Storyworlds in *The Household* by the "Blackheart Gang"

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Abstract

This study explores the digital presence of *The Household* (http://www.thehousehold.xyz/) – a name given to the collective fantasy artwork with narrative dimensions created by a group of South African artists who call themselves the "Blackheart Gang". *The Household* is explored as a possible world that overlaps with the real world (drawing on notions of storyworlds across media). No academic investigation has been undertaken on this artwork. The work comprises mainly a web presence that is supplemented by various texts in other media including animations, an illustrated picture book, as well as musical compositions. The two artists who form the "Blackheart Gang" conceptualised *The Household* a rather absurd web-based fantasy realm with "rooms" filled with intrigue and wild characters, such as dodos seeking refuge, moles at war with bears, and a field mouse named Eddy overseeing much of the bizarre activities in the realm. It is a world powered by bathwater obtained from drainage pipes in which, the artists propound, "free flowing archetypal symbols and images manifest in the form of stories".

In the first instance, a reflection on transmedial storytelling provides the narratological lens that guides the study. This is followed by an exploration of *The Household* as storyworld with reference to salient theoretical constructs pertaining to worldmaking in *The Household.* An appropriate methodology was developed based on a perusal of the relevant theoretical constructs and applied to an interpretation of the artwork. This model comprised of an investigation into the story system, the cultural systems and technological considerations. The story system in *The Household* is interpreted in light of narratological time, space, character and event. Then, parallels are drawn between selected socio-political conditions in South Africa, representing cultural systems of *The Household* that allude to the real world. Some technological considerations are presented as part of the interpretation process.

Specific parallels are drawn between issues suggested in the realm of *The Household* – notions hinging on identity, cultural formation, the role of media and various complex power relations that characterise discursive practices in contemporary South Africa.

The study of *The Household* aims at advancing our understanding of the relationship between narrative digital realms and storyworlds as possible worlds in the context of transmedial narratology. Thus, the study is positioned as interdisciplinary in nature.

Keywords

“Blackheart Gang”, fantasy as reflection/escape, storyworlds (across media), possible worlds, postclassical narratology, South African context, *The Household,* transmedial narratology

Opsomming

Hierdie studie bied 'n ondersoek na die digitale teenwoordigheid van *The Household* (http://www.thehousehold.xyz/) – 'n naam wat aan 'n kollektiewe fantasiegebaseerde kunswerk met narratiewe dimensies gegee is en wat geskep is deur 'n groep Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaars wat na hulself verwys as die "Blackheart Gang". *The Household* word onder die loep geneem as 'n moontlike wêreld wat oorvleuel met die regte wêreld – hier word staatgemaak op konsepte vanuit die studie van storiewêrelde oor media heen. Geen akademiese ondersoek is al onderneem ten opsigte van hierdie kunswerk nie. Die werk bestaan grootliks uit 'n webteenwoordigheid en word aangevul deur verskeie tekste in ander media wat animasies, 'n geïllustreerde boek en musikale komposisies insluit. Die twee kunstenaars wat die kollektief die "Blackheart Gang" vorm, het *The Household* gekonseptualiseer – dit is 'n redelik absurde webgebaseerde fantasiewêreld met "kamers" gevul met intrige en ietwat wilde karakters soos dodos wat skuiling soek, molle wat oorlog maak met bere, en 'n veldmuisie met die naam Eddie wat verskeie van hierdie bisarre aktiwiteite in die wêreld dophou. Hierdie wêreld word aangedryf deur badwater vanuit dreinpype waarin, aldus die kunsenaars, "vryvloeiende argetipiese simbole en beelde manifesteer in die vorm van stories".

In die eerste plek bied die studie 'n besinning oor transmediale storievertelling as narratologiese lens wat die studie rig. Dit word gevolg deur 'n ondersoek na *The Household* as storiewêreld met verwysing na tersaaklike teoretiese konsepte wat verband hou met wêreldskepping in *The Household.* 'n Toepaslike metodologiese benadering is ontwikkel soos gebaseer op relevante teoretiese konsepte, wat dan toegepas is op 'n interpretasie van die kunswerk. Hierdie model bestaan uit 'n ondersoek na die storiesisteem, die kulturele sisteme en verwante tegnologiese oorwegings. Die storiesisteem in *The Household* is geïnterpreteer in die lig van narratologiese tyd, ruimte, karakter en gebeurtenis. Daarna word parallelle getoon tussen geselekteerde sosio-politiese toestande in Suid-Afrika wat die kulturele sisteme van *The Household* verteenwoordig soos wat dit op die regte wêreld sinspeel. 'n Aantal tegnologiese oorwegings word ook gebied as deel van die interpretasieproses.

Spesifieke parallelle word uitgewys ten opsigte van aangeleenthede wat in die realm van *The Household* gesuggereer word, insluitende identiteit, kulturele totstandkoming, die rol van die media en verskeie komplekse magsverhboudinge wat diskoerse in eietydse Suid-Afrika kenmerk.

Die ondersoek na *The Household* stel homself ten doel om ons begrip van die verhouding tussen narratiewe digitale realms en en storiewêrelde as moontlike wêrelde te verbreed, spesifiek in die konteks van transmediale narratologie. Gevolglik is die studie uiteraard ‘n interdissiplêre onderneming.

Trefwoorde

“Blackheart Gang”, fantasie as refleksie/ontsnapping, moontlike wêrelde, postklassieke narratologie, storiewêrelde (oor media heen), Suid-Afrikaanse konteks, *The Household,* transmediale narratologie

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CHAPTER ONE

Key Words: Storyworlds (across media), transmedial narratology, Blackheart Gang, *The Household,* South African context, fantasy as reflection/escape, postclassical narratology

1.1 Introduction

This study presents an interpretation of *The Household* (http://www.thehousehold.xyz/) – a name given to the collective fantasy artwork by a group of South African artists who call themselves the "Blackheart Gang". The interpretation is guided by the notion of storyworlds[1] and the possible worlds that inform these (drawing on Marie-Laure Ryan's [2004, 2014] insights pertaining to narratives and storyworlds across media). The work comprises mainly a web presence which is supplemented by various texts in other media: animations (such as *The Tale of How* with a musical composition and voice over*),* a beautifully illustrated picture book, sculptures, paintings, etchings, as well as field recordings.

The artists include Ree Treweek (b. 1978), the character developer and illustrator, and Markus Wormstorm (alias for Smit) (b. 1981) who writes and composes. Together they conceptualised *The Household*, a fantasy world with "rooms" filled with intrigue and wild characters such as dodos seeking refuge, moles at war with bears, and a field mouse named Eddy overseeing the activities. It is an absurd world powered by bathwater obtained from drainage pipes in which, the artists propound, "free flowing archetypal symbols and images manifest in the form of stories" (De Jong, 2012). This multi-layered, transmedial realm represented in the form of a "household" with different rooms filled with occupants, objects, artefacts, animations and much more, can be seen as different layers of fictional worlds. The juxtapositioning of these bizarre sub-worlds in *The Household* hinges on notions of society, history and the various layers of meanings these suggest. These worlds relate to the world we live in – South Africa specifically – it is about "different people inhabiting the same space" and determining "our place in it" (according to the artists in an interview; De Jong, 2012).

[1] The term "storyworld" is written as one word throughout the study in compliance with Ryan's (2004) use of the term.

The study argues that the sub-worlds in *The Household* reflect, at times satirise and simultaneously offer an escape from the complex South African situation by combining traditional and contemporary South African stories and events with bizarre fantasy elements.

The Household can therefore be seen as the parent narrative from which all other narratives sprout. The tension present in some of the storyworlds in *The Household* thus seems to correspond with the often-dubious relationship between parent narratives (such as the prehistoric fantasy realm of *The Household*) and micro-narratives (interpretable worlds within *The Household*). These worlds, comprising spaces and characters, provide a reflection on South African society, and refer to events and real people in South Africa.

The Household functions, in this sense, as a textual possible world (a term used by Ryan [1991:554]). It also represents a system of worlds where facts described by the text, whether fictional or not, are presented as actual and others as possible or counterfactual. Within this textual system of reality, alternative possible worlds exist which might belong neither entirely to the realm of fantasy, nor to that of empirical reality. However, these fantastic elements may be linked with the "real", because perceptions of how we understand reality are usually influenced by the external physical world around us and mediated by the teller or artist. These alternative possible worlds become reflections, not only of the "Blackheart Gang", but also of South African society in general. *The Household* becomes a collective experience – a "Wish World" with elements of the good, the bad and the indifferent, all imbedded beneath or beyond the crust of the often painful and ridiculous real world. The digital realm therefore provides sometimes ironic and satirical commentary in a manner that points to societal issues, often making fun of these.

1.2 Contextualisation: *The Household*

According to the artists, *The Household* is based on a mythological structure predicated on various African myths and folklore. A river spirit in the form of a giant snake is, for instance, believed to be responsible for spinning the bathwater when the plug of the bathtub is pulled. These kinds of myths become fantastical elements imagined and visualised by the artists.

The Household plays a pivotal role in advancing our understanding of the relationship between digital media and storyworlds as textual worlds as well as, in this case, real worlds. Engaging with the website http://www.thehousehold.xyz/, one is progressively

pulled into into a fantasy realm below the crust of the earth. The world is one where Ree's characters can roam freely and Markus' poetry inscribes textual meaning. The different sections of the website resemble an archaeological dig with layers to be explored. A map of the underground world visually explains the different areas and their uses (see figure 1.1) and textual descriptions in the sections of the website are also employed below to give context to the different spaces and happenings in this multi-layered world.

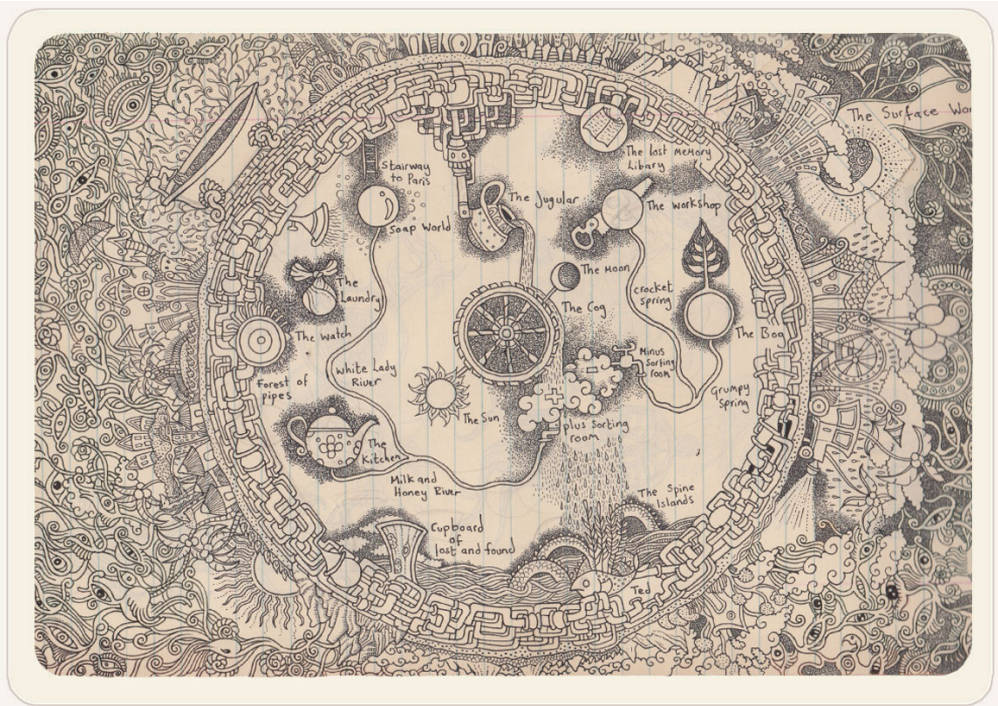

Figure 1.1 Blackheart Gang. Map of *The Household.* http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

"The Crust" separates "The Surface World" from the fantasy realm below – as noted a realm that is powered by human bathwater. The notion of human waste powering an underground world seems absurd. When water disappears down a plughole, it follows an intricate pathway through a network of pipes into different rooms of *The Household.* The human spillage reaches far and wide. "Ol' Lonely" is a special pipe that "separates tears from the bathwater", insinuating the likelihood that tragedy is the order of the day. The tears are transported by "Ol' Lonely" to a very sad, muddy place in "The Bog", creating a possible space for contemplating the pain embedded in South African history. The bathwater, on the other hand, travels to a vast chamber called "The Jugular". This chamber might relate to that of Parliament where various issues in the country are often heatedly discussed and wastefulness of government is laid bare. A waterfall of bathwater at its centre spins down about three thousand kilometres and the water crashes down with deafening sound into a half-exposed "Time Cog". This huge, slow-turning water-wheel is

decorated with a sun at the one end, and a frozen moon at the other. The water-wheel is responsible for casting sunlight and bringing evening to the rooms in *The Household*, which indicates an ongoing daily occurrence. “Soap World”, in turn, is filled with sweet-smelling vaporous clouds that are formed as a result of the waterfall crashing down into one of “Soap World’s” many lakes. Water-powered musical harp sounds can be heard as a result, hinging on the possibility that, in spite of the turmoil, something positive can emerge from the situation. “The Tub” in the centre of the room is explained to be a wonderful metropolis [perhaps relating to South African society] where wonderful ideas come from. It is inhabited by millions of souls and is surrounded by a colossal serpent called “Rachel”, who guards the only entry points into the tub from land. If this world relates to South Africa, who does “Rachel” represent? Can it be the ANC, the ruling political party of South Africa? This party’s reputation has been tainted in the past few years by reports of corruption in high ranks – for instance, the previous President (between 2009 – 2018), Jacob Zuma, stands accused of selling the country out to the Gupta brothers[2]. On the other hand, “Rachel” might also function on a spiritual level.

Whatever her role, she marks the only entry way to “The Surface World”, through a ladder that reaches up, and ending up at 214 Rue Royale, Paris, where the “Dodos have set up shop to sell some of the finest soap in the world”. A correlation might be drawn between these extinct creatures and politicians and partisans of the “apartheid” regime, as well as the contentious economic position South Africa occupies internationally or even “dead” notions of power and politics. Many more spaces like these are found in the digital realm of *The Household*. Clearly, this website creates a fantasy world with various subworlds consisting of a “factual” domain, as well as fictional worlds.

The characters that populate these worlds have similar fantasy-reality aspects. A character is a participant in a storyworld (Jannidis, 2009, also see Margolin, 2007). In the storyworld of *The Household*, for example, “Otto” is a monster that lives in one of the soapy lakes north of the great waterfall; “he helps churn treated water and honey to create a latherous (sic.) shampoo”. The dodo community who lives on the shores of the lake harvests the shampoo, and in return, the dodos scrub the octopus “with loofer (sic.) sponges to get rid of the grassy moss that grows on him”, resulting in a silvery glow. This symbiotic yet at times complex relationship can be related to the interaction between different South

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[2] A *BBC News* article by Neil Arun (14 July 2019), “State capture: Zuma, the Guptas, and the sale of South Africa” (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48980964)

African groups. The award-winning animation, *The Tale of How*, as well as a book with the same title, is linked to the website. It tells the story of a ferocious monster of the Indian Ocean who devours the innocent dodos who live in the tree on his head. The relationship between different groups of people can at times be described as vicious and corruption is also the order of the day in South Africa. With the help of a white field mouse, “Eddy the Engineer”, the dodos unite to “escape the clutches of the terrible tentacle tyrant and sail off into the sunset on their mother, the tree” (Allan, 2010). Such a narrative induces laughter in order to satirise issues in South African society. A variant of the animation is also currently available in the form of a beautiful coffee table book with stills from the animation, together with poems that tell the story in an engaging lyrical tone. A copy of the animation, related to *The Household,* is provided in the book and offers an extra-sensory experience when viewed and listened to in combination with reading the book.

In concurrence with Ryan (2014) the importance of narrative and placing it at the centre of media interaction and convergence is foregrounded in these worlds. An investigation into storyworlds (and relating possible worlds) in the context of transmedial storytelling can enrich the interpretation of *The Household,* also by linking elements such as the animation, book, a Facebook and Instagram page, as well as “real” world exhibition spaces. Ryan furthermore explains storyworlds as “sites of creative activity in which cultures elaborate their collective social imaginary” (2014:19), a linking feature to the storyworlds recognised in *The Household*.

1.3 Storyworlds and related concepts

In an attempt to grasp the nature of the worlds and the characters of *The Household*, it has become clear that this realm consists of many different and sometimes incongruous worlds. As mentioned above, it is a multi-layered, transmedial realm represented in the form of a household with different rooms filled with occupants, objects, artefacts, animations and much more, which can be seen as different layers of fictional worlds related, in some respects, to the “real” world.

Parallels can be drawn between fictional and real worlds in a text (in this case, the digital realm is text) and those in visual representations (comp. Herman, 2002 and Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). A text or artwork can comprise various potential referential worlds that become actualised when they are “read” or interpreted. Van Wolde (1989:48) refers to these worlds as “possible worlds” and Ryan (1991:1) explains that a narrative

state consists of a “constellation of possible worlds linked to each other by various types of relations”. Many believe that stories have the ability to shape our views of the world and change behaviours (see Chatman, 1978; Abbot, 2013; Heinen & Sommer, 2009; Heise, 1997; Nünning, 2009; Ricoeur, 1985, Bell, 2011; Bell, 2016). In the words of the editors of *Storyworlds across Media*, Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon (2014:2), it is not uncommon to find examples of “a much more direct interrelation between ‘fictional’ narrative representation and ‘real’ social interaction”. In *The Household,* the larger structure of the “Blackheart Gang” identity is represented in the form of a storyworld in both a concrete and an abstract sense. A storyworld is represented by means of various narratives that make up the different sections, functionalities and creative work of the “Blackheart Gang”*.* The extent of the group’s creativity emerges in the many possible worlds revealed in *The Household*. In considering Ryan’s *modal structure of narrative universes* (1991:111), a distinction can be made between the *actual world* - in which the author and reader functions - and the *textual actual world* - in which the characters function. It is in this *textual actual world* where reality and fantasy meet.

In describing the characters and their various idiosyncrasies and mental capacities, Ryan’s (2004:24) modal system of the authentic worlds - consisting of *knowledge world, obligation world, wish world and intend world* - is useful. These domains function in both the authentic and pretended (mock) worlds and may lead to alternative universes. The *Knowledge world* usually describes the characters’ knowledge of their actual world, including knowledge of other characters within their world. Within the *obligation world*, in terms of cultural rules and moral principles, commitments and prohibitions are accounted for. *Wish worlds* operate by systems of goodness, badness and indifference based on an individual’s personal desires. Lastly, the *intended world* describes plans and goals. Furthermore, Ryan (2004:43), in her investigations into the relations between possible worlds of theory and narrative semantics, distinguishes among four different types of “modal constraints” that structure narrative worlds. The *alethic,* made up of the operators possible, impossible and necessary, is shown to be responsible for the division of the population of fictional worlds into groups of different abilities (e.g. gods versus humans), as well as for the categorisation of fictional worlds as a whole as realist, fantastic, or nonsensical. Constraints of the *deontic* type generate plots of obligation, crime and punishment, the *axiological* system underlies stories of quest and moral dilemma, and the manipulation of the categories of the *epistemic* system produces mystery stories, narratives of learning, comedies of error, and the all-important function of deceit (Ryan

1991:2). Ryan's modal system and constraints create a platform from which an enriched reading of *The Household* commences.

Fantasy, in turn, is predicated on the use of symbolic modes of representation and therefore depends strongly on the use of visual imagination (Morgan, 1992:121). In a literary sense, fantasy is defined as "deliberately designed by the author to leave the reader in a state of uncertainty whether the events are to be explained by reference to natural or supernatural causes" (Todorov, 1973:37). Although the imaginary civilisation in *The Household* has mythical origins, interpretation of the stories playing off in the different rooms of the digital realm is still left to the reader/viewer – which I refer to as viewer-user-reader (VUR) in the context of the present study. These strategies are unravelled in the interpretation of *The Household.*

The challenges of media-conscious narratology (as part of a broader programme of intermedial scholarship – see Ryan, 2014) are currently being addressed by a number of scholars (Ronen, 1999; Ryan & Thon, 2014; Steiner, 2004, Bal, 2010); the most pressing of these challenges for this study are to (1) engage with the nature of media-conscious narratology[3] on a visual-semiotic level appropriate to the medium of digital art; which will help to (2) understand media in terms of semiotic, technological and cultural terms. I argue, however, that engagement with the textual world (stories) of a storyworld is also pivotal in arriving at a holistic view of the underlying semiotic worldmaking strategies in a transmedial storyworld. For this strategy, traditional concepts of narratology are acknowledged as central to narrative studies, but have to be explored, expanded and refined to suit the characteristics of digital media storytelling. In this regard, Peter von Stackelberg and Ruth Jones (2014:61) make valuable contributions, especially in proclaiming that the result of transmedia storytelling is not only a message, but the communication of an experience. To this end, the authors propose that at the core of any transmedia narrative is the storyworld structure within which all characters, objects, settings and events exist (2014:66), which basically constitutes the text world. In his pivotal publication *Text-worlds* (1999), Werth explores text-worlds as an ontological feature of storyworld configuration, and subsequently, he also metaphorically equates text-worlds with terms such as "conceptual or cognitive space" and "mental landscape" (Werth, 1999:6). A text world gives structure to a storyworld and allow for a space in which storyworld formation can take place. The structural semantic ontology of a text world is, in

[3] In this sense, the present study is situated in the sphere of postclassical narratology (comp. Alber & Fludernik, 2010, 2014; the term was coined by Herman, 1999).

my opinion, encoded with signs (relating to space, time, characters and events) to be discovered in the cognitive dimension of a storyworld. I take the stance that a storyworld is characteristically a mental construct[4] in which stories are narrative instances that concern certain types of entities (characters) and relationships between these entities. In this sense, narrative is a combination of story and discourse, but, more so, it is its ability to evoke stories to the mind that distinguishes narrative discourse from other text types (Ryan, 2003). The cognitive process of storyworld formation is described by Ryan as a form of "fictional recentring", resulting in the relocation of consciousness itself to another world (2015:73). The viewer should immerse into story space and time to experience a "sense of being present on the scene of the represented events" (Ryan, 2001:122). This process is illuminated by bringing in personal world knowledge as the concept of worldmaking usually reflects a world known to the viewer. As a result, the need exists to delve into the context in which narrative content regarding the text world is presented, not only relating to the characters, but also of the viewer. Von Stackelberg *et al.* (2015:42) propose a cultural approach to storyworld formation that involves examination of the characters' interior and exterior worlds, as well as the collective interior and exterior worlds regarding the physical world context. Ryan (2014:30) proposes the latter to involve the inquisition into the behaviour of users and producers, as well as into that of the institutions that guarantee the existence of media.

Another important element in storyworld formation is the role of medium and technologies, including the affordances of medium and the VUR's interaction with it. Questions may arise as to the nature and definition of the term *media*. Ryan does not focus on one definition, but explains that the meaning of *medium* is best understood to involve a "technological, semiotic, and cultural dimension", "media categories informally used by Western cultures" (Ryan, 2014:29). *The Household* presents different media on a digital platform, the webpage. As noted, this storyworld also functions on other digital platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram. The represented mediums in the form of a book, sculptures, paintings and etchings can be regarded as technologies when considering their different modes of production. Ryan (2014:29) suggests an expansion of technological analysis in terms of spatiotemporal extension, signifying dimensions, sensorial impact, together with mode of signification, salient elements in *The Household*.

[4] Two schools of thought exist regarding the nature of storyworlds. Doležel (2000:24) perceives storyworlds as semiotic objects that exist objectively, whereas Ryan (1991b:19) regards them as constructs of the mind.

The Household, as a unique instance of digital narrative[5] art, can be interpreted by means of both textual inquiry and media-conscious narratological tools, as mentioned above. The value of "media-conscious narratology" (Ryan, 2014:30) in terms of the three approaches (technological, semiotic, and cultural dimension) is acknowledged. My contribution, however, will be to also employ narratological strategies, including a textual investigation into the characters and events presented in *The Household,* in order to arrive at a concise strategy that can be implemented for websites with narrative attributes. In *The Household,* a storyworld unfolds that reflects the socio-political, historical and cultural conditions in South Africa, creating a space for contemplation and dealing with injustices and absurdities in our society.

1.4 Problem statement, research questions, and aims and objectives

The central question that arises concerns the ways in which *The Household* by the "Blackheart Gang" can be read as both a text world and a media-conscious storyworld in order to produce a reflection on events, people and stories in (mostly) contemporary South Africa in order to simultaneously critique and offer an escape (via fantasy) from the real world and its complexities. The research questions (and the aims and objectives) that guide this study can be regarded as methodological (the first two questions) and interpretative (the following two questions) while the last question proposes a synthesis and the contribution of the study:

How do transmedial narrative studies apply to digital realms? This question is answered by means of a survey of texts that deal with digital media from a narratological perspective; the emphasis is on texts that use narrative strategies in digital realms. Transmedial narratology forms the contexts against which this question in answered.

Why should possible worlds theory be expanded for purposes of reading digital art? I address this question by means of a critical exploration of literature on storyworlds and especially possible worlds theory, to determine ways in which parallels can be drawn between fictional and real worlds and the role of the viewer/interactor in the actualisation of these worlds.

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[5] In the context of the present study, a digital narrative is presumed to be interactive – although there may, of course, be instances where a digital narrative is like a literary text that is simply read. However, for the sake of brevity, I refer to interactive digital narratives as digital narratives or digital realms.

In what ways do the worlds generated by The Household *offer a satirical reflection as well as a fantasy-based escape of events and people in South Africa?* Here the textual and media-conscious narratological strategies are further unpacked in order to present a reading of ways in which the narratives set up a satirical narrative, as well as an escape from the harsh realities of the contemporary South African condition.

In what ways can insights based on the reading of The Household *be generalised towards a transmedial approach to storyworlds and possible worlds in the digital realm?* The findings from the reading of the artworks inform this section which sets out produce a useful transmedial approach towards the interpretation of digital narrative art.

1.5. Central theoretical statement

This study contends that *The Household*, and various digital realms more generally, can be read as storyworlds and possible worlds. This is because storyworlds provide a much-needed theoretical connection for comparing language-based narrative with transmedial narrative. Furthermore, these storyworlds can be related to transmedial narration because the explosion of new types of media in the past decades and their important role in our daily lives, "have led to a strong sense that 'understanding media' is key to understanding the dynamics of culture and society" (Ryan & Thon, 2014:2).

More specifically, the study argues that using the concepts of storyworld and possible world allows for a richer understanding of the way in which *The Household* provides a reflection on events and people in South Africa, while simultaneously providing a fantasy-based escape from the harsh realities in this country. In this sense, *The Household* makes fun of, ridicules and ultimately may evoke corrective laughter to highlight the wrongs and follies of events and people that are satirised, hinging on the notion that healing can take place through reflection, awareness and laughter.

I argue that scholarship of transmedial studies can benefit from an expanded transmedial lexicon that can provide access to interpretative dimensions that would not be possible without such an approach.

Finally, I posit that the concepts of storyworld and possible worlds are appropriate concepts for a narratological lexicon of digital art that can contribute towards the current discourse on transmedial studies.

1.6 Methodological framework

This is a qualitative study: a literature study and theoretical framework are followed by a reading of the multimodal artworks with emphasis on the narrative digital platform. For the literature study I consulted relevant publications – books, anthologies, and periodicals. Databases including Jstor, Ebscohost and AcademicSearchPremier have been consulted; a Nexus search has also indicated that no similar study has been registered. Where necessary, internet sites have been consulted. The artists Ree Treweek and Marcus Wormstorm provided the initial text to the website, that included additional text not included in the website. Various interviews with the artists provided valuable insights and contextual information for this study.

The methodological approach of this study entails an interpretation of *The Household* with reference to this digital realm as a storyworld (with various possible worlds) that reflect and offer a fantasy-based escape from absurdities in contemporary South African society. This methodological approach is envisaged as a means to participate in current transmedial discourse that relate to digital art, as well as in storyworld (and possible worlds) theory to expand insights pertaining to the manner in which they relate to the field of digital art.

As a point of departure, I apply Mieke Bal's elements of narrative structure (time, space, character and event; [1978], 1986; [1985] 1997) and Von Stackelberg *et al.'s* (2014:66) approach that at the core of any transmedia narrative is the storyworld structure within which all characters, objects, settings and events exist. In terms of *The Household*, the different spaces, and how these relates to the fantastical characters, objects and events are posited to have corollaries in the real South African context.

Secondly, a cultural approach to storyworld formation requires an examination of selected characters' interior and exterior worlds, as well as the collective interior and exterior worlds regarding the physical world context (Von Stackelberg *et al.,* 2015). This approach is supplemented by Ryan's (2014:30) "media-conscious narratology" categories, especially in terms of the story system as well as the cultural and technological dimensions. The story system comprises the text world (the four elements of narrative – time, space, character and event). For the cultural dimension, the context of the VUR, salient linguistic dimensions as well as that of the institutions that guarantee the existence of media such as newspapers and the internet (Ryan, 2014:30) are pertinent. The technological dimension requires a consideration of signifying dimensions well as modes of signification

(keeping in mind Ryan's criteria for semiotic substance, ibid.). Such an exploration requires an awareness of, among others, elements such as sound and two-and three-dimensionality in the artwork. The technological system thus considers the VUR's experience of and interaction with the medium, or rather media, in its various forms. These include, not only media-defining technologies (such as film, TV, photography etc.), but also any kind of mode of production (Ryan, 2014:29).

Throughout this study the interpretation process is consistently informed by an emphasis on the digital artwork as point of departure. My contention is that the spaces, people and events in *The Household* offer socio-political, economic, cultural and at times satirical instances (through storyworlds, possible worlds and fantasy) in order to make sense of the (real) world we live in. This is informed by a media-conscious approach that considers cultural and technological dimension regarding storyworld formation.

1.7 Contribution of the study

This study aims to make scholarly contributions in two senses. In the first instance, no academic investigation has been undertaken into this artwork, but the group was invited to present their work at the Design Indaba expo (2012) in Cape Town. Their presence at this prestigious event signals their importance in the South African digital design sphere. I therefore wish to contribute to scholarship on the work of this group.

Secondly, transmedial narratological investigation into digital realms is fairly underrepresented in scholarly literature, although more recently this field has begun to attract the attention of scholars. In other words, the current study wishes to contribute to this field of transmedial studies by relating these to possible worlds theory with a view to expand the conceptual and methodological tools available for the interpretation of digital art in particular.

1.8 Work plan and chapter division

After having laid out the context, problem statement and motivation for the study in the first chapter, the second chapter presents an overview of transmedial narratology and digital realms. Emphasis is placed on the manifestation of narrative meaning in different media by assessing the relations between narratological concepts and media categories.

The third chapter provides a literature survey of texts that deal with storyworlds and possible worlds in order to develop the theoretical framework and methodological approach of the study. I draw on the insights gleaned from the perusal of sources dealing with transmedial digital studies as well as the theoretical framework developed in this chapter in order to construct a methodological approach that is applied in chapters four and five. Ryan's (2004) "media-conscious narratology" (story system, cultural dimensions and technological dimensions) informs the methodological framework.

The interpretations are synthesised in chapter six where I draw conclusions and set out the findings of the study. I also indicate what I consider to be the contribution of the study and make suggestions for further research in the field.

CHAPTER TWO

Transmedial storytelling and the digital realm of *The Household*

Introduction

Transmedial storytelling, also referred to as "textual dispersion", relates to the use of different media (television, comics, cinema, video games, etc.) and languages (verbal, iconic, etc.) across multiple semiotic channels for meaning-making that contribute to and participate in the construction of a transmedial narrative world (Scholari, 2009:587). I argue that the digital storyworld of *The Household* by the Blackheart Gang presents an instance of such transmedial storytelling especially in terms of its diverse media artefacts, infused stories and "multilayered approach[6]". Thus, in this chapter, I intend to explore, expand and refine the so-called transmedial narratological toolkit because no such strategies exist for the exploration of websites with a narrative premise. An appropriate vantage point will be to consider possible changes in and correlations between classical narratology and contemporary, postclassical and transmedial narratology. As Phelan *et al.* (2005:16) state:

> There in no one best way to navigate between tradition and innovation, and the field [of postclassical narratology] is flourishing because its scholars have developed multiple paths even as they continue to invent new ones.

I agree with the authors' sentiments about the state of contemporary narrative theory. While sharing their commitment to innovation, it is important to remain cognizant of the history and tradition of narratology. The synthesis of narratological approaches and transmedial storytelling are evident in various explorations that focus on games, films, graphic novels, together with franchises that developed from novels[7]. The most salient critical enquiries in this regard include recent narratological studies of contemporary media

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6 Frank Zipfel, in his essay *Fiction across media: Toward a transmedial concept of fictionality* (2014), explores transmedial fictionality in terms of medium-specific conception, which requires a multilayered approach. He proposes three components in this approach: a f*ictional world criterion* (a storyworld must comprise invented elements) (2014:105)*;* a *cognitive criterion* (participants must commit in a game of make-belief) (2014:106); and an *institutional component* (cultural practices and representational conventions relating to the medium) (2014:108). *The Household* by the Blackheart Gang shows elements of multilayerdness and a complex integration of different semiotic modes of meaning-making.

7 Prominent examples of source material being deployed through various techniques of adaptation include the *Lord of the Rings* novels*, Star wars* movie series*,* and Marvel comic universe (such as *Spiderman* and *Batman*), to name a few.

culture, such as *Star wars and the history of transmedia storytelling* (2017), edited by Sean Guynes and Dan Hassler-Forest, Jan-Noël Thon's *Transmedial narratology and contemporary media culture* (2016), Marie-Laure Ryan's *Narrative across media* (2004) and *Storyworlds across media* (2014b). Marsha Kinder's (1991) work is often overlooked. She was one of the first users of the term "transmedia" (in an intertextual sense) and her engagement in cultural theory across various media precedes many scholarly investigations into "entertainment super systems" – a term coined by her in 1991 (Kinder, 1991:3). Henry Jenkins, in turn, also established himself in the field of media studies and made valuable contributions regarding transmedial narratology in cinema, comic studies, video game studies and collective intelligence in media culture. He is probably most renowned for his publication *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide* (2006). Building on prior foundational texts, he uses case studies of media artefacts and franchises as a means to introduce and refine theoretical notions and conceptual frameworks (embedded in culture and history), thus expanding upon the theoretical groundwork laid by Kinder (1991).

Given the advances in multiple platforms of narratological application, fundamental questions arise as to the current ontological status of narratology. Due to the vast scope of narratology, classical narratology and advancements into postclassical narratology are introduced briefly below, especially in terms of elements relevant to the current study. My stance towards transmedial narratology is then clarified in order to arrive at strategies and approaches relevant to the present study. This will be used to develop a framework for exploring websites as storyworlds with storytelling attributes.

2.1 Classical narratology to postclassical narratology

Narratology shows potential to play a pivotal role in achieving coherence in (often scattered) transmedial narrative experiences, perhaps as a result of its initial structuralist[8] foundation. Whereas "'classical' narratology is traditionally interested in the nature of narrative in general, trying to define regularities and recurrent features which are shared by all narratives" (Heinen & Sommer, 2009:1), transmedial narratology, as a dimension of postclassical narratology, considers these aspects, but (inevitably) transcends the

[8] It is acknowledged that various opinions exist regarding the applicability of a stucturalist approach to transmedial storytelling, but in accordance with Rettberg (2014:193), "structuralist ways of thinking can be useful in the context of developing a collective storytelling system, or for that matter a storytelling 'engine' of any kind".

classical narratological scope that focusses almost exclusively on language- and text-based narratives. As a result, an understanding of the construction of narrative meaning in different contemporary media applications necessitates an "assessment of the relations between narratological concepts and media categories" (Ryan, 2014:3) (cf. 2.1.1 Media and Transmedia). As the field of communication and media studies diversifies and expands, so do the approaches, theories and methodologies used to interpret and construct meaning in these spheres. The possible risk of such a proliferation is that investigations into the field of media can become superficial and lose sight of its scholarly roots. This concern is addressed by various scholars, but Kaarle Nordenstreng (2011) summarises it succinctly:

> The rapidly expanded field [of media] has become more and more differentiated, buttressed by convergence, with new media, including internet, extending grounds for highly specialized – and often unconnected – focal points of interest in communication and media studies. With such a development, the field is both losing its healthy roots to the more basic disciplines which have retained a definitive core – such as sociology, political science, linguistics and literature – and is becoming more and more dependent on the empirical and practical dimensions of reality (2011:195).

In order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the value of storytelling in transmedial studies, the need exists to revert to and expand on the narratological roots of transmediality and not necessarily focus on media studies *per se*. In my opinion, a reconstructive approach in correlating core principles of narrative storytelling in a traditional sense and transmedial storytelling, will reinforce narrative investigation into websites that reflect storytelling techniques.

The pre-occupation of classical narratology with language and text-based inquiry[9] can be traced back to before 1966 when a special issue of the journal *Communications* appeared, containing articles by leading structuralists Barthes[10], Eco[11], Genette, Greimas[12], Todorov

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9 I acknowledge that mention has been made by Roland Barthes (amongst others) in *An introduction to the structural analysis of narrative* (1975) to the "countless forms of narrative in the world" (1975:237). He refers to the variety of genres that "branches out into a variety of media", but in his earlier work he cynically continues to question the possibility of "all substances" (referring to media) to "accommodate man's stories (1975:237).

10 In "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives", Barthes ([1966] 1975) focused on an analysis of language in the structure of sentences as well as larger societal narratives where he broke narratives down to three basic elements: functions, actions, and narration. He also studied the linguistic structure of narratives for the prejudices, biases, and point of view in the semiotics of each word and each sentence. His interest in semiotics and structuralism contributed to his overall critique of the symbols inherent in French society (Perazzetti, 2013:1).

11 Umberto Eco (1932-) has contributed significantly to the development of a philosophy of meaning-making through his work in semiotics. Eco theorises that, "since any work is composed of an infinite

and the film theorist Metz (Meister, 2013:7). This publication had considerable influence on future research on narratology in terms of how a story's meaning develops from its overall structure (the *langue*) rather than from each individual story's isolated theme (the *parole*) (Mambrol, 2016:1). It is, however, acknowledged that different foci have developed in narrative theory in different countries and periods in time, resulting in an overlapping chronology.

The first strand (that includes followers of the formalist Vladimir Propp[13] ([1928] 1968) and of the structuralists Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tzvetan Todorov[14] (1973) and early Roland Barthes (1975), "understands narrative as a sequence of events and the theorists focus on the narrative itself independent of the medium used" (Tomaščíková, 2009:282). The second strand, represented by scholars and successors of Gérard Genette ([1972] 1983), Mieke Bal ([1985] 1997) and Seymour Chatman (1978), considers narrative as a discourse (also see Tomaščíková, 2009:282). Chatman clarifies that a distinction can be made between the story, that represents the *what* in a narrative, and discourse, that represents the *how* (1978:19)*,* although the two cannot function separately. The final strand advanced into poststructuralism and include, amongst others Umberto Eco (1979) and Jean-Francois Lyotard ([1954] 1991). This strand observed narrative as a complex artefact, the meaning of which is furnished by the receiver (Tomaščíková, 2009:282).

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set of signs, it becomes an open work (*Opera aperta*, 1962), offering a multiplicity of possible interpretations. The reader of the text must use his/her encyclopedia to actualize the message and yet avoid overinterpreting the textual indices that are present (*Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 1992). The so-called model reader (*Lector in fabula*, 1979) is able to grasp the meaning of the text by discerning the modes of sign production and interpretation (*A Theory of Semiotics*, [1975] 1976)" (Hébert, 2004:1).

12 Algirdas J. Greimas developed the actantial model, based on Propp's ([1928] 1968) analysis of the morphology of folktales. He explains an actant as a structural unit or a function that is not necessarily a person (character), but can also refer to an abstraction (e.g. success) or an institution (e.g. the banking system). According to this narrative device, six basic actants form three pairs of binary opposition, describing subject/object, power/receiver and helper/opponent patterns in narratives (Søderberg, 2003:12).

13 Propp ([1928] 1968) presented a model regarding the elementary components of narratives in relation with empirical folktales (more specifically Russian fairy tales), and the way they are combined and can be described in terms of a sequence of thirty-one abstract "functions." French structuralists, while acknowledging the model's originality, at the same time criticized it for its purely sequential, mono-linear logic of action and suggested replacing it with combinatory, multi-linear models (Lévi-Strauss 1976) (Meister, 2013:5).

14 Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic*, an essay in fictional poetics, is consciously structuralist in its approach to the generic subject. Todorov seeks linguistic bases for the structural features he notes in a variety of fantastic texts, including Potocki's *The Sargasso Manuscript*, Nerval's *Aurélia*, Balzac's *The Magic Skin*, *the Arabian Nights*, Cazotte's *Le Diable Amoureux*, Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, and tales by E. T. A. Hoffman, Charles Perrault, Guy de Maupassant, Nicolai Gogol, and Edgar A. Poe (Todorov, 1973:x).

Gérard Genette's *Narrative discourse* ([1972] 1983) is celebrated for consolidating key terms and concepts of narrative theory. He refined the analytical approach to the reading of text and this made his work particularly valuable for literary critics. Genette, inspired by the structuralist approaches of Barthes and Todorov, shared their basic concern with structured narrative technique (Chihaia, 2012:3). The systemic approach, also evident in Mieke Bal's early publication, *Narratology. Introduction to the theory of narrative* (1985) (*De theorie van vertellen en verhalen* (1978)), concurs with Genette's distinctions between different layers of narrative, but she especially highlights three layers of analysis, including the fabula, the story and the narrative text. Bal defines a narrative text as a text – "finite, structured whole composed of language signs … in which an agent relates a narrative … in a particular medium, such as language, sound, building or a combination thereof" (Bal, 1985:5). A fabula, according to Bal, relates to "material or content" that is incorporated into a story to form a more chronological, simplified "series of events" (1985:7) that are "caused or experienced by actors" (1985:10). *Shklovsky* (1917) made distinctions between the fictional structures of two opposing and interactive dimensions: syuzhet and *fabula*. According to him, the *fabula* refers to the actuality and the chronologic sequence of the events that make up the narrative; and syuzhe*t* to the order, manner, and style in which they are presented in a story (Burke & Evers, *eds*., 2014:36). The rise of transmedial narratology forwarded questions around the function of the fabula or story level of a transmedial narrative, especially when a story or stories, built on the premise of transmediality, is spread across various media. This concern is problematised in section 2.2.2.

Analytical structural concerns therefore resulted in new foci in postclassical narratology – more so in digital realms. Explorations by Bal (1978; 2002) whose focus began to shift to the (cultural) contexts of text, were soon followed by other scholars of narratology (Nünning & Nünning, 2010; Jenkins, 2006(a)(b)(c); Herman, 2004, 2007, 2009) who propounded that new concepts and methods have to be refined, adapted and incorporated into the analytical toolbox of classical narratology.

Postclassical narratology, coined by David Herman in an essay "Scripts, sequences and stories: Elements of a postclassical narratology" (1997), refers to a new phase in the history of narratology. In this publication, he drew on a variety of theories and explored narrativity in various kinds of texts and contexts. This was mainly due to the range of narrative phenomena that expanded beyond what structuralist narrative scholars envisioned (Biwu, 2015).

Classical narratology therefore made way for new media applications, issues of fictionality and cognition, and questions surrounding authorship - some of the areas of contribution by authors of essays in the publication *Postclassical narratology: Approaches and analyses* (Alber *et al.,* 2010), thus problematising and expanding on narratological approaches. This publication is especially relevant in demonstrating multidisciplinary approaches towards a wide spectrum of themes and critical theory such as psychoanalysis, media studies, the rhetorical theory of narrative, unnatural narratology, and cognitive studies (Alber *et al*., 2010). Contributors illustrate how implementation of a rich contextual framework and the application of a variety of methods can enrich current narrative analysis. David Herman, in an interview with Shang Biwu (2015), stresses that this synthesising process should be fluid and unforced:

> If a poll of researchers in the field were conducted, my sense is that feminist narratologists, scholars of digital narrativity, cognitive narratologists, and analysts working on narratives across media would think of themselves as engaged in a common enterprise: namely, developing, testing, and refining models of what stories are and how they work, while also contributing to a joint effort to understand how narratives are imbricated with other sociocultural practices and processes of meaning-making (Biwu, 2015 – interview with David Herman).

Narrative understanding and the construction of narrative from various semiotic cues ultimately involve not only knowledge of the nature of narrative, but also an appreciation of the interrelationship between human beings, their contexts and the "real" world. As a result, narrative is often referred to as the discourse of human experience (Fludernik, 1996:28).

As illustrated above, traditional narrative analysis and theory provide the tools that is necessary to broaden our understanding of storytelling in a transmedial environment. Through these means an interpretation of *The Household*, as illustrative of possible evaluation strategies of websites with narrative attributes, will elucidate the nature of mediated narratives and how these narratives function.

By looking forward, various digital platforms provide several means in which the construction of narrative is instrumental to inform and entertain audiences through different, and not always predictable modes of storytelling. In order to unlock such possibilities, it is therefore necessary to use and expand on transmedial strategies, including narrative representation and theoretical inquiry, into the "correlation, modification

and expansion of existing approaches to narratological analysis across media" (Thon, 2016:xix).

Although transmedial narratological strategies are being explored in South Africa – perhaps mostly in terms of advertising and brand strategies in media studies and not in many other fields - I am of the opinion that a transmedial narratological approach to storytelling can enrich the fields of contemporary art and media culture. As mentioned above, a gap was recognised in terms of the transmedial exploration of the medium of websites that do not only include layers of semiotic cues and information, but make use of creative storytelling techniques and artefacts to enrich the experience of the viewer[15].

In the remainder of the chapter, I introduce transmedial characteristics present in *The Household* website, compare various theoretical viewpoints and clarify my stance towards transmedial storytelling. The contentious issues surrounding *media,* under the umbrella term transmedial, are highlighted and followed by comparisons of various transmedial narrative strategies in order to arrive at the appropriate toolkit for exploring websites with narrative attributes.

2.2 Towards transmedial narratology

Although various transmedial narrative strategies can be traced back to the pre-digital era, Henry Jenkins introduced the term, "transmedia storytelling" in his book *Convergence culture* in 2006. For Jenkins (2016:1), https://immerse.news/transmedia-what-15edf6b61daa "transmedia", in simple terms, describes "some kind of structured relationship between different media platforms and practices", resulting in a sense of interconnectedness amongst separate, related works on diverse platforms. This statement seems to connect with a terminological suggestion made by Marc Rupple (2009) when he

[15] The *viewer* in a multimodal context, refers to the viewer/user/reader, and the critic (in this instance, myself) and will be, henceforth, referred to as VUR .

refers to “cross-sited narratives” as a narrative method of telling multimodal stories across media channels (2009:281). He observes that:

> … increasingly, narrative is functioning not just through mono-medial constructs, but also through convergent networks of media platforms, where stories move, shift and drift, progress and regress, grow and flow across film, television, print, digital artifacts, the web and interpretive communities (Rupple, 2009:282).

The flow of narrative across networks speaks of an elaborate experience for the consumer (reader or co-constructor/participant in the narrative), especially when the role of intertextuality is considered. This concept is explained and problematised in section *2.2.2.3 Meaning-making: Transmedial intertextuality.* Earlier allusions to the concept surfaced in, for instance, *Narrative across media* (2004), in which Marie-Laure Ryan (*ed*.), David Herman and other contributors, although more steered towards specific media, expanded the scope of narratology beyond language-based fields. An attempt was made through the above-mentioned collection to redefine the act of storytelling, rather than relying on a particular theory of interpretation. Nonetheless, the transference of narrative from one medium to another (Elliott, 2004:221; Ryan, 2004:338), as well as the manner in which narrative can migrate, mutate and create meaning across various media, was introduced. Terms such as transmedia, transmedia narrative and transmedia storytelling became the focus of many scholarly inquiries (Dena 2009; Scolari 2009; Rupple 2009, Ryan 2013, 2014(b)).

The question arises if a richer experience and understanding of the storyworlds of the “Blackheart Gang” collective can be achieved when consideration is given to the flow and construction of transmedial narrative within digital storyworlds and across media. In order to gauge possible answers to these questions, the perceptual possibilities relating to the VUR’s experience of a multimodal platform, such as *The Household,* needs investigation. The role of the VUR, as well as the act of co-construction will be problematised in section *2.2.2.2 Meaning-making: problematising author / narration / navigation.*

As previously mentioned, *The Household*, an online platform (website) created by the “Blackheart Gang”, includes references to various media (artforms and channels). This website is not a typical mono-medial construct. Rather, layered sections reveal a variety of mediums and related stories, inviting contextual and meaning-making participation beyond

the scope of the website. Intertextually rich stories and artefacts reveal connections between this storyworld beneath the crust of the earth and the “real” world. Sections of the website serve as locations or rooms in *The Household* and in each area a different story plays out, with its own unique characters and realms. Obviously the different sections of *The Household,* as well as the multimodality of its approach relate to each other. On the other hand, the variety of media might hamper a classical, predictable narrative flow. This study therefore explores how different sections connect with each other to allow for the construction of multilayered narratives and to explore the transmedial convergence of various narratives.

In *Convergence culture*, Jenkins (2006) refers to the term convergence as a new paradigm for understanding media change. He recognised the need for understanding how media are merging, transgressing and replacing traditional boundaries between different media.

He states that:

> [c]onvergence does not occur through media appliances, however sophisticated they may become. Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others” (Jenkins, 2006:3).

This statement infers that our dependence on various technologies results in a collective, mediated sense of knowledge and interpretation, the extent of which I doubt Jenkins could predict in 2006 (see 2.2.2.3 on meaning-making).

The Household, as the Blackheart Gang’s website was coined, together with extensions of the group’s creative endeavors, skillfully integrates various media and transmedial narrative strategies into a collective storyworld. This storyworld enables narrative convergence by thematically connecting all narrative elements through the implementation of an array of technologies. The following section contemplates the characteristics of artefacts and digital platforms as media and the role it plays in transmedial storytelling.

2.2.1 Media and transmedia

Different media constitute and enrich the extended storyworld of *The Household*, such as animation, illustrations, reference to a book, sculptures and many more. In the various sections of this storyworld, different stories, strangely sharing a common thread of instances of humor, conflict and political and social strain, play out by means of beautiful imagery, musical compositions and text. Information about the group of creatives, descriptions of the sections of *The Household*, together with lyrical poems, infused with wit and quirkiness, skillfully unfolds in converged media applications.

As mentioned above (*cf.* p.5), any story that is conveyed to recipients requires a medium (Bal, 1985:9). The media through which stories are conveyed each have their own characteristics and need to be situated in terms of transmedial narratology.

