'Metro 2033' – More Than a Cinegame?

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Abstract: This article's main idea is to extend the concept of the cinegame and put it into a broader medial context. As the example of 4A Game's first-person shooter *Metro 2033* (2010) demonstrates, film-computer game relationships prove to be essential intermedial connections, but they are by far not the only ones to be found. Besides the obvious filmic influences, interferences with literature and with other games shape the *Metro 2033* shooter experience in a process I want to call *ekranizatsiia* – 'screenisation'. Firstly, Glukhovskii's novel *Metro 2033* (2005) provides a fantastic universe which favours the emergence of convergent media such as the cinegame. Secondly, the process of *ekranizatsiia* uses filmic strategies in order to visualize the text. Thirdly, genre conventions of first-person shooters are applied to the result in order to add interaction. Thus, the media film, computer game and literature are equally involved in putting the *Metro 2033* shooter on the screen.

Keywords: intermediality, digital media, computer games, Metro 2033, Dmitrii Glukhovskii, fantastic universes.

In the last twenty years, the computer game managed to leave its marginalized position and enter the realm of mainstream media. During this process, the computer game has moved towards other media, while at the same time maintaining its unique medial status. According to Mark P. Wolf, the video game is to be put 'in a different category from traditional media, despite its audiovisual nature and often narrative basis' (Wolf 2002: 13). Wolf then describes how difficult it is to map the borders between games and other media (Wolf 2002: 14).

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, who incorporate new digital media such as the computer game into Marshall McLuhan's classic media theory, describe transmedial processes and interdependences more clearly. They state that

> a medium is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real. A medium in our culture can never operate in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of respect and rivalry with other media. (Bolter et al. 2000: 65)

According to Bolter and Grusin, computer games remediate the older media of film and television (Bolter et al. 2000: 94ff). Film and television in return remediate computer games (Bolter et al. 2000: 185). In this medial border region between game and film, the concept of the cinegame can help to better understand inter- and transmedial processes. The medium of computer game and the medium of film approach each other, media borders are crossed and a new hybrid medium — the cinegame — is born. But as the example of the *Metro 2033* shooter demonstrates, film-computer relationships are only a small part of a larger intermedial network this article strives to uncover.

Dmitrii Glukhovskii launched the fantastic *Metro 2033* universe [Vselennaia metro 2033] with his 2005 novel of the same title. It was then further extended by the sequel *Metro 2034* (2009) as well as by a set of novels written by other authors[1], various websites[2], an online radio station[3] and the first-person shooter *Metro 2033*[4] (2010) and its successor *Metro: Luch Nadezhdy / Metro: Last Light*[5] (announced for 2013). A feature-length film in the *Metro 2033* universe has been in the planning phase for quite some time now, but as of yet has not been realized (Sokolova 2012: 7). In this article, 4A Game's first-person shooter *Metro 2033* and its intermedial relations are in the centre of attention. This game has been tremendously successful, receiving critical acclaim and being extensively marketed all over the world. The PC version got an impressive rating on *Metracritic.com*, a website which accumulates game reviews: *Metro 2033* was in the top 40 games of 2010 and has been among the top 400 games of all time ('Highest and Lowest', 2012). At *Amazon.com*, it is currently still ranked number 54 in PC games sales ('Amazon Best Sellers', 2012). This commercial success does not come out of the blue. The virtual world of *Metro 2033* was created with great attention to detail, and the overall setting is intriguing: after a global nuclear war, a few remaining humans struggle to survive in the vast underground realm of the Moscow Metro. They are constantly threatened by mutants living on the planet's surface. Among those mutants, the so-called Dark Ones [Chernye] pose an especially severe threat. They are virtually invincible because of their psychic abilities and frequently enter the Metro tunnels through the Metro Station *Botanicheskii sad* [Botanical Garden]. As a consequence, the neighbouring *VDNKh* station becomes mankind's last stronghold against the mutant intruders. One of *VDNKh*'s inhabitants, the game's and novel's main protagonist Artem, travels the lengths of the Metro tunnels in order to find support and rescue for his home. The mutants are, however, not the only threat to mankind, there are fights among the human survivors of the nuclear war as well, and they have formed all sorts of political alliances.

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[1] In 2012 there were thirty books available and this number is increasing fast ('Vselennaia Metro 2033', 2012).

[2] Glukhovskii published his novel online at http://www.m-e-t-r-o.ru, nowadays http://www.metro2033.ru serves as entry point into the *Metro 2033* universe (both sites accessed 28 October 2012).

[3] The official radio station of the *Metro 2033* universe can be found at http://radiouniversum.podfm.ru/radio metro2033 (accessed 28 October 2012).

[4] *Metro 2033* (Ukraine, 4A Games 2010).

[5] *Metro: Last Light / Metro: Luch Nadezhdy* (Ukraine, 4A Games, planned for 2013). NB: As of November 2012, the Russian title has not been confirmed, see http://metro-game.com/page.php?id=253 (accessed 21 November 2012).

In order to describe the various intermedial interferences in the Metro 2033 universe, I theorize the convergent process of adapting a novel for the screen – no matter if a computer or silver screen – using the Russian term *ekranizatsiia*, meaning transferring meaning onto a screen.[6] In order to align this concept with contemporary media theory, I refer to Jens Schröter's idea of the 'primal intermedial network' [ur-intermediales Netzwerk] (Schröter 2008: 590-594). Afterwards, the notion of *ekranizatsiia* is used to conduct an analysis of intermedial connections in the *Metro 2033* computer game. First of all, its close relationship with film is elaborated. Then, I describe the game's relations to its literary predecessors. In the concluding section, I trace the *interludic* connections because the comparison between the computer game and the board game *Metro 2033* – i.e. a non-digital game – adds to the holistic overview over the computer game's position in the vast convergent realm of the *Metro 2033* universe.

