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Sweet transvestites: From *The Rocky Horror Show* to *One Piece*. A case of intersemiotic translation

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But if death comes for me peacefully and I fade gently
from light into dark oblivion, why would I be afraid of it?
Sometimes, I rather think it would be a comfort.
(Curry, 2025: 252)

Abstract

This article exemplifies intersemiotic translation as a process of crossing and reconfiguring semiotic, cultural, and ideological borders, through a comparative analysis of Dr Frank-N-Furter from *The Rocky Horror Show* and the fictional character of Emporio Ivankov from Eiichirō Oda's manga *One Piece*. Drawing on the theoretical and methodological framework of Multimodality, the study explores how Frank's transgressive identity travels across media, genres, and sociocultural contexts, and how it is resemiotised in Oda's characterisation of Ivankov. Rather than a linear transfer of meaning, intersemiotic translation emerges as a site of negotiation in which identities, styles, and discourses are reconfigured as they move across borders and boundaries. The analysis shows that intersemiotic translation functions as a form of discursive border crossing that enables the circulation of queer identities across transnational and transmedial spaces, while simultaneously challenging normative regimes of gender and authority. While Frank stages queerness through theatrical excess within a constrained moral landscape, Ivankov inherits and reshapes this legacy into a revolutionary performance grounded in political resistance. By foregrounding borders and their transgression, the article contributes to Critical Discourse Studies by demonstrating how popular culture reshapes identity and ideology through movement across semiotic and cultural boundaries.

Keywords: intersemiotic translation; multimodality; resemiotisation; *The Rocky Horror Show*; *One Piece*; border crossing; genre boundaries; media borders; critical discourse studies; popular culture.

1 Introduction

Cultural icons move across media, national borders, and time. The transmigration of a character – its visual style, language, and performativity – from one medium to another, and across cultural contexts,

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raises important questions about what survives, mutates and resonates when language, visuals and ideas travel across space and time. Lambrou (2021, p. 1) conceives this as a delicate and uncertain process:

> Once told, it is inevitable that the narrative will be retold, reconstructed or reimagined into a new text where original elements, such as characters and plot, may or may not always be recognizable, influenced by factors such as the audience (reader, listener, etc.), the medium (and its affordances) and the rhetorical goal linked to its retelling. By understanding reworkings of narratives as process and product, it is possible to gain insights into the complexities involved in their reconfiguration.

This article examines the Intersemiotic Translation (Dusi, 2015; Pârlog, 2019; Sütiste, 2021) of Dr Frank-N-Furter, the transgressive anti-hero played by the late Tim Curry in the musical and film *The Rocky Horror Show* (O'Brien, 1973; Sharman, 1975), into Emporio Ivankov, a character from Eiichirō Oda's famous manga *One Piece* (1997–present). The study explores Oda's reworking of Frank's cultural iconography, gender performativity, and linguistic style. Intersemiotic translation is here approached not only as a process of semiotic transfer, but as a form of border crossing that actively transgresses the boundaries between media, genres, and culturally situated meaning-making processes. By highlighting elements that are either preserved or transformed in the target text/character, the paper investigates the way these changes reflect the cross-cultural and cross-media shifts inherent in intertextual spaces (Kristeva, cited in Moi, 1986).

The intersemiotic translation considered in this research involves different media and modes: being *The Rocky Horror Show* a theatrical production and then a film (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*), the same as *One Piece* being a manga and then an anime that have been translated into several languages, different layers of translation are to be considered. Therefore, the study relies on the framework of Multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, 2021), which provides tools for understanding how the interplay between language and multisensorial design (visuals and sounds mainly) does not only contribute to the meaning-making process, but also plays a main role in the passage from one system of signs to another (O'Halloran et al., 2016; Adami, 2023). By comparing Frank-N-Furter and Emporio Ivankov, the analysis sheds light on how identity crosses borders of media (stage/film → manga → anime) and cultures (Western musicals/glam rock → Japanese manga/anime → global translations), and how much of a character's recognisable persona can survive when it is semiotically displaced, as linguistic, visual, and cultural adjustments are necessary for reception in different contexts (Adami & Ramos Pinto, 2020).

This introduction is followed by an overview of the double case study – musical/film and manga/anime – in which both works are presented as compelling examples of cross-border, cross-boundary and cross-cultural pop products. The third section presents and discusses Intersemiotic Translation, along with Multimodality framework as proper means to obtain insights into this multifaceted translation. The analysis section then examines verbal and visual cues related to Frank and Ivankov, as well as contextual and narrative reflections of O'Brien's plot into Oda's one. The article finally underscores the contemporary role of Intersemiotic Translation in spreading cultural milestones of identity performativity across space and time.