In the first instance, the umbrella term “media” needs clarification. The singular form, medium – besides referring to the way one prefers a steak being cooked, or to a person claiming to have contact with the dead - alludes to a method or way of expressing content, and in many cases narrative content. In terms of artistic or critical discourse, different views exist, but it is commonly accepted that distinctions can be made between “medium as artistic medium” and “medium as a generic means of communication” (Quaranta, 2013:29). Ryan also makes two distinctions: 1) material or technical means of artistic expression and 2) a channel or system of communication, information, or entertainment (2003:2).The first is a term used by artists and art critics to refer to the material out of which a work of art is made or, more generally, what a particular art form constitutes. Materials as medium refer to, for instance, oil paint on canvas, watercolour on paper, charcoal on paper, etching or a sculpture in bronze. Ryan elaborates that “the material substances out of which messages are made or in which signs are presented, include clay, stone, oil, paper, silicon, scrolls, codex books and the human body” (2014(b):26). Medium in a traditional sense includes literature, painting, drawing, sculpture, music and printmaking. Ryan (2014(b):26) adds to this list by including dance, sculpture, installations, architecture, drama, the opera, and comics. The term “mixed media” developed as contemporary art practitioners introduced mixtures of a number of visual materials in their artworks, such as photographs, prints, cardboard, oil paint, acrylic paint, watercolour paint,

ink, pen, markers, charcoal, metal, embroidery and many more. As a result of the expansion of the media environment, the term “new media” was coined to refer to the application of mixed media in, for instance, installation art, assemblage, three-dimensional art forms and performance art (in which the artist’s own body becomes the medium). With the establishment of “new media”, the different fields of application broadened as a result of the electronic media evolution.

The term “multimedia” came into use in situations where two or more media types, such as text, images, audio, video, animation, three-dimensional models and more are combined (Furht, 2008:121). *Multimodality* and *intermediality* (replacing “multimediality” Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) are relevant terms discussed in the pivotal publication *Storyworlds across media* (Ryan & Thon, ed., 2014). In terms of media-conscious narratology, multimodality is found on two levels – that of the medium and the level of genre[16] (Ryan & Thon, ed., 2014:10). In terms of medium, multimodality comes into play when the nature of the medium suggests multiple types of signs (Ryan & Thon ed., 2014:10) - a combination of multiple sign systems (Kress, 2010) - and the “orchestration of multiple modes for analysing visual, aural and embodied communication” (Rowsell (2013:6).

Ryan (2014(b):26), apart from referring to medium as substance or as art form, summarised the phenomena that have been called “media” in multimodal terms to encompass the following:

> (a) channels of mass communication, such as newspapers television (TV), radio and the Internet; (b) technologies of communication, such as printing, the computer, film, TV, photography and the telephone; (c) specific applications of digital technology, such as computer games, hypertext, blogs, e-mail, Twitter, and Facebook; (d) ways of encoding signs to make them durable and ways of preserving life data, such as writing, books, sound recording, film and photography; (e) semiotic forms of expression, such as language, image, sound and movement…

Many of the above-mentioned categories are present in *The Household* website and plays into different meanings of the term media. In the first instance, *The Household* website functions as an application of digital technology that carries its own semiotic form of expression. Furthermore, besides frequent exhibitions of sculptural objects relating to the world of the website (made of artistic media such as clay and wood), illustrations and

[16] Ryan highlights that the distinction between medium and genre is not always clear, but while genre is defined by more or less freely adopted conventions chosen for both personal and cultural reasons, medium imposes its possibilities and limitations on the user (2006:27).

prints, *The tale of how* is presented in the form of both a high-quality coffee table book with prints and poems and a highly acclaimed animated short film (which includes sound recordings and music compositions). Interviews with "Blackheart Gang" members are available online and in printed media editions. This reiterates that *The Household* shows signs of a narrative approach to media and convergence across various platforms, from a book, exhibitions in galleries with sculptures and prints, to online applications such as a website, animation and a portfolio of work on Behance – an electronic art network https://www.behance.net/theblackheartgang

The blending of a book, sculptures, illustrations and prints with a digital platform provokes discussion on media-specific analysis, especially when considering N. Katherine Hayles' statement that "print is flat, code is deep" (2010:20). For scholars of literature and/or the arts, this statement probably provokes a knee-jerk reaction, because she seems to imply that digital media is superior to print (or any visual art form for that matter). Hayles redresses, on the other hand, that books are "too robust, reliable, long-lived, and versatile to be rendered obsolete by digital media" (2010:31). In accordance with her follow-up statements, it makes much more sense to delineate and compare characteristics of digital environments and print books in acquiring sophistication and playfulness in its experience (Hayles, 2010:30,31). Valuable contributions can be made in exploring characteristics of artwork, print and digital elements in *The Household* and comparing simulated and diverse properties contained in each medium. These strategies will be fleshed out in chapter 4 in which media-conscious narratology will be categorised and explored and the value of such approaches will be highlighted, especially for websites with a storytelling premise.

The VUR's experience of a specific medium, whether in print, on screen or in the form of an artefact will differ from person to person and from one platform to another. On the other hand, the artist /author /creator's choice of medium to convey a story has a decisive influence on the manner in which a story is shaped, presented and perceived (Ryan, 2013:1) through the planting of narrative cues. The experience and co-construction activity of the VUR, and the role of the author will be problematised in section *2.2.2.2 Meaning-making: problematising author / narration / navigation.*

Regardless of VUR experience or artist's intentions, I concur with Jannidis (2003:39) that all representation takes place in a medium, and the characteristics of each particular

medium dictate key properties of any representation that takes place in that medium. The category of medium (in terms of narratology) and its adaptation into the field of media, furthermore requires acknowledgment that some concepts are "medium free"[17] and others are "medium specific"[18] (Ryan, 2014:3). I will incorporate both concepts, because a textual inquiry into a storyworld is not necessarily dependant on medium. Medium is semiotically coded with its own characteristics and properties and needs consideration. I argue that consideration of both textual elements and meaning through medium result in a deep, layered experience of a storyworld.

A medium cannot function in isolation due to the existence of so many types of media and the interrelatedness of various platforms of production. Our everyday lives are mediated by what we experience in terms of available content and social digital platforms. What does become evident is that the choice of medium will convey stories in different ways. Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.) in *Narrative across media* (2004), stresses the important role of media and deduces that stories and their worlds are crucially shaped by the affordances and limitations of the media in which they are realised (2004:337). Not all platforms will be suitable for relating certain types of stories and how and why they are told or comprehended. Artworks, sculptures, installations and performance art are surely best experienced in person, although these may often be difficult to access. However, various platforms, including television, internet, newspapers, blogs, social media and many more, have brought artistic expression and the experience thereof to the masses.

The question arises whether too many semiotic channels, or media, may result in the loss of a narrative core. The role of medium and the transpositional effects of narrative migration across various media in a transmedial context thus need to be resolved. Ryan, amongst others, raises concerns about the contrasting "new media object", which allows the VUR to perform various operations – "view, navigate, search", and narrative, that is "a way of organizing experience that follows rigorous internal logic, makes sequence supremely significant, and strives toward closure" (Ryan, 2004:331-332). A story

[17] Ryan and Thon (2014:4) describes medium-free to relate to "the defining components of narrativity: character, events, setting, time, space, and causality". As transgression between medium-free and medium-specific, they highlight interactivity as a valid (yet not medium-free) concept for transmediality, which is "applicable to video games, improvisational theatre, hypertext fiction, tabletop role-playing games" etc. (Ryan & Thon, 2014:4).

[18] Media-specific concepts are developed for a certain medium, "but they can occasionally be extended to other media through a metaphoric transfer" – e.g. "the concepts of gutter, frame and the arrangement of panels on a page are tailor-made for the medium of comics" (Ryan & Thon, 2014:4).

traditionally follows its course in a linear fashion, especially those texts that rely on language as their primary mode of presentation. The moment a story is accessible online, the flow of narrative is disrupted and the writer/creator is no longer in control (see *2.2.2.2 Meaning-making: author / narration / navigation)*.

If the “Blackheart Gang” functioned only as a group of artists exhibiting works of art, for instance, the beautifully executed prints, illustrations and sculptures would still be admirable in terms of its enticing characters, fantasy style and rich colour use. *The tale of how* is a well-crafted coffee table book with poems and illustrations of strange characters in a weird world. However, add to the mix an animation, with moving images, a voice-over, orchestral composition and a website featuring links to the above, as well as a virtual storyworld in which all these media feature, and the entire experience becomes both and less controllable.

Thus, for a transmedial story to be effective, it should present narrated data in the form of semiotic cues planted through the “text”, whether in artistic, textual and/or audiovisual media. The focus of this study, which is on websites by an artist collaborative, necessitates an understanding of the multimodal nature of websites. The fragmentation of pages with framed sections changes the linearity of a traditional narrative. The reader intuitively determines his or her pathway and sequence of events by means of a menu with buttons or hyperlinks. It is up to the creators of the website to structure the information in such a way as to guide the reader in an intuitive manner. The technological dimension and related approaches that reflects in *The Household* will be addressed in chapter 6 (technological system).

In order to gauge the manner in which *The Household* reflects and appropriates multimodality, transmedial storytelling and relevant narrative concepts are explored in order to arrive at a possible strategy through which meaning is created and the creative endeavour is perceived through the roles of author, narration and navigation. The following section explores and problematises various narrative devices and role players in a transmedial context in order to arrive at an applicable theoretical framework for exploring websites with creative and narrative attributes.

2.2.2 Transmedial narrative strategies

More artistic and corporate establishments are engaging in transmedial narrative strategies in art, advertising and brand management campaigns to engage VURs (audience members /consumers in media theoretical terms) in captivating and memorable ways. The creative strategy often involves interpreting archetypal, demographic and psychographic information and using creative elements to create emotional engagement that is relevant and impacting (Mills n.d, Piirto (1991), Beddows (2012), Harris & Sanborn (2014), Rogers & Yee (2014), Leland (2016)). A story will not be successful and compelling if the intended audience members are not reached through these means. In classical narrative theory, the author usually consciously engages in creative strategies and narrative construction that suggest a fairly predictable fabula. Transmedial storytelling, however, diverges from the classical view of ordering and continuity of narrative, towards a perspective which emphasises readership, participation and interpretation (Booth, 1983; Iser, 1989). In this regard, narrative is a form of constructive and synthesising "meaning making" and subjective process (Polkinghorne, 1988:36) with various interpretative possibilities or realisations.

When engaging with narrative, interplay among various dimensions are considered, such as structures, functions and meaning. In 2.2.1 it was demonstrated how various media present unique narrative possibilities. In the next section, the strategies through which these possibilities manifest are explained.

2.2.2.1 Fabula / story / text

Hayles (2010), the influential new media theorist, who hails from the field of literary studies, argues that both material and formal properties of a work can shape its meaning-making strategies and how an audience interprets it. As previously mentioned (see 2.1), a transmedial narrative strategy, in my opinion, is elucidated by considering the field of narratology. The contributions made by Mieke Bal (1985), amongst others, in understanding narrative structure, necessitate a re-evaluation the function of the Fabula- / story- / text-model in Bal's terms (1985) (see 2.1). Having said this, it is acknowledged that a narrative model for transmedial storytelling should not only consider the basic construct

of a given narrative, but should take heed of the role of different media and languages and its applicability in a transmedial context. In the event that narrative meet digital platforms, do *narrative*, spread across multiple platforms, still consider *narrative strategies* in the traditional literary sense?

In the first instance, this question can be partly answered when the function of the fabul*a* is considered, especially when accepting that it traditionally refers to the chronological sequence of events that underlies the narrative. The linearity of written linguistic text can be two-fold – Bal (2009) refers to this phenomenon as '*double linearity'*: that of the text as a series of sentences, and that of the fabula, the chronological structuring series of events. As noted in the Introduction to this chapter, transmedial storytelling is non-linear in nature due to its multilayerdness, thus problematising the classical sequential nature of the fabula.

This again stresses the concern that "the elaboration of parallel strings of one fabula make it difficult to recognise one single chronological sequence in that fabula" as "several events happen at the same time" (Bal, 1985:273). I argue that the efficiency of a website with a narrative premise is not necessarily dependent on the linearity of the text and events, as it sets up intriguing plots that can be expanded upon on various levels and platforms. It will also give rise to an immersive experience for the VUR, based on both visual and textual intriguing cues of the storyworld portrayed, as well as the relevance and interdependence of the subworlds to the storyworld. Although chronological deviations or "anachronies"– the differences between the chronology of the fabula and the arrangement of the story (McErlean, 2018:101) – are part and parcel of the primary storyworld of *The Household* website, all the rooms or subworlds are strategically integrated, but not prescriptive of a fabula to be "discovered". In concurrence with Eco (1979), the fabula is best described as a possible world "which encompasses its successive states", as well as "the possible worlds of the characters of the fabula*,* representing beliefs, wishes, and projects of its characters" (1979:235) (see Chapter 3). Besides the text that considers possible cooperation on the part of the reader and the plot as a strategy of semantic devices intended to elicit pragmatic coorperation (Eco, 1979:246), the fabula as possible world is imagined and asserted by the author (Eco, 1979:253). It is argued that the fabula thus has a rightful place in transmedial storytelling, because the author organises text(s) by applying a series of codes that result in a sequence of communicative effects. This construction is often subjectively synthesised, depending on the context, and does not

have a definite structure that is “discovered” by all readers in the same manner. It is the role of the reader to decode the ensemble of codes and engage intuitively in discovering a storyworld or storyworlds through the click of a mouse. Deductions are not made at the end of the reading experience, as transmedial narratives do not have decisive endings. The fabula is thus a series of changes in states and is continuously experienced.

In terms of the study at hand, the VUR is lured into exploring every “corner” of *The Household* and engaging with narrative cues and instances on his or her own terms. I argue that, although there are many semiotic channels to be explored by the VUR in order to unlock the coded information, a lack of sequence and resolve in the storyline of *The Household*, typical of transmedial narratives, only serves to enrich the narrative experience and the storyworld. Readers are continuously engaged, through senses, such as hearing, sight, and physical interaction, to respond to various storytelling modes.

Cues left to be discovered relate to expectations that are created by the ‘main author’ (Wolf, 2012:271,273) who is perceived as the originator of the story or storyworld. Thus, the main author envisages the storyworld and is the inventor of the storyworld who sets the boundaries of that world and creates its infrastructure. Authorship, however, is a complex concept that will be expanded upon in the following section. The realisation of the storyworld, the recognition of possible worlds and deriving meaning from it, are in the hands of the reader as co-creator of the storyworld, aspects explored in the following section.

2.2.2.2 Meaning-making: author / narration / navigation

As highlighted in the sections above, readership involves interpretation through participation. The process of narrative meaning-making is subjective, based on construction and synthesis, especially in transmedial storyworld formation. As opposed to traditional print-based texts, or monomodal texts, the production and reception processes of a transmedial storyworld and additional ways of communication through multimodal channels (such as sound and movement) and digital technology, result not only in multiple layers of narrative meaning, but also raise attention to the affordances of media in storyworld formation. These intricacies give occasion to revise traditional reception models regarding understanding and interpretation, in arriving at a more experience-orientated

model that affords value to multimodal texts and channels. What have changed in recent reception theory is a move away from “a stable preexisting notion of text, a linear process of communication, from sender/author to receiver/reader, and discrete moments of production and consumption”, especially in terms of multimodality (Jewitt, 2012:97). Consequently, meaning-making strategies need to be framed with narrative communication processes in mind, but in a transmedial context. Thus, a brief outline of who the role players are in the process of narrative reception and storyworld formation, commences with the author-role.

A variety of opinions regarding the author exists in narrative discourse. The notion of authorship has enjoyed significant scrutiny, as general perspectives on the subject varied from “the death of the author” (Barthes, 1968) – a term used to describe a reorientation towards text to the detriment of the role of the author in the text production process - to Foucault’s insistence on re-examining the empty space left by the author’s disappearance ((1969) 2009:323). Controversial notions surrounding functions of the name of an author are clarified by Foucault’s in his essay *What is an author?* ([1969] 2009). He ([1969] 2009:326-329) subsequently deals with the author as a function of discourse, and in distinguishing between typical characteristics of such a discourse, arrives at four features relating to authors:

1) “they are objects of appropriation”, which means that ownership (later referred to as copyright) is indicated through legal codification;
2) “author-function is not universal or constant in all discourses” and “in any given culture”. In some instances, such as in the seventeenth and eighteenth century scientific texts, authentication was not required, as these were accepted on its own merits, as “the role of the author disappeared as an index of truthfulness”. On the other hand, ‘literary’ discourse relied on authentication to lend value and meaning to the relevant text, because, as reiterated by Walter Benjamin ([1936] 2002:105) this value is a consideration of the work’s embeddedness in the context of tradition – its uniqueness, or rather, “aura”.
3) the “author-function is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures”, which positions the author in a space between the “actual writer” and the “fictional narrator”;

4) “it does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy”

Foucault places an author’s name at the contours of texts, neither inside the text or as a real person outside of the text. This notion draws attention to the questions “who speaks?” and “who writes?” (questions also asked by Bal (2006:13) regarding the interpretation of narratives). The implications for this study regarding authorship centres around the creators of *The Household* website, who is implied to be “The Blackheart Gang” (the “fictional narrators”), with members Ree Treweek and Markus Wormstorm, presumed to be the “actual writers”. The following discussion attempts to clarify the narration process and the roles of the different agents in a storyworld.

Wolf Schmid (2010:33) states that a narrative work is an act of narration with a communication system that includes both the *narrator’s communication* (the narrated world created here is part of the fictive represented world / textual actual world), as well as the *author’s communication* (between author and reader). Thus, the author communicates through specific means – through a narrating agent. The vital importance of this agent is explained by Bal (2006:13) as an autonomous representative “whom the author deliberately entrusted with the narrative function within the narrative: the narrator”. In other words, the narrator answers the question “who speaks?”. This agent is set in motion by, and represents the author (“who writes”) (Bal, 2006:13), or in Foucault’s terms, the “actual writer” ((1969) 2009:323). In *The rhetoric of fiction,* Wayne C. Booth argues that the existence of the text implies the existence of an author (not to be confused with the narrator) and he distinguishes between a “real author”, presumably referring to the “actual writer” and an “implied author” (the author’s “second self”) (1983:151). Chatman, furthermore, distinguishes between the “real author,” the “implied author” and the “narrator,” as well as between the “real reader,” the “implied reader” and the “narratee[19]” (1978: 147-151). The general structure of narrative transmission as proposed by Chatman in his “Narrative Communication Diagram” (1978:151) (also see Prince, 2013) thus flows from real author to real reader through the following steps:

[19] The narratee refers to “the reader, addressed more or less overtly by a narrator and thus serving as a text-internal agent of communication, with whom the real reader may or may not share traits” (Schneider, 2010:482).

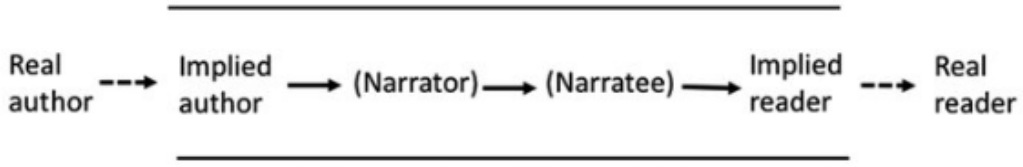

Figure 2.1 Chatman's (1978) narrative communication model

The role assigned to the narrator is that of the “voice” - “the textually encoded historically authoritative voice” - related to, but not identical to the biographical real author who created the text (Lanser, 1981:152). My interpretation of the content of the website of *The Household* thus applies in addition to my role as co-narrator. The “real” author creates this voice through, for example, a character who tells the story - a commentator or voice-over (in the instance of a film or animation such as “The tale of how” in *The Household*). The role of the narrator as commentator in *The Household* is to describe the various rooms, characters and interactions through illustrative, textual and audiovisual means, resulting in the act of narration. This character (narrator) is inferred by the real author, assumed by the reader and is never visually portrayed.

As opposed to the “real author,” the “implied author”, as explained by Schmid (2013) refers to the “author-image evoked by a work and constituted by the stylistic, ideological, and aesthetic properties for which indexical signs can be found in the text”. It is therefore inferred that the implied author has an “objective” function, relating to the underlying structure of the work and a subjective side - a product of the reader’s meaning-making process. The implied author can be “read” in the indexical signs of the text, but in a contextual sense, each individual reader will perceive and evaluate these signs differently. Chatman elaborates that the implied author is not the “voice”, or has no “voice”; only the narrator can be the “voice” of narrative discourse (1990:85). Rather, he refers to the “implied author” as the “agency within the narrative fiction itself which guides any reading of it” (Chatman, 1990:74). Although highly criticised, the term is still being applied to the inferred authorial element present in a work of art or text (Schmid, 2013; Birke et al., 2015; Kindt et al., 2006). Thon (2016:132-133), although preference is given to the term “hypothetical author,” states that the term “implied author” still has value in a transmedial context, referring “to whom the overall design of the narrative work in question can be attributed.” In this sense I thus conclude that the inferred authorial “Blackheart Gang” fulfils the position of implied author(s) as representative(s) of the author-image.

A distinct characteristic of transmedial narratology centers around the authorial element in a transmedial product. As opposed to a single real author or an implied author, in a traditional sense, the complex forms of production that transmedial narratology entails, most often involves multiple "authors". Complex forms of production and distribution of multimodal media, as well as collective authorship, complicate the production roles and artistic responsibility of any project. A great deal of co-ordination, collaboration and understanding is expected of any author collective working on a transmedial project. Co-authorship therefore suggests joint commitment. In the case of *The Household,* the ("hypothetical" or "implied") author collective, the "Blackheart Gang," displays this kind of individual commitment and shared vision in creating a storyworld that is a reflection of their creative abilities and the identity that they want to portray to the reader. The production roles of the author collective, in this instance, have been a natural process for the biographical authors, with Treweek producing the artwork and illustrations, Smit complementing these with poetically written text, and Hendriks adding technical assistance and dramatic, musical compositions to the moving images. As author collective, each member thus contributes in encoding the website with creative, lyrical and textual signs that form the storyworld.

As counterpart of the "implied author", the "implied reader[20]" is also not represented visually or in the text. Also referred to as the "intended reader" (Schneider, 2010:482) or "model reader[21]" (Eco, 1979:7), the role of this reader is to decode creative, lyrical or textual information as shared or encoded by the real author or author collective. The "implied reader" is thus a term that is indicative of the space created for the reader through the illustrations, artworks, musical compositions, animation, text etc. The reader is guided through this space through various means and is empowered with the agency and responsibility to explore the storyworld and collect story fragments. Verón (in Scolari, 2009:592) explains this exploration process as a "reading contract" that is a result of the acceptance of a proposal between the real reader and his/her recognition of the "implicit" (implied) reader proposed by the textual, audio and visual coded information. Reception thus imply that there must be a willingness to engage with and respond to narrativity. Wolf

[20] The "implied reader", a term introduced by the reception theorist Wolfgang Iser (1978), considers the text, as well as the reading activity. A real reader, according to Gerald Prince (2013), is a "decoder, decipherer, interpreter of narrative texts" (in a broad sense) ((also see Chatman (1978) and Rimmon-Kenan (2002) for distinctions between the "real reader" and the "implied reader").

[21] Umberto Eco (1979) used the term "model reader" to refer to the possible reader who can supposedly deal interpretively with the expressions in the same manner in which the author deals with them generatively (Eco, 1979:7).

(2017:263) explains that humans have a natural ability or tendency to “narrativize”, or “decode given sign configurations as narratives” in terms of various media forms.

My view on transmedial narration, especially in terms of *The Household* with creative storytelling by an author collective, is that the implied reader and the model reader are expected to have knowledge of the context in which the “Blackheart Gang” functions and narrates. The cultural context and the specific point in history in which the recipient is immersed become relevant. Thus, the recipients active engagement is necessary in the process of narrativisation, however, the model reader, ideally should possess contextual knowledge of South African culture, history and politics. I deduce that an ontological overlap exists between the real world and the storyworld, an aspect that will be further explored in chapter 3 and 4. Narration is guided by the hypothetical “Blackheart Gang”, but is constructed through the participation of the VUR, with a contextual knowledge of the coded information. The moment the VUR engages with the storyworld, conventional flow of narrative is disrupted and the author collective is no longer in control.

I furthermore argue that a connection exists between the “reading” process of the story and the interdisciplinary concept of navigation. Navigation is explained by Ryan (2016:102) as a combination of “nautical travel with the images of a road map”, a concept that can be correlated to, for instance, the exploration of a navigation system of a website. A distinction can be drawn between two navigation systems: embedded systems – constant, local and contextual systems; and supplementary systems – maps, indexes and guides (Pérez-Montoro et al., 2017:11). In my opinion, the accessibility of information on a website relies on the effectiveness of the website’s navigation system as set out above, but I am also of the opinion that the visual and aesthetic attributes contribute toward the enjoyment (or not) of the journey of creative narrative exploration. Although the focus of this study is not on the technical issues behind search systems or digital navigation systems, material and technological approaches to media are addressed in chapter five, in order to demonstrate how medium and navigation can support storytelling in creative collaborations. Concepts of navigation and travel across digital platforms correlate with transmedial narrative strategies in the sense that the moment the reader enter the website and is guided through the digital space, he/she enters into a “reading contract”. The reader recognises signifier signposts as planted by the author collective. The author collective also has a responsibility in this navigation process, especially in terms of which platforms

to include in the narration process. In accordance with Norrington (2010):

> The story should model itself in ways that readers consume stories – meaning that to simply fragment a story across multiple platforms won't work…Dragging readers/audience from one platform to another simply 'because you can' won't work. There's a danger of overkill and hosting 'parties' at venues where nobody will turn up. (Norrington, 2010)

The term "travel" thus relate to the exploration of space and its many forms. The interrelationship between space, time and narrative in terms of transmedial storytelling allows for active participation in storyworlds and is problematised in the following section.

2.2.2.3 Space, time and narrative

As mentioned above, the narrative tool of navigation in transmedial storytelling is a guiding mechanism for VUR for discovering narrative cues within a story space. An understanding of how transmedial story space functions and how *The Household* is constructed and perceived in time and space, will facilitate a better understanding of the storyworld of *The Household.*

Space, rooted in geography, but also applied in disciplines like physics, mathematics and psychology and to transmedial dimensions, sometimes implies literal or physical space, but is often meant in a metaphorical sense. Cyberspace has a less concrete connection as it is often perceived as an abstract domain, especially when reference is made to the clouds. In her pivotal publication, *The pearly gates of Cyberspace: A history of space from Danté to the internet,* Margaret Wertheim (1999) highlights correlations between cyberspace and the spatial dualism of the Middle Ages. This era is characterised by a shift from the belief that space is only physical. Religious (mostly Christian) beliefs actuated a non-physical space, a spiritual space, metaphorically paralleled with the material world – "a separate and unique part of reality" (Wertheim, 1999:229). Wertheim demonstrates how the concept of cyberspace is an accumulation of a long history of imagined spaces. A story space or storyworld in transmedial storytelling functions in the same manner - an imagined space within an imagined space, within an imagined space – e.g. the storyworld of *The Household* within a website that functions within a multi-faceted domain, the Internet.

When considering imagined spaces in literary terms, Ryan *et al.* (2016) distinguish between narrative space, the space that serves as context, the space taken by text itself and the spatial form of text (2016:3-6). In its simplest form, narrative space refers to the environment in which a story plays off and in which characters interact. Ryan (2012) categorises narrative space as including "spatial frames", "setting", "story space", "narrative [or story-] world" and "narrative universe". In *The Household,* the spatial frames are presented as a map, mainly revealing subspaces or rooms below the crust of the earth (the setting). Story space is "relevant to the plot, as mapped out by the actions and thoughts of the characters" (Ryan, 2012). The story space of *The Household* is a combination of spatial frames or rooms*,* together with textual reference to locations not visually portrayed, such as an array of libraries and the "Tub" in the center of "Soap World."

The storyworld is conceived in the mind of the reader when the story space is imagined as a "coherent, unified ontologically full and materially existing geographical entity" (Ryan *et al*., 2016:24) (see Chapter 3). The reader assumes that the story space is continuous, although there might be gaps in the reception-like representations of these spaces. It is these gaps that will be filled by the reader's real world and fictional world knowledge. The narrative universe is implied by the text as representing the actual world and is supplemented by "counterfactual worlds constructed by characters as beliefs, wishes, fears, speculations, hypothetical thinking, dreams and fantasies" (Ryan *et al*., 2016:25, Ryan, 1991) (*cf.* Eco's view on possible worlds, p.19). The narrative universe of *The Household* is a realm below the crust of the earth, containing "a magical world of mayhem and madness, of intrigues and impossibilities" "filled with living, breathing characters, power struggles, corruption and love lost" (http://www.thehousehold.xyz/). This world is described as being an infinity removed (from the real world) "yet only six feet away." Spatio-temporal issues, as explained below, come into play when considering that this storyworld is populated with characters and is situated in time and space, with certain events taking place.

Various debates centre around the inseparability of time and space, the assumption that time and space cannot exist in isolation, as well as concepts of "place[22]" and "sense of

[22] Place refer to the qualities that make spaces unique and distinctive with regard to the way environments and settings have been moulded and shaped by human action and habitation (Ryan et al., 2016:7).

place[23]". Janet Murray (2011:159), for instance, highlights the importance of spatial and temporal conventions in digital projects and that designers should consider a broad range of conventions including:

> …containers such as lists, tables, and virtual file folders, and landscapes composed of continuously navigable space and discreet, recognizable places. Designers should draw on the existing possibilities of geographical and abstract maps, including the spatial mapping of temporal phenomena through interactive timelines and animations, while also looking for new ways to express relationships through space, including emerging conventions for location-specific information an 3D displays.

Murray is not as much concerned with the temporal, but this might be as a result of her stronger focus on the technological aspects of creative narrative communication. Ryan (2004:20), on the other hand, regards spatio-temporal extensions as more relevant to the issue of narrativity than distinctions relative to technological support. This gives rise to questions as to how time and space are perceived in a transmedial narrative context. The spatio-temporal extension of media can be categorised as temporal – supported by music or language exclusively – spatial – such as painting and photography – and spatio-temporal – such as dance, cinema, image-language combinations and digital texts (Ryan, 2005:19). The last mentioned aspect is usually applicable to websites, such as *The Household* of the Blackheart Gang. In considering the importance of language and the unique contributions combined media can make in the transmedial meaning-making process, Ryan (2005:10) exclaims the following:

> Narrative is not just the wire frame plot captured by summaries, but the expansion of this wire frame into a total *imaginative experience*, into a spatio-temporal world to which we react intellectually, emotionally and sometimes aesthetically [my italics].

This imaginative experience seems possible if one considers an important narrative navigation tool - the spatial distribution of stories by, for instance, providing implied readers with a story space or a map that illustrates the relationship between the content and specific locations (Nisi *et al*., 2011:221). The necessity of maps, indexes and guides in

[23] The concept of "sense of place" according to Ryan et al. (2016:7) is indicative of the attachments people develop or experience in particular environments, from the microscale of the home (or a room), to the neighbourhood, city, state or nation.

technological terms is supplemented by spatial frames in narratological terms that guide the reader through a spatio-temporal world. As a result, in multimodal texts, meaning is thus distributed through various channels and a storyworld is created through a synchronisation of modes. These modes may include a combination of spoken and written language, still or animated images, hand-drawn or electronically generated images, and/or sound, to name but a few. As mentioned before, coded information is provided through such modes, but it is up to the reader to recognise signifier signposts and decode the narrative information. Ryan (2003) considers this as a process of activation and explains:

> *Narrative* is defined as a mental image, or *cognitive construct*, which can be activated by *various types of signs*. This image consists of a world (**setting**) populated by intelligent agents (**characters**). These agents participate in **actions and happenings** (events, plot), which cause global **changes** in the narrative world. Narrative is thus a *mental representation* of causally connected states and events which captures a segment in the history of a world and of its members [my italics].

The moment a reader enters a website such as *The Household,* he/she activates the reading process through decision making and interpretation of these signs as mentioned above. Narrative is thus a cognitive construct by the hypothetical "Blackheart Gang", a mental representation of the spatio-temporal storyworld of *The Household,* but is constructed through the participation of the VUR, with a contextual affinity towards the coded information, connected states and events. Last-mentioned relate to the participatory culture that will be highlighted in the following section. Signifying signposts are often intertextually loaded, as intertextuality[24] postulates that all texts (including websites, artworks, animation, books etc.) are intertexts. The following section will state the role of intertextuality as a transmedial narratological strategy.

2.2.2.4 Meaning-making: Transmedial intertextuality

According to Mevlüde Zengin (2016:299), intertextuality as a literary device can be explained as a set of relations that a text has with other texts and/or discourses belonging to various fields and cultural domains. With its roots firmly embedded in "theories of such theorists as Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975), Julia

[24] Van Wolde (1989) provides a broad sense of the term intertextuality by explaining the value of Kristeva (see 1982, 2000), Barthes and Derrida's standpoints as comparable with a river in which elements from other texts are incorporated in a text like drops of water in a river (1997:3). She goes further in stating that it is not the writer who is determinative of the intertext, but the reader (1997:3).

Kristeva (b. 1941) and Roland Barthes (1915-1980)" (Allen, 2000:14; Zengin, 2016:300), intertextuality strongly focuses on an interrelationship between literary texts.

Kristeva recognised, in her coining of the term *intertextuality,* that all texts are intertexts because they refer to, recycle and draw from the pre- existing texts[25] (Allen, 2000:30). Any work of art as a text, for Kristeva, is an intertext that interacts with other texts, rewrites, transforms or parodies them. Zengin concur with this view in his recent statement that "[intertextuality] provides an area of study of influences, adaptation and appropriation of texts into not only the written or literary texts, but also the other media or non-literary fields" (2016:301). Intertextuality inevitably seems to have had a considerable influence on the theories on which transmedial studies were built. I argue, at the hand of various theorists, that intertextuality is also relevant in the reading of transmedial narratives and storyworlds.

As early as 1991, "on the verge of an interactive multimedia revolution", Marsha Kinder explored the various ways in which children acquire the ability to understand narrative and how this ability has been affected by mass media like television and video games (1991:x). In the process of enquiry, the term "transmedia intertextuality" was introduced that referred to "commercial supersystems[26]" constructed around various stories and characters, that became recognisable across a range of media platforms (Kinder, 1991:3). Although I do not necessarily want to dwell on the term intertextuality, its relevance in transmedia studies must be noted.

Easily accessible platforms allow for a rapid expansion of interconnectedness that reach across a network of cultural domains and forms of storytelling. An understanding of the meaning-making process, also necessitates comprehension of participatory culture. Axel Bruns highlights the role of the user, producer, consumer and end-user (2008:2,11) in the production of knowledge, it's management, collaborative creation and extension of

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25 Similar views are shared by post-structuralists, e.g. Roland Barthes and Jaques Derrida. Derrida's often misunderstood proclamation that there is nothing outside the text, basically states that there is no pure original text that has not been 'touched' by other texts (Clark, 2004:132). Ribière summarises that the statement by Barthes, that 'every text is an intertext' connote that "every text is seen as a mosaic of conscious and unconscious quotations: it takes up formulae embedded in language, and repeats, transforms and combines all kinds of discourses widely disseminated through language and culture (2008:50).

26 A "commercial supersystem", according to Kinder, "is a network of intertextuality constructed around a figure or group of figures from pop culture who are either fictional (like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,* the characters from *Star Wars,* the Super Mario Brothes, the Simpsons … [etc.] or 'real' (like PeeWee Herman, … Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, Michael Jackson … [etc.] (Kinder, 1991:122).

information and knowledge (2008:2,18,101,316). At the core, Bruns suggests that:

> "…participation in these social spaces spans a *continuum* stretching evenly from active content creation by lead users through various levels of more or less constructive and productive engagement with existing content by other contributors, and on to the mere use of content by users who perhaps do not even consider themselves as members of the community" (2008:18).

The interconnectedness of participatory culture, resulting in the wider distribution of knowledge, also heeds a larger responsibility in the production and distribution of knowledge and the creation of a "collective intelligence". Although *The Household* does not invite active content creation by the VUR, user engagement does apply in terms of the Facebook page of the "Blackheart Gang" in which comments can be shared and one may enter into competitions. I furthermore argue that participatory culture implies that the VUR construct meaning from a "continuum" of online content in a subjective reading process of the storyworld. Regarding creative storytelling by an author collective such as *The Household* I reiterate that the implied reader and the model reader are expected to have knowledge of the context in which the "Blackheart Gang" functions and narrates. This implies a participatory culture with knowledge of South African culture, politics and history. Participatory culture also closely relates to "collective intelligence", a term coined by Pierre Lévy in 1997 in his publication *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace.* The term is applied to describe the ways in which knowledge is produced and circulated within digital, networked culture and he defines it as:

> … a form of universally distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills… My initial premise is based on the notion of a universally distributed intelligence. No one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity… New communications systems should provide members of a community with the means to coordinate their interactions within the same virtual universe of knowledge (Lévy 1997:13-14).

The ability of the VUR to participate in and contribute to various discourses across multiple platforms, is tested. The focus on social interactions and VUR participation has placed new demands on consumers and "knowledge communities" (Jenkins, 2006a:20). The statement above that "all knowledge resides in humanity" implies that complexities surrounding social, cultural and political views might come into play, but this dimension will be investigated in chapter 5 (cultural and technological systems).

Due to the scope of this study, I focus on one aspect – creative collaboration – that involve meaning-making between author collective and the subjective VUR that is part of the collective South African context. It is assumed that the participatory culture in this regard will involve a group of people interested in creativity, art, animation or acquiring the services of a creative company, such as the South African-based collaborative, “Blackheart Gang”.

Although *The Household* website does not function as a social media platform, active user engagement with the website do take place in various forms – often only on an intellectual level. There is a link to their Facebook page on the website: https://m.facebook.com/theblackheartgang/. This space allows for interaction between the artists and users and recently (February 2017), a set of prints from their *Postcards of Molitia* series for their upcoming book was introduced. A link is also provided to the collection of postcards on https://www.instagram.com/postcardsofmolitia/. Active user participation also takes place in the website in the reading of the text and viewing/reading of illustrations, sculptures, animation and the book. The content is provided by the group of creatives, for the information and enjoyment of the user, through various multimodal strategies. The various sections and links to social media contain characters and stories relating to the larger storyworld. It has also been noted that this storyworld relates to the world we live in and its contemporary, especially political context. Visual and literary clues are provided in each section of the website and it is the role of the VUR to make the connections and fill in the gaps. This process relates to the concept of “reception” that is deeply rooted in classical literary and cultural studies (Hall, 1973; Eco, 1976; Iser, 1978, Martindale, 1993). In a transmedial context, “reception” is defined by Willis (2018:1) to involve the following:

> …looking at texts from the point of view of the readers, viewers, listeners, spectators and audiences who read, watch or listen to cultural productions, interpret them, and respond to them in a myriad of different ways.

Different avenues of reception studies are explored, for instance to understand how readers and audiences interpret and apply texts, and reception theory explores the nature of interpretation, language and meaning itself (Willis, 2018:1).

In order to draw conclusions from the information contained in the text, images and/or audiovisual material, the intended audience members need to construct meaning based on narrative cues. Narrative strategies, as rooted in classical and postclassical narratology, proved valuable in the determination, analysis and description of narrative structures within transmedial storytelling. Consideration of the fabula, story and narrative text enhances comprehension of the larger storyworld and give rise to a synthesis of the role of characters and the events that is taking place – "are they concrete or abstract objects, complexes of signs, propositional structures or mental modes" (Eder, 2003:11).

Furthermore, transmedial narration should account for a combination of interlinked communication strategies, without hampering narrative flow. Lastly, the context of the recipient should be considered. This involves the "characteristics of a particular historically and socioculturally defined group of recipients" in the meaning-making process (Eder, 2003:4). In both instances, the process of transmission involves communication, reception and cognition.

2.3 Summary

This chapter constituted a theoretical inquiry into narratology and transmediality in order to illustrate how transmedial storytelling can contribute, not only in entertaining the VUR, but also to reflect the world of artist collectives, such as the "Blackheart Gang". It has been illustrated how transmedial storytelling is strongly imbedded in classical and postclassical narratology. Although rooted in language and text-based inquiry and informed by different (structural) layers of analysis, such as fabula, story and narrative text, the need for expansion of the analytical toolkit of classical and postclassical narratology was recognised and highlighted.

In classical narratology not much attention was paid to the role of medium, but recently, multiple platforms of narratological application have given rise to a convergence of media that transgress and blur boundaries between different media. The blending and choice of media were show to have a critical influence on how a story is shaped, presented and perceived. *The Household* is exemplary of the blending of various media that resulted in a rich storyworld. The focus, nonetheless, is not so much on the type of technologies used to convey meaning, but on the sharing of readership and the interpretation of the storyworld.

The value of the fabula, story and narrative text are acknowledged, but in a transmedial context, visual and textual intrigue and the efficiency in creating a strongly fused storyworld were found to overshadow the need for a single chronological sequence of events. The vigilance and intuition of the VUR is relied upon in realising the storyworld and decoding signifying signposts as assigned by the author collective. I, as co-narrator, assume the role of the "voice" in this regard. The "implied" or "hypothetical author" is thus the "Blackheart Gang" with its real author collective consisting of Treweek and Smit (and in some instances assisted by Hendriks).

It is thus concluded that narrative transmission strategies must be adapted to a transmedial environment. The interrelationship between narrativity and media enjoys greater attention. Multimodality, as mentioned above, suggests multiple types of signs which influence the manner in which storyworlds are constructed and perceived. Affordances and limitations of media will have an effect on the types of stories told.

The structuralist approach to narrative is currently supplemented by the focus on mental processes through which means narratives are detected, decoded, as well as constructed (or co-constructed). The premise of this study is not to focus solely on the communicative intentions of the author collective, but rather on the interaction that arises from the process of meaning-making.

The manner in which the VUR conceives the storyworld relies on navigation through space. What makes *The Household* engaging in this sense is the use of a spatial frame in the form of a map, together with subspaces or rooms in which different stories play out. Spatio-temporal issues come into play as a result of image-language, audiovisual and digital texts combinations.

Navigation between various nodes and story elements were not found to hamper the "narrative flow", but rather reinforces the co-construction and contextualisation of the given storyworld, as various senses are employed to experience the storyworld at hand. This results in a personalised experience of the storyworld with various aesthetic and psychological effects. These effects and understandings are usually tied to the participatory culture's previous experiences and knowledge.

In this chapter, the nature of transmedial storytelling, which highlights the manner in which

narrative and meaning can migrate across various media, was communicated. This intricate network of connected media proved valuable in relating an overarching narrative that operate within a larger storyworld. The following chapter will be dedicated to establish narrative ways of worldmaking, especially in terms of possible worlds theory and storyworld theory. This chapter will contribute towards an understanding of the relationship between digital websites and storyworlds, especially in terms of *The Household* by the “Blackheart Gang”.

CHAPTER THREE

The Household as storyworld

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the various means through which transmedial storytelling is applicable to the digital realm and specifically to artists' collaborative websites, such as *The Household* by the "Blackheart Gang" were highlighted. Theoretical links were made by comparing language-based narratives with transmedial narratives. The most prominent principle that surfaced was the importance of the notion of storyworlds in understanding transmedial storytelling. Thus far, mention has been made of storyworlds intuitively, based on the premise that a storyworld provides a sphere or spatio-temporal frame (see section *2.2.2.3 Space, time and narrative*) within which texts/artworks operate narratively through various media and platforms – elements recognised in *The Household*. It was also suggested that a storyworld can expand beyond extant plots, ignore linear storylines and invite new relationships with other plots or storyworlds. Such arguments, however, need clarification, in order to allow one to arrive at a working definition of the term storyworld.

The following section engages with various perspectives on storyworlds and specifically transmedial storyworlds to develop a concise working definition. Subsequently, the manner in which *The Household* can be said to function as a storyworld is elucidated. The sections that follow explore various narrative strategies of worldmaking[27] and their relevance for a transmedial storytelling approach. To elucidate the multilayered nature of transmedial worldmaking, these elements are positioned in relation to a transmedial supersystem, with semiotic systems and sub-systems. In the first instance, the transmedial text world as semiotic story system is explored by not only highlighting the roles of sub-systems (some of which surfaced in chapter two) such as plot, characters, the fabula, time and space, of a more medium-free nature, but by broadening the scope towards the media-specific signifying sub-systems as underlying considerations in worldbuilding. From here, it follows that technological systems also have a role to play in terms of media-conscious narratology and this necessitates exploration to explain the semiotic and expressive

[27] I acknowledge that in orthographical terms "worldmaking" is two separate words, or rather hyphenated, but I choose to apply Goodman's (1978) single conceptual spelling.

possibilities of this strategy. As a story system and technological system function in a certain context, exploration into the cultural use of media from a cultural point of view follows. Cultural elements, such as myth, language art and medium will be explored as part of cognitive worldmaking strategies.

In summary, the experience of transmedial stories in the text world, transmedial platforms and audiences (participatory culture) as strategic systems in the process of meaning-making are clarified in terms of media-free and media-conscious narratology. A concise theoretical framework is then established with a view to analyse and interpret artist collaborations that create digital realms such as websites with storytelling attributes. This framework is applied in chapters four and five as illustrative of its relevance for creating websites with creative and narrative attributes.

3.1 Defining storyworlds

The concept of storyworlds is rooted in fictional worlds theory but only in the sense that both types of worlds project an imaginary world. The manner in which these worlds are contemplated differs, as will be explained below. Firstly, the term *fictional* may refer to a type of story or account that is perceived to have been invented in the imagination of its creator. Zipfel (2015:105) is of the opinion that, for a world to be fictional, it should contain characters (who do not exist in the actual world), and events (that did not occur in the actual world). These guidelines are not necessarily clear-cut, as will become clearer below.

Non-fiction is usually perceived to represent stories as “true” of the actual, “real” world. Such narratives are generally represented as narrative texts in, for example, science, history, and autobiographies. This view, however, can also be problematised in the sense that our understanding of “truth” or “reality” is always already mediated - “the storyteller can be lying, misinformed, or playing loosely with the facts” (Ryan, 2014:33) - and thus non-fiction also has aspects or dimensions that pertain to the realm of fictionalised narratives. Even history can be said to be a fiction because it is related in the interest of certain people and events or any other aspect of a historical account can be elaborated, minimised or even fictionalised. In, for instance, an article by Catherine Gallagher (2011), *What would Napoleon do? Historical, fictional and counterfactual characters,* a distinction is made between these types of characters as portrayed in three different quotes from a letter by G.W.F. Hegel to Friedrich Niethammer (13 October 1806), a quote from Leo

Tolstoy (*War and Peace,* 1869*)* and a quote from *Napoléon et la conquête du monde* (1836) by Louis Geoffroy-Château. Although this study refers to three quotations from texts about Napoleon Bonaparte, the meanings of these texts differ vastly, resulting in the unsettling of referent, namely the various personae of Napoleon and diverse perspectives on these. For example, for a long time Napoleon created a fiction around himself as an educated man of letters, art and the like; as patriarch, demi-god and so on, and used propaganda to fictionalise himself and even the course of history – at least for a while. The quotations, highlighted by Gallagher (2011), on the other hand, differ in the sense that the first quotation portrays Napoleon as a "figuration of history", whereas the second only implies him to be an "impersonal executor" of history (Gallagher, 2011:317). The third quotation refers to Napoleon's "counterfactualism", as it highlights what Napoleon "might have done instead" and "what the world-changing ramifications would have been", thus historical figures are attributed "unknown thoughts and deeds" (Gallagher, 2011:322, 323). In terms of fictional and historical worldmaking, focussing only on character to distinguish among the categories of historical, fictional and counterfactual narration seems beneficial to this discussion, but limiting, as implications on (historical) timeline, space and events – issues disregarded by Gallagher (2011) – are also relevant, as discussed below.

The fictionality of *The Household* by the "Blackheart Gang" is evident through the creatives' own views, as mention is made by Ree Treweek in an interview (http:www.mblife.co.za/Passion/Blackheart_Gang_14112012) of "an imaginary realm", a "daydream universe" and "sheer escapism". Treweek, however, goes on to purport (in the same interview) that "[i]t is a story of colonisation", "… about different people inhabiting the same space", with the purpose to "figure out our place in it". These views suggest notions of historicity, typically relating to the "Blackheart Gang's" country of origin, South Africa. It is clear that this kind of worldmaking constitutes fictional and historical characteristics. The phenomenon of the simultaneous existence of both elements is addressed in the emergence of storyworld theory below and in the expansion of narratology from literature to other media and disciplines. This inquiry widen the spectrum and nature of storyworlds to include various elements - fictional, non-fictional or a combination of the two (Von Stackelberg *et al.,* 2015:25). Ryan (2014:33) agrees that storyworlds may refer to both factual and fictional narratives, "meaning stories told as true of the real world and stories that create their own imaginary world respectively". She regards the former as representing the "reference world" which can act as a gauge to assess the extent to which the storyworld corresponds to the actual world (Ryan, 2014:33). Cues relating to the

reference world of the *The Household,* as mentioned above, are expanded upon in chapter four to determine which actual world elements are present and are implied by the text as representing (and making absurd) the actual world in the storyworld. This notion harks back to the discussion above on historical, fictional and counterfactual characters (Gallagher, 2011) as the basis of narrative. An understanding of a storyworld is supplemented by the notion that "counterfactual worlds [are] constructed by characters as beliefs, wishes, fears, speculations, hypothetical thinking, dreams and fantasies" (Ryan *et al*., 2016:25, Ryan, 1991). These counterfactual worlds, as perceived through the eyes of characters, is a first step towards explicating the premise of possible worlds theory.

Related to fictional world theory, Eco, Pavel, Doležel and Ryan, amongst others, developed possible worlds theory[28] to illuminate the relationship between the so-called actual world in which the VUR lives, and possible worlds as imaginative constructs. As mentioned above, this process is actuated by investigating / considering the reflected private worlds of the characters with regard to their dreams, wishes, beliefs and obligations (Ryan, 1991). Ryan (2019) elaborates that, as a result, storyworlds become entire universes (also see Eco, 1984), since they not only contain a textual actual world with narrative "facts", but also a multiplicity of possible worlds created in the minds (or private worlds) of the characters. Eco (1984) refers to these as *subworlds,* meaning possible-worlds-within-possible-worlds. Characters, thus, are agents in storyworlds, as they project prepositional attitudes that reflects as possible worlds. For these possible worlds to be believable and imaginable, McHale (1987:34) specifies that it also depends on a prepositional attitude by some human agent. Such an agent includes the VUR and the artist collective in the case of *The Household.* This notion relates to the discussion in chapter two (2.1 Classical narratology to postclassical narratology) regarding Eco's (1984) conceptualisation of the "model reader", which highlights that every text should ideally have a VUR who is contextually and culturally predisposed to the given text, thus relating to a "cultural-historical reality" in and for which the narrative was created (Ronen, 1994:15). In this sense, the model reader relates to the implied reader. Cultural issues and how these relate to, and may form a contextual backdrop to transmedial storytelling are addressed in chapter five. In this regard, possible worlds theory illuminates storyworld

[28] The theory of possible worlds in analytical philosophy is another strand in the genealogy of narrative worldmaking. Scholars who relate these strategies to literary theory include Umberto Eco (*The role of the reader,* 1979), Thomas Pavel (*Fictional worlds,* 1986), Lubomír Doležel (*Heterocosmica: fiction and possible worlds,*1998) and Marie-Laure Ryan (*Possible worlds, artificial intelligence and narrative theory,* 1991; *Narrative across media. The languages of storytelling,* 2004). Followers of Doležel, for instance, regard the narrative semantics of fictional worlds as relevant. This primarily involves the semiotic domain of the plot or story (Also see Bennett *et al.,* 1995).

theory, not only through a consideration of the character's prepositional attitudes, but this process is also illuminated by the reading process. It is also the case that a consideration of character's private worlds must be supplemented by the reconstruction of the world of the story in the mind of the VUR in order to make inferences of, and establish the significance of information contained in text (with, in this instance, various avenues of signification). Possible worlds thus become part of the mental model the VUR creates in his/her mind to make sense of the storyworld. The reading process is further illuminated in the following paragraphs.

