SOUTH KOREAN AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION IN SPAIN: GRANADA AS A LUDIC WORLD IN THE SERIES *MEMORIES OF THE ALHAMBRA*

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INTRODUCTION[1]

The increasing prevalence of studies about Asian pop culture (Kim, 2013) is a reflection of the exponential growth of the audiovisual industries of China, Japan and South Korea in the last decade. Online VOD (video on demand) platforms and digital networks have played a decisive role in the distribution of Asian audiovisual production to the rest of the world (Lobato, 2018). This is especially true in the case of South Korea. "Korean dramas have become, within just a decade, one of the types of broadcasting content most in demand in many Asian countries" (Jeon, 2005). Although this cultural and industrial phenomenon, known as the Korean Wave (Ju, 2014: 47), encompasses a wide range of content, from K-pop (music) to literature (Chŏng, 2012), television series are a highly representative element of the phenomenon.

In the case of Spain, the impact of Asian audiovisual content is also evident in the proliferation of productions filmed in our country (¿Por qué los asiáticos...?, 2019) and even stories set in the country. An example of this is the retro-futurist animation series *Sound of the Sky* (So-Ra-No-Wo-To, Hiroyuki Yoshino, TV Tokyo: 2010), with a setting in a town named Seize, inspired by the Spanish city of Cuenca, which has given rise to a fan tourism phenomenon in the city (Mendoza, 2015). Another is the more recent *Magi: The Tensho Boys' Embassy* (MAGI Tensho Keno Shonen Shisetsu, Hiromi Kusaka, Toshio Kamata, Amazon Prime Video: 2018-2019), about the first Japanese diplomatic mission to Spain, filmed in Valladolid, Puerto de Santa María and Salamanca (Estreno mundial..., 2019). In the case of *Sound of the Sky*, the connection to Spain operates on a creative level only, since the real Cuenca is not represented: "In Seize, things happen that never happen in Cuenca [...] but [...] they make reference to Spanish fiestas. The Tomatina, the *Guerra del Agua* and flamenco are some cultural elements that are de-

picted in the series"[2] (Mendoza, 2015). The series only took inspiration from the city: "the producer Syuko Yokoyama and part of the production team came to Castilla-La Mancha to take pictures and gather ideas to enrich the architecture of Seize" (Mendoza, 2015). As mentioned above, the similarity between the two cities—the fictional and the real—has resulted in a significant boom in Japanese tourism (Mendoza, 2015). On the other hand, *Magi: The Tensho Boys' Embassy* found inspiration not only in Spanish aesthetics but in a real event related to Spain: the pioneering visit of four Japanese seminarians to the court of Phillip II (Amazon Prime estrena…, 2019). Thus, the Spanish connection is not merely aesthetic but also related to production: the miniseries was filmed with a Spanish film crew and received institutional support from the Salamanca Film Commission and the Valladolid Film Office (Estreno mundial…, 2019). It is worth noting that in addition to its international distribution through Amazon Prime Video, *Magi: The Tensho Boys' Embassy* also has a significant metanarrative element: its audiovisual production has required a recreation of the very cultural encounter it depicts. The industrial expansion of Asian audiovisual content is therefore fostering a cultural encounter between two worlds: Asian production and a Spanish cultural and geographical context.

This is also reflected in the South Korean series *Memories of the Alhambra* (Alhambeura Goongjeonui Chooeok, Jae-Jeong Song, TVN-Netflix: 2018), about an audiovisual technology developer who discovers an augmented reality game in the city of Granada. Produced by the South Korean TV network for Netflix, "it was simultaneously released on the Netflix platform and on cable television in South Korea" (Fariñas and Fernández Larrechi, 2018). Thus, the distribution strategy of

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THE AESTHETIC AND NARRATIVE USE OF THE IMAGINARY OF A SPANISH CITY IN A SOUTH KOREAN AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION OFFERS AN INTERESTING CASE STUDY