2 Intertextual works, spaces, characters

Since its premiere in 1973 and its film adaptation in 1975, *The Rocky Horror Show* (henceforth TRHS and TRHPS for the film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*) has achieved great prestige as a cult theatre production and a global pop culture milestone (Weinstock, 2007; Locke, 2015). The show narrates the

accidental journey of the conservative couple Brad and Janet into the castle of Dr Frank-N-Furter, a drag vampire-like alien scientist who, along with the court and his lab-made creature Rocky, systematically destabilises bordered norms of gender and morality, "playing upon themes of heterosexual romance, monogamy, sexual stereotypes and identifications, virginity and in general, middle American morality" (Kinkade & Katovich, 1992, p. 199). Through musical numbers, grotesque humour, and explicit sexualised performance, TRHS stages a liminal, yet subversive space in which identity becomes fluid, performative, and excessive.

The subsequent circulation across theatre stages, cinemas and fan practices turned TRHS into a transnational cultural phenomenon whose songs, costumes, and catchphrases became immediately recognisable (Locke, 2015). It owes longevity and cultural mobility to its fans' participation and ritualised callbacks, which further extended the show beyond the stage and screen, proving "the potential power of audiences – power not just to make a production company money, but to influence the court of public opinion and to shape reception" (Weinstock, 2007, p. 109). From this perspective, the show's afterlife can also be read through intersemiotic translation as a transgressive form of border crossing, whereby meanings, bodies, and identities overcome semiotic, spatial, and social boundaries. At the core of this proliferation lies a discourse of transgression and self-fashioning, which primes audiences to recognise and celebrate non-normative identities: "[a] crowd of strangers come together in an urban theatre at midnight, ready to participate in a communal ritual: to express their collective outsider status together as a group. It makes them feel better. In fact, it makes them feel great" (Locke, 2015, p. 13).

The extravagant persona of Frank-N-Furter emerges as the semiotic core of the whole TRHS phenomenon. Scholarship has consistently read Frank as an icon of queer performativity whose silhouette and rhetoric transform identity into spectacle and resistance: as a self-proclaimed "sweet transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania", he embodies camp theatricality (Cawley, 2023), drag performance (Roach, 2024), and Frankensteinian creation (Moskot, 2019), combining scientific authority with sexual display. The global reception of such a richly performative figure, who *plays* with gender and is overtly sexual, shows how subversive and iconic identity codes can cross linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The theatrical language of the show/film is mainly attested in its song lyrics. Lines such as "I see you shiver with anticipation" use theatrical rhetoric, an arch tone and a playful address to the audience. On stage, TRHS uses British English with flamboyant intonation, together with queer slang and innuendo. On the screen, these features are enhanced by cinematic timing, close-ups, and sound. The iconic body language literally steals the show, with gender nonconformity being performed theatrically, as a spectacle of erotic bodies wearing corsets, make-up, fishnets and heels, which serve as semiotic elements of transgression. Behind and around them, the setting borrows horror genre iconography (a castle, a laboratory, a gothic atmosphere) to evoke the boundary between norm and transgression. Such a kaleidoscope of different verbal and non-verbal features makes TRHS an "extended intertextual space" (Locke, 2015, p. 6).

Almost twenty years after O'Brien and Sharman's works, the *One Piece* (hereby OP) manga was first serialised, giving the world the adventures of Luffy, a young boy who, together with his crew, set sail to become *King of the Pirates*. It tells of the romance of piracy (Cordingly, 2006), reframing the pirate as a symbol of freedom and ethical self-determination rather than criminality (Sasada, 2011), and celebrating "diversity and borderlessness" (Nakamura, 2023, p. 1). Similarly to TRHPS's resonance, Eiichirō Oda's masterpiece has been adapted into anime, games, a Netflix live action, gradually becoming the brand of a cultural and commercial empire. It sits among the milestones of manga and anime culture, and it is a global best-seller (Loo, 2018).

