THE CONSTRUCTION OF FANDOM STORYTELLING IN GONCHAROV, A SCORSESE FANFILM

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Fandom storytelling Goncharov fanfilm mixed narratives transmedia storytelling diluted authorship Scorsese	The study examines the digital discourse and fandom storytelling surrounding Goncharov, a fanfilm that has been attributed to director Martin Scorsese. By employing a combination of digital ethnography and discourse analysis, we are able to define the characteristics of this original collaborative transmedia story and trace the trajectory by which it has transformed from a meme to a fanfilm to an urban legend. The results permit a confrontation with existing theories of fandom storytelling and enable a comparison of Goncharov with other historical phenomena. The findings illustrate the ability of fans to extend a narrative and construct new, hybrid texts with a diluted authorship that ultimately give rise to new cultural products.

1. Introduction

Goncharov can be defined in a number of ways. It can be considered as an urban legend, a pop culture phenomenon, a meme, or even a fanfilm or narrative universe that emerged from the creations and stories of fans, who were inspired by the authorial style and work of director and producer Martin Scorsese. While none of these definitions is incorrect, they are all reductionist and incomplete. The challenge of defining *Goncharov* is further compounded by the lack of scholarly articles that have studied this phenomenon, as well as the inconsistency between media and other sources regarding the dates and events that led to its creation and subsequent growth.

The starting point of this article is anchored in the conceptualisation of Goncharov as a fictional film, which has been designated as Scorsese's "non-film" (Aznal, 2022; Cain, 2022; Meeks, 2022; Sung, 2022)'. Its genesis is attributed to a label on the reverse of a pair of boots (De Partearroyo, 2022; Kircher, 2022; Pérez, 2022). On 22 August 2020, Tumblr user Zootycoon posted an image of the label on a pair of boots purchased online, accompanied by the following comment: "I got these knockoff boots online and instead of the brand name on the tag they have the name of an apparently nonexistent Martin Scorsese movie" (Zootycoon, 2020 in Wiki Fandom Goncharov, 2022). It must be acknowledged that the provenance of the label remains unproven. However, given that the item in question was placed on counterfeit footwear, some commentators (De Partearroyo, 2022) have speculated that the error may have been a typographical one, with the label in fact reading 'Gomorrah' – a reference to the celebrated Italian television series about the Camorra, which Scorsese supported for its distribution in the United States.

Figure 1. Boot label that gave rise to the Goncharov phenomenon

Source: Zootycoon, 2020, in Wiki Fandom Goncharov, 2024.

Although this Tumblr post was shared by other users at the time, generating a considerable number of comments, it did not achieve the status of a viral phenomenon and was subsequently forgotten. On 10 November 2022, a user named "mrs. curio" uploaded a series of still images purporting to depict scenes from *Goncharov* to the social network X (formerly known as Twitter). The images were accompanied by the following text: "Martin Scorsese's 'Goncharov', the greatest mafia movie ever made" ("mrs. curio" in De Partearroyo, 2022). This publication generated several hundred retweets, thereby initiating a process of viralisation that reached its peak eight days later, on 18 November 2022. At this juncture, another Tumblr user, identified as Beelzeebub (Aznal, 2022; Vallejo, 2022), created and disseminated a poster of the fictional film (see Figure 2). The poster displayed the following text: "Martin Scorsese presents: A film by Matteo JWHJ 0715". Thus, according to this poster, the film was actually directed by an unknown individual (Matteo JWHJ 0715) and endorsed by Martin Scorsese. Furthermore, the film features an impressive ensemble cast, including renowned actors Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, Cybill Shepherd, Gene Hackman, Harvey Keitel, and John Cazale (Aznal, 2022).

Figure 2. Original *Goncharov* poster

Source: Beelzeebub, 2020 in Aznal, 2022.

If we consider the error on the boot label to be the catalyst that brings *Goncharov's* idea to life, then the fictional still frames depicting scenes from the film, along with the first poster shown above, can be seen as the driving force behind the virality (Paniza, 2022; Vallejo, 2022) of this phenomenon. The widespread dissemination of *Goncharov* content took shape through memes, posts, and different types of social media publications, all sharing a common denominator: the belief that the film actually existed. The authenticity of the film was a significant factor in the emergence of a variety of short-term content, including the publication of reviews on various platforms with the intention of increasing its virality (Panizo, 2022). The most significant contributions to this phenomenon include a film trailer and a collaborative effort developed by fans on Google Drive (2022), comprising a 45-page literary script, character biographies, notes on costume design, and additional posters and promotional materials (Vallejo, 2022), among many other details about the film. This has contributed to the further expansion of the transmedia narrative universe generated by a fictional product that is assumed to be real: "Tumblr cinephiles have a new favorite movie this week. It's decades old, so maybe you've already seen it." (Kircher, 2022).

