Transmedia and identity construction in the music industry: the case of the visual album Montero by Lil Nas X

Transmedia y construcción de identidad en la industria musical: el caso del álbum visual Montero de Lil Nas X

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Abstract

Transmediality is a new paradigm of ideation and construction of cultural projects that consists of fragmenting the messages or meaning elements of a story between various media. The aim of this work is to analyze the visual album Montero, by the American musician Lil Nas X, as a transmedia, artistic and queer vindication project, with its visual imaginary and some actions in social networks. A methodology of cultural and multimodal analysis is used to know the intertexuality and cultural quotes in this visual album. The conclusions point to the generation of leitmotifs around the construction of an identity in transformation and a vital experience of rebirth or positive change. The generation of digital and 3D graphics, kitsch aesthetics and Afrofuturism, as well as visual motifs taken from the classical symbolic tradition and intertextuality and intermediality, define a narrative where lyrics, visual band and content shared on social networks build a personal storytelling.

Key words

Transmedia narrative, visual album, music video, LGTBQ+, Lil Nas X.

Resumen

La transmedialidad es un nuevo paradigma de ideación y construcción de proyectos culturales que consiste en fragmentar los mensajes o elementos de sentido de una historia entre diversos medios, para generar estrategias globales de promoción. El objetivo del trabajo es analizar el álbum visual Montero, del músico estadounidense Lil Nas X, como proyecto transmedia, artístico y de reivindicación *queer,* con su imaginario visual junto a algunas acciones en redes sociales. Se emplea una metodología de análisis cultural y multimodal para conocer la intertexualidad y citas culturales en este álbum visual. Las conclusiones apuntan a la generación de *leitmotivs* en torno a la construcción de una identidad en transformación y una experiencia vital de renacimiento o de cambio positivo. La generación de gráficos digitales y en 3D, la estética *kitsch* y el afrofuturismo, así como motivos visuales recogidos de la tradición simbólica clásica y la intertextualidad e intermedialidad, definen una narrativa donde letras, banda visual y contenido compartido en redes sociales construyen un *storytelling* personal.

Palabras clave

Narrativa transmedia, album visual, videoclip musical, LGTBQ+, Lil Nas X.

1. INTRODUCTION: TRANSMEDIALITY IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

One of the trends in the general context of cultural production, which tends towards the platforming of cultural consumption (Van Dijk Poell & De Waal, 2018; Gillespie, 2015), has to do with the emergence and consolidation of trans-media, as a set of entrepreneurial initiatives spread across all types of media and channels. Its narrative form or facet was defined by Jenkins (2006) as the relationship of all the content generated across different visual and media platforms to fabricate worlds or story worlds as planned fictional narratives (Scolari, 2009) and multiplatform.

The convergence of media in the technological, social, and economic spheres makes it possible to disseminate and distribute messages, leading to their fragmentation, extension, and expansion. Collaborative production, fandom communities' production, and amateur' production multiply platforms' content and allow the growing competition between them to continue (Ballon & Evens, 2014).

Transmediality, the strategy of telling stories in different directions and media, has several possibilities that broaden the horizon of stories. Among them, storytelling involves a narrative presented from images, words, and sounds, which helps to understand the multimodal dimension (Rosales-Statkus & Roig-Vila, 2017) and "combines the art of storytelling with a mix of digital media, including text, images, recorded audio, narration, music and video" (Robin, 2016, p. 18).

The record and music industry has developed a rapid adaptation to the new cultural conditions in all its phases of creation, consumption, and reception (Garland, 2020). Since their birth in the 1950s, music projects have tended to relate to visual texts to expand their listening and promotional media. From there, television programs, rock youth cinema, and video clips were born. These formats have been the subject of some studies from a transmedia perspective (Fendler, 2022; Parahoo, 2020; Melzer, 2021). As a format prone to innovation, it is subject to genre specialization and modification towards hybrid forms. The music industry has shifted towards video - *a visual turn*- (Holt, 2011), which has become a format for listening to music.

Social networks have increased this trend: short videos have become the most shared and viralised format on social networks, where the mediation of content from different contexts also converges. Music and those respon-sible for producing and distributing it (record labels, managers, concert impresarios) know that their work goes beyond musical creation. Musicians themselves are forced to perform an extraordinary range of tasks and to renegotiate their appearance in various contexts, genres, and media products (Jost, 2019).

