

**Abstract:** In this article, I propose a reflection on the concepts of *identity/alterity*, *cooperation/conflict*, *ally/enemy*, starting from the exceptional case of media representation of Ukraine, its president, and the background of the current conflict, given by the production of a prescient sitcom, by Zelenski himself, titled like the party that brought him success, in total continuity between reality and imagination.

**Keywords:** semiotic of war, conflict representation, aestetization of politics, semiotic borders and identity

**Résumé :** Dans cet article, je propose une réflexion sur les concepts d'identité/altérité, coopération/conflict, allié/ennemi, à partir du cas exceptionnel de la représentation médiatique de l'Ukraine, de son président et du contexte du conflit actuel, présenté par Zelenski lui-même à travers la production d'une sitcom prémonitoire portant le même titre que le parti qui lui a apporté le succès, en totale continuité entre réalité et imagination.

**Mots clés :** sémiotique de la guerre, représentation des conflits, esthétisation de la politique, frontières sémiotiques et identité

## 1. The semiotic relevance of war

The battle being fought on the North-Eastern frontiers of Europe beginning on February 24, 2022, makes it particularly timely to ponder on the semiotic ideas of identity/alterity, cooperation/conflict, and ally/enemy, devoid of any scholarly aura. Consequently, I would like to focus on them in this paper by revisiting the reflections of a few of our masters and articulating them with contemporary events observed from texts regarded as exemplary of their media representation.

Paolo Fabbri, in his work, has continuously supported the semiotics importance of a systematic study of conflict and strategic interactions since, within the texts of a culture that are its object, “even a certain way of seeing, or conducting, war, in a given cultural-historical moment can have consequences within this same culture: becoming successful even on the strategic level, to the point of retroacting on the tactical level” (my translation, Fabbri-Montanari 2004). Hence he proposes to comparatively study cultures and strategic systems, intending to explicate their differences, different types of efficacy, and the construction of representations – think, for example, of the different ways cultures have of imagining the ‘enemy’ – and the possibilities of translation between these representations. An invitation that, in effect, opened up a field of semiotic studies dedicated to war, terrorism, and violence (for example, see Montanari 2004; Aldama 2006; Aldama, Bertand and Lancioni 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> E-mail : [isabella.pezzini@uniroma1.it](mailto:isabella.pezzini@uniroma1.it)

This viewpoint was connected to the more general growth of strategic studies itself, whereby – war has gradually become a global and ‘total’ war, such that it now invests all the systems of society and has expanded both chronologically and physically, going beyond the conventional battlefields: “Now, the strategic function is increasingly extended: initially, to war preparation operations – organizing and mobilizing forces, understanding how to take technical innovations into account; subsequently, such a conception, while still limited, expands beyond the war itself” (*ibid.*) – consider the Turkish-made drones the Ukrainians use to carry out spectacular exploits, for which they have written hymns and songs...

In addition to the ground battle, war is increasingly being conducted with semiotic weapons such as threats, challenges, counter-challenges, duels, retaliation, revenge, and “disinformation.” It extensively invests the pathemic-cognitive dimension in many ways, attempting to induce negative passions (fear, horror, terror...) in the populations engaged as well as eroding “troop morale” or conversely exalting it by inspiring excitement and enthusiasm.

Observers describe the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a “hybrid war” due to the diverse terrain it encompasses: see, on the one hand, the alleged interference in the recent Italian general elections, and on the other hand, the mutual accusations of condemned acts of war, such as the bombing of the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant or other civilian targets, or the assassination attempt on Putin’s ideologue Alexander Dugin, in which his daughter died.

Furthermore, conflict is embedded in the language in numerous ways: semiotics appears to hold within it a model, an “agonistic,” polemical-conflicting fundamental conception originating from the structuralist linguistic model, from which semiotics sprang. All of the categories developed by semiotics are based on the deep oppositions between different values of meaning and the articulation between the planes of expression and the plane of content. In the words of Greimas, the whole universe that surrounds us, the social world of things and events, is viewed by us in such a manner, characterized by tensions and contrasts. As a constitutive manner of viewing the world, *polémos* is, therefore, according to the theory of semiotics, the source of all things. A world that is not given once and for all, but is composed of perceived meaning and is formed in the very process of this perception; and, most importantly, such meaning – this “world essence” – is comprehended through contrasts. Consequently, it is still possible to conceive the base of signification in a deeply dynamic-conflictive way.

