Memories of the future in steampunk theatricality: between retrofuturistic heterotopic voices and visualities

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Abstract: This article is a partial result of research at CNPq and focuses on the memory of the future in steampunk theatricality. Based on researchers from the Human and Social Sciences, focused on the theoretical field of memory and communication, which includes studies of oral and visual culture, this article aims to analyze the way in which the memory of the future is generated. To this end, it uses a combination of different methodologies, methods and techniques: practiced flânerie at steampunk events for the production of interviews, photographic and videographic images, bibliographic and documentary research. It is expected to demonstrate that in this theatricality the memory of the future is created in the verbivocovisual interweaving perceived in the materialities generated: oral narratives, invented clothes and objects, retrotypes, which provide heterotopic and retrofuturistic visualities.

Keywords: Memory of the future. Steampunk. Theatricality. Heterotopia. Retrofuturism.

Memórias do futuro na teatralidade steampunk: entre vozes e visualidades heterotópicas retrofuturistas

Resumo: Este artigo é resultado parcial de pesquisa no CNPq e tematiza a memória do futuro na teatralidade steampunk. Com base em pesquisadores das Ciências Humanas e Sociais, voltados ao campo teórico da memória e da comunicação, em que se incluem os estudos da cultura oral e visual, o presente artigo objetiva analisar o modo pelo qual a memória do futuro é gerada. Para tanto, vale-se da combinação de metodologias, métodos e técnicas diversas: a *flânerie* praticada em eventos steampunks para a produção de entrevistas, de imagens fotográficas e videográficas, pesquisas bibliográficas e documentais. Espera-se demonstrar que nesta teatralidade a memória do futuro se faz no entretecido verbivocovisual percebido nas materialidades geradas: narrativas orais, roupas e objetos inventados, os retrótipos, que proporcionam visualidades heterotópicas e retrofuturistas.

Palavras-chave: memória do futuro, steampunk, teatralidade, heterotopia, retrofuturismo.

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Initial Considerations

Research into steampunk – a science fiction genre consolidated in the United States of America at the end of the 1980s, which expanded to the streets, through meetings of young adults in costume, and to media other than literature – is being developed by myself and the research group that I have been coordinating for some time, especially observing the steamers collectives at their events. Between the periods of 2014 to 2016[1] (Nunes, 2015), we investigated the historiography and dominant logics of consumption and developed the concept of theatricality, based on the studies of Paul Zumthor (2007) and Josette Féral (1998), expanded to analyze this practice using the work of Ileana Diéguez (2014).

Between 2017 and 2020, we came to the understanding that the production of steampunk memory could be named as "invented memory", based on the understanding of the role of montage, the planning of something that does not exist in the world of facts, open to projections of the imaginary (Nunes, 2017). We feel encouraged to think about a way of articulating memory that projects a future beyond the past as a temporal mark of the thing remembered (Ricoeur, 2007). We recognize the fruitful dialogue between this invented way of constructing memories with what the English historian Mary Carruthers (2011) calls memory of the future when highlighting, in medieval culture, the importance of imagination for memory, when remembering could be remembering what unknown, invisible things, like Saint Augustine's maxim: "remember Paradise". The ongoing research (CNPq, 2021-2024)[2] problematizes steampunk theatricality by asking about the memory of the future and the construction of codes to understand it, such as utopia, heterotopia and uchronia. In this article we only discuss heterotopia, "absolutely other spaces" (Foucault, 2013, p. 21).

Based on researchers from the Human and Social Sciences, especially focused on the theoretical field of memory and communication, which includes studies of oral and visual culture, this article articulates the relationships between memory, theatricality, heterotopia and retrofuturism based on specific narration of the research trajectory. It aims to analyze the way in which the memory of the future can be generated in steampunk theatricality. To this end, it uses a combination of different methodologies,

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1   Called MCTI/CNPq/MEC/CAPES nº 22/2014 – Human, Social and Applied Social Sciences.
2   Project related to the Productivity PQ Level 2 Grant: "Memories of the future, codes and consumption: steam theatricalities, texts and spaces".

methods and techniques: practiced flânerie in the field to capture interviews recorded in audio and video, the production of photographic and videographic images, bibliographic and documentary research.