Music artists construct an image of totality that is composed of the sum and accumulation of messages coming from the lyrics and music of the music project (main content), the performative part (concerts), traditional media, and new media (social networks, online media). In this way, it enhances the transmedia capacity of the contemporary music industry and generates both cultural and economic value (Brembilla, 2019).

From the sociology of popular music, the general perception of a musical artist has been referred to as a star-text (Goodwin, 1992), paraphonography (Lacasse, 1997), or metanarrative (Gare, 2017). More recently, Auslander's (2019) and Arne's (2019) concept of 'musical personae' shape this idea of complete identity construction by musicians, of how communicative management of a transmedia nature and inspiration takes place. It has, however, precedents in cross-cutting historical figures such as David Bowie, Madonna or Michael Jackson. All of them are prototypes of a habitual exploration of authenticity that has conditioned the aesthetics of popular music. As sociologist Frith (2001) puts it, good music is an authentic expression of something and someone.

This paper focuses on the construction of a specific narrative regarding the identity of musical artists in the current transmedia context. Specifically, the case of Lil Nas X and his project Montero (2021), belonging to the hip-hop genre, will be analyzed.

Lil Nas X is an American songwriter, hip-hop musician, and rapper who released Montero, his first musical work, in September 2021. A couple of years before, his early career was characterized by controversy as an avid fan of Nicki Minaj, his intense social media activity, and his creations of micro-blogging.

In 2019, he signed with Columbia Records and came out as gay, to which not everyone in the hip-hop world reacted positively. Since then, he has positioned himself and claimed his rights and those of the LGTBQ+ community, which is another example of how music is a generator of social realities.

In fact, hip-hop is a genre suited to social engagement despite its increasing commodification, as it "offers an interesting insight into the struggle for human freedom and aspects of people's knowledge of the world" (Richardson, 2006, p. 9), especially concerning the "pleasures and problems of black urban life in contemporary America" (Rose, 1994, p. 30). As increasingly influential music in all orders of popular music, iconic artists such as the late Tupac Shakur are an inspiration for global popular culture.

On the other hand, visual content close to music, where we can mention music video clips, has been shown to allow the construction of social imaginaries (Martí, 2000) around its artists and producers: "Music videos are a powerful source of representation of identities" (Balaji, 2009). Many have social content linked to "the transmission of values and the vindication of rights" (Guarinos & Sedeño, 2020, p. 122). In this way, it has been a channel for race-related minority identities or, in recent years, especial-

ly for queer representation (Jorquera & Pérez, 2021) or for the construction of multiple identities empowered by black female artists (Crenshaw, 1993; Curiel, 2007).

Following the release of his first studio album, the artist has continued his social media activity. He has begun a tour, including the Coachella festival, and starred in two documentaries.

2. OBJECTIVES, SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to analyze the transmedial narrative around Lil Nas X artist Montero's album. The methodology of multidimensional analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) tries to be creative (Botescu-Sireteanu, 2019) and hybridize textual and descriptive analysis of the qualitative nature of letters and sequential moving images to attend to the different states of the meaning of each material. An iconographic analysis has been added to this in search of elements of continuity - visual motifs - and quotations from other works and their comments on social networks. The exhibition comprises all the music video from the visual album. Below is a breakdown of the title, the link to view each video, and the lyrics of each musical composition (Table 1) for each of them.

Title of the work	Video	Lyrics
Montero (Call Me By Your Name)	See video	See lyrics
Dead Right Now	See video	See lyrics
Industry Baby (ft. Jack Harlow)	See video	See lyrics
That's What I Want	See video	See lyrics
The Art of Realization	See video	See lyrics
Scoop (ft. Doja Cat)	See video	See lyrics
One of Me (ft. Elton John)	See video	See lyrics
Lost in the Citadel	See video	See lyrics
Dolla Sign Slime (ft. Megan Thee Stallion)	See video	See lyrics
Tales of Dominica	See video	See lyrics
Sun Goes Down	See video	See lyrics
Void	See video	See lyrics
Don't Want It	See video	See lyrics
Life After Salem	See video	See lyrics
Am I Dreaming (ft. Miley Cyrus)	See video	See lyrics