OP crosses borders and boundaries thanks to a double-sided translation. On the one hand, both drawn and animated versions of the story have travelled outside Japan by means of traditional translation,

subtitling and dubbing in several languages, making it accessible worldwide (Susanto, 2018). On the other hand, OP enacts a form of intersemiotic translation of the real world itself: its landscapes, adventures, and narratives translate lived realities into fiction, reworking both the positive dimensions of human experience and its darker aspects, including war, poverty, corruption, and social injustice. While foregrounding friendship, solidarity, and loyalty, the series stages historical clashes between social classes, political parties, and even religious groups. In OP's world, rulers and military forces are not always principled, but rather mirrors of controversies in International Relations, as observed by Kopper (2020, p. 8):

> One Piece, like many Japanese cultural products, is not characterized by a dichotic depiction of the world, which makes it capable of capture nuances in dilemmas over order and justice. When we learn about the way order is maintained in the world of One Piece it becomes clear that this at times requires compromises. Although in the story the world is ruled by the World Government, uniting the kingdoms of the world for keeping the peace, it had to make deals with some of the most powerful pirate lords [...] and let them rule over their own territories as sovereign rulers, even though many in the marines understood that their rule was morally appalling.

As the manga has recently hit 115 volumes (and counting), this didactic aspect of the story has accompanied generations of readers and spectators, also shifting from public to personal sphere. Indeed, OP articulates a narrative of individual growth in which taking risks to chase dreams is inseparable from the inevitability of failure, the necessity of healing, and the possibility of starting anew with greater maturity and experience.

As the quest for awakening is one of the main leitmotifs of the series, one character who embodies it as both learner and mentor is Emporio Ivankov, a drag nonbinary revolutionary and former slave, who is capable of modifying the human body at a biochemical level. As one of the commanders of the Revolutionary Army, he's neither a pirate nor a government agent or marine, which makes him a liminal character. Often called Iva by his comrades (therefore sounding more feminine), not only is he a visually explicit homage to TRHS – as confirmed by Oda (2010) himself – but he also shares Frank-N-Furter's gender fluidity, physical and theatrical appearance, and an ethos of self-empowerment and bodily transformation.

Oda's narrative universe is characterised by strong verbal stylisation and visual excess, both in manga and anime. Characters adopt distinctive speech patterns, registers, and invented lexicons, often drawing on foreign myths, English loanwords, and culturally hybrid naming practices. This verbal creativity is matched by highly expressive visual design: exaggerated facial expressions, unconventional body shapes, and densely populated panels have become Oda's hallmark as a *mangaka*[1]. With his story, he succeeds in priming the audience for recognition, making OP's characters and aesthetics iconic. In Aubrey's (2021) lauding words:

> [Y]ou won't be ready for how much a comic with exaggerated smiles on the cover can make you feel truly sad. Oda stretches the limits of his character's faces, like a caricature in all situations, contorting them until they resemble the most intense emotion possible.
> Jaws will drop down by a foot, irises will disappear in a flood of tears, and all that's left is the image of someone truly broken. Oda represents pain in the same way he represents joy – by leaving just enough humanity in each illustration to ensure the characters still feel like living, breathing people. Smiles will literally stretch from ear to ear, and hunger is portrayed in a manner befitting of Kirby crossing over with the Looney Tunes. Every emotion is taken to a cartoonish extreme, and while that certainly leaves a lot of space for comedy and humour, Oda never loses sight of the seriousness of his story.

[1] "A writer or illustrator of manga", Oxford English Dictionary.

Seen together, TRHS and OP exemplify (both individually and through a celebrative echo) how cultural products can traverse borders of time, space, medium, and ideology. Both have travelled decades and continents, shifting from local productions to global phenomena, while maintaining recognisable symbols of resistance and identity play. Frank and Ivankov function as emblematic figures whose voices and bodies articulate defiance against normative orders. In the case of OP, this symbolic charge has extended beyond fiction: the protagonist's pirate flag (the Jolly Roger with a straw hat) has recently been appropriated as a sign of resistance in protest movements, including pro-Palestinian demonstrations and youth-led uprisings against authoritarian regimes (Harvey, 2025; Jalli, 2025; Ratcliffe, 2025). In this sense, both TRHS and OP operate as transnational and transgressive anthems of resistance. Through characters such as Frank and Ivankov, they show how semiotic figures can cross borders, accumulate new meanings, and continue to mobilise communities long after their original contexts of production.

3 Reading intersemiotic translation through multimodality

Intersemiotic Translation (henceforth IT) stems from Jakobson's (1959) tripartite distinction between intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation. IT traditionally involves interpreting verbal signs using non-verbal sign systems. It encompasses processes such as adapting literary works for film or dance. Building on Jakobson's work, contemporary scholarship has developed a more dynamic and socially oriented notion of IT as a resemiotisation practice: the shift of meaning across modes, media and contexts (O'Halloran et al., 2016), i.e. the object of this study, which translates a theatrical character into an ink-and-paper one.

