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- ABSTRACT -

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***HUNGER GAMES* AND THE CULTURE OF
VIOLENCE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM.
DISCURSIVE AND MEDIATIC ASPECTS IN
EARLY EDUCATION**

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Keywords: postmodernism, structural violence, cultural violence, hyperreal, dystopia, simulacrum, *Social Self*, intersubjectivity, social imaginary, ideology, euphemism, *habitus*.

Abstract:

Our research project, entitled ***HUNGER GAMES AND THE CULTURE OF VIOLENCE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM. DISCURSIVE AND MEDIATIC ASPECTS IN EARLY EDUCATION***, falls within the sphere of the analysis of the social construction of violence, i.e. the theorization and conceptualization of aggression, which, in the current context of image culture and digitization, also involves forays into the sphere of simulacra and social epistemology. These social constructions have a historical character, being determined by ideology and power relations. Charlene L. Muehlenhard and Leigh Ann Kimes of the University of Kansas (*The Social Construction of Violence: The Case of Sexual and Domestic Violence*, 1999) consider that the way we talk about various social issues helps to change them.

In fact, discourse proves more effective in shaping reality because it has prestige and a wide audience. The portrayal of violence, therefore, can have a greater impact than the facts themselves. The simulation of reality is constructed by reducing it to its component symbols. According to the theorist Jean Baudrillard (*Simulacrum and Simulation*, 2008), simulated violence poses a more acute danger than real violence because it undermines the principle of reality and calls into question law and order. In the same way, writing stumbles under the convention of simulation in a ghostly revival of absent referents. Similarly, truth can no longer be acquired in an individualized form. The dominant epistemology of a cultural phase also influences social behaviour, subjecting young generations to a reconciliation of their own thoughts with the testimonies, the experiences of others, of the media culture.

“Philosophy of the soul” as emancipation from the ephemeral, culture follows the curve of society's evolution. The drift of the institutions of culture has had the effect of promoting kitsch, surrogates and false values, often serving a populist ideology. The negative imaginary par excellence de-centres the ego, degrades identity, reiterates myths in a palimpsestic form and transposes violence as the central form of human reaction and manifestation. The dissension between high culture and mass culture is accentuated in an upward spiral. The creators of art attach the mask of adaptation, become aesthetic legislators of contemporary norms, producing a pseudo-art.

When the real world is reduced to mere images, they become the new reality and also the prototype of deviant behaviour. The visual takes priority in discovering the world as the privileged human sense, while the rest of the senses are left behind, to other historical periods.

This context seems to have fulfilled Guy Debord's predictions concerning the transition to a society of the spectacle (*Society of the Spectacle*, 1970). The author does not consider the spectacle as a collection of images, but the social relationship between people mediated by images. Reality has been removed through the act of representation and transformed into a pseudo-reality, an object of contemplation. The spectator is overcome by the feeling of alienation when he tends more towards the contemplation of objects, thus distancing himself from self-knowledge, from his own existence. Actions and gestures become externalised, no longer belonging to him, but mandated to an alter-ego. The spectator will not feel at peace anywhere; he will not be able to locate his own self, because the spectacle (the instrument of unification) is everywhere. Above and beyond this spectacle, globalisation, which has come about not only through the erasure of geographical borders (the shrinking of distance), but also through the proliferation of the virtual, the annihilation of the distance between the real and the virtual, is having its effects.

The **distinct research directions** open a path to investigate the new cultural reality (the cynical transfer of violence into media and entertainment as a feature of post humanist insensitivity) and the risk of perpetuating violence that undermines the integrity of the personality of children and adolescents. Therefore, the choice of topic was based on the following argument: the golden age of childhood, as it is symbolically called, is the age in which most psycho-behavioural acquisitions take place and whose quality will influence the rest of the future adult's development. This is why our proposal for an interdisciplinary research aims at outlining a holistic view on the slippages of the culture of violence and the emerging consequences on children's cognitive ontogenesis.

Exposure of children to television in the early years of life can lead to attention disorders around the age of seven (Christakis, Zimmerman, DiGiuseppe, McCarty, 2004), and later to the development of delayed language acquisition (Wright *et al.*, 2001), cognition, and social-emotional skills (Schwarzer, Grafe, Hiemisch, Kiess, & Poulain, 2022). Neuroscientist Manfred Spitzer explains how handwriting and learning letters is far superior to learning with digital tools:

Studii de neuroimagistică pe bază de rezonanță magnetică funcțională au arătat că recunoașterea literelor învățate prin scrisul de mână duce la o activitate sporită în regiunile motorii din creier, ceea ce nu se întâmplă în cazul literelor învățate pe tastatură. De aici deducem că doar scrisul de mână stimulează apariția urmelor mnemonice motorii care se activează la perceperea literelor și ușurează recunoașterea vizuală. Această urmă de memorie vizuală care apare ulterior, utilă pentru citit, nu se activează când e folosită

tastatura, fiindcă mișcarea n-are nici o legătură cu forma literei.¹ (Manfred Spitzer, 2020, p. 158)

The latest research on the human brain raises concerns about the high-scale use of digital media. Neurobiology presents concrete findings of how the brain is constantly changing and in a constant learning process. Therefore, time spent in front of devices also leaves its mark on the brain. Spitzer reports a grim diagnosis as a result of prolonged screen time:

Medicii din Coreea de Sud, un stat industrializat și cât se poate de modern, cu o tehnologie a informației foarte avansată la nivel mondial, au înregistrat la adulții tineri tulburări de memorie, de atenție și de concentrare din ce în ce mai frecvente, precum și o aplatizare emoțională și o opacitate generală. Ei au numit acest tablou patologic «demență digitală».² (*Ibid.*, p. 8)

The hypothesis as the starting point of the present work concerns the deconstruction of contemporary human identity subjected to excesses of violence and simulacra and at the same time in permanent desynchronization with any traditional frame of reference. **The topicality** of the research lies in its engagement in an approach to the analysis of the culture of violence, of the technological super-fluid that spills over, not only in a direct form into personal life, leaving man „naked” of his own individuality, but also indirectly, through art, literature and culture, and **the innovative character** is given by the scarcity of the approaches in our country to the theme of cultural violence, as well as the few experiments carried out with the aim of determining the degree of influence of media violence on children's development.

