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A TRANSLATION THEORETICAL APPROACH TO THREE INTERRELATED
PHENOMENA: THE DOZENS, READING, AND VOGUE

Master Thesis

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I hereby declare that I have written this Master's Thesis independently. Within this thesis, all works cited or used have been properly referred to throughout the text, as well as documented in the section entitled "Works Referenced."

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Table of Contents

Introduction

A major driving force in the evolution of culture is the process of translation. Peeter Torop describes translation as "inseparable from the concept of culture" as culture "operates largely through translational activity, since only by the inclusion of new texts into culture can the culture undergo innovation as well as perceive its specificity" (Torop 2002: 593). This innovation of culture naturally takes place in every conceivable field, every sphere, across time and space, because it cannot help but happen. That is not to say that this should be taken for granted, and furthermore that our understanding of the process of innovation and evolution should be taken for granted. It is imperative that in order to understand how culture shifts and evolves we understand the process of translation. "Culture" is, of course, not only an enormously complex and difficult to understand topic; as the subject of academic investigation it lacks a single unified methodology that would allow us to delve into its complexities within mutually agreed-upon parameters. Since culture is so vast and diverse, many scholars have attempted, in varying terms, to set definitions and methods of study for it, only to add to an already rich treasury of incompatible tools. Taking a more concentrated view of culture, such as, in the case of this paper, translation, the possibilities for defining the object of study become more manageably limited, although the problem of finding a unified methodology is still present. On both the object- and meta-levels translation studies has attempted to solve these same problems that come with the analysis of culture (Torop 2002: 594). Understanding translation, by whichever methodology one may choose to employ, can help us understand the underlying mechanisms of culture. The huge mixed toolbox of translation theories offers us a wide range of perspectives by which we can analyze culture and it is up to us to choose which tools are right for the job, as we have not yet found one universal multi-tool.

This paper aims to explain three practices – the dozens, reading, and voguing – in two related yet very distinct cultures—the African American community and black and brown LGBT community—by using the concept of translation as the point of departure. An approach of this type must be done on three levels. First, we must understand the cultural phenomena that are to be analyzed. It is important to have a clear understanding of who the people are who engage in these practices, how they do it, and why they do it. By clarifying and delimiting the examples to be scrutinized, we make the process of understanding the towering mountain of "culture" into a series of walkable hills. Second, we must understand the methods of translation that are to be applied to

the cultural phenomena, why they are relevant and useful, and how they will provide us with the answers to our questions concerning the mechanisms of culture at work. I use methods in the plural here because for a job such as this it can be much more fruitful to use a few lenses through which we can view the cultural phenomena and later synthesize multiple points of view regarding the mechanisms at work as opposed to using only one lens and interpreting every factor through it (although that is also a perfectly valid approach). And third, these theories of translation must be applied to the objects themselves in such a way that they reveal some common threads and uniting factors among the cultural practices themselves while simultaneously revealing some truths about the underpinnings and underlying machinations of culture.

For this thesis I have chosen to explore and analyze three cultural phenomena through three general lenses of translation. These three understandings of translation will not correspond individually to each object of analysis, but instead will work together to give a more fully rounded picture of the relationship between the three practices. I have chosen translation as the approach to take for this analysis of culture because, as Peeter Torop writes, "In the discipline of semiotics of culture it comes naturally to say that culture is translation, and also that translation is culture" (2002: 603). This seemingly simple observation actually holds the key to understanding culture generally, but more germanely, the three objects of analysis because they are, I will argue, translations of one another and therefore inherently related aspects of culture. Translation allows us the "theoretic means to approach the essence of cultural mechanisms in a way that the analysis of both translation and translating as well as culture are enriched" (Torop 2002: 603).

The research questions of this thesis will be: Using the lenses of cultural translation, intersemiotic translation, and rhizomatic translation, (1) how do the three objects of analysis of this paper—the dozens, reading, and vogue—function in their respective cultures; (2) how are they related to one another; and (3) how have they influenced each other as translations of one another?

1. Three phenomena

In this first chapter I will present the three objects of analysis of this paper. They are all distinctly different from one another but are united by a web of factors. The first phenomenon, the insult game known commonly as "the dozens," has been a staple of African American communities for decades and bears striking similarities to the second phenomenon—reading (or throwing shade). This other form of insult game takes place in the very different, but still overlapping queer community of people of color in the United States and serves a somewhat different purpose. In this same community can be found an evolution of the insult game in the competitive dance style known as "vogue." In all three of these phenomena we can see similarities and differences ranging from the people who are involved in their creation and proliferation to the functions they serve in their respective cultures. There has been considerable academic study devoted to the dozens, most of it having been done in the 1960s and 1970s, barring the John Dollard's early study of the dozens in 1938. Considerably less study has been done, however, regarding reading and vogue. There are articles and studies in sociological journals and dance magazines and journals which mention vogue and give a brief overview of the Ballroom culture in New York city, but unfortunately not much scholarly material exists for either of the subjects. Regarding their connection to theories of translation and semiotic inquiry, studies of the nature conducted in this paper are virtually nonexistent, meaning that a semiotic approach to these three phenomena is somewhat original. In these subsequent sections, along with references to research done on the phenomena studied, I will discuss the historical origins of each phenomenon, their place in their respective communities, how people go about performing them, and the social functions they serve. By doing this, it will provide the objective basis for later semiotic analysis of these phenomena as translations.

1.1 The dozens

Dating back probably before the time of slavery in the United States and continuing to this day in slightly different forms, men in African American communities have taken part in a game of exchanged insults that has still undetermined origins and goes by many names. Known as "sounding", "woofing/wolfing", "signifying", "capping", "joning", "sigging", and a few other names (Lefever 1960; Abrahams 1962), most commonly it is called "the dozens" by those that have studied it (Abrahams 1962, 1963; Ayoub, Barnett 1965; Chimezie 1976; Dollard 1938; Lefever 1960). By hurling increasingly complex and biting insults at one another, the players in

this game evoke a tradition that has been an important part of black adolescence all over the country for a variety of reasons., This contest of wit has been played for generations usually by black youths who historically have held a less privileged position in American society. The most convincing theory of the origins of the dozens has been put forth by Amuzie Chimezie, who argues that the dozens originated in Africa in various forms among many different groups of people. Previous writings on the dozens, many of which were done in the mid-20th century, "have played down, merely mentioned in the passing, or totally ignored the very high probability of its having been carried over from Africa" (Chimezie 1976: 405).