Following Fabbri and Montanari’s lead, the resulting layered model of meaning generation (the generative trajectory of meaning, GTM) can also serve as an analysis grid for conflict events and strategy in general. In order to identify further coherences or dissonances and to comprehend the dynamics and tendencies at play, the various actors involved in a conflict are essentially x-rayed and deconstructed through the various levels of the grid. Thus, the various figures constituting interactions and conflicts can be split down into more fundamental components and layers that can be interdefined and associated. To summarize, these components – which include the level of values at stake, the level of narrative and modal programs, the level of production and enunciation in diverse spaces, times, and actors, and the rhythmic-passionate level – can then be regrouped to account for what might be regarded true “semiotic acts”; or basic figures constitutive of broader strategic configurations and conducts, such as the threat, the promise, the challenge, the ultimatum, etc. If a conflict occurs when two wills clash,

then it is critical to comprehend, using this semiotic model, the various ways these “wantings” are constituted and affirmed; they conceal, chase, and battle.

However, Umberto Eco, in his work *Constructing the Enemy* (Eco, 2015), acknowledged a type of primary human imperative of defining oneself through the formation of an enemy; and again, Paolo Fabbri takes it up a notch with his study on the pronoun system inscribed in languages – in all languages – which also provides intriguing stuff for our thought. He devoted one of his most recent research areas to collective enunciations, specifically how “I” becomes “We”; he, too, views the pronoun system as a series of “social figurations.” Just one example: “Let us attempt to conjugate the verb ‘believe’: ‘We believe’ is the statement of a certainty; ‘You believe’ introduces doubt; ‘They believe’ implies that they are mistaken. Self-representation must necessarily travel through the “We” image, as others mirror our own. As a result, in order to define ourselves, to recognize ourselves as permanent, we must always face the Other: the “You” of the Other and the unfamiliar and the “They” of the Stranger and the alien (lat. *alienum*)” (author translation from Fabbri 2019). We will also circle back to Lotman’s famous idea, in which each semiosphere is defined relativistically with respect to the others (Lotman 1999). And more recently, Jacques Fontanille (Fontanille 2021) has reflected on collective actants such as nation, homeland, and people, as well as their dynamics, not to mention the crucial semiotic reflection on strategic interaction (Parret 1990, Landowski 2006).

## **2. The deuteragonists’ depictions in the conflict**

It is common knowledge that the current war is merely the most recent chapter in a battle whose origins can be traced much further back in time, depending on historical reconstructions. Relatively recently, the prevalent narrative attributes its birth to Vladimir Putin’s attempt to reassert Russia’s dominance against what he perceives as a progressive expansion of the West’s sphere of influence and, a therefore possible threat to Russia’s borders. After numerous complaints, protests, and unfulfilled demands, Putin moved on to actions with the war against Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, support for the Donbas insurgents, and the invasion of Ukraine. As is generally known, this should have been a blitzkrieg, but as we will show, a severe misunderstanding of Ukraine’s “semiotic personality” (Lotman 1999) and resilience (Greimas 2017) turned it into a “long” conflict with an unclear outcome. Lotman ties the abstract concept of boundary with semiotic individuality in his analysis of the structuring of each culture in terms of a semiosphere different from all others. The boundary may unite different semiospheres insofar as it is a space for exchange and translation, but it also divides, marking the consistency of each collective personality by the degree of its self-consciousness (Lotman 1984). Putin vehemently refutes the notion of Ukrainian uniqueness vis-à-vis Russia, which is strongly tied to the resiliency of the Ukrainian people. According to Greimas, resistance is a ‘worldview’ that allows humans to give themselves extra meaning in a national struggle by elevating the nation to the level of a historical subject” (Greimas 2017, p.97). (Greimas 2017, p.97).

