

“IT’S OVER 9000.” APEIRON NARRATIVE CONFIGURATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY MEDIASCAPE

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Abstract

Recently, a peculiar narrative configuration has developed and is spreading through the internet culture and new media. Characterised by a specific representation of the individual growth process, Apeiron narratives find their origin in pen & paper role-playing games, but it is only after the development of digital games and the diffusion of the Japanese cultural codex through the contemporary mediascape that they have become a coherent, autonomous and viral phenomenon.

In the following pages, this narrative configuration will be described through a series of paradigmatic examples; its roots will be traced back to the peculiar traits of role-playing games, and the importance of recent digital adaptation will be highlighted. Finally, I will describe its diffusion beyond the domain of fictional text, hinting at possible environments for its diffusion.

Keywords: videogame, narrative, fiction, semiotics, aspectuality

1. Description

1.1. Introduction: memes and power level

“It’s over 9000” is one of the first and most famous memes still used on the internet: it is generally used in messages as a reply to incredible values or numbers, often ironically or to imply an excess in forecasts or predictions. In recent years, its success served as a starting point for practices of meme remix-remake, which could be called a meta-meme.



Figure 1: the original image of the “it’s over 9000” meme

It is possible that this success is not by chance: the scene from which the meme is inspired can be considered one of the clearest representations of a recent narrative configuration, which has been spreading across different media platforms in the last years.

The meme itself is derived from a sequence of the American version of the *anime* (Japanese cartoon) *Dragon Ball Z*, created by Akira Toriyama and a sequel of the famous *Dragon Ball* series.

In order to define the paradigmatic elements of the meme, a brief resume of the plot of the *DBZ* series is necessary: the cartoon starts with the arrival on planet earth of the vicious race of the Sayans. They are equipped with a combat scanner (called *scouter*), which is able to precisely measure the combat potential of living beings, and assess it on a numerical scale. The aim of the Sayan Raditz is to convince his brother Goku (the main character of *Dragon Ball*) to join them, and conquer Earth. Since Goku refuses, the two fighters start to battle. Raditz knows he will win, since his combat power is 1500, while the two strongest fighters on earth, Goku and his friend Junior (who joined the battle) only have a power level of 416 and 408. By acting recklessly, however, he is killed through a stratagem by the

two earthlings. Despite this he is able to send a dying message to his much stronger comrades Nappa and Vegeta, who head for planet earth. Since the two aliens arrive one year later, the main characters have enough time to train and be ready to face them.

One year later, in the scene from which the meme is taken from, Goku joins the battle at a later stage, while his friends are being defeated by Nappa. Before stepping up, Goku gives a demonstration of his combat power, to show his enemies how strong he has become. Nappa, whose scouter got destroyed during the previous battle, asks Vegeta for the result. Vegeta, stupefied and overcome by anger, shouts “Unbelievable... It’s over nine thousand”, destroying the scouter out of rage. Nappa (whose power level is 4000)¹ does not trust the result, charging relentlessly: as a result, he is defeated with one blow.

1.2 Representing power and growth

Three main characteristics of DBZ’s representation of power let us outline the peculiarity of its narrative configuration:

1) The measure of Competence: through the semionarrative framework developed by Greimas (1983), the measure of the scouter can be defined as a sanction of a specific performance. However, it is important to note that the scouter does not measure the actual fight (that is, the main performance), but only a virtualisation of performance of the subject, or it should be said, their competence. In the scene previously described, the Addressee Nappa refuses to acknowledge the Sanction, and as a result he is defeated when Goku’s Virtual Competence translates into a Performance (an actual fight). The Sanction of the scouter, however, is conveyed through a numerical value on a specific scale, rather than vague guessing or judgment from the warriors themselves. This numerical scale translates every possible ability of the fighters (strength, speed, stamina, technique etc.) into a mono-dimensional axis.

2) Competence/Performance discrepancy: by extending the consideration to the previous episodes of Dragon Ball, a second trait is visible. While the main character’s power level is 20 times higher than his previous fight (from 416 to 9000), this growth is not mirrored by a change in the representation of fights: fighters’ movements, punch feedback, and spiritual energy are substantially comparable if not identical in the two battles, both in the anime and in the manga.