In chapter two, the argument was made that transmedial narratology, due to the presence of multiple semiotic channels in different transmedial instances, functions on the premise that various platforms can be implemented for distributing narrative content and is not reliant on one text or plot, one world and one story (as is, arguably, the case in textualism). Classical narratology was predicated on the "discovery" of a story or a fabula following the first reading, which pointed towards a rather singular interpretation of a deeper plot – the fabula is defined in terms of its reconstruction of a chronological chain of events, whereas fictional world theory stresses the superiority of 'narrative worlds' above "discovering" one particular fabula *per se* (in which case the author of a text would have a certain authority over the unfolding of the "true" narrative content) (Birke *et al.*, 2015:3). In postclassical approaches to narratology, however, the fixity of the fabula is questioned; a fabula may, instead, be seen as a subjective reconstruction of events in the mind of the user of the text.

In the context of possible worlds theory, Eco propounds that a (literary – but I argue this is true for non-literary texts as well) text is "a machine for producing **possible worlds** (of the fabula, of the characters **within** the fabula, and of the reader outside the fabula)" (1984:246). This notion has tangential points with the discussion in chapter two, where it was highlighted that the role of the VUR - who relates to a participatory culture – is pivotal in connecting narrative instances and recognising the narrative strands (suggested by the presence of some sort of fabula that has to be [co] constructed in the mind of the VUR of the text). However, in the context of narrative worlds, emphasis is placed on readership, especially with the rise of cognitive theory[29] and analytical philosophy[30]. It is, however,

[29] Critical enquiries include Richard Gerrig (*Experiencing narrative worlds,* 1993), Paul Werth (*Text worlds: representing conceptual space in discourse*, 1999), David Herman (*Narrative ways of worldmaking,* 2009), and Vera and Ansgar Nünning and Brigit Neumann (eds.) (*Cultural ways of worldmaking: media and narratives*, 2010). These authors focus mainly on cognitive approaches and techniques related to literature and linguistics. With its roots in reception theory (see 2.2.2.3),

inferred that the fabula still plays an important role in establishing a golden tread of narrativity through storyworlds across media - although different entry points exist that allow for a fabula to be constructed, rather, as noted, than being discovered; the fabula is subject to imaginative and subjective reconstruction by every text user (Eco, 1984 – *Lector in fabula*).

With its roots in reception theory (see *2.2.2.3 Space, time and narrative*), cognitive theory is concerned with the mind of the VUR in the process of interaction with text and the resulting imagining of worlds, whereas analytical philosophers (compare, for example, Lewis, 1961,1978; Zipfel, 2015; Badura *et al*., 2019) problematise issues regarding narrative "truth" and factuality (issues addressed above). It was furthermore highlighted (see *2.2.2.4 Meaning-making: Transmedial intertextuality)* how the experience of the narrative world is enriched, because the reading process is predicated on a reception-like process of "filling gaps" in texts and in the ontology of narrative worlds, by applying real-world and fictional-world knowledge. This process is supplemented by considering intertextual inferences regarding pre-existing texts and experiences of the participatory culture that render the experience of narrative worlds more profound. As the recipient (i.e. Eco's implied reader), the narrator (implied, rather often – see Booth, 1961) and the author (or, in the case of "texts" such as "The Blackheart Gang", an authorial function fulfilled by a collective) bring their own world knowledge into the reading process, their respective systems of reference come into play (as mentioned in chapter two). All these elements contribute toward an immersive experience of a storyworld, arguably in peculiar ways in digital contexts which invite the user to immerse him or herself into the realm of a different world (that may well have tangential points with the "real world" as reference points) and in the process assume a co-narrating function. The user of digital storyworlds also, importantly, performs this function in the context of knowledge of cultural elements that inform his or her participatory experience.

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cognitive theory is concerned with the mind of the VUR in the process of interaction with text and the resulting imagining of worlds.

30 Diverse contributions in the field of analytical philosophy make a judicious definition of this method of approaching philosophical problems, difficult to establish. What does seem to be a commonality is that the essence of practitioner's (e.g. G.E. Moore (1873-1958), G. Frege (1848-1925) and L. Wittgenstein (1889-1951)) work is directed towards articulating, analysing and defining meaning in concepts, such as "knowledge", "belief", "justification" and "truth" (Stroll, 2000:8). Although it is usually assumed that the actual world represents the "truth", this notion is complicated when considering that a fictional world can also contain fictional "truth" (Badura *et al*., 2019:245) . Issues regarding "truth" and factuality, in this context, have been widely problematized by various scholars (compare, for example, Lewis, 1978; Zipfel, 2015; Badura *et al*., 2019).

Relating to the notion of participatory culture, Ryan draws parallels between storyworlds and "represented worlds" – represented in the sense that they are "sites of creative activity in which cultures elaborate their collective social imaginary (Ryan *et al.,* 2015:3). These sites of creative activity are what distinguish them from fictional worlds in general. Koten (2002:50) clarifies this notion by noting that:

> While the fictional world is characterized as a model of a semiotic system, that is as a collection of entities created by the power of fictional discourse, or as an extensional set to which the text refers, story world [*sic*.] is defined as a discursive or mental model the reader necessarily creates in his mind in order to understand the narration.

Relating to this view, Ryan (1991b:19) also distances herself from the notion that a fictional world is a mere semiotic object and argues that mental models are "constructs of the mind", that allow for not only an immersive experience, but for "fictional recentring"; once the VUR becomes immersed in the fictional world, the characters becomes "real" and may seem recognisable, and the VUR's (textual actual) world momentarily takes the place of the actual world (1991b:21). Herman (2002:5) corroborates that a storyworld relies on mental models as constructs in the mind of the VUR, because it contextualises "who did what and with whom, when, where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which recipients relocate —or make a deictic shift". The notion of a deictic shift shows certain correlations with Ryan's above-mentioned notion of "fictional recentring" and immersion theory (also see Thon, 2008; Duchan *et al*., 2012; Bell, 2016). Duchan *et al.* (2012:17), in accordance with Ryan, state that a mental model is constructed when engaging with certain types of texts that draw on, I would add, elements of a participatory culture, in the sense that the VUR "must use general knowledge, logical and pragmatic constraints, and special stances toward the text" - presumed to be an open (multiple interpretation) text - "to experience and interpret it correctly". These cognitive approaches to world-building and the mental simulation of a storyworld by means of immersion in digital contexts are further complicated when one considers the different digital levels (entry points) of such texts, such as menus, hypertext and interactivity. In other words, the experience of immersion in digital media, and important for the current study in the context of narrativised websites, relies on reconstructions of the fabula through multiple channels and entry points (such as hypertexts and menus on a website). As discussed in chapter two, although *The Household* allows for chronological reshufflings depending on the navigation and concomitant co-narration of the user, "rooms" or subworlds are strategically integrated and accessible (through various menus and semiotic channels), thus hinting at fabulae

suggested by signifying signposts encountered in the immersive process. The fabula or – more likely, fabulae therefore, emerge as possibilities in the mind of the VUR through engagement with the digital realm, ultimately leading to storyworld formation.

As the VUR is invited to immerse into the storyworld by transgressing the boundaries that are presumed to separate the storyworld and the "real world" (Herman, 2002:339) issues relating to time and place - the "when" and "where" - in which the narrative takes place, present themselves as salient. Ryan (2015) proposes that the mental process of envisaging a storyworld involves three types of immersion: spatial, temporal and emotional immersion. As explored in chapter two (see *2.2.2.3 Space, time and narrative*) every narrative, or narrative world, constitutes a story space with spatio-temporal characteristics. A story space has correlations with a storyworld in the context of transmedial storytelling as it functions in the same manner – as an imagined space within an imagined space, within an imagined space – in this instance digital channels hinting at sub-worlds within imagined storyworlds in *The Household.* Space, in transmedial storytelling, thus also represents the multi-faceted online environment with digital systems and hypertext navigation that allow for a network of entry points and exit points in a digital realm such as *The Household*. In short, it involves a response to the storyworld suggested by the world of the characters and the external, "real" world of the user.

On the other hand, temporal immersion (the "when") in a multi-faceted storyworld involves temporal choices and ruptures as a result of navigation that are not bound by a temporal unfolding of a narrative as would be the case in a literary text. In literary texts, temporal unfolding is guided, according to Genette (2002), by three principles: order, duration and frequency. These principles allow the reader to mentally recap or re-evaluate instances or events in the storyworld that can shed more light on hidden clues and narrative "truths" (in a fictional sense) (Ryan, 2015:100-101). The sum of these instances (that also include inferences made about possible worlds) thus make up the mental representation formed in the mind of the VUR. Ryan relates these responses to narrative effects such as curiosity, suspense and surprise in the experience of events in the storyworld (2015:248).

In digital contexts, no linear unfolding (and after the fact reconstruction) of events takes place. Rather, temporalities are determined by signifying clues planted in the text but are wholly dependent upon navigational choices by the user. For example, in *The Household,* events seem ongoing and are referred to in the present tense. Each of these events is subject to temporal choices made by the user, even though they also refer to specific

scenarios and events taking place in the storyworld. Even more open-ended than literary texts that leave the choice of an ending up to the reader (such as John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* 1969*)*, digital realms may have no ending. In this regard, storyworlds hold a "greater fascination for the imagination", as it can "sprout branches to their core plots that further immerse people, thereby providing new pleasures" (Ryan, 2014:19). *The Household* do contain links to the animation and book namely *The tale of how,* that "document" an historical event in which "Eddy the engineer", a little white mouse saved the dodos from a terrible monster, and sailed away into the sunset, thus insinuating a conclusion to the story (figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Blackheart Gang. Still from *The tale of how* animation. Follow link to view animation: http://www.thehousehold.xyz/portfolio/detail/the-tale-of-how/

On the other hand, the present tense and certain pronouns used in the textual sub-sections of *The Household* suggest a continuation of events, such as "an *ongoing* plot", "*constant* oddity", "*frequently* bakes" and "*hardly ever* leave" (http://www.thehousehold.xyz/). The ongoing, open-ended nature of these narrative instances, in my opinion, keep the VUR immersed in time through moments of intrigue, surprise and suspense. The development of the storyworld in the mind of the VUR, furthermore, depends the temporal context / situatedness of the VUR. The manner in which the website is explored through navigation menus and sub-menus, as well as the sequence according to which sections and events are opened, each contributes to the

mental model of the storyworld. Each semiotic channel that forms part of this immersive experience also contributes towards various levels of temporal immersion.

Lastly, emotional immersion can be evoked by empathy towards characters in a storyworld, or it can be self-directed (Ryan, 2015:249) – the latter relating to the VUR's experience of the storyworld through actions taken. These actions engage the VUR in connecting with, for instance, characters, illustrations and text in an online website or storyworld such as *The Household* through exploration[31]*.* This kind of exploratory engagement means that the VUR cannot determine a specific outcome in the storyworld as may happen in some gaming platforms, but it implies that the exploration and experience of self-driven randomised sequence of events encountered in various sections of a website or storyworld, such as *The Household,* can give rise to a sense of narrative play in the process of engaging with the storyworld. The three types of immersion, namely spatial, temporal and emotional, allow for internal and external experiences in storyworld analysis. It furthermore highlights the multi-layered nature of a transmedial storyworld in which narrative information is made available (mapped out) in the context of various temporal and spatial clues.

The storyworld is, then, conceived in the mind of the VUR when the story space is imagined as a "coherent, unified ontologically full and materially existing geographical entity" (Ryan *et al*., 2016:24). The VUR may assume that the story space is continuous, but there might be gaps in the reception-like representations of these spaces. It is these gaps that need to be filled by the reader's real-world as well as fictional world knowledge. This information needed to fill gaps is activated through the imagination of the VUR who is transported from his/her actual world to textual actual worlds and related alternative possible worlds.

I thus argue that the concept of storyworlds as a cognitive construct can be illuminated by considering core (textual) elements of storyworlds (relating to underlying fictional world and possible world principles) that can be actualised by exploring semiotic sign systems pertaining to the so-called "real world", which can also be fictionalised because of their production and mediation of "facts" by the media, amongst others. Also, a transmedial

[31] Ryan proposes that four strategic forms of interactivity exist, combined from two binary pairs – the one is internal / external and the other is exploratory / ontological (2006:107).

storyworld is an imaginary world (mental model) constructed by considering various semiotic channels.

Gambarato (2012) expands on this notion that "a transmedia project can be characterized as a supersystem that incorporates a series of complex objects, its systems and subsystems, in the process of unfolding content and evolving the storyworld" (2012:73) (also see Kinder, 1991). Von Stackelberg *et al. (*2015:42) explain that the formation of such a supersystem involves the examination of characters' interior and exterior worlds[32], whilst the storyworld's settings, "complete with fictional physical environments, social groups, cultural systems, and technologies, provide the opportunity to examine the collective interior and exterior worlds[33]". The notions of a character's interior and exterior worlds and the collective interior and exterior worlds regarding settings correlate with what Genette ([1972] 1983; 1988) and Ryan (1991) refer to as *intradiegetic* and *extradiegetic* narrative elements. Ryan, for example, explains that in the context of computer games, the *intradiegetic* is represented by the dialogue and images inside the storyworld, whereas "the menus that offer the player a choice of actions and the statistics that report the player's level of achievement" represent *extradiegetic* elements (2017:33). The multi-layered nature of a storyworld can thus be attributed to the representation of interior and exterior worlds - not only of the characters and how they perceive their surroundings, but those of the VUR's internalisation of the storyworld, and the experience of and interaction with the medium. This argument highlights correlations between Gambarato and Von Stackelberg's notions of a supersystem and that of a transmedia project that represents a supersystem that correlates with a storyworld.

A concise definition of what a storyworld is can be derived from the dichotomies highlighted above – it is not necessarily only fictional with a singular text or fabula, read chronologically, and experienced only as a narrative world (in terms of fictional worlds theory). A storyworld, rather, may resemble a multi-layered realm, represented by a variety of semiotic systems and sub-systems, that form a supersystem and that provide for an ongoing, immersive readership experience.

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[32] Interior worlds function on a subjective level and are concerned with changes in the values, goals and perceptions of characters, whilst the characters' exterior worlds refer to the objective perspective concerning the way characters perceive changes in how people act externally (Von Stackelberg *et al.,* 2015:27).

[33] The collective interior world pertains to shared cultural meaning of groups such as changes in cultures, languages and institutions, whilst the collective exterior world, also referred to as the physical world, examines changes regarding natural and constructed external environments (Von Stackelberg *et al.,* 2015:27)

In short, the following requirements are necessary to regard a world as a storyworld:

- There must be cognitive space resembling a multi-layered supersystem;
- This space should contain systems and sub-systems that augment the world-experience;
- Furthermore, this realm should allow one to construct a fabula through various entry points; and
- *Intradiegetic* and *extradiegetic* narrative elements should be present.

The following subsection applies these salient issues pertaining to the defining characteristics of a storyworld as set out above in order to demonstrate why and how *The Household* can be perceived as a storyworld.

3.2 Experiencing *The Household*

As discussed previously, *The Household* is presented mainly in the form of an online website. This medium provides a platform where a mental and cognitive "space" is presented in which narratives can unfold. This space, however, does not only refer to an online presence, but it also implies "the very concrete space projected by stories" (Ryan, 2017:32). This space manifests, furthermore, in the form of a world - *The Household;* furthermore, the artist collective explains it to represent an "imaginary realm" with "vast chambers" they call "rooms"[34]. Different spaces may be seen to represent various story spaces, with various characters and narrative hints. It will be demonstrated why these elements constitute the story system, a pivotal part of a transmedial supersystem.

The experience of the storyworld's text world begins on the landing page of the website http://www.thehousehold.xyz/ dating *The Household* back to its beginnings in the year 0000. This storyworld is documented up to the year 2013 – the point at which the website was created. It is, however, nowhere stated that the world came to an end. On the contrary, it is stated in the website that "the documentation of *The Household* is the "Blackheart Gang's" life-long project. A brief description of what *The Household* is not – "[i]t is not some whimsical land of yellow-brick roads and houses made of candy" – introduces *The Household* as an extraordinary fantasy world. This multi-layered realm is accessible by clicking on various links. These categories of inquiry include, amongst others, "The Household", "The Gang", "Work by medium", "Awards", and "Exhibitions" and relate the storyworld to the actual (physical) world of the artist collective and the paintings,

[34] http:www.mblife.co.za/Passion/Blackheart_Gang_14112012

illustrations and sculptures in various media and exhibition spaces. To the left of the landing page “Household rooms” are listed: “The Crust”, “Libraries”, “The Bog”, “Soap World”, “The Laundry”, “The Kitchen”, “The Workshop”, “The Court” and “The Cupboard of Lost and Found” (see fig. 3.2). Some of these “rooms” remind one of settings found in an ordinary household where domestic activities take place, such as cooking, doing laundry, reading and even playing tennis. However, it becomes clear that these sections involve much more, especially when one considers various strange accompanying “rooms”, illustrations and descriptions, such as “the Bog”, or “The Cupboard of Lost and Found” that do not relate to a typical household.

Figure 3.2 Blackheart Gang. Top half of landing page of http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The homepage of the website also invites one to engage with a map of the “world” resembling a planet, such as earth, with a crust and a surface world. However, various sections below the crust - “The Crust” is also listed under the “Household Rooms” drop-down menu - seem to form the bigger part of this world. “The Crust” separates the surface world from the fantasy realm below that is powered, absurdly, by human bathwater. When

the water disappears down a plughole, it follows an intricate pathway through a network of pipes into different rooms of *The Household.* The positioning of the different rooms is contextualised by exploring the map.

Figure 3.3 Blackheart Gang. Bottom half of landing page of http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The map contains a reference to "The Surface World", namely Paris, France in particular. This positions the real world above the world of *The Household,* which is underneath the crust of the earth. Mention of the surface world suggests that this storyworld is a play on the world we live in, as there is a stairway connecting the two. This visual connection hints at the overlap between fictional and non-fictional (loosely referred to, in my mind, as "factual") worlds with their stories (compare, for example, Von Stackelberg *et al.,* 2015; Ryan, 2015), typical of transmedial storytelling. In the explanatory paragraph in the

introductory page of the website, even the “Blackheart Gang” members are described as characters of this fictional world who can transcend the boundaries between the “real world” and *The Household.* It is thus evident that an ontological overlap exists between the world created for the online platform, the “real” world to which this platform alludes, and the “real” personae of the creators. The artist collective does not, however, physically place themselves in the story space by featuring as characters in the storyworld. Their presence and investment in this storyworld are only implied through the text.

Although this world is described as “living”, “with breathing characters where power tends to corrupt, where happily-ever-afters are far and few between, and where love is sometimes lost” (figure 3.2), VUR interaction with the various links is still required in order to systematically engage with the stories and characters relayed in the Blackheart Gang’s website. The process thus facilitates the gradual construction of fabulae through various entry points into the storyworld. The “Household Rooms’” menu button, navigating the VUR to a range of settings, is an especially rich source of stories and characters. Each section contains its own events and is colourfully contextualised in a lyrical, poetic – and often absurd manner. “The Bog”, for instance, is explained to represent a great, deadly jungle, which is “quite humid and warm”. It is protected by an ancient race, the “Moles”, but another group of residents, the “Bears”, threaten the existence of the “Moles”. Both groups are at war over “Jungle Honey” in what is said to be “one of the bloodiest and drawn-out wars in the history of ‘The Bog’”. “Soap World” on the other hand, is explained as being filled with clouds, caused by a “large waterfall of filtered bathwater” – “thirty kilometres at its base, and falls for nearly five hundred kilometres” into one of “Soap World’s” many lakes. The tub in the centre of the room is described to be “a wonderful metropolis where all the best ideas come from”. It is inhabited by millions of souls and is surrounded by a colossal serpent called Rachel whose tip of her tail and head are the only entry points into the tub from land (see figure 3.4).

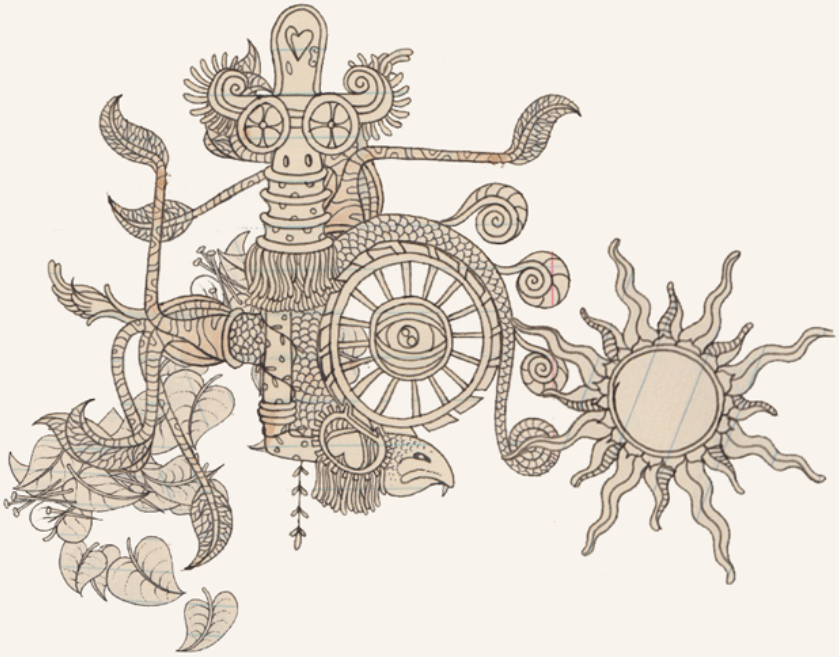

Figure 3.4 Blackheart Gang. “Rachel”. “River of paper boats” in “Poems” under “Work by medium” sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The Household’s text world therefore contains many stories and characters for the VUR to explore, co-construct and unravel. What is interesting about these “stories” is that they are not suggestive of linearity with a specific beginning or end. Rather, seemingly random situations are plotted and illuminated by means of illustrations relating to specific characters and scenarios in *The Household* at various entry points. In this regard, the story system is rather open-ended, which affords the VUR an ongoing, non-linear, immersive readership experience.

There are, however, exceptions, such as a link to the short animation, *The tale of how* and the related book which seems to follow linearly. As mentioned above, it tells the story of Otto, a ferocious monster of the Indian Ocean who devours the innocent dodos who live in the tree on his head. With the help of a white field mouse, Eddy the Engineer, the dodos unite to “escape the clutches of the terrible tentacle tyrant and sail off into the sunset on their mother, the tree” http://www.dontpaniconline.com/magazine/desire/the-black-heart-gang. The coffee table book contains stills from the animation, together with poems that tells the story in a lyrical way (see figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5 Blackheart Gang. The tale of how (book). “Publications” under “Work by medium” sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/portfolio/detail/the-tale-of-how-book/

Although the supersystem of *The Household* seems to be limited to the website, various systems and subsystems provide a semiotically-rich environment, not only in terms of its online presence, but also in the representation of artworks in other mediums and on other platforms. The storyworld is layered with different settings, plots, characters, relaying text worlds with their own spatio-temporal characteristics. However, as highlighted in section 3.1, a story system does not function in isolation. As the selection of stories and their respective worlds gives rise to the actualisation of a very concrete space – a storyworld – theoretical consideration should also consider context in worldmaking *per se*. I thus argue that, in order to understand the semiotic story system, of a storyworld, contextual issues considering the role of the VUR need perusal as it contributes towards worldmaking. The following section recaps the narrative strategies of worldmaking and applies it to transmedial storyworld (co-) construction by firstly considering structural elements and secondly cognitive strategies to worldmaking, which will elaborate on the (mostly contextual) role of myth, language and art (according to Cassirer) and how these function in *The Household*.

3.3 **Transmedial storyworld co-construction in *The Household***

3.3.1 Ontology of *The Household* storyworld

The role of the VUR in storyworld co-construction is activated the moment he/she engages in a reading contract – navigation through space, recognition of signifying signposts and co-construction of narrative cues (including textual elements) planted by the artist collective. For a VUR to make sense of the ontologies of composed storyworlds, it is necessary to consider how these worlds are created structurally. Nelson Goodman (*Ways of worldmaking,* 1978) proposes five strategies in which worlds can be constructed out of

other worlds. An investigation into these strategies will determine what contribution it can make towards transmedial storyworld construction and specifically how these strategies are applied in terms of the digital realm of *The Household* by the "Blackheart Gang".

In the first instance, Goodman proposes the world-building process of "taking apart and putting together", or more specifically "composition and decomposition" (1978:7), by means of the following:

> … on the one hand, … dividing wholes into □art sand partitioning kinds into subspecies, analyzing complexes into component features, drawing distinctions; on the other hand, … composing wholes and kinds out of □art sand members and subclasses, combining features into complexes, and making connections (ibid.).

Regardless of the fact that these strategies seem rigid or structuralist in approach, they illustrate that the process of world-construction takes place in the mind of the VUR when components of the world are identified, sorted, partitioned and analysed. The basic worldmaking processes of composition and decomposition rely on the acknowledgement and reception of objects and entities that are selected as part of a narrative world. Goodman (1978:8) warns, however, that the composition or decomposition of these entities does not necessarily mean that a new world is constructed at every step - they may belong to the same world, or differ, given that "not everything belonging to one, belongs to the other". In terms of narrative storytelling and worldmaking strategies pertaining to digital realms by creative collaborates, this strategy will apply to the analysis of the digital realm, its organisation of sub-elements and its relationship to the whole.

Two other worldmaking processes that Goodman considers involve *weighting* (or emphasis) and *ordering*. *Weighting* implies that special importance is accorded to certain elements or objects of the narrative world by means of various aesthetic techniques, such as line, shape, balance and colour. Emphasis can also be placed on objects, characters and their actions, or events in the narrative representation that highlight distinct appearances or properties (Yacavone, 2015:93). *Ordering* relates to *weighting,* as the latter is usually employed to emphasise or de-emphasise those parts that are positioned or arranged in the narrative world and function in comparison with other worlds. Goodman (1978:12) suggests that many patterns of perception and meaning can alter with different orderings of similar elements or events. Through the arrangement of certain events, situations and characters, connections and patterns amongst them are established, resulting in the generation of a storyworld. It is thus argued that, in transmedial storytelling,

the strategic ordering of story elements or characters, accessible through various entry points of the digital realm, can guide the navigation process of the VUR through the storyworld by establishing links between different sections and characters of the storyworld.

Deletion and *supplementation*, explained by Goodman (1978:14-16) as involving "weeding out and filling – actual excision of some old and supply of some new material", come into play when one world is created from another. With extensions into cinematic worldmaking, these concepts suggest that a narrative world operates on various levels such as auditory (relating to sound), visually (relating to image) and lived and represented worlds of the narrative (Yacavone, 2015:107). The experience of such a world will thus rely on how many or how few of these elements are utilised to create an effect. As a result, the strategies of *deletion* and *supplementation* draw attention to the relevance of media-conscious narratology and the semiotic contribution made by various media towards an understanding of transmedial storyworld construction in the mind of the VUR.

The last category, *distortion*, is almost always applied in conjunction with one or more of the other strategies (Goodman, 1978:16). As Yacavone explains:

> … deformation [distortion] may be taken to refer to artistic versions and variations where aspects of content, theme, subject, or story remain constant from one (earlier) work-world to another (subsequent) one, while, simultaneously, aspects of formal structure and presentation are radically altered to thereby reveal something otherwise hidden or overlooked in the original work-world (2015:108).

This strategy accentuates questions regarding originality that have often created contention in critical discourse. Artistic creation is often regarded as creative re-making or recycling. Linda Hutcheon, in her pivotal publication, *A theory of adaptation* (2012:21), recons texts (and artworks for that matter) to be "mosaics of citations that are visible and invisible, heard and silent; they are always already written and read". This notion acknowledges the important role of intertextuality (comp. Barthes, 1975, 1977) and Kristeva (see Allen, 2000:3) that hypothesise that all texts (including artworks, books, animations and the like) are intertexts because they draw on existing texts and recycle these texts (see *2.2.2.3 Meaning-making: Transmedial intertextuality*). Distortion (deformation) functions in a similar way and results in new artistic versions and altered worlds. Intertexts thus function as signs, which in turn implies that a semiotic sign becomes a distortion of the intertext.

Distortion almost seems to be a natural characteristic of transmedial storytelling projects with properties pertaining to a single storyworld, containing many stories and many forms, spread over multiple platforms, as opposed to crossmedia that relate one story across many platforms. The *LEGO* franchise is an example of a transmedial universe that includes various storyworlds on various platforms, such as film (animation), gaming and toys. An expansion of storyworlds within the *LEGO* universe recently saw the light in the form of *The LEGO Movie* (2014) and *The LEGO Movie 2 – The Second Part* (2019). Amongst spin-offs of the movies are toys and video games with the same titles, as well as toys, video games and movies relating to characters from *The LEGO Batman Movie*[35] and *The LEGO Ninjago Movie*[36] that followed the *The LEGO Movie.* These storyworlds are thus represented by characters and their associated characteristics, relating to early DC Comics superheroes, such as Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman and Green Lantern, amongst others. Whilst reinforcing both the DC Comics' fan culture and that of *LEGO,* a symbiotic relationship is created that feeds into the transmedial multi-layeredness already established by the two brands and industries. Distortion, in this instance, thus takes place when established storyworlds fuse and relay new storyworlds within a transmedial universe.

As a collective, the above-mentioned strategies, namely *ordering* and *weighting, deletion* and *supplementation,* as well as *distortion* contribute toward an ontological understanding of worldmaking. The textual actual world of *The Household*, for instance, through *composition* and *decomposition,* is a "world", divided into various "rooms" with their own characters and events taking place, constituting the story system. Through *decomposition* the fabulae are distributed throughout the storyworld, and can be accessed at various entry points, for example through a choice of links to pages on the navigation menu of the website. In other words, the above-mentioned strategies set the stage for navigation, cognition and co-construction of the storyworld.

The following section peruses cognitive strategies towards worldmaking by considering how the storyworld is perceived contextually (by the VUR). Narrative strategies of worldmaking need to be re-capped and the role of myth, language and art (according to Cassirer, [1946]1953) will be expanded on to gauge the role of culture and technology in storyworld co-construction. This will illuminate the development of a theoretical framework

35 https://www.warnerbros.com/movies/lego-batman-movie/
36 https://www.warnerbros.com/movies/lego-ninjago-movie/

that will prove the effectiveness of applying these strategies to transmedial storytelling, and specifically for the analysis of websites by artist collectives.

3.3.2 Cognition of *The Household* storyworld

This section provides a brief overview of the views of scholars and conceptualisations of cognitive worldmaking, how these developed and became the cornerstones of storyworld theory. Towards this end, it is acknowledged that the concept of worldmaking is not only relevant to the field of narratology. Various philosophers and scholars across different disciplines in the humanities, including the visual arts, language studies and social sciences have engaged with theories of worldmaking, the construction of worlds, and the recognition of correlations between "orders of knowledge[37]" and worldmaking in recent years (Nünning *et al*., 2010:1). I acknowledge the interdisciplinary nature of this concept, as well as the valuable contributions from multiple fields of inquiry, but due to the scope of the present study, I mainly focus on narrative worldmaking as a cornerstone of transmedial storytelling, and especially its possible contribution towards the cognition of storyworlds in digital realms by creative collaborates.

Narrative worldmaking, as suggested in the previous chapter, refers to the world-creating potential of a narrative. The notion of worldmaking has been widely applied to various branches of narrative theory, but approaches differ. Studies regarding worldmaking include the pivotal publication *Ways of worldmaking* by Nelson Goodman (1978) who developed a theory pertaining to symbol systems which illustrated a universal, flexible approach to processes of worldmaking and various kinds of world models. To capture how different strands of thought developed around the ontology of worlds, the primary theories and strategies toward worldmaking need consideration in order to establish its relevance to transmedial world-building.

As early as 1946, the philosopher Ernst Cassirer set out to answer questions pertaining to the nature and structure of the "world" and he found it to revolve mainly around language, art, myth[38] and religion[39]. Rather than seeing these as fixed categories, he promoted finding measures and criteria for discovering, in each of these forms, their own "spontaneous law of generation" (Cassirer, [1946] 1953:8). He proclaims that:

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37 With reference to Nelson Goodman's primary interest in the nature of knowledge, he propounds that knowing cannot exclusively or primarily be a matter of determining what is true, but aims at something other than truth or belief (1978:21). The author states that knowing pertains to an increase in "acuity of insight or in range of comprehension, rather than a change in belief," through an "advancement in understanding" (1978:22).

38 The word 'myth' derives from the Greek *mythos* that means 'word', 'speech', 'tale of the gods'.

39 Cassirer proclaims that a common root exists between linguistic and mythic conception in the evolution of thought and that theoretical, practical and aesthetic consciousness, the world of language and of morality, the basic forms of community and the state are all "originally tied up with mythico-religious conceptions" ([1946] 1953:44).

> …myth, art, language and science appear as symbols; not in the sense of mere figures which refer to some given reality by means of suggestion and allegorical renderings, but in the sense of forces each of which produces and posits a world of its own (ibid.)

Cognition of the world as we know it suggests that it is not a fixed entity. It is a shared whole with spatio-temporal features and interrelationships of shared contextual experiences by its inhabitants. Cassirer's composite "forces" or symbols involving myth, art, language and science, may be perceived as "clearly distinguishable units" ([1946] 1953:13) which have their own identity, function in a certain space and usually do not fuse. I concur, however, with his subsequent statements that myth, language, art and science "function organically together in the constitution of spiritual reality" ([1946] 1953:9), which suggests an underlying force at play in worldmaking. I thus argue that the above-mentioned elements function as subsystems or forces in their own right that collectively contribute towards a spiritual reality in the process of worldmaking.

The interrelationship of Cassirer's worldmaking elements – myth, language, art and culture - in the formation of a storyworld has not received much scrutiny in academia[40] in terms of transmediality. Although the interpretation of a storyworld is an imaginative experience, I am also of the opinion that the textual analysis of subsystems within the story system, such as plot, characters, time, location, genre, settings, and world (Gambarato, 2012:73) are invaluable in arriving at a "spiritual reality" of a transmedial storyworld, such as *The Household*. In chapter two it was concluded that an expansion of the analytical toolkit that informs transmedial narrative strategies proved valuable in the determination, analysis and description of narrative structures within transmedial storytelling. There are, however, a few tangential points in approaches that are addressed in the sub-sections below. A combination of these elements, including plot, characters, language, art (medium included), space, and time, guide a textual investigation into story systems. In order to understand the core elements that define the notion of "worldness", Klastrup *et al.* (2004:412) state that one has to, in the first instance, study worlds at a textual level, but not before one understands the "ur-actualisation" of the world and the core elements which

[40] Narrative inquiry into the elements of myth, language, art and culture, as storytelling elements in transmedial narratology, is mainly considered independently of each other. Myth for instance is singled out by Popa Blanariu *et al.* (*A mythological approach to transmedia storytelling*, 2019), as they highlight the connection between mythical narrative and transmedial storytelling in relation to the "performative dimension" of these aspects (2019: 451). In *Media, myth and minnials: critical perspectives on race and culture*, Campbell *et al.* (eds.) published contributions from various scholars relating to the proliferation and subversion of racial myth in transmediality. Coupled with myth, in this and other publications, are also issues regarding the representation of culture. Jan-Noël Thon (2016), for instance, in his pivotal publication "Transmedial narratology and contemporary media culture", investigates various forms and functions of narrative representations across media and expands on current narrative, media and cultural studies.

seem to define its worldness". This "ur-actualisation" correlates with Cassirer's notion of a "spiritual reality", motivated by myth or *mythos*[41]. I do, however, not agree that it is possible to arrive at an understanding of the spiritual reality of a storyworld, before a textual investigation has been conducted. For that reason, I consider a textual investigation to precede cultural considerations, as will manifest in the development of a framework towards the end of this chapter. The following section will investigate the importance of myth in arriving at a sense of worldness and how it fits into cultural ways of worldmaking.

3.3.2.1 Discovering myth as worldmaking strategy in The Household

As concluded in the section above, myth is one of the essential elements of worldmaking. Myth is generally considered as folkloric genre in narrative storytelling or fables regarding the attainments of heroes or gods, but, it is rather more multifaceted than the general understanding of myth may suggest, because, as will be demonstrated below, myth illuminates and contextualises a range of sub-systems contained in a storyworld / supersystem, including character and culture. I intend to demonstrate that myth is an underlying factor in character types (of the text world), as well as the cultural system of *The Household.*

Closely related to fantasy, the term "mythical" is often associated with (being) "untrue" – Eric Rabkin, author of *Fantastic worlds: myths, tales and stories,* accentuates that "all fantastic worlds are mythical" (1979:9). Regarding issues about what is "true" and "untrue", it is necessary to acknowledge that myth creates its own mode of reality. For the artists of *The Household*, Ree and Markus, one of the first collaborative projects they embarked on was a three-page comic strip based on a mythological story told by Ree's Xhosa nanny, Fabia, when she was still a child. She warned that if Ree and her brother did not get out of the bathtub after she pulled the plug and the water began spinning, a river spirit in the form of a giant snake would appear and eat them. Ree also drew an array of characters based

41 *Mythos* is regarded as the "backstory of all backstories" – "the central knowledge one needs to have in order to *interact with or interpret events in the world* successfully", referring to characters, creatures, stories and rumours (Klastrup *et al.,* 2004:412). It describes "establishing conflicts and battles of the world" (ibid.). It is argued that, if one understands the interior and exterior worlds of characters and settings, as suggested by Von Stackelberg's (2015), one should have a strong perception of *mythos.* Deriving from the Greek word, meaning "myth", this term is explained by Alexander (2017) to be indicative of "mythic systems". This concept is relevant to transmedial storytelling, as it originates from the expansion and re-shaping of mythologies into "neo-mythologies" … "based on cultural paradigm shifts" over a period of time (Alexander, 2017:121) and space.

on this story and Markus embroidered narratives around these images. According to Ree, that was the start of *The Household*.

With its origins traced back to the beginning stages of human culture, where myths were created by different cultures to explain their origins (Danesi, 2002:47-48), it is evident that myth and culture are inseparable. Roger Silverstone elaborates on the origins and nature of cultural myth:

> [T]he mythic[42] dimension of culture contains traditional stories and actions whose source is the persistent need to deny chaos and create order (…) It acts as a bridge between the everyday and the transcendent, the known and the unknown, the sacred and the profane (1981:3).

Myths are passed on from generation to generation and although relating to both cultural heredity and fantasy, are usually fabricated in such a way they are believed to have an element of truth. It is often argued that these worlds have a lesser degree of probability of being historically[43] true, but in accordance with Silverstone's above-mentioned quote, myth can act as a bridge between the known and the unknown. As tool in making sense of culture and the world we live in, myth will thus inevitably be influenced by real world experiences, places and people.

Myth and ideology are also closely related although their functions differ. According to Halpern (1961:130), "myths" and "ideologies" differ in two major senses:

1. Myths involve the study of the origins of beliefs in historical context. The study of ideology involves understanding the moulding of beliefs by social situations.
2. The social function of myth is to bind together social groups as wholes; that is, to establish social consensus. The social function of ideology is to segregate and to serve special interests within societies.

What seems evident is that myth, as passed on through generations, does not only reflect original ideologies, but is moulded to serve a current generation's needs or beliefs. This relates mainly to myth's functions to naturalise mass culture in the popular psyche, as proposed by Roland Barthes (1972). For Barthes, myth has in its nature an ideological

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42 Roger Silverstone prefers the use of the word "mythic", which according to him includes myth, folktales and rituals. He suggests that "mythic" is indicative of a stage in mankind's cultural development "between an albeit hypothetical state of nature and one, our own, where knowledge and experience have become more specialised, more scientific and technical," rendering myth "transitional" (1981:3).

43 Ben Halpern (1961) implies *history* to be either an "accumulation" of concrete ideas in terms of "science", "art", "culture" and "law", or an "opinion" or "theory" leading to a "dynamic process". Also related to the term *historical,* distinctions are made between "accumulation" and "dynamic process": the former is basically handed down over generations, whereas the latter pertains to social change (Halpern, 1961:130).

impact embedded in popular culture – "(w)hat the world supplies to myth is a historical reality … and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality" (1972:142). This "natural image" inevitably is still ideologically charged and reflects certain cultural and religious interests and perceptions within society – a concept again linking with the "spiritual reality" as proclaimed by Cassirer ([1946] 1953). These interests may be strengthened or weakened as a result of expanding social media communities and the prevalence of mass media in general that features in cultural worldmaking (*cf.* chapter five). Although myth binds together certain social groups, it might also be a source of conflict. How the VUR experiences myth, therefore, depends not only on how the narrative is presented, but also on past experiences that configure worldviews. The question arises as to how the narrative strategy of myth can, in the first instance, be identified in online narrative websites and, secondly, communicate the potential for changing worldviews, especially in transmedial storyworlds such as *The Household.*

Barthes' above-mentioned notion of the "popular psyche", which correlates with the collective unconscious of human culture in the sense that both manifest as an underlying force that binds societies together, provides a helpful introduction to the identification of mythological aspects in media and in establishing character types. It is only when such societies are analysed, that certain types of people/characters in society – and in storyworlds for that matter – with individual personalities, behaviours and appearance, becomes distinguishable. Graeme Burton identifies three levels of classification:

> Types found in media are frequently recognizable without necessarily being stereotypes (e.g. businessmen); (2) Stereotypes are simplified representations of human appearance, character and beliefs. They become established through years of repetition in the media, as well as through assumptions in everyday conversation. They illustrate crucial power relations and attitudes towards categories of people in a particular society at a given time. These categories include nationality (e.g. the Scots, Roma people), 'race', gender (male or female), class (e.g. low-class), age (e.g. teenage, old people), sexuality (e.g. homosexual), occupations (e.g. policemen) and deviant groups (e.g. drug users); (3) Archetypes are also very deeply embedded in culture. They are the heroes, heroines and villains who epitomize the deepest beliefs, values and perhaps prejudices of a society. Superman is an archetype, just as all the heroes from mythology are Archetypes.

In concurrence with Burton's type-classification, the first step towards the discovery of narrative strategy regarding myth, commences by investigating the characters of the story. This involves the identification of characters in the story system of *The Household* and distinguishing between the characters' types (and archetypes, where relevant),

stereotypes and the like that manifest through storytelling, in order to arrive at the "natural image" that represents myth.

Carl Jung (1964; 1968; 1971) introduced the notion of archetypes as structural elements of the collective unconscious (relating to Barthes' above-mentioned notion of the "popular psyche") as part and parcel of the way in which the human psyche functions. Carol Pearson (1991, 2012) expands on the classification of these archetypes in storytelling. By refining Jung's views on archetypes, she distinguishes among twelve different archetypes which are divided into three categories, namely the *Ego*, *Self* and *Soul*. Archetypes in the *Ego* grouping include the *Innocent,* the *Orphan,* the *Hero (Warrior)* and the *Caregiver,* whereas the *Soul* category represents the *Seeker (Explorer),* the *Rebel (Destroyer),* the *Lover* and the *Creator.* The *Self* category includes the *Ruler, Magician, Sage* and *Fool* (Pearson, 2012:5-10). These archetypes are often strategically incorporated into storytelling to ensure rounded characters[44].

Jung equated archetypes with "motifs" or "primordial images" that form an integral part of the unconscious psyche (1968:58) and that manifests in fantasies, dreams, metaphors and symbolic images (1964:45). He recognised archetypes as patterns of emotional and mental behaviour in man[45] (Jung, 1964:304) that mainly reflect the human condition and is stored in the collective unconscious[46] of a deeper self. In other words, the recognition of the roles played by certain archetypes or characters in a storyworld and the analysis of the archetypes in the context of an "underlying force," also reflect much about the VUR's collective unconscious as part of a participatory culture. (This issue is addressed in chapter five - Cultural and technological systems.)

The recognition of aspects related to the unconscious such as dreams, fantasies, metaphors and symbolic images relating to archetypes in transmedial storytelling can be illuminated by considering Ryan's (2004:43) "modal constraints" that structure narrative

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44 Round characters, as opposed to flat characters, also relate to the dichotomy of "dynamic" *versus* "static" characters. E. M. Forster in his seminal publication *Aspects of the novel* ([1927] 1980), theorised that a flat character is constructed around a single idea or quality, whereas round characters become fuller, can fade and have various facets similar to a human being ([1927] 1980: 103-106). Also, round characters can develop.

45 Jung, in his pivotal publication, *Man and his symbols* (1964:45) (https://archive.org/details/B-001-004-443-ALL/page/n183) warns that archetypes do not equate to instincts. The latter refer to the psychological urges perceived by the senses, whereas archetypes manifest in fantasies, dreams, metaphors and symbolic images.

46 According to Jung the psyche consists of *ego, self, personal unconscious* and *collective unconscious* (the latter comprising archetypes) (Jung, 1968:357).

worlds relating to her investigations into the relationship between theory of possible worlds and narrative semantics. She distinguishes among four different types of "modal constraints". These are based on archetypes that manifest from the collective unconscious (see Jung, 1964; 1968; 1971 and Pearson, 1991, 2012). One can relate these archetypes or modal constraints to characters, but also to genre, plot and story – elements inclusive to the story system of a storyworld.

In the first instance, the *alethic,* made up of the operators' possible, impossible and necessary, is shown responsible for the division of the population of fictional worlds into groups of different abilities (e.g. gods versus humans), as well as for the categorisation of fictional worlds as a whole as realist, fantastic, or nonsensical. In other words, the *alethic* considers the *topos*[47] of the storyworld*.* Constraints of the *deontic* type generate plots of obligation, crime and punishment, the *axiological* system underlies stories of quest and moral dilemma, and the manipulation of the categories of the *epistemic* system produces mystery stories, narratives of learning, comedies of error, and the all-important function of deceit (Ryan 1991:2). The last three constraints mainly consider the *ethos*[48] of the storyworld. Ryan's modal system and constraints create a platform from which an enriched reading of *The Household* commences, as various related issues, such as conflict, war, moral perplexities and quests are part and parcel of this storyworld.

Archetypes as characterisation strategy thus also link with possible worlds theory in this regard as storyworlds become imaginary when the dreams and aspirations that characters might have are considered. The collective unconscious, is furthermore represented by mythological motifs (Jung, 1968:58) and personified images such as Angel, Devil, or Clown (Jung, 1968:264). Consider, for example, the river spirit in *The Household* named "Rachel", the serpent-like creature, who is said to surround "The Tub" at the centre of this

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47 Klastrup *et al.* (2004:412) regard *topos* a result of the actualisation process in understanding the actual time and space of a transmedial world. In other words, *topos* relates to the setting of the world in a specific historical period and environment, whether in the past or future, whereas *mythos* considers the characters' interior and exterior worlds, *topos* seems relevant for the VUR in understanding the geography and historical period and how it is explored through navigation in the digital storyworld. This actualisation process of a storyworld necessitates consideration of technological and contextual issues in terms of a collective participatory culture involving the VUR (issues that are addressed in chapter five).

48 *Ethos* refers to the moral compass of a world. It is the "explicit and implicit ethics of the world" and "codex of behaviour, which characters are supposed to follow … as well as what is "in character" and "out of character" (Klastrup *et al.,* 2004:412). *Ethos,* as a driving force, may also influence the private worlds (relating to the dreams, desires and fantasies) of characters in terms of possible worlds theory. The *ethos* of a transmedial storyworld is, however, not only perceived through the "eyes" of the characters, but is also influenced by the context of the VUR in the actualisation process of the narrative. Mullin (2010), who relates *ethos* to the believability of the "author", also emphasises the importance of "readers" and their contexts in the reception process.

storyworld (see fig. 3.4). The only entry point through the tub on the surface world, is "through the meeting point between the tip of her tail and her head" http://www.thehousehold.xyz/. "Rachel" gives the impression of a protector of the realm of *The Household*, but on the other hand, she might be a villain that is waiting to devour those who attempt to enter the realm. "Rachel" and other characters will be explored in chapter four to determine their character types and relevance in terms of myth as semiotic sub-system.

Other mythological motifs include symbolic events (Jung, 1968:166) or symbolic transitions in life. The consideration of "motifs", in relation with Jung's archetypes, and "myth as symbol", according to Cassirer ([1946] 1953:8), highlights the connections between myth, the (collective) unconscious psyche and semiotics. These connections also give rise to myth-oriented semiosis theory, as explained below.

This multi-layered nature of myth makes it almost impossible to focus on a single aspect of the concept, such as phenomenological or psychological stances. It is also acknowledged that the recognition of archetypes is clearly not only a structural exercise to make sense of the collective unconscious. It is an order of signification (Fiske *et al.,* 1978: 40-47) that manifests in the relationship between the signifier, which is primarily representational, and the signified, relating to the expressive value of a sign. This semiotic relationship does not only pertain to myth, but flows into the discussion of other systems of signification pertaining to this study. Barthes' views (see discussions below regarding 'systems of signification' – denotation and connotation in Barthes' view (1967) regarding the connection between myth, culture and semiotics has interested many scholars[49] in literary, semiotic and media studies (amongst others). Many publications relating to media studies, illustrate the successful use of archetypes to establish, for instance, brands through archetypical inquiry (Mark & Pearson, 2001), and using archetypes as a toolkit for creative storytelling (Hartwell *et al.,* 2012). Similarly, it is evident that the incorporation of myth equates to powerful storytelling and world-building.

[49] See, for instance, Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Nicholas W. Jankowski (eds.), *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research* (1991:41) and Jensen's (ed.) later publication, *A handbook of media and communication research: qualitative and quantitative methodologies* (2002) that both focus and expand on the production of meaning through different communication strategies in terms of mass communication and cultural, as well as social practices. Arthur Berger's publication, *Media, myth and society* (2013) investigates classical myths by using a cultural approach to establish the effects these has on psychoanalytical studies, sociology, as well as different kinds of cultural and historical experience.