Memories of the Alhambra can be considered international from its conception. Its Spanish setting was also part of the project from the very beginning: "The production […] couldn't be filmed in any other city because the screenwriter, Song Jae-Jung, was inspired by places in Granada like the Alhambra" (Vargas, 2018). In fact, the creator of the series wrote the first draft of the script while staying in a hostel in Granada (Vargas, 2018). While *Memories of the Alhambra* is the latest in an ongoing trend of Asian series set in a Spanish context, here the relationship with Spain is different from that of *Sound of the Sky* and *Magi*, as it is not limited to mere aesthetic inspiration (Granada is the model for the fictional city), although it does not subordinate the action to a series of historical events either. Taking an approach between these two extremes, this South Korean melodrama with elements of suspense and echoes of the parallel universe subgenre *isekai* ("other world" in Japanese), which has enjoyed notable success in South Korea according to ratings data from Nielsen Korea and Talk Walker (Fariñas and Fernández Larrechi, 2018), does not explore a Spanish cultural context but rather plays on its exoticism as a specific narrative device.

The aesthetic and narrative use of the imaginary of a Spanish city in a South Korean audiovisual production offers an interesting case study.[3] The intrinsically playful way the series appropriates Granada, its reinterpretation of a theme as markedly Spanish as the notion of "illusion", and the different types of worlds underlying the story are the three basic ideas explored in this analysis. Additionally, building on studies by Miguel Sicart (2014) on the concept of the ludic and on Víctor Navarro Remesal's (2019) notions of cinema and play, this article takes the idea of other possible

Protagonists with the Alhambra in the background

worlds as a theoretical framework. These offer a fruitful methodology for exploring not only the ludic but especially fictional stories set in cyber-virtual environments. According to Lavocat (2019: 272-273), "[t]he notion of world is so central in cyberculture that some scholars suggest that terms like 'world' and 'universe', which in their opinion are beginning to be used metaphorically and abusively in literary theory, should be reserved for digital artifacts" (Caïra, 2011). The tradition of other possible worlds, beginning with the philosophy of Leibniz and consolidated in analytic philosophy and by authors such as Saul Kripke and Marie-Laure Ryan, among others (Planells, 2015: 9), presents the narrative as something spherical rather than linear. Specifically, this tradition studies the narrative beyond the strict confines of the story itself, the action in its most classical sense, to encompass those elements surrounding it and sustaining the structure within which it develops (Planells, 2015: 52). The notion of world, in addition to the virtual, is also closely linked to the ludic: "Play creates worlds, represents our world, and what's more, can transform it directly. [...] Play

superimposes realities on top of others, mixing and contaminating them, contrasting rules and logics in a single space" (Navarro Remesal, 2019: 19). This explains the increasing number of studies on ludic-fictional worlds, referred to by Planells for the case of videogames (2015: 10), and that can be applied to cinema as Navarro Remesal does in the broadest sense (games in general) and, in this case, to television series. The ludic-logical perspective provides an understanding not only of the cultural encounter between two worlds (Korea and Spain) that *Memories of the Alhambra* represents, but also of the encounter between the physical and the virtual. After all, it is "through play that we are in the world. Play is like a language—a way of being in the world, of making sense of it" (Sicart, 2014: 18).

LUDIC GRANADA:
THE APPROPRIATION OF A WORLD

A clear example of the close link between urban imaginary and audiovisual narrative (Cubero, 2013) can be found in the connection between Granada and *Memories of the Alhambra* (Valle and Ruiz, 2010). The plot of the series is based on the idea of Granada as the setting for an augmented reality game inspired by the Reconquista: in every corner, laneway and public square, Nasrid warriors or Castilian soldiers appear, ready to fight; objects and weapons can be found, and perilous missions are undertaken. The story revolves around the transformation of the urban space into a stage for ludic possibilities, similar to the games developed by the company Niantic (2019).

