

The Hero's Journey in a Converging World

With her lively, engaging presentation style, Aistė made us ponder the relationship between classical storytelling – from folk tales and Homer's *Odyssey* – and the contemporary phenomenon of media convergence, which presents content creators with new challenges. On the one hand, our craving for new stories hasn't changed in millennia, as stories seem to trigger something profound in us. On the other hand, the cultural landscape has changed dramatically, bringing about audience fragmentation and, with the internet, the loss of importance of linearity (hypertexts). How does that change the ways stories are told? The basic 'hero's journey' script as studied by Propp, Greimas and Campbell, among others, involves a leap into the unknown, crowned by an (enriched) return to the known, a sort of new synthesis. However, when watching TV series – the most popular, paradigmatic example of contemporary narration – we do not necessarily aim for the protagonist's final redemption, for catharsis. Here the notion of 'fractal storytelling', which Aistė borrows from Tatjana Samopjan, comes in handy: linear narrative gives way to a cluster of variations, new episodes, parallel stories, in order to meet the audience's demand for more and more content. The debate following Aistė's presentation has been no less rich, with some participants pointing out the capitalist nature of such offer-demand logic, revealing the need for escapism during societal crisis (e.g. the rise of populisms, the challenges of globalisation). Aistė acknowledged such objections, but also pointed out that originality and the ability of some TV series (e.g. *Girls*, *Fauda*, *The Good Wife*) to provoke us and make us think are hardly questionable, testifying that the art of storytelling is more alive now than ever.

Talk by Aistė Ptakauskaitė, 21 February 2019

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