This African-origin hypothesis holds more water than a competing independent-origin hypothesis put forth by John Dollard (1938) because, as Chimezie explains, "it would be superfluous and illogical to start with looking elsewhere for an explanatory hypothesis when the African culture from which Afro-Americans came to the United States has the phenomenon that is being explained" (1976: 406). Since African peoples had played and still do play similar, if not identical, games to the dozens, it only makes sense to first look there for the origins of the game. To not do so would be "extravagantly errant and unnecessarily unparsimonious" (Chimezie 1976: 406). The most similar game to the dozens found in Africa is *Ikocha Nkocha* or "making disparaging remarks" which is played by the Igbos of Nigeria. It is nearly identical to the dozens for several reasons: it is generally played by young people, an audience is present, and contestants take turns insulting each other, gradually building in intensity (Chimezie 1976: 403). A key difference, though, is that the Igbo version of the game is markedly less sexual in content than its American counterpart, due to the fact that it is played among family members. Harry Lefever describes the usual setting for the American dozens contests as being in the low-income areas of major cities, although evidence has also been found that it was played by middle-class boys and men. Males are the usual participants in the game, he explains, but there is also some evidence that black females occasionally play, and at least one study has shown that white high school-age boys sometimes take part in the game (Lefever 1960: 73). It is important to consider that boys usually do not play the game in front of their female peers. An exception might be when one boy is attempting to show off and put another boy down in order to win a girl's favor (Abrahams 1963: 47). But a case like this may lead to a physical altercation, which is decidedly not the aim of the game. Roger Abrahams (1963: 47) argues that sounding (= the dozens) "certainly could not perform any similar psychosocial function among females as it does among males," but he does

concede that "the mechanism does exist as an expression of hostility by either sex." And regarding the practice of these games by white youth, Millicent Ayoub and Stephen Barnett's study on insult games in a white high school showed that some diffusion did occur in the 1960s. They posit that "it is most probable that Sounding stems from American Negro culture and only recently—that is, after World War II and especially the post-Korean War—diffused to white adolescent culture" (Ayoub, Barnett 1965: 342).

Since the game has been played all over the country for quite some time, there are bound to be variations in the way people play. There are general similarities which unite the varieties of this game of insults. Contestants during a game of the dozens do not speak the way they would normally speak to their friends and family, instead they opt for more slang and transgressive language, as there is more potential for insult and ingenuity, which is the goal. Rhyming is very common and an often-used strategy, but not a requirement. Whether the contestants rhyme or not, the language they use is understood to be a part of a contest because of such "linguistic (or paralinguistic) elements as changes in pitch, stress, and sometimes syntax" (Abrahams 1962: 211). Likewise, certain cues such as counting-out, which signals a suspension of reality, or phrases like "Have you heard the one about…?" alert those involved that they are using a framework for jokes. When the game begins and one of these signals is observed, "it can be predicted that he [the player] is about to construct a hypothetical playfield on which a verbal contest is to be played" (Abrahams 1962: 211).

The linguistic features of the dozens help give the game structure and outline the rules, which will be discussed in the next section. Abrahams (1962: 211) argues that there are three most prominent linguistic features in the dozens:

1. **The reliance upon formulaic patterns.**
   Formulaic patterns could be any number of well-known rhymes and sayings that any child would be familiar with, or references to songs and poems that are immediately recognizable.
2. **The use of rhyme within these patterns.**
   As mentioned before, rhyme is an important part of the exchanges in the dozens because of its playful nature and mocking qualities.

3. **The change of speech rhythms from natural ones to ones that conform to the demands of the formula.**

   This third point describes more concretely what Abrahams means when he writes about the linguistic elements that signal that a game is being played. When contestants make an obvious change to conventionally accepted patterns of pitch, stress, and syntax, they enter into the world of comedy.

The following example, collected by Abrahams, is a clear example of the first two features that characterize the dozens. Everyone (at least in the English-speaking world) knows the familiar rhyme that starts with "roses are red, violets are blue." It is a formula that virtually anyone could modify and customize to fit their situation. And the obvious element of the rhyme makes it a perfect frame for an insult in the dozens.

> *Roses are red,*
> *Violets are blue.*
> *I f----d your mama,*
> *And now it's for you*
> (Abrahams 1962: 212)

A change of speech rhythm to conform to the formula at hand can be seen in the short example below. Since "fee, fie, fo, fum" is generally known as the exclamation by the giant in the classic fairytale Jack and the Beanstalk, and is followed by "I smell the blood of an English man," it is unexpected to shorten the expected rhythm scheme while changing it into a short, punchy rhyme. So the speaker is keeping with the expectations of the dozens—i.e. the rhyme and formulaic pattern—while also changing the expected rhythm of this popular quotation.

> *Fee, fie, fo, fum,*
> *Your mother's a bum*
> (Abrahams 1962: 218)

As the children who play this game grow older, their wit and linguistic abilities become more sophisticated and advanced. They will more easily be able to improvise new humorous jabs while implicitly understanding the framework of the game and appropriate or inappropriate subject matter. As older adolescents they will move beyond the simple formulas of childhood rhymes in favor of their own creations, but in the beginning this rhyming framework provides an entry into the game, an introductory lesson to the art of insult.

1.1.1 How to play

The rules of the dozens are simple, but vital for proper functioning of the game. As was mentioned before, the game consists of two players who face off by insulting each other, but most often each others' mothers. The insults are usually not direct critiques of actual characteristics of their targets, but may instead be rhymes and quips about imagined traits that that person possesses or actions (usually sexual in nature) that they perform. It would not be proper to insult someone's mother based on a real problem she has, such as some kind of physical deformity, but imagining her flying through the air or climbing a tree like a monkey is completely plausible, as can be seen in the following example:

I saw your mother flying through the air.
I hit her in the ass with a rotten pear.
(Abrahams 1962: 217)

The reasons for why mothers are the primary targets of insult are contested, but what is sure is the reliance on sexualized maternal insults for the functioning of the game (Abrahams 1962: 211). The majority of the examples of insults that are provided by authors who have studied the dozens deal with mothers in some form or another. Most often they involve the speaker telling his opponent about his sexual endeavors with his opponent's mother and the absurdity of her genitals. In accordance with the previous example, these sexual-themed insults also usually have a tinge of the absurd to them. It makes them especially shocking and humorous.

I hate to talk about your mother,
She's a good old soul.

She's got a ten-ton p---y
And a rubber a-----e.
She got hair on her p---y
That sweep the floor.
She got knobs on her titties
That open the door.
(Abrahams 1962: 210)

While the usual focus of the insults is the opponent's mother, they are not meant to be taken as literal insults on the actual mother. If a game of the dozens is to go as expected, both parties involved must understand the rule of not taking the insults personally. If one starts to get emotionally invested in the rude things he is hearing, he has already lost the game. As Abrahams explains, the dozens requires "extreme permissiveness, which must apply as much to the audience as to the contestants." One would not choose an opponent randomly, but "someone who [is] safe to play it with" (Abrahams 1962: 215). Normally a game of the dozens does not result in any kind of physical altercation, but occasionally it will. Ayoub and Barnett's interviews among high school students indicated exactly this, as one informant said, "No Sound gets you angry—angry enough to fight. That's not in the rules" (Ayoub, Barnett 1965: 340).