More specifically, between 26 and 28 November, *Goncharov* was the subject of considerable media interest, with numerous international outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, NBC News, and others reporting on the story. Table 1 below illustrates the manner in which the subject in question was disseminated throughout the media landscape, as evidenced by the press clipping conducted for this study:

Table 1. *Goncharov* press clipping

	Author	Medium	Date
News Report	Daniel de Partearroyo	20 Minutos (Spain)	22/11/2022
News Report	Madison Malone Kircher	The New York Times (USA)	22/11/2022
Article	Jorge Aznal	El Debate (Spain)	24/11/2022
News Report	Sian Cain	The Guardian (Europe Edition)	25/11/2022
News Report	Randy Meeks	Espinof (Spain)	26/11/2022
Article	Francisco Pérez	Futuro Chile (Chile)	26/11/2022
News Report	Morgan Sung	NBC News (USA)	26/11/2022
News Report	Antonio Vallejo	Genbeta (Spain)	28/11/2022
Article	Rocio Paniza	Cinéfilos (Spain)	28/11/2022

Source: own elaboration, 2023.

Nevertheless, there are still many unanswered questions regarding the manner in which this fanfilm transitions from being the product of a community of Scorsese film enthusiasts to becoming a viral phenomenon that is defined by a collaborative network of collective authorship. Against this backdrop, this research examines the traits of digital discourse and fandom storytelling in the content generated by users on social media for the aforementioned fanfilm, along with the elements that make up *Goncharov's* transmedia narrative universe.

1.1. Fandom Storytelling, Transmedia Narrative Universe and Intertextuality

The fan phenomenon, as we understand it today, has its origins in the early nineteenth century, with the spontaneous emergence of various groups of readers who met to discuss the works of the great novelists of the time, including Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Lewis Carroll and Jane Austen. Even writers like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien belonged to this kind of readership during the first half of the twentieth century.

However, the collaborative creation of content and stories by the so-called "fandom" has emerged in the digital age, particularly with the advent of Web 2.0, also known as the social web. This has provided fans with a voice, as well as with agile and effective tools to communicate, gather and share the content they create (Busquet, 2012). Nonetheless, in their analysis of the TV series *Gomorrah*, Napoli and Tirino (2015) argue that these actions are driven by American production companies and their desire to create social spaces where the public can enjoy narrative extensions of any given franchise, with the aim of establishing network links that facilitate going beyond the traditional relationship between audience and audiovisual production.

User-generated content (UGC) thus constitutes an integral element of the transmedia narrative construction (Hernández Ruiz, 2019; Jenkins, 2006; Molpeceres Arnáiz & Rodríguez Fidalgo, 2014; Ryan & Thon, 2014; Scolari, 2009) that characterises the majority of contemporary licences, franchises and productions. In this narrative construction carried out by the fandom, two types of fan creators can be identified according to Seo (2017). The first type of fan experiences great satisfaction in expanding or seeing the original story and franchise expanded. The second type has a more vigilant or protective profile and is less inclined to accept the transformation of the story through creations developed by other fans. Booth (2008) identifies a third type of fan: those who express themselves on social media by adopting the name and personality of a character from the original story, and by creating social media profiles for these characters, in order to bridge the gap between fiction and reality. This phenomenon, Booth (2008) notes, challenges and rewrites the conventional rules of fandom. In relation to this, McClain's (2009) reflections are noteworthy, since these emerging narratives do not simply represent or expand the films, but rather transform them into an aesthetic distinct from that of the transitional cinematic era and more in line with classical cinematic norms.