The scientific character is testified by the generosity of the critical apparatus. The bibliographical references reveal a greater concern with our theme at the international level than at the national level, which invites approaches to bring the theme to public attention and debate.

The objectives of our work include:

- To diagnose the culture of vulnerability in the paradigm of the postmodernism era, with considerations on the evolution of the dystopian fictional genre in the current context;

¹ “Functional magnetic resonance neuroimaging studies have shown that recognition of letters learned by handwriting leads to increased activity in motor regions of the brain, which is not the case with letters learned on a keyboard. From this we deduce that only handwriting stimulates the appearance of motor mnemonic traces that are activated when perceiving letters and facilitate visual recognition. This later visual memory trace, useful for reading, is not activated when the keyboard is used, because the movement has nothing to do with the shape of the letter.” (Manfred Spitzer, *Demența Digitală. Cum ne Tulbură Mintea Noile Tehnologii*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2020). <https://archive.org/details/manfred-spitzer-dementa-digitala.-cum-ne-tulbura-mintea-noile-tehnologii>.

² “Doctors in South Korea, an industrialized and extremely modern state with a very advanced information technology worldwide, have recorded increasingly frequent memory, attention and concentration disorders in young adults, as well as an emotional flattening and a general opacity. They called this pathological picture «digital dementia».” (*Ibid.*, p. 8).

- Demonstrating Suzanne Collins' use of lost referents in the construction of the narrative thread of the Hunger Games trilogy and showing that the use of the same method that herself vehemently criticizes (violence) does not compromise the ethical structure of the text;
- Conducting a cross-sectional experiment to identify whether there is a correlation between the frequency of exposure to violent media content and the level of aggression children subsequently display;
- Applying a questionnaire to a sample of 75 preschool teachers in order to collect data on teachers' attitudes to this phenomenon of hyper-digitalisation and the effects observed on children's development.

Our study involves a number of **key terms**: postmodernism, structural violence, cultural violence, hyperreality, dystopia, simulacrum, social *ego*, intersubjectivity, social imaginary, ideology, euphemism, *habitus*.

In terms of **critical theory**, the **methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis** and **Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis** will be applied in the first two chapters, while in the third chapter, we applied two types of data selection and analysis, both in terms of qualitative (analysis of secondary sources, descriptiveness) and quantitative (collection of data recorded after the small-scale cross-sectional experiment and the application of the questionnaire to a sample of 75 teachers). Thus, the third chapter is based on the method of experiment, observation and survey, and the instruments used are the questionnaire, a 10-step Likert-type scale measuring the intensity of aggressiveness (Appendix 1), an observation sheet recording the level of imitation of aggressive behaviour types (Appendix 2), the *Tom & Jerry* cartoon, the *Alice in Wonderland* cartoon. In order to establish an association between the frequency of exposure to violent media content and the level of aggressiveness in children subsequently manifested in the experiment, a statistical method, namely the Pearson correlation coefficient, will be used. In parallel with the application of the methodology mentioned above, reference was also made to semiotics through the writings of Roland Barthes.

The **“hybrid” critique** of the early 21st century is characterized by Julian Wolfreys, author of a collection of essays (Wolfreys, 2002) that covers the quasi-all theoretical discourses born of poststructuralism, feminism, deconstruction and psychoanalysis, as exercises in critical thinking on topics of major interest to contemporary society, this aspect of social criticism uniting the critical theory of the present with the social criticism of the Frankfurt School (Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, with a follower in Jürgen Habermas). The characteristic of this **critical theory** is its **applicative character**. On the one hand, critical discourse (critical and

cultural studies) is applied to canonical works - novels, poems, films, websites, blogs, etc. - on the other hand, these interpretations are completed with theoretical applications, including their transformation into study and teaching resources.

Critical interventions motivated by epistemological interests, identified in Julian Wolfreys' anthology, are carried out in interdisciplinary frameworks and applied to literary works or films. The interpretation of *The Hunger Games* series engages, in our case, some of these theories:

- **Amaterial Criticism.** The world we live in has acquired a spectral character, the distinction between the real and the image, media phantasmagoria becoming increasingly difficult to identify. Even cultural artefacts are haunted by precedent, the individual seems to be inhabited by an alien subjectivity, generated by the fantasies of a culture of the empty image;
- **Ethical Criticism:** The relationship between the *self* and the *other* is vitiated by violence, by power games that pit individuals against each other, turning human society into a jungle of struggle for survival;
- **Feminism, gender theory (Gender Criticism).** The protagonist, Katniss, is degraded to a warrior, an instrument of death rather than of love and life, as in traditional mythology. She is a puppet, a chimera, a bird set on fire, but from which she manages to be reborn, resymbolizing the Mockingjay with the Phoenix Bird;
- **Ecocriticism.** The despotism of power is exercised against nature, which is transformed into an apocalyptic spectacle.

The epistemological cores that structure the argument apply not only to this film series but also to the problematic of the formation of the younger generation, increasingly exposed to media channels and the sphere of digital entertainment.

In terms of **organizational structure**, the thesis is divided thematically between the first two chapters with related subchapters and the third chapter, to which are added the introduction, partial conclusions, final conclusion, bibliography, table of illustrations and appendices.

According to the logical order of the research approach, the first chapter of the paper, **THE HYPOSTASES OF VIOLENCE IN THE CULTURE OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM**, represents a foray into the relevant aspects of the theme in the context of postmodernism and the beginning of the new millennium, aimed at identifying the changes in the discursive canon of dystopian fiction writing, as well as to passing a diagnosis on contemporary culture with a focus on the implications of violence on mentalities.

In the **first three subchapters** we have explored the postmodern condition and new emphases in post-postmodernism using the writings of scholars such as Michel Foucault, Fredric Jameson, Norman Fairclough, Julian Wolfreys' interdisciplinary approach, Julia Kristeva's feminism, Jean Baudrillard's version of the study of representation and simulacra, and Stuart Hall, Gregory Claeys' and M. Keith Booker who have modified the dystopian canon, sociologist Johan Galtung's study of direct, structural and cultural violence.