As Federico Montanari’s research on the languages of war has ably demonstrated, there are various degrees and areas of representation of war, the subject of my current analysis: let us begin with that of the principal deuteragonists, identified as Vladimir Putin, president of the Russian Federation, on the one hand, and Volodymyr Zelenski, president of Ukraine, on the other.

Their images and communication styles could not be more divergent – and oddly complementing – as a quick Google search reveals (which, in any case, is a Western search engine). Putin, in contrast to Zelenski, nearly always appears in his official role, with solemn looks or grimaces or scarcely discernible reactions, except for a few “manly” photographs displaying him shirtless while horseback riding, fishing, or practicing judo.

On the other hand, their biographies could not be more dissimilar: Putin was infamously a KGB spy and thus a “statesman only in power”, whereas Zelenski, despite coming from a family of intellectuals, was an actor and comedian with a particularly appetizing past for the media, which have continuously resurrected and re-presented it. While Putin prefers official communiqués and lengthy, convoluted speeches, Zelenski prefers the simplicity and accessibility of social media and short forms of expression. To be more specific, before he was elected president, he developed and starred in a 30-episode satirical sitcom called *Servants of the People*, in which he represented the misrule of Ukraine. Currently, he entrusts a daily audiovisual message to Telegram, the most reliable (Russian born) instant messaging and broadcasting service, as well as lengthy interviews with reliable foreign broadcasters and appearances at various international events – including the most recent Venice Film Festival – to call for solidarity and denounce his opponent. Intriguingly, his physique du rôle is not very athletic – the other characters frequently outmatch him – but he is quick, fluid, and expressive.

Maybe no one has ever taken such a global approach to discussing and showing a war before. For example, the “movie” about the war, which came out on March 22 and was widely criticized, was split into two parts: *WAS*, which showed images of the destruction caused, and *WILL*, which was a kind of trailer for the victory.

Even amid the war, Zelenski posed for a controversial photo shoot in the July 28, 2022 issue of *Vogue*, where he is portrayed by the renowned photographer Annie Leibovitz alongside his wife, who is a screenwriter and the ambassador of Ukraine. His wife is shown as a typical Western first lady.

While it is true that Bin Laden and ISIS used media and social media extensively for propaganda (and likely still do so) in order to grow their followings, the videos they released were unsettling and were ultimately doomed to have the opposite of their intended effect on the broad Western public. In Zelenski’s case, satire and comedy bleeding into tragedy remain within the genre system of our tradition, and I believe we can speak of a soft power that has asserted itself in this way in favor of Ukraine, which emerges from the fiction as a poor but proud people, harassed by a corrupt political class and eager to emancipate themselves while remaining true to their traditions (Pezzini 2009).

Vladimir Putin placed the so-called “special operation” in Ukraine, with the invasion on February 24, within a convoluted reconstruction of the history of Russia-Ukraine ties, the subject of a lengthy speech three days earlier. Russia and Ukraine share a common Slavic identity that must be rebuilt. He defended the invasion of Ukrainian territory in advance based on his critical evaluation of Soviet policies (1917-1924) that permitted the formation of national groups with their own ethno-cultural identities, from which modern Ukraine emerged (Schiavon, 1998). According to his historical reconstruction, Ukraine would not exist if not for Vladimir Lenin and his associates, who created it by “wresting territories from Russia” from the Donbas basin to Bukovina and Transcarpathia, to Crimea, ceded in 1954 as part of the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Pereyaslav, which sanctioned the alliance between the Cossacks and Moscow in an anti-Polish context. “Modern Ukraine was entirely

created by communist Russia,” he claims, citing the Soviet strategy of *korenizatsiya* as a blunder that “consolidated at the state level the division between the three Slavic peoples, Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian, instead of the great Russian nation.” “To whom did California belong in the past? And Texas? Has it been forgotten? No one remembers” Putin had already mentioned this about two states that were once a part of Mexico. “So we had also forgotten who created Ukraine: Vladimir Ilych Lenin, when he created the Soviet Union” (cit. from the Huffington Post, February 21, 2022).