The elements that shape a narrative universe are not limited to a fixed number; however, they must always "ensure narrative continuity, expansion and multiplicity, adapting and modulating the message through different media, formats and platforms, or through authorised and unauthorised channels" (Freire-Sánchez et al., 2023, p. 20). In terms of the type of content that can be considered as *fandom storytelling*, the following elements are included: written fictional stories (fanfiction), artistic creations (fanart), costume design and characterisation of people as fictional characters (cosplay), video games made by fans (fangames) and films made by fans (fanfilms). Such creations frequently delineate the ways in which audiences interpret the original narrative and its characters, often extending and elaborating upon the original story. This is exemplified by the Star Wars franchise (Taylor, 2015) and the Tolkien Universe (Brown & Waterhouse-Watson, 2016; Papadaki & Volakis, 2022). The transmedia landscapes or worlds (Rosendo Sánchez, 2016) created by fans constitute a broad and flexible intertextual space that modifies or extends the comprehension of the relationship between the original narrative and its fandom storytelling. To some extent, this can enrich the *storyworlds* (Ryan & Thorn, 2014) of transmedia narrative universes (Arnau Roselló, 2016; Lastra, 2016).

In this regard, it is pertinent to recall Kristeva's (1978) assertion that "every text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations, every text is the absorption and transformation of another text" (p. 90). This intertextuality inherent to creative processes enables researchers, as Daniyeva (2020) argues, to observe the manner in which a narrative establishes connections with other texts. From the perspective of fandom studies, the intertextual links between content that is recognisable by fans become especially relevant: "The consumer/viewer feels at ease with the recognition of narratives with which they are

already familiar, and this fosters a sense of intelligence, confidence and agency in the creation of meaning" (Freire-Sánchez et al., 2022, p.10). In the case of works that exist beyond the written text, Capra and Floridi (2023) propose the concept of *intervisuality* as a means of tracing the interrelationship between images in the visual domain while also exploring the complex interaction between the visual, the verbal and the textual.

1.2. Mixed Narratives of Diffuse and Collaborative Authorship

The triple conjunction formed by the original narrative, the official audiovisual productions and the set of narratives created by fans (fandom storytelling) gives rise to mixed narratives (Freire-Sánchez et al., 2023) or remix culture (Mora-Fernández, 2019). Beyond the act of creating something new based on pre-existing content, Retez (2022) posits that this phenomenon also occurs whenever fans comment on or discuss a film or video game with one another. This is because they appropriate the original author's creativity and remix it with their own lives and knowledge, with the intention of expressing their own views and opinions. Nevertheless, the provenance of these fan creations is characterised by a diffuse or diluted authorship, which may be inspired by the personal imprint of recognized authors, whether writers, filmmakers, or other types of artists. This kind of mixture between original authorship and subsequent creations, as Bruni and Baceviciute (2013) argue, gives rise to what they define as a 'narrative paradox'. Similarly, Freire-Sánchez et al. (2023) point out that "the author's narrative connects through transmediality with the creations produced by users and, in turn, causes authorship to become blurred" (p. 10). The combination of authors in multimedia and transmedia creations results in transcreation and transauthorship (Meng, 2022). This phenomenon occurs because "the fictional universes created by story authors are also living and dynamic entities that enable new creations, thus favouring transauthorship, or the dilution [of authorial boundaries] across the content created by different users" (Freire-Sánchez et al., 2023, p. 10).

This has a considerable impact on the concept of the author and the potential dissolution of the original publishing label. As O'Meara and Bevan (2018) explain, transmedia creations tend to emphasise original and individual authorship, yet these authors contend that this approach is limiting and distracts attention from two key aspects: firstly, how stories spread across platforms and secondly, the valuable content that fan communities create. This, they argue, dilutes or overthrows classic theories of authorship. Similarly, these two authors contest the theories put forth by Henry Jenkins (2003) concerning the significance of authorship or authorial prestige in transmedia narratives. The phenomenon of transcreation and transauthorship has been stimulated in recent years, in part, by the necessity, as posited by Papadaki and Volakis (2022), to create engaging cultural content in a highly competitive transmedia environment. This has resulted in the formation of synergies between numerous cultural industries and/or cultural producers, including film, video games, music, and literature.

Conversely, another defining feature of this category of transmedia creations in digital contexts is the facilitation of discourse, fostering dialogues between cultural industries and their audiences, whether in the context of television series (Martínez-Borda et al., 2022) or in the domain of fan-generated content. Additionally, as Mora-Fernández (2019) notes, new but recognisable creations can emerge from pre-existing modular narrative elements of characters as they perform and interact with new actions in original spaces and times. Thus, original authorship is once again diluted by new and fan-derived creations, although there remains an interest in preserving the author's signature, to the extent possible.