Postmodernity and history are in total opposition, in the sense that the former seems to be the end of history, predicted by Hegel, through the exhaustion of the possibilities of renewal. History has yielded to historicity – a succession of styles along time, without continuity and in the absence of organic growth from one another. History depends on the way the present is constructed, on its specificity and novelty. At the same time, postmodernity, like modernity, despite its aspiration towards immediacy and liberation from the “chains” of the past, cannot take shape without incorporating history.

Postmodernism has its roots in architecture. The Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon questions the duplicitous nature of this phase of culture precisely because of the position from which it arose. She explains:

Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as «natural» (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact «cultural»; made by us, not given to us. (...) And there we find further contradiction. It is one which juxtaposes and gives equal value to the self-reflexive and the historically grounded to that which is inward-directed and belongs to the world of art (such as parody) and that which is outward-directed and belongs to «real life» (such as history). The tension between these apparent opposites finally defines the paradoxically worldly texts of postmodernism. (Linda Hutcheon, 2002, p. 2)

Hutcheon does not deny the contribution of postmodern thought to the separation of humanity from nature, from reality, but she also captures the possibility of using it to take a critical, detached view of current problems. One of the advantages of postmodernism, to the detriment of modernism, which had explicitly excluded mass culture, is its ability to juggle (“of complicity and critique” - Linda Hutcheon, 2002, p. 27) with the two forms of culture: high culture and popular culture. In contrast, Huxley was among those who saw mass culture as an object of manipulation, the ideal way of nullifying individuality. The collapse of public order in the threat

of terrorism cascaded, collecting, from the first manifestations, all possible forms of violence, leaving humanity unable to react.

The new historicism was the result of the influence of the thinking of several critics, including Michel Foucault. He inspired postmodern writers and argued vehemently that our way of perceiving history leads to significant distortions of the truth, which is why a conscious convention with the past is needed. José Arroyo endorses this view, arguing that:

Constructing a world which combines the real with the imagined, the past with the present, results in a depiction of a sense of time and space which is quasi-mythic. Fredric Jameson argued that this is typical of the dehistoricising effects of postmodern culture. But one could counter-argue that what he calls dehistoricising can be a means of making past conventions of storytelling understandable in the present context. (José Arroyo, 2000, p. 96)

What we would call in a film “flashback” and “flashforward” serve in postmodern writing as essential strategies of the narrative timeline. *Analepsis* and *prolepsis* as defining terms are the subject of cognitive construction in our time.

In *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*, Fredric Jameson, one of the most influential contemporary critics and theorists, addresses the specificity of postmodernism by presenting two dominant characteristics: *pastiche* and *schizophrenia*. He glosses on the creator's disconnection from the historical condition, the copying of other styles and the removal of any possibility of acquiring an identity of one's own. In his opinion, the work - imitation, or pastiches, as the theorist calls it - does not mirror authentic reality but, to put it as Baudrillard did, he considers that it only reflects a simulacrum, which leads to capitalism's suppression of any original thought. Starting from the idea that there are only a few combinations to create a new direction, artists and writers consider that they can no longer achieve stylistic innovation, all they are left with is imitation, masks and mimicry. At the same time, Jameson feels the need to clarify the meaning of this word - *pastiche* - in order to avoid confusion with another related term: *parody*.

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor [...]. (Fredric Jameson, 1985, p. 114)

All this crisis generated by excessive construction, the mixing of styles, the gap between the meaning of the text and the meaning of the images, the disorientation produced by the presence of several voices expressing different things, leads to *schizophrenic writing*. Borrowed from the theory of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, the term *schizophrenia* is introduced by Jameson for descriptive rather than diagnostic purposes, as he explains in the aforementioned paper. As a result of refusing to engage deeply with the present or to engage in historicised thinking, the artist fails to create an identity, just as the schizophrenic, lacking the ability to perceive the temporality of language, cannot relate to the self.

Baudrillard also speaks of this “disease” marring new creations and of the individual exposed to communication networks, convinced of the terror of divided identity:

[...] today we have entered into a new form of schizophrenia – with the emergence of an immanent promiscuity and the perpetual interconnection of all information and communication networks. No more hysteria, or projective paranoia as such, but a state of terror which is characteristic of the schizophrenic, an over-proximity of all things, a foul promiscuity of all things which beleaguer and penetrate him, and no halo, no aura, not even the aura of his own body protects him. (Jean Baudrillard, 1988, pp. 26-27)

Caught up in the multitude of information channels, man finds himself vacillating between his own deformed identity and the rest of the world, itself mediated by other norms.

Postmodernism maps its territory through its self-reflexive and self-referential characteristics. M. Keith Booker sees the essence of the literature under this period term, and in particular of dystopian fiction, in the capacity for parody.

As Gary Saul Morson emphasizes, dystopian (he uses the term «anti-utopia») literature is in essence a parodic «anti-genre»; by its very nature dystopian literature is intended as a parody of utopian literature. Meanwhile, parody is a (perhaps *the*) central technique of postmodernist literature as well. (M. Keith Booker, 1994, p. 28)

From the point of view of authenticity and viability, reality is in direct correspondence with the supremacy of the imaginary, thus, when the limits of the imaginary are reached, a „haemorrhage of reality” takes place through a fall into hyperreality. There is a regression of the imaginative process, and, as Baudrillard states, the act of creation is summed as “artificial resurrection of «historical» worlds, can only try to reconstruct in vitro, down to the smallest details, the perimeters of a prior world, the events, the people, the ideologies of the past, emptied of meaning, of their original process, but hallucinatory with retrospective truth” (Jean Baudrillard, 2008, p. 90).

The integrative approach to the concepts of “**culture**” and “**violence**” in **subchapter (1.2.) Violence in the Culture of the New Millennium** highlights much of the novelty of the present research, both formulations referring to the **legitimisation** or **normalisation** of violence through its intersection with our values and traditions. Violence is an act that can have social, cultural or political implications. Hidden behind institutions or a political system and their representatives, patterns based on coercive behaviour take on a legal form of abuse. Often financial, verbal, emotional or worse, physical tactics win the day in order to manipulate and control people.