But here, rather than using a mobile phone, players wear an optical device that allows them to interact with the characters and virtual objects in an extremely realistic way (in this sense the series is quasi-futuristic). Thus, a process unfolds that is highly characteristic of the ludic: "Play is appropriative, in that it takes over the context in which it exists and cannot be totally predetermined by such context" (Sicart, 2014: 11-12). In Episode 1 (#1x01: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), the first time Yoo Jin-woo, the developer of the optical devices, travels to Spain in search of the mysterious creator of the game and interacts with augmented reality, he encounters a Nasrid soldier who emerges from a statue that has come to life. This illustrates the appropriative character of play: "play will always force us to contextualize the meaning of the things involved in playing. Play appropriates the objects it uses to come into existence" (Sicart, 2014: 14). Like a monumental theme park, the city becomes an open network which Sicart defines as "play", as opposed to a "game" (2014: 51), because *play* (the ludic) permits the player to appropriate the meaning and the dynamic of the activity while a *game* is presented as a closed, one-way system (Sicart, 2014: 51). Thus, the Granada *play space* emulates a chil-

dren's playground which deploys on the existing urban structure a series of ludic possibilities that "signal paths, activities, challenges, […]; one can crawl, jump, creep up […] in ways that the space suggests but does not determine. The dramatic flare of these playgrounds also indicates ways in which they could be appropriated" (Sicart, 2014: 52).

In parallel to this ludic appropriation as the basis for the series, *Memories of the Alhambra* appropriates visual aspects and cultural references universally associated with Spanish and particularly Andalusian folklore. Beyond a historical analysis of the depiction of Granada in the series (García, 2019), this appropriation of the city's imaginary can be traced throughout the series as a manifestation of the ludic character of the series itself. Jung Hee-joo, the sister of the game's inventor (who, it turns out, has disappeared), runs a hostel catering especially to Korean tourists, where she will provide lodging to Yoo Jin-woo, the developer of the optical devices for augmented reality who wants to buy the game. Hee-joo has integrated fully into Spanish society and thus becomes the vehicle for the cultural appropriation in the series: she is a skilled guitarist and a conservatory graduate (#1x02: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018); she works as an apprentice in a guitar-maker's workshop (#1x02, #1x05: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018) and as a tourist guide at the Alhambra (#1x03: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). Additionally, an NPC (Non-Player Character) in the game inspired by her (and designed by her brother, obviously) wears a veil and plays the song by the composer Francisco Tárrega which gives the series its name (#1x03: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018).

Yoo Jin-woo discovers the augmented reality game

Jung Hee-joo's Spanish guitar workshop

Here we see how cultural appropriation is placed at the service of the game itself, as it adopts the romantic forms of the Andalusian imaginary, attributing them to NPCs, ornamental characters that are interactive but not controlled by a real-life player. Other details reflecting the appropriation of the Granada and Spanish imaginary are the recurrent panoramic shots of the Alhambra at the beginning of the first episodes (#1x03: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), the lush wares of the flower seller (#1x06: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), the shop selling medieval antiques (#1x06: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), the café at the Alcazaba (an invented historical detail, actually filmed in the historic centre of Ljubljana, Slovenia) where characters eat *churros* with chocolate (#1x03, #1x10: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018) and the recurring Spanish guitar leitmotif with the street musician playing *Memories of the Alhambra* (#1x04: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018).

The most iconic case of cultural appropriation takes place at the end of the first season (only a

Jung Hee-joo's NPC with a veil
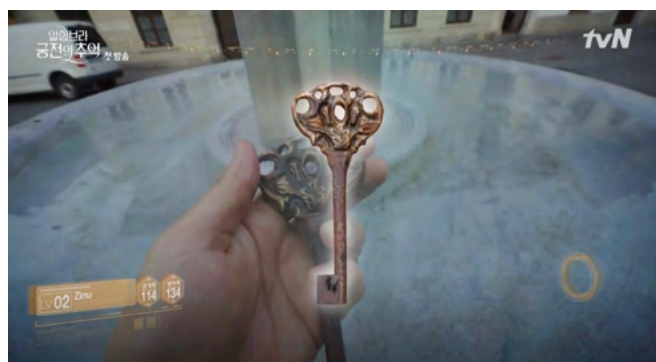
The key to the dungeon

single season has been released thus far) with the Alhambra's Gate of Justice, associated with the legend of the hand of Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, holding the keys to Paradise. On reaching level 100, the protagonist unlocks a key that is given to him by the NPC inspired by the game creator's sister, which will allow him to find the missing inventor: the key will free him from his virtual prison (he had become trapped in his own game) in the very dungeons of the Alhambra itself (#1x13: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). Cultural appropriation again serves as the basis of the ludic, with the Nasrid palace being reinterpreted as an architectural puzzle at the service of the series. Granada ultimately turns into the model for a universal play-city when in Episode 7 (#1x07: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018) the game is exported to Seoul while reproducing the same dynamics (Korean soldiers, King Sejong Square, etc).