1.3. Digital Urban Legends and Viral Phenomena

As previously stated, *Goncharov* undergoes a metamorphosis from its inception as a meme to evolve into a digital urban legend, bearing the label 'Scorsese's unknown film', and ultimately becoming a viral phenomenon. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to elucidate the concept of a digital urban legend and to identify the elements that define it, as well as to determine the conditions that must be met for it to be considered viral.

Urban legends are narratives concerning anomalous and extraordinary occurrences, yet they must be sufficiently plausible to generate doubt and belief. Similarly, as Guerini and Strapparava (2014)

emphasise, they must emulate the specifics of the news (what, where, how, and when something occurred), while also being emotive and accessible, akin to a folk tale. Heath and Heath (2007) posit that there are six defining characteristics of urban legends: simplicity, concreteness, verisimilitude, emotional value, capacity for surprise, and narrative depth. Trabado Cabado (2021) claims that these legends occupy a space that is "integrated into mass culture" (p. 133), which provides a conduit for their narrative translation to other media, including comics, audiovisual formats, and others that may or may not be included in a transmedia narrative universe.

At the present time, urban legends are more frequently found in digital creations known as *creepypasta.* García-Roca (2021) describes these as "phenomena that stand out for their protean nature and continuous adaptation to different social and historical contexts; consequently, they represent an inexhaustible source of texts from which networks feed and rewrite" (p. 3). The advent of the digital era has given rise to a plethora of content and creations that originate from a premise that challenges the boundaries of reality, subsequently expanding through the medium of fiction. These are known as ARGs, or alternate reality games (Rojas, 2020; Ruiz-García, 2022) and are created by networked users. It is therefore significant that links can be identified between ARGs and urban legends in the current digital biosphere.

There are evident, notable distinctions between urban legends from the pre-digital age and those observed in the digital age. One illustrative example is the urban legend of the *Necronomicon*, a fictional book "by an imaginary mystic and demonologist of the Islamic era, Abdul Alhazred" (Del Percio, 2020, p. 89), which features in the work of the playwright and literary author H. P. Lovecraft. This fictional book was considered a genuine entity, even regarded as a forbidden and cursed text, thereby generating a tangible mythology around it, despite its mere existence being confined to Lovecraft's imagination and writings. In his 2019 study, "How the *Necronomicon* Became Real: The Ecology of a Legend," Laycock examines the construction of the urban legend of the *Necronomicon* and determines the agents involved in its creation. He identifies four categories of individuals involved in the development of this urban legend: 1) pranksters, 2) 'misguided' teenagers who were unaware that it was a legend; 3) Lovecraft's followers, whom he refers to as occultists and who, despite being aware of the book's fictional nature, perpetuated its legend; and finally, 4) alarmists or outraged individuals who believed the *Necronomicon* was a hidden threat to society.

Nevertheless, additional actors and variables have emerged that influence the transformation of a meme or urban legend into a viral phenomenon. Some of these elements, as identified by Ling et al. (2022), include the popularity and number of followers of the creator, as well as the content shared through video formats. In contrast, Berger and Milkman (2013) suggest that the most viral content evokes highly positive emotions, such as astonishment, or negative emotions, such as anger and anxiety. Conversely, Jacobsen (2020) asserts that the ambiguity between fact and fiction, along with the recipients' adaptation to their cultural and media environment, serve to enhance virality in the context of celebrity *vitafiction*.

2. Methodology

In order to achieve the stated objectives of this research project, a combined methodology has been designed. This is comprised, firstly, of the study of digital or virtual ethnography (Niño Vázquez, 2022; Pink et al., 2019), also known as computational ethnography (Brooker, 2022), which facilitates the investigation of fan behaviours and interactions on social networks. As Suárez-Vergne (2020), argues, virtual ethnography "advocates an exhaustive approach to research, coupled with a broad perspective" (p. 12). The objective of this initial methodology is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of *Goncharov*'s fans. However, it should be noted that, as Joshi et al. (2023) state, all research methods, including traditional and digital ethnography, are susceptible to subjectivity and bias.

Secondly, this digital ethnography has been combined with semiotic and discourse analysis of fan-created actions. The choice to combine these methods was driven by the predominantly visual nature of the content created by *Goncharov* fans, which lends itself to visual analysis (Geraghty, 2015). This type of study enables us to examine the constituent elements of fandom storytelling and *Goncharov*'s transmedia narrative universe.