1.1.2 Functions of the dozens

There are several reasons why people play the dozens, not the least of which is that it is simply a fun game. Beyond that, playing the game has a more utilitarian value and plays a role in the psychological and social development of those involved. An early researcher of the dozens, John Dollard, posed the theory that the dozens were developed as a practice for displacing aggression. This aggression, he believed, would have ideally been directed toward white society but is instead channeled into a safe, in-group game. His thinking was that black people were taking out their built-up aggression on each other rather than their true enemy, white people:

> From the historical point of view, the Dozens pattern is seen as a collective creation, fashioned in the adjustive struggle of the Negro caste.... The Dozens behavior is expressive of impulses generated and fashioned in living individuals by other portions of their life

experience…The Dozens is an in-caste pattern. It does not countenance jeering openly at white people, but it confines aggressive expression within Negro society. The reason for this limitation seems obvious, i.e., the punishing circumstances which come into play when Negroes display direct hostility for whites. (Dollard 1939: 20–21)

This early explanation for the origins of the dozens is not sufficient, but is understandable given the temporal and social context in which Dollard was operating. Chimezie explains, quite logically, that Dollard's theory does not hold water because the dozens in all likelihood predates American black-white relations, as it originated in Africa (Chimezie 1976: 408). It is an erroneous claim that the game is a mechanism for the release of aggression against white oppression. His use of the term "Negro" alone alerts us to just how dated his thinking is by today's standards. But nevertheless it is important to recognize the beginnings of the sociocultural exploration and understanding of the dozens.

Abrahams agrees that the main function of the dozens is to be a mechanism for the release of aggression. He describes the process as boys "developing the tools of battle on their own home field" because "the players are in some way victims of a fixation, needing a kind of release mechanism that allows them to get rid of some of their tensions." While children play the dozens in order to safely release their frustrations, adult men play, he claims, as "an obvious prelude to a physical fight" (Abrahams 1962: 215). Abrahams' explanation for the reason for the release of aggression is quite different from Dollard's, though, as he argues that the dozens developed internally in African American families. The focus of his argument in particular is the role of women in black families:

The Negro man from the lower class is confronted with a number of social and psychological impediments. Not only is he a black man in a white man's world, but he is a male in a matriarchy. The latter is his greatest burden. Family life is dominated by the mother…The results are often an open resorting to the apparent security of gang existence in which masculinity can be overtly expressed…Femininity and weakness become the core of the despicable; the expression of these reactions is the gang. (Abrahams 1962: 213–214)

Abrahams also criticizes Dollard's assessment because he fails to recognize the difference in games of the dozens played by adolescents and games played by adults. Ultimately Abrahams and Dollard agree that the game is primarily a mechanism for the release of aggression, but they disagree on how and why.

Shifting the focus to the more technical sociolinguistic functions of the dozens, Abrahams also points to what he calls the "infantile fixation" which is evidenced "by the use of agonistic rhymed verbal forms" which he argues is "a neurotic symptom which is observable in many Negro males through much of their lives" (Abrahams 1962: 209). After a two-year study on a community in South Philadelphia and similar communities in Texas, Abrahams concluded that this verbal contest "is an important part of the linguistic and psychosocial development of the Negroes who indulge in this verbal strategy" (1962: 209).

Harry Lefever writes about another theory, proposed by Ulf Hannerz, that the dozens are a way for adolescents to prepare for adult life because the relationships between men and women are often characterized by conflict. By engaging in this kind of game young boys are preparing themselves for the types of relationship struggles that they will encounter later in life (Lefever 1960: 76). Another possible explanation that Lefever cites is the educational value that the game provides. Boys are able to develop their verbal skills and process information quickly and respond in turn. One must be able to craft creative and entertaining responses while playing, and in order to do this they must practice the craft. In many communities a man who is very eloquent is often revered for his abilities and the youth of the community will look up to him. Verbal acuity is prized just as much as physical strength, and as such the dozens can reveal a man to be mentally strong and fit (Lefever 1960: 75).

1.2 Reading & shade

For at least the past 50 years in the United States, the Ball scene has been a staple of African American and Latino queer communities. These so-called Balls were initially often held in New York City in the late hours of the night in large halls or auditoriums because the types of people who attended were the outcasts of society and could not reserve the spaces at normal daytime hours: gay men and women, drag queens, transgender and transsexual people, and virtually all of them black or Latino. Aspects of Ballroom culture have existed in other American cities since the

early-twentieth century and expanded rapidly throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s. Now there are ballroom scenes in almost every major city in North America (Bailey 2011: 368). The people involved in hosting these events are much freer to hold them at reasonable hours and in more desirable locations. At the Balls people compete for prizes in various categories including fashion, modeling, and dance, which are subdivided even further into categories that include all kinds of gender and sexuality identities. Balls were, and continue to be, safe spaces for queer and trans people to gather and express themselves creatively while competing for prizes and adoration among peers in their communities.

An important component to the culture of the people participating in these Balls is the practice of "reading" and "throwing shade." These two concepts are very similar and are sometimes used interchangeably, but some have drawn distinctions between them. "Shade" is usually understood as insulting someone without directly insulting them, while "reading" is using one's wit to insult another and exaggerate their flaws. This practice is, I will argue, an iteration of the dozens and shares many similarities. As in the dozens, usually two players "read" each other while surrounded by an audience (though the audience is not a necessary component). These reads are essentially insults which are not meant to be taken to heart, but for entertainment purposes or to express frustrations with the opponent. The people engaging in this playful banter must also craft clever quips and insults in order to entertain the audience. One key difference, though, is the subject matter. Since the people in this underground queer community are members of minority communities united by things like sexuality and gender identity and usually race, those qualities do not make sense as the basis of insult. Instead these queer people of color would insult something more superficial such as their opponent's makeup or their outfit. The essence of the insult game is the same, but the parameters were adapted to fit the circumstances of the people involved.