In processes of resemiotisation, meaning is not simply 'transferred' intact, but rather actively reconstructed according to the possibilities and constraints of the target semiotic environment (Adami & Ramos Pinto, 2020). Dusi (2015) emphasises that IT is both theory and analysis, requiring consideration of media-specific codes, cultural context, and multimodal ensembles. Within this framework, IT consists of shifts at various levels, which align with those considered in this study: medium and modality (from stage and film to drawn panels and animated frames); cultural context (from Western glam rock and queer theatre to Japanese manga and global anime fandom); semiotic system (from spoken and sung English to Japanese language and visual cueing, and voice acting in multiple languages). Indeed, manga and anime often present fragments or longer strands of IT, which turns out to be, among other things, a cross-cultural practice for cross-cultural texts.

In their contributions to manga and anime studies (see Brenner, 2007), Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer (2013, p. 1) approach manga from a cultural perspective, considering "this kind of comics as something that serves not only as a site where different cultures meet or intermingle, but also as something that is best understood as a cultural crossroads":

> It goes without saying that all cultures are shaped by exchanges with others. Popular cultural practices in general and comics in particular have come to be built on appropriation and hybridization. Suffice it to mention the examples of the melting pot that gave rise to American comics, the impact of American comics – and later manga – on *bande dessinée*, the manga piracy rife in 1970s South Korea, and the recent transcultural success of the graphic novel. However, manga usually attracts the most attention when *culture* is at issue within comics studies, at least pertaining to culture defined in a geopolitical or national sense.

Just like manga, IT must be further understood as a social practice. As Adami and Ramos Pinto (2020, p. 71) argue, meaning is (re)created "in a world of untranslated signs", and IT provides ways of investigating how identities survive or change across semiotic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. This is consistent with Gottlieb's (2017) observation that translation is inherently multimodal, as texts are never solely verbal, but always embedded within different systems of signs. Thus, IT is that it can be adopted as both object of study and methodological lens, and in both cases, insights into translation processes can be gained by means of a multimodal approach.

IT and Multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) converge, providing that translation is conceived as one form of communication which, as a phenomenon, never takes place in isolation, but rather across modes such as language, image, sound, gesture, and space. This is crucial for the present study, as both TRHS and OP are naturally multimodal in their own plots: the former fuses music, dance, and costumes, while the latter integrates text, drawing style, and voice acting. This implies the necessity of analysing Emporio Ivankov as a target text and comparing it to its source text, Frank-N-Furter. This is what O'Halloran et al. (2016) define as intersemiotic complementarity, or the collaboration of verbal and non-verbal resources in shifting across texts and modes.

It is fundamental to notice that while IT describes the cross-modal transfer of meaning, the three metafunctions of visual communication – representational, interactive, and compositional – that Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) derive from Halliday (2014) for their theory of Multimodality, provide analytical tools to understand how multiple semiotic resources combine to create meaning. Analytically, this study focuses in particular on the representational metafunction, with attention to both conceptual and narrative structures through which social actors, actions, and relations are encoded in the show/film and echoed in the manga/anime; at the same time, the compositional metafunction is explored to account for how meaning is multimodally constructed, communicated, and made salient through the orchestration of verbal and visual resources that allow for recognition of TRHS in OP.

Balirano's (2017) concept of multimodal prosody is also relevant here, as the priming force of language can persist across modalities and influence the interpretation of images and gestures. By focusing on prosodic patterns of multimodal communication, it is possible to understand how recognition is ignited through the reiterated interplay of verbal and non-verbal language. For example, Frank's style is echoed and immediately recognised not only in Ivankov's figure, but also in the plot and other characters around him, which also borrow TRHS's script. While the multimodal framework is essential for tracing how aesthetics and identity are negotiated within and across cultural borders and boundaries, multimodal prosody is particularly explanatory of the intrinsic mechanism of such negotiation.

While the present study adopts a multimodal analytical perspective, manga panels and film/anime frames are not reproduced in the article for reasons related to copyright. The analysis therefore provides and relies on detailed descriptions and intersemiotic interpretations of visual and auditory features. This choice is also supported by the fact that the cultural products under investigation are globally circulating texts, whose key characters, scenes, and configurations are widely accessible and culturally recognisable.