Convergent Media and the Concept of *Ekranizatsiia*

As Henry Jenkins notes in his *Convergent Media*, the 'fascination with fictional universes often inspires new forms of cultural production' (Jenkins 2006: 131). Jenkins subsumes these new forms under the term 'convergence', i.e. 'a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communications systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture' (Jenkins 2006: 243). Jenkins focuses on American and British examples such as the *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* franchises (Jenkins 2006: 131-168; 169-205), but as Natalia Sokolova points out, convergent media are also part of Russian culture. According to her, the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* series is the most notable example, and she also mentions the *Watch* [Dozor] series, the *Ethnogenesis* [Etnogenez] series and *Metro 2033* (Sokolova 2012: 4ff). Due to the richly mediated nature of these convergent universes, it does not come as a surprise that they all – at least to a certain extent – contain film-computer game relationships. For example, the computer game *S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Shadow of Chernobyl / S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Ten' Chernobylia* (Ukraine, GSC Game World 2007) is loosely based on the film *Stalker* (1979, dir. Andrei Tarkovskii). The blockbuster *Night Watch / Nochnoi Dozor* (2005, dir. Timur Bekmambetov) spawned a computer game adaptation when it hit the cinemas in 2005: *Night Watch / Nochnoi Dozor* (Russia, Nival Interactive 2005). The *Ethnogenesis* series, which started with Polina Voloshina and Evgenii Kul'kov's novel *Marusia* (2009), as of now consists only of literature, but a medial expansion to film and computer game is planned ('FAQ – Novosti – Literaturnyi', 2011). Last but not least, a *Metro 2033* computer game already exists, and a film is projected, too. All of these examples illustrate the connections between film and computer games, but at the same time they suggest that other intermedial relations are important as well. First of all, the *Night Watch* computer game is not only based on Bekmambetov's

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[6] Throughout this article, the Russian plural form of ekranizatsiia – 'ekranizatsii' – is used as well.

film, but also on Sergei Luk'ianenko's eponymous novel from 1998.[7] The *S.T.A.L.K.E.R*
computer game draws its main ideas from the Strugatskii Brothers novel *Roadside Picnic*
[Piknik na obochine, 1972], and the *Metro 2033* shooter follows Glukhovskii's 2005 novel of
the same title. Thus, it becomes evident that the cinegame should be put into a broader medi-
al context, where the various processes of adaptation between film, computer games and lit-
erature can be highlighted. In order to investigate the cinegame in a broader medial context I
use the term *ekranizatsiia*, which corresponds with Jenkins' idea of content flowing across
media borders.

The Russian term *ekranizatsiia* can be translated as 'picturisation, filmisation, cinemati-
sation' or 'screen adaptation', but its literal translation would be *screenisation*. Currently,
ekranizatsiia is used to signify filmic adaptations of novels, but it could also apply to the
process of 'putting' a computer game 'on the screen'. This interpretation sheds a new light on
the medial interconnections of the cinegame, as it brings together literature, film and com-
puter games: Bekmambetov's film can be regarded as a classic, i.e. filmic *ekranizatsiia* of
Luk'ianenko's novel. The *Night Watch* computer game then is the result of a ludic *ekrani-
zatsiia* which is partly based on the novel, partly based on the film. Within the *Metro 2033*
universe, the shooter can be regarded a ludic *ekranizatsiia* of Glukhovskii's novel. It is the
structural similarity of the ludic *ekranizatsiia* to a filmic one which makes the *Metro 2033*
game a cinegame.[8] In other words: the screen, or *ekran*, ties together computer game and film
and thus provides the foundation for the cinegame. This focus on the screen as the pivotal
point corresponds with Kirill Razlogov's idea of 'screen culture' [ekrannaia kul'tura], which
is 'a cultural system which is formed by and dispersed through technical media, where the
screen is used as the basic carrier of information'[9] (Razlogov 2010: 5). Razlogov focuses on
the 'interferences between technology, communication and art' [vzaimodeistviia tekhniki,
kommunikatsii i iskusstva] (Razlogov 2010: 47) in screen-based media ranging from early
cinema to the internet. In his understanding, the screen is a page of text which 'becomes
alive' ['ozhivshaia' stranitsa] in cinema, which entered private households via television and
offered possibilities for interaction [vozmozhnost' obratnoi sviazi] by means of VCR and
fully developed its interactive potential on computer displays (Razlogov 2010: 18). Razlogov
also notes that there is no medium of the screen *per se*, he rather points out different types of
screens and 'interference[s] between the screens' [vzaimodeistvie ekranov] (Razlogov 2010:
171f), meaning interactions between cinema and television, for example. Therefore, the
screen is the foundation of the cinegame, which connects film and computer games. The var-
ious instances of *ekranizatsiia,* i.e. processes of 'putting something on a screen', describe
how content may traverse the borders between literature, film and computer games. A
cinegame is always a result of an *ekranizatsiia,* but the result of an *ekranizatsiia* does not
necessarily have to be a cinegame – it could be a 'classic', traditional film as well.

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[7] Luk'ianenko himself acts as another intermedial connection, as he served as scriptwriter for Bekmambetov's
film.
[8] An in-depth discussion of this structural similarity can be found in the subsequent section.
[9] Ekrannaia kul'tura – sistema kul'tury, formiruemaia i rasprostraniaemaia tekhnicheskimi sredstvami, v
ramkakh kotorykh osnovnym nositelem informatsii iavliaetsia ekran.

Cinegame is an elusive term and as Jens Schröter points out all other, well-established media definitions are questionable, too (Schröter 2008: 584). Schröter uses the example of film to illustrate his point. Film shares its technical foundation – light-sensitive emulsion – with the photographic medium, but the two are commonly regarded as distinct media. At the same time, the term 'film' covers diverse incarnations such as black and white silent movies, animated cartoons or Hollywood blockbusters. These both technically and stylistically diverse forms have little in common, but they are all regarded as examples of the filmic medium (Schröter 2008: 593). The fragile status of distinct media becomes especially apparent when the computer is involved, which is able to digitally simulate all other media, and also all forms of intermedial relationships between them (Schröter 2008: 584).