¹ For a list of power levels with sources, http://dragonball.wikia.com/wiki/List_of_power_levels (last visit 27/09/17)

DBZ “grammar of fights” was mainly created at the beginning of the series, and aside from specific events (such as the fighters’ transformations), remains constant within the series. To simplify, there is no way for the reader to discern the actual power level of the fighters involved in a battle without knowing beforehand. After all, the author of DB, Akira Toriyama, explicitly said the scouter was designed as a simple plot device to make the readers aware of the relative strength of the fighters, without having to rely on different visual cues and exhibition of strength for every battle.

3) Exponential growth: right after destroying the scouter, Vegeta asks himself how it is possible for the weak Goku to develop so much in only one year. His doubts do not regard his enemy’s current fighting competence (he is still stronger than him), but Goku’s competence in growing. The incredible development in power of the main characters becomes increasingly clear as the story proceeds in the following narrative arcs: Goku beats Vegeta (power level 18.000) with a quadruple *kaioken* (his special attack, which multiplies his power per 4). In the next arc, Goku’s power is 90.000, and grows further during the episodes. In the subsequent one, during the fight against Freezer, his power raises from 3 million to 150 million thanks to his transformation into Super Sayan, surpassing his enemy’s 120 million.

By describing the process of growth in DBZ through its aspectuality traits (Fontanille 1991), it can be defined as durative (the process of growth is continuous), iterative (constituted by multiple cycles of growth) and progressive (the process is oriented through hierarchically growing Sanctions, following units of measurements on a growing scale).

To summarise the previous observations, the process of growth is characterised by three main elements: 1) the subject’s Competence, which is directly represented and sanctioned through a numerical value and scale, linked to the value of a virtual Performance. 2) The growth process, as represented through the different numerical Sanctions, is characterised by the following aspectuality traits: durativity, iterativity and progressivity. Using a visual metaphor, this could be represented by an exponential equation, developing through a higher order of magnitudes as the story develops. 3) This growth in competence is not balanced by a comparable change in the representation of the actual performance related to the competence (the battles), which seem to follow a static visual and narrative style.

1.3. Apeiron configuration in comics

The elements described above are not limited to the Dragon Ball series, but are a key part of multiple contemporary narratives, starting with Japanese and Korean comics (*manga* and *manwa*): by expanding the analysis

to the presence of these elements in *shounen* and *seinen*, it is possible to define the constitutive parts of a common narrative configuration, which will be referred to as Apeiron from now on. In addition, well-known comics, such as *Tokyo Ghoul*, *Naruto*, *One Piece*, *Bleach*, *Claymore*, *Tower of God*, *Re:Monster*, *The Gamer*, and many others can be used as examples to describe variations and expansion in the configuration described below:

1) The unit of measure for Competence (and thus of the process of growth) can be represented directly or indirectly. For instance, in *One Piece*, the pirate threat is measured through the bounty assigned to them; in *Tower of God*, characters’ ability is measured through the number of floors of the Tower they have climbed; in *Claymore*, each soldier is ranked through its number on a general leaderboard for all the soldiers of his/her generation.

2) The measure of Competence can also be represented through hierarchies, ranks and titles: in *Tokyo Ghoul*, the anti-ghoul police ranks its enemies in classes ranging from C- to SSS (and maybe more); the investigators are divided into 4 levels (second class, first class, special class 1, special class 2) predominantly according to their combat prowess. In *Bleach*, *shinigamis*’ Competence is based on their rank number in the respective corps (1° captain, 2° vice-captain, 3° lieutenant, etc.). While the unit of measurement seems to not be as precise as a numerical value, the growth in competence correlates with the same exponential rhythm through titles and hierarchies: the main character in *Bleach* defeats a vice-captain, then a captain, then the strongest captain among the army corps in only three days, despite his enemies’ decades of training to reach those positions.

3) These leaderboards, numerical values or ranks/hierarchies can be combined together to create complex representations of the levels of strength, in order to avoid the confrontations to be too predictable. Furthermore, plot devices can be devised to make the circumstances more nuanced (multiple characters teaming up, unknown special powers revealed etc.), acting as specific “calculations.” As a result, the readers start to perceive the inherent logic behind the values and measurements, integrate it into the narrative development of the story, and use it to “compute” the possible narrative outcomes for the story.

