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CHUCK LORRE'S VANITY CARDS AS A PERSONAL BLOG: THE SYNTHESIS OF FACILITIES AND MEANS

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Chuck Lorre's vanity cards are analyzed as a specific personal blog. Recordkeeping as a diary or journal assimilated by the Internet culture takes a new form and new meaning now. The entries in a blog are created for the public, in contrast to the traditional "paper" diary. Lorre, "journaling" the vanity cards, posts them on the "platform" of his products, which can be watched on TV or downloaded from the network. This increases his potential "subscribers" enormously. For his self-expression the author synthesizes the facilities and means of television and the Internet.

Ke words: Chuck Lorre, vanity card, the Internet, television, blog, synthesis.

INTRODUCTION

Studying the phenomenon of synthesis in culture we turn to its various manifestations. Traditionally, we are thinking about art synthesis: the synthesis of kinds of art or styles, the synthesis of art and science or technology, etc [1, 2]. We refer to the synthetic arts – theatre and cinema. But the synthesis in culture occurs in other spheres too. Moreover, in the basis of many modern cultural phenomena we find synthetic principles, for example, in television or the Internet. And we also can speak about the combination of means and facilities of these media. The aim of this work is to analyze the vanity cards of Chuck Lorre as a specific personal blog which entries are placed in TV production.

1. TELEVISION AND THE INTERNET – MEANS FOR SELF-EXPRESSION: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The Internet becomes more accessible. The number of devices you can use to go online increases: traditional personal computers, laptops, to which recently were added netbooks and tablets, mobile phones. Most of the users have their own websites – personal pages, accounts in social networks and blogs, etc.

Means which are available on the Internet give everyone the opportunity to express oneself. Recordkeeping as a diary or journal takes a new form and new meaning now. Due to such resources as social networks and blogs we can deliver our thoughts, expressed by words, audio or visual material, to those who are our "subscribers" or are "following us". You can talk about the fact that many of our ideas and images are rated by us as "postable" or not.

An important characteristic of the Internet culture is the opportunity to stay anonymous. Real people "hide" themselves behind nicknames, obtaining more freedom, and often being less responsible, because "in the anonymized Internet space responsibility primarily has an inner form of self-control due to the lack of specific reference of the virtual personality to the real one" [3, p. 28].

Despite of the fact that “the Internet is a medium that is unparalleled in its reach... never before have average people like you or me been able to reach a global audience with so little trouble” [4], there is however a mass media, covering larger audience – television. TV sets have become commonplace everywhere – in homes, offices, public places, etc. And if in the past TV, being the telecommunication medium, primarily informed people about important events, now, perhaps, it has become a way of entertainment rather than communication.

Only a few have the possibility to express themselves through television. To afford this you have to be directly related to the TV industry. And in any case the self-expression there will be within the professional activity: the actor’s performance, the scriptwriter’s scenario, the cameraman work, etc.

It is extremely difficult to stay anonymous in the industry where the freedom is limited at least because of the censorship. And traditionally people come on television not to conceal their identity.

Thus, we can see that these two mass media have common features as well as differences.

There is one more aspect that should be mentioned within this work. Two influential media for sure do have interrelations and affect each other: we can speak about such examples as on-line television broadcasts or the storage of TV products for further downloading from the file sharing services.

Let’s return to the idea that the television does not only inform now but mostly entertains. Perhaps the most popular forms of entertainment here are various shows and sitcoms. The main tasks of each TV show are to attract the viewers for a long period and to keep their interest to the product from release to release, episode by episode. The aim is not always clear to consumers: usually this is the necessity to recoup the costs of advertisers at whose expense this TV production was created.

So, it happens that this affection of the audience to TV shows, especially sitcoms, can be used for the completely personal purposes – for example to tell people what a scriptwriter was thinking about while working on the episode.

2. CHUCK LORRE’S VANITY CARDS – THE BLOG ON TV

Chuck Lorre is an American television writer, director, producer and composer. He has created many popular and successful sitcoms including *Grace Under Fire*, *Two and a Half Men*, *The Big Bang Theory*, etc.