4 Resemiotising *The Rocky Horror (Picture) Show* in *One Piece*

The analysis is carried out at five interrelated levels, each addressed in a dedicated subsection. These levels correspond to the different semiotic and discursive dimensions through which the IT of Frank-N-Furter into Emporio Ivankov is examined, namely: plot and setting; characters' first appearance; provenance and social in-betweenness; verbal and visual language; and bodily transformation.

4.1 Plot and space: from Transylvania to Impel Down

The very first clear example of IT between TRHS and OP is the reworking of the plot, setting and character dynamics. The show/film opens with a political backdrop: Brad and Janet's car radio announces former USA President Richard Nixon's resignation, situating the events in the unstable post-Watergate era. This foreshadowing of international tension is comparable to OP's arc in which Emporio Ivankov first appears (Oda, 2009), when the capture and public execution of Luffy's brother is announced. In both texts, personal journeys are therefore framed by institutional crises.

As Brad and Janet stumble into Frank-N-Furter's castle, Luffy and his friend, Mr. 2 Bon Clay, infiltrate the fortress prison of Impel Down to free Luffy's brother, Ace. The two pairs' encounters with extravagant figures – Frank and Iva – catalyse the narration. Interestingly, both characters destabilise gender and power binaries by embodying transgression within fortress-like domains. Indeed, the settings also translate aesthetic codes: while Frank's gothic castle and hidden laboratory evoke forbidden knowledge, Impel Down is a prison where detainees are punished according to themed levels (a presumably, yet unconfirmed Dantean inspiration). Ivankov – who, as a revolutionary, does not plan to be kept long – is at Level 5.5, a shelter of queer prisoners who stay away from surveillance and are officially lost, which mirrors Frank's castle in being marginal and ideologically liberated from normative order.

Environmental setting also strengthens this parallel, with TRHS beginning in a thunderstorm that drives Brad and Janet to the castle, and Luffy and Bon Clay being taken to Level 5.5 after fainting in Level 5's perpetual snowstorm. In both stories, the presented inside worlds are inaugurated with a celebration: TRHS's famous *Time Warp*[2] introduces Brad and Janet into Frank's realm of fluid identity; similarly, a hidden feast welcomes Luffy and Bon Clay into a queer utopia when the two characters wake up. Music, costumes and dance mark these spaces as thresholds of identity re-discussion.

Although the main characters have not even appeared yet, these early parallels already exemplify resemiotisation (O'Halloran et al., 2016): political frames, outsider protagonists, fortress settings, storms and celebratory rites migrate across media.

4.2 Silhouettes of desire: from Sweet Transvestite to Ivankov's entrance

For drag performers, entrance and first appearance are a calling card of paramount importance (Esposito, 2024), and that is exactly how Frank and Ivankov are introduced. In TRHPS, Frank first appears to the tune of *Sweet Transvestite*[3]: he is concealed in shadow, his back to the audience, with glimpses of his clothes' dramatic lighting building anticipation. Identically, Ivankov appears from behind in a spotlight on a curtained stage, with even more eye-catching clothes, such as the fishnet cape. Secrecy before flamboyant revelations of these two characters is a signal of their extraordinary nature.

Verbal cues reinforce this echo. In the musical track, Frank (Tim Curry) sings:

> How d'you do?
> I see you've met my faithful handyman
> He's just a little brought down because when you knocked
> He thought you were the candyman

The ironic and iconic "How d'you do?" is mirrored when, as the curtain opens, Ivankov asks Bon Clay: "Did you sleep well?". Moments before, secondary characters translate across texts: Riff Raff, Frank's

[2] *Movieclips* official YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-woWPkB3XJ4.
[3] *Movieclips* official YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCZDWZFtyWY.

faithful handyman, welcomes Brad and Janet, while Inazuma, Ivankov's right-hand, plays a comparable role for Luffy and Bon Clay, having who saved them from the snowstorm. Even Frank's *candyman* motif reappears as he addresses Bon Clay with *candy boy*, then rephrased into *Bon-boy*, blending the name of the character with his linguistic habit of adding *-boy* to names. Such a stylistic choice, along with Iva's aesthetics, functions as a prosodic performative marker of queerness (Balirano, 2017).

