

Chapter 4

Origin Story and Self-Made Character: Virtuality and Context of Political Figures in Media

ABSTRACT

This chapter dwells upon a construct of origin story and self-made pastiche in universal codes of media, as seen through international political communication. The main case upon which effectiveness of the constructs are demonstrated is the case of overwhelming media presence of certain politicians, which transcends into narrative fiction. Analyzed is the phenomena of Presidents of the United States and their appearances in movies, comics, and music, which is the case for every US President ever. Supplied are results of author's own empirical research on subjects which concerns all three mediums. Additionally, dissected are the concepts of American dream, mystery men, and media presence of certain politicians showcased both retrospectively and contemporarily.

INTRODUCTION

Origin story is not exactly a well-formulated genre – it could be applied to a plot of any complexity, theme or medium. However, as a mythological element of storytelling, origin story often relies on a series of *hooks* and/or

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tropes, which could be easily traced to primordial mythologies that sparked civilization's culture.

Searching 'media hierarchy' on the Internet will mostly bring what is commonly known as *media hierarchy of influences*. Present theories on media hierarchy (if we can call them such) lack not only sufficient research backing, but at times common sense. Anonymous website, rather pompously named Media vs. Reality (2018a, 2018b) and also using the audiovisual form of YouTube (2019) attempts to formulate media hierarchy on its own, as well as 'media diet' on the principles of discarding certain types of media altogether. The basic idea uses *The Matrix* as one of the relevant and important allegories (if not something more direct), trying to inspire the audience to break most of their relationship with the media.

The irony of that confused worldview is that *The Matrix*, despite undoubtedly present philosophical elements to the plot, is hardly relevant when it comes to modern media policy. Most of the movie takes place in an irrelevant simulation, a virtual world, something elusive and important mostly as an element of oppression. Yet, *The Matrix* is hardly a groundbreaking science fiction, as many students of the Donetsk National University (now Vasyl' Stus Donetsk National University) uncovered while learning dialogs from *The Matrix* and studying the meanings of such in-depth were provided with additional vocabulary and context. While the film itself still remained as a relevant achievement in their opinion, stripping it of pseudo-scientific layers actually might have increased the value of expressed philosophical ideas, which are reportedly influenced by different cultural layers, mixing principles of mythological storytelling with storytelling achievements of twentieth century. (Buchanets & Opryshko, 2008, pp. 11-34).

However, 20 years has passed since *The Matrix* at the moment of this book's conception and development. Despite movie remains important, twenty-first century hardly excludes as much elements of mythologies as the movie tried to convey. In fact, virtual reality became a mundane media type with mostly no strings attached. Essentially term virtual is usually viewed from the two perspectives in English: a non-existent, illusion, a hologram; or essentially the same as something. Upon entering Ukrainian and Russian languages, virtual only retained the former meaning, lifted exclusively from the term virtual reality. We can safely say that the term is derogatory in Ukraine's political context, borderline offensive. An attempt and way to call out a charlatan or façade of some kind. Volodymyr Zelenskiy, President of Ukraine, right before being elected was nicknamed as 'the first ever virtual candidate'.

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