It is possible to define a medium, or, as Schröter puts it, a 'media monad' [Medienmonade], only in contrast to other media. New media are always described by means of resorting to older ones. An example for this stance is Andrei Tarkovskii's understanding of film as 'sculpting in time' [zapechatlennoe vremia]. For Tarkovskii, it is crucial that the flow of time is preserved in the filmic image. It should not be cut, edited or interrupted, but rather 'sculptured' (Tarkovskii 1986: 121). In order to illustrate his theory, Tarkovskii resorts to an older medium – sculpture – and thus proves Schröter's point. When a new media monad is constructed, all different sorts of medial features are combined, which are to be found in other, previously established media monads as well. In order to theorize the complex process of creating a new media monad, Schröter introduces the concept of the so-called 'primal intermedial network', which not only includes all medial features of all media monads, but also the interconnections between these features: 'Clearly defined, stabilised media monads are discursively "cut out" from a heterogeneous network (or superposed networks) consisting of technical processes, institutions, programs, discourses, [...] formal strategies, author representations, practices, etc., so that a particular strategic purpose is met' (Schröter 2008: 594, translation G.H.). The strategic purpose of temporally constructed media monads is to reduce the complexity and lack of transparency of the primal intermedial network lurking in the background. They help to better understand otherwise unintelligible medial structures (Schröter 2008: 600). Thus, the cinegame is such a temporally constructed media monad, which recurs on the two previously established media monads 'film' and 'computer game' and which is used to illustrate otherwise unclear, non-transparent intermedial processes. *Ekranizatsiia* stands for the process of 'cutting out' the cinegame from the primal intermedial network. This view can be brought into resonance with the original idea of convergent media. While Jenkins still operates with distinct media when he argues that 'each medium makes it own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story' (Jenkins 01.08.2011), Christy Dena in her elaboration on Jenkins' ideas implicitly follows Schröter. She argues 'against media specificity to facilitate the interrogation of the transhistorical and transartistic nature of [the urge to combine distinct media]' (Dena 2009: 55). Without doubt Schröter's theory can help identify more clearly intermedial and transmedial phenomena, and among them the media

monad of the cinegame and the process of *ekranizatsiia*. To what extent are other media[10] of importance to the cinegame *Metro 2033*? I address this issue in the subsequent sections.

The Cinegame between Ludic and Filmic *Ekranizatsiia*

The interconnections – or, as Michael Nitsche puts it, 'stylistic cross-fertilization and cross-referencing' – between video games and film have been noted by a number of media scholars, among them Ted Nelson, Jay David Bolter, Geoff King, Tanya Krzywinska and Mark Wolf (Nitsche 2008: 74; See also Nelson 1990, Bolter 14.02.1997, King et al. 2002, Wolf 2002). According to Nitsche, computer games have to rely on cinematic strategies in order to present the game space to the user. This mediated space is a crucial part of the game's interaction system. Game space can be used to structure the narrative experience of the player, to enforce the game's rules and to define the player's possible actions (Nitsche 2008: 187ff). Nitsche sums up the interdependence between cinematic strategies and the role of space as follows:

> The plane of the mediated space is part of the interactive system in video games, but it quotes many visual traditions from cinema. In order to keep the mediation legible, 3D games have lined themselves up in the tradition of the moving image, and it is not surprising that a remarkable amount of effort has gone into the use of cinematic visualization techniques in video games. (Nitsche 2008: 79)

Thus, filmic and ludic *ekranizatsii* are closely related to each other. Nitsche, for example, describes the usage of 'virtual cameras', i.e. mathematical projections which simulate optical properties of real cameras in computer games (Nitsche 2008: 89ff). As a consequence, the visual result of a ludic *ekranizatsiia* may exhibit cinematic qualities. *Metro 2033*'s depiction of the underground city *Polis*, for example, is true to the novel and could serve as a blueprint for a film set (Fig. 1). Aside from these visual congruencies between film and computer game, the *Metro 2033* shooter contains numerous cutscenes, i.e. short digitally rendered ingame movies. In turn, most major feature films nowadays rely on computer generated imagery, especially when it comes to special effects, so a fundamental technical overlapping of the two media cannot be denied. As a result, a ludic *ekranizatsiia* of a film such as the *Night Watch* game of 2005 often resorts to the visual language already established by its filmic predecessor.

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[10] For clarity, the terms 'medium', 'computer game', 'film', etc. are used without reference to their problematic background. They are understood as temporally created media monads, which combine medial features taken from the primal intermedial network.

Figure 1: *Metro 2033* offers some stunning visuals, for example the virtual rendition of the vast underground city *Polis*.

Source: Screenshot from *Metro 2033* (Ukraine, 4A Games 2010)

In spite of the close relationship concerning visualisation techniques, one key difference between film and computer games remains: a computer game allows for manipulation of the presented mediated space, whereas cinematic space remains less adaptable. According to Nitsche, '[t]he player not only enters the game worlds but also changes them and their ingredients. These event-shaping features separate interactive access from the experience of traditional media and pushes interactive game worlds beyond Barthes's *readerly* and *writerly* texts' (Nitsche 2008: 31, italics original – G.H.). Following Espen Aarseth, computer games are neither 'readerly' nor 'writerly', but 'ergodic' texts:

> [T]he user will have effectuated a semiotic sequence, and this selective movement is a work of physical construction that the various concepts of 'reading' do not account for. This phenomenon I call *ergodic,* [...] from the Greek words *ergon* and *hodos,* meaning 'work' and 'path'. In ergodic literature, nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text. (Aarseth 1997: 1, italics original – G.H.)

Interaction is not exclusive to the computer game. Aarseth provides examples for ergodic literature as well. The most prominent one is the Chinese *Book of Changes* [I Ching, around 1000 b.c.], a book containing 64 text fragments which are combined according to the outcome of three coin tosses (Aarseth 1997: 9f). As opposed to moviegoers or readers of non-ergodic texts, players have to react to the game world *physically,* otherwise the story does not

continue. They have to press a key, move the mouse or toss a coin, which means acting upon the game space and thus playing a game requires 'real' effort. One of the primary tasks of a ludic *ekranizatsiia* is therefore to find a way to include interaction.