As in many other movies or serials in his production we meet so called vanity cards. Traditionally a vanity card (or production card, or vanity plate, or production logo) is “a logo used by movie studios and television production companies to brand what they produce. Production logos are usually seen at the beginning of a theatrical movie or video game (an "opening logo"), or at the end of a television program or TV movie (a "closing logo")” [5]. Well known are such production logos as the 20th Century Fox's monument and searchlights, or Columbia Pictures's lady with a torch.

In the case of Chuck Lorre’s vanity cards we speak about the closing logo. The author uses his production cards (that appear at the end of each series) to post an essay or observation in small type which changes each week and requires pausing with a recording device to read.

These texts – in which Lorre reflects on life, modern culture, jokes and sometimes talks to the audience – can be small (fig. 1) like #195 (first aired 12 November 2007, *The Big Bang Theory*, season 1, episode 8) or long and unrestricted (fig. 2) like #182 (first aired 24 September 2007, *The Big Bang Theory*, season 1, episode 1).

CHUCK LORRE PRODUCTIONS, #195



United we stand.

CHUCK LORRE PRODUCTIONS, #182

Back when I was writing and producing *Dharma and Greg* the only way to read my cards was to record each episode on a VCR and hit the "pause" button. This was not an easy task. The image wobbled like crazy making the tiny words of my weekly tomes very hard to see. Then it hit me. What about building a device that records video images digitally? Wouldn't this allow for a much more precise "pause" function? I took my little notion to an impoverished computer whiz by the name of Schlomo Tivowitz. At the time of our meeting Schlomo was feverishly trying to invent an improved version of the *George Foreman Grill*. Schlomo's grill would contain a hard drive that remembered all the details of your last barbecue, as well as an address book. I didn't really see the point of it, but, not being a tech guy, I held my tongue and presented him with my idea. I will never forget his reaction. With hamburger-flecked spittle flying from his blubbery lips, he laughed, called me some very unkind names and demanded that I leave his mother's basement immediately. My hopes dashed, I went back to work on *Dharma* and forgot about my silly idea. Well, I'm sure you can figure out what happened next. The fact that you're reading this card right now should tell you. Thankfully, it's not in my nature to be bitter. But there are times when I feel a little used -- usually when I've forgotten how to effectively grill a fatty piece of chicken.

Fig. 1.

Chuck Lorre's vanity card #195 [6].

Fig. 2

Chuck Lorre's vanity card #182 [7].

So Chuck Lorre uses his production cards exactly the same way as the Internet user – his or her blog: “short for Web log, a blog is a Web page that serves as a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual. Typically updated daily, blogs often reflect the personality of the author» [8]. The author creates his cards in order to share with the viewers (that here become readers) his thoughts, expressed in different forms, that is consistent with the concept of blog, which is defined as «a place to express yourself to the world. A place to share your thoughts and your passions” [4].

The main difference between a blog and a traditional “paper” dairy is that the author usually writes the first one for him- or herself and doesn’t want anyone to read the notes. The entries in a blog initially are created for the public. And if bloggers in the Internet “have the opportunity of reaching hundreds or even thousands of people each and every day” [4], then imagine how many people can read the cards of Chuck Lorry.

As well as in a blog in the Internet, the author here in addition to the cards with texts places the cards with pictures – they are usually photos that also illustrate his thoughts and mood (fig. 3) as #347 (first aired 19 May 2011, *The Big Bang Theory*, season 4, episode 24).

CHUCK LORRE PRODUCTIONS, # 347



Fig. 3

Chuck Lorre’s vanity card #347 [9].

There is one more reason why we can refer these texts to the dairy or blog entries: they are usually created very fast. The author says: “Sometimes they’re written on the bus to school... That’s part of what gets me into trouble. If I had a little more time to think, I may not have written a few” [10].

There are more than 400 vanity cards aired in *Mom*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *Two and a Half Men*, *Mike & Molly*, *Dharma & Greg*, *Cybill*, and *Grace Under Fire*. All these cards are published on <http://www.chucklorre.com/> (Chuck Lorre Productions, The Official Vanity Card Archives) [11].