It is evident how dissimilar Putin’s and Zelenski’s historical arguments are. For Putin, history can safely proceed “a crawling pace” (Eco 2016); there is nothing that cannot be changed or, from his perspective, corrected, proclaiming the Greater Russia plan (Putin, 2021), presented as a defensive strategy against the danger posed by NATO and the United States. To buttress his allegations, he characterized the military intervention as a necessary “denazification” of the occupied territories, invoking the will of the Ukrainian government’s oppressed inhabitants. In addition, he provided a ruthless assessment of Ukraine’s inability to handle its independence, condemning the corruption and treachery of its leaders. Zelenski, on the other hand, claims the Ukrainian national identity in every manner imaginable, including through the media, which is of particular significance to us here.

Vasija, the fictitious president of Ukraine, has a nightmare in which Ivan the Terrible appears to him in the 2014 sitcom *Servant of the People*, filmed before the war, as I previously stated. It is an apparent reference from Eisenstein’s renowned 1944 film, which Stalin used to encourage the Russians while they were losing the war. The confrontation between the two characters, which concludes with Ivan punching Vasija violently, could not be more evident.

/.../“Russian rulers are autocrats and no one has the right to criticize them,” Vasija says.

“What is death without torture? – the Czar tells him, flooded by a red light, which darkens the whole rest of the study – the corrupt will be tortured, impaled, their knees will be broken.”

“But that’s illegal,” replies a puzzled Vasija, in a suit and tie.

“But you are the law,” Ivan retorts.

“I am not the tsar, I am Goloborod’ko, we settle things democratically”.

“What are you saying? – Ivan urges him – we are Russians, being cordial is misunderstood. You are the czar.” “No, I am the president of Ukraine.”

“You mean the Prince of Kiev? How are your brothers? Are you still prisoners of Poles and Lithuanians? But you must be patient, we will soon free you.” Little Vasija, wading from the bottom up, answered him impatiently:

“No, thank you, we don’t need to be freed. We are going to Europe.”

“What? Really?” the tsar replies, incredulous. “But we have Slavic blood,” he adds.

“Again with this blood thing,” retorts the president, “we’re going one way, you’re going the other, then we’ll talk about it in three hundred years. We have another way, our way.”

“No,” the tsar replies menacingly, “our roads are the same”!

At this point he strikes Vasija with his scepter. The president collapses to the ground, unconscious, as Ivan kneels over the body, cupping his face in his hands and shouting, “Who will you be with? With whom, with whom?”

Commenting on this emblematic exchange, albeit imaginary, we might paraphrase Tzvetan Todorov, who asserts that what defines the European Union is the acceptance of plurality, indeed a “wise management of it,” the ability to convert the negative, that is, differences, into positive, against the backdrop of a fundamental renunciation of violence, and in the perspective of affirming civilization as its own future (Todorov 2009).

### **3. Borders and differences**

It is interesting to reflect for a moment on the issue of borders, because one of the arguments Putin used to justify the invasion involved pro-Russian movements within the regions solemnly declared annexed on September 30, 2022 (Donetsk, Lugansk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhya), following the conquest of arms and unrecognized referendums. More generally, it is well-known that there exist complete so-called ‘buffer’ states, whose geopolitical goal would be to make boundaries’ elastic,’ so expanding their extent; Ukraine was intended to serve this function.

When reading the works of Jurij Lotman, we are constantly predisposed to respect borders as zones of extreme permeability and “translatability,” and hence creativity. In fact, boundaries are the “predestined” site of conflict, whose semiotic existence is marked by tensive actuality.

Borders are predominately regions of instability, sites of conflict, and infrequently of productive interchange. The more rigid things are, the more visibly unstable they are. Moreover, as soon as one party transgresses, cultural boundaries become inflexible, and differences revert to being oppositions rather than neutral and nuanced concepts if we refer to the semiotic square. I read in the press that there is an ongoing debate about whether “borsch,” the famed turnip soup found in many variations throughout Eastern Europe, is of Russian or Ukrainian origin (!?!).

Simultaneously, the remaining populace in the Russian-occupied territory appears to have informal arrangements with the invaders, which are highly stigmatized by the government yet required for daily living.