3. Fieldwork and Data Analysis

The fieldwork based on digital ethnography is composed of different phases. These phases take into account the focus on the boundaries of the group/culture under investigation, the focus on the platform, the accessibility to the information, and the specific dynamics of the group that is being observed (Nascimento et al., 2022). Following an initial exploratory search, it was determined that, although *Goncharov* had emerged on Tumblr, Instagram would be the platform subjected to analysis. This decision was made for two reasons. Firstly, it was of particular interest to observe the phenomenon's transition from a niche social network (Tumblr) to a more mainstream or generalist one, with wider potential audiences (Instagram). Secondly, this platform provides users with the ability to share both images and videos, and it was therefore anticipated that the variety of formats published would be more diverse than on other networks (such as TikTok).

It was then necessary to extract variables that would subsequently allow the results of the data obtained to be coded. In this regard, the variables had to be aligned with the objectives that were set forth and with the research questions that guided this study: How was the *Goncharov* fanfilm developed? What time frame does this phenomenon cover? What elements and types of content constitute the narrative universe of the fanfilm? What type of authorship can be ascribed to it? In establishing the coding variables, consideration was also given to other questions (such as the types of formats used by fans, or the specific content of the publications) that would facilitate a more in-depth examination of the phenomenon through discourse analysis and semiotic analysis, respectively. Table 2 below presents the quantitative and qualitative variables used for coding the data obtained from the ethnographic study. The aforementioned variables enable the analysis of "the object phenomenon in its actual context, employing multiple sources of evidence –both qualitative and quantitative– simultaneously" (Villarreal and Landeta, 2010, p. 2).

Table 2. Coding variables determined in the digital ethnography

	Quantitative variable	Qualitative variable
Author/User		x
Date of publication	x	
Type of content	x	x
Type of format	x	x
Text of caption		x
Language	x	x
General hashtags	x	x
Hashtags Goncharov	x	x
Characters	x	x
Description		x
Comments		x

Source: own elaboration, 2024

The following step was to establish the form of data collection, and for this purpose, the search was limited to the months of January and February 2024. The data collection was conducted manually, as the qualitative variables and those susceptible to discourse or semiotic analysis could not be extracted using software designed for social network analysis. Thirdly, the way in which the information would be accessed was determined. To this end, a fictitious user called "goncharovfilm.study" was created, from whose account all relevant hashtags and content were tracked. The objective was to guarantee that the searches were based on uncontaminated algorithms (García-Mingo & Prieto Blanco, 2023). Once access to the information had been established, a preliminary selection of informants was required. In this case, the informants were the users who comprise the *Goncharov* fandom. To achieve this, the observed hashtags were filtered by counting those most frequently mentioned (#goncharov,

#goncharov1973), which constitute the main hashtag landscape. In addition, other related hashtags – also referred to as hashtag families– were identified (e.g., #goncharovcosplay or #katyagoncharova, among others.)

In a subsequent filtering process, the researchers determined that #goncharov should be discarded as the main hashtag. Although it was the most frequently used hashtag, it is also a Russian surname, which meant that a significant number of the posts obtained were not directly relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Consequently, a decision was made to designate #goncharov1973 as the primary hashtag and #goncharovcosplay as the secondary one. The publications retrieved using these final hashtags were further refined by excluding those from media sources, as they did not represent fan contributions. Additionally, any posts unrelated to the *Goncharov* case study were discarded. Of the posts that were tagged, Instagram permitted access to a total of 148, which were subsequently collated for analysis. Of these 148 posts, 26 were found to be irrelevant for the reasons mentioned above and were thus excluded. The final dataset consisted of 122 posts, six of which were carousels containing multiple images. All of these were deemed sufficiently distinct and therefore meaningful for the study. In conclusion, the total number of unique items examined in the digital ethnography is 129. The results of their analysis were coded in Excel, following the aforementioned variables.

4. Results

In order to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the *Goncharov* phenomenon, the results will be presented under three different headings, which reflect the prevailing approaches detailed in the theoretical framework above. First, the results pertaining to the elements that constitute the transmedia narrative universe within which this fanfilm has been developed are subjected to analysis. Second, the findings from the digital ethnography conducted on fan creations will be scrutinised and discussed. Finally, the factors that contribute to the virality of this fanfilm and its transformation into an urban legend will be examined.