This possibility to interact with the game world empowers the user in unexpected ways. The *Metro 2033* shooter, for example, is not only played as intended, it is also used to produce films.[11] Thus, the ludic *ekranizatsiia* leads to a filmic one. There exists a fake movie trailer (vgrisha 21.11.2010) which uses footage from other films as well as cut scenes taken from the video game. Another fan-movie is *Metro 2033 FFP* ('Film First Person'), a feature film entirely consisting of footage from the interactive parts of the game (Excellarge 03.02.2011). Other examples without material from the game include *Konets voiny / End of the War* (Shleps76 18.02.2011) or the American clip *Isolation* (Joe Careaga 28.02.2011)*,* the latter demonstrating the world-wide success of the *Metro 2033* universe. Another Russian example, the video clip to *Gruppa Leon*'s song *Metro 2033* (groupleon 29.12.2007) features a cameo appearance by Dmitrii Glukhovskii. This clip was shot in the *Taganka* bunker in Moscow[12] and also uses brief sequences from the game. The most 'official' film to date is the trailer for the coming *Metro: Luch Nadezhdy*. Because of its life actors and professional production it looks like the announcement for a feature film. Only at the very ending it blends over into computer generated imagery (metrovideogame 11.07.2012). These examples point back to Razlogov's idea of the 'interference of the screens': a ludic *ekranizatsiia* can evidently spark a filmic one. The results, however, do not seem to be able to respond to the *desideratum* of a missing full-fledged feature film. Here, the 'close ties between the formal and material characteristics of media, their "content", and their economic and social functions' (Bolter et al. 2000: 67) become evident: the computer game might share some structural similarities with film, it might even have a comparable economic potential, but it cannot replace the film's *social* function. Although the game was well received by the novel's fans, most of them still long for a film version – just put 'Metro 2033 film' into *Yandex* and browse through the results. At the moment Glukhovskii, who is well aware of the public demand, prefers to wait for a decent director – most favourably Timur Bekmambetov – to create a quality cinematic rendition of his novel (Nevskii 2010).[13]

These examples stress how an *ekranizatsiia* can turn a novel into a film, a novel into a computer game, a computer game into a film and a film into a computer game. The computer game features interaction as its special trait, but 'borrows' most of its visualisation strategies from film. Film in turn is nowadays very dependent on computer generated imagery (Pierson 1999; Bolter et al. 2000: 147-150; King et al. 2002: 19f). Furthermore, fan films accentuate the blurring of media borders with their mixture of life action footage and in-game clips as well as with labels such as 'Film First Person*'*. Aside from film and computer game, an *ekranizatsiia* involves other media monads as well. The shooter's first-person view, for ex-

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[11] This process is not exclusive to the *Metro 2033* game, for other examples see the *Machinima* (from 'machine' and 'cinema') website http://www.machinima.com (accessed 28 October 2012).

[12] The former Taganskii protected command point, or 'GO-42', is a bunker near *Taganskaia* Metro station which nowadays hosts the Cold War Museum; see http://www.bunker42.com (accessed 21 November 2012).

[13] Most interestingly, the *Etnogenez* project argues very much along the lines of Glukhovskii: They got a lot of offers for a film version, but they are waiting for the 'right' person to direct their movie ('FAQ – Novosti – Literaturnyi', 2011).

ample, is a remediation of film's subjective camera angle, but can be interpreted as a reference to central perspective technique established in Renaissance painting (Bolter et al. 2000: 24f). Correspondingly, the use of interaction is not exclusive to the computer game but can be attributed to the ancient Chinese *Book of Changes* as well. Thus, in order to further uncover the mechanisms of *ekranizatsiia*, the subsequent sections are discussing *Metro 2033*'s relationship to literature – the 'bibliogame' – and to other games – the 'ludogame'.

Figure 2: The game's main menu features a typewriter, indicating that the story is not played, but rather told.

Source: Screenshot from *Metro 2033* (Ukraine, 4A Games 2010)

The Tell-Tale Typewriter, or: The Bibliogame

4A Game's *Metro 2033* is based on Glukhovskii's novel, so there are obvious parallels between these two medial incarnations. Literature and computer game share the notion of a complex and time-consuming experience. Both reading a novel and playing a computer game usually take longer to enjoy than a Hollywood blockbuster's standard duration of two hours. For the ludic *ekranizatsiia* resulting in the shooter, a certain re-organization of the novel has been conducted, mostly to reduce the amount of locations (and thus, the amount of work to create the virtual world), but the basic plot outline and atmosphere have been preserved. This congruence may be attributed to Glukhovskii's active participation in the making of the game:

> The game developers consulted me as regards all arising questions. I flew to Kiev several times in order to get to know the game. And, finally, I wrote all dialogue and all texts for the Russian version myself. For me this project is very important, I lay great hopes on it and thus, cannot allow that somebody else writes the words of my heroes.[14] (Nevskii 2010)

The key difference between the novel and the *Metro 2033* shooter is the user interaction. The *Metro 2033* game uses a fairly typical and rather uninspiring example of the 'beads-on-a-string' structure (Costikyan 2007: 8). Small narrative parts, which are linearly arranged, connect the interactive sequences, or beads. In the case of *Metro 2033*, which is a classic first person shooter, player interaction consists mostly of navigating through the post-apocalyptic Moscow Metro tunnels and avoiding and/or killing mutants. Some minor side quests exist as well, which involve talking to non-player characters or locating some objects in various levels. These interactive parts constitute what 'playing a game' really means. On the other hand, the overall narrative structure of the *Metro 2033* shooter does not differ a lot from that of film or fiction. The game's background story is for the most part linear. Depending on the player's actions, however, the game offers two different possibilities. The novel's ambivalent ending[15] has been split in two, resulting in a 'good' and a 'bad' outcome. If the player collects enough 'karma points' in the interactive parts, i.e. if s/he for example helps non-player characters, s/he receives the 'good' ending. This setup introduces a ludic element – a notion of interaction – into the game's otherwise linear narrative structure.