To understand the production of steampunk memory, considering the participation in events held in São Paulo (Steamcon, 2015, 2016), where many steamers are concentrated, we bring, in the article, fragments of the recordings obtained placed in relation to the images generated in the field, understood as sources of memory (Mauad, 2013). In view of the material collected and generated, the considerations of Hermeto and Santhiago (2022, p. 26) are confirmed when they highlight the importance of oral history "as an enterprise that has the recording of the human voice at its center, but that amplifies the reach of their hypotheses and speculations when combined with other sources and records that allow the apprehension of the unsaid and the researcher's intuition". Therefore, the importance of the field and the researcher involved in the sensitive universe: immersed in the soundscape, listening, attentive to the configurations of the images, aware of their own verbal questions.

The article is structured into three sections, in addition to initial and final considerations. In the first part, it presents a set of interviews and images linked to the concept of steampunk theatricality; next, visualities created in line with heterotopias and memory. Finally, a type of spatiotemporal coding, retrofuturism recognized in Steam creations. It is expected to demonstrate that in this theatricality, the memory of the future is created in the verbivocovisual interweaving apprehended in the materialities constructed by its participants: oralized narratives through which they narrate their visions of steampunk as well as clothes, accessories and invented objects, the retrotypes, which provide retrofuturistic heterotopic visualities.

Pedro, Max and Lita

The decision to spend that Sunday in August in the village of Paranapiacaba, municipality of Santo André, in the state of São Paulo, came about to continue research into youth theatricality.[3] The village was home to workers on the São Paulo Railway Company Limited, the first in the state, founded by Irineu Evangelista de Sousa, the Baron of Mauá, José da Costa Carvalho and Councilor José Antônio Pimenta Bueno in 1867. The road connected the city of Santos to the then village of Jundiaí and other provinces of São Paulo to transport the coffee production at the time. Located at the top of Serra do Mar, the railway village is today an urban complex listed by the

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[3]   Research into young groups dressing up and performing as characters was developing, primarily with cosplay. At that moment, we began the investigation into steampuks or steamers (Nunes, 2017).

National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (Iphan),[4] but it is also the setting for steampunk conventions, such as Steamcon Paranapiacaba, which has been taking place since 2013.

Conventions get their name inspired by foreign events. At these meetings, fans and supporters of the genre gather for a "spatial-temporal immersion that provides interactive activities set in museums and buildings of great historical importance", according to the Steampunk Council blog[5]- São Paulo store.[6] From exploratory research, we obtained an indication of this event and headed there.

Leaving Estação da Luz, in the center of São Paulo, the journey can take up to 2 hours. We arrived[7] by train and stopped in Rio Grande da Serra (Figure 1), also a municipality of Santo André, from where we left by bus to the village of Paranapiacaba.

Figure 1 – Rio Grande da Serra railway station.
Source: Field research – III Steamcon. Author's file. Photograph: Gilson Pedroza.

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[4]   Memory | The opening of the first railway in São Paulo, the São Paulo Railway. BNDigital, Feb. 16th, 2021.Available on: http://bndigital.bn.gov.br/artigos/memoria-a-abertura-da-primeira-ferrovia-paulista-a-sao-paulo-railway/. Accessed on: Mar. 24th, 2023.
[5]   Although the steampunk science fiction movement or genre established itself in the late 1980s, in Brazil it was only in 2008 that fans were able to join together in groups called Steampunk Councils gathered in stores, such as the São Paulo store, Rio de Janeiro, Paraná, among others. The Councils have the function of bringing together fans, publicizing the movement, promoting meetings and other cultural activities. Information from the Loja São Paulo website. Available on: http://sp.steampunk.com.br/steamcon/. Accessed on: Apr. 8th, 2023. See Pegoraro (2016).
[6]   Information from the Loja São Paulo website. Available on: http://sp.steampunk.com.br/steamcon/. Accessed on: Apr. 8th, 2023.
[7]   Research coordinated by me and carried out with the participation of members of the Mnemon research group – memory, communication and consumption (ESPM/CNPq).

We were four researchers: two master's students under my supervision, Gilson Pedroza and Lucas Teixeira, a professor external to our institution, Marco Bin, and me. We had been developing, in these projects, the *flânerie* method for producing interviews for some time now. We began field research without an exact time to start, at the mercy of the forces of chance, and, almost always, surprised by the unforeseen. Guided by a leaked script, we began by asking the interviewee to talk about their interest in the researched practice (Nunes, 2015b). A form of approach in flow that we created in the wake of Walter Benjamin's thoughts on Baudelaire (1991) and the concepts developed by Peter McLaren (1998) on the urban ethnographer, in the guise of a *flâneur*, between narratives and commodities.