4) Among the specific narrative plot devices used for “calculation”, a key role is played by limit-break processes: transformations (*Super Sayan* in *DB*), alternative forms (*Kakuya* in *TG*), all-out special attacks (Bankai in *Bleach*). Almost all the comics listed above feature one or more limit-break processes, in which previous numerical values or ranks are suddenly crossed and overcome, acting as a quantum leap in Competence. These

plot devices are generally used in the most climatic battles, in which the difference in competence among the enemies is too high, or too low, acting as a trump card to produce (and justify) specific narrative developments.

1.4. The original traits in role-playing games

The *Apeiron* configuration, while common in eastern comics and cartoons, is not limited to Japanese/Korean cultures, nor can it be fully said to originate in the traditional domains of the narrative. On the contrary, it is the result of a complex process of intermedial translations, in which abstract narrative structures spread, change and diffuse through multiple media and cultures.

However, this should not be seen as the result of an actual genealogy or direct imitation (which could be proven with difficulty) so much as the result of the spread of specific abstract narrative structures through the contemporary mediascape (Appadurai 1996), a process further encouraged by the social development of the digitalisation, and by the key paradigmatic role achieved by games as a medium in the 21st century (see Idone Cassone 2017).

For this specific configuration, it is possible to highlight the role of traditional and digital games in its origin and development, specifically role-playing games, the game genre most based on the development of player Competence.

1) As a general pattern in role-playing games, both traditional (*Dungeons & Dragons*, *Vampire*) and digital (such as the Japanese *Final Fantasy* or *Dragon Quest* series, the Western *Dragon Age*, *Divinity: Original Sin* and *Fallout*), the characters played by the user are defined by a character level and other statistics, directly dependent on the level achieved. As per the units of measure described in the previous paragraphs, levels acts as a Sanction of the character's Competence, and only indirectly of its performance. Each time players fight, characters gain experience and increase their level, gaining new powers and increasing their stats, which in turn increase the damage they do, their health points, their magic points, etc.

2) While new visual effects are sometimes employed to represent characters' strongest special power, the main difference in the performance is limited to the display of attacks' damage output, or of the health points and the magic points available. A specific attack will always trigger the same animation, regardless of whether the character's level is 1 or 100; it is only through the damage counter that it is possible to perceive the difference in Performance.

3) The individual progress is once again tied to narrative development, and shaped through an exponential-like curve: as players progress through the story, the quests and fights cause their characters to gain levels, while new and stronger enemies appear in the next narrative arcs, including the so-called Boss, the strongest and last enemy of a narrative arc, whose power and level is generally superior to that of the main characters. While the level range vary according to each game (from 1 to 100 in *FF*, from 1 to 20 in *D&D...*), the difference in the other stats usually highlights the quantum leap from early to peak levels.

However, the roots of this system of exponential growth can be traced back to analogical games, such as the forefather of pen and paper RPGs: *Dungeons and Dragons*.

LINEAR WARRIORS, QUADRATIC WIZARDS

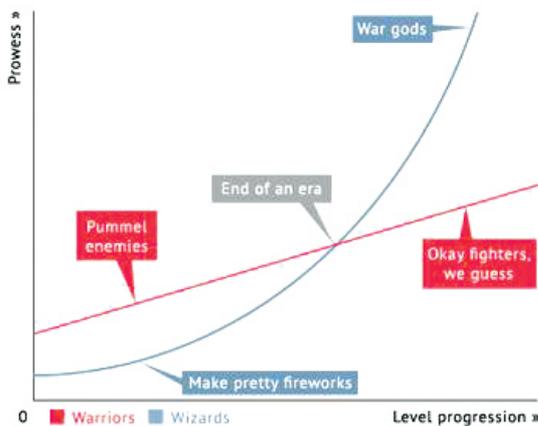


Figure 2: a chart describing the increase in power of warriors and magical classes in *D&D*

The mechanical issue later labelled as “linear warrior, quadratic wizard” has been visible since the earliest versions of *D&D*. It refers to a difference in progression between the fighter classes and the magic ones: while the former gained points of damage in a linear manner (rolling 1 dice, and adding X), the latter gained damage points of damage by multiplying the dice roll (rolling X dice); in addition, magic classes gained further spells, and new dice for each one of the previous spells known, while fighters progressed in only a limited number of attacks.