Some of them were numbered “4^{1/2}”, “333(c)” or “111*”, where “(c)” is an abbreviation for “censored”, “*” means that “this is the official “I have nothing worth writing about” vanity card” (fig. 4, fig. 5).

CHUCK LORRE PRODUCTIONS, #223

CENSORED

Once again, my efforts at comedy
have been rebuked by the powers
that be. As always, you know
where to look.

CHUCK LORRE PRODUCTIONS, #111

This is the official 'I have nothing worth writing about' vanity card. It will run whenever I have nothing worth writing about. Don't be surprised to see it quite a bit. From now on, when our schedule requires me to deliver a new card and I'm empty, I'll simply say, 'Run one eleven.' A check of the one hundred and ten cards I've already written will quickly demonstrate that I should have written this card a long time ago. Why didn't I? Vanity. I had become vain about my vanity cards. I was determined to write a new one each week because, well... I'm just that kind of guy. But I'm older and wiser now. I know when I have nothing to say. And that knowledge is freedom. Freedom from the constant need to win your approval. And more importantly, freedom from the obsessive and relentless need to end each vanity card on a joke. Governor Schwarzenegger.

Fig. 4

Chuck Lorre's vanity card #223 [12].

Fig. 5

Chuck Lorre's vanity card #111 [13].

And "a half" in "4^{1/2}" shows us that it is an addition to the previous one, both started with the words "I believe that" (fig. 6). The card #4^{1/2} is a kind of game with the audience. It contains the phrase "I believe that all work and no play makes Chuck a dull boy" repeated nine times and interrupted for sudden "I believe that if you've read this far in my vanity plate you are an extraordinary person infused with great love and compassion" [15] and then five times about "dull boy" again (fig. 7).

CHUCK LORRE PRODUCTIONS. # 319

As I Get Older
(a poem under construction)

As I get older,
I see more clearly,
but not with my eyes.
I hear more sharply,
but not with my ears.
I smell more ripely,
but not with my nose...

As I get older,
I see more clearly,
but not with my eyes.
I hear more sharply,
but not with my ears.
I touch more intimately,
but not with my finger...

As I get older,
I see more clearly,
but not with my eyes.
I hear more sharply,
but not with my ears.
I love more deeply,
but not with my penis...

As I get older,
I see more clearly,
but not with my eyes.
I hear more sharply,
but not with my ears.
I think more better,
but not with my brain... my head... noggin...

As I get older,
I see more clearly,

Fig. 8.

Chuck Lorre's vanity card #319 [19].

Reflecting on the situation with the F-word, Chuck Lorre says in #322 (first aired 03 January 2011, *Mike & Molly*, season 1, episode 13): "I believe that words by themselves are actually quite impotent. They hardly rise above being noise. Ideas, however, the clever, inane and/or insidious grouping together of words, are dangerous. If history proves anything, the wrong idea at the right time can do unbelievable damage. Bad ideas are what the culture should fear and guard against" [20].

He believes that "consciousness creates the illusion of individuation, the false feeling of being separate... This explains the paradox of our culture, which celebrates the ego while simultaneously promoting its evisceration with drugs and alcohol. It also clarifies our deep-seated fear of monolithic, one-minded systems like communism, religious fundamentalism, zombies and invaders from Mars" [21] (#334, first aired 28 February 2011 *Mike & Molly*, season 1, episode 18). These statements reveal his quick wit and tongue as well as sense of humor.

Reading further we can find many other wise or funny statements in the same spirit. In conclusion I would like to turn back to the anniversary vanity card #200 (fig. 9) (first aired 31 March 2008, *The Big Bang Theory*, season 1, episode 11), where Chuck Lorre's self-irony with the bitter taste displays: "Two hundred vanity cards. I have now amassed a body of work that can safely be called "pointlessly unique." In the history of literary efforts, there has never been a literary effort quite like this one... Two hundred cards! Boy, oh boy, that is really something... Oh God, I'm so lonely" [22].