3. THE MONTERO VISUAL ALBUM: MUSIC VIDEOS, INTERTEXTUALITY AND VISUAL MOTIFS

Montero, Lil Nas X's album, takes its author's first name, something familiar in the first full-length albums in popular music. It consists of fifteen tracks, fourteen conventional songs, and one skit, a short piece typical of hip-hop. The art of realization is a genre trademark. It is music that is very close to its producers and receivers, of an urban nature, and strongly involved in lyrics and aesthetics with the demands of black Americans. A visual piece in the form of a video clip accompanies each of the musical pieces. Together, they make up what is called a visual album.

The visual album, the central figure of many of the music industry's new promotional strategies, arises from the need to create complete pieces of the entire album, resulting from an industrial context demanding audiovisual content. According to Harrison (2014), the visual album is constructed as a uniform visual and sound discourse, where each song on the album has a video clip. Faced with so much visual diversity, the author argues that techniques tend to be sought to give unity to the videos in themselves and to each other: these visual *leitmotifs*, in their recurrence, systematize themes, staging, and visual formulas. The intertextuality above is added, a fully transmedia feature; thus, other cultural texts are cited, situated in the spectator's collective memory, and perfectly recognizable, which helps to create meaning.

In short, the visual album is a global product that interrelates the artist's universe and story through the distribution of official content via social networks and everything created by fans (Sedeño-Valdellos, 2021).

Some African-American artists precede Lil Nas X in their decision to carry out transmedia work similar to this one as a form of self-expression and identity creation with a social scope or background. This is the case, first of all, of Beyoncé, who has a total of three visual albums: *Beyoncé* (2013), *Lemonade* (2016) and *Black is King* (2020). In her works, she has placed the African-American community at the center and explored sisterhood and feminist vision through visual motifs and performance techniques to achieve the aggrandizement of her central figure and an immersive experience for the viewer (Sedeño-Valdellos, 2021).

3.1. CONVENTIONAL MUSIC VIDEOS

On Montero, four tracks are singles with conventional full-length music videos: *Montero (Call Me By Your Name), Industry Baby* (ft. Jack Harlow),

That's What I Want, and Sun Goes Down. These were the most visible singles on the album. All four cases involve mixed narrative/performative music videos in which the singer appears and plays the lead role. These stories are not complex but are generally linked to his lyrics.

Montero (Call me by your name) is the first song on the album, which also opens the visual album and refers directly to Luca Guadagino's queer-themed film (2017). It begins with a crane-like overhead shot, the sense of which is the introduction, through a rural scene where trees are visible. A pink-colored countryside brings to mind a colorful fantasy or fairy tale.

After this, the singer is presented as an adanic character who begins a journey through places with no realistic solution of continuity, while he comes across some figures that refer to a biblical imagination. There is the tree with large fruit (apples) and the serpent, from which he flees. The serpent pushes him on a spatial journey that takes him from heaven to hell, which he reaches by climbing down a pole dance pole.

This discipline is used in several videos shared on social networks. Meanwhile, the lyrics address a vital duality: "In life, we hide parts of ourselves that we don't want the world to see. We lock them away. We say no, we make them disappear. But we won't do it here. Welcome to Montero". This is followed by a quote in Greek from Plato's Banquet: "After the division of the two parts of man, each one desiring his other half," while the image represents a trial reminiscent of that of Jesus Christ before Pontius Pilate - with his multiplied figure.

The last part of the video continues with this dance, as he sexually insinuates himself into a devil figure sitting on his throne. After that, he kills the devil and removes his crown. At this point, the Lil Nas X figure finishes transforming, represented by a smile and glassy eyes, like a supernatural entity.

Therefore, the plot and connotative codes of the image are aimed at representing a process of individual transformation. The sexual content of the video - Lil Nas X has relations with the snake and with the devil -and the use of color - from primary pastel blue colors to saturated reds and blacks that differentiate the two parts of the video -are key elements that engage the audience in the analysis. The use of virtual scenarios (almost all of them realized as 3D scenarios) combines throughout the video to create a visual piece that is somewhere between computer graphics, video game figuration, and naturalistic daydreams.