The research that took place during III Steamcon was no different. We wanted to listen and get to know steampunk through the voices of its actors. We got on the bus and, when we arrived at the designated point to start the walk to the village, we realized that many of those who shared the bus with us were going to the event. Three of them were dressed in clothes that didn't look like branded or fashionable clothes to us, but we weren't sure how to characterize them. The bus stopped and we got off together, asking questions, starting conversations. To understand this genre of science fiction as a communicative, memory and consumption practice, it is almost impossible to separate orality and visuality because voice and word, gestures and poses, props, objects and scenarios are confused in the fabric of what we call steampunk theatricality.

Initially, the concept of theatricality was thought of as the theatricalization of everyday life based on performance involving voice, body and the materialities or cultural artifacts with which these young people occupy public spaces in an aesthetic way. Féral (1988) understands theatricality as a product of the gaze that creates another space, which becomes the other's space and gives way to the otherness of subjects and the emergence of fiction. Theatricality is the result of a perceptual dynamic, that of the gaze that unites a subject or object looked at with someone who looks. Photography, in the steampunk scene, amplifies this dynamic.

The bus was still there while Pedro Silva, Max Silva and Lita Ferreira – names discovered moments later, posed for Gilson Pedroza. Photography translates as corporeal-digital language in this practice whose expression is given through narratives, invented objects, specific clothes, accessories and performative gestures, such as those seen in igure 2: Pedro and Max's weapons raised, drawn; the yellow skirt lifted, the bag in front of the young woman's folded arm. They offer themselves to the gaze not only of the photographer, but of other visitors or residents of the village. Always ready to pose and post their images on social media, steamers bring to practice not only the physicality of the body, but its mediatization in the image.

Figure 2 – The steamers Pedro, Max and Lita upon arrival in Paranapiacaba, Part Alta.
Source: Field research – III Steamcon Author's archive. Photograph: Marco Bin.

When studying performance, Paul Zumthor (1997, p. 157) understands that the linguistic text, spoken or sung, in a certain way removes itself from the body thanks to the voice. The voice serves the body, and from then on "everything is colored in the language, nothing in it is neutral anymore, the words flow, loaded with intentions, with odors, they smell of man and the earth (or of what man uses to describe them). represents)". The presence gives the performance the status of symbolization, bodily integration in the cosmic harmony signified by the voice; the performance puts the actors in the presence, putting them into play through voice and gesture.

But here the performance is mediated thanks to photography. It is interesting to highlight that, unlike classic uses, the portraits in these scenes are not made to remember, as highlighted by Caroline Sotilo (2017, p. 131) when studying the use of photographs in the cosplay scene. The researcher draws attention to the "click effect", in which "the photographic act merges with the characters, forming part of the performance ritual, with the gesture [of photographing] being more important than the factual record". In the same way, steampunk theatricality can only be understood as a living body and voice and simultaneously a presence mediated by the image because it would not exist without photographs. It is worth saying that "each type of photography has a distinct social circuit, associated, to a large extent, with the social environments that produced it" (Mauad, 2013, p. 85). Photographic and videographic images of Steam meetings are made to circulate on the networks or simply remain stored in the memories of cell phones and computers, as Sotilo (2017) concludes.

We started going down Part Alta towards Vila Martin Smith or Vila Velha, where the festival took place. The interview took place walking over boulders and slopes whose steep slopes spoke of the local topography. Thais Cruz (2007, p. 84), when studying the architecture of Paranapiacaba, explains that the Upper Part "received an occupation marked by Portuguese heritage", defining the narrow street following the marking of the rugged terrain, with houses with small fronts, such as we see in Figure 6, different from Vila Martin Smith, established by the British from São Paulo Railway. During the long walk, we asked questions, laughed, listened, learning from them, as shown in the following sequence of photographic and videographic images.