Compared to the dozens, the specific type of insult game that is played in the Ball scene has considerably less documentation and academic examination. Luckily there is a benchmark documentary film concerning the Ball culture in New York City in the late 1980s and early 1990s that sheds some light on this special variation of the game. Jenny Livingston's *Paris Is Burning* (1987) continues to be the primary point of reference for the ball scene. This documentary "initiated a spirited and fruitful debate among feminist and queer scholars on Black and Latina/o LGBTQ identities among this underground community that exists at the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexual marginalization" and furthermore "marked one of the first explorations of the

lives of Black and Latina/o transgender people" (Bailey 2011: 368). This film will make up the bulk of my source material for reading/shade and for the next section on voguing because it allowed some members of this underground community to share their personal stories and experiences with Ball culture and more specifically the phenomena discussed in this paper.

One such participant who acts as a narrator for much of the film is a drag performer who goes by the name Dorian Corey. As we watch her do her makeup in front of a mirror, she gives a brief and succinct explanation for the terms reading and shade: "Shade comes from reading. Reading came first. Reading is the real art form of insult" (*Paris is Burning* 00:33:41). She elaborates later by saying, "Then reading became a developed form where it became shade. Shade is 'I don't tell you you're ugly, but I don't have to tell you because you already know you're ugly.' And that's shade" (*Paris is Burning* 00:35:29).

1.2.1 How to read

As was previously mentioned, reading and shade are nearly the same thing. When people in the Ball culture read each other, they are performing a game of insults in which each opponent must top the previous comment. In order to read, you have to create clever and entertaining responses to your opponent. The reads are not meant to be malicious, especially because the people involved in the game are already marginalized in various ways by the larger core culture. Generally reading is meant to be entertaining for the group of people involved or just spectating, though it can also be used as an outlet for disagreements in lieu of physical fighting. Shade, since it grew out of reading, is a more nuanced form of crafting an insult. When someone is being shady (or "throwing shade," to use a more modern parlance) they are reading their opponent in such a way that they do not necessarily realize they are being insulted. The shade is so stealthy and indirect that it may leave one's opponent scratching their head for a while after as they realize the blow that has been dealt to them. Like the dozens, a critical part of reading is that the participants not get emotionally invested in the insults and take them as serious affronts to their appearance or actions. The reads are meant to be lighthearted and fun. Dorian Corey explains, "You get in a smart crack and everyone laughs and kikis[1] because you found a flaw and exaggerated it, then you've got a good

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[1] "Kiki" is a slang term used among LGBTQ people to mean a gathering of friends for the purpose of gossip, conversation, and fun. It can be used either as a noun or a verb, as we see here.

read going" (*Paris is Burning* 00:34:20) This simple explanation of the game shows that the main purpose of it is to have a good time, to entertain each other.

A key difference between reading and the dozens is the subject matter. While insults in the dozens are most often focused on mothers and often include explicit sexual language, reads can be about any manner of things. Most commonly, though, people in the Ball scene would read each other about those aspects that are prevalent in the Ball culture itself, that is, clothing, makeup, general appearance, etc. Dorian Corey has this to say about reading:

> But then when you are all of the same thing then you have to go to a fine point. In other words, if I'm a black queen[2] and you're a black queen we can't call each other black queens 'cuz we're both black queens. That's not a read, that's just a fact. So then we talk about your ridiculous shape, your saggy face, your tacky clothes. (*Paris is Burning* 00:35:01)

The insults are more personalized, but are not exactly personal. They are not serious, but are still based on reality. They do not rhyme or involve fantastical situations, but are still entertaining and playful. In the following example from the film, we see Venus Xtravaganza, a transgender performer in the Ball scene, engaging in some playful reading with a few friends:

> Now you want to talk about reading? Let's talk about reading.
> What is wrong with you Pedro? You going through it? You're going through some kind of psychological change in your life?
> *She went back to being a man*. [Unidentified man]
> Oh you went back to being a man.
> Touch this skin darling. Touch this skin honey. Touch all of this skin. Okay. You just can't take it. You're just an overgrown orangutan.
> (*Paris is Burning* 00:33:51)

We do not get to see the beginning of the exchange which prompted this read, but it is clear that Venus is responding to some sort of negative comment that her friend Pedro made. Her response is to read Pedro about her (presumably "her" because they are discussing her fictional transition

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[2] Drag queen

back to being a man) psychological state because something seems to be bothering her. Someone off-screen suggests that Pedro has decided to transition back to being male, which Venus reiterates, in jest of course. She is playing off of Pedro's bad attitude by saying this and by suggesting that Pedro is not as beautiful as she, and is therefore jealous ("Touch all of this skin…You just can't take it). And finally makes the absurd comment that Pedro is just an overgrown orangutan, which undoubtedly causes everyone watching to burst into laughter. Venus takes a usually sensitive topic—transitioning from one gender to another—and mocks Pedro with it because she is in the same situation. Venus and Pedro understand each others' struggles as transgender people and thus can feel comfortable joking about it with each other. We see a similar situation in another example of reading with an unnamed queen who is reading a group of people while also lampooning herself at the same time.

> See there go my sister right there. She don't even want to admit that she my sister. She a bulldagger[3].
> That's my husband right there.
> And that's my girlfriend right there.
> (Everyone laughs)
> (*Paris is Burning* 00:34:43)

The joke here, which everyone involved understands, is that it is humorous or disturbing to most people outside of their culture that someone would want to be related to or in a relationship with a transgender person or a drag queen. Since they all recognize the stigma against it, they feel free to laugh at it and mock it. These two examples, of Venus Xtravaganza and the anonymous queen seem to be contradicting the way Dorian Corey describes the subject matter of reading in the Ball scene because they are using exactly those things which unite them as the basis of their reads. But in fact they are not at odds because the basis of insult is not simply that they *are* trans or that they are undesirable members of society, but that they have issues beyond that which are still related to them being trans.

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[3] A pejorative term for a very masculine lesbian

1.2.2 Functions of reading

The distinct differences between reading and the dozens come in the functions of the games. Considering the fact that the dozens is mostly played by younger, adolescent boys (and sometimes grown men), reading is quite different. All manner of people are invited to participate in reading and shade, especially because the Ball scene is made up of so many diverse people. In the film we see middle aged Ball walkers, people who look to be in their 20s and 30s, and at one point two teenagers are interviewed; so all ages are welcome. Straight and gay men and women, transgender people, gender non-conforming people, drag queens, and anyone else really, are all eligible to join in the fun. Reading can potentially be used as a mechanism for expressing frustration and aggression, as is explained in the film. But considering the examples of the phenomenon that we see in *Paris is Burning*, it seems that it is more likely to be used simply as entertainment. The dozens, according to researchers, works conversely. One comment from Dorian Corey, however, gives a hint about why reading is done the way that it is: "If it's happening between the gay world and the straight world, it's not really a read, it's more of an insult, a vicious slur fight. But it's how they develop a sense of how to read. They may call you a faggot or a drag queen; you find something to call them" (*Paris is Burning* 00:34:33). She seems to be implying that reading grew out of a need to retaliate against straight, cisgender people who shame and slander the kinds of people who attend Balls—gay, lesbian, trans, etc. This could be true, and if that is the case then it shares certain similarities with the origin theory of the dozens put forth by John Dollard that the insult games grows out of a need to rebel against the dominant culture that one is a part of.