Industry Baby is probably the most conventional clip within the typology of narrative videos: First of all, the singer does not modify his identity beyond what is conditioned by the plot, which is inserted in prison and an escape seasoned by a choreographic performance, starring semi-naked or naked black men. These again refer directly to the homosexual vindication contained in the album's narrative, included in the lyrics and the author's comments in all kinds of media. The prison space and the plot around an escape stand out as a unique metaphor for a flight of feelings and a situation of lack of identity authenticity that he complains about: "I told you a long time ago on the road. I got what you were waiting for. I'm not running away from nothing, dog".

That's What I Want is a story of heartbreak that places Lil Nas X in three very different settings. The first two are used to construct a classic love story between him and another man in situations about normative masculinity: an American football field and an American Western location (the latter is a specific quotation from Ang Lee's 2005 film *Brokeback Mountain*). In the

final scene, however, the story is set in a church where dressed as a bride, he weeps after learning of the conventional marital life of the character he loves.

Finally, *Sun Goes Down* is a hybrid between conventional narrative and the following visual type to be analyzed - visual postcards - which begins with a 3D-generated conceptual world, giving way to a story with a cinematic aesthetic inspired by the 1980s. However, the actual plot was set in 2017. The artist, in this song, talks about his experience when he attempted suicide as a teenager.

To begin with, the singer appears in a water-filled space that turns into mirrors, from which doors open into specific visions of other videos. One of them opens on what seems to be a journey into his teenage past. There, he appears at a party known as prom, a special time for every American teenager. Lil Nas X seems lonely and sad and wonders about himself and his sexuality, in contrast to the apparent normality of his peers, who attend the prom as a couple. At this moment, this sense of not belonging is accentuated when he locks himself in the bathroom and cries. Finally, after talking and seeing his future self (the current Lil Nas X), he rejoins the others at the dance.

The song's lyrics again refer to a scenario of confusion, negative feelings, and not belonging to the youth social group in which he is inserted. The chorus of the song says: "I want to run away. I don't want to lie, I don't want a life. Send me a gun, and I'll see the sun. I'd rather run away. I don't want to lie, I don't want a life. Send me a gun, and I'll see the sun".

Discrimination due to their physique and skin color also appears in the lyrics, which talk about bullying and the emotions of loneliness, anxiety, or depression that they arouse (also appearing in their messages on social networks). Despite

all this, the outcome of the song is positive and hopeful, as can be seen in the last chorus: "I know you want to cry. But there's so much more to life than dying".

According to the artist, the song is about his suicidal thoughts as a teenager and is intended to serve as an example for other young people in the same situation. As a construction of a queer subject, it requires a restructuring of experience and a departure from the norms of white heteronormativity experienced as a child. In this project, "queer is a form of longing to reconstruct outside the timeline of what was lost or repressed in childhood" (Grullon, 2022, p. 8).

In short, these music videos, which are closer to narrative classics, contain many references to the lyrics and their identity-claiming content. Moreover, they are highly intertextual.

3.2. VISUAL POSTCARDS

The rest of the videos on the visual album are of a simpler and more diverse production and take the form of 3D digital postcards. They are visual texts of concise duration, between 30 and 40 seconds, which are reproduced in a loop and repeated throughout the song. This is usually the result of production processes with lower quantity and quality of economic resources in the production phase, which is compensated for by this generation of 3D graphics.

It is worth noting the variety of settings that populate the digital scenographies, which are visually freer, less aesthetically, and creatively limiting, unlike the filming conditions of the natural settings. *Dolla Sign Slime* and *Lost in Citadel* start with a moving zenithal shot, like a bird's eye view, and *Void* or *Tales of Dominica* take a slower one. All have an immersive effect or an invitation for the viewer to enter a utopian world. Skyscrapers with glass walls that can be pierced, fairytale castles, and apocalyp-

tic, urban, and surreal scenarios make up the scenographic roster of Montero's pieces and, in them, we see a multitude of physical representations such as avatars or virtual characters performing basic actions of video game heroes. We also see classic animated stories such as flying, floating, or passing through glass to enter buildings. This clearly references a claim of identity construction or experiential transformation. Numerous doublings of his visual figure allude to the allegory of the döppelganger or double.