Figure 3 – High part. Pedro, Max and Lita. Descent to Vila Martin Smith.
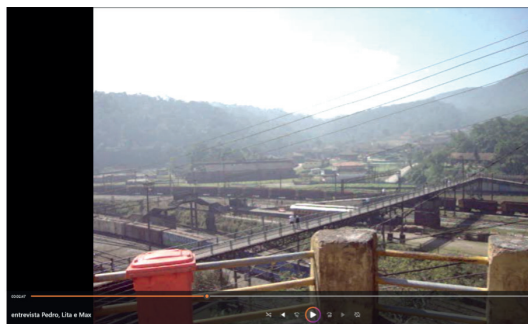Source: Field research – III Steamcon. Author's archive. Photograph: Gilson Pedroza.

Figure 4 – Frame 1: Descent to Vila Martin Smith, Parte Alta, Paranapiacaba.
Source: Field research – III Steamcon. Author's archive.

Figure5: Frame 2 – Pedro during the interview. Descent to Vila Martin Smith.
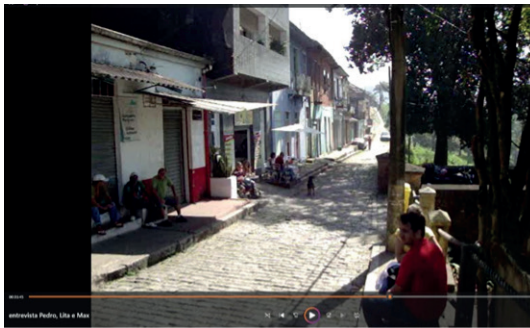Source: Field research – III Steamcon. Author's archive.

Figure 6 – Frame 3: Local population in the streets of Parte Alta seen during the descent.
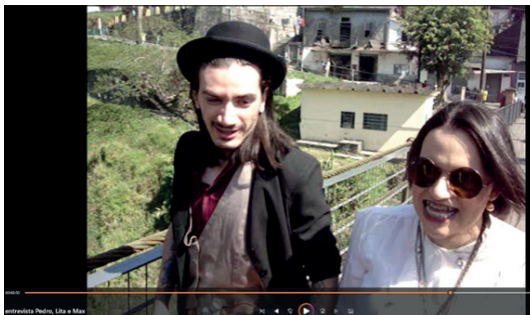Source: Field research – III Steamcon. Author's archive.

Figure 7 – Frame 4: Detail of Max and Lita during the interview. Descent to Vila Martin Smith.
Source: Field research – III Steamcon. Author's archive. Video: Marco Bin.

To introduce us to steampunk, Pedro goes back to the importance of literature from the end of century XIX, such as the works of Jules Verne, "Around the World in Eighty Days", "20,000 Thousand Leagues Under the Sea", he also refers to cinema

and mentions the film "The Crazy Adventures by James West", by Barry Sonnenfeld, produced in 1999. Pedro elucidates aspects of the genre: "steampunk is a science fiction genre with adventures from a world that evolved from the Victorian Era, but from steam" (Pedro Silva, 2015). The friend, Max Silva (2015), adds:

> [...] almost a parallel universe of the evolution of human beings, as if the world had evolved until the Victorian era and stopped there and evolved from there. So, you won't have the technologies that we have today, like cell phones, computers, [it's] a culture based on low technology. So, you have most things with steam, handmade, handmade, a lot of leather [...].

In between the chat/interview, I ask if they make their own clothes in which they perform. They respond alternately, placing themselves as metonymic representations of steampunk: "yes", says Pedro. "We improvise", continues Max. "It's a type of style that is very easy to do with pieces you already have in your wardrobe. Dress pieces or pieces with a lot of frills, leather", adds Lita Ferreira (2015). Max continues his comment about the costume of the girl who we discovered was his girlfriend: "[...] she made a mix of some cosplays she already had and other thrift store pieces". Pedro continues: "my [clothes] are more social and I just provided the suitcase, painted the gun and decorated the glasses". "And I walk like this every day", concludes Max, to the sound of our laughter, wearing a bowler hat, tight pants and a vest.

We didn't know Paranapiacaba nor had we attended the Steamcon event before that day. The working-class village, at the end of the century XIX, lent itself to the landscape, making it a symbolic space, a "practiced place", citing Michel de Certeau (1994), the setting for new narratives aimed at displaying a culture and style in accordance with Max's words (2015) and Lita (2015) referring to steampunk.