Thus, it was constantly stated that the Russians counted on the Ukrainians’ tight allegiance to their invasion: they claimed that the Ukrainians were Russian at heart and merely superficially “Ukrainian”;; based on the languages spoken every day, this border was porous. In contrast, the Ukrainian resistance demonstrates that a specific “semiotic personality” existed “in slumber” and that they did not surrender. When warfare violates territorial limits, cultural boundaries become rigid, and the other becomes an adversary.

In the Russian-Ukrainian war, the language issue is another significant cultural factor: the spread of the Russian language throughout the country is one of the reasons why Ukrainians are “deep down” Russian. According to the 2001 census, 71 percent of the population speaks Ukrainian as their native language, while 26 percent speak Russian, and the rest speak other languages (about 40 are spoken in all, and in 2003, Ukraine ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, assuming responsibility for protecting regional languages in the country). According to a university poll conducted by the Sociology Department of Kyiv in 2004, nearly half of Ukrainians spoke Russian at home for several reasons. Different Ukrainian governments pursued divergent language policies until the controversial “Language Law” (Law No. 5670-d) was passed on April 25, 2019, establishing Ukrainian as the sole official language, in contrast to the previous law of 2012, which was more receptive to local

language dominance. In some ways, the 2019 law was, therefore, also a part of the Russian-Ukrainian struggle that had been ongoing for decades.

The topic of linguistic distinctions is well known to be quite complex, and in the Lotmanian culturological perspective, the national language serves a dual function: internal homogenization and divergence concerning the outside world, which are characteristics of the dynamics of each semiosphere in relation to the others. Clearly, this creates an additional, frequently contradictory tension between different semiospheres. In Lotmanian theory, this type of tense dynamic must be understood within the context of the overall communication difficulty between diverse semiotic personalities. Subjects, collectivities, and texts who enter into relationships in the broader semiosphere have a dual need: they must be able to communicate, share their knowledge, and ensure that their communication is valuable enough to generate new information. The first necessity encourages one to view communication as a transmission and to account for the mechanism of constructing metalanguages, which is more socially significant. These latter provide unity and existence to cultural collectives by simplifying the complexity of reality and concretely promote communication - Lotman, for example, refers to standard national languages.

In addition, according to an analysis of data from the most recent census in Ukraine, ethnic Russians comprised 56% of the entire Russian-speaking population, while the remaining 44% consisted of Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews, Greeks, Bulgarians, Moldovans, Armenians, Tatars, Poles, Germans, and Crimean Tatars. The great majority of Ukrainians speak Ukrainian. The language is closely connected to Russian and has strong similarities to Polish. Russian is the most significant minority language, especially in eastern regions. A considerable segment of the population speaks Romanian, Moldavian, Bulgarian, Crimean Turkish, or Hungarian. According to a survey conducted by the International Institute of Sociology in Kyiv in 2004, Russian is utilized significantly more frequently than indicated by the official census. At home, 43-46 percent of the population speaks Russian. Similar to the proportion of the Ukrainian-speaking population. The majority of the population in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine speaks Russian, according to this census.

As a result, it is no accident that, as of June 2020, Olena Zelens'ka has initiated a campaign to disseminate the Ukrainian language over the world, as well as the introduction of audio tours in Ukrainian in the world's most renowned locations, particularly in the world's largest museums. As semioticians centered on authoritative studies (Eco 1993, Fabbri 2003), we should recognize that the variety and independence of languages are an asset and not a hindrance but that they are probably more tolerable in times of peace.

#### **4. The aestheticization of politics and conflict**

We have already shown that Russia's military aggression against Ukraine is grounded in an ideological vision defended by time-honored tactics. These include appealing to personal grievances and vendettas, rewriting the past to suit one's purposes, appealing to feelings of national pride and superiority, and so on.

On the other hand, the astonishing ascension of the current president, Volodymyr Zelenski, a Russian-speaking Jew who was initially a comedian, is evidence of how Ukraine's commitment to the Western paradigm also passes primarily through media modalities. It is well known that it resulted from

the popularity of a TV show he produced, which spawned a film with the same tone. This is a prime example of the aestheticization of politics, for which Walter Benjamin (1934) was a brilliant precursor in his writings on the effects of artworks' technical reproducibility, in opposition to the politicized of art. Benjamin attributed the phenomena to totalitarian regimes of his time, with their magnificent parades and tremendous propaganda films, but there is no doubt that it continues to this day, even with new media, in other forms and under other regimes (Montani 2022).