"Play is appropriation, expression, and a personal affair. Together with computation, they bring us an expanded world with which we can play, that we can make ours as we delegate to and appropriate machines" (Sicart, 2014: 100). This is what we have seen here in the strategy of ludic-cultural appropriation of Granada in *Memories of the Alhambra*. It is a process extended by the idea of illusion, which the Korean series adopts as its own, placing it at the centre of its narrative.

THE ILLUSORY: APPROPRIATION OF SPANISH IDENTITY

"Many come to Granada to see the Alhambra. But I have come to see something else. Something more marvellous than the Alhambra. [...] I have come to see magic. One day Granada will be famous for being a magical city," affirms the protagonist upon his arrival in Spain (#1x01: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). The impossible and the supernatural are present in the series from the very beginning; of course, augmented reality is based on a mechanism of illusion. And in the case of this cutting-edge game, optical and physical sensations (cold, heat, blows and cuts to the body, etc) seem exceptionally real. In other words, the illusion is taken to the maximum. Furthermore, the illusory character of the game harkens back to the very origins of play and forms a part of its essence since it relates to the player's willingness to suspend disbelief. "This attitude toward play has been mentioned by Huizinga, Caillois, and Sutton-Smith, but it is Suits (2005) who named it 'the lusory attitude'" (Sicart, 2014: note 30) in reference to the acceptance of the rules of the game, which, while not identical to the suspension of disbelief, is very closely related to it. Planells also speaks of illusion as "playful, shared pretending" (2015: 43), a fundamental condition for the game to be sustained.

By locating the series in a Spanish city, the screenwriter and creator of *Memories of the Alhambra*, Song Jae-Jeong, perhaps unwittingly chose the ideal cultural context for her story, since illusion can be considered a characteristically Spanish theme. Indeed, in his *Tales of the Alhambra* (Irving, 1999), Washington Irving noted the taste of the Spanish people for "fantasy", suggesting that they "have an Oriental passion for story-telling, and are fond of the marvellous" (1875: 77). "They will gather round the doors of their cottages in summer evenings," continues the American author, "or in the great cavernous chimney corners

of the ventas in the winter, and listen with insatiable delight to miraculous legends of saints [...]" (1875: 77). In his landmark text *Orientalism* (1978), the Orientalist Edward Said suggests that "Islam and Spanish culture cohabit rather than confront each other belligerently" (Said, 1978: 9-10)[4]. *Leyendas* (2013), by the Andalusian romantic writer Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, also testifies to the notable Spanish taste for the fantastic and supernatural. But it was the philosopher Julián Marías in his *Breve tratado de la ilusión* [Short Treatise on Illusion] (1990) who attributed a special, exclusive relationship between the Spanish language and the word "illusion" in its positive sense (1990: 3). This word, which originates from the Latin *illusio*, from *ludere* (to play), takes on a sense of deceit due to its association with demonic appearances in the Vulgate, a meaning that persists in all European languages (Marías, 1990: 5). However, in Spanish dictionaries since the 19th century (Marías, 1990: 9), in addition to this widespread pejorative meaning, the term *ilusión* has also acquired a positive connotation (1990: 10), as demonstrated by its common and colloquial use when referring to something exhilarating or that causes excitement. Marías identifies the turning point in the meaning of the word as *La vida es sueño* (Life is a Dream) by 17th century playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca: "For Calderón, the dream is a form of temporality that corresponds precisely to human life. And in this way, behind the supposed unreality, he reveals the reality of the dream as life itself" (1990: 20). This reflection is, of course, framed in the interpretation the philosopher gives of the play: it is not a play about the fraudulent nature of reality but about its oneiric or dreamlike forms. And in the Romanticism of the 19th century, following in the spirit of Calderón, would be poets such as Espronceda and Zorrilla, who reinforced the hopeful and optimistic sense