I explain our research to them and ask them why they want to revive or reinvent the Victorian period. Max takes the floor: "I particularly like the fashion of the thing and the ideas that are shared". Lita, in turn, states that "Victorian women were much more elegant", refers to "all that pomposity, the education", and concludes: "it's all so different, it's a pleasure to try to revive that". One of the group's researchers intervenes and points out the contradictions of the time, highlighting women's lack of freedom during the period. Max interrupts: "[...] in the current universe, but not in steampunk! It's a total recreation of the universe". The steamers advance in their motivations, and Lita reinforces: "you can be whatever you want in the steampunk universe, a pirate on an airship, for example". "An airship", continues Pedro. "This, an airship, one of the largest vehicles used in the steampunk era", adds Max. Pedro clarifies our doubt definitively: "there is no historical correspondence, it is as if the world had evolved along another timeline".

Heterotopic visualities

Walking around the village alongside the steamers, recording, photographing, filming, that is, producing oral and visual writings, was fundamental to discovering what was previously unknown. Thanks to the research work of two photographers and Photography teachers in Communication courses,[8] it was possible to obtain views translated into images, corroborating what Ana Maria Mauad (2013) highlights by bringing Guran's (2000) assumptions about the use of photography in social research and fieldwork. The author highlights the role of the researcher-photographer, whose role may be that of an assistant, not necessarily the scientific responsible. Gilson Pedroza was with us that Sunday and rode his Cannon G11 during our journey in Paranapiacaba. We all had cameras on our cell phones. Some turned to capturing images, behaving like researcher-photographers, others to interviews.

Guran didactically establishes attributes to the images taken in the field: photographs to discover and photographs to tell. In the first case, the researcher becomes familiar with his object and asks questions based on the images. In the second, he masters his object of study and uses photography "to safely highlight striking aspects and situations of the culture studied and develop his reflection based on the evidence that photography can point out" (Guran, 2000, p. 156). The author states that as the research progresses, the two types of work occur simultaneously. In our investigation, discoveries and stories occurred as we learned from the interviews and the literature consulted.

In this article, the set of images brought tells how urban remains from other eras allow the materialization of memory in its intertwined temporal relationships narrated orally by steamers. Let's look at the photographs: The present steampunk performance taking place in the middle of a Sunday in the old railway town of São Paulo with its inhabitants and habits: passers-by, young people on bicycles (Figure 8) or people on doorsteps framing the streets we crossed with Pedro, Max and Lita on the way to Martin Smith's village, as shown in the previous section (Figure 6). The past remains thanks to the history of the town itself and the invention of sign materialities attributed to the Victorian period, such as ruffled dresses, hats, leather accessories (Figure 9), or thanks, still, to elements of the landscape: the spectrum of an old train continuing its days next to the modern car parked in front of the lawn where one of its carriages is rotting (Figure 8).

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[8]   Caroline Sotilo and Glson Pedroza.

Figure 8 – Abandoned wagon on an old railway line, Paranapiacaba.
Source: Field research – III Steamcon. Author's archive. Photograph: Gilson Pedroza.

Figure 9 – Steamers in Vila Martin Smith, Paranapiacaba.
Source: Field research – III Steamcon Author's archive. Photograph: Gilson Pedroza.

The researcher-photographer's gaze offers details that may go unnoticed without the use of a camera, so the task of photography used as a method of observation is also "to make visible what is not always seen" (Guran, 2000, p. 160). Figure 9, for example, reveals the temporal and mnemic confluence and simultaneously the opening for the projection of a heterotopic fictional space, making the experimentation with steampunk theatricality possible.

Steam characters walk in front of the group of semi-detached houses made of Riga pine wood whose retreat from the street gives way to gardens and a side retreat. Thaís Cruz (2007, p. 73) explains that these constructions, at the time, responded to an English ideal, perhaps referring to Victorian England, "where the suburban or country house became popular thanks to the prosperity of the middle classes who sought refuge in remote places". Life without opulence, enjoying nature and your own gardens. The author reinforces that in Brazil, until the middle of the century XIX, urban houses were not set back and gardens were uncommon. It defends the hypothesis that the São Paulo Railway implemented a new urban logic in Paranapiacaba, a new way of living imported from England, which is reflected in the group of houses in Vila Martin Smith where, today, steamers parade their styles and looks.