The ground of manifestation varies according to the type of violence to which we refer. Drawing on sociological studies, we identify the typology of violence proposed by Johan Galtung (Norwegian sociologist and pioneer in the theoretical study of conflict), which covers the whole sphere of its manifestation in relation to reality: *direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence*. *Direct violence*, according to the author, is that which kills quickly, is intentional, with bodily harm, while structural violence is that which kills slowly, which harms the individual through injustices in society. The two types are interrelated, including family violence, sexual and gender violence, murder, racism, terrorism or war. *Structural violence* was first introduced in 1969, in *Violence, Peace and Peace Research*. The author says that this type of violence is not portrayed in a picture of physical violence, but affects the basic needs of the individual, making it harder to identify and address. Three decades later, Galtung added the concept of *cultural violence* in the *Journal of Peace Research* (Galtung, 1990, pp. 291-305), which means that certain aspects of a culture offer the possibility of justifying or legitimising direct and/or structural violence. This can be identified and exemplified in language and art, empirical science and formal science, religion and ideology. Johan Galtung links cultural violence and structural violence by stating:

Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look even feel right - or at least not wrong. Just as political science is about two problems - the use of power and the legitimation of the use of power - violence studies are about two problems: the use of violence and the legitimation of that use. (Galtung, 1990, p. 291)

By referring to power and control, Baudrillard explains the shift from *explosive* to *implosive violence*. If in the past we were a “culture of liberating violence”, things are different today.

Deterrence precludes war – the archaic violence of expanding systems. Deterrence itself is the neutral, implosive violence of metastable systems or systems in involution. There is no

longer a subject of deterrence, nor an adversary nor a strategy – it is a planetary structure of the annihilation of stakes.³ (Jean Baudrillard, 1981, p. 34).

In an age of dissent, everything disappears, the subject disappears: “No more violence or surveillance: only «information», secret virulence, chain reaction, slow implosion, and simulacra of spaces in which the effect of the real again comes into play.” (*Ibid.*, p. 31). Terrorism, on the other hand, is an act of reality.

(Re)clarifying the referential framework and terminology is done in **subchapter 1.3 Theoretical framework, history and evolution of dystopian fiction**, thus identifying a new category of literature (**eco-dystopia**) and addressing a facet of a new criticism: **ecocriticism**. Opinions for and against the dystopian genre, as well as the new literary genre for teenagers, turned into a debate, whose references were limited to the writings of Nick Lacey, M. Keith Booker, René Wellek & Warren Austin and Gregory Claeys.

The dynamism of the creative act has generated new categories of writing. The new criteria for grouping texts tend to be academic discourse. “Genre is a matrix of form-giving tendencies born at the trysting place of history and textuality” (Maria-Ana Tupan, 2008, p. 23). In postmodernism, the classification of literary genres changes. The current view focuses on the New Historicism and is mediated by language, discourse analysis, cognitive content, inter-human relations, etc. The classical theory of literary genres forces a strict delimitation of genres, without the possibility of combination or influence. This was the aesthetic of the purity of genre (*genre tranché*). The social status of the characters also varied from one genre to another. While tragedy dealt with the nobility and satire with the common people, modern genre theory no longer takes social status into account, because classes are professional, not economic.

The culture of the new millennium is invaded by science fiction writings/sci-fi, especially dystopian ones. The surge of interest in this genre among teenagers is due to changes that make more obvious references to modern-day reality. While totalitarian dystopias or those linked to the use of science to the detriment of the natural evolution of the human species predominated before this century, the new metamorphosis proposes current themes, which are not only related to the political situation, but also include environmental problems (eco-dystopias) and the progress of technology: pollution, global warming, climate change, hyper-technology, etc.

The emphasis on aesthetics rather than content, the perennial framework, and the speed of a cultural stage in the rush for innovation and change, led us to conclude that these trends are extrapolations of the new trend.

³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Editions Galilee, 1981, p. 34. Web: <https://0ducks.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/simulacra-and-simulation-by-jean-baudrillard.pdf>.

In the **subchapter 1.4. The construction of violence in the Hunger Games trilogy**, we analyse the particularities of certain mappings of reality according to the theory of simulacra and simulation formulated by Baudrillard and approached through *close-reading*, with application to Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy.

In the **subchapter 1.4.1. "Games of simulation"** I have exposed and demonstrated the most conclusive passage of an image through the four successive phases, according to Baudrillard's theory, with the main character of the trilogy - Katniss Everdeen - at the centre. The first two phases of Katniss's image are concerned with truth and falsehood (reflection of a deep image and masking/denaturing a deep reality), with what she really is and what she ends up distorting (what she must become in front of the cameras – “the girl on fire”), while the third phase moves on to appearance (masking the absence of a deep reality), and the final phase marks the era of simulacra (the absence of any relation to reality). Reality is no longer what it was/should be, and so we find a nostalgic note in the construction of the narrative thread (invocation of nature, of the pastoral).

REALITY, MYTH AND THE DYSTOPIC IMAGINARY IN SUZANNE COLLINS' THE HUNGER GAMES TRILOGY is the subject of the **second chapter** of this research. The first part examines **(2.1.) the space of science fiction in the adolescent narrative: real, virtual, imaginary**, with a focus on the phenomenon of desensitization and dissolution of the principles of reality. In the second part of the second chapter, the method of Critical Discourse Analysis was applied to Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy in order to identify the dangers of the violence-ridden virtual (**the subchapter 2.2. When the reality of war meets fiction**), archetypal dynamics and the plasticity of myths (**the subchapter 2.3. Elements of classical mythology in Suzanne Collins' trilogy**), which conceal or distort reality. This method was chosen because of the innovation it brings with it, namely, the analysis of discourse as social action, the dynamics of understanding the text by involving the reader in the interpretation of the discourse and the possibility of **intertextual analysis**. Just as different meanings/words can be hidden behind a word, other textual sources can also be identified behind a text, which functions as an open system. According to Julia Kristeva's theory, *intertextuality* (a term first introduced in *Word, Dialogue and Novel*, 1980, and later in *The Bounded Text*, 1980) is increasingly taking the place of the term *intersubjectivity*, meaning that the transfer of meaning is not directly from writer to reader, but is filtered through codes transmitted to both by other texts that have previously appeared. The word becomes the mediator of structural patterns with cultural and historical environments.