Because of the direct transition from the novel to the game, one might expect Glukhovskii's novel to have a common ground with the computer game, which would render a ludic *ekranizatsiia* the more obvious choice than a filmic one. However, there are only few direct computer game features in the *Metro 2033* novel. Its apparent parallels to the computer game *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* – radiation mutants, strange anomalies and fearless stalkers – point, upon closer inspection, to the original *Roadside Picnic* novel. The only actual computer game connection is *Fallout* (USA, Black Isle Studios 1997), which – according to Glukhovskii – served as the primal source of inspiration:

> The key influence, which inspired me to think about a Russian variant of life after the end of the world, was *Fallout* – the first as well as the second part. In general it seems to me that I am part of the first generation of writers, for whom the computer game is a full-fledged form of art, an experience, which formats the consciousness and which determines further thinking and work. For us, beloved games do not have less, but perhaps even more significance than films or books.[16] (Nevskii 2010)

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[14] Razrabotchiki konsul'tirovalis' so mnoi po vsem voprosam, kotorye u nikh voznikali. Ia neskol'ko raz letal v Kiev, chtoby oznakomit'sia s igroi. I, nakonets, ia sam napisal vse dialogi i voobshche ves' tekst dlia russkoi versii. Dlia menia etot proekt ochen' vazhen, ia vozlagaiu na nego bol'shie nadezhdy i prosto ne mogu pozvolit' sebe, chtoby slova moikh geroev pisal kto-to drugoi.

[15] Spoiler alert: Artem realizes that the Dark Ones could actually help mankind to survive, but it is too late. A warhead deployed by him and his comrade-in-arms Miller [Mel'nik] destroys the mutants' hive located at *Botanicheskii sad*.

[16] No kliuchevym vpechatleniem, kotoroe menia deistvitel'no podtolknulo k razmyshleniiam na temu rossiiskogo varianta zhizni posle kontsa sveta, stala igra Fallout – i pervaia, i vtoraia chast'. Voobshche, mne kazhetsia, ia prinadlezhu k pervomu pokoleniiu pisatelei, dlia kotorykh komp'iuternye igry stali polnotsennym is-

One trace of game influence is the constant weapon fetishism throughout the text, which evokes the notion of first-person shooters. A lot of weapon-related terminology is found throughout the novel, the main protagonist Artem, for example, uses a customized AK rifle. Glukhovskii himself is depicted with an AK rifle on the inner coat of the book. One has to admit, however, that only a little shooting takes place in the novel, so the connection to the first-person shooter genre is quite weak.

The various political and social groupings described by Glukhovskii, *Red Line* [Krasnaia liniia], *The Forth Reikh* [Chetvertyi Reikh], *The Hanseatic League* [Ganza], *The Confederation of 1905* [Konfederatsiia 1905 goda], etc. – all with their distinctive philosophies, traits, benefits and handicaps – point to opposing online gaming factions. Another seemingly parallel between the *Metro 2033* novel and computer games is the importance of movement through space. As discussed in the previous section, interaction with space is vital for the gaming experience. But space is also very important in the *Metro 2033* novel, which may be considered a travelogue: It describes the trip from the Moscow Metro station *VDNKh* to *Biblioteka imeni Lenina* [Lenin Library] and back (Fig. 3).

Figure 3: The player's progress is tracked on the loading screen, underlining Metro 2033's travelogue qualities.
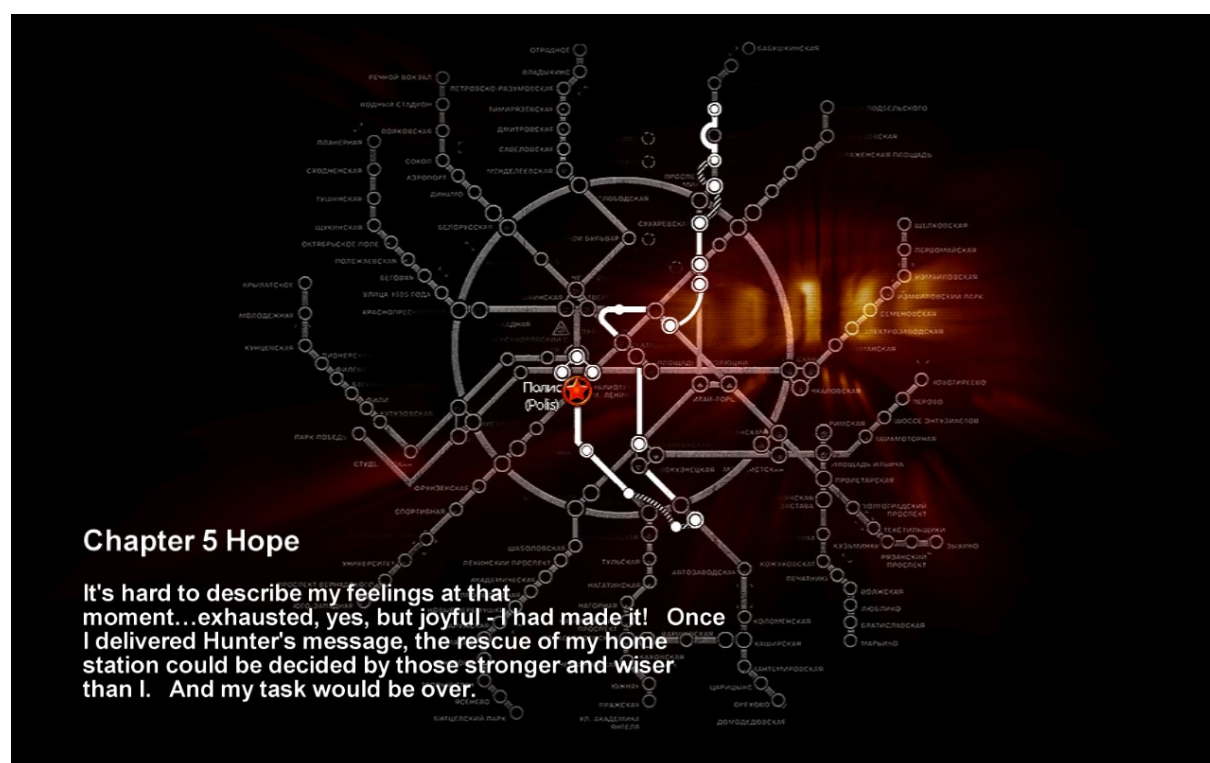
Source: Screenshot from *Metro 2033* (Ukraine, 4A Games 2010)