The researcher-photographer managed to "capture a representative synthesis moment of the universe under study", returning to Guran (2000, p. 159), because in the photographic image (Figure 9), a heterotopic space constructed thanks to capturing the flow of passersby in that place, at a given moment. Several temporal and mnesic connections are imposed: relationships of similarity between the brownish color of the houses from the century XIX, in the background, and those of the fake Victorian dresses, brown and pink, sewn with current fabrics and trimmings bordering the cobblestones; paradoxical relationships between the set of houses, the characters and the young man in shorts, t-shirt and photographic equipment who accompanies them; We also see, in the image, a certain mirroring between modern photographic equipment and the reinvention of the old camera[9] seen subtly in the background of the scene, on the back of another character wearing pants, a vest and a mask coming off his head.

Such associations form an optical counterspace in tune with theatricalization, with (re)lived Victorianism. Among Foucault's heterotopias, there are the heterotopias of time or heterochronies. The author finds that heterotopias can be linked to temporal segments and that many societies create spaces of all times, where times accumulate to infinity (Foucault, 2013, p. 25). In steampunk theatricalization, timelines not only accumulate, they juxtapose and overlap.

Heterotopias have been associated with fictional elements linked to the reinvention of Victorianism or, as it has been called, neo-Victorianism. According to Marie-Luise Kohlke, Elizabeth Ho and Akira Suwa, editors of the special issue of the journal *Humanities*, "Neo-Victorian Heterotopias" (2022), associating heterotopias with neo-Victorianism is a fertile exercise to explore the impacts of the century XIX on the cultural imaginary, on memory and in today's identity politics. The authors

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9   When amplifying the image, we intuitively noticed the similarity between the daguerreotype camera, from the 1800s, and the steampunk recreation, using the website of the photography news outlet, Abstract Photographic. Available on: https://www.resumofotografico.com/p/quem-somos.html. Accessed on: Apr. 23th, 2023. However we did not interview the steamer referred to in the photograph to confirm that the recreation is based on the suggested model.

reinforce that the heterotopias identified by Foucault, although initially associated with architecture and spaces, are open to studies of fictional representations and are currently used in a wide range of theoretical fields. Linked to the century XIX, heterotopic constructions represent resistance and even reparations to actions of social and political erasure.

We are interested in understanding that heterotopias, and equally uchronias (Nunes; Bin, 2021) establish a counterspace of memory – in which spatiotemporal layers juxtapose and overlap, configuring the invented future perceived in the formulation of "a world evolved by another timeline" (Max Silva, 2015; Pedro Silva, 2015), that is, pregnant with unthinkable events in the directions taken by historical societies. Kelvin Knight (*apud* Kholke; Ho; Suwa, 2022) considers that heterotopias are most effective when they distort the conventional experience of time – understood linearly, progressive, unidirectional, always advancing towards a supposedly better future. Neo-Victorian works, for the author, as well as heterotopias, interrupt this apparently relentless movement, as they bring representations of the century XIX to the present, inviting us to simultaneously see the remaining past in action in social spaces, institutions and policies. current government. It understands the self-production of neo-Victorianism as a heterochronic relational space that allows the experimentation of the century XIX in the present and the present in the past, making the neo-Victorian text itself a kind of heterotopia.

Heterotopias are also useful for questioning norms of century XIX, as shown by the reflections seen in flânerie among steampunks, especially regarding female behavior patterns, such as what we heard in Lita Ferreira's speech (2015): "you can be the want in the steampunk universe", even though this young woman referred to the pomposity of the dresses, to the education of the Victorian era, as narrated above, without verbally paying attention to the oppressive mechanisms of that society.

Karol Souto's interview (Figure 10) is more incisive. With crossover[10] Star Trek steampunk, she appears in fishnet tights, high-heeled boots, shorts, tights and whips, subverting the classic image of a Star Trek character and, equally, that of a Victorian woman. The long lace petticoat used under skirts to create volume in women's fashion of century XIX now appears shortened only at the front, open, exposing the shorts. Karol reports that her look serves to protest, as some young women would have been victims of misogynistic speeches thanks to the characters they represented with sensual cosplays at another event, demonstrating a political stance in their verbal speech and in their characterization.

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[10] In the language of audiovisual series, crossover is the presence of two or more distinct series or "universes" coexisting in one, as well as two or more characters from different series. The young steamer refers to the construction of a character bringing together features of steampunk and the Star Trek series, an American audiovisual product created in 1966, designed and produced by Gene Roddenberry. Available on: https://www.omelete.com.br/star-trek. Accessed on: Apr. 27th, 2023.