1.3 Voguing

Beginning in the 1980s in the Ballroom scene, a competitive dance form known as voguing emerged which shares certain basic principles with reading and shade, while remaining a legitimate form of expression on its own. This dance style, named after the popular fashion magazine *Vogue*, consists of two or more people competing to out-perform each other by twisting their bodies into awkward positions, moving into linear poses, and using their hands to mime various actions, all while not touching their opponent/opponents. They are judged both by their audience and a panel of judges, much like the surrounding audiences of people playing the Dozens or reading each other. A whole section of *Paris is Burning* is devoted to showing and explaining voguing. Later in the 1990s the dance form was co-opted by Madonna and brought to the masses,

but it did not serve the same purpose then as it did in the Ball scene. So for the purposes of this paper, I will only focus on vogue as it existed in this culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

One of the main interviewees in the film and one of the biggest proponents and teachers of vogue, Willi Ninja, explains that "voguing came from shade because it was a dance that two people did because they didn't like each other. Instead of fighting you would dance it out on the dance floor and whoever did the better moves was throwing the best shade basically" (*Paris is Burning* 00:36:11). In his own words, Ninja states that voguing grew out of shade. The similarities between these two practices and the dozens are striking. He goes on to say that "voguing is the same thing as […] taking two knives and cutting each other up but through a dance form" (*Paris is Burning* 00:35:56). To vogue is to act out the essence of the insults heard in "reading" and "shade" with one's body. Beyond the clear similarities of the qualities of competition and grievance, theorists have pointed out a few other characteristics of the dance style that can link it to reading/shade and the dozens.

Tara Susman has described voguing in the following passage from her article on the New York Ball scene:

> All voguing improvises from a broad vocabulary of movement. Inventiveness is important because a *battle* often proceeds by one-upmanship when two or more competitors face off. The use of the term battle to refer to a voguing contest recalls its substitution for fights. Battles can be fierce and physically dangerous. In addition to attempting to cow an opponent, knowledge of what the children[4] would call the politics of voguing (understanding the psychology of the crowd and the judges) is just as important. Competitors must calculate how, when, and where particular movements should be performed. (Susman 2000: 124)

Her explanation of voguing as a battle between competitors is strikingly similar to the way the dozens is described. As a substitution for physical fights, this dance and the insult game have been developed as a way for the people involved to act out their aggressions and frustrations in a safer, non-violent way. In much the same way as the dozens and reading, people who vogue have to take

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[4] Here "children" does not refer to actual young children, but is a term used in the Ball scene to refer to the people involved in it.

into account the reactions of the audience because at their cores, all of these practices are a form of entertainment, not only meant to settle private disputes. Another common element that ties voguing to reading and the dozens is the pivotal role of comedy in the process. A definition by Sally Somer of club dance is helpful when considering the bases of vogue:

> It blends ethnic, gender, regional, and even neighborhood styles. Humor and commentary are embedded in the process—as this is the optimistic premise—that dance is always in evolution, and that reinvention and adaptability are strategies for what life, at its best, should be. (Somer 1995: 7)

While voguing undoubtedly demands intense physical movements and was used primarily for competition, it is important to acknowledge that the Ballroom scene was founded upon providing a place for a diverse group of people who had been rejected from the dominant culture and as such was meant to be a place of support and encouragement. Continuing in that vein, voguing and reading/shade at their core are meant to be lighthearted and fun; they are meant to entertain the audience and make them laugh.

1.3.1 How to vogue

The unique movements associated with voguing have not been immutable. The type of vogue we see in *Paris is Burning* is very different from the vogue that is usually done today in competitions and clubs. More immediately than the functions of vogue we can see the changes that have occurred in the actual movements of the dance. There are four main styles of vogue: Old Way, New Way, Vogue Femme, and Dramatics (Freeman 2008: 114). For the purposes of this paper I will only focus on the Old Way and New Way which are demonstrated in *Paris is Burning*. While Vogue Femme and Dramatics[5] are very interesting and impressive in their own rights, they are used nowadays for very different purposes than their predecessors. After much attention on the Ballroom scene, especially because of the groundbreaking documentary, the media spotlight began to fade in the early 1990s. As a result, vogue transitioned back to its underground roots and The

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[5] Vogue Femme is a style that emphasizes an exaggerated femininity and flamboyance. Dramatics describes the acrobatic tricks and stunts often incorporated into the vogue style. (Freeman 2008: 114)

New Way emerged as the hot new style, seen by many as more innovative and acrobatic (Freeman 2008: 115).

The "Old Way", as Santiago Freeman (2008: 113) says, "describes any style that predates 1990 and focuses on graceful movement, transitions between standing and floor positions, and linear hand gestures and poses." We see several dancers in the film demonstrating these graceful poses and making smooth transitions both on the runway individually and on the floor in a group. The ability of words to describe a dance is indeed limited, so a screenshot from *Paris is Burning* is provided below:

Paris Is Burning. *Dir. Jennie Livingston. Miramax, 1991*

Here Willi Ninja is holding his arms and legs in awkward yet clearly defined linear positions in just one of many poses from and into which he transitions. He moves swiftly, but not rapidly and he changes from pose to pose. Ninja, as a pioneer in the vogue scene, blends this Old Way style into the New Way which mostly comes post-1990 and "incorporates more contortionist movements of the limbs, known as "clicking," and creates complex illusions with the arms and hands" (Freeman 2008: 114). These illusions done with the hands are exactly what Ninja talks about when he explains vogue:

> You can take the pantomime form of the vogue. Generally, sometimes what I do is I make my hand into a form like a compact or makeup kit and I'm like beating[6] my face with blush, shadows, or whatever to the music. Then usually I'll turn the compact around to face that person, meaning almost like my hand is a mirror, for them to get a look. Then I start doing their face because what they have on their face right now needs a dramatic makeup job. (*Paris is Burning* 00:36:31)

This New Way style of voguing is still focused on poses and making shapes with the body, but has an added dimension of telling a story or communicating some message. In this style one can more clearly act out the messages that they would send verbally if they were reading or being shady. Instead of exaggerating the flaws in someone's makeup, as Dorian Corey said, a voguer could mime the action of fixing their makeup in the mirror, in the style of Willi Ninja.