The structuralist, palimpsestic and universal nature of the myths made it possible to integrate the following myths into the narrative thread of the trilogy: **(2.3.1.) The myth of Theseus and the Minotaur** (which the author herself recognizes as the basis of the story behind the death games), **(2.3.2.) Artemis and/or Persephone** (whose qualities we find in balanced doses in Katniss, the main character), **(2.3.3.) The myth of the Saviour and biblical references** (found through the protagonist's spirit of sacrifice) and **(2.3.4.) The myth of the damned lovers** (mirrored in the impossibility of knowing the feeling of love in a world of atrocities, death and violence).

This chapter aims to demonstrate how the trilogy is shaped as a cultural product moulded to the contingent context of the present. Studying Suzanne Collins' work leads us to place it among the visual arts. The author's insight into the political, social, cultural implications liberates the psyche of the collective society, resonating at both the group and individual level with both the conscious and the unconscious. The collapse of cultural principles and moral values served as a landmark in the creation of the narrative thread. The trilogy proved to be a fine reflection on the cultural moment in which it was conceived, offering truisms of contingent reality.

The essence of **subchapter (2.1.), Science fiction space in teenage narrative: real, virtual, imaginary** is to explore the leap from reality to hyperreality, not only in everyday life but also in literature. When the geographical map is exhausted and has nothing spectacular left to offer, man begins to exploit the virtual terrain and cyberspace. The exegesis of the imaginary spilling over into hyperreality I have illustrated through the theory of simulacra and simulation formulated by the theorist of postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard, and subsequently, applied to Collins' trilogy.

With the identification of the resurrection of the original myths analysed not only in the **subchapter (2.3.), Elements of classical mythology in Suzanne Collins' trilogy**, but also in the description of post-apocalyptic fiction (the myth of the doomed lovers, the myth of the Saviour, but also the myth of the Apocalypse), the *Hunger Games* trilogy proves to be an allegory of the traumas of present-day experiences. In addition to those listed above, the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur is the most easily identifiable, with multiple parallels between: the sacrificial heroes Theseus and Katniss, between Daedalus, the creator of the labyrinth and the Games' creators, between the minotaur and the monstrosities built in the laboratories, between Ariadne and Peeta (unconditional support as a form of love) and between the labyrinth and the Hunger Games arenas. The reintroduction of the feminine archetype into the contemporary cultural imaginary has proved to be achieved through references to the goddesses Artemis and Persephone. A number of the main character's abilities, attitudes and qualities, such as archery

skills, warrior spirit, care for nature, love for family and others or the concealment of femininity seem to be culled from a fusion of the qualities of the two deities. However, the parallel characterisation led us to conclude that our protagonist does not follow any of the goddesses' destinies to the end, but instead curbs her vengeful spirit (contrary to Artemis), deviating from the trajectory of the Amazons of popular culture and choosing to empathise with the suffering of those around her.

In **subchapter (2.4.)**, **Collins's imaginary** is approached through a strategy of bidirectional hermeneutics: an analysis from the text to the author's biography and back again. The personal experience of living through the war (father gone to Vietnam), the lessons her father taught her, explained at length in **subchapter (2.2.) When the reality of war meets fiction**, have left their mark on her writing, leading us to conclude that writing the *Hunger Games* trilogy could be a way of distilling an inherited trauma. The author mentions in an interview how she witnessed the emotional problems and nightmares her father faced after returning from the war, mirrored in Katniss' post-traumatic stress, manifested equally in nightmares, anxiety. So the violence that permeates the three novels could be part of (self)therapy, as a form of adaptation and mobilisation to the critical situations she faced as a child. In fact, creative writing is a common technique in integrative psychotherapy, through which thoughts, (re)feelings, attitudes and perspectives towards certain things, situations, people, etc. surface. The ease with which emotions are revealed in this way gives the technique an important role even in healing deep traumas.

The research proceeds by a shift in focus from examining the proliferation of images of violence, from the tension of discourses that criticize violence but are themselves caught up in this vortex of violence, to assessing the vulnerability of children to the media dimension as a propagandist vector of violence. The theoretical delimitations of the first two chapters are complemented by the applied ones summed up in the pages of **the third chapter: THE PROVOCATIONS OF DISCURSIVE AND MEDIATIC VIOLENCE: APPLICATION TO EARLY EDUCATION**. This chapter focuses on the analysis of a series of media discourses, providing an insight into the progress of communication research but also into the ways in which the human becomes a product of the social imaginary, all from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. The question this study seeks to answer is: "To what extent is the semantic field of violence represented discursively and mediatically in narratives in online media, children's literature, animations, computer games or music and how does it affect children's development?" In order to provide a convincing field of reference for the study, a cross-sectional experiment was used to identify whether there is a

correlation between children's aggressive behaviour and the violent media content they are exposed to. Also, given that early childhood teachers spend between 5 and 8 hours a day with preschoolers, we thought it appropriate to gather information on how they perceive excessive media violence, the extent of technology use in the classroom, the frequency of behaviours reliably observed as borrowed from cartoons or the online environment, and the viability of measures that could protect preschoolers from negative media effects. A questionnaire was administered to a sample of 75 preschool teachers for this purpose.