kusstvom, perezhivaniem, formatiruiushchim soznanie, opredeliaiushchim dal'neishee myshlenie i tvorchestvo. Dlia nas liubimye igry imeiut ne men'shee, a mozhet byt', i bol'shee znachenie, chem fil'my ili knigy.

This interpretation opens up a row of connections to the literary genre of the picaresque novel, which uses travel and the image of the 'picaro' [rouge, rascal], whose attributes suit Artem, the main protagonist of both the *Metro 2033* game and novel, quite well. Thus, the importance of space is more of a literary reference than a ludic one. This interpretation is backed up by Glukhovskii's sequel *Metro 2034*, which stresses its connection to the Odyssey by means of introducing a protagonist called Homer. Aside from that, in an interview with *RIA Novosti*, Glukhovskii stated that Artem's journey is based on the author's every day commute to school when he was a child (Grishina et al. 2010). So the travelogue is inspired by biographical facts as well.

While the original novel does bear some resemblances to computer games, this connection works better in the other direction. The first-person shooter incorporates a number of direct references to literary works. One of the player's companions – a non-player character – explicitly mentions the Strugatskii novel in the game's *Library* level. Moreover, there are a lot of *Metro 2033* books to be found as background props throughout the game (Fig. 2 and 4). This occurrence can in part be attributed to clever intermedial marketing strategies, but in part it might point to the nearly sacred status of books in Glukhovskii's novel. In his text, books are scarce and thus, very valuable items, they are sources of forgotten knowledge and at the same time objects from a better, non-contaminated past.

Another striking example of a literature-game connection is the typewriter which is prominently situated in the centre of the game's main screen (cf. Fig. 2). In order to start a new game, the player has to click on the typewriter, which either suggests that s/he writes a diary of the happenings or that s/he even *invents* all these happenings instead of directly *experiencing* them. Either way, narration has an unusually high status in the game. This fact, however, does not automatically point to literature – narrativity can be attributed to the filmic system as well. The typewriter's placement on the screen clarifies this ambiguous interpretation. Literature is in the very centre, whereas the TV set as a signifier for the filmic medium is placed in a rather marginalized position on the right – it can be used to continue a previously started game. Another copy of a *Metro 2033* novel right next to the typewriter – albeit without any actual, clickable function – further strengthens the predominance of literature. In a noteworthy act of self-awareness, the main screen displays analogue versions of the media the computer game remediates: film (TV), music (turntable), literature (book) and telecommunication (radio set). This accentuation of the game's mediated nature can, according to Bolter and Grusin, be interpreted as 'hypermediacy' (Bolter et al. 2000: 70f). A strong notion of mediation contradicts the first-person shooter genre's strong focus on 'immediacy', which is the opposite of hypermediacy, i.e. a direct and seemingly non-mediated experience (Bolter et al. 2000: 70). In comparison with other first-person shooters, *Metro 2033* uses a reduced user interface which especially stresses its immediate qualities. Most of the status information is embedded in the actual game world and not shown as an abstract display on screen. For example, the player has to protect him- or herself from radioactive dust by means of wearing a gas mask. The filters of this mask, however, last only for a very limited period of time. In order to find out how long his or her current filter will last, the player has to glance at the in-game wrist watch instead of looking at some countdown in an on-screen display. In this immediate context the typewriter as a symbol of hypermediacy does not make any sense

– except, of course, that it can be interpreted as a reference to the game's literary predecessor. Reflection of medial features is a standard trait of fantastic literature (Durst 2007: 387), so it is not surprising that a fantastic game tackles these questions as well.