In *Montero*, the artist plays all the roles; in *Void*, his avatar watches his own figure on television; in *Lost in Citadel,* he watches himself sleep; and in *Sun Goes Down*, he seems to be advising his adolescent self, which follows the spirit of the letter. This physical multiplication has also been employed in the promotional photographs of collaborations with fashion brands (Harris, 2021).

There are also several occasions where the naked or semi-naked torso is used, either alone or in a group. They refer to the homosexual iconography of San Sebastián. Choreographies of several semi-naked or naked black men are found in *Industry Baby*; also, there are kisses with himself (Montero) and with other male characters (narrative video clips such as *That's what I want*; a kiss with his partner was also used in the performance of the BET awards, Black Entertainment Television) (Figure 1).

Figura 1.

Queer bodies and desire in various music video

Industry Baby

Montero (Call me by your name)

At this point, it is necessary to reflect a little more on the character of the 3D digital image and its relation to queer aesthetics in recent years. According to Blanco-Fernández (2022), there is no real referent in them, which is why they are more suitable for disruptive narratives, worlds outside the norm, and utopian worlds, such as those presented by queer phenomenology, whose main referent is the figure of the cyborg, the new political subject. Indeed, 3D seems to be the most pertinent type of figuration to begin to "model worlds, speculate

bodies" (Blanco-Fernández, 2022) and create a revolution with the construction of more egalitarian and subversive identities (Swope, 2021).

This is the most important reference to Afro-futurist aesthetics, a term developed by Dery (1994). It is used to indicate a utopian reconstruction of the future through the black race, where aesthetic elements typical of science fiction are joined with others associated with black identity.

Another fully postmodern aspect is found in the *kitsch* inspiration of virtual scenography, where classical tradition and 3D merge. The accumulation and mixture of these components of varied origins creates a certain disorder in this desire to quote and produces a very artificial final effect that has a renewing will. As Meracci says, "The typical modality of *kitsch* is to quote out of context an aesthetic and artistic reference" (2018, p. 22) to completely reappropriate that form.

The columns of ancient Roman art in videos such as *Montero* (the first video of the album) and *Am I Dreaming?* (the last), with flowers and bushes in unnatural colors that do not hide their digital figurative modality, underline the opening and ending character of the entrance to a place, to a world of one's own, to a kind of great theatre where a story will take place or has taken place.

Medieval references, dream castles, and artificial exteriors (urban, bucolic) allow for an almost infinite set of visual quotations, which are re-appropriated to give shape to a utopia of identity or self-birth that can be seen, for example, in *Dolla Sign Slime*. There, a black king dressed in golden armor sits on his throne. This look has been employed by the artist in concerts and for guest attendance at events, in an example of the intermediality of his narrative (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Intermission between a Dolla Sign slime and Lil Nas X's Instagram moment.

Dolla sign slime

Instagram de Lil Nas X

As the last noteworthy element of these four videos, it is necessary to discuss the visual motifs and cross-references that construct an intertextual coherence between videos.

Firstly, they have to do with the references to other visual texts close to queer iconography, although they are also related to everything related to a previously underlined biblical symbolism and specific global visual icons, such as the figure of *The Thinker* (Rodin, 1881-1882) in *Tales of Dominica.*

Similarly, a whole series of visual motifs recur between the conventional video clips and the digital postcards and refer to introspective characters who have visions, invoke, or see the future or the past. A parallel is made with the blind Tiresias, fortune teller and prophet of the city of Thebes, who metamorphoses into a woman in Ovid's work. A narrative of self-discovery, apprenticeship, and subjective quest lies behind the use of symbols such as water, mirrors, and watery surfaces such as eyes, which reflect objects or are sometimes glazed by blindness (Figure 3).

Figure 3

As a fortuneteller or prophet in various videos

These visual postcards refer in particular to queer desire and a series of quotations well known to the writer for their biblical content and their use of *kitsch* aesthetics.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL PROMOTIONAL TOOLS

The artist has used social media around his releases and visual works, which allows us to affirm that he has made good use of digital strategies, especially to achieve subtexts and link the themes of videos and songs with the tools that come from platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter.

First, in 2018, he promoted his song *Old Town Road* through the *#YeeHawChallenge*, launched on TikTok. The challenge consisted of users taking part in videos dressed as cowboys or cowgirls while dancing to the song[1]. Such was its impact that the web was filled with versions, mashups, and visual ideas about this game.