The children of our days are confronted with a new form of epistemology - social epistemology, which studies knowledge, while also taking into account social contexts. Knowledge becomes social when it is acquired through interaction with other people, groups, institutions and other means of information dissemination (media). Whereas in the past epistemology involved the acquisition of truth in an individualised form (by an individual, with only his or her own opinions), ignoring the social environment, today the two (epistemology and society) are intertwined. Leading figures in the social, psychological and educational sciences are sounding the alarm that social vectors are turning into cultural dissolvers that lead to the infantilisation of the world. In fact, the eighth strategy for manipulating the masses and brainwashing the human brain, as outlined by Pseudo-Chomsky, is to encourage the public to indulge in mediocrity, promoting stupidity, vulgarity and inculturation as fashionable. (Noam Chomsky, *“10 strategies of manipulation” by the media.*)⁴

The epistemological tradition places René Descartes (1596 - 1650), who argued that truth must be discovered through individual reasoning accessed through introspection of one's own mental contents, and John Locke (1632-1704), according to whom the brain is originally *tabula rasa*, the entire mental content of the individual coming from empirical experience, in extreme positions. Social epistemology is a counterpoint to the standard epistemology that has dominated the world of science for hundreds of years, bringing with it an extension of the traditional one, according to which a proper social organisation provides beneficial factors in the acquisition of truth. Among the most notable arguments in favour of social epistemology is that of the common commitment that binds people together, which Margaret Gilbert discusses in her research, most

⁴ The numerous versions of the title and the absence of the name of a publisher claiming copyright leads us to trust the opinion of the two Slovak scholars, A. Fedorov and A. Levitskaya, that this is a forgery, the replacement of a lesser-known author with a celebrity. Nevertheless, the theory is interesting, methodologically applicable and therefore useful, even if it would perhaps be more accurate to attribute it to a “pseudo-Chomsky”. (Our specification).

famously in *On Social Facts* (1989), where we are presented with the idea of a common group convention, a special bond, hence the idea of a “plural subject”.

The main references in the postmodern redefinition of the *self* in **subchapter 3.1. From the Cartesian Self to the Social Self** include psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (decentering the *self*), political philosopher Michel Foucault (the subject and power), linguist Émile Benveniste (the concept of intersubjectivity), semiotician Roland Barthes, discourse analyst Norman Fairclough, philosophical anthropologist Charles Taylor and the psychoanalyst Castoriadis (the social imaginary), Pierre Bourdieu (the idea of *habitus*) and so on.

The *Cartesian theory of the Self* has taken into account that conscious thought precedes and transcends human existence. Unlike classical reasoning, where knowledge precedes human existence (theological dogmas), in modern reasoning (Descartes' view, which disregards theological dogmas), human existence is subject to individual reason. In other words, what the author meant to say is that the individual cannot be convinced of the existence of the world and therefore of his existence, but only of the fact that he thinks. Until man succeeds in subjecting the existence of the world to the power of his thought (the only fact of which he is certain), he cannot be convinced of its existence. *Cogito, ergo sum!* (the famous expression of the French philosopher René Descartes). The world is subject to the thought of the Ego. Man can doubt anything about this world, his victory over existence being that he thinks.

Jacques Lacan's psychoanalyst studies on the constitution of subjectivity start from Descartes' meditations, but the French psychoanalyst observes a de-centring of the Ego from *I think, therefore I exist!* between the unconscious subject (the *thinker*) and the conscious subject (*exist*). The projection of the *Other* is done through language, the *Cartesian Ego* describes itself using language, thus gaining authority over thought and at the same time proving that it exists. Lacan mentions the division of the *Other* into a “larger” *Other* (language) and a “smaller” *Other* (the *Ego*). The use of language leads to the formation of the self-image and thus the Ego emerges.

In parallel with the three stages of psychosexual development of the child outlined by Freud (the “oral”, “anal” and “phallic” stages, starting from the Oedipus Complex and the Electra Complex), Lacan traces a similar trajectory of the child's development by introducing the concepts of need, demand and desire as correspondents of the three “registers of the psyche”: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The Imaginary - the prelinguistic stage - represents the stage in which the child has no sense of self, it is a chaotic stage dominated by desires, like an “omelette” as Lacan calls it. It is the stage of self recognition, of the delusion of autonomy (Imaginary - derived from mental processes). The acquisition of language propels the child into

the Symbolic, where he or she encounters the fact that the naming of the objects of his or her desires is not fulfilled by the object in question, but language constructs meaning only in relation to other words. It is the Symbolic that legislates us, it is the space of language (derived from culture), while the Real (different from reality) is in the realm of the impossible, indefinable, opposed to the imaginary and untouched by any symbolic order (derived from the senses). The first part of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's research is identified with the order of the imaginary, based on the theory of the mirror stage. In *Le Stade du Miroir* (1949) Lacan uses the mirror as a way of constructing the individual ego. Analysing the behaviour of children aged between 6 months and one and a half years, he observes that human identity is divided into the *Self* and the *Other*. By looking in the mirror, the child recognises his image or sees his parents in his image; self-awareness emerges, the transition from identity to otherness. The child perceives itself as a duality. This fascination of the child to look in the mirror has been considered a paradigm of the imaginary. Seeing his or her image reflected as whole, yet feeling fragmented because of his or her inability to move, the child forms a rivalry with his or her own image over the threat it makes him or her feel. The conflict is resolved when the subject identifies with the image.

The discourse of the contemporary imaginary shows a use of the term imaginary that is out of the pattern of its domain, joining the political, social, historical or economic. The adjective “social” draws some limits to the meaning of the imaginative act, while placing it in a bifurcation of meanings: on the one hand we have the meaning of social projection that precedes and possesses the individual, on the other hand we have the act of imagining social relations.

In its most common definition, imagination is the capacity to produce images, whether existing or non-existent. In an interpretation of modernity, Cornelius Castoriadis offers an ontological status to the imagination from two points of view: highlighting the “radical character” of the imagination (without it there would be no reality) and “the social imaginary that establishes society”. In his view, imagination cannot be conceived as a purely individual intellectual faculty, but rather humanity is immersed in the social imaginary into which it is born. The social context shapes the imagination. This occurs violently as the individual psyche internalizes the world, norms, language, giving up its autonomy. This definition of the social imaginary is closest to the present research.