1.3.2 Functions of voguing

In *Paris is Burning* we do not get much of an explanation of the reasons why people vogue, but Willi Ninja makes one comment that cements the dance's connection to the previous topics discussed in this paper: "Voguing is like a safe form of throwing shade" (*Paris is Burning* 00:37:01). This insider in the Ballroom scene believes that the dance that many people partake in for the sake of competition is directly related to the practice of performing an insult game. This is further supported by Ninja's explanation of miming the makeup compact as it is a clear allusion to the sorts of verbal exchanges that one would hear among people reading each other. Beyond just this evidence from the film of the functions of voguing, there has been some academic study dedicated to it and to similar dance styles.

Johnathan Jackson argues that dances such as voguing have the effect of carving out a special niche for LGBTQ people in the dominant culture of dance. Because "the values of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered voguing community are in many ways counter to the frequent machismo and heterosexism of archetypal hip-hop or breakdance crews" people are able to feel more free to express themselves and their queer identities through dance, which they would not be able to do in more mainstream dance styles (Jackson 2001: 49). And more germane to the topics

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[6] To "beat" one's face is a slang term meaning to do one's makeup.

of this paper, Jackson also explains that "Black vernacular [dance] forms are often developed in competitive social performance" (Jackson 2001: 50). Voguing is full of complex movements and patterns along with many symbolic actions which are used by two or more people in relation to one another. The roots of vogue are in competition and symbolic movements play a significant role in that competition. This is a common thread in all three of the main topics discussed so far: the dozens, reading/shade, and voguing.

2. Lenses of translation

In this section I will discuss the various methodological approaches that will be used to analyze the three phenomena presented in the previous sections. I have chosen to examine these cultural practices through lenses of translation because I believe these theories of cultural and inter semiotic translation, and especially the rhizome model, allow for a unique insight into the functioning and evolution of these cultural practices. By tracking the changes that have occurred in the evolution of the dozens, reading, and vogue, and the way they stand in relation to one another, as translations of one another, it is possible to see them as more intimately related than what may have previously been thought. Because translation is such a broad concept and, as Peeter Torop says, "is a process that takes place within a translator's mind, but also within language, culture, and society," it can easily be applied to these three phenomena as they fall under the umbrella of "cognitive, linguistic, cultural or social process[es]" which "can take place between minds, languages, cultures and societies, but […] can also take place within a single mind, language, culture or society" (Torop 2008: 377). These processes are alive and well because they are instances of translation. Translation itself is inseparable from the concept of culture. One cannot understand culture without understanding how culture changes and grows, how texts and practices are exchanged among people and groups, how culture communicates with itself in order to evolve—all of this is translation. By understanding the integral role that translation plays in culture, we can gain a new perspective by which we can see the evolution of culture around us, a new frame into which we can position the world.

2.1 Cultural translation

In the cultural semiotic understanding of translation, the idea of culture communicating with itself is fundamental. In order to understand how translation occurs within a mind, a language, a culture, a society, we must develop a metalanguage. But since we do not have one singular metalanguage to describe all of these various processes, we must use a mixed bag of approaches. In order to make the process of understanding translation a bit easier, "the translation process has to be brought closer to its beginning and to its end" (Torop 2008: 377). It is logical to say that a translation happens between two texts or two messages because we see the beginning and the end product— the source and target texts or messages. In order for this resulting translation to occur, the text must

be dealt with by some mind, in some language, by some culture. In this way, the text is communicating with the culture of which it is a part. The translation process is essentially communicative. As Peeter Torop writes, "The original and the translation are simultaneously both the beginning and the end of the process as well as the cause and the result of the process" (2008: 377). In the next section we will explore this idea further as we look at how translation functions as cultural autocommunication.

2.1.1 Cultural communication and autocommunication

Translation occurs in a given culture when some text or idea or practice is altered and/or reproduced in some way. A popular book series is adapted to a feature film, or a painting inspires someone to write a poem about that painting. These instances of translation are not only the work of the people working to write the script, design the sets, create the costumes, and everything else that is necessary for filming a movie, nor are they only of the poet inspired by the painting. At a fundamental level, the texts that are being translated are communicating with the cultures that they themselves are a part of. Stories, practices, symbols, art, are kept alive and active in a culture because they are repeated and repeated with variation, often repeated in different types of media (Torop, Ojamaa 2015: 63). The same way a text can be repeated and changed, some practice or phenomenon can also be repeated. A dance style, for instance, can be repeated and copied and tweaked little by little each time someone performs it. No two performances of that dance style will be exactly the same. Each time the dance is done it is translated and as such builds upon itself and solidifies its position in the culture. Peeter Torop and Maarja Ojamaa explain this concept clearly in the following passage:

> Translation in its essence is repetition with variation, and the same can be said about the recursivity of a literary text as a cinematic adaptation. Repetition is a process and an entity that simultaneously underlines sameness and difference between the new text and the previous one. Indeed, texts, text fragments, meanings that are considered important from the point of view of a community's identity are repeated not only in the natural language, but in different sign systems of the same culture. This is demonstrated by countless examples, from church architecture repeating principles from the Bible, to cinematic adaptations of canonical novels as well as popular cinematic stories that have grown into

franchises. Therefore, the principle of repetition or iteration is important both from the point of view of textual construction and of culture as a whole. Repeating a story across different sign systems is culture's way of remembering and increasing the meaningfulness of a given text. (Torop, Ojamaa 2015: 63)

The meaningfulness of a text is a key factor here. In order for a text to have significance in culture, it must have significance for the people creating and engaging with it. It becomes a fixture of the culture when it has been translated enough times and enjoyed by enough people. The *Harry Potter* franchise is a wonderful example of this. Originally a series of books, they have been adapted to (translated into) films, the *Pottermore* website, countless toys and clothing items, games. These translations strengthen and solidify the story of Harry Potter in our culture and cultural memory because they are repeated and adapted to fit the parameters of different sign systems. In addition to these intersemiotic, transmedial types of translation, the series has undergone interlingual translations. Now that the *Harry Potter* series has been translated into 68 natural languages, its reach extends into countless other cultures and therefore has the same potential to stay alive and actively be reproduced and changed.