THE SCRIPTWRITER JAE-JEONG SONG CHOSE THE IDEAL CULTURAL CONTEXT FOR A STORY ABOUT ILLUSION

of the term (Marías, 1990: 11-16, 16-18), and thus its literary use would give rise to the current colloquial use of the word "*ilusión*" (Marías, 1990: 10). It is important to note how central this idea is to *Memories of the Alhambra* in order to appreciate how the series, by means of this appropriation, adopts the Spanish tradition of *ilusoria-ilusionante* (in both of its senses).

In addition to its use of augmented reality as an illusory device, in Episode 3 the series begins to introduce a doubt about the mental health of the protagonist and the limits of the game itself. In Granada, Yoo Jin-woo encounters his business rival and former friend and partner, Cha Hyun Suk, who has also discovered the game and is searching for its creator in the hope of buying the licence. Their hatred is mutual, and in a duel that they thought was only virtual Jin-woo kills Huyn Suk (#1x03: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). The following morning his corpse appears at the place of the duel and from then on an NPC (Non-Player Character, and therefore with no independent will/intelligence) resembling his deceased enemy will constantly appear and attempt to kill Jin-woo in revenge. This virtual ghost (so to speak) is always conjured up by the sound of the song "Memories of the Alhambra", even when Jin-woo is not wearing the lenses necessary to access the game world; moreover, only Jin-woo can see him. The protagonist's sanity is cast into doubt for the other characters and, along with his mission to find the game's creator and deactivate the error that is killing the other players, he must also survive these continuous attacks. "It hurt for real. The knife really hurt. It's not like the other NPCs" (#1x08: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). Madness now appears explicitly as one of the central themes of the series: "What if it's the game that's crazy, not me?" (#1x08: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018); "The

sound of the guitar. You hear it? [...] Am I the only one who hears it? I am going crazy" (#1x05: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018); "Some things can only be understood if you go crazy" (#1x05: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). This last phrase foreshadows one of the final twists in mid-season (#1x08: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), when his personal assistant creates a profile in the game and establishes an alliance: in alliance mode, he can see the apparitions of the vengeful NPC who is trying to kill his boss, and thus shares his madness, or rather, confirms his sanity and reveals that a fatal (and somehow supernatural or at least inexplicable) error is affecting the game. At this point, there are immediate parallels with *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (Cervantes, 2015), the ultimate Spanish masterpiece dealing directly with the concept of illusion. If we consider the protagonist of *Memories of the Alhambra* as a Quixote figure and his secretary as Sancho, the Marías' argument takes on special relevance: "Sancho slips, so to speak, into the life of Don Quixote [...] takes on his point of view [...]. And while Sancho becomes more quixotic, Don Quixote [...] never loses contact with the so-called real world" (Marías, 1990: 71). The fragility of the human mind and the problematic consistency of reality (or objective reality) appear in the series, as they do in Cervantes' masterpiece, as themes associated with illusion, which may be understood as the delusions Don Quixote suffers but also as the chivalric ideal that Sancho comes to share, which in a way is reproduced in the series with the demonstration of Jun-woo's sanity when his assistant becomes his ally in the augmented reality game.

The characteristically Spanish ambiguity of the concept is thus appropriated by *Memories of the Alhambra*, and reproduced as well in other sub-plots, such as the love story between Jin-woo and Jung Hee-joo, the owner of Bonita Hostel and sister of the game's creator. Hee-joo naively believes the tech executive to be an honest man (unaware he is trying to cheat her by buying the

hostel, whose ownership is tied to the game licence, for much less than it will be worth when the game becomes a worldwide hit). This is not only an illusion but also demonstrates Hee-joo's capacity to see redeeming features in Jin-woo's personality (#1x09: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). When she refuses to abandon him despite his lies and his apparent insanity, Jin-woo is surprised and questions her motives (#1x09: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018):

—You still believe I'm crazy?
—Yes. But I believe you.
—Why do you trust me? I'm a fraud.
—Why is it so difficult for me to hate you?