4.1. The Goncharov Transmedia Narrative Universe and its Discourse

The central concept of this phenomenon, which emerged from a boot label posted on Tumblr, is the existence of a mafia film called *Goncharov*, endorsed by Martin Scorsese and directed by the hitherto unknown director Matteo JWHJ 0715. From this idea, several independent narrative lines arose and were developed by fans. The first of these is the initial poster, which also provides the main cast for the film. The second is a series of scenes generated by a user with the assistance of AI, which adds a visual and aesthetic dimension to the idea behind *Goncharov*. The third is the publication of content created by different users, which further enables the expansion of the narrative. The following infographic presents an overview of the evolution of *Goncharov*'s transmedia narrative universe:

Figure 3. Evolution of *Goncharov*'s transmedia narrative universe
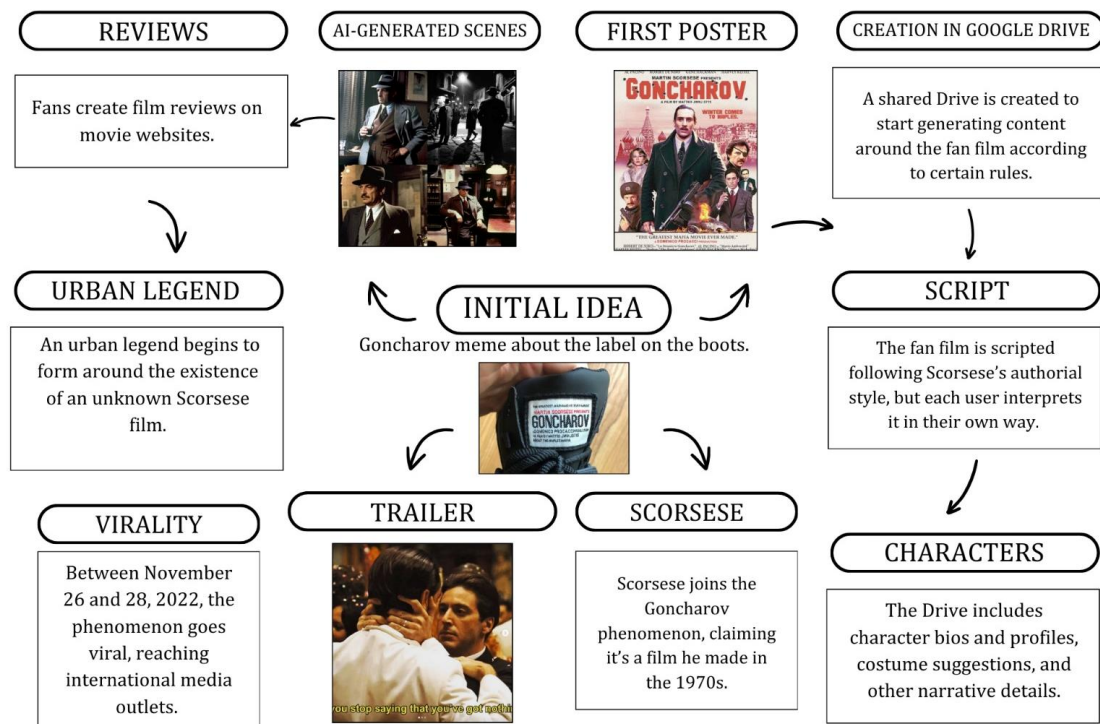
Source: own elaboration, 2024.

In a new phase, the creation of a shared Google Drive called "Goncharov 1973" facilitated a collaborative creative process for fans, enabling independent users to work together and, thus, generating a fandom around *Goncharov*. This shift marked a transition from a unilateral, individualistic approach to a collaborative and interconnected methodology. Moreover, the integrity of these creations is safeguarded by a select group of users responsible for ensuring adherence to established standards and guidelines. In this regard, one of the fundamental tenets of this collaboration is as follows: "In general, avoid period inaccuracies. Since this is Goncharov, some inaccuracies are obvious (e.g. What became of the Soviet Union?), but technology and fashion should not go beyond 1973" (Drive Goncharov 1973, 2024). The aforementioned users are responsible for creating the film's script and character descriptions, while others are tasked with developing a trailer. In this way, the meme evolves into and becomes a fanfilm project, as it comprises all the elements of any other cinematic production, with the exception of the actual shooting and editing of the film itself.

Subsequently, the Wiki Fandom for *Goncharov* was established. Similar to other creations stemming from the original concept, this website is founded on the assumption that *Goncharov* constitutes an authentic cinematic production – to the extent that the biography of its fictional director, Matteo JWHJ 0715, is presented on this platform as though he were a real person. Furthermore, the website provides details about the purported release of the film and the events that transpired in 1973, when Scorsese's alleged non-film was supposedly screened in cinemas. Concurrently, a multitude of users have reviewed *Goncharov* on film-specific websites, such as Metacritic and IMDb, with a dual objective: to perpetuate the notion of the film's legitimacy and to expand its reach to a broader audience.