Myth, furthermore, can evoke humour in the sense that the *Self* – including the *Ruler, Magician, Sage* and *Fool* - is reflected upon and it allows us to recognise the universal nature of ourselves through the condition of the "other" (Boeree, 1998). Lewis explains that humour in myth is not there for the sake of being funny, but it takes place where the uncommon and bizarre occur (1961:44). Thus, absurdity and humour are reactionary elements to myth and add insouciance to what can be perceived to be serious subjects – contributing to the process of making sense of who we are or what our cultural heritage is. In this vein, it can be noted that *The Household* contains bizarre characters, environments and strange happenings. These often provoke a chuckle, but the reason for that might be that the situations and characters seem extremely familiar to us and remind of real-life people, places and experiences. Consider, for example, an illustration featured in the website, namely "Old Father Zuma", with possible reference to the previous President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma (see fig. 3.6).

Figure 3.6 Blackheart Gang. "Old farther Zuma". "Poems" under "Work by medium"
http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

In this illustration, it is assumed that Zuma refers to the figure second from the right, because he is dressed in warrior attire (perhaps relating to Zulu traditions), and is elevated, as if in a leadership position. These three mole characters seem rather peculiar. With their noses in the air, the impression is created that they are reliant on smell, more that sight. It might further allude to the saying: "blind leading the blind" – perhaps referring to Zuma's leadership skills.

Subtle reflections of the so-called "real world" connect the textual world of *The Household* to the actual world. In this fictional space, that also hinges on the mediated fictional world

of actuality, the VUR's perceptions are filtered through aspects of both fantasy and the real. In addition, through laughter and the recognition of humour, we may try to counter something that we fear. This notion is reiterated in Boeree's (1998) view that humour is the discovery of safety within fear, and just like laughter, humour's physical counterpoint is relaxation of stress. As a narrative strategy within myth, humour thus represents the less serious side of myth.

The VUR should, however, ideally question his/her reaction towards elements that provoke laughter. What exactly is recognised in the characters, settings or situations that is perceived as humorous or absurd? For this to be achieved, the visual imagination should recognise (intertextual) signifying signposts regarding myth and humour in the narrative fantasy of the textual actual world and compare it to the context of the actual world. Inferences made are contextualised from the VUR's actual worldview, except for instances where the artist collective clearly specifies its intentions. Storytelling, in my opinion, will not be an imaginative experience when all intentions and signifiers are pedantically revealed in the textual world. The VUR should be enticed to remain immersed in the storyworld through a sense of curiosity in order to arrive at the source of the sense of unease and intrigue. In concurrence with Todorov's view (1973:37), fantasy should rather be "deliberately designed by the author to leave the reader in a state of uncertainty whether the events are to be explained by reference to natural or supernatural causes". This might relate to the sense of bizarreness and subtle humour observed in *The Household* that positions the storyworld in the genre of fantasy.

Although the imaginary civilisation in *The Household* has mythical origins, as confirmed by the artist collective, interpretation and details of the stories playing off in the different rooms of the digital realm are still left open to interpretation by the VUR. Traditionally, mythology is connected to a world of its own, but for an imaginary storyworld to come to life, it needs the intrigue and sense of uncertainty generated through myth(s). It thus makes sense that a transmedial storyworld will also optimally function if grounded mythologically, as a mythical realm enhances a sense of the world – real or imaginary. It, furthermore, strengthens an understanding of the role of culture in media and formation of character types. These strategies are applied in the interpretation of *The Household* (chapter five) when the cultural (and technological) system is analysed.

In comparing myth with language as narrative strategy of worldmaking and as sub-system of a transmedial storyworld, it might be inferred that myth is less structured than language

and more primitively perceived. The reason for this is because myth is symbolically grounded in, for instance, culture and rituals, whereas language has found specific theoretical distinctions and strategies to deal with the world around us. The following section explores the role that language plays as a narrative strategy in narrative worldmaking. This strategy contributes towards a possible theoretical framework for artist collectives to follow in creating storytelling websites and their applications that will be applied in the analysis as will be demonstrated in the interpretation of *The Household* by the "Blackheart Gang".

3.3.2.2 The role of language and art as worldmaking strategies in The Household

Language is an important factor to consider in the interpretation and co-creation of a storyworld. On their own, text and textualism presuppose the term *world* to equate one text with one world. Whereas the signifier has enjoyed prevalence in structuralism or textualist approaches, the narrative turn of the 1980s shifted the focus to the signified and a more cognitive approach to the text.

Thus, whereas it was previously assumed that the content of texts are the carriers of meaning, Wolfgang Iser (1989) warns that to refer texts to an already existing frame of reference only results in the "sharpness of texts" becoming "inevitably dulled" (1989:vii). This notion is also what informed the development of reader response criticism that focusses on the understanding of text processing and revealing the way in which the reader's faculties are both acted upon and activated (1989:vii) (see section *2.2.2.2. Meaning-making: author / narration / navigation* for discussion on, for example, the "implied reader" and the "reading contract"). In concurrence with Bortolussi and Dixon, regarding reader response methodology, both text features (relating to the "objective and identifiable characteristics of the text") and reader constructions (involving "subjective and variable" responses to the text) (2003:37) need consideration in the reading process. This study expands on this notion by including a cognitive and textual reading to language, art and other related semiotic systems present in the transmedial storyworld of *The Household*. In this context, the need exists to clarify the process of worldmaking both objectively and subjectively. Goodman (1978:6), writing from his constructivist (or pluralist) stance, regards worldmaking as remaking through *mimesis*, since worlds are constructed from other worlds that are already related to what we know. The world is thus not a fixed entity, but is always in the process of evolving into a new world, filtered through

perceptions of the textual world and the actual world. This filtering manifests through the process of *mimesis.*

Paul Ricœur (1985:53) clarifies the process of *mimesis* by dividing it into three components: *prefiguration*, *refiguration*, and *configurations*. *Prefiguration,* according to Ricœur, refers to "the hermeneutic circle between narrative and life in which narrative imitates life and in turn, life is informed by narrative" (ibid.). He furthermore correlates it "to the narrative and world contexts from which we read a text" (ibid.). In other words, social and cultural contexts (in terms of language and art) are relevant in the analysis of narrative worldmaking, elements typically addressed as part of the cultural system of a transmedial storyworld. *Configuration* or *emplotment* refers to how events are ordered and what the relationship between the events are. The platforms, media and the distribution of semiotic possibilities, constituting the technological system of a transmedial storyworld, will typically manifest in this mimetic process. *Prefiguration* and *configuration,* furthermore lead up to the third type of *mimesis*, *refiguration,* which involves the act of reading that informs our understanding of the world and the new perspective that the narrative brings to the world (Simms, 2003:98). The latter is also related to reader response theory and the process of reception (see 2.2.2.3).

It has been demonstrated in chapter two that transmedial narratological systems function on multiple levels and by means, often, of multiple semiotic channels. As deduced, text is thus not the only mode of access to a narrative world, but syntactical rules often play an important role in the formation and combination of these systems.

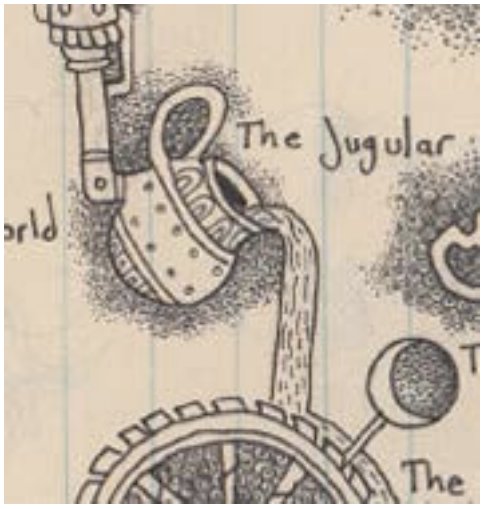
In a linguistic system, any object (sign or symbol) that is assigned to a word is experienced contextually through a world already known or revealed to us. Herman regards this as a process of "mapping words into worlds" and finds it a fundamental requirement "for narrative sense making" (2009:71). Malt *et al.* (2010) also stress the importance of words when they state that "words evoke knowledge about the world, and thoughts about the world are conveyed through words" – they refer to the process as "world-to-word mapping".

Before any narrative phenomena can be conceived or understood, the process of "naming[50]" (in terms of language) has to take place, also before a mental world of ideas

[50] Olson (2013:4) describes "naming" as a means of structuring reality, by means of our own vision of the world and related to experiences of past meaning. He concludes that "naming is a means of interpersonal communication via language".

and meanings can manifest. Goodman (1968:31) correlates the action of naming with what he terms "denotation"[51] – which implies that a collection of symbols can also represent items in the field of reference, for instance pictures are pictorial labels, as opposed to linguistic (verbal) labels. Valuable contributions came from Goodman's earlier studies, especially in the field of art and aesthetics, after the publication of *Languages of art: an approach to a general theory of symbols* (1968). He proclaims artworks, too, comprise of symbols and, in effect, are representative of a constructed world or worlds. In the same vein, I argue that *The Household* as artwork is a symbol containing various other linguistic and sensory (art) symbols. It functions in a transmedial context in the sense that it is a constructed storyworld that contains coded systems of signs that migrate across various platforms. An understanding of the role of semiotics and how the reading of symbols has certain types of systems in play will also clarify the role of language and art and how these and other coded systems contribute towards transmedial worldmaking.

The first step towards recognising sign systems in transmedial storyworlds such as *The Household,* as inferred above will involve the recognition of textual symbols in terms of language and art. Initial engagement with the text world of *The Household,* (on a semantic level) certain words are literally mapped into the storyworld. Consider, for example, the names of the different "rooms" of *The Household,* in the map in figure 3.3. The "vast chamber"[52] named "The Jugular", that collects bath water from "The Surface World" is portrayed in the form of a jug (see figure 3.7).



51 According to Goodman, "denotation" is the core of representation. He explains that pictures are symbols in symbol systems that are devoted to denotation and that have certain (primarily) syntactic characteristics, for instance "a picture that represents – like a [linguistic] passage [e.g. in a text] that describes – an object refers to and, more particularly, *denotes* it" (Goodman, 1968:5).

52 Text in the section of "The Crust" - http://www.thehousehold.xyz/the-household-2/the-crust/

Figure 3.7 Blackheart Gang. Detail of “The Jugular”. Map on the landing page.
http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The word *jugular,* according to the Collins Dictionary[53], refers to one of the three important veins in your neck that carry blood from your head back to your heart. Metaphorically speaking, “The Jugular” “room” is thus pivotal for the running of *The Household,* but instead of blood being carried to a heart, bathwater is channelled to a water wheel that propels energy for *The Household.* Filtered through perceptions of the textual world and the actual world, humour and absurdity is added when the signifier is portrayed as a jug. This is illustrative of how a play of words and imagery add to the fantasy element of *The Household.*

The labelling of symbols in this coded system relates to the signifying process of the theory of *semiotics*[54] and with the science of signs, *semiology*[55]. Barthes’ (1967) view on semiology that concurs with Goodman’s perspective on denotation, as well as with Saussure’s groundwork regarding the general science of signs (1916) is highlighted when he states that:

> Semiology aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects and the complex associations of all these which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not *languages,* at least systems of signification (Barthes, 1967:9).

Barthes’ paved the way for the recognition of various systems of signification that are characteristic of transmedial narratology, as transmediality involves the interaction of multiple signs, symbols and mediums spread across various platforms. Kress and Van Leewen in their pivotal publication *Multimodal discourse: the modes and media of contemporary communication* (2001) investigate different semiotic modes in search of common semiotic principles. Their intentions include the following:

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53 https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/jugular

54 Eco (1976:7) explains *semiotics* as a theory “concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign”, which implies, according to Chandler (2017:2), “all meaningful phenomena (including words and images)”. The American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce proposed three modes of signs – icon, index and symbol – although these can occur in combination with each other (Chandler, 2002:43). An icon usually resembles something and can be illustrative or diagrammatic, e.g. a “no-smoking” sign. An index sign has a direct correlation between sign and object such as traffic signs, whereas symbols have no logical connection with the object they symbolize and must be learned. Ferdinand de Saussure, on the other hand, simplified the structure of a sign as containing a *signifier* (the form the sign takes) and a *signified* (the concept it represents).

55 The philosophical tradition of, for instance, Pierce’s theory of signs is often described as *semiotics*, whilst *semiology* relates more to the linguistic tradition relating to Saussure (Nöth, 1995:14).

> … to sketch a multimodal theory of communication based, not on ideas which naturalise the characteristics of semiotic modes by equating sensory channels and semiotic modes, but on an analysis of the specificities and common traits of semiotic modes which takes account of their social, cultural and historical production, of when and how the modes of production are specialised or multi-skilled, hierarchical or team-based, of when and how technologies are specialised or multi-purpose, and so on (Kress *et al.,* 2001:4).

Language as a semiotic mode thus needs to be filtered through social, cultural and historical contexts of its origins. *The Household* language features through speech (indirectly through orally transmitted storytelling from one culture to another and directly through voice-overs in *The tale of how* animation) or through writing, as manifesting in the names of the different "rooms" of *The Household,* in the map in figure 3.3. In *The tale of how* publication, the story is perceived (in physical appearance), for example, as hand-written type, which provides a personalised experience, almost as if the artist temporally connects with the VUR in the writing process. The hand-written type, also evident in the map, thus lures the VUR into the storyworld through temporal immersion, to the moment of creation. On the other hand, the computer type applied to the website, in terms of mode of production, is much more mechanical. As one considers the website production process, it is usually mediated by a web-master (often not the artists themselves), which may give rise to a sense of disconnect for the VUR. What these examples show, is tangential point regarding the role of technology and culture in storyworld co-construction.

Language, furthermore, is fundamental to the semiotic modes of poetry and art that also feature in *The Household* sub-sections under "Work by Medium"*.* Consider, for example, the differences in signifying devices between poetry and artwork, such as a painting. Whereas poetry "unfolds over time", "painting extends across space, but can be taken in by the eye in an instant" (Green *et al., eds.* 2016:264). Temporalities in poetry are determined by signifying clues planted in the text. These often depend on intertext that can be recognised form other texts, as exemplified in the following poem from *The Household:*

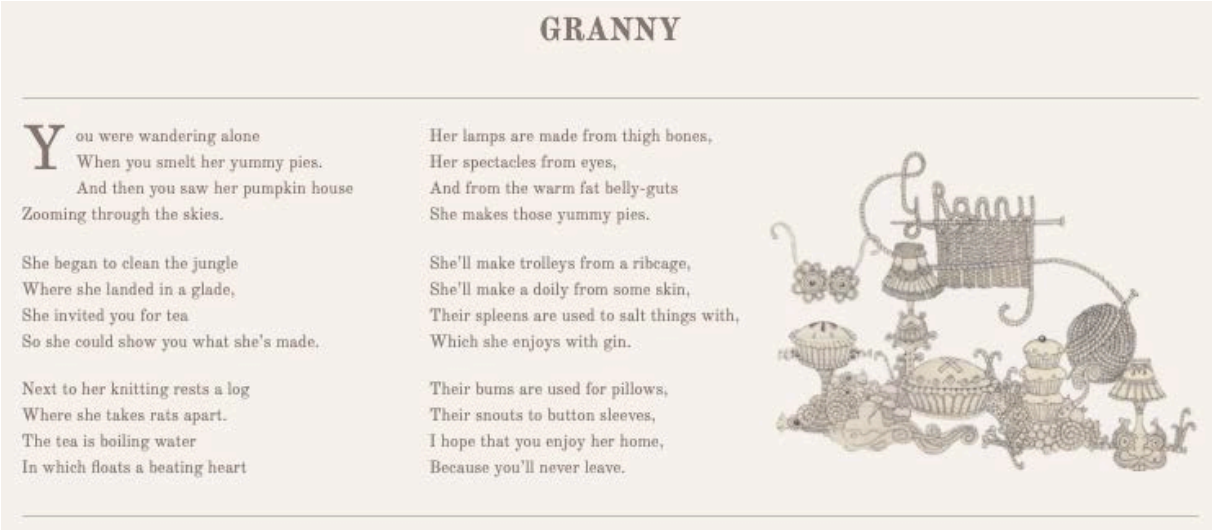

Figure 3.8 Blackheart Gang. "Granny". Poem under "Work by Medium". thehousehold.xyz/portfolio/detail/granny-3/

The phrases "wandering alone", "saw her pumpkin house", "invited you for tea", remind of a typical fairy tale or folktale, which in a Russian formalist tradition can be quite gruesome. This poem does, in this regard, not disappoint. Talk of "trolleys from a ribcage" and "a doily from some skin", tells about rather cruel intentions and affords "Granny" a *villain* character type, with "you" (the VUR) who will "never leave" as the victim. The result is a sense of temporal and emotional immersion as the VUR is pulled into the storyworld. Intertextual references, as recognised in the poem, "Granny", thus create gaps or "migratory cues" (Ruppel, 2005) that function as directional pointers for intertextual connections. In *The Household,* poems thus also represent a system of signs.

Semiotics also adds another dimension in the co-construction of *The Household* in the guise of a more concealed "language" - the language of art. Various mediums and art conventions play a role in how *The Household* is perceived.

Although traditional media (with monomodal signification) feature in sections of *The Household,* these signifying systems are mediated through coded technological and cultural semiotic channels, embedded with signs, symbols and narrative cues for the VUR to discover and, at times, reconfigure. The challenge thus facing semiotics in transmedial storytelling is to transcend the traditional notion that semiotics is only relevant to a single medium such as texts, painting and sculpture, amongst others.

Recently, various scholars of transmedia storytelling have addressed the role of semiotics in media studies (for example, Scolari, 2009), especially with a focus on media-conscious

narratology. In chapter two, inferences were made that a medium as sign system dictates and presents its own possibilities for storytelling – how it is told, presented and perceived. However, the medium also reflects in different narrative semiotic domains, such as semantics, syntax and pragmatics (Ryan, 2015:18). Ryan explains how the three semiotic domains feature in narrative theory:

> … semantics become [*sic*] the study of plot, or story; syntax becomes the study of discourse, or narrative techniques; and pragmatics becomes the study of the uses of narrative (2005:18).

Semantics implies that the manner in which stories are "told" functions differently on various platforms and in different modes. Episodes of a television production, for example, are based on brief episodic stories for instance, whereas gaming usually depends on a single plot with various quests, progressing to levels that represent their own sub-stories relating to the plot. *The tale of how* animation (figure 3.1) is a story with a single plot, portrayed through continuing moving images with fantasy characters and settings. It can be accessed online through the website or on a CD disk. *The tale of how* book (figure 3.5), on the other hand, features on *The Household*-website in the form of stills from the book[56], but the option is provided to purchase the book[57]. The study of discourse necessitates that the VUR has knowledge of different interpretative possibilities of different media. In other words, from a full-length film, to a shorter animation, such as *The tale of how,* are evaluated as series of continuously evolving images, as opposed to a comic strip or illustrated book with short narrative instances. Lastly, on a pragmatic level, VUR participation is influenced by various types of media and modes of storytelling. The VUR is usually guided to navigate and participate in a digital storyworld and experiences of this process will differ. Semiotic domains are thus influenced by the medium used in transmedial storytelling.

In agreement with Goodman, it is acknowledged that the processes involved in worldmaking entail multiple symbolic systems of reference that pertain to the "broadest forms of symbolic transformation at work in virtually any cultural context and cognitive activity …" – also in "… artistic creation" (Yacavone, 2015:87). In the sections above, the role of semiotic approaches in discovering meaning in transmedial storyworlds (especially regarding *The Household*) illustrated the pivotal role of mythological, linguistic and art symbols – which in this realm mainly seem to be attributed new, absurd and humorous

56 http://www.thehousehold.xyz/portfolio/detail/the-tale-of-how-book/

57 http://www.thehousehold.xyz/news/

meanings / signification that heighten the sense of fantasy. It was also demonstrated how in a transmedial storyworld, such as *The Household*, signs and symbols are not only language-based, but also constitute a transmedial dimension that is communicated by means of visual, audiovisual and motion signs and symbols. Different mediums and channels of storytelling showed various semiotic attributes toward storyworld co-construction. The following section serves as a summary of cognitive and text world signifying strategies in arriving at a theoretical framework that will guide the analysis of *The Household* in chapters four and five.

3.4 Theoretical framework and summary

Apart from concluding that a storyworld can expand beyond extant plots, ignore linear storylines and invite new relationships with other plots or storyworlds, it can be said that a storyworld resembles a multi-layered realm, represented by a variety of semiotic systems and sub-systems, forming a supersystem that provides for an ongoing, immersive readership experience.

Valuable insights were gleaned by considering Von Stackelberg *et al.'s* (2014) explication of elements of storyworld (in terms of future studies) that are central to the development of a storyworld. The framework that includes identification and description of characters, significant objects, settings, events and spatio-temporal attributes contributes towards an understanding of the story system of a storyworld (Von Stackelberg *et al.*, 2014:66), but unfortunately this framework does not include the contextual role of culture and technology in the formation of a storyworld. Klastrup *et al.* (2004), furthermore, suggest a framework for analysing transmedial worlds by firstly determining the "ur-actualization of the world" and then to proceed towards studying worlds "at a textual level, such as that of for instance story and plot". I, on the other hand, argue that this actualisation has the quality of a "spiritual reality" (see Cassirer ([1946] 1953:9) and discussion - 3.2.1 Worldmaking as semiotic sub-system) that manifests during the textual analysis of a storyworld by considering characters, myth, plot, language, art (medium included), space, time and culture in unity. This being said, it is acknowledged that addressing these element separately may complicate the analysis of the story system as overlaps exist among these elements. Myth, for instance, is central to character in terms of archetypal considerations and categorisations, but myth also underlies the cultural system of a storyworld – the reason being that myth is central to a culture's understanding of their origins. In order not to hamper the fluidity of the analysis of a storyworld's story system, the broad traditional

narrative categories of space and time, characters, as well as events (see Mieke Bal's seminal publication, *De theorie van vertellen en verhalen,* 1978) will be applied to the framework and expanded for consideration of transmedial narrative in terms of semiotic domains, such as semantics, syntax and pragmatics. These narrative domains are also central to Ryan's (2007:29) search for a definition of narrativity, based on the following organisation of the conditions of narrativity:

Spatial dimension

1) Narrative must be about a world populated by individuated existents.

Temporal dimension

2) This world must be situated in time and undergo significant transformations.
3) The transformations must be caused by non-habitual physical events.

Mental dimension

4) Some of the participants in the events must be intelligent agents who have a mental life and react emotionally to the states of the world.
5) Some of the events must be purposeful actions by these agents.

Formal and pragmatic dimension

6) This sequence of events must form a unified causal chain and lead to closure.
7) The incidence of at least some of the events must be asserted as fact for the storyworld.
8) This story must communicate something meaningful to the audience.

These proposed conditions of narrativity thus involve three semantic, and one formal and pragmatic dimension (Ryan, 2007:28). In terms of transmedial narrative identity, Ryan highlights the cognitive dimension relating to the above-mentioned domains (2005:4). It also, somewhat, correlates with Pratten's (2011) notion that a transmedia story includes, amongst other dimensions, narrative spaces that include location, characters, time etc. The dimension of narrative spaces, runs parallel with Ryan's notion that the spatial dimension facilitates the construction of the mental image of a world populated with individuated agents (characters) and objects (spatial dimension) (Ryan, 2005:4). The physical events that should be associated with mental states and events (goals, plans, emotions) of the characters, furthermore relate to possible worlds theory. This network of connections, resulting from the relationship between the "logical, mental and formal

dimension", is what "gives events coherence, motivation, closure, and intelligibility and turns them into a plot" (Ryan, 2005:4). These aspects are discussed in chapter four under the heading "Story system".

Cultural and technological dimensions are seldom highlighted as pertinent to storyworld construction, as is the case with Von Stackelberg *et al.* (2014). However, Pratten adds audience involvement (passive, active, interactive, collaborative) and number and relative timing of the platforms (sequential, parallel, simultaneous, non-linear) – referring to the technological dimension, to necessary dimensions in storyworld formation. Klastrup *et al.* (2004), furthermore, acknowledge that a concrete analysis of an actualised digital storyworld requires reflection on the "software with which the world is implemented and the medium through which the world is filtered". Ryan's (2009) perspective on the different dimensions of media includes a valuable consideration of technologies and cultural practices, although her focus is more on media-specific narratology and less on the textual content of a storyworld.

Gambarato's (2012:73) notion of a supersystem seems to fundamentally contribute best towards arriving at a theoretical framework for reading websites with storytelling attributes. In his view a supersystem combines systems such as story, experience, audience and platforms with subsystems relating to characters' roles in the evolving process of storyworld formation through the interaction of participatory culture as an "intertext" that is activated in the mind of the user. The presence of a technological dimension that has a bearing on the distribution of stories within a storyworld, and makes it accessible at different entry points, plays a pivotal role in storyworld formation in this instance. This technological dimension therefore has a bearing on the manner in which the VUR experiences the storyworld. The technological dimension is necessary to provide certain cultural significations and as a result these two domains are interwoven. Therefore, it is necessary to also peruse cultural systems relating to the external, contextual notion of a participatory culture, as well as considerations into the internal cultural sub-systems of the characters and their experience of a storyworld.

In summary, a transmedial storyworld like *The Household* thus comprises a coded supersystem with many semiotic channels, systems and subsystems, embedded with signs, symbols and narrative cues for the VUR to discover. In chapter two, the importance of the system of medium in transmedial storytelling was highlighted, but it was also demonstrated that layers of analysis such as the fabula, story (sjuzet) and narrative text

(all subsystems) can inform the reading process of transmedial worlds. A storyworld thus combines systems regarding story (with *intradiegetic* narrative elements), culture and technologies (with *extradiegetic* narrative elements). These systems are informed by subsystems relating to space, time, characters' roles, plot, language, art (medium included) and myth, in the evolving process of storyworld co-construction. This process takes place through the interaction of participatory culture and through the lens of different technologies.

The following methodological framework is proposed in arriving at a concise analysis of a digital website with storyworld attributes by artist collectives, and specifically *The Household* (see table 3.1 below).

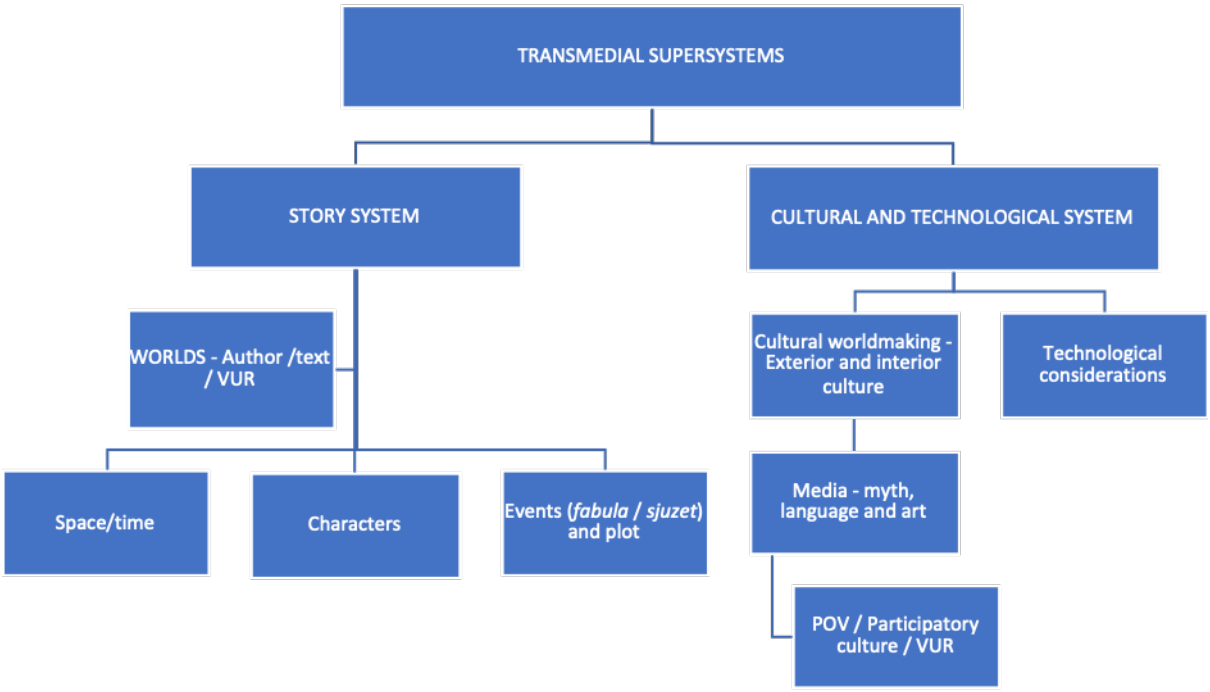

Table 3.1 Framework for analysing websites with transmedial storyworld features

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of the story system of *The Household* as storyworld

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the various means through which a storyworld functions as a creative supersystem for platforms such as websites by artist collectives -specifically the Blackheart Gang's *The Household* – were illustrated.

I postulated that this multi-layered realm, resembling a household with different rooms, occupants, objects, artworks and links to various other forms of artefacts, functions as a storyworld. Narrative strategies used for worldmaking and transmedial storytelling have been clarified (in chapter 2) and refined in chapter 3, to arrive at a clear understanding of their textual and cognitive functionality of the online storyworld of *The Household*. I further indicated that the story system includes worldmaking strategies relating to space, time, characters, plot, language, art (medium included), myth and culture. Ryan's (2007:28) findings on conditions of narrativity roughly correlate with traditional story structure categories – space/time, characters and events and Robert Pratten (2011:12) elaborates in this regard by addressing the following dimensions that should be considered when creating a transmedial story:

- the narrative spaces one wants to cover (location, characters, time);
- the number and relative timing of the platforms (sequential, parallel, simultaneous, nonlinear); and
- the extent and type of audience involvement (passive, active, interactive, collaborative)

Pratten's notion of narrative spaces, including location, characters and time, together with Ryan's (2007) conditions of narrativity – are found to allow for both textual and cognitive analysis of story system elements. As a result, a deliberation on these elements paves the way towards more profound interpretative possibilities of the represented structural and spiritual reality of the storyworld, as well as its possible relationship with the viewer / user / reader's actual world.

The VUR as audience member, furthermore, functions as part of a participatory culture that involves cultural use of media, from a cultural point of view – thus constituting a *cultural* system at work. This notion correlates with Pratten's above-mentioned consideration regarding audience involvement. Lastly, a digital transmedial storyworld includes a *technological* system through which the experience of the storyworld is mediated and through which semiotic and expressive possibilities are filtered and facilitated – also relating to Pratten's concern with how platforms are experienced. These three systems (story system, cultural system and technological system) form the main structure of the theoretical framework applied to this study, and specifically to the analysis and interpretation of *The Household* website as a transmedial digital storyworld.

The following section applies the transmedial narrative strategies identified in the previous chapter to an exploration of the story system in terms of transmedial storytelling. The following breakdown of the framework explains the story system analysis:

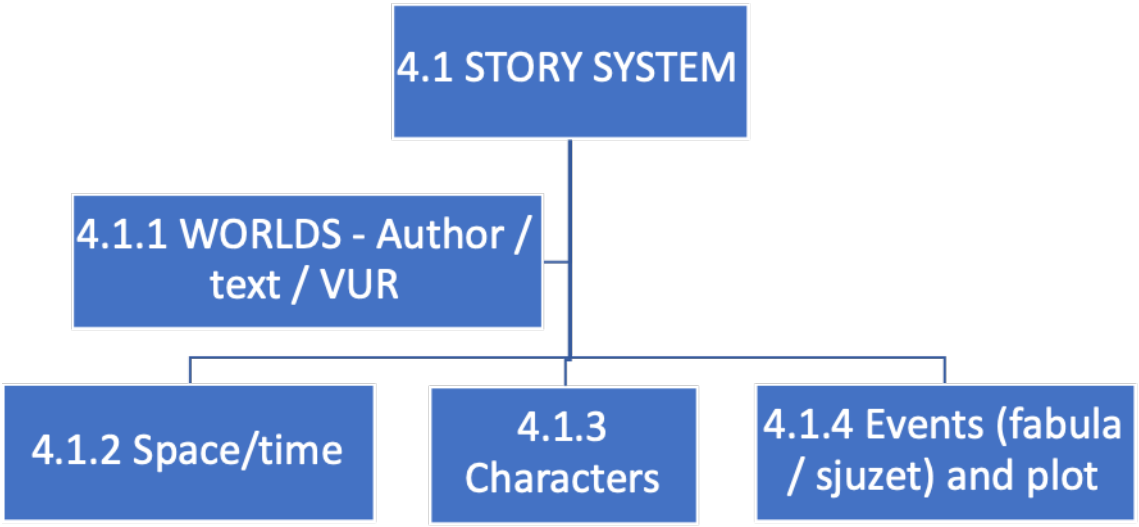

Table 4.1 Story system framework

This is followed by an investigation into cultural (chapter 5) and technological dimensions (chapter 6) and applied in the reading of *The Household*. The manner in which these strategies contribute towards an interpretation of the mental formation of the storyworld at hand and the nature of transmedial storyworlds in general is demonstrated through this reading. Possible worlds are also highlighted in order to demonstrate possibilities (or rather "alternative possible worlds"[58]) for the characters, as well as for the VUR of the text to imagine and assert[59]. The premise is to illustrate the relevance of this theoretical framework by analysing a digital platform functioning as a transmedial storyworld with specific reference to *The Household* by the (implied) author, the "Blackheart Gang". The following section, firstly, analyses the website as storyworld in terms of its story system.

4.1 The story system of *The Household*

The theoretical foundations of transmedial narratology highlight the existence and distribution of multiple semiotic channels due to the multi-layered nature of its application.

58 Ryan (1991:18) defines "alternative possible worlds" as the satellite worlds that surround the centre of a modal system (that modal system's actual world).

59 Eco (1984:246) distinguishes among three types of possible worlds within narrative texts: those states represented as actual by the *fabula,* the possible subworlds (manifesting through dreams, wishes, beliefs and the like of the characters within the *fabula,* and of the possible subworlds (asserted through dreams, wishes, beliefs and so forth) of the reader outside the *fabula.*

Theoretical inquiry into these systems of signification shows “evidence of a much older tradition of implicit semiotic studies concerned with the nature of signs and communication” (Nöth, 1995:11). The focus of this section is on the potential of semiotics to not only contribute towards text- and medium-based analysis of signs, but also to problematise the reading process and the context (thus calling for a refinement and augmentation of existing narratological concepts pertaining to storyworld and story systems, as well as the function of the reader in transmedial storytelling in relation to worldmaking (as contextualised in 2.2.2.2 *Meaning-making: author / narration / navigation)*. This, in other words, means that I shall consider both the cognitive approach (with elements of analytical theory relating to possible worlds), and a textual approach that manifest in transmedial supersystem of *The Household*. By problematising the issues noted above, I aim to demonstrate how adapted and refined strategies, centred on traditional narrative strategies, facilitate the interpretation and comprehension of evolving storyworld formation within a transmedial supersystem.

The worldmaking experience of the story system of a transmedial storyworld manifests through the interplay among various cognitive and textual components that contribute towards the internal storyworld structure. These include the existence of different narrative sub-worlds within the textual actual storyworld relating to space, time, different characters, stories and plots, and underpinned by language, art (medium included), myth and culture. However, there is also an external world, relating to the “real” world of the author and recipient. The following section analyses *The Household* by firstly relating the process of worldmaking to the *worlds* of the author collective, the implied author and the VUR (in terms of Chatman’s (1978) linear narrative communication model, figure 2.1). These inferences are then filtered through the internal story system of the narrative text and imagery, illuminating elements of *time, space, characters* and *events*. These four elements, as devised by Mieke Bal in her seminal publication, *De theorie van vertellen en verhalen* (1978), are regarded as the basic building blocks of any narrative world and are also representative of sub-worlds of the storyworld.

4.1.1 Worlds within the storyworld: a co-constructive process

As indicated in 2.2.2.2 *Meaning-making: author/narration/navigation,* the encoded signs need active participation and interpretation in order to be decoded. Hall refers to the

instances of “circulation and reception” of signs as “moments” (1973, 2006:165). Corner (1983:266-7) elaborates on these moments as 1) the moment of encoding; 2) the moment of the text; and 3) the moment of decoding by the VUR. The linearity of these instances relates, in certain terms, to Chatman’s (1978) narrative communication model (figure 2.1). I draw parallels between moments and worlds in semiotic terms and will loosely refer to these as 1) the world of the author; 2) the world of the text (Werth, 1999) (art included); and 3) the world of the VUR, with the understanding that a measure of overlap is unavoidable, especially in terms of the multi-layeredness of transmedial worldmaking. These classifications do not, however, intend to diminish the role of the VUR in the cognitive process of storyworld formation, as reiterated by Dinehart (2008):

> In a transmedial work the viewer/user/player (VUP) transforms the story via his or her own natural cognitive psychological abilities, and enables the artwork to surpass medium. It is in transmedial play that the ultimate story agency, and decentralized authorship can be realized. Thus the VUP becomes the true producer of the Artwork (Dinehart 2008)

I concur that the role of the VUR (including the critic, in this instance myself,) is salient in storyworld formation. Although narratives are affected by the constraints and affordances of a given medium, narratives do demonstrate a sense of agency that can be examined separately from a particular medium (Basaraba, 2018:58). The production process is initiated by the author (collective) (see 2.2.2.2 *Meaning-making: author/narration /navigation)* by planting signifying signposts (relating to semiotic media and material) in the storyworld*.* The moment the world is conceived in the minds of the artist collective*,* the processes of naming, labelling and “encoding” (Hall 1973, 2006) begin. The implication for transmedial narratological strategies with regards to encoding is that a series of codes is applied or embedded[60] by the author(s) that results in a sequence of communicative effects, which is not necessarily based on a linear model of transmission. The encoding moment(s) relate to the conceptualisation process which takes place in the minds of the author collective, whereas the moment of the text is explained by Corner as “the... symbolic construction, arrangement and perhaps performance... The form and content of what is published or broadcast” (1983:267). These correlate with the textual and artistic content that represents the textual world. In addition, the textual world comprises various

[60] Jenkins (2004) considers four types of narrative in interactive media, including *evocative, enacted, embedded* and *emergent*. Embedded narratives convey information by means of the spatial distribution of narrative-infused moments, typical of the narrative instances accessible through various menus and links in *The Household* website.

temporal, spatial, character and event-related content, that together constitute the story system of *The Household.* These elements represent a series of codes, often subjectively synthesised (through a process of encoding) in the minds of the author collective – and subjectively received and co-constructed in the mind of the VUR, that result in a sequence of communicative effects. The textual world serves as a vessel for these iconographic and semiotic codes, and the VUR systematically decodes the ensemble of codes and engage intuitively in discovering the storyworld of *The Household*. This decoding process does not rely on a set structure that is "discovered" in the same manner by all readers. It is a continuous reading experience, with various *fabulae* that represent possible worlds and a series of changes in states, at various entry points, that leads to the continuity of storyworld formation in the mind of the VUR (compare Eco's chapter on "Lector in fabula" [1984] where he proclaims that *fabulae* are constructed rather than "discovered"). This co-constructing process will be demonstrated in the analysis of *The Household* in the sections to follow.

Thus, the role of the transmedial storyteller, in this instance *The Household'*s (implied) author collective, the "Blackheart Gang", is to act as a conduit in which narrative cues are planted for the viewer to discover at various entry points of the website (see discussion below). The functions of the *fabulae* and *sjuzet* have some relevance in terms of how, where and when the author collective organises textual elements across various semiotic and media channels, and how these are perceived by the VUR. However, these "moments", accessed through temporal decisions made by the VUR, are not dependent on sequentiality - in the case of a navigable domain such as a website, the sequence in which the fabulae are co-constructed will of course vary with every reading of the text. The sum of these decoding instances in *The Household*, comprising segments of texts (lexias), links and imagery, is responsible for the actualisation of the storyworld. This configuration of signs thus gives rise to reading as a constructive act, "done in conjunction with mediating texts and the cultural-historical context in which the reading takes place" (Smagorinsky, 2001:137). As a result, a text never stands alone, but the VUR attributes meaning to it in the context it is presented and interpreted. This context, according to Smagorinsky (2001:135) may be viewed as "a relationship among people or artefacts and their environments, which typically include multiple sets of overlapping goals, values, discourses, tools, and other residues of social life". This particular issue concerning context is further unpacked in chapter 5 which addresses the cultural system in which the storyworld functions.

Into the text of The Household: In order to understand the world of *The Household* and the units it consists of, it is necessary to identify characters, rooms and happenings and how these manifest in semiotic terms in the text world. Engaging with the textual world in *The Household*, one tends to search for clues that function as mediating texts, or rather, decoding instances in a process that resembles a treasure hunt. A typical journey through the storyworld is described below in order to demonstrate my analysis of the story system of *The Household.*

When entering the website, at first glance, the main narrative features that contribute towards worldmaking in *The Household* website depend on a combination of written text and visual imagery as exemplified by the landing page of *The Household* (fig. 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Blackheart Gang. Landing page (full scroll) of *The Household* website.
http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

Different textual cues, artefacts and fictional spaces within *The Household* communicate significant narrative information that contribute towards storyworld formation – obviously interpreted, in the present analysis, from my encultured point of view. What seems evident from the onset of engagement is that *The Household* does not represent an ordinary world – instead, many elements seem fantastical yet hinge on real-world correlatives. As related in the textual content of the website, this world is "real", with "real characters", experiencing the same hardships, pain and corruption as inhabitants of the world we live in. In this sense, the storyworld is already relatable in terms of shared social, emotional and ideological characteristics of being human. However, a combination of strange structures, foliage and creatures correlates more with the explanation in the text regarding *The Household* being "a magical world of mayhem and madness, of intrigues and impossibilities" (see figure 4.1). How, for instance, can it be possible that a sun and moon can be **built** by "Eddy the engineer" (a mere field mouse) and more so, **inside** a tomb of rooms (see figure 4.1)? Furthermore, when trying to imagine the size and location of this world, how can it only be "six feet away", but "an infinity removed"? These notions contribute toward *The Household* being perceived as a fantasy world where the fantastical is the norm.

The different sections of this storyworld are introduced in the fixed banner and navigation menu on the landing page of the website (figure 4.2). The divisions contextualise what the VUR can expect from the website and from where navigation may proceed.

Figure 4.2 Blackheart Gang. Fixed header and navigation menu of *The Household* website. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The links included in the navigation menu are "The Household" (which also forms part of the landing page), "The Gang", "Work by medium", "Awards", "Exhibitions", "News" and "Contact". The VUR can thus decide in what order (or frequency) to engage with different sections of *The Household.* "The Gang" label, short for the "Blackheart Gang", creates an

expectation to discover who the gang members are – as a gang generally refers to more than one person. The subheading of this section summarises in three words that they perceive themselves to be "prophets", "explorers" and "charlatans[61]" (see figure 4.3). It furthermore reads like an invitation to the VUR to participate in and enjoy "the fruits of their labours". Thus, the gang requests the VUR to engage in a reading contract with the storyworld.

THE BLACKHEART GANG

PROPHETS, EXPLORERS, CHARLATANS

THE BLACKHEART GANG WOULD LIKE TO INVITE YOU TO TASTE THE FRUITS OF THEIR LABOURS. AFTER YEARS OF TIRELESSLY EXPLOITING THE NATIVES OF MANY DIFFERENT CONTINENTS, THE BLACKHEART GANG ARE READY TO WIPE THE SWEAT FROM THEIR BROW, AND TAKE A STEP BACK TO APPRECIATE THE FRUITS OF THEIR LABOURS. IN STUDYING THEIR WORK, IT BECOMES APPARENT WHY LEMONS ARE THE BITTEREST OF FRUIT, WHY BEARS ARE TRANSFORMED INTO GOLD, AND WHERE BATHWATER FLOWS TO.

In 1863, the poet Edward Lear wrote of The Blackheart Gang:

"Six feet south,
But worlds apart.
Beware the mouth
Of The Blackheart"

This verse has suffered much critique over the years, partly because it made no sense, or is at least considered to be geographically ambiguous, but mostly because Edward Lear had been smoking opium with Markus Wormstorm when he came up with it.

Lear died soon afterwards, but his words remain a warning from beyond the grave.

Ree Treweek enjoys a good funeral and has delivered many eulogies, mostly at the funerals of her numerous dead husbands. In 1924, she famously ended one such eulogy with the words:

" Begone, begone – you cruel, listless, droll bigot."

It's this remarkable gift of the gab that has over the years allowed The Blackheart Gang to convince the public they had the ability to travel to another realm, a place they call The Household. It is here, the legend goes, that they collect the histories which form the body of their work.

They retell these stories through sculpture, music and paintings ... and, in some cases, even pastries.

In her address to the nation, Margret Thatcher once referred to Markus Wormstorm as "... quite a catch." The strong, stocky composer's heavy brow is framed by an egg-shaped face.

Ree Treweek is worshipped as a deity by an island-dwelling cargo cult in the Indian Ocean. The islanders say the wild artisan's hair is the colour of jungle fire, and that her blood is the colour of ink.

Figure 4.3 Blackheart Gang. "The Gang" page in *The Household*-website.
http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The characteristics of a gang member are often associated with connections to the "underworld", presenting the possibility that this group functions with criminal or sinister intent. This notion, however, creates tension when considered against the more divine description of them being "prophets". The textual content of this section, furthermore, reveals a few interesting "facts" about the world of the members of the "Blackheart Gang". Ree Treweek, for instance, is said to be "worshipped as a deity by an island-dwelling

61 According to the Collins dictionary (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/), a charlatan refers to a person who pretends to have skills or knowledge she or he does not really possess; in other words, a fraud, cheat, sham or fake.

cargo cult in the Indian Ocean" because of her red hair (already a whimsical notion). It is also said that she "enjoys a good funeral and has delivered many eulogies". Markus Wormstorm, on the other hand, was once referred to (by Margaret Thatcher[62], no less!) as "quite a catch". Is it possible that they could have met? Of course not, and so historical fantasy merges with present memory of contexts. The personae described in the text seem mysteriously intriguing and eccentric, and for that reason the VUR might be enticed to delve deeper into the identities of Ree and Markus, and even perform an internet search that might shed more light on who these members are in "real life".

What is evident is that the online, fictionalised personae of who the "gang" members are, complicate the notion of authorship, especially when considering the statement that they are believed, by the public, to be able to travel to the realm of *The Household.* They are able to cross ontological boundaries between the textual actual world and the actual world, as well as the storyworld, "to collect the histories which form the body of their work" (see text in "The Gang" page; figure 4.3) – also insinuating that they can travel back in time. They also cross borders in search of new "imaginary civilisations"[63], that probably represent the process of gathering artistic inspiration on travels to other countries (see interview, SA Design Marketplace). The resulting artwork extends their creative body of work, adding characters and events to *The Household.* Ree describes in an interview (SA Design Marketplace) that, as a small child, she always wanted to be an explorer, travelling to exotic places and, as such, each project may also be perceived as a voyage of creative discovery. In a certain sense, this suggests that, as artists/creators of *The Household*, the members also "discover" the storyworld in their own manner, together with the VUR. This explorer dimension confirms the author collective's commitment to the continuity of this storyworld, because many histories are still in the making as the collective continues with their creative work and storytelling. It furthermore reinforces the open-ended, transmedial nature of this realm.

By referring to themselves as "prophets", on the other hand, the members of the author collective suggest that they can foresee the future, if of nothing else, at least of this

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62 The reference to Margaret Thatcher (13 October 1925 – 8 April 2013) is quite ironic in the sense that she was a British stateswoman who was prime minister of the United Kingdom (1979 – 1990) and leader of the Conservative Party (1975 – 1990) (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Margaret-Thatcher). It is highly unlikely that she and Markus Wormstorm (a South Africa citizen) ever met.

63 Interview by SA Design Marketplace with Ree Treweek: (http://sadesignmarketplace.com/blogs/news/tagged/blackheart-gang)

storyworld. This adds a twist to their role as explorers, because investigations into unfamiliar territories are exploratory acts, as opposed to prophesies that are divinely inspired. It does, however, imply that the gang is driven by a creative vision towards the extension of *The Household*, but that, towards that end, new terrain – artwork, creative themes and new characters - can be discovered. The "gang", furthermore, refers to themselves as charlatans, implying that, in *The Household*, all is probably not as it seems, again alluding to deception and misrepresentation by the gang members.

Moving forward on the discussion in section 2.2.2.2 *Meaning-making: author/narration/navigation,* and seeing that authorship of *The Household* is identified as a contentious issue, certain significant authorial concepts need illumination. What complicates the idea of authorship is the implied presence of the "Blackheart Gang" members as fictionalised personae. Although they are not visually portrayed as represented characters, it is stated in the text that they can transcend the boundaries between the "real world" and *The Household*. The authorial function in *The Household* is not simply connected to the actual writers, regardless of their names and description in the text. Rather, the author function is positioned in the space between the actual writers – Ree and Markus - and the fictional narrator – the latter who is presumably the character, Eddy the Engineer[64]. This subjective positioning functions as the space of convergence, revealing a variety of egos and personae who are neither purely related to the "actual writer", the "fictional narrator", the "implied author" (Booth, 1961), nor to the VUR. The reception process of *The Household* suggests that authorship is decentralised as illustrated in Table 4.2, and that the boundaries between the authorial functions are blurred because of the overlapping author function that oscillates between the creatives "themselves" and the users as co-creators of narrative content.

[64] As stated by Ree Treweek in an interview, the little white field mouse, Eddy the Engineer, created *The Household* (http://sadesignmarketplace.com/blogs/news/tagged/blackheart-gang). In this sense it is understood that, as protagonist and fictional narrator, he constructed *The Household*, but that the author collective (actual writers) dreamed him up as a main protagonist and engineer.

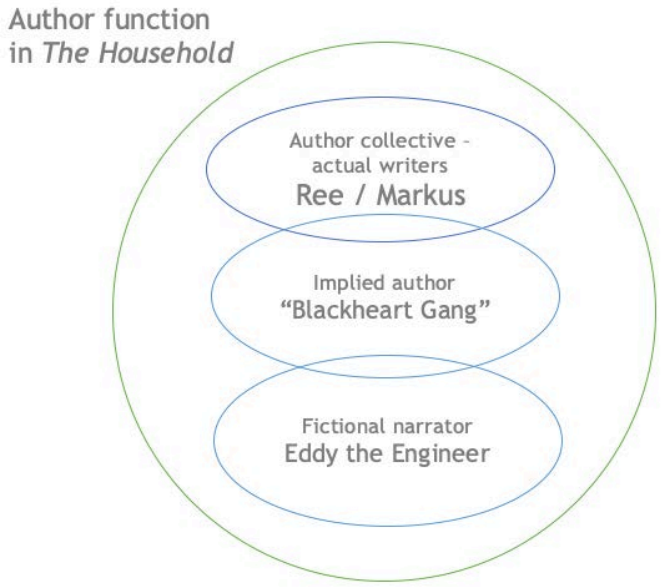


Table 4.2 Author functions in *The Household*

The collective's presence in *The Household* is thus suggested in an abstract manner, as agents of the storyworld and not necessarily as characters portraying a specific role. The role of the author collective extends beyond the literary and artistic products they deliver. I argue, however, that the actual creators of websites with transmedial, creative and storytelling attributes, are part of the narrative back story of a digital storyworld that adds contextual and cultural depth (framing of signs) to the analysis of *The Household.* The views of the "Blackheart Gang" may be assumed to have been influenced and shaped by their cultural surroundings (the South African milieu), resulting in a website (or in this case a storyworld) that is ideologically charged. It is also, as previously mentioned, evident that *The Household* embodies content relating to South Africa's contentious socio-political, cultural and historical landscape.