Hee-joo is unable to give him up, not because she is blinded by his illusory Prince Charming façade, but because she remains in thrall to Jin-woo's real virtues. And this sustains her love for him. "Falling in love means the person I am in love with becomes my project. I don't project myself onto her but with her, as an ingredient of my project" (Marías, 1990: 84). The ludic premise of the series, the apparent insanity of the Don Quixotesque Jin-woo and Hee-joo's love reveal that illusion, so characteristic of the Spanish cultural context in which it is set, constitutes one of the central themes of *Memories of the Alhambra*. According to the different degrees of ludic illusion and the relationship with the play-world of Granada, as many as three distinct worlds can be discerned within the series.

SUPERIMPOSITION OF WORLDS AND DARK PLAY

Planells distinguishes two characteristics of possible worlds: structure and consistency (2015: 19): "possible worlds are constituted by means of two fundamental attributes: the completeness of their structure [...] and their consistent or coherent nature." On this basis, *Memories of the Alhambra* contains up to three different worlds, depending on

the degree to which the augmented reality game defines the characteristics of structure and consistency.

The first of these is the original and primary Granada, with the structure and consistency of a real old city, which could be associated with Hee-joo, not only because of her cultural integration but also because she is unaware of the existence of the game (at least for a large part of the season). The second is the augmented Granada, enriched, *ludified*, associated with the NPCs (especially the vengeful Cha Hyun Suk), who exist only within this virtual world. And the third is the frontier between these two worlds: the place of superimposition, the view through the player's lenses, fundamentally associated with the protagonist Jin-woo, inventor of this technology and always with one foot on either side. In the first world, the real Granada, the degree of illusion is zero; in the second, it is the virtual illusion that gives it consistency and the technology that gives it structure; and the third world maintains the illusory without losing the link to the structure of the real. Thus, by varying the characteristics of structure and consistency according to the degree of digital illusion, the world becomes a question of perspective. And not only of perspective, but of life itself. The character of Hee-joo in particular acts as an anchor to reality for Jin-woo, keeping him from falling completely into the ludic-fictional world of the augmented reality game. She does this fundamentally in one way: by helping him to survive. Initially this occurs unconsciously but decisively: after the first attack by the vengeful NPC of his deceased enemy (#1x03: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), Jin-woo

is hospitalised and again receives a visit from his relentless pursuer. Weakened, the protagonist flees the hospital room but is caught. Just when the virtual double of his rival is about to kill him, Hee-joo, who has come to visit him, appears and, moved by his (apparent) state of paranoid dementia, crouches down next to him and embraces him (#1x05: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018). The augmented reality game detects the obstacle that Hee-joo poses for the NCP and the duel is postponed, and thus Jin-woo is saved. She is still unaware of the existence of the game, but her intervention, motivated by compassion, is decisive in saving him from becoming a mindless NPC wandering around in the game, which is the fate of those who die while playing (like Jin-woo's rival). Hee-joo again acts as a saviour when, after days under sedation in order to avoid the NPC, Jin-woo awakens to see her at his bedside (#1x06: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018); and again when he is about to be killed in the dungeons of the Alhambra while trying to rescue the game creator, and she calls from Seoul to notify the security guards at the monument and sending them to rescue him (once again imposing an obstacle

Jung Hee-joo saves Yoo Jin-woo without realising

that postpones the duel and prevents his death) (#1x11: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018).

It should be noted that just as there is a proportional relation between each world and the degree of illusion, there is also one between each character who represents that world and the degree of morality. Hee-joo's innocence corresponds to the purely physical, primary Granada; the moral ambiguity of Jin-woo (who wants to find the game's creator, Hee-joo brother, but also tries to deceive her) corresponds to his position on the frontier between reality and the virtual world of the augmented Granada; and finally there is the vengeful NPC resembling Cha Hyun Suk, a computer creation devoid of conscience and, therefore, of morality.