Figure 4: In the game there are some of Metro 2033's sequels used as background decoration, which stresses its relation to literature.
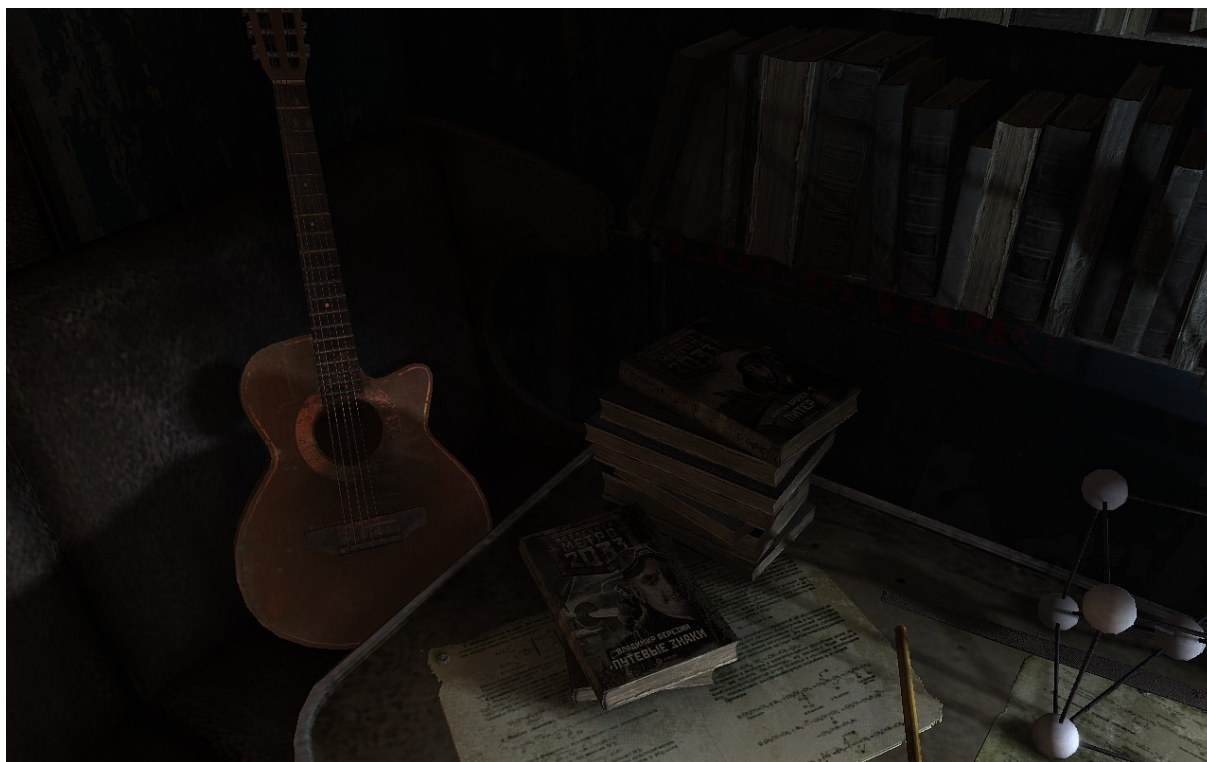
Source: Screenshot from *Metro 2033* (Ukraine, 4A Games 2010)

Although Glukhovskii was inspired by the *Fallout* series, this inspiration concerns only the plot. There are not too many structural references to computer games in the novel – most of them are features which got incorporated in literature as well as in the computer game, for example narration or the travelogue story arc. Thus, Glukhovskii's novel does not explicitly ask for a computer game adaptation. The *Metro 2033* game, on the other hand, is very focused on its literary model and even imitates its mediated nature, which conflicts with the first-person shooter's basic desire for immediacy. In this special case, the process of *ekranizatsiia* has not removed the game's literary roots – one could even argue that all the literary cross-references overtly stress the game's literary origin.

Games Are Games, or Aren't They? – The Ludogame

When a ludic *ekranizatsiia* converts a novel or a film into a computer game, the original content has to be adapted in order to include interaction and to be displayable on a computer

screen. During this process, aspects of genre and computer game tradition heavily influence the outcome. Due to its affiliation with the first-person shooter genre, *Metro 2033* connects with an overwhelmingly large number of similarly structured games, among them international 'classics' such as *Doom* (USA, id Software 1993) and *Half-Life* (USA, Valve Software 1998)*,* or Russian and Ukrainian examples such as *S.T.A.L.K.E.R*, *You Are Empty* (Russia/Ukraine, Mandel ArtPlains/Digital Spray Studios 2006) or *Metro-2 / The Stalin Subway* (Russia, Buka Entertainment 2005).[17] All these games share the first-person perspective and similar gameplay. Besides these genre parallels, programmers from *S.T.A.L.K.E.R*'s developer GSC Game World switched over to 4A Games in order to push out *Metro 2033*, which in part made the audience switch, too (Sokolova 2012: 24). This continuity of both programmers and players implies a strong connection between the two games beyond their similar post-nuclear-catastrophe setting. In spite of the genre parallels, games can differ quite fundamentally. Whereas *Metro 2033* is essentially scripted, and thus, linear and 'film-like', *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* features an open environment with a much stronger focus on interactive elements. Continuity can also be found between *Metro 2033* and its successor, 4A Games' *Metro: Luch Nadezhdy*. This game, which again features Artem as the main protagonist, is said to overcome some of its predecessor's shortcomings in order to ensure a more intriguing experience and is currently scheduled to release in 2013.

All these interludic cross-references play their role during the process of *ekranizatsiia*, but this effect is not limited to the realm of digital games. A board game adaptation of a fantastic universe seems to be a rather uncommon medial choice, but this impression is deceiving. Luk'ianenko's *Watch* universe, for example, has spawned two card games, most notably *Nochnoi Dozor: Svoia sud'ba / Night Watch: Own Destiny* (Russia, Astrel' 2004). Correspondingly, Glukhovskii's novels have inspired an eponymous board game: *Metro 2033. Nastol'naia igra / Metro 2033 Board Game* (Russia, Mir Fentesi 2010).[18] Each player is in control of one faction – *Krasnaia Liniia* et al. – and an additional hero taken from both the *Metro 2033* and *Metro 2034* novels, among them the main protagonists Artem and Homer. The basic goal is to conquer neutral and hostile Metro stations and defeat enemy attacks by mutants or human adversaries. A Moscow Metro map serves as the playing field (Fig. 5), once again modulating the travelogue principle. At the same time, the playing field with the factions' markers on the stations (the blue chips are *Polis,* the red ones *Red Line*, and the green ones *Forth Reikh*) are an interactive version of the *Metro 2033* map depicted on the inner cover of the novels – another literary reference. It may come as a surprise, but to a certain extent the board of a non-digital game can be interpreted as a screen in Razlogov's sense: it is a visualization of a text, and it enables both communication and interaction – in this case with *in situ* human adversaries. Thus, even board games are to some extents results of an *ekranizatsiia*.

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[17] The parallels to these latter games are not reduced to questions of genre only. *You Are Empty* also features a post-apocalyptic (albeit not post-nuclear) Moscow, and *Metro-2* also focuses on the Moscow Metro. It seems as if only a few themes are dominating the current Russian/Ukrainian computer game production. For a closer investigation of post-apocalyptic Russian and Ukrainian games and their connection to Russian literature, see Howanitz forthcoming.