Figure 10 – Karol in his Star Trek steampunk crossover.
Source: Field research – III Steamcon. Author's archive. Photograph: Marco Bin.

In 2016, part of our research group was again in Paranapiacaba at IV Steamcon. From the set of interviews obtained, shared in our research meetings, I list two more that confirm the role of neo-Victorian steampunk heterotopias as political forms. When defining what steampunk is, Raul Cândido Souza, founding member of the Steampunk Council of São Paulo, dialogues with the stance recognized in Karol's narrative.

> Steampunk is marginal steam. It has the Victorian charm, characteristic of steam, but it is marginal from a creative point of view, because when you think of steampunk, you think of technological creation, you think of possibilities. The century XIX, just like modern times, is full of prejudices, in fact we left the century XIX carrying several prejudices and we have more advanced technology [...]. You see women's Victorian clothing where they have the corset, which is a symbol of female aesthetic oppression, is a symbol of sexism, however, the corset on the outside of the outfit and the slightly shorter skirt [becomes] a symbol of female sexual liberation. Marginal vapor is the best definition for this, the countless possibilities and our thinking in relation to our own evolution (Raul Cândido Souza, 2016).

Kholke, Ho and Suwa (2022) argue that neo-Victorian heterotopias are real and that their sudden reappearance across the world, considering the most varied cultural productions, reveals their importance and the transformations they have undergone over time, serving quite different functions. In the entire volume dedicated to neo-

Victorianism, we find a reference to the steampunk genre (Krentz; Perschon; St. Amand, 2022), but not to the type of encounters researched, which we call theatricalities. In any case, we agree with the authors that tracking heterotopias can help to perceive, mirror or reflect the needs and contradictions of the present time, thanks to discontinuity or rupture. After all, as historian Régine Robin asks: (2016, p. 169): "where is there a constituted society that is at 'peace' with its past?".

During the IV Steamcon, our research group interviewed João Luís Dames and Márcia Alves (Figure 11). Through steampunk heterotopia and its theatricalizations, the couple claims the black presence in the century XIX, marked by erasures and racial genocides whose consequences continue to this day. João Luís (2016) states that "the only way to provide equality is to be present everywhere", as demonstrated by participating in the event. He also argues that "historically, the presence of black people in the century XIX and their scientific contribution was enormous, Thomas Edison's assistant was a black man and many inventions recorded by Edison were, in fact, made by him" (João Luís Dames, 2016).[11] Márcia, with her blackness, embodies Lady Fawcett – union leader, suffragist, philosopher, white –, demanding the right to representation. He categorically states: "the most difficult thing is to make technological evolution compatible with the development of humanity, with the end of prejudice, with equality, with rights for all, this is the most difficult thing to change" (Márcia Alves, 2016).

Figure 11 – Steamers José Luís Dames and Márcia Alves, Paranapiacaba.
Source: Field research – IV Steamcon. Author's archive. Photograph: Gilson Pedroza.

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[11]   I would like to thank the reviewer for this article for suggesting that Thomas Edison's assistant referred to by Dames was possibly Lewis Howard Latimer, among the many assistants he had.

In our flânerie at III and IV Steamcon, we were able to recognize not only theatricalized heterotopias reinforcing the necessary racial and gender equity. We hear narratives about paradoxical materialities invented to appear aged, such as nerf guns, like Max's, and copper-painted goggle glasses, like Pedro and José Luís, in turn, carrying a golden prosthetic arm (Figure 11). Bodies and objects perform a curious future implicated in the production of steam memory: retrofuturism.

Retrofuturism and its materialities

Alain Bublex and Elie During (2014), when discussing retrofuturism, a portmanteau word that appeared in 1983 in an experimental American magazine, Retrofuturism, explain the flourishing of the term in varied cultural spaces, from the artistic vanguards to mass culture, "which present, however, the common characteristic of proceeding with a temporal montage between past, present and future" (Bublex; During, 2014, p. 30). Broadly speaking, retrofuturism implies the joining of life forms, objects, goods, futuristic narratives, following the development of technologies, however, amalgamated with obsolete, outdated objects. The authors identify two modes of composition: on the one hand, retrofuturism whose fascination is given by the imagination colonized by a dated future, retro futurism; on the other, the uchronic imaginary, with productions that embarrass the past tinged with colors of the future not yet lived. In the words of the authors: futurized retros.