This disassociation of realities or superimposition of different worlds has consequences that go beyond the ludic or even contradict it: the unintentional death of Cha Hyun Suk at the hands of Jin-woo, obviously, and of all the eliminated players in the augmented reality. This constitutes a perfect example of what is known as *dark play*. Navarro Remesal, citing films such as *Midnight Madness* (Michael Nankin, David Wechter, 1980) (2019: 23), *Jumanji* (Joe Johnston, 1995) (2019: 95) or *The Game* (David Fincher, 1997) (2019: 111), draws on a classical source to clarify the concept: "The shadowy underside [...] is dark play, well explained by the philosopher Bion of Borysthenes (cited by Plutarch): Although children throw stones at frogs in sport, the frogs don't die in sport but in earnest" (2019: 25-26). In other words that very clearly illustrate the uncertain frontier between the primary and the ludic worlds: "If we are forced to play then it's not a game, although for other players it may be" (Navarro Remesal, 2019: 26). Dark play occurs when the dynamic of the game itself becomes anti-ludic, taking control of the activity, denying the player's freedom (Navarro Remesal, 2019: 95) and betraying its original premise. This is precisely what happens in the series. For example, when Jin-woo locks himself

in a shower stall to ensure there is always an obstacle between him and the NPC seeking to kill him, it is impossible for the virtual double of Cha Huyn Suk to appear in such a small space. This image reflects the paradox presented by *Memories of the Alhambra*: the augmented reality game ends up shrinking the player's world. Here the series offers a dystopian vision of technology: the ludic world is composed of several superimposed worlds and the blurred boundaries that separate them can turn it into a dark world.

CONCLUSION

In this study we have seen the impact of the Granada imaginary in the aesthetics and narrative of a South Korean series: the ludic-cultural appropriation of the city, the thematic and narrative appropriation of illusion and the ludic world of Granada as a superimposition of worlds potentially leading to a *dark world*. In general terms, it could be affirmed that *Memories of the Alhambra* itself constitutes a ludic act of appropriation and reinterpretation of a space with the objective of transforming it into the vehicle of meaning for a number of themes. An encounter or dialogue between two cultures as play.

Among other themes, and for consideration for future studies, is the problematic relationship between time and corporeality in digital worlds and particularly in virtual ludic worlds. This same series offers sufficient material for a hypothetical research project into repetition as a temporal structure characteristic of videogames applied to television series: the plot of *Memories of the Alhambra* could be summarised (in an extremely reductionist way) as an attempt by a virtual entity such as an NPC to end the life of a real player. As Navarro Remesal explains, in cinema-*ludens* (and, by extension, series-*ludens*) "we are presented with a time based on repetition, on turning back. Videogame time. Tarkovsky said that while cinema is the sculpting of time, the videogame is moulding

MEMORIES OF THE ALHAMBRA CONSTITUTES A LUDIC ACT OF APPROPRIATION AND REINTERPRETATION OF A SPACE

it over and over again like clay. The game does not advance in a straight line but in loops" (2019: 187). The temporality of the player is also interesting in this sense: "My life takes place in the time between play. This is perhaps the reason I believe that play articulates time" (Sicart, 2014: 6).

The question of time is also associated with the question of death, a complex question if we consider the problem of corporeality in virtual worlds. "It is evidently the absence of body and of physical matter that explains this dissymmetry between the enlargement of the domain of the possible and the reduction of that of morality" (Lavocat, 2019: 288); *Memories of the Alhambra*, as can easily be deduced from this small study, also explores the ethical consequences of the disappearance (or dissolution) of the physical in digital game environments. McLuhan reflected on this same issue when he highlighted the way that the virtual would affect the notion of identity (Horrocks, 2004: 79-81). This is another question that could be considered for future studies.