As a result, the perceived exponential growth in traditional RPGs is not due to a single quantum leap in a comprehensive unit of measurement, but to the sum and accumulation of multiple powers at a rhythm far greater than the standard one; in a similar way to what Vegeta witnessed in the “it’s over 9000!” scene, described above.

Therefore, the general paradigm of role-playing games embodies the three main traits defined in the previous paragraph: measure of Competence, Competence/Performance discrepancy, and Exponential growth. 4) However, they also feature various examples of the limit-break process described for the Apeiron narratives, paradigmatically implemented in the *Final Fantasy* series. In *Final Fantasy*, power limits do not exist within narrative arcs; instead limits are imposed on the maximum level (99) and maximum damage (9999) obtainable in the game. However, it is possible for players to surpass this limit through special powers called Break Limit (or sometimes special moves called Limit Break), that enable characters to surpass the limit and inflict a maximum of 99.999 points of damage (provided the character is skilled enough to reach it). The same limit and limit break is often applied to Health points, Mana points etc. In the Italian adaptation, these abilities have been called “Apeiron”, from Anassimandro’s concept of the infinite, boundless and endless, from which this narrative configuration takes its name.

A less explicit limit-break process is featured in the progression systems of MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online roleplaying games), like *World of Warcraft*. The main difference in WRPG is that the limit break does not result from special attacks or a single power, but consists of the possibility to surpass multiple limits dictated by the game (limit caps). In WOW, players have a maximum level cap of 100: when they reach it, it is the equipment that starts “levelling up.” Divided into different tiers, virtually infinite (from T1 until the actual T21), the main five pieces of equipment represent a new “leap”, and set a new power boundary tied with frequent updates of the game. With respect to the model of the fairy tales, in which objects grant specific Competence on a simple dichotomy, here all the objects have the same function, but the competence is made discreet by the difference in numbers in protections, damage, weight etc.

The Apeiron narrative configuration, formerly described only through contemporary manga and anime, seems to be deeply rooted in the traditions of roleplaying games, and also manifests in their new digital manifestations, both in Japanese and in Western video games. After describing its main four traits and game-related origin, it is now necessary to highlight

the semiotic outcomes of this configuration, how it interacts with “traditional narrations”, and how it is spreading in the contemporary mediascape.

2. Analysis

2.1. Micro-level aspectuality

As a result of this interaction between value measurements, hierarchies of power, narrative arcs, limits and limit break, Apeiron narratives create a complex effect of aspectualisation (Fontanille 1991) out of the aspectuality of the process of growth. The structure and the development of the individual narratives deeply interact with the grammar of Competence and the progress of growth of the characters, both in games and in traditional narratives.

The process is the result of two interacting levels of aspectuality: the micro-level (in which the reader/player’s point of view is within the narrative flow), and the macro-level (the phase of re-elaboration, in which the reader/player’s POV is beyond a single narrative arc, or the whole series).

At the first level, the development of Competence is represented both through durativity (through phases of training) and punctuativity (the measurement of competence through numbers and ranks). Only in the first case is it possible to discuss a real representation of “progression” for the microaspectuality, since viewers experience the character through the process of growth, while in the second case the process of growth is only re-elaborated at a macro-level, by comparing the actual Competence value with the previous value and inferring the evolution.

However, the limit-breaking moments, represented through a punctuative aspectuality (a sudden change in measurement) make the reader aware of the immediate growth in character Competence, through the sudden shift in measurement and in performance. It is during these moments that it is easier to witness a change in the non-numerical representation of the performance.

2.2. Semiotic boundaries and thresholds

As a result of the punctuative vs. durative micro-level aspectuality, a peculiar structure of semiotic boundaries and thresholds (Zilbelberg 2001) is created: these boundaries both affect the narrative development (separating the different story arcs) and the Competence measurement (separating the pre- and post-limit break). As explicated in the Dictionnaire (Greimas and Courtes 1979, entry “aspectualisation”), boundaries and thresholds are linked to aspectuality, since the macro-level points of views on the process

are the result of the positioning of the observer with respect to specific narrative boundaries/thresholds.