Jurij Lotman frequently discusses the aestheticization of politics and war; for example, he satirizes Tsar Alexander I, who enjoyed parades but despised battle because it damaged his soldiers' clothes, and he notes the phenomenon of the theatricalization of combat during the Napoleonic era (Lotman 1994). The same went, for example, during the Moscow parade on July 11, 2022, and vice versa, the Russian army's apparent chaos on the battlefield.

Zelenski's 2014 sitcom, titled *Servants of the People* (*Slua Naroda*, Kvartal 95 Studio), consists of three seasons and a total of thirty episodes. The title is the same as the party Zelenski ran within the elections, which he won with 73 percent of the vote – three days after the end of broadcasting (April 21, 2019). As I was saying, the sitcom was essentially his election campaign, which I believe has never been depicted with such accuracy. Nevertheless, also a *mise en abyme* of the actual situation, in which the protagonist is elected president despite being an unknown history professor, thanks to invective against the count to allow him to run for office. An apparent reference to the potential afforded by the new (and old) media to circumvent conventional political logic.

It is intriguing to observe the program's trailer, in which the protagonist is *already* president, even though in the first episodes, he is not yet. It reveals the complex multi-temporal function of the tv sitcom, which from the perspective of its enunciation (production and airing in Ukraine), was prior to the election of Zelenski etc., but which, from the perspective of its content, was a timely *anticipation* or *prefiguration* of what was to occur with the election and then the presidency of Goloborod'ko/Zelenski, narratively a prelude of the Sanction phase by Canonical Narrative Schema. This appears to be a particularly effective instance of *radical mediation*, a term coined by American sociologist Richard Grusin. According to his theory, there is no pre-existing or previously provided environment (Umwelt) in which media devices, people, and formats function and act; instead, it is these radical mediations that actively and continually build the Umwelt in which people, devices, and formats interact (Grusin 2017). Zelenski's book, which is currently being sold and translated worldwide, also serves the purpose of popularizing both Zelenski, the leader, and Ukraine in Europe and the West, convincing us to support them in their victory over Putin.

Reconstructions of Zelenski-biography, president's which are widely accessible online, explain what was depicted in the sitcom, namely a downward parabola of popularity when he became president, incapable of tackling atavistic Ukrainian problems such as corruption and cronyism, and boycotted at all levels by his close allies and family. In turn, he was accused of diverting the profits of the fiction to tax havens and failing to resolve the conflict in the Donbas as promised. After the start of the war, however, Zelenski staged a return in which he positioned himself as a responsible and omnipresent leader, including through social media, instead of fleeing to safer locations as many had anticipated. As has been appropriately noted, the choice of the often-unexpected locations/circumstances from which he has made and continues to make his interventions served the function of strongly marking the *I-here-*



*now* of enunciation: online transmission, thus reception wherever the Internet reaches, of a message, however, firmly rooted on Ukrainian soil (D'Aloia 2022). So, the series was a requirement for the election, and now it is a comfort for Ukrainians, who already have a hagiographic image of their president, regardless of what he does. In addition, for us 'Westerners' – other observers/actors in this battle –, fighting is also a form of entertainment! Intriguing is the 'cultural' isotopy that runs throughout the television series: in each episode, the actor's friend whom the new president has appointed foreign minister is schooled by the secretary on the cultural norms of the countries whose delegations he will welcome. It is a funny game of stereotypes, which he resolves by acting chaotically or seductively. In reality, in the final episode of the second season, Ukrainian Independence Day, on a major television discussion show, he uses his international knowledge to propose creative answers to common problems. In addition, there are numerous "politically inappropriate" jokes against Georgians and other neighbors (who represent the top of the class) and – usually negative – about Russians. On the other hand, references to Ukrainian cultural identity are abundant: national costume, traditional sweets, foods, vodka, etc. Despite Putin's claim of selling his Slavic identity to the West and embracing foreign traditions and consumerism, we could concur with Lotman that this sitcom serves as a superb self-description of the Ukrainian everyday semiosphere.