Lyrical themes also resonate. Frank continues: "Don't get strung out by the way that I look / Don't judge a book by its cover", encouraging spectators to suspend any preconception, just like Ivankov reframes the deceptive appearance of Impel Down's Level 5.5, which is a *prisoner's…paradise* rather than a jail. Both performers invert expectations and transform repression into festivity. Visual coincidences further reinforce the link, as Frank sings the chorus and is revealed in his corseted dress:

> I'm not much of a man by the light of day
> But by night I'm one hell of a lover
>
> I'm just a sweet transvestite
> From Transexual, Transylvania

Likewise, Ivankov walks the stage with his exaggerated silhouette – gigantic head, elongated limbs and queer vampire-like clothes – presenting an androgynous threshold figure whose resemblance to Frank-N-Furter was immediately recognised by readers who asked Oda (2010) for confirmation.

Frank and Iva exemplify resemiotisation in their entrance choreographies, with elements such as timing, lighting, silhouette, greetings and secondary roles migrating across pop cultures and products. Multimodal prosody lies in the modes and rhythm of anticipation – the introductory beat, the curtain rising, the spotlight, and the vocal opening – resonating across the stage, the screen, the manga, the anime. Thus, Ivankov's debut adapts Frank's *Sweet Transvestite* performance into the idiom of One Piece, interweaving verbal, visual, and performative codes.

4.3 Liminal spaces: from Transsexual to Newkama

In OP, characters' origins and backgrounds are often portrayed in terms of otherness and existing boundaries. Oda adds layers of queerness to Emporio Ivankov's character storyboard. Again, this is already seen in TRHS when Frank claims to come from Transsexual, Transylvania, eventually revealed as a planet of a remote galaxy. The prefix *trans-* suggests hybridity and existence outside of normative conceptions, queerness as both alien and spectacular. In Freudian terms, Frank and its space itself operate as *unheimlich*, 'uncanny': they unsettle Brad and Janet precisely because they distort what is familiar, bringing repressed desires to the surface and destabilising every normative preconception about gender, sexuality, and domestic order.

Similarly, Ivankov's background is framed through names and domains. Oda presents him as the absent queen of the Kamabakka Queendom, a queered monarchy that celebrates marginality and femininity. In Japanese, *kamabakka* means 'full of transvestites', implying a space defined by non-normative bodies. The title *newkama*, adopted by Ivankov and his inmates, expands this idea. It combines *new* with *okama* – a slang term for effeminate men, drag performers, or queer individuals which is often derogatory, but sometimes reclaimed. So, *newkama* suggests a 'new humanity' – people experiencing whatever identity they feel like rather than an established one. This linguistic reworking resonates with *nakama*, 'comrade', which is preferred in OP over *tomodachi*, 'friend', for its sense of shared risk and adventure. The shift from *nakama* to *newkama* redefines fellowship as queer belonging.

Geography reinforces the semiotics of in-betweenness. Kamabakka Queendom is situated on Momoiro Island, literally 'Peach Island' or 'Pink Island', words stereotypically tied to femininity. Its citizens are *okama* who dress and live according to drag traditions. Temporarily situating their monarch within the Impel Down prison further intensifies the liminality, as Ivankov exists neither fully within the carceral system nor outside of society, but rather in a hidden enclave of self-determination from which he eventually breaks out together with all his followers. This mirrors Frank's Transylvania: not entirely human, nor entirely alien, but interstitial. Such in-betweenness is multisemiotic: linguistically, *newkama* reworks comradeship into queer identity; visually, costumes, performative spaces and liminality evoke resistance spatiality typical of the Ball Culture (see Bailey, 2013); narratively, a queendom hidden within a prison creates an additional threshold of belonging; culturally, monarchy is queered, reimagining sovereignty as a form of drag house (see Bailey, 2011).

While inhabiting their respective domains, Frank and Ivankov redefine identity through verbal, body, and spatial language. In stating and enhancing their complex and irrepressible queerness, they ensure their recognisable continuity across media.

4.4 Visual and verbal codes of camp monarchs

Both Frank-N-Furter and Emporio Ivankov's visual representations present either changes or reflections which encode prominence and symbolism. Hair is a defining feature of both figures: Frank's dark curls frame his pale face, evoking glam rock and goth aesthetics; in coloured panels and anime, Ivankov's afro hair is presented as blue-violet. The size and colour of his hair are markers of salience, namely the centrality of some visual elements aimed at drawing the viewer's attention (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

Make-up is another constant feature, as both characters are represented with heavy eyeliner, dark lipstick and bold eyeshadow to accentuate their faces, echoing drag traditions in which the face is a performative canvas (Halladay, 2004). Their muscular physiques, tight clothes, pearl necklaces, gloves, fishnets, and ever-present smiles dramatise a hybrid sensuality – masculine sturdiness combined with a feminine look.