2.1.2 Metacommunication and cultural languages

Torop and Ojamaa's description of cultural autocommunication based off of Juri Lotman's semiotics of culture includes two basic premises: cultural autocommunication is any given communication process between a sender and a receiver, and because it is culture communicating with itself, it can be described as metacommunication or intercommunication (Torop, Ojamaa 2015: 65). Metacommunication is when the primary and secondary (proto- and meta-texts, respectively) communicate through processes such as interpretation, mediation, and alteration of texts. As stated above, in order for a text to be more prominent in a culture and more significant, it must be repeated and changed. Another way of conceptualizing that is by seeing it as a dialogue. The more a text is in dialogue with the culture of which it is a part, that is, the more active the dialogue is, the stronger its connection to the culture becomes. Because the text and its various iterations are in constant dialogue with the culture and the culture in turn is in dialogue with the texts, it is clear that the culture is essentially in dialogue with itself—hence the term autocommunication. The difference between metacommunication and intercommunication is that

the focus in intercommunication is on the implicit relations between texts. The boundaries between the texts are not always as clear because of their overlapping (2015: 65).

The idea of cultural autocommunication was essential for Lotman because it is facilitated by a diversity of cultural languages or sign systems. Having these various languages makes a culture more diverse and complex and, as described in the previous paragraph, this complexity strengthens the culture and allows it to communicate with itself even more. The culture both generates languages and relies on them for its survival and growth. In the early years of the formation of cultural semiotics, there were two keys for conceptualizing cultural languages:

> (1) all five senses are important in human culture, but most communicative processes are based on verbal (discrete) and visual (continuous) languages. Those languages can be viewed as autonomous (e.g. natural language, film language, language of painting etc.), but also as interwoven in texts or in the processes of human thought; (2) any kind of interpretation in culture is based on the relation between described language (object language) and descriptive language (meta-language). (Torop, Ojamaa 2015: 66)

This final point is important to consider especially for the purposes of this paper. Natural language and a language of dance work together to create culture; and in order to understand the culture from which we are analyzing a given text or phenomenon we must understand the relationships between these languages. The meta-language we use to describe these object languages is precisely what this section of this paper deals with: the various models of translation we will use to analyze the cultural phenomena which are the focus of this paper.

2.2 Intersemiotic translation

The second important step in analyzing the phenomena discussed in this paper is to understand the concept of intersemiotic translation. This concept of translation which goes beyond translation of just natural languages was first put forth by Roman Jakobson. He defined three types of translation as follows:

Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.

Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.

Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems. (Jakobson 1966 [1959]: 233)

The term "nonverbal sign systems" is obviously quite broad and can therefore encompass a wide range of phenomena. This allows us to look beyond the finite limits of translation between natural languages and move toward an understanding of translation that unites many aspects of a given culture or cultural practice. Translations between literature, film, dance, drawing and painting, comic books, sculpture, clothing, and virtually any other medium are all possible under the umbrella of intersemiotic translation and can be understood as such. Two texts can be more than simply similar or related, they can stand as translations of one another, which is a powerful uniting force.
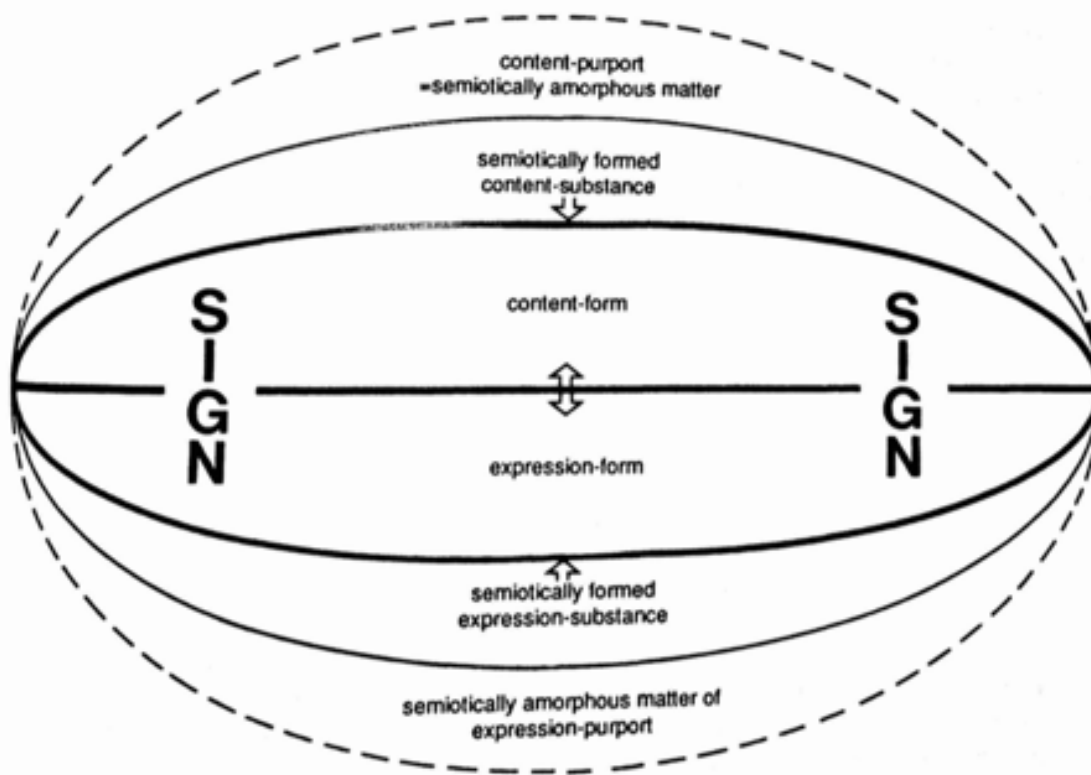
2.2.1 The expressive and content planes involved in intersemiotic translation

Louis Hjelmslev's (1954) theory of "layers," which help make up the expressive and content planes of a sign, is the basis of the notion of intersemiotic translation because, as Nicola Dusi explains, this type of translation

can provisionally be said to take place when there is a re-presentation, in one or more semiotic systems with a different purport and substances of expression, of a form of the content intersubjectively recognized as being linked, at one or more levels of pertinence, to the form of the content of a source text. (Dusi 2015: 184)

To break Hjelmslev's rather complicated model into smaller parts, it is necessary to begin with the content plane of the sign. This is the idea of the sign, the mental image or thought that forms the basis of what comes to be expressed. The content form of the sign is arbitrary. An example of this arbitrariness is how "many languages, including English, divide the progression from 'light' to 'dark' into three areas (white, gray, black). Some languages have only a twofold distinction (no

gray); others have more lexical items, distinguishing various values of gray" (Nöth 1995: 69). The way the content form is expressed is through the expression form and substance. When we speak about verbal language, the expression substance is its phonological system, while the expression form is the underlying system of abstract relations (Nöth 1995: 70). So for example, in languages such as English and French "the written language differs from the spoken one both in expression-substance and in expression-form" while "in other cases, one and the same expression-form can be manifested by various content forms" (Nöth 1995: 70). Examples of the latter are spoken languages that have 1:1 phonemic transcription, a hand alphabet (as in sign languages), or a semaphore (flag) alphabet. Below is a diagram of Hjelmslev's model of a sign where the content and expression planes are further subdivided into their constituent parts.

content-purport
=semiotically amorphous matter

semiotically formed
content-substance

content-form

SIGN

SIGN

expression-form

semiotically formed
expression-substance

semiotically amorphous matter of
expression-purport

Model of Hjelmslevs' dyadic sign model. (Nöth 1995:67)

In simple terms, by the process of translation, the form of the content of one sign is represented by means of the substance of expression of another. The forms of content (the conceptual, mental notion of the sign) of the signs in both texts are linked by the expression substance (the

manifestation of the sign in sounds, writing, etc.).