In accordance with Cerezo Moreno (and relating to the "new historicist definition of culture and man [sic]"), the authors become "intermediaries between ideology and the literary text" (2017:19) or any other kind of texts, for that matter. In other words, they act as conduits through which perceptions of the textual actual world and the reference world are filtered. In the process of narrative transmission, Ree Treweek and Markus Wormstorm - the "real writers" - surrender their authorial authority to the VUR who constructs the narrative and the storyworld. The implied author, as mentioned previously, is the fictive "Blackheart Gang" – the collective author-image evoked by the online storyworld of *The Household*

(see discussion in chapter 2 – *2.2.2.2 Meaning-making: author/narration/navigation*). This implied author collective is thus responsible for the overall creative and narrative design of the storyworld in terms of style, ideology and aesthetic properties. The "voice" of the storyworld, in the form of the narrator (presumed to be "Eddy the Engineer"), is not directly related to the authors, but has agency, provided by the authors, to "tell" the stories and guide the VUR through the various sections and rooms of the *Household.* As a result, the underlying spiritual reality and cultural knowledge of a world are revealed. The world of the author collective is thus an important piece of the puzzle towards storyworld making.

Can everything the "gang" tell us be believed? This uncertainty adds to the sense of mystery, absurdity and fantasy in this storyworld and the possible worlds it contains. This might be a deliberate strategy employed by the author collective, one that Long (2007:53-59) explains to involve a "negative capability" - the ability to build strategic gaps into a narrative to provoke a sense of mystery and uncertainty in the VUR. This presumably creates curiosity that entices the VUR to engage with the content of the storyworld. As co-constructor of the storyworld, the VUR should show a willingness to interact and engage in a "reading contract". Cognitively, by entering into this contract, a decoding process commences in response to cues planted by the author collective. These cues, that Wolf (2017:277) refers to as "narremes", represent fractions of "intracompositional features" or "narrative stimuli". In the context of *The Household,* narremes mostly constitute semiotic codes relating to content of visual (illustrations, sculptures, journaling and so forth), textual (poems, written texts, the book and other creative outputs), audio signs (field recordings) and audio-visual signs (animations and short films). These signs, however, do not all carry the same measure of narrativity. As explained by Wolf (2017:260), "narrativity, the defining quality of narrative(s), is *gradable*", meaning that narremes constitute certain "prototypical features" to a more or lesser degree. This notion of narrativity being scalar hinges on the discussion in chapter 3 regarding the conditions of narrativity presented by Ryan (2007:29) that involve semantic, formal and pragmatic dimensions, and Pratten's (2011) contention that transmedial narrativity should include narrative spaces relating to locations, characters and time, amongst others. These aspects are recognisable signifying signposts in *The Household* landscape, and also manifest in the semiotic channels, as highlighted below.

The subsequent link in the navigation menu, "Work by medium" (see figure 4.4), transports the VUR to a wide range of narremes, including artwork, films ("Ringo", "The dinner party"

and “The tale of how”), publications (“The tale of how”-book) and field recordings (including “Mountain mating call”, “Predatorial calls”, “Singing mountains” and “The never-ending dinner party”). “Poems” and “Diary pages” are also included to be viewed in this section (figure 4.4).

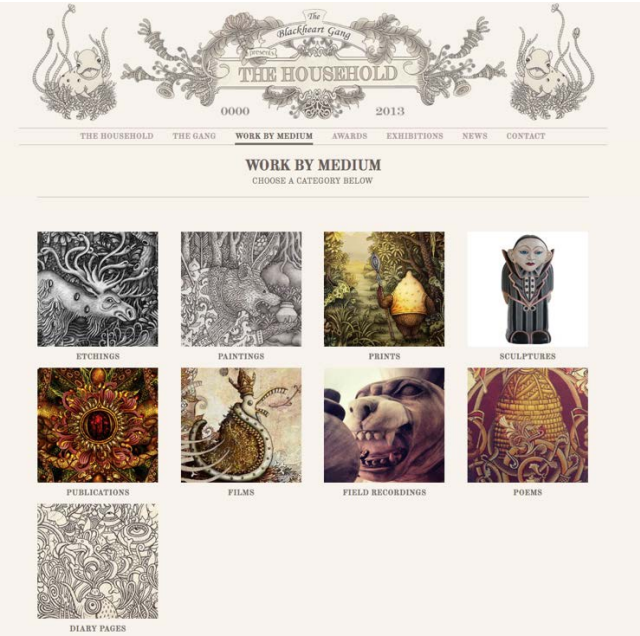


Figure 4.4 Blackheart Gang. “Work by medium” page in *The Household*-website.
http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The diversity of media used by “The Blackheart Gang”, as well as the extent of their creativity is revealed by an exploration and navigation of the website, as each image, sculpture, map, textual description and moving image (in the case of the animations and films) constitutes a “piece of the puzzle” toward storyworld formation. The narrative content of these narremes fills the gaps towards arriving at a possible comprehension of the story system of *The Household*.

Narremes thus function as triggers - Walton (1990) explains this process of engaging with narremes as a “game of make-belief”, in which written texts, images on screen, physical objects, and other sorts of triggers can all be assimilated under the category of “props” which, in themselves, become subworlds that enable and sustain the make-belief storyworld.

However, there is another side to this storyworld - the "real", or rather reference world in which the author collective, the critic and the VUR functions are also part of the storyworld, and represented by the sections on "Awards", "Exhibitions", "News" and "Contact" in the navigation menu of the website. These sections highlight the transmedial connectivity between the public domain of "The Household" and this storyworld. Besides the textual information in the website, this dimension informs the storyworld, especially from a transmedial perspective, in terms of cultural and technological connectivity that widens the scope of narrative information spread across platforms. The connection is also established between related platforms, such as physical exhibition spaces and submenus that contain physical artworks and photographs of the book, *The tale of how.* These signs, relating to the storyworld, can also function independently in public domains such as exhibition spaces. In broad terms, these platforms can be conceptualised as paratexts, a notion that Genette (1997) applied to literary texts, and which encompasses the front matter of a book, the blurb on the back, cultural and other information pertaining to the author, even interviews with the author. In a transmedial sense, paratexts can arguably include all elements outside the particular "texts" which in this instance is the storyworld of *The Household* – artefacts, interviews and other elements that are related to, but not strictly speaking part of the textual world of the website as storyworld.

Genette (1997) also refers to paratexts as *thresholds*[65] of interpretation; these may be *undefined zones*[66]*,* relating to accompanying productions serving as context and background to the actual text. In other words, the paratexts of *The Household* relate to information "outside" the website, including articles about, or interviews with the members of the "Blackheart Gang" and their work, statements that inform exhibitions of their artwork, conference presentations and accolades regarding various awards won for the animation, *The tale of how*. Real-world (public) contact and related events widen the network of the storyworld to include the possibility of visiting an exhibition of artwork by the "Blackheart Gang", holding a piece of artwork created by the "gang" in one's hands, and making contact with the artists as a reality. This "contact" menu which enables one to send a message to the "Blackheart Gang" serves as a paratext, a means to interact with the real writers, as well as with the implied authors (the "Blackheart Gang") and engage with the

65 Genette draws (1990) correlations between the term *threshold* and paratext, based on Philippe Lejeune's explanation of *threshold* in *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Seuil, 1975:45 in Genette ([1987] 1997:2)), that includes the "name of the author, title, subtitle, name of series, name of publisher, even the ambiguous game of prefaces".

66 An *undefined zone* (Seuil, 1979:328 – A. Compagnon, *Le Seconde Main* - in Genette ([1987] 1997:2)) is defined as "an intermediary zone between the off-text and the text".

storyworld directly. It also reiterates the notion that a storyworld may include various media channels and incorporate representational elements of both the material "real" world and of the fantasy world. This notion demonstrates that the actual world, in this sense, fictively becomes part of the storyworld and this spatial, ontological blurring of boundaries is expanded upon in the sections below.

The section above illustrated how the world of the author collective, the textual (actual) world and the world of the VUR contain "pieces of the puzzle" that need to be assembled or reconstructed, as well as co-constructed in the mind of the VUR and, in this instance, the critic-interpreter (myself). The storyworld includes different worlds, dimensions and platforms that function in space and time (or as spaces in time). The paratexts, together with narremes in the text world of the website, inform the story system and provide the "back story" to *The Household,* as demonstrated in the sections below. This co-construction of a storyworld results in an ontological overlapping of the different worlds that, furthermore, necessitates an interrogation of the *when* and *where* of the signs in these worlds in order to frame the temporal and spatial dimensions of this storyworld. The following section, then, analyses spatio-temporal issues in *The Household* as important building blocks towards storyworld formation.

4.1.2 Time and space in *The Household*

The Household functions as a transmedial online storyworld which attributes spatio-temporal characteristics to it; firstly, because the storyworld functions (externally) in a public space accessed, for instance, physically (in exhibition spaces) or via the Internet (through a digital device); and secondly, because it (internally) involves the spatial and temporal distribution of narrative instances over various platforms that have to be cognitively assembled in the mind of the VUR. The internal and external represented worlds (see discussion in section 3.1 Defining storyworlds) representing the actual and the textual actual worlds both become "sites of creative activity" (Ryan *et al.,* 2015:3). In a spatial sense, "fictional recentring" can go both ways – just as the characters, plots and events become "real" in the mind of the VUR, so too, it can be assumed that the "real" world can be projected onto the textual actual world in terms of how characters relate to or desire the real world (in terms of possible worlds theory). This process, mediated through the website created by the "Blackheart Gang", that serves as a space of interaction where

boundaries can be crossed between the "real" world, the textual actual world and the storyworld, follows in the discussions below.

The actualisation process of a transmedial world, as set out in Table 3.1, involves a consideration of time, space, characters and events as central elements of narrativised content. These elements contain narremes, functioning as narrative possibilities that need to be recognised in order to gauge how the story system of a storyworld functions. As mentioned in chapter 2 (*2.2.2.3 Space, time and narrative*) and elaborated on in chapter 3 (3.2 Experiencing *The Household*), the story space, as perceived in the context of the larger storyworld, is an imagined space. The reception process requires, amongst others, engagement by the VUR, in recognising narrativised space and time, contextual space and time, and the space occupied by textual elements. Specifically relating to the time-space connotations, Bakhtin (2002; 2008) developed this notion into the theory of the "chronotope", a term he defines as follows:

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope (Bakhtin, 2002:15).

Bakhtin, with reference to the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (2002:84) highlights the inseparability of time and space in narrative world construction and cognition. It is thus noted that spatio-temporal signs often overlap and in the analysis of the *The Household,* time and space are dealt with through taking cognizance of this interrelatedness.

Internally, temporal issues become active the moment the VUR engages with the text world narremes of *The Household* website. The cognitive process of storyworld formation begins here. Bridgeman (2007:57) explains that such "beginnings are where we first encounter the narrative world and establish its key characteristics". The initial introduction to the landing page of *The Household* (see figure 4.1) is important, as it orientates the VUR in navigating the path towards unlocking narrative cues. It furthermore sets the stage for making sense of the temporal relationships between the narrative instances and the unfolding events (linked to the fabulae and sjuzet). As previously established, these instances or events, as mapped out in the different sections of *The Household,* do not

necessarily follow any prescribed chronological order. Because various entry and exit points are possible in the story space, the ordering of temporal (and spatial) engagement with these points is predicated on decisions made by the VUR. It is thus through the co-construction of the fabulae and sjuzet, in the various sections and "rooms", spread across the story system of *The Household*, that storyworld formation can be realised. In this sense, Goodman's (1978) worldmaking processes of *weighting* and *ordering* only subjectively/informally contributes toward engagement with these entry and exit points. As evident on the landing page's navigation menu of *The Household* website (fig. 4.2) and a secondary menu with links to the different rooms of *The Household* (fig. 4.5), the possibility exists that, according to western norms, one will instinctively engage with the menus systematically from left to right and from top to bottom. However, this is not cast in stone.

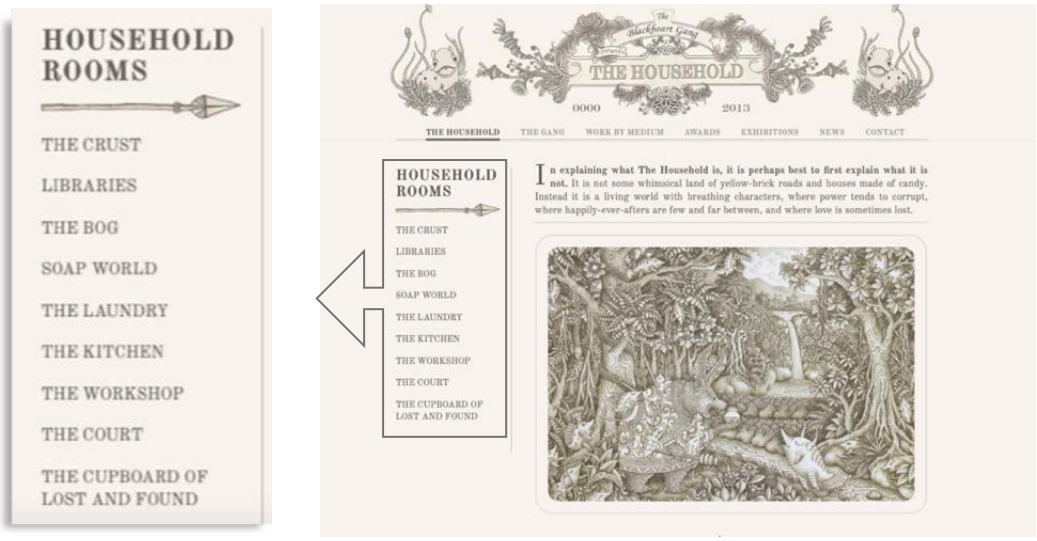


Figure 4.5 Blackheart Gang. Detail of the secondary menu with links to the different rooms of *The Household*. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The temporal elements of *order,* together with *duration* and *frequency* are also highlighted by Genette (1980; 1988; 2002) and Bridgeman (2007) as part of the study of the temporal dimensions of narrative construction. The notion of *duration* of access to stories or information in digital websites, basically gauge the time spent on exploring different rooms, artefacts or texts, resulting in a depth of experience or participation. *Duration* considers the time it takes for an event to occur and is foiled by the time it takes for said event to be narrated (Genette, 1980, 1988, 2002; Bridgeman, 2007). The pace of the temporal unfolding of narrative does not seem to influence the narrative experience of a transmedial

storyworld, because storyworld formation based on transmediality constitutes a cognitive process, regardless of how long it takes. As discussed in section *2.2.2.2 Meaning-making: author/narration / navigation,* the author collective (Treweek & Smit), as well as the "implied" author collective (the "Blackheart Gang"), does not control the reading process or the pace thereof. The VUR, rather instinctively, determines the *duration,* as well as the *frequency* of engagement in the narration process, by making navigational choices in decoding signifying signposts planted by the author collective. *The Household* presents a rich network of textual storytelling that is presented in various forms, ranging from descriptions of "rooms" and character interactions, to poetry. These storytelling strategies are combined with intriguing imagery that asks for more than just a quick glance. For reasons such as these it can be argued that the VUR will be enticed to revisit some rooms or links, even if only to explore fine detail in the illustrations and other artwork that might have been missed before. *Frequency* might thus also be linked with the habitual visiting of certain links, or the lack thereof.

The reading of stories, for instance those linked to the various rooms in *The Household*, subjectively implies order, duration and frequency of access, but it is not prescribed. The VUR is granted the freedom of discovery to determine his/her own temporal path towards narrative discovery and co-construction. These temporal instances function as pieces of the puzzle that contribute towards storyworld formation in the mind of the VUR. There are, however, pitfalls in the mental arrangement, or rather re-arrangement of narremes in the mind of the VUR, as highlighted by Ryan (2005b):

> Since narrativity is based on the fundamentally linear chains of temporal sequence and causal relations, the kaleidoscopic chunking of the text into recombinant fragments constitutes a major obstacle to the construction of narrative meaning. This chunking and shuffling prevent the author from controlling what information the reader possesses when he encounters a given fragment.

Thus, what is expected of the VUP is a "major cognitive investment" (Ryan, 2005b). The willing participant must constantly make connections between various links and narremes and employ memory attentively. Transmedial narratives thus have tangential points with traditional or text-based narratives, not with regard to following a linear path towards an ending, but rather in terms of depending on a combination of "memory", "anticipation" (Bridgeman, 2007:57), as well as "imagination and previous knowledge" (Werth, 1999:7,17). Gaps in time have to be filled, reception-like, by the VUR in terms of memories of what have passed and anticipation of possible resolves, regardless of the open-ended

nature of transmedial storytelling. Memory functions on different levels, as gaps are usually filled with real-world and fictional world knowledge. Memory not only recalls details of stories already accessed on the digital platform. The time it takes for events to unfold in *The Household,* through the gradual co-construction of possible *fabulae* in the mind of the VUR*,* contributes to the sense of temporal immersion and the authenticity of the storyworld. The intended user or rather "implied reader" of *The Household*, armed with memories and knowledge regarding fantasy world genres and real world contexts, for instance South Africa's political, social and historical background, fills the temporal gaps in the storyworld, each bringing with him or herself an individualised memory and understanding of this contextual background.

A good starting point for establishing internal temporality, or the *topos* of the storyworld, is to analyse the setting and environment of the storyworld, as well as the specific historical period (whether in the past or future) in which the storyworld functions. This can be achieved by first of all considering the periodical, aesthetic style elements, and secondly, by analysing the textual semiotic cues in the different sections of the website.

Connections can be made with Nicole Basaraba's views that spatiality (and temporality for that matter) in interactive digital narratives (IDN)[67], that can be analysed through the interface design of websites, relies on three aspects: (1) aesthetics, (2) the manner in which multimodal content is incorporated, and (3) the functionality of the navigation (2018:58) (see examples to follow). In terms of aesthetics she specifically refers to layout, colour usage, and the types of multimodal content used (medium) (Basaraba, 2018:58). The interface design in *The Household* displays the "look and feel" of the aesthetic elements used (see figure 4.1) – the culmination of decorative line drawings, the serif type choice (possibly relating to the Bodoni Antiqua typeface family of the 18th century) (see figure 4.6), as well as a typical vintage brown colouring (see figure 4.7); these create an impression of historicity and antiquity.

[67] Nicole Basaraba refers to *interactive digital narrative* (IDN) as an umbrella term that includes the various formats of digital narrative, such as transmedia stories, hypertext fiction, and video games (2018:48).

Figure 4.6 Blackheart Gang. Detail of the type use in *The Household* website http://www.thehousehold.xyz/ relating to Bodoni Antiqua (1790) and http://www.identifont.com

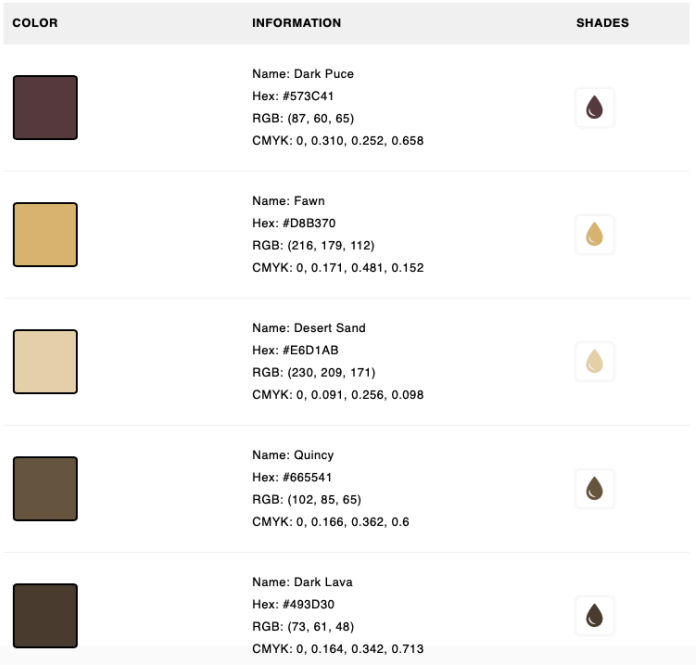


Figure 4.7 Lydia (user and creator of colour combination). Vintage brown look colour scheme. https://www.schemecolor.com/vintage-brown-look.php

The banner in the fixed header (see figure 4.8, bottom) on the landing page is enfolded by decorative Acanthus leaf drawings that allude to decorations found on the furniture and architecture of ancient Greece, from about 1600 BC. During the Roman period (from about

146 BC), applications of the Acanthus plant transformed from the stylistic hard, sharp edges applied by the Greeks, towards a much softer, flowy style[68]. Through years of decorative appropriation of the Acanthus leaf, its appeal is still evident in present-day decor and contributes to the beautiful aesthetics and ancient feel of *The Household* website.

Figure 4.8 Compilation of imagery relating to historic, decorative Acanthus leaf architecture and decor, compared with detail of the "Blackheart Gang's" banner on the landing page of *The Household* website - http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The footer of the landing page of *The Household* furthermore contributes towards the archaic feel of the website. It reveals fictional fairy tale elements such as dragons, an old triumphal arch structure (such as in the illustration dating back to 1604 in figure 4.9), as well as strange fantasy birds, with exceptionally long legs and beaks (featuring in *The tale of how* animation and referred to, by the artist collective, as representing the extinct Dodo species).

68 See https://blog.lostartpress.com/2017/11/16/the-history-of-the-acanthus-leaf-in-the-decorative-arts/

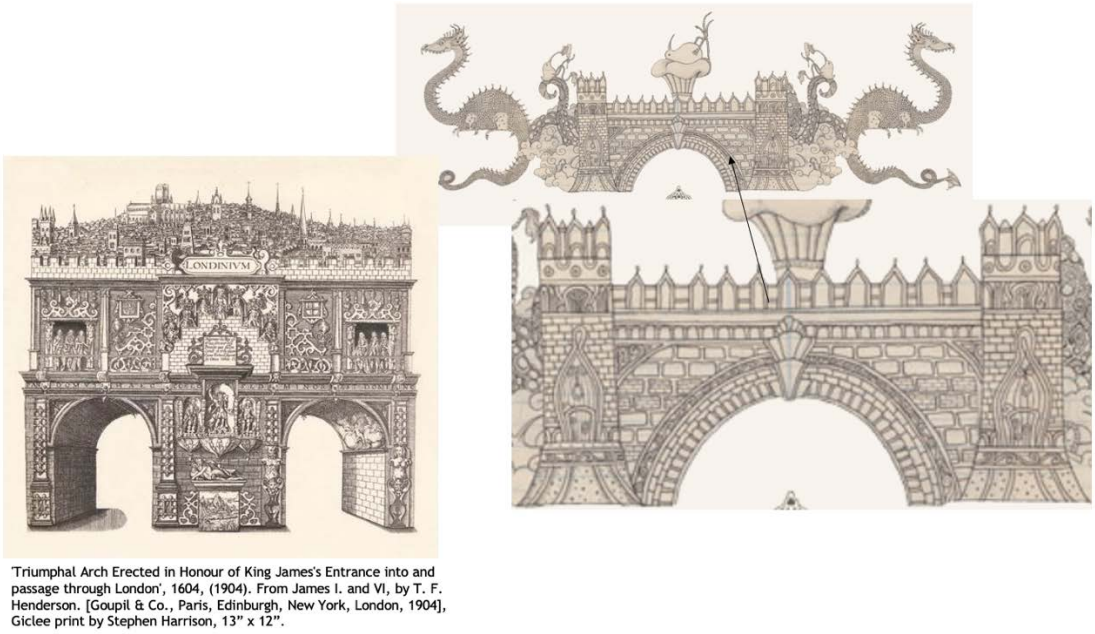


Figure 4.9 Compilation of arches. A) Stephen Harrison. 1904. Triumphal arch erected in honour of King James's entrance into and passage through London, 1604. B) Detail of the arch in the "Blackheart Gang's" banner on the landing page of *The Household* website - http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The archetypal triumphal arch formation suggests that some significant event or person is being commemorated, but in the instance of *The Household,* it might refer to a kind of sacred passageway into the world of the "Blackheart Gang". The positioning of the upside-down decorative heart drawing below the entrance of the arch (see figure 4.10) suggests that this arch marks the entry way into the "Blackheart" domain.

Figure 4.10 Compilation of imagery demonstrating the resemblance between the upside-down decorative heart drawings on the landing page of *The Household* website - http://www.thehousehold.xyz/ and contemporary Celtic jewellery.

The heart shaped sign, adapted by the artist collective, is most probably based on ancient Celtic knot designs. These are symbolic of movement and flow of water, or the curl of roots and vines, and date back to 2500 BC when the early Scottish, Welsh and Irish Celts used these love knots to symbolise eternal life[69]. The upside-down feature and the black background of the Blackheart Gang's heart are suggestive of the unpredictable, looming darkness and mystery of this world, and of "the gang". Furthermore, the symbolism of eternal life provides a temporal relationship, linked to the ongoing nature of this transmedial storyworld.

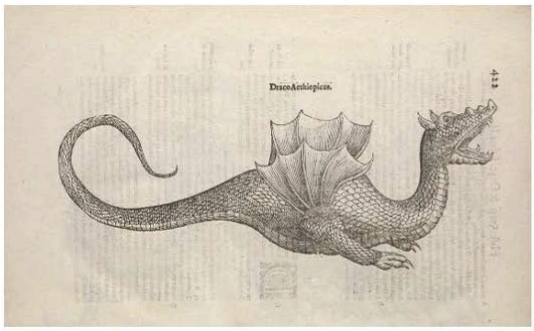
Other elements featuring in the footer of the website's landing page are the curling tentacles of an octopus, referring to Otto the monster, that also features in *The tale of how* animation, linked to *The Household.* The monstrous size of the octopus that spans the height of the triumphal arch in the illustration reminds of the mythological Kraken monster (see figure 4.11).

69 https://www.ancient-symbols.com/celtic-knots.html

The Kraken, depicted with a more octopus-like appearance, attacking a ship (Author unknown. Available at: http://commons.wikimedia.org)

Figure 4.11 Compilation of imagery demonstrating the resemblance between the Nordic Kraken sea monster (artist unknown) and Otto the monster, whose tentacles are portrayed in the footer of the landing page - http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

This colossal creature, as legend goes, had a taste for human flesh, as well as the capability of sinking ships (Salvador & Tomotani, 2014:971). The Kraken was scientifically documented in an "ancient manuscript of circa 1180 by King Sverre of Norway", but as this creature was inflated and modified by seamen's stories, the age-old Kraken monster became part of Nordic mythology and folklore (ibid.). As a result, Otto, the monster, also bestows a sense of historicity, antiquity and mystery on the *topos* of *The Household,* that lends this storyworld a mythological edge. The same mysticism goes for the dragon-like creatures to the left and right side of the triumphal arch in the footer of the landing page (see figures 4.8 & 4.12). Clearly, *The Household* draws on various temporalities by means of allusions to different cultural and temporal instances so that time has a multi-layered presence in this website – no specific temporality is used.



A) Draco Aethiopicus [An "Ethiopian dragon"] by Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605). Royal Society Picture Library.

B) Dragon detail in footer of the landing page of *The Household* website.

C) Tatsu dragon
https://www.thejapaneseshop.co.uk/blog/japanese-symbolic-animals-meanings/

Figure 4.12 Compilation of imagery demonstrating the resemblance between dragons in A, B and C. A) "Draco Aethiopicus" [An Ethiopian dragon]. B) Dragon detail in footer of the landing page of *The Household* website, and C) Tatsu dragon artefact.

Dragons have, for centuries, been associated with mysticism and fantasy fairy tales. Although dragons were often universally portrayed as demonic villains, the mythological Chinese dragon, dating back to 3000 BC, was regarded as sacred and was believed to ward off evil spirits[70]. It is also believed, in Chinese culture, that dragons lived under the surface of the Earth and only visited the surface to bring rain and thunder (ibid.). The dragons of *The Household* seem to function not as antagonists, but as age-old guardians of the triumphant arch entry way, conferring a sense of caution and antiquity on those wanting to enter the underground storyworld. The association of dragons with fairy tales, furthermore, adds a fictional fantasy element to the *The Household* website. Studies done on the origins of Western fairy tales and fables[71], date some of these recorded tales back to 6000 years ago (Shultz, 2016). It is, however, difficult to trace these historical records, as many of the fables had their origins in oral stories. Vladimir Propp (1895-1970), in his pivotal publication *Morphology of the folktale* (1968), made major contributions towards Russian folklore studies, especially in terms of the structural analysis of folklore and the classification of folklore genres. He emphasised the need to consider the particulars or motifs [narremes] in relegating the story to a specific historical reality. It does seem, however, that temporal and spatial determinations in *The Household* have a variety of

70 http://www.beijingservice.com/beijinghighlights/chinesedragon.htm

71 Schultz (2016) reports that the study, published in *Royal Society Open Science*, is based on a massive online repository of more than 2000 distinct tales from different Indo-European cultures known as the Aarne–Thompson–Uther Index, compiled in 2004. The study, however, was limited to tales that contained supernatural elements and magic – mostly famous tales that people are familiar with.

sources, a typical characteristic of transmedial storytelling. Intertextual references in the stories, texts and images throughout the sections of *The Household* contribute towards a story universe with overlaps in time and space. The fluidity of time and space complicates the notion of genre and necessitates a closer analysis of the textual information on the landing page (see figure 4.1).

The "look and feel" as well as elements of age-old fairy tales trigger a sense of situatedness in antiquity. As mentioned in chapter three (3.1 Defining storyworlds), the documentation of *The Household* dates back to its beginnings in the mythical year 0000, up to the year 2013 – the point at which the website was created. However, the world is ongoing, as the documentation of *The Household* is the "Blackheart Gang's" life-long project (see figure 4.1).

This temporal paratext is confirmed in a 2012 interview[72], where Ree proclaims that *The Household* has been "six years in the making" (thus from 2006) and is "nowhere near finished". It is mentioned in additional texts compiled for the website (not included in the final online version[73]) that "Eddy the Engineer", the proclaimed builder of *The Household* – dug for fifteen years, and that it took him two thousand years to build this realm. It is, furthermore, insinuated that he resides in the centre of the gigantic wheel that propels all the functions of *The Household* and is helping with the upkeep of this realm.

The water wheel where Eddy resides, quite conspicuously, resembles the allegorical "Wheel of fortune" symbol related to alchemy and usually found on Tarot cards[74], associated with fortune-telling. This card mainly represents cycles, fate, change, opportunity and the mysterious forces of destiny (source). Imagery on this card usually depicts how everything is interconnected and dependent on cycles such as endings and beginnings, rise and fall, Earth below and Heaven above, and day and night.

In *The Household,* Eddy was cursed to "build a sun and a moon", as the poem on the landing page of the website suggests, and these symbols are depicted around the wheel in

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72 http://www.mlife.co.za/Passion/Blackheart_Gang_14112012/

73 Extra text not included in the website – provided by "The Blackheart Gang".

74 The term Tarot refers to any of a set of cards used in tarot games, in the occult and in fortune-telling. Tarot decks originate from Italy in the 1430s by adding to the existing four-suited pack a fifth suit of 21 specially illustrated **cards** called trionfi ("triumphs") and an odd card called il matto ("the fool") (https://www.britannica.com/topic/tarot).

the middle of “The Cog” (see figure 4.12A – detail from the map on the landing page). “How it came to be” is a poem (included on the landing page of the website) resembling a conversation between the Lord and Eddy the Engineer (the “builder” of *The Household*), explaining that Eddy was cursed for being lazy and is now “to build a moon and a sun inside a tomb of rooms, and work until all work is done”. Considering that the upkeep of a household takes effort and is never really complete, this notion alludes to the construction and maintenance of this realm or household being an ongoing process. As a result, it confirms the storyworld’s open-ended nature, thus allowing for a range of transmedial interpretative options.

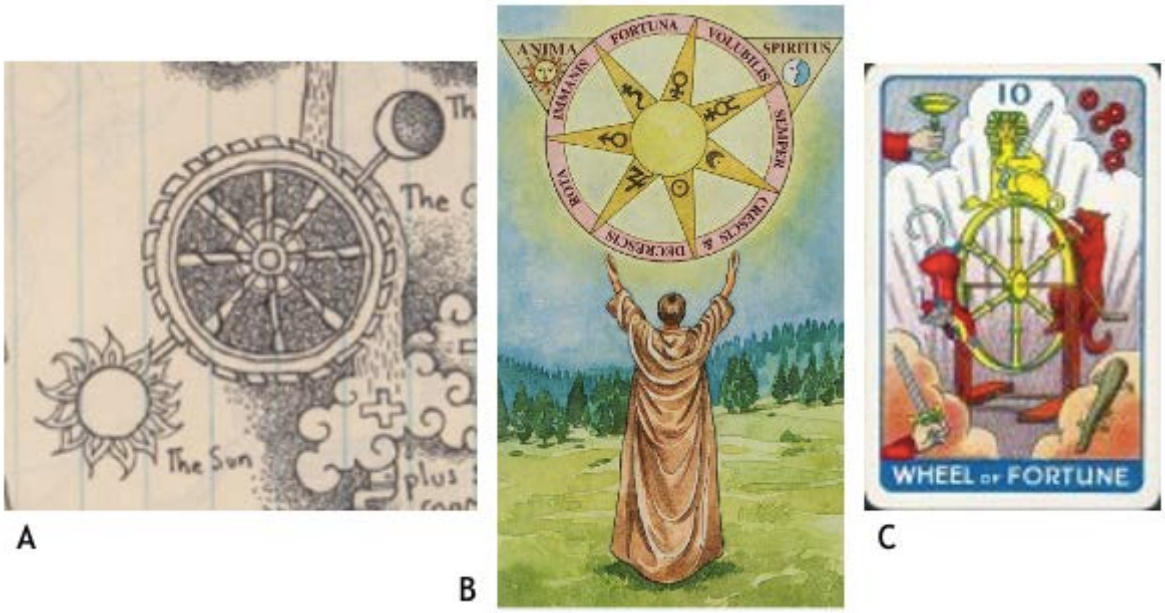


Figure 4.13 Compilation of imagery demonstrating the resemblance between the water wheel in *The Household* (A) and Wheel of fortune tarot cards, The Sorcerers Tarot deck 10 – (B) and (C) Ezekiel Tarot deck – Wheel of fortune.

The sun and the moon bring day and night to the rooms of *The Household,* indicating the passage of time. As human bathwater disappears down a plug hole, it reaches the water wheel (also known as “The Time Cog”), the pivot around which this world operates. It powers all the rooms, due to the interconnectivity of a network of pipes. In some instances, the “Wheel of fortune” card portrays two dragon-serpents around the wheel, one red and one white, biting each other’s tails (see figure

4.14). This also refers to the alchemic notion of “the end is the beginning”[75] – all cycles are interconnected.

Figure 4.14 Robert Place’s Tarot deck. Wheel of fortune deck 10.

The two dragons-serpents around the wheel relate to the pipe, “Ol’Lonely”, that separates tears from bath water before it reaches “The Jugular” in *The Household.* An image and a poem about this pipe, found in the section “Work by medium”, explain that this pipe has both male and female properties and is destined to be lonely, as the female will never submit to the male.

75 http://tarotbonkers.blogspot.com/2012/03/my-favorite-majors-wheel-of-fortune.html

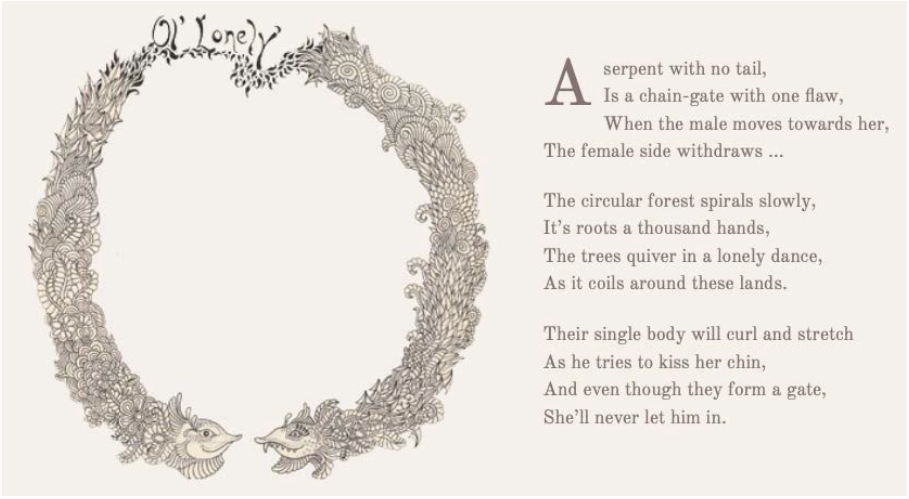


Figure 4.15 "Blackheart Gang". "Ol'Lonely" in "Poems" in the section under "Work by medium". http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

These two heads are thus in a constant struggle towards unity, and as a result the cycle will continue forever. This symbol resembles the age-old allegorical *ouroboros* serpent (see figure 4.16) that has been the subject of awe and wonder for millennia. This image correlates with Rachel, the colossal serpent that surrounds "Soap World", and whose tip of the tail and head are the only entry points into the tub from land (see figure 3.4). Literally meaning 'tail-devourer' in Greek, this symbol has appeared in numerous forms in a wide array of contexts and geographies[76]. As a symbol of an ongoing pattern of events, it represents the perpetual cyclical renewal of life and infinity, the concept of eternity and the eternal return (also evident in concepts of alchemy), and represents the cycle of life, death and rebirth, leading to immortality (ibid.).

76 https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20171204-the-ancient-symbol-that-spanned-millennia

Figure 4.16 The ouroboros appears in the classic alchemical study, *Atalanta Fugiens* (1617), by the physician to Emperor Rudolf II, Michael Maier (Credit: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin).

The characteristics of this symbol furthermore allude to the ancient Egyptians who understood time as a series of repetitive cycles, instead of something linear and constantly evolving[77]. The notion of an ongoing cycle as opposed to linearity more or less resembles the characteristics of the internet and virtuality in terms of the multiple orderings of space and time across on-line and off-line borders and the resulting blurring of boundaries between what is "real" and what is "virtual".

The ongoing cycle also relates to the "life-long" intent and commitment of "The Blackheart Gang" (as stated in the section on "The Household") to document this realm, to "archive its histories, to conduct a variety of sociological and anthropological experiments on its inhabitants, and to collect some of its wealth of antiquity" – the last two intents seem rather exploitative. As the storyworld tells "stories of colonisation" (ibid.), it thus implies that the members of the "Blackheart Gang" are also perhaps ironically, colonisers of the inhabitants and the places they dreamed up. Some of the imagery portrayed in *The Household* gives the impression of exploration of uncharted territories, discovery and documentation, such as the map featuring in the *Tale of how* publication (see figure 4.17).

77 https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20171204-the-ancient-symbol-that-spanned-millennia

Figure 4.17 Blackheart Gang. “tale_print01”. “The tale of how” – prints in “Work by medium” sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/portfolio/detail/the-tale-of-how-prints/

In this map with its weathered fold marks, mythical creatures such as Otto the monster, that shows resemblances with the “Kraken monster”, can be recognised. It furthermore illustrates the geography of the coastline and interior of an island with “The mother tree” at its centre. The incorporation of mythological creatures, together with the antique colour use and rich decorative elements applied in figure 4.17, resembles age-old medieval and Renaissance cartography, as exemplified in figure 4.18 and figure 4.19. Although cartography in those eras was questionable in terms of geographical accuracy, it seems apt to assume that the intention of these maps was to portray the reality of the time. Rachel Levy-McLaughlin (2017) proclaims that in early maps, up to about 1560, monsters that appeared in maps were usually interpreted from “reliable sources” and portrayed in an encyclopaedic illustrated manner. After that era, sea monsters were regarded with more scepticism and were often incorporated in maps as decorative elements (ibid.). Whatever the case may be, such maps hold a warning that the ocean is an unknown and dangerous place. On the other hand, it also indicates which landmasses have been “discovered” and charted (although, in most cases, of course these countries were already inhabited).

Figure 4.18 Map of Islandia. Anders Vedel. 1585. In: Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum orbis terrarium* [Theatre of the world].

Figure 4.19 Abraham Ortelius Flemish Cartographer (1527 – 1598). Map of Flanders from the *Theatrum orbis terrarium* [Theatre of the world].

The function of the maps portrayed by "The Blackheart Gang" correlates with the charting practices of early explorers. These maps guide the VUP through *The Household* and provide additional decorative details about inhabitants and characteristics of this world. In doing so, confirmation is provided that these areas (the storyworld) were inhabited before "the gang" arrived, or rather imagined it, and that this world was theirs for the "taking". This reminds of a long history regarding western colonisation of uncharted territories – so called

terra nullius, whereby various European (and American) nations explored, conquered, settled, and exploited large areas of the world, mainly for political and economic gain[78]. Central Africa was one of the last areas to be documented, and the mystery of this continent and its possible inhabitants, was the subject of much speculation (see figure 4.20).

Figure 4.20 Map of Africa from *Cary's New Universal Atlas*
London, 1808. https://library.si.edu/exhibition/fantastic-worlds/terra-incognita

The uncharted territory, or "unknown parts" depicted in the map of Africa (1808) (figure 4.20), attracted Western explorers determined to learn what they would find there. Africa was sensationalised in the press, and depicted as "mysterious and fraught with danger"[79], further transfixing the public and urging adventurers to be eager to get to know more about

78 https://www.britannica.com/topic/Western-colonialism
79 https://library.si.edu/exhibition/fantastic-worlds/terra-incognita

these exotic locations. The role of such media as signifying signposts in cultural worldmaking will be analysed in chapter five.

The Household's location underneath the crust of the Earth, together with strange events, creatures and spaces, also "reads" as an adventure story, drawing on natural science history and myth. Renowned fantasy author Jules Verne (1828-1905) created fiction based on real world travels, missions and explorations, which he construed into dramatic adventure stories such as *Journey to the centre of the Earth* (1864) and *Twenty thousand leagues under the sea* (1870)[80]. Some of the imagery portrayed in *The Household* even can be assumed to belong in pseudo-scientific documentation publications such as the well-known publication *Kunstformen der Natur* [Art forms in nature] by biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919)[81] (see figure 4.21 and 4.22).

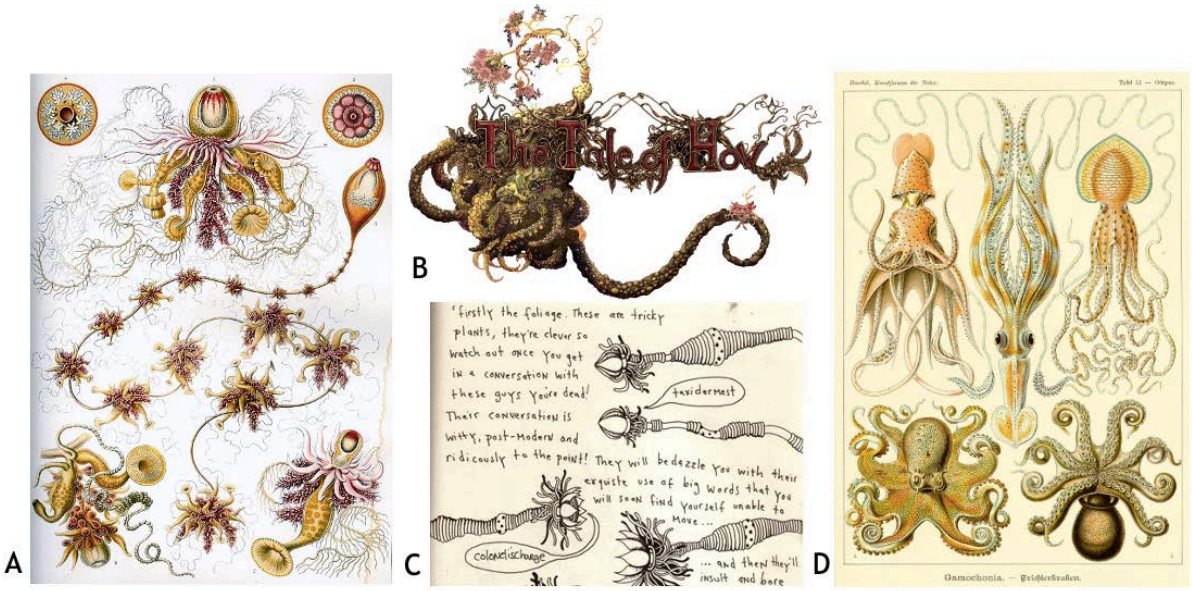


Figure 4.21 Compilation of natural botanical-like sketches: A) Ernst Haeckel, 1904, Plate 7, *Kunstformen der Natur* [Art forms in nature]. B) "Blackheart Gang", Front cover image of *Tale of how* publication. C) "Blackheart Gang", Detail from diary pages D) Ernst Haeckel, 1904, Plate 54, *Kunstformen der Natur* [Art forms in nature].

80 https://library.si.edu/exhibition/fantastic-worlds/terra-incognita
81 https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ernst-Haeckel

Figure 4.22 Compilation of natural botanical-like sketches: A) Ernst Haeckel, 1904, Plate 77, *Kunstformen der Natur* [Art forms in nature]. B) “Blackheart Gang”, detail of foliage http://www.thehousehold.xyz/work/ C) “Blackheart Gang”, detail of foliage in fixed banner, landing page, http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

A culmination of the above-mentioned semiotic cues that include allegorical, mythical and natural history signposts, creates the impression of a mystical fantasy world set in antiquity, and relating to eras of discovery and expeditions. As a result, multi-layered temporal immersion is hinted at, through the systematic unravelling and decoding of the “moments” or hidden “truths” of the story system, accessed as a result of the viewer/user/reader’s (interpreter’s) curiosity towards intertextual references recognised in the textual content of the different sections in the *The Household,* relating to historicity.

In terms of spatiallity, a household may imply that one is dealing with a built structure with a few inhabitants, mostly family members. However, as one engages with the different rooms described in the textual and visual cues of the story system in *The Household*, it becomes clear that all is not what it seems.

As mentioned in chapter 3 (3.1 Defining storyworlds) the initial idea of a physical "world" manifests in the illustration of the lay-out of *The Household* (on the landing page) that assumes the form of a cross-section map of an Earth-like planet with an underground network of rooms, a crust and a surface world (see figure 4.23).

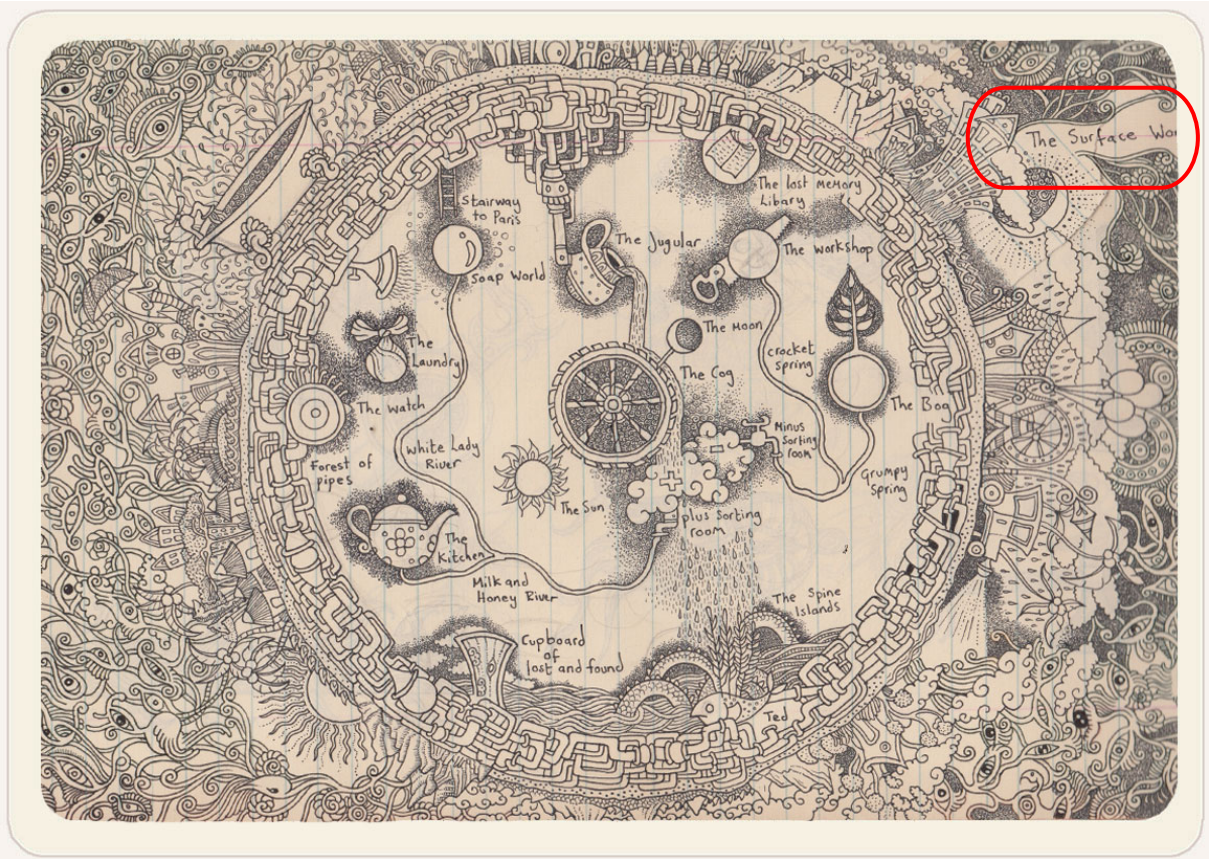


Figure 4.23 Blackheart Gang. Map of *The Household* showing "SurfaceWorld". http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The atmosphere around this planet is labelled "The Surface World" (encircled in the illustration), and is filled with a decorative sun and moon, hand-drawn curly patterns that resemble stylised vines, clouds and water waves. Correlations can be drawn between these elements and the Tarot card "Wheel of fortune deck 10" in figure 4.14. The alchemy theme regarding cycles in life and nature and the surrounding four elements of *earth, air, fire* and *water,* as portrayed on the Tarot card, also features in the map of *The Household* (figure 4.23). The recurrence of the four elements of nature in "The Surface World" and the world underneath "The Crust" accentuates the similarities between the household rooms, "The Surface World", as well as the actual world of the VUR. Among the environmental

elements, a bathtub, buildings, a car, a fun fair and decorative eye-shapes are recognised in the surrounding surface world, suggesting real-world elements and human presences or traces of presences. Reference made to Paris, France (see the ladder in figure 4.24 connecting “Soap World” with the surface world) reinforces the notion that “The Surface World” is connected and thus relatable to the real-world.