In short, as explained by García-Noblejas, a thinker who has explored the question of possible worlds, these "are small worlds, miniature universes, prepared to cooperate in the configuration of personal identity, and in providing a landscape for the orientation of our decisions in our everyday world" (1996: 17). This is what I have attempted to show with this analysis of the ludic world of Granada in *Memories of the Alhambra* and what, in future studies, may lead to the development of a theory of the series-*ludens*, understood as a collection of ludic series, for their ludic content, theme, plot, or form of play, or for the way they encourage a playful attitude in the spectator (but

not taken as a sub-genre or new taxonomy). Indeed, *Memories of the Alhambra* may be taken as a paradigmatic example of the series-*ludens*. This theory would not (or not only) encompass the series/episodic videogame as already studied by Navarro Remesal (2017a; 2017b) but ludic-centred audiovisual series in general. ∎

NOTES

1   This research was conducted within the framework of the Imagination and Possible Worlds Research Group of the Faculty of Communication Sciences at Universidad Francisco de Vitoria.

2   Translations from Spanish sources are by the translators of Universidad Francisco de Vitoria´s Vice-rectorate for Research.

3   This article does not intend to address the narrative solvency of the series. Although the plot development does occasionally exhibit a certain incoherence and the outcome practically contradicts the premise (#1x16: Gil Ho Ahn, TVN-Netflix: 2018), these questions are not within the purview of the present study. The purpose of this analysis is to highlight and explain the relevance of the series as a representative case of an Asian audiovisual production that ludic-logically appropriates the Spanish context.

4   In his introduction to the Spanish translation of *Orientalism* (Goytisolo, 2015: 11-13), Juan Goytisolo explains that "with implacable rigor, Said sets out the mechanisms for the fabrication of the Other which, since the Middle Ages, articulate the orientalist project» (2015: 12). In a certain way, it could be argued that the series *Memories of the Alhambra* constitutes a reverse process to that of orientalism, in that the appropriation of the Spanish imaginary on the part of an "oriental" country is a type of, so to speak, *Occidentalism* (of course, without the connotations and implications of political domination included in Said's analysis).

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SOUTH KOREAN AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTION IN SPAIN: GRANADA AS A LUDIC-WORLD IN THE SERIES *MEMORIES OF THE ALHAMBRA*

Abstract

Asian audiovisual production has become so international that some of its content, such as television series, are set in foreign countries. *Memories of the Alhambra* (Alhambeura Goongjeonui Chooeok, Jae-Jeong Song, TVN-Netflix: 2018), for instance, deals with an alternative reality game set in the city of Granada. Drawing on Miguel Sicart´s (2014) play studies, Victor Navarro Remesal´s (2019) research on movies and games, and the theoretical framework of Antonio J. Planells´ ludic-fictional worlds (2015), this paper analyses the aesthetic and narratological approach of a Korean television series to the imaginary of a Spanish city. The intrinsically ludic way in which the series appropriates Granada, its reinterpretation of a theme as markedly Spanish as illusion and the different kinds of underlying worlds are the three main aspects of this analysis.

Key words

Korea; audiovisual; Spain; Granada; game; world; series; Alhambra.

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EL AUDIOVISUAL SURCOREANO EN ESPAÑA: GRANADA COMO LUDO-MUNDO EN LA SERIE *RECUERDOS DE LA ALHAMBRA*

Resumen

La expansión de la producción audiovisual asiática ha alcanzado una dimensión internacional tan alta que ahora sus ficciones televisivas también se desarrollan en países extranjeros. Es el caso de la serie *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* (Alhambeura Goongjeonui Chooeok, Jae-Jeong Song, TVN-Netflix: 2018), que trata de un juego de realidad aumentada en la ciudad de Granada. Apoyándonos en los estudios de Miguel Sicart (2014) sobre lo lúdico, en los de Victor Navarro Remesal (2019) sobre cine y juego y tomando como marco teórico las nociones ludo-ficcionales de Antonio J. Planells (2015), esta investigación analiza la aproximación estética y narrativa de una ficción audiovisual coreana al imaginario de una ciudad española. El modo intrínsecamente lúdico en que la serie se apropia del espacio granadino, su reinterpretación de un tema de marcado carácter hispánico como lo ilusorio y los diferentes tipos de mundo subyacentes al argumento son los tres aspectos fundamentales del análisis.

Palabras clave

Corea, audiovisual; España; Granada; juego; mundo; serie; Alhambra.

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