But, to return to the trailer for the first TV series (2015), it is a ride through an ultra-modernized Ukraine with sparkling infrastructure of all kinds, including bike routes – as it was/or rather, as it would have been – by the newly elected president, a quiet man who rides a bicycle (a great bicycle, by the way) to work at the presidential palace, with a clothes peg holding his trousers in place (a reminder of his past petty-bourgeois life), which he takes off as he looks around before entering.

A dream come true! This concept of crossing over will be present in the other trailers or opening parts—a canonical schema of passion, by the president/actor, with "ultimate catharsis," as if to indicate that any hardships experienced along the way will eventually be addressed constructively. On the other hand, each episode is presented as a simulation of one of the divisive topics of government, which invariably meet with solid opposition or even spill over into their opposite, and in constant dialectic with his own administration, the oligarchs, and the media who try to discredit him, accusing him of populism, inexperience, and naivete, which is, incidentally, sharply the case, and which has punctually occurred, according to the classic repertory. In this approach, fiction not only prepares or anticipates reality but also justifies it prior to its occurrence; it is not its antecedent but its future anterior.

So it is incorrect to call this series fiction: it is a plausible hypothesis, an effective simulation! Indeed a method of 'speaking the truth,' provided we agree with Umberto Eco's assertion that "the truth is primarily a simulation effect." When is a simulation realistic? When it is internally consistent and capable of explaining numerous universe-related features (Lorusso 2018).

Until the advent of war, it was easy to confuse Zelenski the president-actor with Zelenski the actual president, which was, if not intentional, at least an unambiguous impact of meaning that can be found by comparing his fictional and official depictions of himself. From the beginning of the conflict, however, a drastic change in appearance was required: Zelenski grew a beard, losing his extremely youthful look, and he wore only T-shirts and sweatshirts that could be linked back to an informal military uniform worn in the field (Terracciano 2023).

## 5. In conclusion

With all due respect to those who still insist on the necessity to distinguish between fact and imagination, this case demonstrates precisely that this line has long since dissolved or is considered to be so “porous” as to be almost invisible. Moreover, as Greimas already indicated in his analysis of passions, and of rage, in particular, introducing the dimension of subjects’ imaginative projections as crucial aspects of the analysis of interactions: simulacra, those imagined objects that the subjects project beyond themselves and which, although they have no intersubjective basis, are yet able to determine effectively, intersubjective conduct as such (Greimas 1983). In terms of discourses and representations, there is, if anything, a cultural problem with the appropriateness of genres, the acceptability/acceptability allocated to specific activities, and, as a result, the credibility provided to their enunciators/producers. Behind the screens of words and images, however, the materiality of violence and destruction inevitably loses coherence and simultaneously makes its barbarism more impossible and awful.

In closing, I would like to share another statement by Paolo Fabbri, from his piece titled “Pacifondai,” about the need to work toward world peace:

Respect and tolerance must be preserved, but it requires bravery in order to combat arrogance without becoming arrogant oneself. The non-conciliatory boldness of a Peace that neither implies nor defends is sufficient. It must be defended: Peace cannot be inferred from fundamental concepts. Reason and sanctity are insufficient – we can always beat the very hell out of one another! To be a pacifist is equivalent to going to war or peace. Peace is never permanent and is not a condition but rather an intense and delicate experience that must be generated periodically. A real-world occurrence that must be actively pursued without the calm assurance of definitive guarantees. A solitary event resulting from the acts, passions, and innovations we “pacifists” will employ to achieve it. Peace will never reign because the world is a republic of pacifists, not appeasers (Fabbri 2016).

So, let us fight!

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Pour citer cet article : Isabella Pezzini. « Trajectories of identity, difference, and alterity in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war », *Actes Sémiotiques* [En ligne]. 2023, n° 128. Disponible sur : <https://doi.org/10.25965/as.7957> Document créé le 30/01/2023

ISSN : 2270-4957