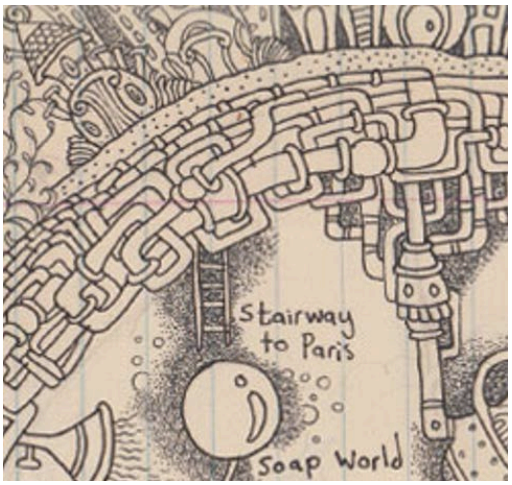


Figure 4.24 Blackheart Gang. Map of *The Household* – Detail of “Stairway to Paris” http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The presence of these real-world elements suggests that the VUR may be drawn to associate him or herself with “The Surface World”, due to its seeming familiarity and points of contact with the “real” world. Furthermore, these real-world elements illustrate that an overlap or blending of the actual world and textual actual world happens inside the website. “The Surface World”, as illustrated in *The Household* (figure 4.23), forms part of the textual actual world, and the larger storyworld, nonetheless. It contributes to the mystery and intrigue of the storyworld, because a sense of the unknown is created by the presence of “The Crust” of *The Household* that divides the surface world from the “world that lurks beneath” (and *vice versa)*. Surrounding the real-world elements in The Surface World”, decorative eye-symbols create a sense of fun and quirkiness, due to the curly, pattern-like handling. On the other hand, the eyes suggest being watched (see figure 4.25A), which may give rise to a sense of unease. The appearance of the eyes resembles the Egyptian symbol for the goddess Wedjet, as well as Horus, the ancient Egyptian sky

god[82] (see figure 4.25B), who is believed to possess royal power and provide protection and good health. The all-seeing eye of God (as portrayed in figure 4.25C), representing the divine gaze of providence and justice, may also be implied[83]. The presence of the eye-symbols suggests an underlying force at play in worldmaking, constituting not only a human presence, but a spiritual reality (see discussion in 3.2.1 Worldmaking as semiotic sub-systems). It furthermore reinforces the suggestions of allegorical and mythological forces at work (and play) in this storyworld.

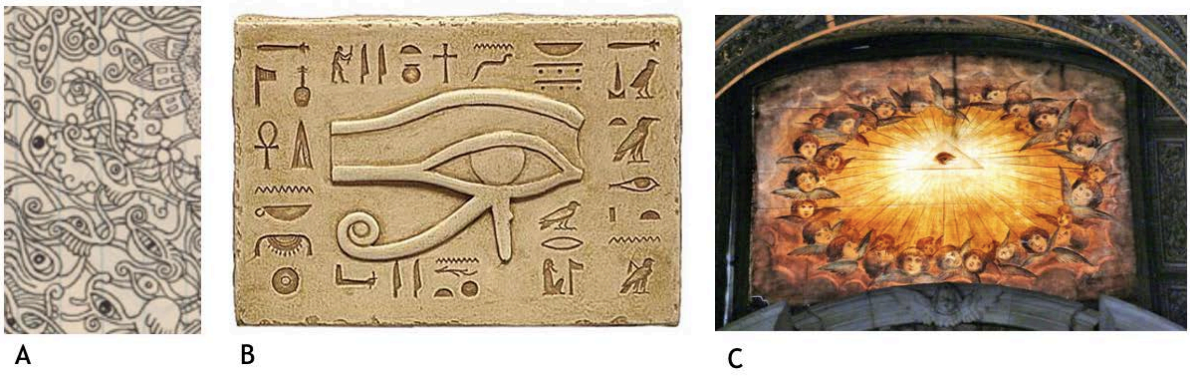


Figure 4.25 A) Blackheart Gang. Detail of eyes on map of *The Household* – Landing page. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/ B) Eye of Horus relief. C) The all-seeing eye of God. Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome.

The presence of these eyes in "The Surface World" of the textual actual world of *The Household* may also be intimidating for the world and characters underneath "The Crust". The VUR might perceive "The Surface World" as part of *The Household,* as it is presented as such, but for the characters of the underworld, "The Surface World" presents the "unknown". This gives rise to an awareness of the overlapping of boundaries between different sub-worlds of *The Household*. A space where textual worlds interconnect and overlap is referred to by McHale as an *intertextual zone* (1987:57), a space allowing for dialogue. This *zone,* however, is often characterised by friction, because of a violation of ontological boundaries between fictional worlds (McHale, 1992:152). The boundaries, however, do not only pertain to fictional worlds. Ryan distinguishes among different kinds of boundaries, such as:

82 https://www.firemountaingems.com/resources/encyclobeadia/charts/f21m
83 https://gwmemorial.org/blogs/news/the-eye-of-providence

> … boundaries within the representing discourse, and boundaries within the represented reality (the 'semantic domain' of the text); boundaries with gates to get across, and boundaries with only windows to look through (1990:873).

The VUR perceives *The Household* through various filters presented in the textual actual world and through the process of narrative discourse – contextually through his/her own eyes, through the eyes of the "The Surface World" and its inhabitants, filtered through "The Crust's" pipe network, as well as through the eyes of the characters of the world beneath the surface. As a result of the crossing and blurring of boundaries, tension is generated that manifests in a liminal in-between world where the ontological differences between the real and the fantastical fade.

Where is *The Household* then? I argue that as a textual actual world (the represented reality), the geographical situatedness of this world, containing a surface world, a crust and an underworld, all containing their own borders, relate somewhat to what we perceive to be Earth. Textual cues in the website, however, refer to these as "rooms", although, in the text, it is also noted that it resembles planets, thus planets within a planet, or worlds-within-worlds. In the actual world, rooms are usually built structures – with a floor, ceiling and walls - that have a specific function. Rooms or chambers do not particularly feature below the surface of the earth, unless in the form of mining shafts or chambers and basements beneath (certain) houses or complexes. In extreme cases, fortified underground bunkers might be built to function as shelter for people (refugees) and protection of valuables during times of war or any other natural (or "apocalyptic") disasters. The question arises as to the intent of building a household beneath the surface world. It does seem to heighten the sense of mystery and the unknown, but it might also serve as protection against elements (and watching eyes) of the outside world.

Although the form of *The Household* represents an Earth-like sphere and rooms appear to speak of human-built structures, some elements of these rooms do not correspond with what is expected of a typical household. Referring back to figure 4.5, the list of rooms under the section "Household Rooms" includes "Libraries", "The Laundry", "The Kitchen" and "The Workshop". These rooms of *The Household* are presumably named according to their functionality, typical of those found in a home. The names of the rooms (including "The Kitchen", "The Laundry" and "The Workshop"), as a result, transfer typical household

features found on the surface and actual worlds to the world below the surface, and make the “unknown” more relatable for the VUR. However, these rooms have strange characteristics. “The Kitchen”, for instance, has a conveyer belt that is more than a thousand kilometres in length. It transports the food prepared by the kitchen ladies through the entire household, to *The Household’s* seven billion inhabitants (see figure 4.26). What country has seven billion inhabitants? According to Worldometer[84], the total world population currently (2020), is almost eight billion people, thus relating the size of *The Household* to that of the world.

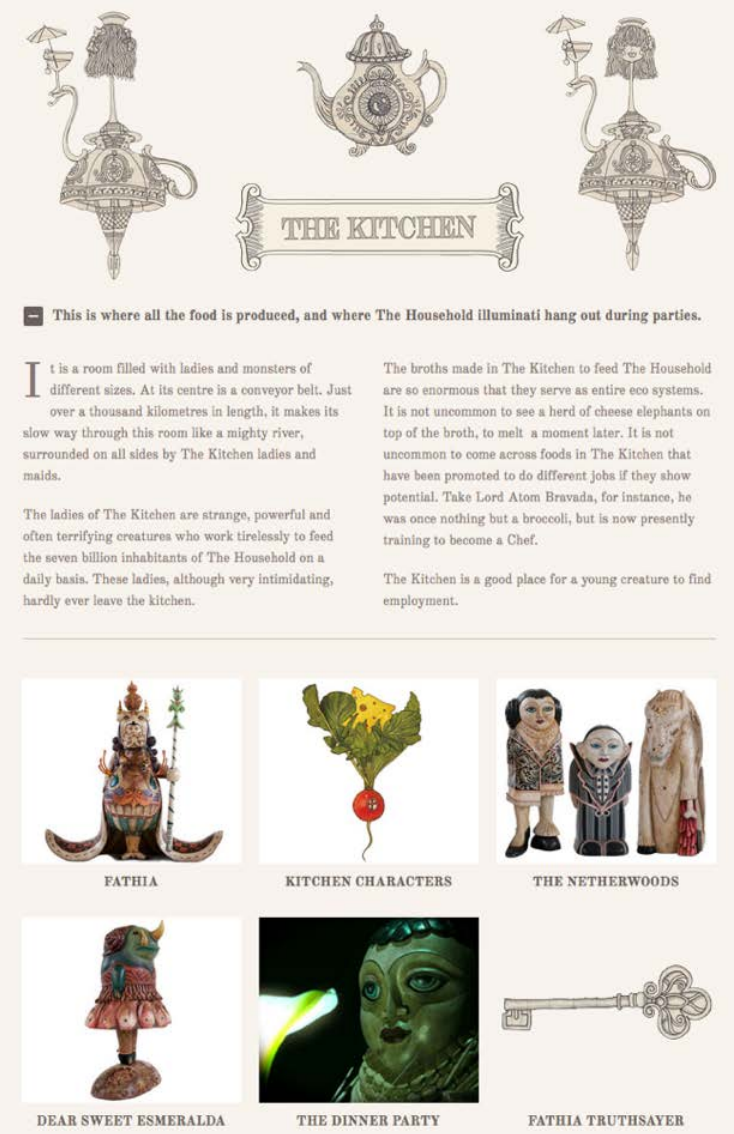
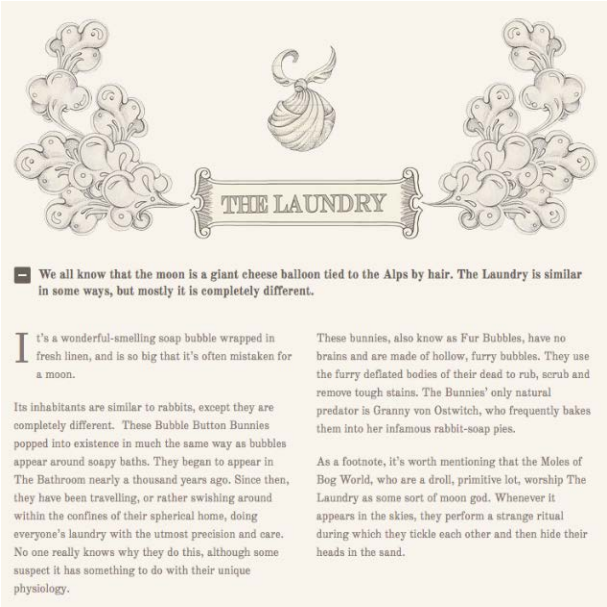


Figure 4.26 Blackheart Gang. “The Kitchen” sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

84 https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/



THE LAUNDRY

We all know that the moon is a giant cheese balloon tied to the Alps by hair. The Laundry is similar in some ways, but mostly it is completely different.

It's a wonderful-smelling soap bubble wrapped in fresh linen, and is so big that it's often mistaken for a moon.

Its inhabitants are similar to rabbits, except they are completely different. These Bubble Button Bunnies popped into existence in much the same way as bubbles appear around soapy baths. They began to appear in The Bathroom nearly a thousand years ago. Since then, they have been travelling, or rather swishing around within the confines of their spherical home, doing everyone's laundry with the utmost precision and care. No one really knows why they do this, although some suspect it has something to do with their unique physiology.

These bunnies, also know as Fur Bubbles, have no brains and are made of hollow, furry bubbles. They use the furry deflated bodies of their dead to rub, scrub and remove tough stains. The Bunnies' only natural predator is Granny von Ostwitch, who frequently bakes them into her infamous rabbit-soap pies.

As a footnote, it's worth mentioning that the Moles of Bog World, who are a droll, primitive lot, worship The Laundry as some sort of moon god. Whenever it appears in the skies, they perform a strange ritual during which they tickle each other and then hide their heads in the sand.

Figure 4.27 Blackheart Gang. "The Laundry" sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

"The Laundry" is compared with the size of the Moon, but it is actually a "giant soap bubble wrapped in fresh linen" (see figure 4.27). "The Workshop", where everything in *The Household* is built (mainly by males), features on the opposite side of "The Kitchen" (mainly occupied by women) (see figure 4.28).

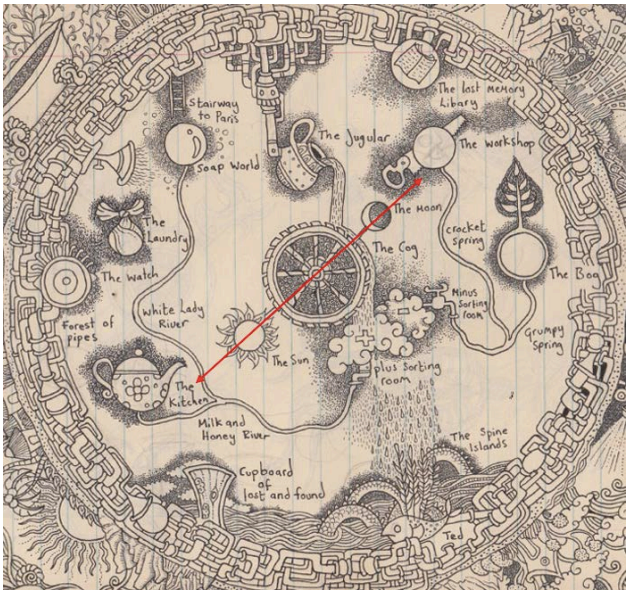


Figure 4.28 Blackheart Gang. Map of *The Household* – Detail of the location of "The Kitchen" as opposed to "The Workshop". http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The location of what is described to be polar opposite rooms, correlates with the position of the Sun and the Moon around the big water wheel. The polarity suggests that these worlds and their inhabitants differ like day from night, most probably in terms of the related characteristics of masculinity and femininity. The worldmaking process thus requires consideration of gender issues and differences.

Our (real world) society is also characterised by contentious gender issues and in that sense *The Household* seems relatable, as certain events will demonstrate (in section 4.1.4). In looking back, Goodman (1978:6) correlates worldmaking with remaking, since narrative worldmaking usually entails relatable aspects from worlds known to us. Through the process of *mimesis,* an intertextual relationship is forged between the textual actual world and the actual world, resulting in the formation of a "hermeneutic circle between narrative and life" (Ricœur, 1985:53). Parallels can be drawn with continuous cycles in life, as represented by the *ouroboros* serpent (see figure 4.16) that unavoidably illustrates narrative's inclusivity. This idea reinforces the sense that a symbiotic relationship exists between the actual and textual actual worlds, resulting in the formation of a liminal in-between space between fantasy and reality, and "suspended between belief and disbelief" (McHale, 1987:33). It is argued that the cognition of the storyworld – *The Household* takes place in this intertextual zone.

Furthermore, in gauging the relationship between the actual and textual actual worlds, it seems difficult to associate a typical household with "The Crust", "The Bog", "Soap World" and "The Cupboard of Lost and Found", as none of these fit into the typical confinements of a room in a house. "The Crust", consisting of a network of pipes, mainly separates "The Surface World" from the world underneath "The Crust". It functions as a kind of membrane between the two worlds, which implies that one world can be penetrated by another, although they also seem to depend on each other for their existence. The water from "The Surface World" generates power for *The Household* and, on the other hand, "The Surface World's" inhabitants gain equity by allowing soap products to be sold above ground, as implied in the "ladder to Paris" in figure 4.24 and stated in the text of the "Soap World" sub-menu (figure 4.29).

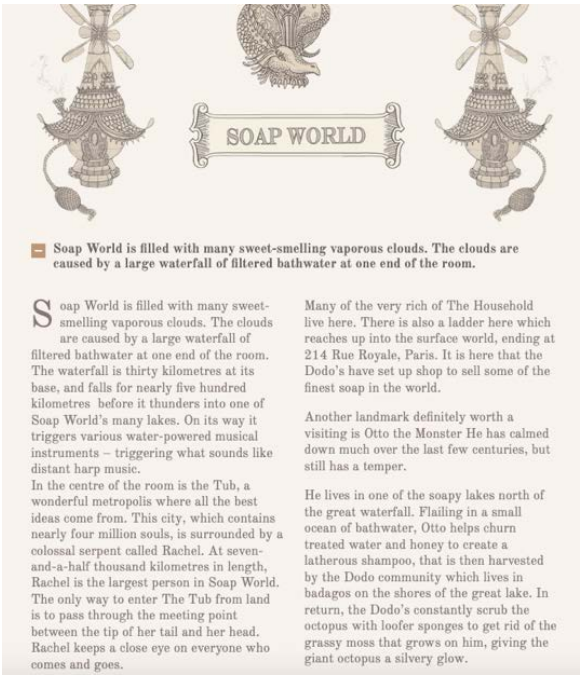


Figure 4.29 Blackheart Gang. "Soap World" sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

A similar symbiotic relationship is suggested in this world between the Dodos (an extinct species) and Otto the Monster. "[T]he Dodo's constantly scrub the octopus with loofer [sic] sponges to get rid of the grassy moss that grows on him" and in return, he "helps churn treated water and honey to create a latherous soap" (fig. 4.29). It is also stated that many of the rich of *The Household* live in "Soap World". This implies that socio-economics and class differences, contentious issues in our real-world societies, play a role in *The Household,* again focussing the attention on the blurring of boundaries between the real and fantasy worlds.

When comparing the "real" world with *The Household*, a sense of the bizarre and absurd is created when the size of the rooms is considered in comparison with the physical size of Earth (which is more or less relatable to the shape and form of *The Household*). The spatial experience of this storyworld assumes enormous proportions. When one considers the diameter and circumference of Earth, the rooms of this household take on astronomical proportions, capable of housing huge communities. Thus, the rooms below the crust of the earth would geographically compare to the size of continents on Earth or, at least, resemble demarcations of different countries. When considering that the VUR's actual world overlaps with the surface world and the underworld of *The Household*, the existence of multiple boundaries or membranes become clear. "The Surface World"

manifests as a liminal world – a meeting place between the actual and the textual actual world. “The Crust” similarly separates “The Surface World” from the world of the characters. Visually, one can imagine characters migrating through the crust of the Earth, that serves as an exit point from the world below the surface (their reality) and entry point into the “unknown”, mysterious surface world. The manner in which this storyworld is illustrated – a cross-section of an Earth-like planet – thus visually re-enforces the notion of transmedial multi-layeredness due to the crossing of internal and external boundaries.

In the section above, it has been established that *The Household* is spatio-temporally situated as an ongoing fantasy world, relating to historical antiquity, that more or less resembles the “real” world as we know it – thus it relates to the past, present and future. What has come to light, also, is that the inhabitants of this fantasy world deal with the same global issues such as gender, class and cultural (in-)balance, overpopulation and socio-economic issues. Towards an understanding of the dynamics of this storyworld, an analysis of the characters in *The Household’s* story system follows that will describe (on a textual and cognitive level) the positions that these characters hold in the larger storyworld and the character types they might portray.

4.1.2 Characters in *The Household*

A character, according to Jannidis (2013), is “a participant in a storyworld”. Characters are not mere players in a game of make-belief. They are “the objects of our curiosity and fascination, affection and dislike, admiration and condemnation” (Bennet & Royle, 1995:60). For that reason, characters can have a significant impact on how the VUR immerses and identifies (either positively or negatively) with a storyworld.

Characters can usually be recognised through the names conferred on them, and more so, through their actions. Propp (1968) is of the opinion that action, leading to progression in a story, determines characters (*dramatis personae* in his terms):

> The names of the *dramatis personae* change (as well as the attributes of each), but neither their actions nor functions change. From this we can draw the inference that a tale often attributes identical actions to various characters. This makes possible the study of the tale according to the functions of its *dramatis personae* (1968:20).

In a similar sense, Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917-1992) connects character to the concept of *actant,* but he conceptualises the *actant* to rather involve narrative units that explain the actions of a range of different characters (*actors*) (1987:70). Thus, one *actant* can be represented by many *actors* in terms of a more generalised function through actions they perform. One *actor* can also represent various functions. Based on Propp's *dramatis personae,* consisting of the categories the *villain*, the *donor*, the *helper*, the *sought-for person (and her father)*, the *dispatcher*, the *hero* and the *false hero* (1968:79-83), Greimas ([1973] 1987), in an attempt to streamline these categories, proposes six *actants*: *the hero* (also sjuzet) and his search for *an object*; the *sender* and the *receiver*; *the hero's helper* and *the opponent*. These *actants,* due to the descriptive nature of the categories, thus highlight the interconnectedness of character and action, which will be expanded on in the analysis of events (4.1.3) (also plot and fabulae/sjuzet).

The categories on which Propp's *dramatis personae* are based, as well as Greimas' *actors/actant* model, relate, at its core, to archetypes that manifest in the collective unconscious (of culture), as proclaimed by Jung and Pearson (see Jung, 1964; 1968; 1971 and Pearson, 1991, 2012) (see discussion in *3.3.2.1 Discovering myth as worldmaking strategy in* The Household). The twelve different archetypes, as delineated by Pearson (with reference to Jung) will guide the investigation into the character types included in *The Household.* These include the *Innocent,* the *Orphan,* the *Hero (Warrior),* the *Caregiver,* the *Seeker (Explorer),* the *Rebel (Destroyer),* the *Lover,* the *Creator,* the *Ruler, Magician, Sage* and *Fool* (Pearson, 2012:5-10).

Due to the large number of characters in *The Household,* only a few of the main role players will be highlighted in terms of their character types, as these often represent a balanced *actor/actant* corps in a story. There are, however, characters who represent more than one character type, and *actants* that are represented by multiple characters. One such example is "Eddy the Engineer", in which Eddy is attributed a specific trait or trade through naming. Identification of character types can be gauged, firstly, through naming – "from the perspective of the function and meaning of names" - or the process of ascribing properties to names through characterisation (Jannidis, 2013). Eddy, the seemingly timid white mouse, with flowers for a tail – he constantly loses his tail and it grows into flowers after burrowing into the ground - and six legs, sails around on a bunch of bananas and a spoon (figure 4.30). Due to these strange, humorous attributes, his traits do not necessarily seem to include those of an engineer.

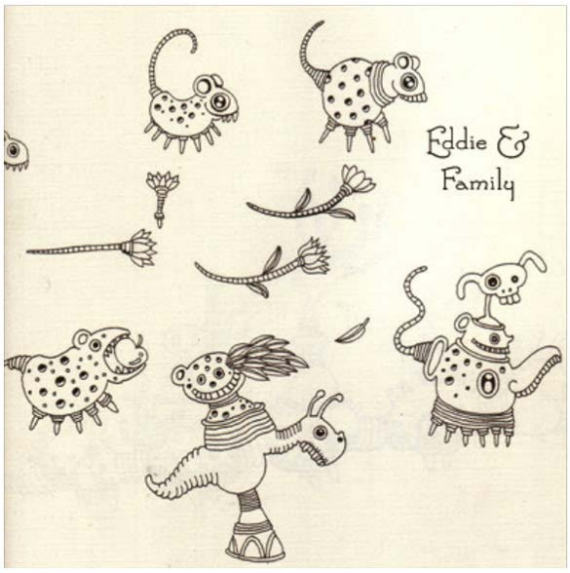


Figure 4.30 Blackheart Gang. “Eddy & family” drawing. http://siouxwire-annex.blogspot.com/2007/05/interview-blackheart-gang-ree-treweek.html

He furthermore shows slight resemblance with the iconic Bulbasaur, one of the Gen I game’s grass type characters in the Pokémon franchise[85] (see figure 4.31).

Figure 4.31 Blackheart Gang. Detail of Eddy in the fixed banner on the landing page. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/ compared with Bulbasaur from the Pokémon franchise https://www.thegamer.com/pokemon-bulbasaur-facts-trivia/

85 https://www.thegamer.com/pokemon-bulbasaur-facts-trivia/

Bulbasaur has special powers in the sense that he can inflict damage on his enemies by using his slender vines to perform the "Vine Whip"[86]. Eddy's tail that leads to the sprouting of new flowers, on the other hand, has a more mysterious purpose. This trait seems to connect Eddy with the *Creator* and *Magician* archetypes. As indicated in the additional text to the website (provided by the artist collective), it took Eddy 2000 years to build *The Household,* which, due to its size, seems to be a huge accomplishment. (It is thus also difficult to believe that he is described as "a lazy lump of lard" (see fig. 4.1)). Although he is the creator of this world, it might be insinuated that there is some magic involved in the process.

In an interview with Ree Treweek[87], the paratextual information reveals intertextual references that are relevant to the present discussion. She describes Eddy as "a cross between MacGyver[88], Buddha and God". His association with MacGyver might imply that he has innovative plans and acuity to accomplish life-saving and complicated tasks. In terms of the god/God association, a sense of divinity is attributed to him. Being able to build a world and adorn it with a sun and moon, certainly asks for a super-being, and affirms Eddy's *Creator* status. However, the circumstances surrounding Eddy's fame are put in perspective when consideration is given to the paratext that describes how he became the *Creator.* In the additional text (not included in the final version of *The Household*) it is explained that Eddy lived in Greece, below Mount Olympus, and because he was so lazy, Zeus cursed him "to build a moon and sun", and "work until all work is done" (see poem, fig. 4.1). Eddy got such a fright that he started digging to get away. He "did not stop digging for fifteen years" and it took him a further "two thousand years to build *The Household".* He is still "pottering around fixing stuff". In the above-mentioned intertextual reference, Zeus is representative of the "god" motif and *Ruler*, and ironically, as a result of his curse on Eddy, "empowered" Eddy to become a *Creator* and even *Ruler* of his own kingdom, *The Household.* Besides being in awe of Eddy and his accomplishments, a sense of sympathy is provoked for his ordeal.

In *The tale of how* animation and publication, Eddy also features as the *Hero* persona (see figure 4.32) who saves the dodos from the terrible "Otto the monster" (see figure 4.33).

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86 https://www.pokemoncenter.com/product/703-04002/pokemon-gallery-figure-bulbasaur-vine-whip

87 http://siouxwire-annex.blogspot.com/2007/05/interview-blackheart-gang-ree-treweek.html

88 MacGyver refers to the main character in the American hit-television series with the same title, that featured between 1985 and 1992 (and has recently been reproduced). This character always makes innovative plans to solve problems and catch the villains. Each episode is filled with action, adventure and crime.

Figure 4.32 Blackheart Gang. tale_print10. “The tale of how” (prints).“Work by medium” sub-menu http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

Figure 4.33 Blackheart Gang. tale_print05. “The tale of how” (prints). “Work by medium” sub-menu, http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The *Hero* persona, according to Propp, involves the following:

> The hero of a fairy tale is that character who either directly suffers from the action of the villain in the complication (the one who senses some kind of lack), or who agrees to liquidate the misfortune or lack of another person. In

> the course of the action the hero is the person who is supplied with a magical agent (a magical helper), and who makes use of it or is served by it (1968:50).

Eddy, the *Hero,* thus agrees to assist the dodos in defeating “Otto the monster”, who represents the *dramatis persona* of the *Villain*. In *The tale of how* (figure 4.33), a poem describes: “Otto is deaf; Otto means eight [possibly referring to eight tentacles]; Otto means death, to the dodos he ate”. Not only does he reign over “one of the soapy lakes north of the great waterfall”(figure 4.29), conferring on him a *Ruler* status of that area, but he is also responsible for killing many of the Dodos that live on the shores of the lake, that assigns the *Destroyer (Rebel)* archetype to him. In terms of Greimas’ *actant* model Otto is the hero’s (Eddy’s) opponent, because Eddy assisted in the dodos’ escape from “Otto the monster”. The text in the “Soap World” sub-menu (see figure 4.29) describes the centuries-old Otto as a kind of attraction or “landmark” worth visiting, but a warning is served that he still has a temper. He thus also presents a spatial element, because in the description under the sub-section “Films” – “The tale of how” (in the website under “Work by medium”), it is stated that the dodos lived on Otto’s head. This undeniably creates a sense of tension and doom, because their biggest enemy is their place of habitation, but also their home.

The dodos represent the *Innocent* character type, since their motivation in this world relates to making a living from the soap products and to not be killed by Otto in the process, as gorily portrayed in the “The tale of How” (see figure 4.34).

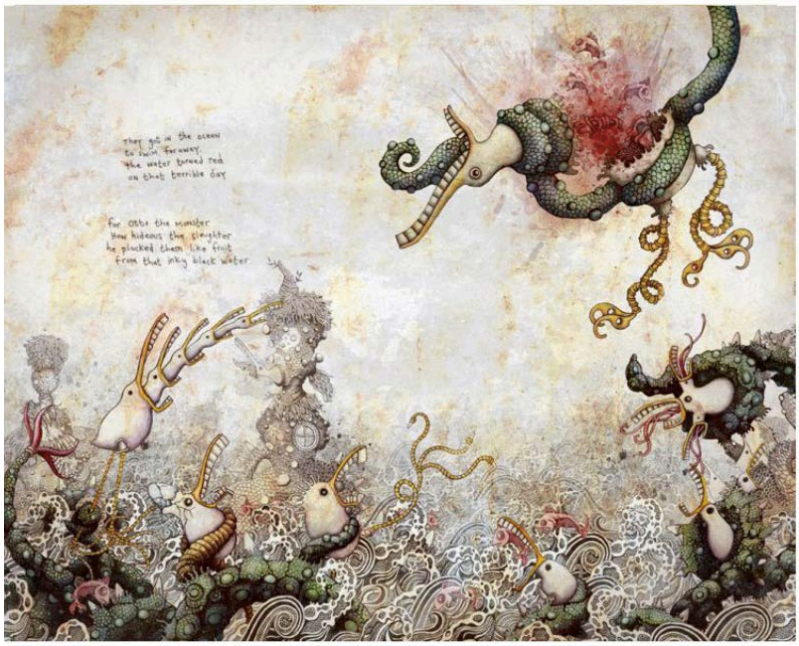


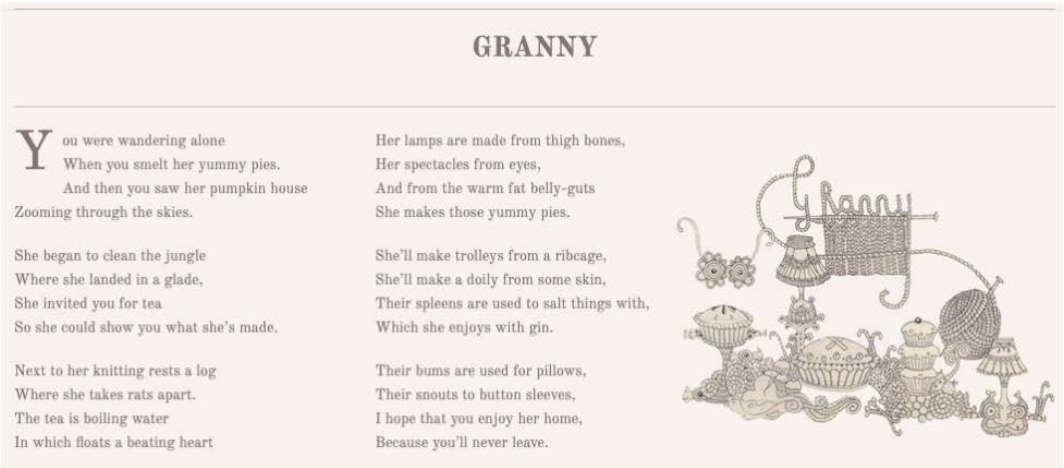
Figure 4.34 Blackheart Gang. tale_print07. “The tale of how” (prints). “Work by medium” sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The irony that these *Innocents* are dodos, an extinct species that existed in the “real” world, could represent a gloomy prospect for these characters in *The Household.* Their possible *Wish world* might involve a desire to survive. On the other hand, the VUR’s *Wish world* might include the desire to right the wrongs of the past (relating to the *Knowledge world*) and preserve these characters. One can, however, not help but laugh at these characters. Their strange physiology – long thin legs and beaks with teeth – counters the empathy towards these rather absurd characters (see sculptures of Dodo characters in figure 4.35).

Figure 4.35 Blackheart Gang. Representations of sculptures of Dodos under “Soap World” sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The names attributed to these characters - *Dr Mysterio*, *Keeper of secrets* and *Crown for a head* – do not only ascribe certain properties to them through naming, but it also enhances the fantasy atmosphere of *The Household* due to the absurdness associated with the sculptures and names.

Another *Villain* character type, “Granny von Ostwitch”, bakes rabbit-soap pies from the “Bubble Button Bunnies” that reside in “The Laundry” (figure 4.27). Although these *Innocents* are described as brainless and “made of hollow, furry bubbles” (and thus devoid of emotions), the actions of this granny seem exceptionally cruel. Consider for example the matter of fact type description of these acts in the poem, “Granny” (figure 4.36).



GRANNY

You were wandering alone
When you smelt her yummy pies.
And then you saw her pumpkin house
Zooming through the skies.

She began to clean the jungle
Where she landed in a glade,
She invited you for tea
So she could show you what she's made.

Next to her knitting rests a log
Where she takes rats apart.
The tea is boiling water
In which floats a beating heart

Her lamps are made from thigh bones,
Her spectacles from eyes,
And from the warm fat belly-guts
She makes those yummy pies.

She'll make trolleys from a ribcage,
She'll make a doily from some skin,
Their spleens are used to salt things with,
Which she enjoys with gin.

Their bums are used for pillows,
Their snouts to button sleeves,
I hope that you enjoy her home,
Because you'll never leave.

Figure 4.36 Blackheart Gang. “Granny”. “Poems”. “Work by Medium” sub-menu.
http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The decorative monotone painting of “Granny” (figure 4.37) portrays her as a rather odd-looking old woman, surrounded by a lush tropical forest with strange foliage (see figure 4.22), her pumpkin house and small mole-like creatures. However, in her hands she clenches the tails of (seemingly dead) rats (or bunnies, according to the text in figure 4.27), the main ingredients of her delicious pies.

Figure 4.37 Blackheart Gang. “Granny”. “Paintings”. “Work by Medium” sub-menu.
http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

This bizarre scene, together with the poem, alludes to her exploitative acts against the *Innocents.* This creates sympathy towards the *Innocents,* because a grandmother is often associated with the *Caregiver* character type, which this character is definitely not. Her surname, Von Ostwitch, may, in the first instance, imply her possible association with a witch, a typical *Villain* type character in fairy tales. An example of an evil witch, features in the story of Hansel and Gretel, two children who were abandoned in the woods, lured into a house made of gingerbread and cake and fattened by the witch in order to eat them. “Granny” shows the same intentions with the “Bubble Button Bunnies”, who, through trickery, capture them and bake them into pies.

On another level, her surname sounds like the German word Auschwitz, the largest Nazi concentration (death) camp that operated during World War II. Adolf Hitler’s policy known as the “Final solution”, resulted in the isolation, torture and deaths of many Jews and other “undesirables”[89]. About 1.1 million people lost their lives in this camp, one amongst many. “Granny’s” tyranny thus has a huge impact on *The Household,* when compared with the Holocaust on Nazi Germany.

89 https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/auschwitz

Named as the custodians of the jungle and the realm, "The Moles" resemble the *Ruler* character type, a "proud and ancient race" and settled in the jungles of "The Bog" about a hundred years before the story begins (see figure 4.38).

Figure 4.38 Blackheart Gang. "Mole tribal village". "Paintings". "Work by Medium" sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

It seems rather strange that such small, blind and invasive creatures can rule over an area that spans the size of jungles. In a series of artworks by "The Blackheart Gang", called "Postcards from Molitia"[90], various mole characters, as well as bear characters, adorned with strange and interesting attire, can be recognised (see figure 4.39).

90 "Postcards from Molitia" is also the title of an exhibition held in 2012 at "A word of art" gallery in Cape Town.

Figure 4.39 Blackheart Gang. A range of characters from the series “Postcards from Molitia” https://www.instagram.com/postcardsofmolitia/?hl=en

Some of the mole characters have characteristics of African tribalism especially in terms of their decorative patterned attire and weaponry, such as spears. Consider, for example, “Shangoma” (figure 4.40), who, through naming, is ascribed certain properties relating to an African healer.

Figure 4.40 Blackheart Gang. “Shangoma” from the series “Postcards from Molitia”

https://www.instagram.com/postcardsofmolitia/?hl=en

The title “Shangoma” alludes to *sangomas* or *izinyangas,* traditional healers from African indigenous groups, who are said to not only impart advice and treat ailments with herbs and remedies, called *muti,* but also constitute a strong spiritual side of tribal life (Richter, 2003) (see figure 4.41).

Figure 4.41 Sangoma ritual. 2020. “Sangoma: photos of traditional healers in South Arica”. https://petapixel.com/2020/02/11/sangoma-photos-of-traditional-healers-in-south-africa/

This trade, handed down from generation to generation, is often perceived as supernatural and strange due to the chanting and throwing of bones associated with these rituals. There was even legislation[91] implemented in early colonial Africa (around 1891) that prohibited sangomas from practising their trade, because it was seen as witchcraft (Richter, 2003). The toothed fish headdress worn by “Shangoma” (figure 4.40) may also allude to the important role of water in *The Household.* The backstory, pertaining to the presence of a river snake, comes from Ree’s knowledge about a sangoma, named Ghotsa, who lived in the area she grew up in, and who was believed to have control over the river spirit in the form of a giant snake[92]. This river snake harks back to the character of “Rachel” (figure 3.4) and the *ouroboros* serpent (figure 4.16), relating to ongoing cycles in life, that once again highlights the mythological premise of *The Household. “*Rachel” is in a way the protector of this realm, because the only entry way into this world (first through “The Tub”, which leads to “Soap World” – figure 4.29) is between her head and the tip of her tail.

Another mole character, “The General”, relates to “the pious father Zuma”, who “strayed and lost his way” (the poem appears at the bottom of figure 4.42). Former President of

91 The Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1957 and the Witchcraft Suppression Amendment Act of 1970 explicitly prohibited the diviners from practicing their trade – as early as 1891 in colonial Natal (Richter, 2003).

92 http://siouxwire.blogspot.com/2007/05/interview-blackheart-gang-ree-treweek.html

South Africa (between 2009 – 2018), Jacob Zuma (b.1942), has over the past few years developed a tarnished reputation in terms of corruption and his role in "State capture[93]" of South Africa. It thus makes sense that "The General" refers to former President Jacob Zuma, firstly because of the connecting poem.

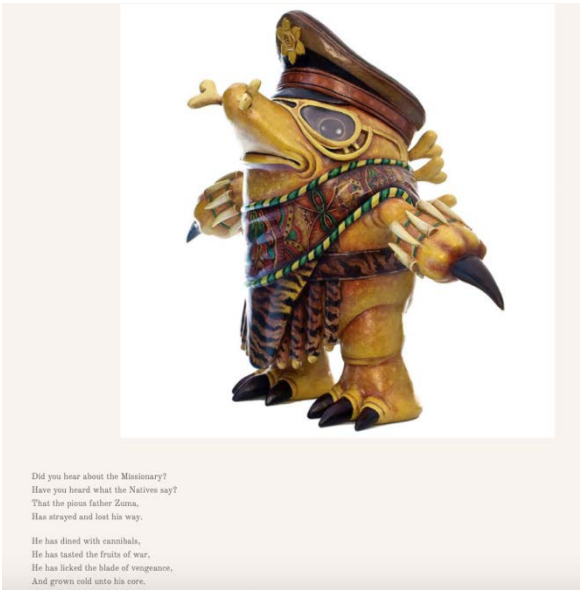


Figure 4.42 Blackheart Gang. "The General". "Sculptures". "Work by Medium" sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The sculpture depicts a proud mole, with his nose held up high and arms out to his sides, almost showing off his attire. The traditional loin cloth, made of wild animal skin, is typical Zulu tribal attire worn at traditional ceremonies. In an article, "What Zuma and his bride will wear", Sameer Naik[94], in anticipation of Zuma's wedding to his fourth wife, describes the outfit Zuma wore to his third wedding (see figure 4.43). The fact that he has many wives ironically links him with the *lover* character type.

93 The term "state capture" describes a form of corruption in which businesses and politicians conspire to influence a country's decision-making process to advance their own interests. A *BBC news* article by Neil Arun (14 July 2019), **"**State capture: Zuma, the Guptas, and the sale of South Africa", explains the mutually beneficial relationship between the Zuma family and the Guptas, three Indian-born brothers who moved to South Africa after the fall of apartheid.

94 Sameer Naik, 21 April 2012, "What Zuma and his bride will wear" in *Saturday Star* https://www.pressreader.com [Date of access: 25 November 2020].

Figure 4.43 Naik, S. 2012. Picture from article: "What Zuma and his bride will wear". https://www.pressreader.com

Another association made between the sculpture of "The General" and Zuma is the sash worn over the shoulder, reminding of his prior role as President. The trim rounding off the sash is a pattern containing green, yellow and black, the colours of the ANC[95], and as such illustrates his association with the governing party. The ANC also has a long militant *struggle* history against the then apartheid regime. In the 1960s the ANC went underground and formed the MK – *Umkhonto we Sizwe,* which led to various acts of sabotage, and subsequently, the *Rivonia trial*[96]*.* The military-style hat worn by "The General" (see figure 4.42) is probably associated with Jacob Zuma's leadership role in the *struggle*, resulting from his three-month leadership and military training course (in 1978) in the then Soviet Union[97]. Correlations made between Jacob Zuma and "The General" (figure 4.42) highlight various roles fulfilled by the former president. For this reason, he is

95 The African National Congress (established in 1912) is the current governing political party of South Africa, since the first free and democratic elections in April 1994.

96 The *Rivonia trial* (1963) was the result of charges laid against MK leaders for "attempting to cause a violent revolution". Some ANC leaders, among them Oliver Tambo and Joe Slovo, avoided arrest and left the country, whilst other ANC members left to undergo military training (https://www.anc1912.org.za/brief-history-anc).

97 http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/profiles/president-jacob-zuma-0

associated with many character types, including the *Hero* or rather *Warrior,* who sought justice and democratic rights for his people, the *Rebel (Destroyer)* who would do anything to accomplish this goal*,* the *Lover* of many women*,* the *Ruler* who became president of South Africa*,* and the *Fool,* who stands accused of complicity in state capture and corruption.

"The Bears", on the other hand, are associated with the *Seeker (Explorer)* character type, since they invaded this jungle around a hundred years before this story begins, and settled in "The Bog" (see figure 4.44).

Figure 4.44 Blackheart Gang. "The Bog" sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The *Seeker* character type also makes sense when considering a poem called "The admiral and the squire" (see figure 4.45), that describes the exploration inland from the shore into the jungle ("The Bog").

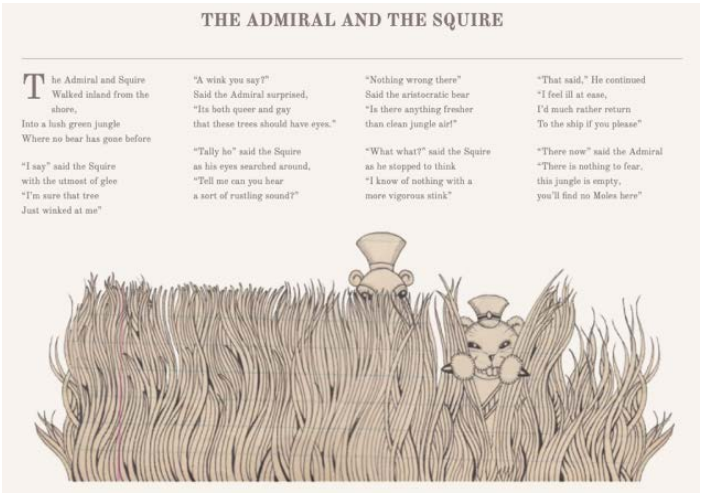


Figure 4.45 Blackheart Gang. "The Admiral and the squire" from "Poems" in "Work by Medium" sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The poem evokes "rustling sounds" and trees with watching eyes, indicating that they find themselves in a strange, fantastical world. "The Bog" is thus the sought-for object that can soothe their desire for territory, curiosity and wealth. Bears and a Mole that show distinct resemblance with an *Explorer* character type are "General Dreadstikov" with an explorer-type hat and "Livingston as a zombie" (see figure 4.46), referring to the traveller, explorer and missionary, D. David Livingstone (1813-1873) whose explorations might have gone sour.

Figure 4.46 Blackheart Gang. "General Dreadstikov","Livingstone as a zombie" and "The Admiral" from the series "Postcards from Molitia" https://www.instagram.com/postcardsofmolitia/?hl=en

Due to their conquering desires, “The Bears” often have to retaliate against invaded groups such as “The Moles”. The military association is deduced by considering the names attributed to characters, such as “General Dreadstikov” and “The Admiral” above, but also according to their attire. In the case of “Rooster Bear” (figure 4.47) the name does not reveal much other than his genealogy, that includes a mixture between a rooster and a bear, but his attire, including amulets and a sword, speaks of high military ranking. This may also place him in the *Hero/Warrior* character group, but the poem “Dear Rooster” reveals something else.

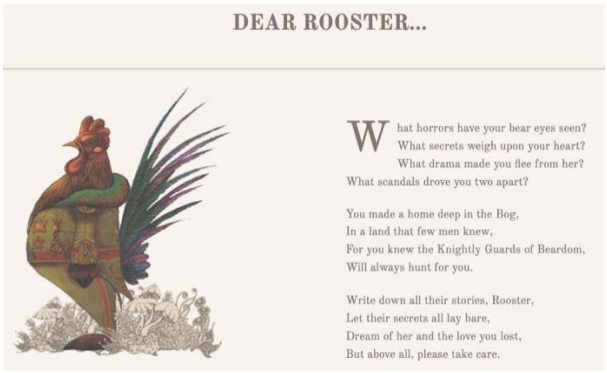


Figure 4.47 Blackheart Gang. “Dear Rooster” from “Poems” in “Work by Medium” sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

From the poem it is assumed that Rooster had a scandalous affair, and was forced to flee to “The Bog”, because he is being hunted. The *Hero/Warrior* status is in jeopardy when his *Lover* character type takes over. This evokes sympathy towards this character due to his lost love.

The Household demonstrates how an array of different kinds of characters can occupy a storyworld. Consider for example the fairy tale “Goldilocks and the three bears”, combine it with some absurdity and you arrive at “Bramblelocks and the four bears” (see figure 4.48).

Figure 4.48 Blackheart Gang. “Bramblelocks and the four bears” from “Sculptures” in “Work by Medium” sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

The four bears obviously relate to the bears of “The Bog”, but the fairy tale connection is an intertextual reference that connects the VUR’s knowledge of fairy tales to *The Household.* The already well-known fairy tale, “Goldilocks and the three bears”, opens up this world to consider different modes of storytelling, but over-throws these norms through association and semantics (from “Goldilocks” – presumably a White girl to “Bramblelocks” – a Black girl, and the three bears are now four). Changing the norms of the traditional fairy tale indicates that, in *The Household,* anything is possible.

In this section, various character types were highlighted and it became clear how these characters contribute towards the backstory, or *mythos* of *The Household.* Throughout this study, deductions have been made that a world’s fictionality depends on the existence of (amongst other elements) characters who do not exist in the actual world (Zipfel, 2015), but it has also been demonstrated that characters can resemble characteristics of real life people. As illustrated in chapter 3 (3.1 Defining storyworlds), a distinction can be made between historical, fictional and counterfactual characters, which furthermore blurs the boundaries among the “real”, fantasy and myth. It, furthermore, highlights the fact that characters are cultural and social constructs in the mind of the VUR, as a character in a transmedial context, is no longer an immanent entity related to a single text (Bertetti, 2014:2344). In this sense, characters are less connected to the text and will also feature in the discussion of the cultural system of *The Household* in chapter five.

The textual information pertaining to descriptions of rooms, characters and events is still necessary as it provides clues that function as mediating texts in the process of discovery. The fictionality of the characters and of *The Household* as storyworld is clear, especially in

the recognition of characters that imply a connection with traditional fairy tales. The context of *The Household,* however, skews the typical character types, for instance the dragon, who is usually perceived as the *Villain,* is in this instance more of a gate-keeper (protector) of the realm. Eddy, a rather small and fragile character, represents the *Hero, Creator* and *Ruler* character types. The existence of counterfactual characters, furthermore, grants the VUP the opportunity to compare both fictional world characters with actual world personae. This strategy seems relevant in the analysis of *The Household,* as some of the characters, such as "Zuma" and "Livingstone" semantically, as well as characteristically relate to the "real" personae. Distortion of typical character types also features in this realm, such as the typical *Caregiver* type that is skewed into a *Destroyer* of the *Innocent* type – "Granny von Ostwitch" uses the "Bubble Button Bunnies" to bake her pies.

Through the investigation into the characters, an underlying interplay of actions and reactions came to light, which is a necessary part of the conditions for narrativity. As Ryan states (2007:29), there should be "some participants in the events" who act as "intelligent agents, who have a mental life and react emotionally to the states of the world" and "[s]ome of the events must be purposeful actions by these agents". The intelligent agents who display emotional reactions to different states of *The Household* and who purposefully act on these emotions, are the subject of the following section.

4.1.3 Events (*fabula / sjuzet*) and emplotment in *The Household*

As mentioned previously, the events in this realm do not follow linear progression (except for *The tale of how,* that has a beginning, middle and end), but focus on instances of narrativity with various *fabulae,* accessed through various entry points, that, when co-constructed in the mind of the VUR, leads to storyworld formation. Although *The tale of how* demonstrates a closed storyline, Otto and the dodos are still at odds in *The Household* as they are woven into the fabric of this storyworld - Otto is still a lingering threat.

Instances of narrativity or events are not in themselves stories, but according to Ryan, "raw material out of which stories are made" (2003). This raw material correlates with signifying signposts, planted by the artist collective in order for the storyworld to cognitively manifest in the mind of the VUR. In other words, one needs to recognise these states or

events, as set out in a world with intelligent agents, who participate in certain happenings or actions that can cause possible changes in the storyworld (see discussion in *2.2.2.3 Space, time and narrative*). Because of the intertwined nature of events and plots in *The Household,* these narrative elements are discussed in one section.

Considering Greimas's *actor/actant* (1987:70) model, happenings or events in *The Household* can be gauged through narrative units that illustrate or explain the actions of a range of characters on a textual level. These actions systematically began to unfold in the sections above, as the character's functions revealed much about the interactions among various *actors/actants.* These interactions often involve tension and conflict, although there are also instances of humour.