4.2. Digital Ethnography: The Construction of Fandom Storytelling

Despite the limitations outlined in section 3, the results of the digital ethnography conducted in this study make it possible to discern several clear trends regarding fandom storytelling practices. The time frame of the publications that have been examined extends from 21 November 2022 to 31 May 2023, with the period between 21 and 30 November 2022 representing the peak of this phenomenon (85 of the 129 posts analysed were published between these dates). This demonstrates an atomisation of user-generated content within a narrow temporal window. With regard to language, English is not only the

most prevalent, but also serves as a lingua franca for users from different countries to share their creations pertaining to Goncharov. Nevertheless, a number of publications have been identified in other languages, including Spanish. In terms of content type and format, fanart —particularly digital illustrations created with software such as Procreate— is the most widespread. However, the study has recorded a broad range of fan content, including cosplay, games, merchandising, fantrailers, memes, promotional posts about podcasts discussing Goncharov, and even a song from the film's soundtrack, "Katya's Song". Figure 4 below offers a visual representation of the fandom's creations, as observed through the digital ethnography.

Figure 4. A selection of *Goncharov* fan creations, drawn from the digital ethnography
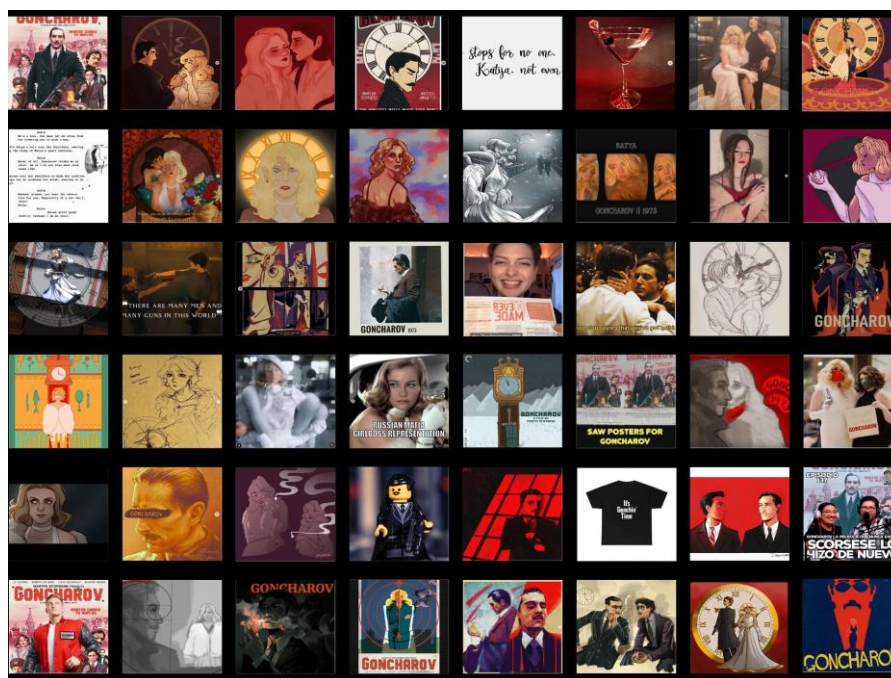
Source: own elaboration based on images uploaded by users to the Instagram social network, 2024.

In terms of intertextuality, the constant reference to Scorsese's work is evident, as well as to other films whose plots revolve around the mafia, such as *The Godfather* trilogy. Furthermore, the featured cast of actors who have previously collaborated with Scorsese, including Robert De Niro, Al Pacino and Cybill Shepherd, is particularly noteworthy. Moreover, the white dresses worn by Shepherd in various 1970s films are instrumental in defining her character, Katya Goncharova. Visual motifs related to *Goncharov*'s major themes have also been identified, including the clock and the passage of time as a central thematic axis of the narrative. Other recurring elements in this fan-created universe are blood, fire, cigarettes and guns, which are consistently presented with a visual identity influenced by the aesthetics of mafia films. Additionally, saturated tones, especially red, grey, and black, dominate the visual palette. The presence of *crossovers* also emerges as significant in this digital ethnography, whereby fans draw upon other existing narrative universes to create new storylines, 'crossing' and blending the world of *Goncharov* with other stories from mangas, video games or television series.