In the case of Apeiron narratives, the process of growth is represented through two main complementary points of view: the first centred on the subject/ anti-subject relationship, the second centred on the relationship between narrative arcs.

In the first acts in a narrative arc, the main characters are placed at the lower level of the power scale, while their enemy/ies are put on the upper boundary of the power scale. By assuming the POV of the main character, growth process is perceived from a “bottom-up perspective” in which the final goal is not simply to reach the limit, but to surpass it. As noted by Fabri and Sbisà (1985), boundaries and thresholds are tied with the specific result of *debrayage* and *embrayage*: in this case, the distinction in narrative arcs is strengthened by limit-break events, which settle a new degree in subject Competence and act as the ending of the previous bottom-up perspective. As a result, a new narrative arc, a new perspective and a new aspectuality on the process of growth are established in the following arc.

If the story had been written from the point of view of the anti-subject (a “top-down” point of view), no development or growth in Competence would have been possible: the resulting aspectualisation would be that of a continuously stagnating anti-subject competence. But since the narrative configuration is built on following the main subject’s path from a bottom-up perspective, the moment in which the limits of the Competence and the limits of the narrative arcs are reached necessitates a new arc.

However, due to the exponential growth increase that characterises Apeiron narratives, the new arc will need to develop exponential growth through the replication of the bottom-up POV. The boundaries of the new narrative arc behave in the exact same way: new anti-subject, new limit, new limit-break.

This second arc/arc point of view shapes the general aspectualisation of the whole text: aspectualisation not limited to explicit actions, but referring to the general positioning and interaction of the reader/player with all the narrative horizons, within and beyond the boundaries, in relation to virtual processes (growth), actual processes (limit break), and realised processes (continuous acts of establishing and surpassing limits). These forms of aspectualisation result from the use of units of measurement within the narration, and the separation into narrative arcs.

2.3. Perspective and retrospective

When the reader moves from macro-level to micro-level aspectuality, another outcome of the Apeiron dynamic becomes apparent. The reader/

player will try to synthesize the text, integrating the narrative development and the growth-process grammar into a coherent shape, through the micro-level points of view and aspectualities used in the text. However, due to the above-mentioned dichotomy between the punctuative and durative representation of the growth, and the iterative nature of the growth across different narrative arcs, two main types of narrative inconsistencies can be observed in Apeiron narratives:

a) The passage from one arc to the other causes a retrospective paradox. Due to the exponential representation of growth, and to the use of limit-break as narrative endings, everything that a character has been experienced becomes insignificant when a new arc is reached. The previous enemies, challenges, and power balances are now meaningless, since the new arc follows the same bottom-up, progressive point of view, in which new limits and anti-subjects shape the power balance. In this regard, Apeiron narratives can be considered the opposite of classical Epic narratives, in which the meaning of the action is defined only in a retrospective way, as an obligation and valorisation of the Past.

b) The passage from single arcs to the interpretation of the entire text produces a discontinuity function paradox: since growth is experienced mainly through discontinuous punctuative measurements and limit breaks, it is the reader who must translate it into a continuous, progressive process, “connecting the dots” and filling the narrative gaps in power balance and competence growth. But since the process is represented through an iterative, bottom-up view, a multiple perspective incoherence may arise (character overgrowth, different “curves of power”, implicit imbalances between characters, etc.).

As a result of these two narrative inconsistencies, a conflict between the narration and the progression is produced: on the one hand the story needs to progress through specific successions and coherence; on the other, the aspectuality created through numbers and ranks develops its own coherence, pacing and logic. Some typical results of these inconsistencies can be briefly described:

a) In the *DBZ* series, the main enemy of the Freezer Arc has a power level of 530.000, threatening to make a planet explode by triggering its nucleus. Several narrative arcs later, the devil Darbura declares that a power of 200-300 *kiri* (a new unit of measurement introduced in the series) is enough to blow up a planet. However, by a *Q&A* in the 2004 *V-Jump* review this power should be equal to 15 million in the traditional unit of measurement, but both Vegeta and Freezer are able to destroy the planet while having only 0.36 and 10 *kiri* respectively.