Probably one of the most important events is the creation of *The Household*. Due to the laborious efforts of "Eddy the Engineer", the rooms, the wheel that powers this realm, and the sun and moon around the wheel were built. He is also continuously busy with the upkeep of this realm, which seems to be a huge responsibility, due to the extent of *The Household.* This, together with the movement of the wheel (as a result of human bath water flushing down the plughole) and the movement of the sun and moon, are thus ongoing events that contribute to the open-ended nature of this storyworld. Human intervention (taking a bath) is pivotal for the upkeep of *The Household*. This alludes, furthermore, to the fact that without a VUP, *The Household* will have no rationale. The consequences are a constant crossing of ontological boundaries between the intrinsic and extrinsic storyworld (textual actual world) and the actual world - between fantasy and the real.

The boundary between the intrinsic and extrinsic storyworld is represented, not only in the form of "The Crust" (a network of pipes), but also manifests as an *ouroboros* serpent, relatable to "Rachel" (see fig. 3.4 & fig. 4.16), that alludes to ongoing cycles and the alchemic belief that the end is the beginning. Tension is created in the notion that, in order to enter *The Household,* you have to cross between the tip of the serpent's tail and her head. This, in a sense, alludes to a mysterious, mythical storyworld that may even be viewed as "sacred ground", due to the protection needed from "Rachel" and the dragons, who guard the archetypal triumphal arch of *The Household* landing page (figure 4.12). Similarly to Rachel's circle-of-life conception, is the water wheel's turning cycle, indicating that this world itself is an ongoing event and that everything in this world is inter-related.

Resembling the “Wheel of fortune” symbol on the Tarot card (figure 4.14), the water wheel serves as a signifying signpost for the possible fate, change and the mysterious forces of destiny that underlie this realm.

These forces manifest when consequential events in *The Household* are described – these typically represent acts with purposes and effects (Ryan, 1991b:192). Consider for instance “The Kitchen” residents (mostly women) (figure 4.26) who “fraternise with the stinky men” of “The Workshop” (figure 4.49) once a month at dances organised by “Eddy the Engineer”.

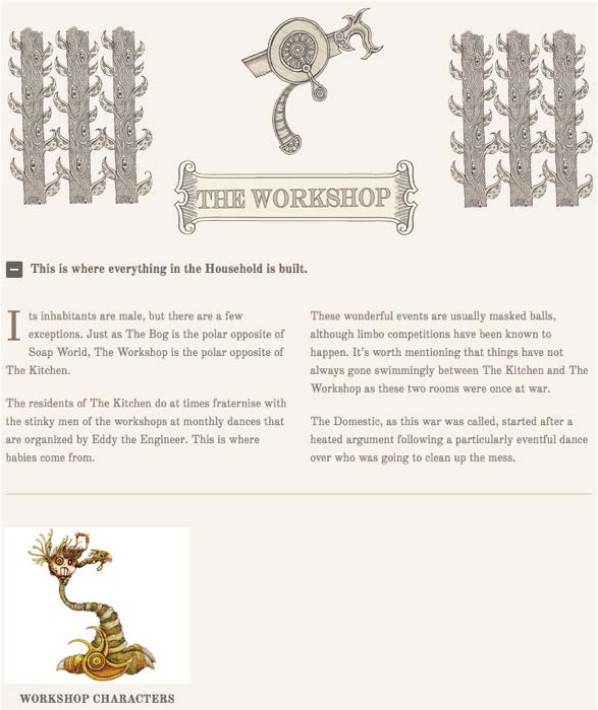


Figure 4.49 Blackheart Gang. “The Workshop” sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

These events give rise to a complex network of relationships that lead to various courses of action. For instance, conflict is inevitable because of the polarity described previously (figure 4.28) and in the text under “The Workshop” sub-menu (figure 4.49). These two groups (*actants*), representative of masculinity and femininity, obviously give reference to gender differences, not only typical to *The Household.* This opens up a range of possible worlds due to the ongoing interactions between different groups or *actants* of *The Household* and the crossing of ontological boundaries between different character groups and their worlds. The issues manifesting in *The Household* are actual world issues that our

society is faced with daily. Although huge strides have been made in narrowing the gaps in gender inequality, there are still much to be done on a socio-cultural level to change perceptions regarding gender inequality. Another socio-cultural issue comes into consideration in the text, as it is mentioned that the monthly dances “is where babies come from” (see figure 4.49). This highlights various social and moral issues that may include licentiousness, having children out of wedlock, the resulting over-population and the further escalation of poverty amongst lower income groups, to name but a few. These social, economic and cultural problems do not only pertain to *The Household,* as storyworld, but also reflect in South Africa’s current circumstances and will be expanded on in chapter five.

In *The Household,* it is not only inhabitants of the rooms opposite to each other, such as “The Kitchen” and “The Workshop”, that clash. One room, “The Bog” (figure 4.44) is the battlefield of two groups, “The Bears” and “The Moles”. In section 4.1.2 (Characters in *The Household*), the moles are described as the custodians, the *Ruler* character type, who first occupied the jungles of “The Bog”. “The Bears”, representing the *Seeker (Explorer)* character type, initially only “harvested the ocean of natural gas found below the jungle”, but as soon as they found honey, “The Moles’” sticky gold, and began “chopping down their jungle”, skirmishes quickly escalated “into one of the bloodiest and drawn out wars in the history of The Bog” (figure 4.44). The events taking place in “The Bog” are based on possible worlds in the minds of the *actants*, especially both parties’ Wish Worlds and Intended Worlds. “The Moles” are described (in the text of the website) as “a droll, primitive lot” who performs “strange rituals” when the moon god of “The Laundry” appears (see figure 4.27). These characteristics, possibly relating to their tribal backstory (see figures 4.38 and 4.40) and perceived in contrast with their proud nature, add a measure of irony and humour to these *Ruler* types. The question is if they can be taken seriously. “The Bears”, on the other hand, are being resented for invading “The Bog”, robbing “The Moles” of their natural resources, and who, as a result of their overindulgence, grew wealthy and fat (see figure 4.50).

Figure 4.50 “Blackheart Gang”. “Sweet amber of division” sculpture and “The first expedition” from the series “Postcards from Molitia”. https://www.instagram.com/postcardsofmolitia/

The result is that both of the group’s Wish Worlds (the desire to prosper) are in jeopardy due to the other’s Intend World (plans and goals). The feared states (desires not met and goals not obtained) of both group’s Wish Worlds and Intend Worlds overlap, and it is in this liminal space that the war rages, not only physically, but also mentally. The characters (“The Bears” and “The Moles”) and their stances toward the storyworld, thus reflect in the ideologically charged war between them. It furthermore reveals their cultural Knowledge Worlds, Obligation worlds, Wish Worlds and Intend Worlds (that I will expand on in chapter 5 – cultural system). These clashes, similar to those between the inhabitants of “The Kitchen” and “The Workshop”, are probably inevitable due to opposing ideologies. In *The tale of how* animation and book, although based on linear storytelling, a similar situation unfolds that lingers on in *The Household*. Although “Otto the monster” gets scrubbed clean by the dodos, he still attacks them, because it is in his nature. Otto, in this sense, represents a *donor persona,* who provides a space and service to the dodos by churning honey and treated water to create shampoo for retail in the “Surface World”. What can be a symbiotic relationship, is tarnished by the Wish Worlds and Intend Worlds of both parties. Otto will probably die if he is not scrubbed regularly and the dodos will not be able to make a living without the help of Otto.

There are various other events taking place in *The Household* on a daily basis, but some are more comparable with events. As a kind of event, a happening “occur[s] without the agency of a specific character” (Abbott, 2008:94). Such happenings include, for instance, disputes in *The Household* as explained in “The Courtroom” sub-section (see figure 4.51).

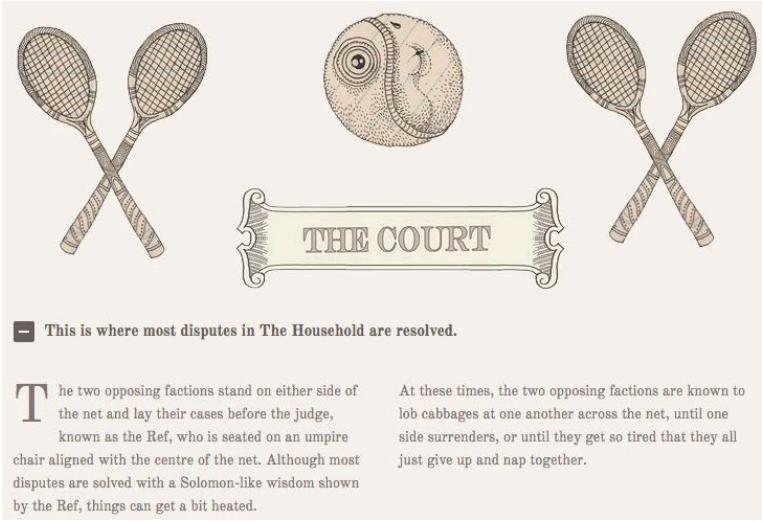


Figure 4.51 Blackheart Gang. “The Courtroom” sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

For any household to run smoothly, the need exists to handle disputes with open-mindedness and wisdom. In *The Household* the “Court” ambiguously refers to both a tennis court and a courtroom (in a court of law). The characters are said to play a game of tennis “until they get so tired that they all just give up and nap together” (see figure 4.51). As such, a serious event turns into an absurd game. Disputes between oppositional parties in a South African context will be explored in more detail in chapter five.

The order of events in a transmedial website with narrative characteristics, as argued in this study, depends on the intuition of the VUR in engaging with the storyworld through different entry points and in their own time. The understanding of the plot of *The Household,* will, as a result, be co-constructed in the mind of the VUR, who is willing to engage with narremes. It is thus necessary to explore various events and the associative mental states manifesting in the wishes, dreams, goals and plans of the characters in order to understand the plot of this storyworld. Ryan (2005:4) highlights the importance of gauging events and mental states of the characters, not only in illustrating the “logical, mental and formal dimension”, but it “gives events coherence, motivation, closure, and intelligibility and turns them into a plot”. In South Africa, for instance, it may be proposed that the politicians lost the plot, because there is little comprehension for the events taking place in this country and they are oblivious to the mental states of their inhabitants.

On the other hand, it is suggested that the plot of *The Household* can develop over time, due to the open-ended nature of this storyworld. Other than the function of plot in classical narratology, that is accepted to illustrate (in a linear fashion) how a story unfolds, develops and progresses **in** time, transmediality requires a wider approach to plot. *Mimetic configuration* or *emplotment,* referring to **how** events are ordered and **what** the relationships between the events are, provides a broader scope for linking individual events with the totality of the plot which these constitute **over** time (Ricœur, 1985:47; see discussion in section *3.3.2.2 The role of language and art as worldmaking strategies in* The Household. Emplotment thus has a strong spatio-temporal underpinning, as investigations into *The Household* demonstrates. Emplotment manifests in the form of a vast textual actual world (showing correlation with our actual world), an online virtual world with various entry points into the storyworld (the **how)**, events in different rooms of *The Household,* playing off **over** thousands of years, and timeous engagement of the VUR with the storyworld at various intervals. What emplotment allows for is the possibility for expansion of plot over time and space, thus adding to the layers of a storyworld.

The co-constructing process of the storyworld by the VUR correlates in a sense with *refiguration* (Ricœur, 1985)*,* which involves the act of reading that informs our understanding of the world and the new perspective that the narrative brings to the world (Simms, 2003:98). The world of *The Household,* plays an important role because, as confirmed by Gambarato (2013:90), the world that a story inhabits, determines the narrative itself, as well as the possibility to expand the transmedia storyworld. On the other hand, the arrangement of certain events, situations and characters, establish connections and patterns amongst them as illustrated in the sections above. I argue that these patterns represent fabulae that are co-constructed through engagement with different sjuzets (stories) and events taking place in the distinct rooms or in the liminal spaces between the rooms. Central to emplotment, one finds conflict between the ladies of “The Kitchen” and the men of “The Workshop”, between “The Moles” and “The Bears” and between “Otto the monster” and the dodos. The *fabulae* are thus co-constructed only after consideration of the different sjuzets and events*.* There is, however, a bigger, underlying metanarrative that manifests in the form of colonialism and the ideologies surrounding it, which will be discussed in chapter 5 – cultural system.

In moving full-circle, back to worldmaking, “the hermeneutic circle between narrative and life” (Ricœur, 1985) is again highlighted. Through *prefiguration*, narrative imitates life and

in turn, life is informed by narrative" (Ricœur, 1985:53). In *The Household* the "hermeneutic circle" even manifests metaphorically in the form of a water wheel that illustrates how human intervention (bathwater) is necessary to power this realm. On a virtual level, the participatory VUR's engagement with the website is also needed to decode the storyworld. As the wheel keeps on turning, the storyworld keeps progressing in the mind of the VUR. The alchemy allegory becomes a possible world that link the mysterious and spiritual reality of this realm to the "real" world, and its ongoing cycles. On the other hand, as the mental model forms in the mind of the VUR to make sense of the storyworld, so too does the reflection of this storyworld, that seems to resemble the world we live in, influence our perception of the actual world. It is suggested that consequentially, this storyworld, *The Household,* can have an influence on the way the VUR perceives life and the actual world we live in. Corrective laughter becomes a possibility (as will be discussed in chapter five), as the VUR is lured into finding humour in certain characters and situations in *The Household*.

4.2 Summary

In this chapter, the pivotal part played by the story system in *The Household* as a transmedial supersystem was explored. Strategies regarding spatio-temporality, the role fulfilled by characters and the events that demonstrates the formal and mental dimensions that give rise to emplotment in a storyworld were highlighted and refined.

At the onset of the analysis it was determined that an understanding of the different worlds involved contextualises the scope of worldmaking in *The Household.* This process was initialised by determining what the world of the author collective, the world of the text (art included) and the world of the VUR entail, although noted that a measure of overlap and crossing of ontological boundaries is unavoidable. The role of the transmedial storyteller, in this instance *The Household*'s (implied) author collective, the "Blackheart Gang", as a conduit in which narrative cues are planted for the viewer to discover at various entry points of the website, was confirmed. Textual elements, planted by the author collective across various semiotic and media channels, were found to constitute the text world (that informs the textual actual world and other possible worlds). These manifested in the form of narrative instances or moments, that explains much about the spatio-temporality, the characters and the events taking place in this world. These moments have spatio-temporal

relevance in terms of how, where and when it is organised by the author collective in terms of the text world and across platforms and how these are perceived by the VUR.

The functions of the fabulae and sjuzet have some relevance, but narrative instances, accessed through temporal decisions made by the VUR, are not dependant on sequentiallity - in the case of a navigable domain such as a website, the sequence in which the fabulae are co-constructed will of course vary with every reading of the text. The sum of these decoding instances in *The Household*, comprising segments of texts (lexias), links and imagery, is responsible for the actualisation of the story system in this storyworld. This configuration of signs thus gives rise to reading as a constructive act, through mediating texts and informed by the cultural-historical context in which the reading takes place. As a result, a text never stands alone, but the VUR attributes meaning to it in the context it is presented and interpreted. This context, according to Smagorinsky (2001:135) may be viewed as "a relationship among people or artefacts and their environments, which typically include multiple sets of overlapping goals, values, discourses, tools, and other residue of social life". This was particularly evident by gauging the characters, character types, and interactions among the character types. In the events that play out in *The Household,* it became clear how incongruous sub-worlds, inhabiting groups with opposing ideologies, stand in conflict against each other. Different social, economic, cultural and political viewpoints and characteristics, result in clashes in the liminal spaces where opposing groups' dreams, aspirations and intend (possible) worlds overlap. Correlations were drawn between *The Household* and South Africa, not only relative to spatio-temporal issues, but also with regard to characters and events. The emplotment manifested through consideration of both the events (through actions of the character groups), and the possible worlds manifesting in the thoughts of the characters.

This particular issue concerning context that is reliant on an VUR who identifies with South African history and who is a willing participant in this storyworld, is further unpacked in chapter five, which addresses the cultural system in which the storyworld functions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis of the cultural and technological systems of *The Household* as storyworld

Introduction

The discussion in this chapter, as a second step towards analysis of *The Household'*s storyworld as transmedial supersystem, evolves from the interpretation arrived at in chapter four regarding worldmaking, space/time, characters and events. In terms of worldmaking, distinctions were drawn between the world of the artist collective, the world of the text and the world of the VUR. It was, furthermore, demonstrated how a measure of overlap among these worlds is evident due to the multi-layered nature of transmedial worldmaking, but also as a result of tangential points in the underlying cultural make-up of relevant worlds. These worlds manifest through various media and technological dimensions (channels) that contribute towards the reading of *The Household*. Because culture and technology are interconnected on various levels, both systems will be analysed in this chapter and additional technological considerations will be highlighted at the end of this chapter.

In chapter four the text world analysis demonstrated how mediating texts involving spatio-temporal dimensions, characters and events, contribute to the realisation that certain socio-cultural, economic and political correlations can be drawn between the text world and its characters and the world of the implied VUR (and in this instance the critic, myself). The world of the artist collective mostly manifests subjectively through creative conceptualisation moments that correlate with what Hall (1973, 2006) refers to as the process of naming, labelling and encoding. The storyworld is thus encoded by the artist collective who brings their own knowledge world, with distinct cultural underpinnings into the storyworld formation. These signifying signposts or narrative cues were discovered at various entry points of the website, and contribute toward storyworld co-construction. The arguments throughout this chapter will thus flow from examples in the textual actual world of *The Household* recognised mainly as cultural signifiers. A cultural analysis will be perceived through technological media and channels pertinent to this reading.

The cultural and technological systems framework (see table 5.1) is extracted from the structure suggested in chapter three, whereby a transmedial supersystem is gauged

through analysis of the story system, the cultural system and the technological system. The cultural system pertains to distinctions between the exterior culture that include media (language and art) as well as the external cultural point of view through which technological channels come into play. This analysis will be followed by a synopsis of how the cultural and technological systems contribute towards an analysis of *The Household*.

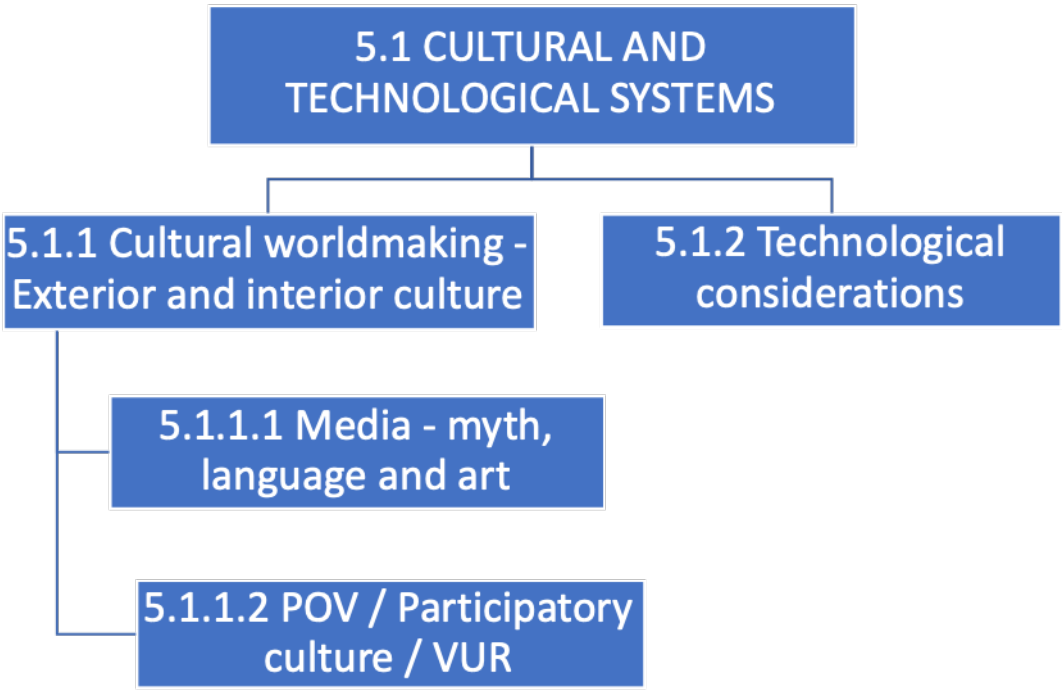


Table 5.1 Cultural and technological systems extracted from the transmedial supersystem framework (also see Table 3.1)

5.1 Cultural and technological systems in *The Household* – applying the theoretical approach

The term *culture*, as defined by South African History Online (SAHO, n.d.)[98], traditionally referred to specific groups of people's behaviour, "belief systems, values, customs, dress, personal decoration, social relationships, religion, symbols and codes". Although the notion of culture is complex and often contested, it remains a very useful and necessary term for engaging with aspects of life in various contexts. The present discussion does not dwell on debates pertaining to what the concept culture might entail, but rather sets out to present brief and useful definitions that will find application in the analysis that follows.

98 https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-apartheid-south-africa

UNESCO[99] defines culture as "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (UNESCO, 2001). Beliefs and values are not measurable, but by gauging associated behaviours and practices, a sense of culture may be achieved (UNESCO, 2009). In a globalised network of countries and cultures, conceptual foundations and methodologies are required to arrive at a common understanding of culture. Nünning and Nünning (2010:11) suggest finding "theoretically consistent and empirically well-founded solutions" applicable to cultural studies. I argue that these solutions are grounded in a constructivist perspective of worldmaking (see discussions 3.3 Transmedial storyworld co-construction in *The Household* and Goodman, 1978), according to which cultural knowledge can never objectively represent real events or cultural changes (Nünning & Nünning, 2010:11). In a literary sense, Goodman's analytical approach to worldmaking (in his pivotal publication *Ways of worldmaking*, 1978) provides a platform from which to expand on notions of cultural worldmaking. What is, however, lacking in his approach are the subject areas of "values, knowledge, and history" (Mitchell, 1991:24). Goodman does, however, acknowledge that *knowing* pertains to a heightened sense of "acuity of insight or in range of comprehension, rather than a change in belief" resulting in the "advancement in understanding" (1978:22), which indicates a readiness to recognise alternative worlds (1978:21). Thus, Goodman suggests that knowing is also remaking, and as such storyworld knowledge and actual world knowledge are co-constructions in the mind of the VUR. Nünning and Nünning (2010:3), in concurrence with Mitchell's (1991) accentuation of values, knowledge, and history, suggest that the study of culture has a bearing on cultural ways of worldmaking, our collective identities and scholarly practices. A volume in the publication *Cultural ways of worldmaking* (Nünning *et al.,* 2010) is devoted to an elaboration of these notions of contexts, culture(s), values, functions, and history (or histories). These elements, in relation to cultural worldmaking in *The Household* are considered in the discussion below.

[99] The constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was adopted by 20 countries at the London Conference in November 1945 and came into effect on 4 November 1946. The Organization currently has 193 Member States and 7 Associate Members (UNESCO, 2009).

5.1.1 Cultural worldmaking - Exterior and interior culture

As demonstrated in chapter four, meaning-making is not only dependent on the encoded information provided by the artist collective, but is also filtered through the text world and the world of the VUR, as these bring their own knowledge worlds into the process of storyworld co-construction. In the process of narrative meaning-making, the VUR decodes these narrative instances by way of his/her own knowledge world. In this context, distinctions should be made between the factual, the counter-factual and the historical through consideration of the "principle of minimal departure", described by Ryan (1991:51) to involve the following:

> [T]he principle of minimal departure states that we reconstrue the central world of a textual universe in the same way we reconstrue the alternate possible worlds of nonfactual statements: as conforming as far as possible to our representation of AW [actual world]. We will project upon these worlds everything we know about reality, and we will make only the adjustments dictated by the text.

In this sense the VUR will gauge the storyworld with reference to what is represented in the text world as well as through mental representations that are manifested in the character's encounters and possible worlds. Such encounters provide a platform from which to establish the "human significance of physical events and actions" in narrative meaning-making (Ryan, 2012). The reception of cultural signifying signposts in *The Household*, for each VUR across different cultural societies and contexts will differ.

The complicated relationship between text and context is explained by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson in their seminal publication *Semiotics and art history* (1991) where they refer to Jonathan Culler's (1981) argument that context is itself a text that is composed of signs that need interpretation and, as such, one should not assume that the meaning of a text, or an artwork, is necessarily "explained" by context. Since context is a construction, Bal and Bryson (1991:175) – again following Culler's (1988:xiv) notions regarding context – prefer to use the term "framing" of signs instead of context. Jørgen Bruhn (2010:2) aptly summarises this notion: "one does not *find* a context – one constructs a frame". Within these frames, signs have different meanings for different people or different cultural groups. As explained by Smagorinsky (2001:136), the dominant culture often has the "power to define their version of reality as reality, thus establishing their values as authoritative and sovereign". This is a form of cultural hegemony. In a country such as South Africa, cultural dominance is not necessarily clear-cut due to the country's (changing) multicultural landscape. The "model reader", in this regard, should be

contextually and culturally predisposed to the given text, thus relating to a "cultural-historical reality" in and for which the narrative was created (Ronen, 1994:15, see discussion in chapter 3.1 Defining storyworlds). Relating to the "model reader", Smagorinsky states that "how a sign comes to mean is a function of how a reader is encultured to read" (2001:137). This notion highlights the fact that every reading or "framing" of signs is subjective, constructed and variable, depending on the enculturation of the VUR. In other words, every sign is a cultural construct.

South Africa, the country of origin of the artist collective, of the implied VUR and of myself, is characterised as culturally and ethnically diverse, with widespread social, economic and political challenges. This country's population is not only historically infamous for racial intolerance, but gender issues are also a subject of contention in this country. Manifestations of these issues relating to culture that can be described as "exterior" (or *extradiegetic*) cultural issues are also evident in the story system of *The Household's* interior (*intradiegetic*) culture. These correlations are highlighted in the discussion below by firstly referring to relevant signifying signposts in the interior culture of the story system. As mentioned in chapter three (3.3.2 Cognition of *The Household* storyworld), different types of media[100] (technology) are also carriers of cultural meaning, and relay the cultural point of view, language (institutions) and cultural artefacts (art) of a cultural storyworld system.

In gauging cultural ways of worldmaking in *The Household*, the present discussion draws on the theoretical investigation into narrative and transmedial strategies for worldmaking in chapter three (3.3 Transmedial storyworld co-construction in *The Household*). A cultural system, not only in the context of a storyworld, but also pertaining to the actual world, is dependent upon underlying worldviews, that are in turn based on forces of myth, art, language and reflections of these in media, among others. These worldviews (for instance, as evident in different cultural groups in one society, such as South Africa) can be similar to a degree, but if value systems differ, tension and/or conflict can ensue, as was demonstrated in the discussion of the story system of *The Household*. It is thus necessary to consider *ethos* as driving force and moral compass behind culture in order to

[100] In this regard, the terms "medium-specific" and "medium-free", as well as the various meanings of *media* or medium, as discussed in chapter two (2.2.1 Media and transmedia), also have relevance. "Medium-free" was found to pertain more to (analytical) narrativity and its components (such as space, time, character and events) in the textual actual world of *The Household*, whereas "medium-specific" concerns the affordances and limitations of mediums that serve as conduits of narrativity to the actual (exterior) world on a cognitive level.

understand the *mythos* (backstories) in worldmaking. *Ethos* in a world-internal context reveals the perception of the world through the eyes of the characters, such as the good vs. the bad and conflict vs. peace. This also relates to possible worlds theory, as the private worlds of the characters, in terms of fantasies, dreams, wishes and desires are considered.

The following section considers myth, language and art as cultural constructs and how these manifest through media. Observations made in the story system's text world will be followed by theoretical considerations of significance to this study.

5.1.1.1 Media – myth, language and art in The Household

Culture manifests in the collective unconscious of a society through myth (as backstories) and underlying forces that bind societies together (see discussion in *3.3.2.1 Discovering myth as worldmaking strategy in* The Household). Culture (much in the same vein as political and economic policies) is regarded mainly as a contextual phenomenon that characterises different societies, but Chen (2008) adds that "culture clearly influences societal or community-level activities and structures (e.g., political and economic policies) and, at the same time, individual beliefs, emotions, and behaviors". In this regard, Nünning and Nünning (2010:12) consider three domains of worldmaking: self-making, community-making and literary worldmaking and the important role of narratives, literary genres and artistic media as world-building institutions.

In self-making, narratives make sense of life by giving structure to experiences. The manner in which narratives provide structure to our experiences manifests, amongst others, in the ways that genres are structured. Literary genres (for instance drama, fables, fairy tales, fantasy and fiction) relate to self-making and community worldmaking by providing "the necessary and salient frames, scripts and schemata for narrating coherent selves and building worlds" (Nünning & Nünning, 2010:13). The events that take place in *The Household* also contribute as stories we tell about ourselves, and, result in self-making, as will be demonstrated below.

In terms of community-making, the society that we live in serves as a cultural model with embedded culturally available plots and values (Nünning & Nünning, 2010:13). The cultural model can relate to the *mythos* of a society – the central knowledge one needs to interact with or interpret events in the world successfully (Klastrup *et al.,* 2004; Von Stackelberg, 2015). This central knowledge is situated in collective identities that come to

be as a result of the stories that communities tell about themselves. An example of such collective identities in *The Household* manifest, amongst others, in “The Kitchen”, where all of the food is produced (see figure 5.1).

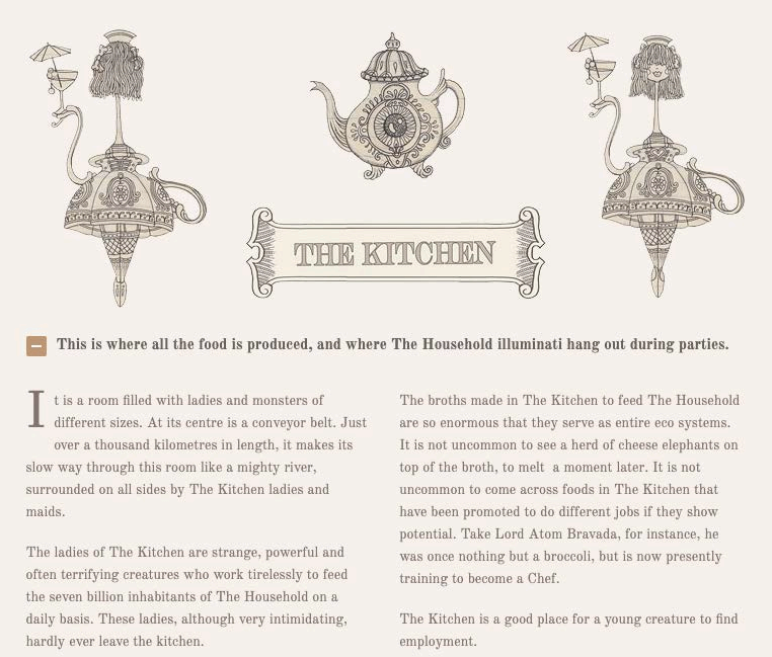


Figure 5.1 Blackheart Gang. “The Kitchen” sub-menu (top half of page) http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

In the text of “The Kitchen” sub-menu mention is made of ladies (“The Kitchen ladies”), maids and monsters. Only women prevail in “The Kitchen” (with one exception that will be discussed at a later stage), which seems like a rather archaic notion indeed. On the other hand, the ladies of “The Kitchen” are described as being “strange”, intimidating” and “powerful”, but also “often terrible creatures”, that might provoke fear in those who dare to enter “The Kitchen”. This notion creates a sense that they take pride in the work they do and as such, “hardly ever leave the kitchen”. It furthermore attributes to them a *Ruler* status in terms of character types. In a world inhabited by seven billion inhabitants, employment is probably rarely found. For this reason, according to the text, “The Kitchen is a good place for a young creature to find employment”.

These circumstances seem all too familiar in a South African context. For purposes of this study, correlations can be drawn between *The Household* and the external cultural model of South African society, where various affiliations are clustered (whether naturally or unnaturally) in terms of socio-economic, socio-political and cultural communities made up of different genders, races and classes. Consider, for example, “The Kitchen ladies and

maids” (see figure 5.1) of *The Household*, who correspond to black women in South Africa and who constitute most of the domestic work force (Stats SA, 2020). When one considers the term “domestic” which is an adjective indicating *local, native* and *not foreign* (Collins, 1994:247), it becomes thick with meaning, especially in a South African context. The term “domestic” worker will usually refer to a person who does the cooking and cleaning in private households, and according to Stats SA (2020), there are just over one million domestic workers in South Africa, of whom most are black women (working in white households). The contentious issues are highlighted by Landau:

> Apartheid turned black South Africans into ‘foreign natives’ within the country, guests of the South African Republic should they stray beyond the ‘homelands’ (dubbed Bantustans) to which they ostensibly belonged. In law, if not always in practice, black South Africans were made temporary sojourners in the city, aliens whose usefulness lasted only for as long as it could build the city, care for gardens and pools, or nurture white children (2010:7).

This touches upon socio-economic and cultural realities in South Africa, that originated in the early history of this country. Apartheid, built on early colonial partiality, is tainted with social, cultural, political and economic inequalities. The results included black and coloured groups being pressurised to migrate to urban and metropolitan regions in search of employment. This furthermore gave rise to separation and isolation due to unravelling family structures, living apart from partners and having to leave their children with family members for long periods of time (Peberdy & Dinat, 2005:1).

Another character that features twice in the imagery at the bottom section of “The Kitchen” sub-menu page of *The Household* (see figure 5.2) is Fathia. The recurrence of this character, and specifically in “The Kitchen” sub-menu seems significant.

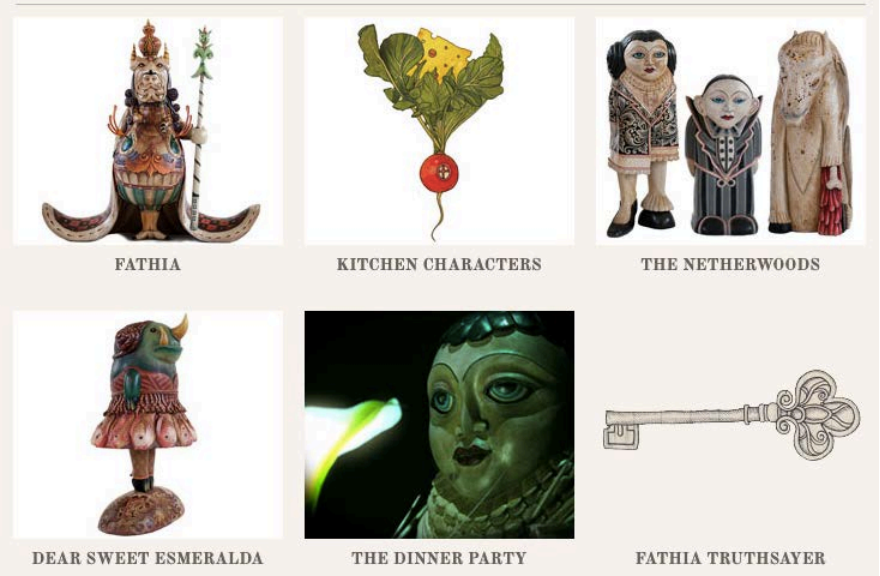


Figure 5.2 Blackheart Gang. “The Kitchen” sub-menu (bottom half of page) http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

In typical fairy tale style, Fathia is represented in the form of a sculpture carved in wood and beautifully painted (see figure 5.3). In the caption or story at the bottom of the sculpture, it is explained that Fathia (actually a teardrop in disguise) is a result of an illicit union between her mother and the river, who “loved her - and cried as she cried”.

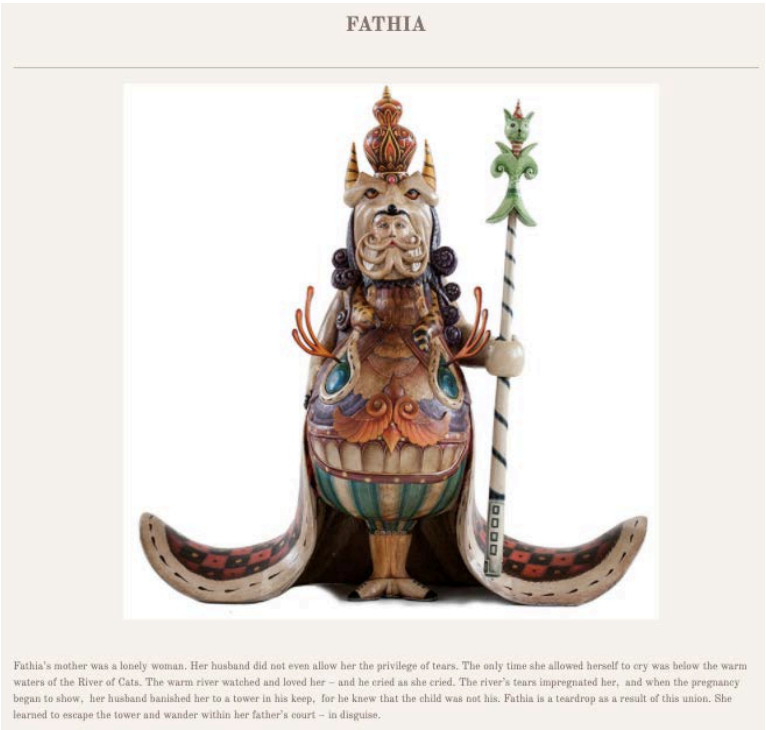


Figure 5.3 Blackheart Gang. “Fathia”. Wood sculpture and paint. “The Kitchen” sub-menu (bottom half of page) http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

Fathia's disguise is playful, but elaborate, with decorative elements resembling a czar's cloak and crown. However, the teardrop shape of her figure is still evident underneath the masks and layers of attire. This figure shows significant resemblance with a mythical Egyptian goddess, namely Bastet (see figure 5.4) in terms of the cat head, decorative attire and staff (in fig. 5.4B).

A B

Figure 5.4 A) Veronese design Bastet Egyptian goddess of protection. Cold cast bronze. Collectible statue sculpture. 15cm x 9cm x 25cm. https://www.amazon.com/veronese-design-egyptian-protection-sculpture/dp/b07wwbsyx9 B) Egyptian feline goddess Bastet cat with slain snake apep tail holding spear & shield statue. Composite resin. Collectible statue sculpture. 14cm x 11cm x 27cm. https://www.amazon.com/ebros-egyptian-goddess-protection-figurine/dp/b083d16qrm

Bastet is said to be the goddess of the home, domesticity, women's secrets, cats, fertility and childbirth (Mark, 2016). The associations relating to *The Household* include the story relating how Fathia's mother secretly fell in love with the "river of cats", who impregnated her. Fathia's disguise, in the form of a cloak and masks, as she wanders within her father's court, conceals the secret of her presence (after being banished, together with her mother, to a tower).

But why is Fathia present in "The Kitchen", besides being goddess of domesticity? An association can be made with the semantic / homophonic correlation of the names Fathia and Fabia – last-mentioned was Ree Treweek's childhood nanny, who relayed

mythological stories to her, as previously mentioned. The “concealed” presence of Fabia in “the Kitchen” gives rise to a connection being made with a maid; however, in a conventional South African household, she will not only cook meals, but will also do cleaning of the house and be a nanny for the children. Fathia, on the other hand, who is the goddess of domesticity and of the home, together with correlations with Fabia, as a result necessarily raises Fabia to the status of a deity of *The Household*. Fabia in this regard is made a *Ruler* character type, but it can also be deduced that she is a *Creator* character type, due to her inputs with regard to the creation of *The Household* through oral storytelling. Fathia’s majestic appearance thus justifies her deity status, but irony is created by viewing her in the context of a kitchen lady, a rather domestic place of work.

The fact that Fathia, and for that matter Fabia plays such an important role in *The Household* can be attributed to the possible influence Fabia had on a white child growing up in an Apartheid system. Myths, as an escape from reality and a means of making sense of the world we live in, became reality for an impressionable young girl. An upbringing in an Apartheid era with ideologies of white supremacy and segregation principles, often accepted as part of white South African’s knowledge world, concealed many gruesome realities of the past. Events that take place in our lives usually guide the stories we tell about ourselves, and, as such, inform self-making. Narratives (stories and storytelling) can even contribute towards identity formation, remembering (memory) and negotiating values (Eakin, 1999). Self-making, thus, is influenced not only by personal stories but also by one’s direct environment and events taking place in communities, societies and the country one lives in. Cultural exchange became a reality for Ree and her nanny Fabia due to a relationship between a domestic worker and the children of the household she worked in.

Through the years, since the end of Apartheid, the possibility became clear that, over generations, ideologies, beliefs and values may change. Cultural exchange may even have a bearing on belief systems and the like. As highlighted previously (in chapter three - *3.3.2.1 Discovering myth as worldmaking strategy in* The Household), in terms of mythology, the expansion and re-shaping of mythologies can give rise to neo-mythologies, resulting in cultural paradigm shifts (Alexander, 2017:121). The term used by Berry (2015:520) that relates to this phenomenon and that is associated with the process of socialisation is *acculturation*:

> … the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At the group level, it involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices. At the individual level, it

> involves changes in a person's behavioral repertoire; these psychological changes come about through a long-term process. Acculturation is a process that parallels many features of the process of socialization. Acculturation may follow individuals' initial socialization into their own culture (e.g., after immigration to a new society); it may also take place at the same time (e.g., among members of ethnocultural communities that are involved with two cultures within one country) … [T]he processes of socialization and acculturation are considered to be distinguishable features of the general concept of *cultural transmission*.

Although Fabia, like many other domestic workers who had to migrate to cities and urban areas, she had to adapt to the language spoken by her employers. This situation, however, made cultural exchange a possibility, and this happens through oral transmission of mythology, breathed life into *The Household.* Language functions on multiple levels in *The Household,* not only through oral storytelling. Casini explains the role of language as follows:

> … language is a network of relationships and relationships between signs, that is, a reference system that welcomes all possible concrete ways of speaking and allows their categorization. But at the same time, language is a historical and social system linked to people's lives because it cannot exist outside of society (2020:19)

As part of the internal culture in *The tale of How* animation, for instance, a dramatic male voice-over lyrically transcribes the story playing out. The opera music drama[101] with animated scenes, relays the tragic fate of a dodo community terrorised by *Otto the monster* and saved by their hero, *Eddy the engineer*. None of the characters in *The Household* are attributed speech, although *Eddy the engineer* (both a narrator and a character), the saviour of the dodos, lyrically "speaks" a few lines in *The tale of how* animation, in a high-English, dramatic voice. He uses the dominant language of the rest of the website. Other language cues that manifest through "naming" in *The Household,* such as *Shangoma* (in traditional languages it means "traditional healer", see figure 4.40), and "the pious father Zuma", (the name "Zuma" appears in the poem at the bottom of figure 4.42 and is traditionally a Zulu name). There are, however, also a few other linguistic cues that relate to other cultures and languages. The name of the strange character, "Granny von Ostwitch" has semantic inclinations, linking this *Villain* character type to the *Auschwitz* concentration camp operated by Nazi Germany during World War II and the Holocaust, as mentioned in chapter four. Her association with death camps makes sense when one considers the gruesomeness of "Granny" (see poem in figure 4.36) against the *Innocents,* the "Bubble Button Bunnies". The

101 The soundtrack to *The tale of how* was composed by Markus Smit (Wormstorm), who also recorded the voice artists and his cousin, Jannes Henrikz (who is often described as the third member of the "Blackheart Gang") composed the computer renders into his scenes and did the final camera animations.

example of “Granny” shows that through tongue-in-cheek linguistics, the evils of the world are laid bare, which might have an influence on the private worlds of the characters, and possible worlds of dreams and desires they may have of freedom, peace and basic survival. Through intertextual references, overlapping spaces are created that allow for contemplation of the *ethos* of *The Household*. This cognitive space informs the cultural system of this storyworld, but also allows for a wider knowledge world that transgresses the boundaries of *The Household* and its framing in a South African context. It touches on the *ethos* of the world/universe, with perhaps as its main driving force, the dichotomy of good and evil.

Other assimilations are recognised in the appropriation of typical European fables and fairy tales, such as “Goldilocks and the three bears” that is transformed into “Bramblelocks and the four bears” (see figure 4.48). Bramble, referring to a prickly plant or shrub, such as the blackberry (Collins, 2020), implies that the typical European girl, with golden hairlocks, is now a black girl, thus overthrowing conventions of storytelling and folklore.

Language, as mentioned above, also features as a historical and social system. The discussion in section *3.3.2.1* (*Discovering myth as worldmaking strategy in* The Household) illustrated that the perception of myth, language, art and other semiotic systems is culturally and ideologically charged. English is mostly seen, in the context of this study, as the language of the coloniser. Furthermore, the cultural significance of English as the dominant language in the written and spoken word in *The Household* and related paratexts, probably has its roots in English as language of instruction in most sectors of education and academia in South Africa (and most of the western world). At present, English is viewed as a wide-spread representational language, although for many, English is not their first language (myself included). It does seem though that indigenous languages thrive on social media in smaller communities, as the multiple contributions in the publication *African language, digital media and communication* (Salawu *ed.,* 2019), amongst others, illustrate. Language as a means of communication is possibly in its purest form when perceived in the cultural context of one’s mother-tongue. However, in the South African context, English still prevails as mainstream media language and many cultural societies had to assimilate this dominant language through processes of socialization and acculturation.

The assimilation of cultures resulting from processes of colonisation, migration to cities due to industrialisation, socialisation and institutionalisation, gave rise to certain cultures having to adapt to the language and institutions of the coloniser as a means of survival and in order to retain a “voice” (Shohat & Stam, 1994:193). *Appropriation* of aspects of the imperial culture can happen in terms of language, forms of writing, film, theatre, even modes of thought and argument such as rationalism, logic and analysis – that may be of use to these societies in articulating their own social and cultural identities (Ashcroft *et al*.,

1998:19). On the other hand, appropriation is not always a one-way street. African and other countires' cultures, languages and art have influenced western art and language through cultural exchange. *The Household* shows similar cultural exchanges in terms of the language of art that will be highlighted below.

In *The Household* sections, various instances of imagery are incorporated that are produced in a variety of mediums, such as etchings, paintings, drawings, painted wood sculptures, a printed book and digital animation. These media are all encoded with their own cultural value as examples below will illustrate. Cultural approaches to language and art in transmedial storytelling reflect both on the textual actual world in which the characters function and how they perceive their interior and exterior worlds, and on the actual world, with regards to the collective interior and exterior world in which the VUR and artist collective function. *The Household*-website employs spatio-temporal image-language combinations, moving images (such as animations) and digital texts, which each makes a unique contribution toward meaning-making and worldmaking processes of the cultural system of *The Household*. Coded information is also provided in depictions of sculpture, still images (hand-drawn, painted, etched and electronically manipulated images), and sound. Such art media (see discussion, 2.2.1 Media and transmedia) also have cultural significance in the manner they communicate through, for instance, the language of art.

In the section on "Work by Medium", paintings and etchings feature that are traditionally more connected to high art conventions. Theatrically staged scenes, in, for example, the etching of "Bashaar Barry" in figure 5.5 reminds of the dramatized Renaissance etchings of, for example, Rembrandt van Rijn (see for example "The angels appearing to the shepherds" in figure 5.6).

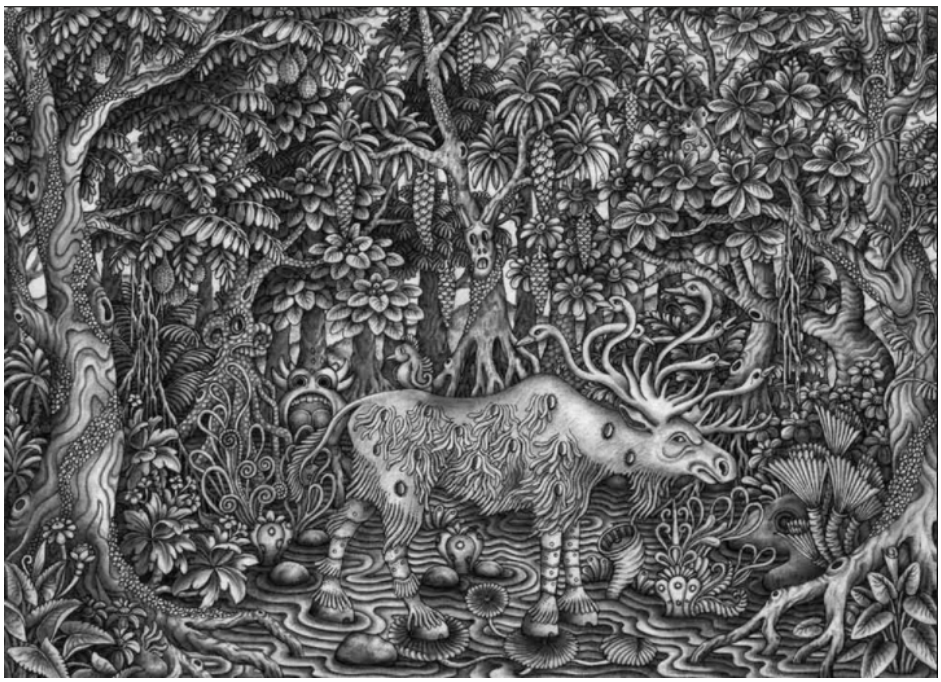


Figure 5.5 Blackheart Gang. “Bashaar Barry”. Etching under “Work by Medium”. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/portfolio/detail/bashaar-barry/

Figure 5.6 Rembrandt. 1634. “The angels appearing to the shepherds”. Etching. Russian collection. https://sites.google.com/site/rembrandtetchings/home/the-angels-appearing-to-the-shepherds

The staging, dramatization and meticulous rendering of every mark in the tradition of etching (relating to the genre of Renaissance and Baroque art), add not only to spatial immersion, but also to temporal immersion. It transfers *The Household* back centuries and positions it as an age-old world. Painting as a sign system is also a long-standing art convention. In *The Household* the paintings stylistically remind one of Renaissance and Baroque art in terms of high contrast and rich colour use, but more so in terms of the compositional staging of the scenes. However, all the paintings, in the section "Work by Medium" is executed in monochrome. The reason for this is explained in an interview with Treweek[102] who prefers colouring in Adobe Photoshop software. The coloured example of "Burpies wander" in figure 5.8 shows dramatic colour-use, mainly inspired by the art of Patrick Woodroffe, Hieronymus Bosch, Medieval art, Russian Folk art, Mayan art and Eastern art, Indonesian temples, puppetry and craft[103], amongst others.

Figure 5.7 Blackheart Gang. "Burpies wander". Painting under "Work by Medium". http://www.thehousehold.xyz/portfolio/detail/burpies-wander/

102 http://siouxwire-annex.blogspot.com/2007/05/interview-blackheart-gang-ree-treweek.html
103 http://siouxwire-annex.blogspot.com/2007/05/interview-blackheart-gang-ree-treweek.html

Figure 5.8 Blackheart Gang. “Burpies wander”. Print under “Work by Medium”. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/work/

Stylistic qualities in the etchings and paintings in *The Household* show definite influences gleaned from different parts of the world and various art styles and conventions. Consider for example the work of Indonesian artists Gusti Ketut Kobot and Nyoma Jendra in figures 5.9 and 5.10. Such works probably influenced Ree on her visits to Indonesia as correlations can be drawn between figure 5.7 and 5.9 in terms of the vintage-type, monochromatic colour use, the detailed, full compositions and the fantastical characters. Figure 5.10 also shows detailed compositions, but the rich colour corresponds with the colourful prints of *The Household,* for example figure 5.8.