Differences signal adaptation: Ivankov wears a crown and a cape, signifying monarchic authority, but also recalling superhero archetypes. By contrast, Frank almost immediately discards his vampire cloak to reveal his iconic corsetry. Their footwear differs too: Frank's stilettos are typical of drag performance, whereas Ivankov's boots are less overtly sexual.

Interestingly, while Frank's palette is vampire-gothic (pale skin and a black corset), Ivankov's colours blend cold (blue) and warm (pink) hues, which are interestingly those of the trans pride flag, and produce chromatic ambiguity that detaches from stereotypical binary coding. This difference in colour schemes, which occurs between two pop products distant in time, seems to translate the contemporary conceptualisation of queerness as visible plurality, opposed to last century's nocturnal secrecy and closetedness. This resonates with the shift from the epistemic regime of the closet (Sedgwick, 1990) to contemporary formations of gay/queer visibility as a public cultural logic (Gross, 2001; Walters, 2003). This is even reinforced by the fact that, while in the end Frank returns to Transsexual, Iva eventually breaks out of jail (a closet), joining the Revolutionary Army and the main story's events.

Finally, smiles determine how the characters address and are addressed. Frank's grin communicates both menace and seduction, differently from Ivankov's typical manga wide smile, which recalls drag pageantry, transforming threat into playful inclusion. As posited by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), the mouth is a vector of address, and its styling vehicles social interaction. These multimodal parallels and

divergences prove that IT is always a practice of adaptation, rather than replication, as in the case under analysis, where TRHS's sensual and gothic outsider becomes OP's queer and technicolour revolutionary.

Both Frank and Ivankov also use distinctive speech codes and vocal patterns, adapted by authors to their respective media. Of course, in the case of TRHS and TRHPS this mainly refers to Curry's acting, whereas in OP it is the anime that is being considered, along with its dubbings. Frank's language stages camp theatricality. It is not merely accent, but rather an ambiguous, plummy drawl, which makes him suspicious and attractive at the same time, especially with the help of look, gestures, and moves. Oda and OP anime dubbers mirror this strategy in Ivankov through some style conventions. On the page, bold typography, oversized speech bubbles and heavy punctuation visualise Iva's booming speeches. In the anime, Ivankov's voices usually prefer a deep, mellifluous timbre with dramatic rises and falls, reminiscent of drag performances. One interesting detail is found in the English translation of the manga, where Ivankov substitutes *w* with *v* (*velcome* instead of *welcome*), a faux-Slavic quirk, but also a vampire cliché like those characterising Frank (Weinstock, 2007).

Further resemiotised homage to Frank's persona is paid in OP when Iva often screams *hee-haw*, a charge-like yell, often changed in translation into more regular *whoo* or *yahoo*. This use of voice as a spectacle device echoes Frank's musicality, simultaneously performing authority and invitation. Words and visuals combine with acoustic elements to create a multimodal effect for queer performance. Together, the vampiric accent, drag-host style and okama talk create a camp texture, making language central to identity visual performativity.

4.5 Hymns and Hormones: bodies as stages

One final remarkable parallelism is that both Frank-N-Furter and Emporio Ivankov are doctors. In TRHS, Frank sings *I Can Make You a Man*, proudly unveiling the creature Rocky as his laboratory-made creation. The lyrics "In just seven days / I can make you a man" gain significance on stage and screen, fusing sexuality, science and spectacle. Frank presents himself as a scientist, a lover and a showman who transforms the laboratory into a theatre of desire. In this case, the reflection in Ivankov resides in the most fictional, yet evident analogy between the two doctors. Like many characters in OP, Ivankov has eaten a Devil Fruit and gained supernatural power; the name of his fruit is *Horu Horu* (from the word *hormon*), which grants control over hormones and anatomy. With it, Iva can, for example, alter sex characteristics, boost vitality or reshape faces, literally remaking bodies. He identifies as an 'engineer of the human body', echoing Frank's scientific Frankenstein-like transgression.

Interestingly, Devil Fruits are ultimately revealed to embody humanity's evolutionary possibilities (Oda, 2022): born from intense desires – "I wish I could do this", "I wish I were like that" – these unnatural fruits grant superhuman abilities to those who consume them, echoing the biblical motif of forbidden knowledge symbolised by the devil's apple. Significantly, all Devil Fruit users lose the ability to swim, introducing a paradox at the heart of a maritime narrative and marking the compromise between power and loss.