Recent research by psychoanalysts presents the individual as being created through the context of socialization by certain imagined meanings of society. The overcoming of the individual versus society dichotomy is presented by Chiara Bottici through a theory of the imaginary. Through this she aims to clarify the dilemma of the imagination seen as a faculty

possessed by individuals and the social imaginary seen as a social context possessing individuals. In doing so, he brings into question the term “imaginal”:

Imaginal means simply that which is made of images and can therefore be the product of both an individual faculty and of the social context as well as of a complex interaction between the two. The imaginal is a concept that has recently been recovered from a Muslim Sufi philosophical tradition (Corbin 1979) and proposed as a third possibility between theories of imagination and theories of the imaginary (Fleury 2006). In contrast to imagination and imaginary, the concept of imaginal emphasizes the centrality of images, rather than the faculty or the context that produces them; therefore, it does not make any assumptions about the individual or social character of such a faculty. (Chiara Bottici, 2014, p. 5)

The term is based on its Latin origin - *imaginalis*, meaning something that is made of images. In common parlance and scientific debate, the imaginary is attributed the characteristic of unreality. According to the author, the juxtaposition of the real and the imaginary is problematic in the age of virtual reality, when the imaginary can become more real than reality itself.

Lacan (in *L'envers de la psychanalyse* and *Radiophonie*, 1969) maps the theory of intersubjectivity by associating it with the master-slave relationship, in the idea that a mutual symbolic recognition of each other's status and identity is necessary to achieve interaction between them. Man does not have complete subjectivity, so he sets out in search of it. In other words, claiming an identity is not located in a natural condition, but is obstructed by the social condition. Subjective recognition in a social environment is considered null in the absence of an intersubjective relationship. Through symbolic recognition (master - slave) we give people a position, and the result is the established relationship (superiority – inferiority).

The linguist Émile Benveniste deals with subjectivity in language (*Subjectivity in Language*, 1971a; *The Nature of Pronouns*, 1971b), pointing out that it is through the *Self* of discourse that the relationship between Self, language and culture is established. Subjectivity refers to the speaker's ability to position him/herself as subject. The socialisation of subjectivity is placed between the Self and culture and is facilitated by discourse. Through the use of the Self in discourse, its insertion into a specific cultural structure takes place, thus transforming it into an expression of subjectivity. “It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone establishes the concept of «ego» in reality, in *its* reality which is that of the being” (Émile Benveniste, 1971a, p. 224). Nouns are referential, fixing and isolating a notion, which does not change, while pronouns are not referential. The understanding of the *Ego*

(“empty” referential) is dependent on the context in which it is used, and other words such as “you”, “here”, “then”, “that woman”, “next Friday” are in the same situation. The *Ego* does not master a lexical entity. Each *I* corresponds to a unique being in distinct situations. It is possible for the use of two personal pronouns in a single sentence to refer to two different individualities when quoting the words of another person. E.g. “**I** want to contribute to the street repair, but my neighbour said, «**I** certainly don't participate in that!»”. Benveniste offers the following definition, to include both instances of **I**: “*I* is «the individual who utters the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance *I*»” (Émile Benveniste, 1971b, p. 218). At the same time, we can also encounter the situation in which the *I* mentioned in the discourse does not refer to the individuality that utters it: “He said, «It was *I*!»”. In this case, the *I* is an anaphoric one, or it is a “metaphorical *I*”, according to Benveniste's theory.

In the humanities we encounter the terms Subject (used for Self) and Object (for entity). The Subject is the one who thinks, feels, perceives, possesses subjectivity and is active, while the Object is perceived, shows passivity. In the second part of his work, the political philosopher Michel Foucault (1984, 1994) formulated a theory of the objectification of the subject. According to this, an individual is subject (feels, thinks, has certain beliefs, perceptions, attitudes towards the world/things) and object at the same time, as it requires a degree of shaping behaviour. In the philosopher's view, medicine, church, society are part of our shapers. We ourselves become objects when we want a change, when we want to progress in some aspect of our lives. By objectification, Foucault means the way individuality is controlled or determined by the family, by institutions, the way we become passive. However, individuals do not lose their subjectivity because of the influence they exert on others, which is determined by the force of submission. The philosopher points to three ways of objectification: scientific classifications (linguists have objectified the speech of subjects), practices of division (labelling categories of people: healthy-sick; poor-rich; criminals-good guys, etc.) and subjectification (the process by which they become subjects).

Subjectivity is both a process of individualisation and a process of socialisation, because the individual cannot isolate himself from the society in which he lives, from the people around him. Through the Symbolic Order, the child is “launched” into language and therefore accepts the norms and dictates of the society to which he belongs. The Symbolic succeeds through a single action (language) in creating a pact that unites the subjects among themselves. As for the concept of intersubjectivity, it refers to the shared meanings given by individuals in their daily interactions, used in turn for the interpretative purpose of socio-cultural elements. In other words, **intersubjectivity** implies a dialogue between subjects, a mutual relationship between

their knowledge, their experiences, which become constitutive factors of the world, automatically influencing the subjects' actions and responses. In *The Subject and Power*, Foucault analyses power beyond its oppressive character, giving it a productive aspect through the production of a new type of behaviour. Considering how power dissipates in all relational structures of society, the individual is placed as the subject of action and not as the object of power. Foucault describes power as a strategy, not something that can be taken possession of. Humans are vehicles of power, *locus* of the exercise of power alongside resistance. Power is positive and produces reality. Institutions use discipline, also exercised through a form of power, as a tool for shaping reality and individuals. The political philosopher does not see a negative aspect in the internalisation of discipline, nor does he see it as a form of uniformisation, but rather as the creation of disparate identities.

One of the most influential concepts found in French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's research is that of *habitus* (dispositions deeply rooted in the sum of an individual's life experiences). Scientific research does not present cultural needs as innate, but as the result of the education received and the impact of the environment in which the individual grows up. Studies show that cultural actions, such as watching a film, reading a book, visiting historical monuments, musical and artistic preferences, etc., depend on the level of schooling established by diplomas and educational levels completed, as well as social background. In one of his most prominent works, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Bourdieu presents a link between taste in art or literature and social class. Aesthetic affinities are shaped by culturally embedded *habitus*. For example, people from an upper social class have formed a taste for the fine arts because they have been exposed to and guided towards appreciating them, whereas people from a working class background have not had access to such art and consequently do not appreciate it to the same extent because this spirit has not been ingrained in them. Although they are not cognitively disabled, they unconsciously identify themselves with the social group where they belong and with corresponding forms in high order popular culture.