Soon after, the renowned music production company Columbia Records signed the artist to release his first album. Then, the song was re-released, featuring country singer Billy Ray Cyrus, which changed his initial commercial strategy. Thus, he achieved a new record in the

1 Compilation https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxwpK-KK3P4s&t=53s

music industry, with a total of fifteen platinum records awarded by the RIIA (Recording Industry Association of America). In 2019, she added to the promotion another challenge that encouraged people to appear magically dressed like in the Wild West and to drink *Yee yee Juice*[2]. TikTok's management highlighted the meme as a success story and took the song to the Billboard Hot 100, where it stayed for 17 weeks.

All this experience helped the singer to innovate on the release of his album Montero. The first single was accompanied by the launch of the "Satan's Slippers," created by a Brooklyn-based artist collective, MSCHF. According to the singer, the shoes in question contained a drop of human blood on the soles, an inverted cross, a pentagram, and the words of the bible verse from Luke 10:18: "Then he said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.'" The shoe was priced at around $1,000, and there were only 666 numbered pairs. According to some sources, the shoes sold out in less than a minute. These shoes were a well-known Nike model, specifically the Nike Air Max 97 (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Satan Shoes
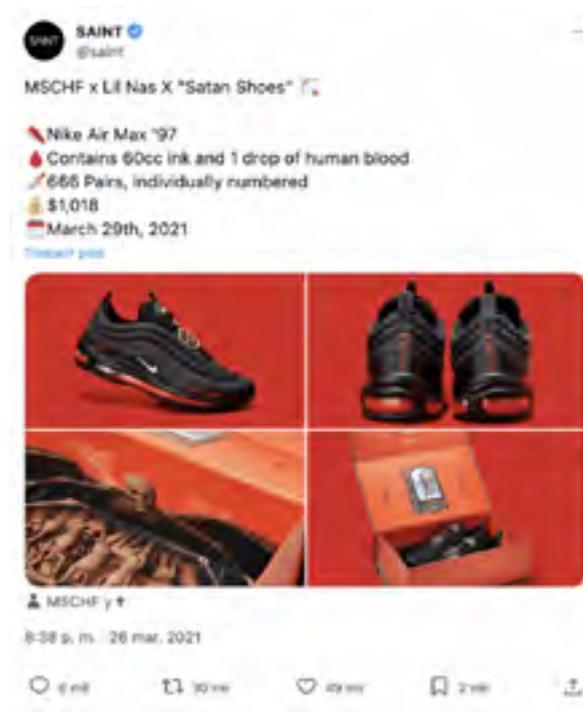
For all this, Nike sued Lil Nas X and MSCHF for trademark infringement. However, as if it were all part of the same strategy, the Nike lawsuit was used by Nas for the intro of his second single, *Industry Baby (feat Jack Harlow)*, which begins with a lawsuit against the artist himself for being homosexual. On his social networks, Nas has expressed his concern about the possible consequences of the lawsuit on several occasions. However, this has only been part of the planning for disseminating his work, which has created content that could quickly go viral due to its dramatic and provocative nature.

Because of this, Montero's narrative spread across all media and social media, generating a lot of public buzz. During the process, Lil Nas shared on his Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter profiles a lot of content created to keep fans on their toes and expectant. Specifically, the narrative was focused on the idea of pregnancy, where the release of his album was the birth of his baby (Image 2).

2   An   example   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbhTEvcvmEU

All this content has generated a lot of controversy. Still, it has engaged fans and generated high interest in his music, as all these audiovisual pills contained references and hidden messages concerning the album itself. Montero's story world goes beyond the visual album itself and its music videos, as he managed to create a story around the product that has enriched and elevated it.

Figure 5.

Content on Instagram regarding the launch of Montero

On another occasion, Lil Nas X released a personal letter he wrote to his 14-year-old self. This action was part of the promotion of his debut album, so it was released on Twitter minutes before the record's release. Its content helped millions of young people who identified with the artist's words. In this letter, he said:

Dear 14 year old montero,

I wrote a song with our name in it. It's about a guy I met last summer. I know we promised to never be "that" type of gay person, I know we promised to die with the secret, but this will open doors for many other queer people to simply exist. you see this is very scary for me, people will be angry, they will say i'm pushing an agenda. But the truth is, I am the agenda to make people stay the fuck out of other people's lives and stop dictating who they should be. Sending you love from the future. (Twitter, 26 March 2021)

The social media intervention has continued on both Instagram and TikTok, with comments on social media about his personal life and attendance at events, concerts, and live television performances.