Figure 5.9 Gusti Ketut Kobot. “Burning the Book of Knowledge”. Canvas and monogram. https://gleefulgrandiva.com/2016/06/24/bali-stories-weak-can-conquer-strong/

Figure 5.10 Nyoman Jendra. Title unknown. https://indonesia.tripcanvas.co/bali/art-paintings-wood-carving/

Not only was Ree influenced by paintings and prints from Indonesia, but the sculptures in *The Household* carved from wood (see examples in figure 5.11), also show influences of typical woodcraft from this country.

Figure 5.11 Blackheart Gang. “Keeper of Secrets” and “Crown for a head”. Wood sculpture and paint. “Sculptures” sub-menuin “Work by Medium” sub-menu http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

Ree explained in an interview[104] that she had five sculptures made in Indonesia when she visited the country (see, amongst others, figure 5.11). These woodcarvings also had an influence on the production and execution of a range of sculptures found under “Sculptures” in the “Work by Medium” sub-section of *The Household* and the

104 http://siouxwire.blogspot.com/2007/05/interview-blackheart-gang-ree-treweek.html

"postcardsofmolitia" Instagram page[105]. The hand-crafted feel of the sculptures can be observed in the example of typical Indonesian commercial sculptures in figure 5.12. The sculptures of *The Household,* on the other hand, are colourfully painted and adorned with small details, such as the crown and cloak with fine jewellery details in figure 5.11.

Figure 5.12 Commercial sculpture sold in Indonesia. https://www.exoticcarving.com

In *The Household,* "Sweet amber of division", featuring in the sub-section "Work by Medium" is a wood sculpture with carvings stylistically relating to sculptures from Indonesian craft markets (figure 5.12). The manner in which the sculptures in *The Household* is painted with decorative patterns shows characteristics of Russian folk art paintings and decoration (see figure 5.13). The example of Pysanky eggs is indicative of Ukrainian folk designs using a wax-resist method of "inscribing" decorative patterns onto the eggs[106]. The look-and-feel of "Sweet amber of division" and other artworks in *The Household*, although influenced by various cultural art practices and conventions, is quite unique in the combination of stylistic approaches.

105 https://www.instagram.com/postcardsofmolitia/?hl=en

106 https://davesgarden.com/guides/articles/floral-folk-art-of-russia-and-ukraine

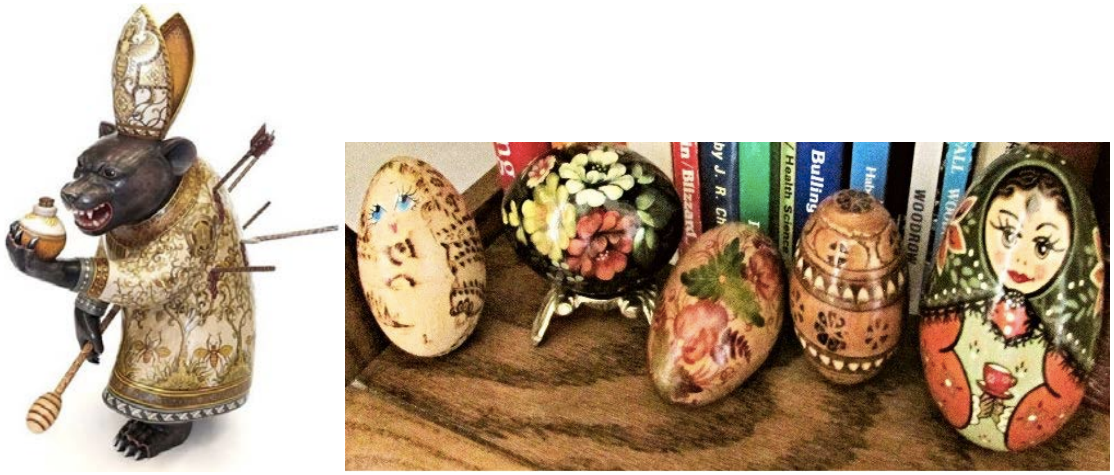


Figure 5.13 Blackheart Gang. “Sweet amber of division”. Wooden sculpture and paint. https://www.instagram.com/postcardsofmolitia/ compared with “Pysanky eggs” in “Floral folk art of Russia and Ukraine”, 2020, https://davesgarden.com/guides/articles/floral-folk-art-of-russia-and-ukraine

This sculpture furthermore contains thematic intertextual references to conflict between two cultural tribes resulting from a battle for resources – honey is the “sweet amber” resource referred to in the title. The theme of portraying Martyrdom is recognised in the multiple arrows stuck in the back of the bear in figure 5.13. Consider, for example, the Renaissance painting, *The martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* that exemplifies this convention (figure 5.14).

Figure 5.14 Guido Reni. “The martyrdom of Saint Sebastian”. Oil on canvas. 100 x 75cm. http://www.artnet.com/artists/guido-reni/the-martyrdom-of-saint-sebastian-ehSbnhy5dlboU0hrlCMuuw2

Martyrdom, referring to the state of being killed or made to suffer greatly because of religious or political beliefs, seems relevant in the battle between the moles and the bears in *The Household*. The wounded bear with arrows in his back consequently relays the notion that this world is morally driven and an underlying *ethos* is present. The bear in figure 5.13 is associated with the coloniser of the jungles of "The Bog" and thus suggests that he is a martyr for his tribe's selfish ideologies and beliefs. Characters, such as the bear in figure 5.13, thus, become ideological vessels – with the bear a representation of the coloniser and the mole representing the colonised (see figure 5.15). The war between the moles and the bears over "Jungle Honey" - as a result of the struggle for resources, as well as superiority over everyone and everything in the jungles of *The Household* – is thus iconic of the long struggle among various cultural groups in South Africa for land, freedom, democracy and equality.

Figure 5.15 Blackheart Gang. "Sweet Amber". "Paintings" under "Work by medium" sub-menu. http://www.thehousehold.xyz/

Besides the subject matter of war and conflict in *The Household,* due to colonisation and different ideologies in South Africa, conflict between the polar opposite groups of "The Workshop" and "The Kitchen" (see figures 4.28 & 4.49) manifested in the story system of chapter four and highlighted gender issues that reflects in the "real" world.

Analysing features, characteristics, relationships and socio-cultural stances of the characters in the storyworld, requires an understanding of how characters experience (what they perceive to be) their authentic world. As a result, the characters' interior worlds

are laid bare. The exterior world of culture, however, requires an understanding of the *ethos* of different cultures in a community. Society in general has its own ideologies and hierarchies, for instance, certain cultures are in favour of a patriarchal system, where in terms of gender roles, women are assumed to be subordinate to men, and only capable of performing duties relating to care-giving and housekeeping. The societal, intellectual and economic contributions made by women in various societies or cultures are often not acknowledged. Government addresses gender discrimination and promotes the upliftment of women and other gender groups, who are seen as previously disregarded and disadvantaged, by regularly propounding related policies. However, deeply ingrained patterns of beliefs and values do not change overnight.

Ryan's (2004) modal system of the authentic worlds - consisting of *Knowledge World, Obligation World, Wish World and Intend World* – is again relevant to determine the characters' knowledge of their authentic world, and knowledge of other characters within their world (*topos*); cultural rules and moral principles, commitments and prohibitions (*ethos*); the characters' personal desires (*ethos*); and goals and aspirations of the characters within the storyworld (*ethos*) (and their reflection on their exterior world). The characters and their stances towards the storyworld thus guide the VUR to gauge cultural aspects in the text world with regard to the story system of *The Household*.

The private worlds (in terms of possible worlds theory) of the bears as a collective tribe thus show signs of conquering desires for land and resources, at all costs, as well as social and economic prosperity. Intentions include to extract as many of the resources as possible and to live comfortable lives. This reflects the colonising endeavours of western societies. On the other hand, the moles' Knowledge World is overthrown, obliging them to defend their land and resources. As a result a yearning for freedom and equality ensues. In some instances cultural exchange is not a given. Views and beliefs are not always shared and elements of one culture can also become the Wish World of another.

In this section the cultural system was analysed by considering the role of mythology, language and art in cultural worldmaking. The contribution narratives make towards worldmaking and making sense of life (through self-making and community-making) became quite clear. Literary genres, language and art as language, as demonstrated above, are carriers of cultural meaning.

The cultural model of what we understand community to be is dependent on the underlying knowledge worlds (*mythos*) that we need to understand and interact with events in our world. The following section interprets such interactions and events in order to arrive at a sense of collective identities that come to be as a result of the stories that communities tell about themselves.

5.1.1.2 Point of view / Participatory culture / VUR

Point of view is a term used by Henry James (1843-1916) in his pivotal publication *The point of view* ([1882] 2004) to explain the angle from which a story is told. His view shifted the observation of actions in the story that was usually viewed through the characters' eyes, to viewing it through the eyes of the VUR. The function of the VUR was addressed in chapter two (*2.2.2.2 Meaning-making: author / narration / navigation)* where the co-constructive role of the VUR through the navigation process was determined.

In both self-making and community-making media is an influential system in the formation and distribution of central knowledge of individual and collective identities as reiterated by Nünning and Nünning:

> "[M]edia … serve[s] to reinforce these narrative communities by disseminating culturally prevalent stories and plots as well as the values and norms the latter serve to reinforce and inculcate" (2010:14).

Traditionally, the manner in which cultural knowledge was transmitted between society members occurred mainly through oral storytelling (although a long history of visual storytelling, manifesting, for instance, in early cave paintings, also communicated certain events and spiritual beliefs). Since the Industrial Revolution, the scope of transmission has widened to include an array of media as conduits of narrativity. Marshall McLuhan (1964), in his seminal publication *Understanding media: the extensions of man,* is of the opinion that, especially from the early twentieth century, new types of media played an increasing role in our daily life, and that "understanding media" gives rise to understanding the nature of societies and culture. Ryan and Thon (2014:2) add that the power to construct social reality lies in the media's ability to transmit stories that shape our view of the world and affect our behaviour. As such, media is thus also often the lens through which we view society.

The array of different media that disseminate information across networks includes types of technologies, such as television, radio, the internet, the telephone, as well as other

cultural channels such as books and newspapers, through media, such as language, sound, image or more specifically, artistic materials, paper or even the human body as Ryan suggests (2006:17). Accessibility to cultural channels such as books and newspapers as well as the internet, and the cultural value attributed to such mediums, also play an important role in determining community-making. Online social platforms, films, articles in newspapers, historical artworks and interviews, contribute toward discussions and opinions regarding culture and expose intrinsic cultural and ideological inclinations. Such interactions may even give rise to shifts in perceptions of certain cultures and ideologies. Various online interviews with members of the “Blackheart Gang”, Facebook and Instagram posts, and exhibitions in physical spaces, contribute towards the construction of a cultural system of *The Household,* as will be demonstrated in the sections below.

In order to construct an external cultural frame, the point of view (that will include the actual world in which the author collective functions) of the critic and the VUR which is based in a South African cultural context, is considered. Also referred to as the collective exterior world, one firstly needs to gauge the shared cultural meaning in groups and then examine changes regarding natural and constructed external environments (Von Stackelberg *et al.,* 2015:27). Cultural information as obtained through media needs to be viewed against the backdrop of historical and political developments and complexities in South Africa, in order to understand how culture is an interpretative frame for understanding *The Household* as digital narrative realm.

Inhabitants of South Africa are (mostly) cognisant of the ideologically and socio-politically charged past that manifests through a long history of colonisation, mainly characterised by European hegemony. Colonial literature and educational textbooks, often portrayed one-sidedly, ideologically charged western perceptions of history. Due to the colonisers’ assumption of their superiority over the colonised, slavery, imperialism and segregation ensued that were ideologically justified by the colonisers. The effects that colonialism had on history formation and the colonised reveal imperial undercurrents in the economic, political, military and cultural domains of South Africa. The victims of colonialism and imperialism were mostly groups of people who were viewed as subordinate, as well as their territories - which were presumed to be available for exploitation. This subordination was often in terms of “class, caste, gender, race, language and culture and is used to signify the centrality of dominant/dominated relationships in history” (Prakash 1994:1477).

Uneven power relations are usually the result of the discursive formation of these relations that is explained in a model called the *Manichean allegory* to involve the following:

> … a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object (JanMohamed, 1985:82).

These oppositions were often fundamental to early western knowledge systems and perceptions. Consider, for instance, the manner in which Africa was presented to European civilisation in nineteenth century maps (such as Figure 4.20) that promoted Africa and its unknown parts as a dark, mysterious territory linked to primitive savagery and in need of salvation and civilisation. Newspaper advertisements, such as figure 5.1, sensationalised Africa's newly "discovered" regions and cultures in the press and introduced the public to (heroic) explorers, such as Dr David Livingstone (1813-1873).

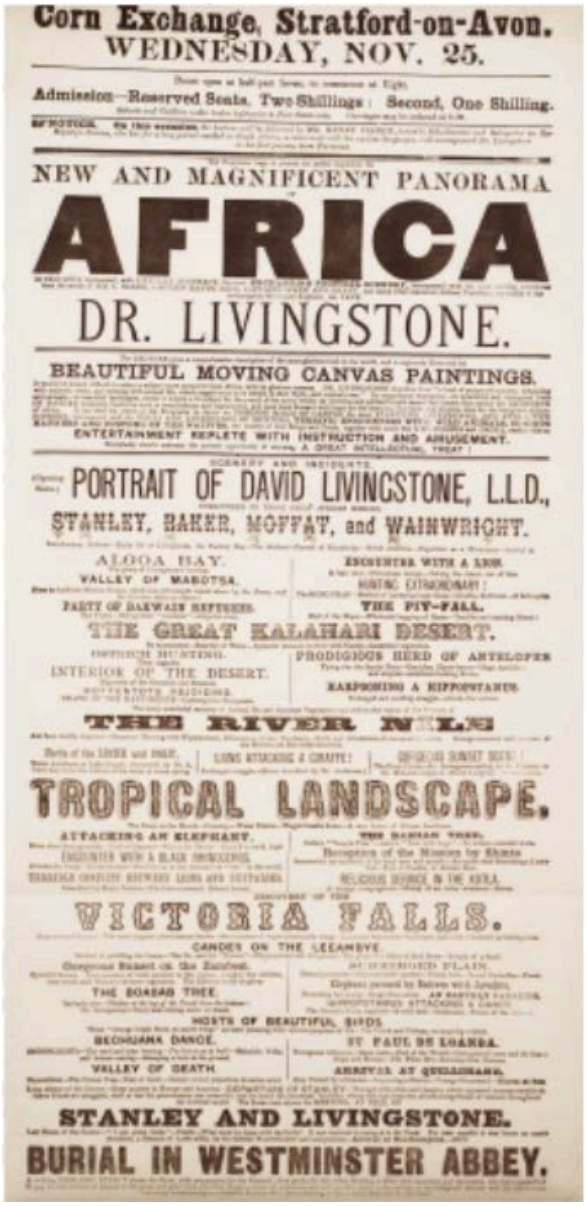


Figure 5.16 David Broadside advertisement, Stratford-upon-Avon, after 1873 Russell E. Train, Africana Collection. https://library.si.edu/exhibition/fantastic-worlds/terra-incognita

The manner in which *The Household*'s cultural system can be perceived is almost like a travel document by and for explorers, complete with charted and uncharted landscapes (see figures 4.20 and 5.16) to discover. This notion places the VUR in the position of an explorer, but also of the coloniser and perhaps also missionaries that wanted to save Africa from its dark savagery. It is thus possible (but also necessary) to place oneself in the shoes of an *Explorer* character type.

The VUR engulfs one on different levels; temporally (back to the era of exploration and through choices made in navigation), spatially (to a "dark" unknown text world, as well as an online network) and emotionally (through empathy with characters). The VUR can

almost associate him/herself with explorers, such as Dr David Livingstone (1813-1873), who, as a result of his travels and publications, became almost a fictionalised explorer character. As one of the most widely known African explorers, he travelled to Africa "to put his medical expertise to use, spread Christianity, and bring awareness of the slave trade to the public"[107]. From these travels sprouted popular publications such as Livingstone's *Missionary travels* (1857) that not only provided information about the different cultures he encountered, but it was also a rich "scientific" and geographical source of knowledge about the African continent, but from a western perspective. In much the same way, the "Blackheart Gang", confessed explorers, prophets and colonisers, also document their travels through the vast chambers of this sensational world beneath our world. The confession in the introduction on the landing page of *The Household* (see fig. 4.1) - "after years of tirelessly exploiting the natives" - furthermore confirms this notion. The deep-seated conditioned effects of colonial endeavours are applied by the "Blackheart Gang" probably to affirm the shared tainted historical past of both (South) Africa and *The Household*.

African expeditions also influenced a number of so-called "colonial adventure" authors of fiction such as Rider Haggard (1856-1925) who published the famous book *King Solomon's Mines* (1886) and Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) with her novel *The story of an African farm* (1883)[108]. Haggard favoured the portrayal of the heroic English colonial gentleman, as typical hero archetype in contrast to indigenous tribes as savage and dangerous villains, or as faithful servants (ibid.). Publications such as these reinforced the Manichean allegory and related discursive power relations between oppositional groups in the colonial era. Late nineteenth century publications, such as Douglas Blackburn's (1857-1929) *Prinsloo of Prinsloosdorp,* and newspaper articles by him, "denounced British colonial attitudes as well as satirising Boer corruption" and documenting the last days of the Boer republic (ibid.) before the British took over control of South Africa. Published literature (by black writers) regarding black culture and societies in the colonial period were not the norm. A few writers, however, were honoured for literary contributions, such as Solomon (Sol) Thekiso Plaatje (1876-1932). He completed his novel *Mhudi* in 1920, that follows the movements of "the Tswana people, during and after their military encounter with the Zulus under Shaka, the Zulu conqueror of the 19th century", and encounters with white people moving into the interior of Southern Africa (ibid.). Such publications

107 https://library.si.edu/exhibition/fantastic-worlds/terra-incognita
108 https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-south-african-literature-timeline-1824-2005

contributed towards a sense of, not only the history of the country, but also the socio-cultural and political circumstances surrounding specific time periods and events.

At the core of this cultural analysis of the world of the intended VUR (and me, the critic), lies the dynamic between oppositional groups and the unassailable crossing and blurring of boundaries in the process of acculturation. Despite the segregating endeavours of Apartheid, the rapid decolonisation of Southern African countries, the growing interdependence of nations as a result of globalisation, and ensuing processes of socialisation and acculturation, there is still a strong sense of heritage in a variety of cultures. A recent newspaper[109] article (see fig. 4.43) discussing the attire worn by former president Jacob Zuma on his wedding day is one example of how Zulu tribal traditions manifest in the western world media and are still being promoted and practised. Another online news article in the *Daily Mail* (United Kingdom) website, namely *Sixth time's the charm: Polygamist South African president Jacob Zuma beams with delight as he marries Gloria Ngema (while his other three wives look on)*[110]*,* describes how a traditional ceremony known as *umgcagco* is held in which the bride and groom take part in the traditional competitive celebratory dance. This is followed by a wedding reception in the evening, reminding more of western traditions (such as cutting of the cake) and a contemporary dress code (see figure 5.17).

109 The reason why I choose to use newspaper articles as example, instead of seminal academic papers or publications is because newspapers function in the public domain. As an influential media system newspapers reinforce narrative communities "by disseminating culturally prevalent stories and plots as well as the values and norms the latter serve to reinforce and inculcate" (Nünning & Nünning, 2010:14).

110 Sixth time's the charm: Polygamist South African president Jacob Zuma beams with delight as he marries Gloria Ngema (while his other three wives look on), *published on the 21st of April, 2012, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2133220/Polygamist-South-African-president-Jacob-Zuma-marries-Gloria-Ngema-wives-look-on.html*

Four weddings: South African president Jacob Zuma and his new wife Bongi Ngema - one of his four current spouses - cut a cake as they take part in a traditional ceremony known as Umgcagco at his home in Nkandla

Figure 5.17 Photograph of Jacob Zuma and his new wife Bongi Ngema -one of his four current spouses. *Sixth time's the charm: Polygamist South African president Jacob Zuma beams with delight as he marries Gloria Ngema (while his other three wives look on)*, published on the 21st of April, 2012. Getty images. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2133220/Polygamist-South-African-president-Jacob-Zuma-marries-Gloria-Ngema-wives-look-on.html

The last day an umabo follows where the bride showers the groom's family with gifts (ibid.). Early nationalist policies did not permit polygamist marriages, but following the end of Apartheid, the constitution was redesigned to accommodate diverse tribal traditions. This illustrates that the role of media is pivotal in strengthening a sense of heritage and recognising traditions that are still being celebrated, even amidst western influences. It also strengthens notions of acculturation and the process of socialization into communities and cultures other than your own, as part of democratizing endeavours.

Media play an important role in creating awareness of different cultural practices and the underlying *mythos* and *ethos* in societies and cultures. Consider, for example an article in the *Daily Sun*[111] (19 December 2017), "Angry 'river snake' swallows sangoma" (see figure 5.18), that relays the happenings of a double drowning:

111 https://www.dailysun.co.za/News/National/angry-river-snake-swallows-sangoma-20171219

> The tragedy unfolded at the Tikwe River in Virginia, Free State [South Africa]. The bodies of the two men – a sangoma (27) and a teenager (18) – were recovered by police divers on Saturday morning. Witness Molantoa Seroke told *Daily Sun:* 'while we were busy appeasing the ancestors and the river snake on the river bank, two men could not wait. They decided to rush and entered the river. We tried to stop them, but they did not listen. The two men were drunk. This made the ancestors and the river snake angry'.


National

ANGRY 'RIVER SNAKE' SWALLOWS SANGOMA!!

Gladys Machakela • 19 December 2017

Divers remove the bodies of the two men who drowned. .

Figure 5.18 Photograph in article in *Daily Sun*: Angry 'river snake' swallows sangoma. 19 December 2017. https://www.dailysun.co.za/News/National/angry-river-snake-swallows-sangoma-20171219

This article illuminates and confirms traditional practices that are linked to belief systems of ancestry in certain cultures. For many members of African indigenous groups, including Zulu and Xhosa people[112] the supernatural and ancestral realms form part of their *Knowledge World*, factors that are not usually part of the *Knowledge World* or spiritual belief systems of white South Africans. It furthermore confirms the role of mythology (as orally conveyed to Ree by her nanny Fabia) that underlies the making of *The Household* storyworld. Such paratexts open up the possibility that, through acculturation, a readiness is created to recognise alternative worlds, without necessarily changing some cultural practices and belief systems.

The stories behind the characters related in section 4.1.2 (Characters in *The Household*) in chapter four, explain the mythological influence regarding the supernatural and the

112 https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/african-traditional-religion

unknown through characterisation. “Shangoma” (fig. 4.40), a comical mole adorned with traditional attire, and the serpent-like character “Rachel” (fig. 3.4), are some examples that infer the impact of African mythology on Ree through language and oral storytelling of a Xhosa woman – an impact so deep that, through adaptation, a whole story universe could originate and function. The *mythos* furthermore revealed underlying social interaction between gender groups, mostly of black descent, which also highlighted culture-specific gender issues (that might reflect the South African socio-cultural conditions). The cultural system thus reflects what Ryan refers to as “modal constraints” of the *axiological* system that underlies stories of quests, moral dilemma (concepts of goodness, badness and indifference) (1991b:111). As a result the *ethos* of this world and the related “real world” is laid bare.

From the examples above, it is evident that media plays an important cultural role in how society is viewed and framed. More so, especially in the South African context, media has narrativized the political post-apartheid developments and “contributed to a culture of democratic debate while playing a watchdog role to keep political power to account through investigative reporting into corruption and malfeasance” (Wasserman, 2020:451). The role of media, especially the print media, however, has been criticised as “serving mostly an elite” and becoming a space where democracy itself is contested (ibid.). In the discussion below, the role of the participatory culture as intended VUR of *The Household* within the context of a contentious media landscape is firstly determined by considering a broad impression of South Africa’s cultural media societies. This is furthermore gauged against the historical background and the related “*institutional component*, describing the cultural practices and representational conventions that relate to the medium” (Zipfel, 2014:108) and, as such, the technological system of *The Household*.

To analyse *The Household* from a specific point of view can create unease, because to situate oneself as a VUR of a specific cultural background blurs the holistic view of South African media culture and the recognition of the diverse cultures it serves. According to SAHO (n.d.) it is highly inadvisable to categorise the different people residing within South Africa’s borders, due to the multiplicity and diversity of South Africa’s cultures, languages and heritages, as well as further intersectional issues of gender, ethnicity and race. Issues of race and segregation were especially complicated as a result of Apartheid policies, due to attempts to emphasise ontological immiscibility of different races (SAHO). Apartheid, as extension of the colonial project, left deep scars on our multicultural and multi-ethnic societies, but it also resulted in institutional complexities for South Africa:

> … it alienated our philosophical reflection from its immediate context. As a consequence, ironically, we are late-comers to the intellectual scene of multiculturalism, whilst at the same time perhaps forerunners in the experience of multiculturality (Van Der Merwe, 1996:77).

In this sense, South Africa's multicultural landscape provides a lived experience in which considerations should include the recognition of a multiplicity of worlds and versions of worlds at play in cultural worldmaking. South Africa transitioned from an authoritarian political system characterised by minority, racist rule to a democracy, but although it has been more than two decades, the legacies of Apartheid still have an impact on contemporary society and the media's role in it (Wasserman, 2020:451-452). African cultural origins and their irreversible influences on development need to be acknowledged, whilst allowing various societies and cultures to "develop harmoniously while accepting structures introduced from outside their social systems" (Schuerkens, 2004:91).

The Household shows evidence of colonial influence in many instances, but what is most impressionable is the manner in which some of the characters are dressed, resembling western attire. Figure 5.19 depicts a bear character, "General Dreadstikov", and a mole character, "Livingstone as a Zombi".

Figure 5.19 Blackheart Gang. "General Dreadstikov" and "Livingstone as a Zombi" from the series "Postcards from Molitia" https://www.instagram.com/postcardsofmolitia/?hl=en

“General Dreadstikov” in typical military style, is adorned with richly decorative amulets that speak of a high military rank. His hat, however, reminds of a mixture of a military and safari hat worn by explorers and colonisers who came to “conquer” Africa. What also seems to represent a safari hat is worn by “Livingstone” in figure 5.19. The mole with a traditional spear in his hand, and standing on a bunch of lemons, appropriated, what seems to be a lemon squeezer into an explorer hat. This speaks again about acculturation and cultural exchange that influence the wishes and desires of the characters in *The Household* in terms of possible worlds theory. “General Dreadstikov” represents the *Explorer* character type in search of land and resources, but the manner in which he is dressed, suggests that he will fight for what he desires, also relating him to the *Warrior* character type. “Livingstone as a Zombi” also shows signs of the *Warrior* character type, but his sad demeanour attributes to him a *Seeker* characteristic relating to his possible desire to reclaim what was lost (such as land and resources). The explorer hat thus relates more to the mole seeking for justice.

Another, more recent example of the iconic meaning of the safari hat, exploded on social media and news rooms on the internet. Melania Trump, wife of former American president Donald Trump, chose to wear a pith helmet, similar to the safari hat discussed above, for a safari trip through Kenya (see figure 5.20).

Melania Trump criticised for wearing colonial-style hat during Kenyan safari

Originally worn in 19th century by explorers, the pith helmet has become symbol of colonial rule

▲ Melania Trump in her pith helmet on a brief safari in Nairobi, Kenya. Photograph: Carlo Allegri/Reuters

Figure 5.20 Carlo Allegri / Reuters. 2018. Photograph in article in *The Guardian*: Melania Trump criticised for wearing colonial-style hat during Kenya safari. Article: Jason Burke. 5 October 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/05/melania-trump-in-pith-helmet-on-kenya-safari-likened-to-colonialist

The actions of a high ranking member of society usually spark criticism. In this instance the controversy around a pith helmet sparked emotional reactions around western society. The reason for this is because these hats "were worn by European explorers and imperial administrators in Africa, parts of Asia and the Middle East in the 19th century before being adopted by military officers, rapidly becoming a symbol of status – and oppression"[113]. The safari hat's presence in *The Household* as signifying signposts of culture, also triggers the same concerns.

Cultural worldmaking strategies, as already noted, depend on the manner in which knowledge of the past, present and future is represented through symbols. A relevant

113 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/05/melania-trump-in-pith-helmet-on-kenya-safari-likened-to-colonialist

concern in terms of how society views culture, especially at present, is reflected in media, as demonstrated above. Colonial and imperial conquests had an impact on various levels of societies and culture (as mentioned previously giving rise to acculturation and cultural exchange). Contact with colonial powers, especially since the end of the nineteenth century, resulted in the introduction of a formal education system, paid labour and a bureaucratic system (Schuerkens, 2004:89). Social change was inevitable, not only for Southern African groups, but also for western cultures that permeated traditional cultures. An analysis of the social change that is a result of transformation processes (such as western infiltration into Southern African cultures) is dependent on various theories, such as modernisation, globalisation and dependency theories (Schuerkens, 2004:89). On a global scale, Ulrike Schuerkens, author and editor of the publication *Global forces and local life-worlds: social transformation* (2004), investigates the phenomenon of social change due to, mainly, internationalisation and the "more or less conscious acceptance of western models or parts of them by large groups in Africa south of the Sahara" (2004:88). Such changes were also true for literature and media structures in the South African media landscape, especially due to historical and political developments since the 1990s that changed the political and social role played by media. Such developments will be briefly outlined below.

The release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990, after serving twenty-seven years for high treason, had a monumental impact on local and even international media. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was the first person to refer to the new South Africa as the "rainbow nation", and later "the father of the nation, Nelson Mandela", adopted the term and it became "a rallying cry to symbolize the shared future with which we would overcome our fractured past" (Buys, 2020:23). The pivotal publication *No future without forgiveness* (1999), by Archbishop Tutu provides an overview of the process of reconciliation following the years of oppression of black South Africans by white South Africans during the era of Apartheid between 1948-1991. Storytelling and narratives of individuals and groups relayed at TRC[114] hearings became the main vehicle towards establishing truth and reconciliation and creating a "new narrative" for South Africa. The storytelling methodology "attracted unprecedented media coverage and participation from diverse groups of

[114] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC) was based on the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No 34 of 1995,* and consisted of three sub-committees: the Amnesty Committee, Reparation and Rehabilitation (R&R) and Human Rights Violations (HRV) Committee. Mr Dullah Omar, former Minister of Justice, regarded the need for these commissions as "a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation." https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/

persons, including rural and urban, poor and rich, white and black, religious and non-religious" (Klaasen, 2020:2). Probably the most important role of the TRC and the media coverage resulting from media feedback, is the sense of a recovery of the "voices" and agencies of the previously silenced. Globally, the TRC process was "recognised as miraculous by the international community" (ibid.) – ironically, South Africa's transitional period coincided with global events linked to the demise of authoritarian regimes and the rise of democratic political dispensations[115]. It is thus also necessary to view media, not only through the South African cultural lens, but also in a global frame.

Since this socio-political shift, the manner in which the South African multicultural societies are portrayed in national and international media, is generally indicative of the promotion of a sense of *ubuntu*[116] and being a *rainbow nation*. The main concept of *ubuntu* relates to the notion that in order to realise one's true self, one should exhibit solidarity with multiple cultures in order to find harmony in a given society. This realisation is dependent on the understanding of an underlying golden thread that connects all life – a collective unconscious (see discussion in 3.2.2 Story system - *Myth* / mythos). As a result, media does not only play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and societal values, but also shapes participatory culture on a national and global scale.

Participatory culture (locally) is dependent on media structures in South Africa that, according to Wasserman (2020), can be divided into public media, commercial media and community media. In a diverse society, such as South Africa's, with socio-economic inequalities, community and public media, focus on providing information to "underserved sections of the public", such as "those in small towns in rural areas" (Wasserman, 2020:453). Commercial media, on the other hand, "serve largely elite audiences" and consumers who can "afford access to commercial media" – usually news agendas and advertising are tailor-made for these audiences (Wasserman, 2020:453). The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) constitutes public media and has transformed dramatically from "a state broadcaster under apartheid to a public entity which reports to parliament" (ibid.). The role of the SABC has changed to serve the broad public, but has also been criticised for, amongst others, corruption and mismanagement, "political interference in its editorial agendas" (Wasserman, 2020:454). Although news media have lately followed the online route, community (news) media are still mainly centred around

115 Voltmer (2013:1) notes that the end of Apartheid coincided with global events, which he refers to as "a wave of democracy", that include the fall of the Berlin Wall and democratisation in countries such as Syria, Tunisia and Egypt.

116 Tutu (1999:31)

rural community radio stations and television with specific ethnic channels and print media is still viewed as elitist. Although statistics show that about 55% of South Africans have access to the Internet[117], and many more globally, it is impossible to determine the scope of participation in storytelling websites by creative collaborators in a South African context. The following section analyses the contributions made by technology in the co-construction of a storyworld, and particularly *The Household.*

5.1.2 Technological considerations

Assuming that the participatory culture in transmedial storytelling is technologically informed, especially in terms of navigating *The Household,* the VUR should still be a willing participant with an artistic or narratological background, who will further be intrigued by aesthetic and literary cues, and who have possibly come in contact with *The tale of how* animation or publication on other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram. In this sense, deductions can be made that *The Household* does not particularly feature in community and public media forums, but more on a commercial (social) platform. Whatever the case may be, this storyworld functions mainly on the internet, which gives it a local and global presence.

In determining the technological system of *The Household,* the dissemination of information needs consideration. The internet, functioning on this level, can be seen as both a culture or a site for cultural formations and a cultural artefact that is shaped by the VUR's understandings and expectations (Hine, 2000:14). In the first instance, the Internet as an intermediary domain between the website and the audience's reception is not a physical but a virtual space (also correlating with the term cyberspace – see discussion in section *2.2.2.3 Space, time and narrative*). Miller *et al.* (2000:1) define what the Internet is not:

> The Internet is not a monolithic or placeless 'cyberspace'; rather, it is numerous new technologies, used by diverse people, in diverse real-world locations.

Hine (2000:7) expands on the spatio-temporal effects of the Internet by stating the following:

> The Internet does not transcend traditional notions of space and time, but rather produces multiple orderings of time and space which cross the on-

[117] https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm

> line/off-line boundary, resulting in a blurring of the boundaries between reality and virtuality and raising questions regarding authenticity and identity.

"Virtual reality" – the term used to describe "the technology used to track users and display digital information" (Schroeder *et al.,* 2008:237) – also refers to the sense of being present in the online world, as if it is "real", thus blurring the boundaries between the "real" and the virtual. This again raises questions regarding contentious issues of "truth" and "reality" that spill over to "virtuality" in the sense that (as discussed in chapter 3) our perceptions are always already mediated by previous knowledge, which, in terms of cyberspace, represents a long history of imagined spaces – also relating to the cultural system of a storyworld. As our perceptions are always already mediated by previous knowledge, it seems accurate to assume that, when navigating through digital story spaces, one initially tends to look for familiar signs. In framing these signs, it is accepted that no two readings will be exactly the same, as "the Internet is mediated through the context of use" (Miller *et al.*, 2000). The framing of signs is complicated when individual visions of "truth" stand in confrontation with cultural, social and political "truths" of another VUR. Certain "cultural practices" and "social norms", as well as "overt rules of a particular context" (ibid.), relating to the participatory culture can influence the manner in which the VUR engages with the medium, in this instance *The Household*-website, as has been demonstrated in the examples above. Websites have proven to be more accessible for users in terms of technology and devices required, and the internet is a highly participatory medium (Basaraba, 2018:51). *The Household*-website interface is easy to navigate because it has a standard text-based menu design with the titles of the different sections or pages to explore, as well as a search box to the left of the landing page, connecting the VUR to the "rooms"- pages. A logical lay-out of the pages that includes a header, navigation menu and sub-menus, makes for an effortless storyworld experience.

Furthermore, the manner in which the levels and environments of a website are designed has a bearing on how the VUR experiences time and space in a storyworld. Navigation through the storyworld requires that certain choices be made in terms of various communicative functions (menus and links) and technologies (including software and mediums through which the storyworld is mediated). In this regard, spatio-temporal issues function internally in the story system, as well as externally through the storyworld's cultural and technological systems. The highly participatory value of *The Household* in terms of the ease of navigation, the accessibility of the website and related links through the internet, as well as the presence of *The Household* on social media, allows for an

immersive VUR experience. More so, this storyworld can also be experienced through obtaining a *Tale of how* coffee table book with a CD containing the animation, view the artworks and prints or visit an exhibition of the artworks. The transmedial narratological experience is thus spread through various channels and platforms and the open-ended nature of *The Household* allows for further expansion.

5.2 Summary

A systematic exploration of the cultural and technological systems of *The Household* unveiled a network of cultural worldmaking and representational conventions. These conventions relate to channels of communication, manifested through media in the form of myth, language and art and highlighted connections between approaches and perspectives relating to culture.

The manner in which cultural approaches reflect in transmedial storytelling and worldmaking was proven to depend on both the textual actual world culture in which the characters function (and how they perceive their interior and exterior worlds), as well as on the actual world culture, or rather participatory culture, in which the VUR and artist collective function. The storyworld is perceived through a world already known to us. Gaps in the storyworld are filled by considering intertextual cues relating to real-world and fictional-world knowledge and examples to this end illustrated how the cultural system is co-constructed by the VUR.

The mythological dimension or *mythos* of *The Household* demonstrated the need for this storyworld to be grounded in cultural heredity and also to make sense of its cultural origins. It enforced the notion that culture is based on underlying “forces” that bind societies together. Language, on the other hand, was shown to function in a more structured manner in cultural worldmaking, for instance through intertextual references to names. Social and cultural context and examples of how language functions on a cognitive level, illustrated how perceptions of *The Household* are filtered through the actual world, relating to South Africa. The language of art and how it manifested in *The Household,* furthermore illuminated the role of media and art conventions of the past. Through examples, the language of art proved to be instrumental in how the cultural system of *The Household* is perceived. Although the referenced artworks (many from western conventions of the Renaissance and Baroque eras) have serious subject matter, the artwork featuring in *The Household* portrays rather absurd looking characters with strange

attire in fantastical settings. By overthrowing traditional high art conventions, fantasy and humour are implemented to create corrective laughter (Pretorius, 1992:464). Such comparisons illustrated how the language of art semiotically contributes to a cultural system by comparing it with existing genres, media and subject matter. As such, *The Household*'s fantasy world status is confirmed. The language of art thus indirectly contributes to the cultural system of *The Household* through appropriation and cultural exchange.

The pivotal cultural role media plays in how society is viewed and framed became clearer. In the South African context, especially, media was shown to have the power to shape perceptions of culture. It was furthermore suggested that, although various knowledge and belief systems exist, the manner in which these are communicated and shared can create an acceptance and toleration for values and beliefs other than your own or the community in which one functions.

In gauging the participatory culture's experience of this storyworld from a technological standpoint, an understanding is reached of the dissemination and scope of narrative instances across different platforms and the immersive forces at play. The cultural and technological systems are important pieces of the puzzle in co-constructing a storyworld, such as *The Household,* in the mind of the VUR.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions

In this study, an interpretation of *The Household* by "The Blackheart Gang" was presented. *The Household* was, for the most part, characterised as a digital realm with narrative intent, and as such was situated in the sphere of transmedial narratology. The emphasis of the study was on storyworlds that constituted the VUR's experience of *The Household* and the relation of these storyworlds with the actual world, in this instance events and people familiar to South African society. The study demonstrated various corollaries between the storyworlds in *The Household* and actual concerns in South Africa, in order to argue for a reflection on, and an escape from often harsh realities that characterise contemporary South Africa.

The present chapter is divided into three sections. In the first instance, I present the research questions posed in Chapter 1, and discuss how these questions were answered in the course of the thesis with reference to how the answers to the questions unfolded in the various chapters. Secondly, I present insights gleaned from the study in order to indicate the contributions of the study, after which avenues for further research are noted.

6.1 Problem statement, research questions, and aims and objectives

The central question that the study aimed to address concerned the ways in which *The Household* by the "Blackheart Gang" can be read as both a text world and a media-conscious storyworld in order to produce a reflection on events, people and stories in (mostly) contemporary South Africa in order to simultaneously critique and offer an escape (via fantasy) from the real world and its complexities. The research questions emanating from the problem statement are discussed below.

How do transmedial narrative studies apply to digital realms?

This question was answered by a survey of texts that deal with digital media from a narratological perspective; the emphasis was on texts that use narrative strategies in digital realms. Transmedial narratology forms the contexts against which this question was answered.

In Chapter 2, transmedial narratology was perused in order to demonstrate the usefulness of this term and the link between transmedial narratology with digital realms with narrative intent was highlighted. Pertinent developments stemming from classical narratology into postclassical narratology were perused. Of significance were statements such as the one below that interrogate different media platforms:

> … increasingly, narrative is functioning not just through mono-medial constructs, but also through convergent networks of media platforms, where stories move, shift and drift, progress and regress, grow and flow across film, television, print, digital artifacts, the web and interpretive communities (Rupple, 2009:282).

It was found that media as a term should be understood in multimodal terms (Ryan, 2014(b):26) to encompass mass communication media, newspapers, television and the internet as well as other technologies such as computer games and platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. It was demonstrated that the various semiotic channels associated with these media contribute towards meaning-making, at times requiring more active participation from the user who then becomes a viewer-user-reader, especially in instances of interactive media.

Complexities arising regarding the narrational as well as the authorial function in the context of interactive digital realms – including, but not limited to computer games and digital contexts such as one finds in *The Household* – were perused. I argued that the narrative, in the instance of narrative digital contexts, is not fixed but that the fabula in such instances is co-constructed by the VUR, based on narrative clues present in the "text" - cues relate to expectations that are created by the 'main author' (Wolf, 2012:271,273) who can be regarded as the originator of the story or storyworld.

Authorial functions were distinguished from narratorial ones, also with reference to Booth's (1961) notion of the implied author. Foucault's (1969) distinction between authorial functions, also with refence to the notion of the author as social and cultural construction, were useful in clarifying the role of the author. In the context of *The Household,* I inferred that the "character" or the narrator is inferred by the author, assumed by the reader and is never visually portrayed. I therefore propounded that the inferred authorial "Blackheart Gang" occupies the role of implied author(s) as representative(s) of the author-image.

Of significance regarding the role of the VUR I argued that Wolf's (2017:263) insistence on (1)

human's tendency to narrativize as well as (2) the willingness of the VUR to participate in co-constructing the narrative are salient in *The Household*, an argument that I believe can be extrapolated to narrative digital platforms in general.

In short, in order to participate in the co-construction of a narrative, and perhaps more so in narrative digital realms, Ryan's (2003) view of narrative guides the process of consumption of the text:

> *Narrative is defined as a mental image, or cognitive construct, which can be activated by various types of signs. This image consists of a world (setting) populated by intelligent agents (characters). These agents participate in actions and happenings (events, plot), which cause global changes in the narrative world. Narrative is thus a mental representation of causally connected states and events which captures a segment in the history of a world and of its members [my italics].*

While this view of what a narrative is may be applicable to all kinds of narratives, the importance of a "participatory culture" was highlighted subsequently; for the narrative to have meaning, the VUR must, reception-like, be willing to undertake the role of active participant.

In light of the notion of narrative as a mental representation and its significance in transmedial contexts, the study proceeded to answer the next question:

Why should possible worlds theory be expanded for purposes of reading digital art? I address this question by means of a critical exploration of literature on storyworlds and especially possible worlds theory, to determine ways in which parallels can be drawn between fictional and real worlds and the role of the viewer/interactor in the actualisation of these worlds.

Eco (1979), Pavel (1986), Doležel (2000) and Ryan (1991a), amongst others, developed possible worlds theory and it was noted that storyworlds can become entire universes (also see Eco, 1984). Not only do narratives embrace textual actual worlds that contain narrative "facts", but they allow for a multiplicity of possible worlds to be created in the minds of consumers of a narrative. These, according to Eco (1984), are *subworlds,* which entail possible-worlds-within-possible-worlds. Possible worlds, in this manner, constitute the material that the VUR uses to make sense of a storyworld in his or her mind.

In the context of narrative digital media, the fabula can be co-constructed by means of multiple channels and entry points, such as hypertexts and menus, as well as – in the case of *The Household* – entering and exiting the various rooms. While *The Household* is predicated on possible chronological reshufflings (these rely on navigation and participatory co-narration of the VUR) it is also an immersive narrative once the storyworld and sub-worlds are entered.

In short, based on the perusal of various characteristics of a storyworld, the following requirements were formulated in order to recognise a storyworld as such:

- There must be cognitive space resembling a multi-layered supersystem;
- This space should contain systems and sub-systems that augment the world-experience;
- Furthermore, this realm should allow one to construct a fabula through various entry points; and
- *Intradiegetic* and *extradiegetic* narrative elements should be present

I also demonstrated that interactive digital narratives present these characteristics by means of the various dimensions that characterise these narratives.

In what ways do the worlds generated by The Household *offer a reflection as well as a fantasy-based escape of issues in South African society?* Here the textual and media-conscious narratological strategies were unpacked in order to present a reading of ways in which the narratives set up a reflection on, as well as an escape from the harsh realities of the contemporary South African situation.

In chapter five, the importance of *mythos* and *ethos* was demonstrated as being part of the cultural system that guided the interpretation of *The Household* that both reflects South African society, but also creates a sense of mirth and allows for a fantasy-based escape – albeit temporarily – from the constant awareness of the complexities in contemporary South African society. Notions pertaining to self-making, community-making and literary worldmaking were salient in this regard. Specific characters and instances in *The Household* were discussed in order to lay bare the parallels between this realm and the real world. The role of language as signification system indicated the pervasiveness of colonial vestiges in postcolonial South Africa and pertinent intertextual references were explored – in the end culminating in the suggestion that *The Household* is a truly hybrid environment. Issues pertaining to gender foregrounded the relevance of *The Household's*

reflection on contemporary South Africa. In a subsequent section, the role of media as transmitter of meaning was addressed with emphasis on its role on cultural formations. Colonial publications pertaining to exploration, for example, added to this concern and corollaries were drawn between colonial exploration and the interactive engagement with *The Household* in order to demonstrate the multifaceted ways in which this digital realm mirrors pressing issues in contemporary South African discourses pertaining to power and the like. Specific instances of cultural formation were highlighted to sustain this argument. In this regard, the pervasive influence of technological phenomena, notably the internet, in the shaping of cultural formation received particular attention.

The bizarreness of the characters, events and "rooms" of *The Household* proved to provide an escape from the often harsh realities of South Africa by creating a fantasy world with a sardonic sense of reality.

References to artistic outputs other than the digital realm enriched the referential potential of this environment – sculpture, in particular, stood out and the works discussed were demonstrated to reinforce the idea of acculturation and cultural exchange, being influenced by various cultural impulses.

In what ways can insights based on the reading of The Household *be generalised towards a transmedial approach to storyworlds and possible worlds in the digital realm?* The findings from the reading of the artworks informed this section which set out to produce a useful transmedial approach towards the interpretation of digital narrative art.

This question was answered by means of a methodological approach formulated from a perusal of salient texts on transmediality and possible worlds. The methodology comprised an exploration of the story system (including the elements of narrative, namely time, space, character and even) as well as the cultural system (including the framing of external culture through media, language and art, and point of view/participatory culture relating to the VUR) and technological considerations. The methodology that was developed and applied was presented in Chapter 5.

6.2 Contribution of the study

A number of possible contributions of the present study were hinted at in the introductory chapter. These are augmented, when necessary, expanded upon, and further contributions that emerged during the course of the study are discussed.

In in first instance, the interdisciplinary nature of the study contributes towards the application of narratological concepts towards the interpretation of narrative digital realms. This contribution is, further, of significance because links between possible worlds and transmedial narratology that were explored contribute towards the theoretical knowledge base of the field. These expansions of narratological concepts for application in digital realms also contribute towards a methodological approach that can be followed when exploring such realms.

Therefore, the methodological approach comprising of the story system, cultural system and technological system developed from theoretical study of possible worlds and transmedial narratology was applied, and proved to be useful in the present context. This methodology is therefore replicable for similar studies.

Possible worlds as a theoretical ambit for the exploration of narrative digital realms imply that the study of narrative digital realms such as computer games or other types of digital narratives can benefit from regarding hyperlinks and other "spaces" as sub-worlds that can be investigated as such. In particular, since such realms are often characterised by non-linear temporalities and spaces, and also constitute immersive experiences on the side of the VUR, the merging of possible worlds theory with salient transmedial notions of non-linearity can be highlighted as a theoretical and methodological contribution.

Since, often, narrative digital realms have open-ended narratives (as is the case in *The Household*), the importance of the VUR as co-constructor of meaning is of significance. This notion relates to the separation of the authorial and narratorial function, entailing that the VUR is also in a position to co-construct the narrative by means of interactive choices when engaging with the realm. The importance of the participatory role of the VUR emerged as salient in this regard.

Specific to the present study is the contribution towards scholarly knowledge on *The Household* as a narrative digital realm, since no such work has been undertaken. Possible publications

emanating from the study of this realm may help to establish *The Household* as an object of scholarly investigation. Furthermore, an understanding that each VUR brings with him or her their own cultural baggage can be added to this contribution.

As regards the above contribution, the present study was also concerned with the exploration of a number of issues in South African society as reflected in *The Household*, and therefore the notion of ontological overlap between the digital realm and the "real world" proved useful and can be regarded as a contribution to the field.

In short, apart from the issues addressed in the perusal of *The Household* that pertain to contexts related to South African society, an important contribution of the present study is the expansion of the postclassical narratological toolbox to integrate concepts such as transmediality with the theory of possible worlds.

Finally, the findings of the present study may find application also for practitioners in the field who wish to produce digital narrative realms, in order to assist them in taking cognisance of narratological possibilities presented by a perusal of transmedial narratology and possible worlds theory.

6.3 Avenues for further research

A number of possible avenues for further research presented themselves during the course of the study.

In the first instance, applying the methodology that was developed based on a synthesis of transmediality and possible worlds theory may be useful for investigating other instances of narrative digital realms such as computer games. In another sense, this methodology may find application in the study of digital realms functioning with hyperlinks that may be said to constitute narrative content, such as virtual museums, art exhibitions and the like.

While the interpretation of *The Household* presented in this study was necessarily selective and only a number of examples of characters, events and the like made up the interpretative application of the methodology, *The Household* has many more rooms, sub-worlds, characters and events that invite further consideration.

In the end, while the scholarly investigation of The Household as transmedial narrative realm that demonstrated the possibility of exploring this realm in terms of possible worlds required a great deal of hard work, this was balanced by the sheer sense of mirth one has when exploring this realm.

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Declaration

This is to declare that I, Annette L Combrink, accredited language editor and translator of the South African Translators' Institute, have language-edited the thesis by

C Lotz

with the title

Storyworlds in *The Household* by the "Blackheart Gang"

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