Social space shapes language, so we considered it important to examine **(3.1.1.) the role of social structures in the development of children's language system**, according to the functional view that M. A. K. Halliday attributes to language. The implicit and explicit nature of ideology and its desirability or undesirability (Van Dijk) requires close examination of how it occurs **(3.1.2.) The incorporation of ideologies into children's narrative fiction**. Propaganda of the culture of violence is manifested through **(3.1.3.) The militarisation of discourse** in the contemporary educational space as an effect of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In an age of consumerism, even **(3.1.4.) Toys are becoming a means of three-dimensional commercial**

manipulation, which is why a review of the tactics of creating a successful brand has been considered.

The implosion of children's media discourse with taboo early childhood topics has led us to identify language tools and strategies that hide underlying messages such as structural violence or age-inappropriate ideologies. Thus, in **subchapter 3.2. Euphemism - a linguistic tool for camouflaging violence and negative representations of reality, a critical and multimodal analysis of the discourse in animated films for children** is carried out. The three films were chosen based on their year of release (after 2000) and popularity among children: *Ice Age 3: Rise of the Dinosaurs*, *Penguins of Madagascar* and *Zootropolis*. The theoretical tools of this subchapter are summarized in the approach to the topic of animation through the work of Ülo Pikkov (*Animasophy. Theoretical Writings on the Animated Films*, 2010), the elements of narrative fiction for children, linguistic criticism and the reflection on subjectivity and ideology in the research of John Stephens (*Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, 1992), the relevance of context in the investigation of discursive practices in Fairclough's writings (*Media Discourse*, 1995a; *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 1995b), the references to the discursive strategy that allows the approach of delicate subjects or controversial - euphemism, in the writings of the following authors: Dominique Enright, (*In Other Words*, 2005), Lakoff (*The Logic of Politeness: or, Minding Your P's and Q's*, 1973), Leech (*Principles of Pragmatics*, 1983), Felt & Riloff (*Recognizing Euphemisms and Dysphemisms Using Sentiment Analysis*, 2020), Hamilton & Foltzer, (*On Euphemisms, Linguistic Creativity, and Humor*, 2021), Hugh Rawson (*A Dictionary of Euphemism and Other Doubletalk*, 1981) and so on.

If the approach of the first two chapters covers the area of the adolescent generation, following the culture and the pattern of discourse to which it is subject, it is also pivotal to carry out a study of the impact of exposure to violent media content among the Alpha Generation (children born between 2010-2025), who are digital natives, who were born, live and communicate through screens (“iGeneration”/“Glass Generation”). So, in **subsection 3.3. The impact of daily viewing of cartoon channels on the development and behavior of preschool children**, analyzing the studies that have a link between violent media content and aggressive behavior, we took the model of the experiments of the psychologist Albert Bandura and the two determining theories - Social Learning Theory (Social Learning Theory, 1977) and Imitation Theory (*Imitation Of Film-Mediated Aggressive Models*, 1961) by Albert Bandura, Dorothea Ross and Sheila Ross, conducting a cross-sectional experiment with 50 preschool subjects. At the same time, an investigation was carried out using a questionnaire as a tool to identify the

position of teachers in relation to this phenomenon of hyperdigitalization and the expected effects on children.

The aim of the present cross-sectional study was to demonstrate the initially formulated hypothesis, namely: exposure of children to mediatised models of aggression increases the probability of displaying similar behaviour in subsequent situations of frustration. In the first, descriptive part of the research, longitudinal studies or meta-analyses were presented on the negative effects of violence on children, at the end of which we can conclude that under certain conditions and circumstances a child can develop aggression if he is constantly exposed to media content violent, and when we talk about conditions, we refer to the Social Learning Theory of the psychologist Albert Bandura which was discussed and from which we extracted essential information that we applied in our experiment: for the manifestation of aggression, the child must go through three stages: attention, retention and reproduction. The child observes the violence, retains it, but does not necessarily reproduce it. The two processes are not enough if there is no motivation, directive energy to push the child to be aggressive. In other words, aggression is a learned social behaviour caused by frustration (Bandura, Social Learning Theory, 1977; John Dollard *et al.*, Frustration–Aggression–Displacement Theory, 1967). In the second part, of the quantitative research, an experiment was carried out following the steps proposed by the psychologist Bandura, the result of which demonstrated a link between exposure to violent media content and the delayed reproduction of aggressive actions in the situation in which it is induced frustration as a motivational factor towards the manifestation of aggressive behavior. Moreover, by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient, the result of which is $r=0.77$, the establishment of a positive linear association between the two variables (incidence of children's aggression and the number of children who recorded increased acts of aggression) was demonstrated.

Applying the questionnaire gave us an overview of how teachers feel the impact of media violence on children's behaviour, especially since they spend 5-8 hours daily with preschoolers, sometimes even more than their parents.

Judging by its results, we believe that the study is relevant and of interest not only to other researchers in the field, but also to parents and teachers. The limits of this research are related to the small number of children included in the experiment and of the teachers surveyed, as well as the short time in which the experiment was carried out. Consequently, we can think of a future longitudinal research into the way media channels camouflage violence and determine negative effects on the socio-emotional, cognitive and behavioural development of children.

The **starting point in the research** is the age of early childhood (and adolescence) as the pillar of the present work. **The motivation for choosing the theme** boils down to the fact that childhood does not have a shield in the form of a cognitive filter. The vulnerability of children in the face of the imminent attack with distorted information, full of violence, susceptible to falsehood, produces a phenomenon of imbalance in the formation and development of their personality. The long-term effects materialize in observations, syntheses, analyzes and personal deductions, doxastic logic, which come to occupy a second place in the formation of the adolescent's vision of contingent reality.

Engaging in a critical analysis that involves two generations (children and adolescents), offers an **integrative** character, in addition to the **interdisciplinary** one built from the approach of linguistics, semiotics, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, neurobiology and sociology.

Therefore, the paper carries **implications at a wide level**: researchers in the field, teachers, children, adolescents, families, society. Much of the research focuses on the effects of violence on the cognitive and behavioural dimensions of preschool children, but it is worth noting that aggression creates not only momentary physical pain, but also emotional, behavioural and psychological damage that will become apparent later in an adult who is a burden on the whole society. The complexity of the subject and the possibilities of interpretation open the present study to further research.

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