CHUCK LORRE PRODUCTIONS, #200

Two hundred vanity cards. I have now amassed a body of work that can safely be called "pointlessly unique." In the history of literary efforts, there has never been a literary effort quite like this one. Okay, literary might be pushing it, but I don't think I'm engaging in hyperbole when I say that it's highly unlikely my achievement will ever be duplicated, let alone surpassed. Why? Well, most show creators who are awarded the hallowed, second-and-a-half, end-of-episode "hey everybody, look at me!" card, have better things to do. Those that have no life (a goodly number), are simply not compelled to vomit up weekly offerings of painfully personal, petty, mock-metaphysical, self-congratulatory, rage-filled, and regretfully sarcastic essays that occasionally haunt them forever. Sure, non-showrunners can write a weekly essay of no particular value. But for it to be considered a true vanity card, it must be attached to the ass end of a television show. And let's keep in mind I've made a lot more shows than vanity cards. There were many weeks on *Dharma & Greg* and *Two and a Half Men* when I was too wasted (mostly in the literary sense) to write something coherent. Anyway, I wanted to use this momentous card to celebrate my accomplishment because, well... no one else was jumping up to do it. Two hundred cards! Boy, oh boy, that is really something... Oh God, I'm so lonely.

Fig. 9.

Chuck Lorre's vanity card #200 [23].

These vanity cards gained great popularity. As Shawna Malcom says, "they've attracted enough of a cult" [10]. They have their own Facebook group called "I watch Chuck Lorre's programs just for his vanity cards".

CONCLUSIONS

Chuck Lorre's vanity cards show us the interaction and mutual influence of two spheres of contemporary culture. The Internet culture assimilated the usual form of keeping a diary, radically changing the focus and orientation of these records. A blogger blogs to be read. Lorre, "journaling" the vanity cards, posts them on the "platform" of his sitcoms, that can be watched on TV or downloaded from the network. This increases his potential "subscribers" enormously. However, the author does not impose his blog to the audience. He reserves the right for the "followers" – to read or not to read – as the texts appear only for a few seconds. Thus, Chuck Lorre synthesizes in his texts traditions, means, possibilities, and facilities of the Internet and TV culture.

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Кокорина К. Г. «Картки марнославства» Чака Лорри як персональний блог: синтез можливостей та засобів / Кокорина К. Г. // Вчені записки Таврійського національного університету імені В.І. Вернадського. Серія: Філософія. Культурологія. Політологія. Соціологія. – 2014. – Т. 27 (66), – № 1. – С. 89-96.

«Картки марнославства» Чака Лорри розглядаються як специфічний персональний блог. Ведення записів у вигляді щоденника, сприйняте та перероблене Інтернет-культурою, зараз набуває і нову форму, і нове значення. Записи блогу створюються «на публіку» на відміну від традиційного «паперового» щоденника. Завдяки тому, що Чак Лорри в якості платформи для розміщення своїх нотаток використовує телепродукцію, яку можна дивитися як у режимі телетрансляції, так і скачувати з мережі, це збільшує його потенційну аудиторію в багато разів. Автор синтезує можливості і засоби Інтернету та телебачення для самовираження.

Ключові слова: Чак Лорри, «картка марнославства», Інтернет, телебачення, блог, синтез.

Кокорина Е. Г. «Карточки тщеславия» Чака Лорри как персональный блог: синтез возможностей и средств / Кокорина К. Г. // Учёные записки Таврического национального университета имени В. И. Вернадского. Серия : Философия. Культурология. Политология. Социология. – 2014. – Т. 27 (66), – № 1. – С. 89-96.

«Карточки тщеславия» Чака Лорри рассматриваются как специфический персональный блог. Ведение записей в виде дневника, воспринятое и переработанное Интернет-культурой, теперь приобретает и новую форму, и новое значение. Записи блога создаются «на публику» в отличие от традиционного «бумажного» дневника. Благодаря тому, что Чак Лорри в качестве площадки для размещения своих заметок использует телепродукцию, которую можно смотреть как в режиме ТВ-трансляции, так и скачивать из сети, это увеличивает его потенциальную аудиторию во много раз. Автор синтезирует возможности и средства Интернета и телевидения для самовыражения.

Ключевые слова: Чак Лорри, «карточка тщеславия», Интернет, телевидение, блог, синтез.