b) Many digital RPG feature grinding dynamics: players can (and should) repeat simple tasks/fights over and over to gain experience points and level up. As a result, in games such as *Final Fantasy*, *Dragon Age* or *Pokémon* it is always possible to continue training indefinitely, without needing to follow the story. The consequence is that by spending a huge amount of time, players can reach a power level high enough to destroy any sense of challenge in the game, making every enemy weak in comparison. However, these enemies will still be described and presented as the strongest character so far, producing almost comical results. As in *Final Fantasy X*, in which the final boss *Braska* triggers a moving dialogue with his son *Tidus* (the main character), but then could be killed with two normal attacks if the party has the Limit Damage Break ability.²

c) American comics and fantasy TV series do not entirely follow the Apeiron narrative configuration: generally they do not feature systems for measuring competence, despite following iterative narrative structures and occasional limit-break events. As a result, due to the huge cast of heroes in the Marvel and DC comics universes, and the long (almost 10-years' worth) narrative plots, it is difficult for readers to interpret the power balance of heroes and their development.



Figure 3: a comparison between the Captain America and Iron Man power level

and the relative low granularity of tiers, the Power Grid created more debates and incoherence than it solved. As an example, the character Captain America, believed to be one of the most important heroes of Marvel, and

It is probably for this reason that readers attempt to elaborate unofficial ranks and leaderboards of characters strength, trying to systematize the logic of power in these fictional universes. As a retrospective attempt to satisfy readers, Marvel created a Power Grid of Marvel Heroes in the *Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*. For each hero, the power grid measures strength in 6 attributes, divided in seven tiers, ranging from one (weaker than common man) to seven (god-like power).

However, due to these described retrospective inconsistencies, intensified by the number of heroes and stories

² As recorded by this player: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URTwowYgSWw&t=354s> (last visit 27/09/17)

who has defeated several key enemies, is technically only a low-tier character, and should have been crushed by many of his enemies, rivals, and allies.

3. Extensions and conclusions

3.1. Non-fictional Apeiron configuration

Until now, the Apeiron narrative configuration has been described and analysed through texts that could be labelled as “fiction.” However, it is also possible, due to its adaptability and its compatibility with the digital culture, that the fictional boundaries could be crossed and that it could become an abstract discursive configuration, used to represent several processes of growth in the digital age, even non-fiction ones. Two examples partially support this hypothesis:

a) It is now a common trend for the producers of IT components such as NVidia, Apple or Arm, to officially present their new products during specific conferences, aimed at the tech-savvy public. The structure of the discourse used during this presentation seems to follow the key traits of the Apeiron narratives, even in a rough and imprecise way:

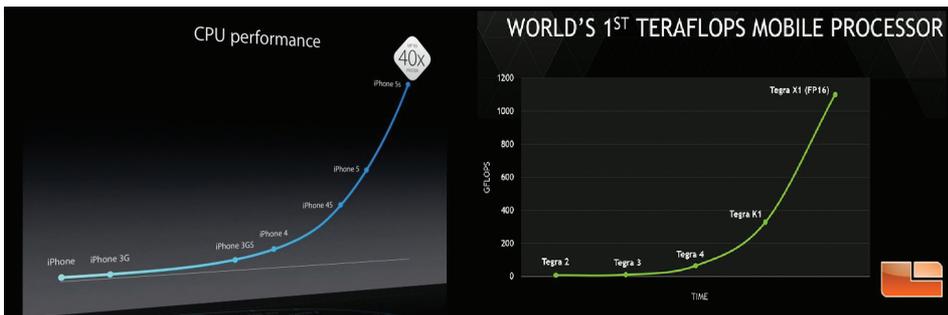


Figure 4: the graphs of Apple (left) and NVidia (right) SoC increase in Competence