Thus, these visual postcards are full of visual motifs and can be related, in particular, to certain controversies involving the artist that are present on his social networks.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Transmedia storytelling aims - and wants to ensure - access to the viewer's attention for communicative projects. While this is a suitable form from an industrial point of view for the marketing of cultural products, it is also relevant for the extraordinary dynamics of personal image management and the creation of storytelling. In Montero's case, the musical project also has a visual format, the album with video clips or postcards. It is maintained with a link through messages on social networks that involve the fans and consumers of this content, acting as a gateway or conduit to the whole album universe.

The main feature of the musical project analyzed, and its storytelling, is the production of a representation of alternative masculinity, constructed in process, in an effort to transform, where there are continuous moments of flight, failure, introspection, acceptance of his homosexual condition, and learning. Situations of suffering, social rejection, and reflection around personal moments are represented in the video plots and in the lyrics and messages on social networks.

An attempt to disrupt the meaning of being a man exists behind the representation of her pregnancy, her crying while dressed as a bride in her heartbreak, and her kisses with another boy dressed as a cowboy or dressed up after playing rugby. The scenes with homosexual content are distributed between narrative moments (love relationships) or performative ones (insinuating choreographies with completely naked dancers), with a fluidity, splitting or multiplication of roles, of identities, which in many cases refers to the dichotomies of good/bad and present/past.

In conjunction with this, the varied representations of the artist as an avatar or virtual character, in many of what have been called visual postcards, enrich this claim of queer existential fantasy of emancipation, where there is an emphasis on non-normative practices and bodies. This kind of radical birth or transformation also requires a spatial framework that is characterized by a visual figuration dominated by artificial scenarios made with 3D digital techniques, as well as a symbolism that combines biblical references, which was already profusely used in video clips (Monzón, 2013), objects with

a substantial charge of meaning (water, the mirror, the eye) and fantasy places (medieval castles, cities of the future). In this sense, the visual album continues to use the viewer's visual memory and knowledge of previous cultural texts to reinforce discursive coherence with minimal resources.

Two interesting aspects emerge from this kind of image system, which is at the heart of *Montero's* storytelling. This storytelling is conveyed by videos and messages on social networks and by the outfits she wears to social events.

Firstly, this hybridization of visual references and their recurrence results in a highly intertextual work and produces an audiovisual experience where the content and its delivery through the various channels is highly cohesive and refers to the kitsch aesthetic, so scarcely developed by the musical genre in which Montero is framed, hip hop, and very useful for sharing content in the digital medium. On the other hand, a conceptual framework is created that refers to the individual future of its main protagonist and creator, Lil Nas X, but also of the collective in which he is located, the black queer community. Race and sexuality appear as criteria of identity definition in a social and political sense, something that Afrofuturist philosophy has already invoked on several occasions. The project is similar to that of other musicians, especially black female artists. It is

somehow integrated into this genealogy, which is becoming increasingly established as a promotional campaigning and storytelling strategy in popular music.

The concurrence of this type of scenes, symbols, and splitting of characters as patterns of representation and the spatiotemporal construction described—fantasy worlds, avatars, references—allows us to affirm that Montero's Adanic proposal is coherent with a kind of presentation in society and exploration of identity and authenticity that has characterized popular music. After all, Adam appears as Lil Nas X in the first video, *Montero (Call by your name).*

Montero is a project that makes explicit the convergence of media and materializes especially in a format, the visual album, helpful in sharing its pieces through the atomization of content - in the form of videos of songs - but which develops seriality and a sense of totality as an invention of media performance that needs to be ubiquitous but also refer to other previous visual texts as quotations. In doing so, Lil Nas X socializes his narrative, shares it, and confirms the efficacy of the transmedia media paradigm and its innumerable economic and promotional advantages.

Transmedia and identity construction in the music industry: the case of the visual album Montero by Lil Nas X

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