[18] I owe special thanks to Ursula Schmitzberger, Alexander Dellagi and Christoph Lugstein for playing and discussing the *Metro 2033* board game with me on a snowy Moscow winter night.

Figure 5: The *Metro 2033* board game.

Source: Photo: G.H.

The digital ludic *ekranizatsiia* of course differs in certain ways from the analogue version. According to Jesper Juul, we deal with two different game media – the computer and the game board (Juul 2005: 47). Moreover, we also deal with two different games – a first person shooter and a strategy board game. The game principles vary a lot: in the shooter, the player controls a lone hero, whereas in the board game, s/he commands whole *Metro* factions – *and* a hero. In the computer game, the player's main task is to react quickly to various threats in order to stay alive. The board game focuses more on developing strategies and managing assets in order to triumph over the whole Moscow Metro. Various aspects of the board game, e.g. the need to organize resources, strategically overcome new stations, and even the god-like perspective, have their counterpart in the classic (digital) strategy game *Sid Meier's Civilization* (USA, MicroProse 1991). Other differences between shooter and board game include human adversaries, which are not present in the former, but essential to the latter, and different visualization strategies. Although both games feature mutant enemies, the board game does not use visual models established by the computer game. It rather relies on hand-drawn artwork – see the red enemy cards in the top region of Fig. 5. The last and most remarkable difference in the process of *ekranizatsiia* is without doubt the status of fiction. Juul notes that

[m]ost video games create fictional worlds, but games do this in their own special tentative and flickering way [...]. [T]he fictional worlds of many games are contradictory and incoherent, but the player may not experience this as such since the rules of the game can provide a sense of direction even when the fictional world has little credibility. (Juul 2005: 6)

So a game creates a special game-world, which is detached from reality, and within which a custom set of rules is in charge. This definition applies to both the board game and the computer game, but whereas the world of the former fits on a cardboard with Moscow's Metro map printed onto it, the latter offers an elaborated, three-dimensional virtual game-universe with far more complex rules, which is visualized by means of cinematic strategies. It is this 'interplay between rules and fiction of video games [...] what makes them *half-real: real rules and fictional worlds*' (Juul 2005: 196). This interplay is twofold, as 'rules can cue the player into imagining a world [...] [and] [f]iction can cue the player into understanding the rules of the game' (Juul 2005: 195f). This fictional aspect was originally pointed out by Roger Caillois, who adds imagination to the gaming equation: 'All play presupposes the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion (indeed this last word means nothing less than beginning a game: *in-lusio*), then at least of a closed, conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe' (Caillois 2001: 19, italics original – G.H.). A computer game works as any other non-digital game with the exception that its imaginary game-world is paradoxically more manifest and implicitly transports the notion of narration, because it has to be transformed from an abstract mathematical model stored in the computer's main memory into a human-perceptible visual representation on the screen. And indeed, although the board game tries to include narration via references to the original novels, the computer game with its film-likeness surpasses the board game's narrative capacities by far. However, this strong narrative focus of the computer game heavily constricts the player's freedom. For example, with the board game it is very easy to change the rules. In fact, a new set of rules has been published on the social network *Vkontakte* (Sasin 15.07.2011).

This section has shown that interludic connections are very influential during the process of *ekranizatsiia*. Older, well-established games provide models, which show how the original content can be adapted and equipped with interactive elements to fit a special game genre. This process is not limited to digital games, but applies to board games as well. The main difference is that the analogue game world presented on a cardboard does not enable filmic strategies, but nevertheless qualifies as a screen in Razlogov's sense. Thus, even the board game may be regarded as the result of a ludic *ekranizatsiia*.

Conclusion

According to Jenkins, fantastic worlds such as Glukhovskii's *Metro 2033* universe are a *sine qua non* for the emergence of convergent media, and thus, of the cinegame with content constantly crossing the borders between film, computer games and literature in a process I call *ekranizatsiia,* i.e. the process of 'putting something on a screen'. During this process, multiple intermedial interferences occur:

1. *Metro 2033* is a cinegame. First of all, it shares several medial features with the film, especially visualisation strategies – both film and computer game are results of an *ekranizatsiia*. Moreover, computer game and film both offer accessible, ready-made realisations of fantastic worlds – and they both are multi-million dollar businesses. Yet in spite of these parallels, some divergence seems to remain: As the audience's longing for a *Metro 2033* movie demonstrates, film and computer game still occupy different social positions. Furthermore, in contrast to film, computer games rely heavily on interaction.

2. *Metro 2033* is a bibliogame. It is the result of an *ekranizatsiia* based on the eponymous novel. Whereas the novel itself uses virtually no computer game references, the game, on the other hand, is significantly linked to its medial predecessor. Aside from the usage of Glukhovskii's book as a background prop in the game world, it also adopts a hypermediated frame borrowed from literature, which heavily contrasts with the first-person shooter's basic focus on immediacy. Other apparent connections between the *Metro 2033* novel and the corresponding game such as narrativity or the travelogue story arc further stress the literary origin of the shooter.

3. *Metro 2033* is a ludogame. During an *ekranizatsiia*, models established by other computer games are used in order to prepare the content for interaction. Thus, it is not surprising that *Metro 2033* fits neatly into its genre, the first-person shooter, and has various quite explicit connections to other Russian and Ukrainian games. Furthermore, it also shares a lot of features with the *Metro 2033* board game, but at the same time, the differences between digital and non-digital games become evident. Narrative processes, for example, are mostly not present in non-digital games.

The computer game is a mixture of medial features usually associated with other media such as literature, film and board games. This finding corresponds with Schröter's idea of the primal intermedial network. According to him, media do not exist *per se*, but are rather temporally media monads constructed for a specific purpose. The visual representation of fantastic universes does not belong to film, just as the travelogue does not belong to literature, interaction does not belong to computer games and rules do not belong to non-digital games. All these features are rather parts of the primal intermedial network, from which they are temporally cut out by an *ekranizatsiia* in order to form the aforementioned media monads. In other words, cinegames are simultaneously bibliogames and ludogames.

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