As can be observed in the image, the power curve used for both Apple A and the NVidia Tegra Soc (system on chip) line is an exponential curve. However, the values that determine the curve are taken from benchmarks or flops in terms of theoretical performance. Both these units of measurement are the results of virtual measurements, which do not correspond to an actual performance increase and cannot be translated into real-case scenarios. Technological leaps, while possible, are the result of complex relationships between research conducted in production systems, raw materials, physics, and software development, which of course do not

necessarily produce exponential progress at each new stage. However, the culture surrounding the technological evolution of “trending” technological artefacts seem to be fascinated by this narrative configuration: it is not casual, maybe, that in video-game online forums, the speculations about the raw power (in flops) of consoles is often compared to 'Dragon Ball's power level scale.³

b) Applications, such as *Stackoverflow*, *Classcraft*, Steam and other digital platforms, employ elements of gamification intended to quantify elements of game design in a non-game context (see Deterding 2011). Not casually, the same game design dynamics of progress described above are used to shape the progress of users: the acquisition of experience points, the increase in levels, and the use of leaderboards (or eventually missions and trophies). As in the case of *World of Warcraft* and *Dungeons and Dragons*, while single elements of their systems are structured through linear growth, the accumulation of several dynamics (badges, experience points, missions, powers) grants the impression of an exponential progression. This model is generally applied to specific activities (coding solutions, school learning, digital shopping) considered to be repetitive activities, without inherent meaningful progression. These gamified elements are designed to change the perception of the traditional routine through the impression of continuous growth and increase in competence, even if the iterativity of the performance remains (as in grinding dynamics).

3.2. Satire, parodies and references

The dissemination of this narrative configuration can also be observed in a further process: the development of full-fledged parodies and satires targeted against the configuration itself. The development of these counter-discourse could prove the Apeiron narratives are starting to be perceived clearly among the main cultural narrative structures and configurations, marking its spread in the semiosphere of internet cultures as a result of its strong ties to the culture of digital games and contemporary animation.

a) *Onepunch man* is a Japanese manga and anime, whose narrative structure is based on a 1 on 1 parody of the Apeiron configuration. The main character is (inexplicably) the strongest man in the universe from the beginning, to the point of becoming incredibly bored, since he can defeat any enemy with just one punch. While the other heroes struggle to gain ranks and fame in the Hero association, he saves the world almost invol-

³ As in <http://www.neogaf.com/forum/showthread.php?t=1379817&page=2>, post #23, #48, #163 and ss. (last visit 27/09/17)

untarily. Since he is so strong and fast, no opponent is able to watch his performance (except for the reader), so he is still considered a third-class hero, and most of his epic deeds are attributed to other heroes passing by, or to inexplicable circumstances.

b) *Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann* is a Japanese anime in which the Apeiron configuration is made explicit through a figurative reasoning (Lancioni 2009): a visual metaphor that acts as a paradigm for the narrative logic itself, being validated or criticised by the main characters.

The main characters’ progressive growth is represented through the metaphor of the spiral power: the spiral shape, the drill (the miner’s tool), the double helix of the DNA, and the class of spiral galaxies are all manifestations of the narrative structure’s main attributes: a drive that moves forward by repeating over and over the same movement, accelerating in the process, combining the human struggle for growth in the biological chain of the DNA and the desire to achieve evolution of all life in the galaxy.

The only noteworthy enemy of this drive is the race of the anti-spirals, beings which seek balance in the universe, and believe that the spiral drive is the origin of the entropy of the universe, and of its future death. Since the anti-spiral strategy is to win the fight by being just as strong as its enemies, any limit-breaking power is useless, highlighting the inconsistencies in the Apeiron narrative. The only way for the main character to win is conciliating the Apeiron narrative into a double-spiral shape, connecting both the perspective point of view to a retrospective one, able to bring together the past and the future of human growth as a single entity.

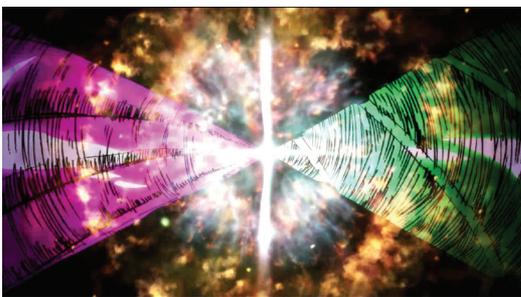


Figure 5: the spiral figurative reasoning in Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann

Conclusions

While not enough to completely prove the hypothesis, these examples seem to confirm a possible extension of the Apeiron configuration to non-fictional discourse, and supports its development as a recognised and clear narrative structure in the current mediascape.

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