We witness the presence of futurized retros with steampunk heterotopias: temporal lines are not thought of from the past to the future, but from the future to the past, a movement to reconstruct the past in the light of the future, to imagine an alternative past, from another "evolutionary" line, as stated by our deponents. For the authors, "this is exactly what the science fiction genre 'Steampunk', a distant cousin of cyberpunk, suggests"[12] (Bublex; During, 2014, p. 33-34). It is true that the models suggested by Bublex and During are mixed and can be understood as different sides of the same coin.

However, we recognize the dominance of this futurized retro, especially in the sound materialities, the narratives they tell, and visuals generated by steams, the retrotypes – objects imagined based on materials existing in the past with a futuristic conception.

Still at III Steamcon we met Alexandre Leader Boss, engineer, 41 years old, steamer, who did not identify himself with his surname. His verbal narrative reveals

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[12]   Cyberpunk is also a literary movement whose most evident characteristic is the presence of dystopian societies. Steam narratives do not necessarily present dystopias.

in detail the construction of his helmet, a retrotype accessory that accompanies the crossover character, steampunk Darth Vader, created for the event.

> I finished it [his helmet] to look like copper, I took a bunch of electronic parts and glued them together, this one is from a car remote control. You take the material, look at it and say: where could I fit this here? Then you see. This here reminds me of something, you'll try it. Ah! This will look cool here! Ah! This isn't going to look good, so you build it little by little, I took like months for the helmet to be ready (Alexandre Leader Boss, 2015).

Figure 12 – Videographic recording frame. Detail: Retrotype helmet.
Source: Field research – III Steamcon. Author's archive. Photograph: Gilson Pedroza.

We observe with this narrative how the ability to imagine necessary to create a futurized retro helmet, covered in alleys, screws, sockets, wires, remains of electronic parts, articulates heterotopias of time. Imagination associated with memory, from a neuronal and cultural point of view – because it also speaks to the memory of the objects themselves, now traces of what they were and their original functions.

From another theoretical perspective, Keightley and Pickering (2012) admit that memory is a creative process and point out the need to think in terms of mnemonic imagination, as the steamer brings when narrating the creation of his retrotype: memory, experimentation and imagination for the appearance in the world of something that did not exist: "This reminds me of something like that, you try it. Ah! This is going to look cool here!" (Alexandre Leader Boss, 2015).

Biologist Henri Atlan (1992), in dialogue with Edgar Morin, attributes the increase in memory, from a neuronal point of view, to the appearance and development of the imaginary and the imagining man. In another way, neuroscientist Antônio Damásio

(1996), when differentiating the nature of perceptual mental images from evoked images that arise as we remember things that may appear when planning situations that have not yet been realized, states: "the nature of images of something that has not yet happened, and may in fact never happen, is no different from the nature of images about something that has already happened and that we retain" (Damásio, 1996, p. 124).

Memory images, whether organized based on past lived experience or on the imagination of a future expressed in the creation of retrotopical objects, feed heterotopias in all their complexity.

Final considerations

This article, representing a partial result of ongoing research, considers photography and video as methods of observation. We thus realize that steampunk theatricality makes fiction emerge on the scene as a break from everyday life, just as Pedro, Lita, Max, Karol, Raul Cândido, João Luís, Márcia and Alexandre parade their styles and characters amidst the Victorian setting of Paranapiacaba, with its topography and history.

However, we also observe that everyday reality crosses and overlaps with the fictional, approaching what Diéguez (2014) calls expanded theatricality. In the current phase of research, when we study heterotopias, this impression is confirmed. Thus, we read Lita's observations, Karol's disruptive stance corroborated by the narrative about steampunk as a marginal vapor and the symbols of female liberation, through the voice of Raul Cândido. Likewise, the demands of João Luís and Márcia in wanting to represent historical characters, black or not.

In our research, heterotopia comes to be seen as a code born from the retrofuturist imagination that allows us to think about the memory of the future. If for Bublex and During (2014) the concrete activation of retrofuturism is the continuous production of hybrid objects, for us, such objects are verbivocovisual materialities. Dresses simulating the Victorians, petticoats inspired by nineteenth-century fashion cut and placed outside the clothing, prosthetic arms, helmets, among others, mixed with narrative voices tell this parallel universe through the projection of new mmemonic imaginaries, which should serve to (re) build and re(invent) the present time, and, in a way, illuminate the past that still echoes.

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