In a similar vein, and in relation to other fan storytelling practices, the prominence of love subplots in the narrative is notable. This is somewhat paradoxical, given that this type of subplot is not as relevant in Scorsese's filmography, nor in the mafia films that *Goncharov* seeks to evoke. Nevertheless, this is a common practice among online fan communities, which establish *ships* (an abbreviation for relationships) to pair their favourite characters. The multitude of couples and love interests that have been created by fans is also documented in the collaborative *Goncharov* Drive. This digital ethnography reveals that, in addition to the main couple (the Katya/Goncharov marriage), two homosexual couples are particularly prevalent in user-generated content: Katya/Sofia and Goncharov/Andrey. Katya is unquestionably the most popular character, as evidenced by her appearance in 75 of the 129 posts examined. She is followed by the character of Goncharov, the protagonist of this fanfilm, who is referenced in 48 posts.

Furthermore, the data collected also sheds some light on 1) the phenomenon of cross-platform content dissemination; and 2) the exchange of feedback between fans during the process of story construction. Regarding the former, both the content of the posts and the comments made by fans prove that the *Goncharov* phenomenon has travelled from Tumblr to Instagram, and that several of the videos analysed in this ethnography were initially created for TikTok. Regarding the latter, the comments and posts published on Instagram certainly serve to bolster the urban legend of *Goncharov* as a real film. This discourse is continually reinforced through messages in which fans share their favourite scenes, or recall how they watched the film with their parents when they were young.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

With regard to the urban legend approach, especially in comparison to other phenomena created by fandom prior to the advent of social networks, such as H.P. Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*, it is possible to identify intriguing parallels with the ideas put forth by Laycock (2019). Applying this author's theoretical framework to the case study of *Goncharov*, the pranksters would be the memes, the teenagers would be the users, the Lovecraft fans would be analogous to the Scorsese fans, and the instigators would be the so-called haters. With this assessment, it can be argued that the relevant agents concur, and that the distinction between these two eras can be attributed to the increased viral capacity of contemporary media platforms. In accordance with the characteristics of urban legends as outlined by Heath and Heath (2007), it can be asserted that *Goncharov* exhibits all of the required traits, particularly in terms of narrative depth and emotional dimension. Furthermore, we posit that this case study also adheres to the capacity for continuous adaptation to different contexts, as postulated by García-Roca (2021).

Conversely, it is generally believed that a transmedia narrative universe, as delineated in the state of the art, is predicated on the fundamental tenet of respecting the identity of the author of the original story. However, our research on *Goncharov* has identified three paradoxes that challenge this approach. Firstly, there are internal contradictions inherent to any given phenomenon of fan storytelling, where authorship is collective, collaborative and diffuse. Secondly, the initial poster credits Matteo JWHJ 0715 as the director; yet, during the viralisation process, the authorship of *Goncharov* is finally attributed to Scorsese, with the original director disappearing from the equation. Thirdly, although fans attempt to respect and homogenise Scorsese's 'authorial signature' with a series of rules, ultimately this is something that responds to the individual interpretation that each user makes of Scorsese's distinctive imprint. Consequently, this notion stems from a high point of subjectivity that, combined with other users and following the precepts of 'remix culture' suggested by Mora-Fernández (2019), actually results in a diluted authorial stamp. Additionally, *Goncharov* exemplifies the types of vigilant fans and those who seek to expand the narrative proposed by Seo (2017), as well as those identified by Booth (2008), who adopt the profiles of fictional characters from the story. It must also be noted that *Goncharov* illustrates the concept of a "mosaic of quotations," as defined by Kristeva (1978). This is evident in the way the narrative is essentially constructed through multiple references to other works.

In light of the aforementioned theories, it is reasonable to argue that the most accurate definition of *Goncharov* is that of a transmedia narrative universe. This construct, whose central engine is fandom storytelling, is characterised by intertextuality, intervisuality, collaborative authorship, the combination of the original author's stamp and diffuse authorship, and the narrative seed that meets the criteria of an urban legend. It can be concluded that the influence of users is not limited to merely expanding the discourse set forth by audiovisual production companies or brands; it also encompasses the creation of original content. This could potentially lead to the emergence of a new business model for audiovisual productions, one characterised by the coexistence of diverse narratives. This may provide a basis for future lines of research, along with the expansion of digital ethnographic studies to other platforms and social networks.

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