Although narratively distant, Frank and Iva's respective abilities perform bodily transformation not as hidden medicine, but as a public performance. This power is dramatised within both products, in scenes reminiscent of Gothic mad science. One example occurs during Impel Down's arc, when Ivankov is confronted by a man seeking revenge for his father's gender reassignment, which raised concerns about patriarchal disruption in his family. Much as Frank's creation of Rocky embodies desire and defiance of norms (Locke, 2015), the moment parallels the tropes of unnatural creation in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, with Ivankov resembling Viktor when he tells the man that his father wanted to be a woman and that he merely helped him to affirm queer self-creation.

Iva's powers and analogy with the creation of Rocky are further observed in his treatment of Luffy's poisoning. The protagonist is chained to a worktable while Ivankov injects him with healing hormones at the cost of ten years of his life. This imagery is reminiscent of Frankenstein's monster – chains, needles and convulsions – with Luffy's agonised transformation mirroring Rocky's birth pangs. Ivankov taking ten years of Luffy's own remaining lifespan as a necessary price for healing resonates with Frank's lyrics 'In seven days I can make you a man'. Both doctors manipulate time and body for the sake of awakening and vitality. Going back again to O'Halloran et al. (2016), resemiotisation involves adapting semiotic resources also across both general and more specific narrative sub-contexts. Here, the Gothic scientist becomes a revolutionary drag doctor. Both Frank and Ivankov literalise the metaphor of identity as performance, making bodies their stages and exemplifying IT at its most compelling and visceral level.

5 Conclusion: "*Don't dream it, be it!*"

Cultural icons are not merely reproduced over time, but rather resemiotised across media and modes, language and style, thereby crossing and reconfiguring the borders that separate semiotic systems, genres, and cultural formations. Through the application of a multimodal lens to an IT trajectory, this study demonstrates that identity does not travel intact; rather it is continually reworked – along with its attributes and ideology – through representational and compositional choices that respond to new semiotic environments, narrative logics, and sociocultural conditions.

The analysis shows that, however apart Frank-N-Furter and Emporio Ivankov may be in terms of cultures of origin, language, genre and generation of audience, they both function as subversive liminal figures whose bodies, voices, and spaces of performativity consistently destabilise normative orders. In TRHS/TRHPS, Frank's gothic theatricality stages queerness as excess, secrecy, and sexual awakening within a hostile moral landscape. In OP, Ivankov reworks this legacy into a revolutionary performance of queerness, embedded within a long-form serial narrative that foregrounds solidarity, healing, and political resistance. This exemplifies resemiotisation as an adaptive process in which leitmotifs are translated across different modes of communication and with constant regard to cultural boundaries.

IT literally moves texts not only across semiotic systems, but also across borders. TRHS and OP have both travelled globally, becoming transnational anthems of dissent whose symbols circulate far beyond their original contexts. Through figures such as Frank and Ivankov, popular culture (just like O'Brien and Oda) demonstrates its capacity to reimagine identity, challenge authority, and sustain communities of resistance across time and space. IT, read multimodally, thus emerges as a crucial site for understanding how cultural meanings survive, mutate, and continue to matter. These border crossings are not neutral movements, but rather acts of transgression that unsettle cultural, medial, and ideological boundaries, allowing queer meanings to circulate, rearticulate dissent, and acquire renewed political force as they move across contexts, audiences, and regimes of representation.

In her study on the influence of TRHPS on the queer communities in the 70s, Jackie Roach (2024, p. 10) concludes with a reflection on these days: "we must put on our fishnets, lace up our corsets, and fight to save our dream". This call for action draws on TRHS's motto, "don't dream it, be it", an incitement to self-determination that is echoed in OP as well. When Bon Clay learns that the healing treatment may kill Luffy, he begs Ivankov to act as the "lord of miracles" he's believed to be, and to save his friend. The revolutionary turns seriously annoyed by what he deems as a passive belief, and crystallises Frank's line by yelling at Bon Clay: "Miracles can only descend upon those with the will to carry on! Do not take them so lightly!" (Oda, 2009). Iva's words function as a metadiscursive closure. They encapsulate an ethical and ideological trajectory: from desire to endurance, from transgression to collective resistance. In this utterance, bodily

transformation, hope, and political agency converge, transforming queerness into a force of survival and mobilisation. In this respect, IT serves as an apt vehicle to let culture travel across borders and boundaries. As Ting (2020) observes, attachments to manga and anime characters can be read not as escapist, but as sites of identification and resistance – an insight that resonates powerfully with Ivankov's role in OP and with the afterlives of Frank-N-Furter.

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