But Dusi makes it clear that intersemiotic translation should not be viewed simply as transposition or representation of the forms of content and expression of one text in a new text. We should consider a translated text as a set of dynamic changes from the original source text, and in doing so "it is necessary to think more in terms of reactivating and selecting the system of relations between the two planes in the source text and to translate these relations in an appropriate way in the target text (Dusi 2015: 184–185).

In order to understand how a translation of these relations occurs, we must look at those aspects of the texts which have been transformed. It is not sufficient to simply look at the texts as they are and compare the similarities and differences. Normally we see the transformations that have occurred, but not the process of translation between two texts. Textual analysis only occurs after the transformative processes have occurred and the target text has been produced. Dusi explains that the forms of the texts "or rather the relations between the forms of the expressive and content planes, can only help to explain the dynamics of translation *a posteriori*, once the processes have been realized." In order to gain a fuller understanding of the process of translation—especially intersemiotic translation—it is necessary "to examine individual texts, viewed in terms of their transformative shifts and not just with pre-established systems" (Dusi 2015: 188). These shifts in the expressive and content planes are the integral part of analyzing and understanding a translation. We must look at the uniting elements of the source and target texts as dynamic changes instead of systematic shifts. Translation is not simply a tool for acknowledging similarities and differences, but also a process of transformation of one text into another. Dusi clarifies this by saying:

> what permits translation in terms of regularity, constants and invariants between the two texts is the relation between *forms* of content and expression, while the *substance* of expression and of content comes into play to define translation as variation and difference, or rather as a process of transformation. (Dusi 2015: 188 – my emphasis)

This emphasis on the forms of content and expression is not the only pertinent aspect of intersemiotic translation for the topics at hand. The idea that translations are dynamic is also found at the basic model of semiotic understanding—the triadic model of a sign.

2.2.2 The triadic model for intersemiotic translation

Aguiar, Atã, and Queiroz (2015) propose using the familiar triadic model of the sign as a model for intersemiotic translation as well. They explain that, because the three aspects of the sign model—sign, object, and interpretant—are irreducible to their individual parts and because they are not set up in any sort of hierarchical structure, it follows that either of the three can be viewed in relation to the other two and thus can also participate in translation. The first implication of this point of view is that in intersemiotic translation both the sign and the object can be any sort of text or media: a book, a painting, a film, some series of actions or properties, cultural practices, and even other scientific models. This also implies that the interpreter can be an individual person/mind or a group of people. Secondly, the interpreter or interpreters of the translation, because they are inseparable from the other two aspects of the triadic relation, make the context and the individual person vitally important to the understanding of the translation. And thirdly, and most importantly:

> …as meaning is a relational property and not something 'fixed' or 'inherent' in a sign, that which is intersemiotically translated is not 'meaning' in the sense of a conveyed 'message', but a habit which can lead to the emergence of other potentially infinite meaning relations (though not any meaning relation, because of the regular nature of the habit itself). (Aguiar et al. 2015: 14)

This habitual nature of meaning is particularly important for the topic of this paper because it can be used to describe a cultural practice or phenomenon. As certain texts or practices are produced or performed more and more often, habits develop among them and among the people producing and performing them. Since a group of people are certainly within the bounds of possible candidates for interpreters, and because the habits of a translation make up the basis of meaning in the triadic relation, this model is well-suited to be applied to the three topics of this paper.

The example that Aguiar, Atã, and Queiroz give to illustrate this triadic model of intersemiotic translation is the cubist prose that Gertrude Stein wrote as interpretations (translations) of some of the paintings of Cézanne and Picasso. This works well because her prose acts in a triadic relation with the paintings of these two artists as the medium for the communication of habits in the paintings. Her writing is determined by the paintings and simultaneously acts to

transform the conceptual space, which is where we find the habitual patterns. Concerning the usefulness of this triadic model for understanding and explaining translation, Aguiar, Atã, and Queiroz have this to say:

> Our IT [= intersemiotic translation] model offers a protocol to identify the relational dynamic between the creation of new artworks and artistic paradigms and their probable sources. Regarding the source of the IT (object), our model *provides a criterion to identify which properties and concepts are relevant in an account of a conceptual space* (e.g., the habits translated by Stein reveal relevant properties in proto-cubist and cubist painting). Regarding the target source of the IT (sign), our model helps to explain *how the conceptual space is transformed*. (Aguiar et al. 2015: 18 – my emphasis)

Being able to identify the relevant habits and characteristics of the conceptual space is an important part of determining if something, firstly, is a translation, and secondly, what its relation to its source text and its interpreter(s) is. In addition, it can also place artworks and cultural phenomena in the purview of translation processes because the subject, object, and interpreter "become historical functional roles of the communication and transformation of habits." In this way communication and the transformation are able to be described as translationally organized processes (Aguiar et al. 2015: 18).

2.3 Rhizome model of translation

The main theoretical framework for this paper will be the notion of a rhizome model of translation based on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987). Their extremely complicated book encompasses a wide range of topics, from economics to philosophy, animals to plants, historical events, and many things in between. What is of use for this paper, though, is their explanation of the rhizomatic behavior of so much of the world. I write this in vague terms because Deleuze and Guattari use so many varying examples in order to illustrate their model. It is more prudent to use my own examples (later in this paper) in order to show how this rhizome model can be used than to reiterate theirs.

While *A Thousand Plateaus* has been a popular text in various humanities studies, it has

not been explored much in translation studies. Janine Hopkinson's notes on the book suggest that their theory of the rhizome has great potential for understanding translation, and especially intermedia translation. Hopkinson (2003: 1) argues that the rhizome model puts the focus of translation on interrelations and connections, instead of the generally accepted source text/target text binary, by emphasizing movement and multiplicity among texts. Dusi (2015: 187) also agrees regarding the usefulness of Deleuze and Guattari's work, as he believes it "helps to overcome the prejudice underlying the majority of positions regarding the differences between languages, and their presumed untranslatability," which can, by extension, also be applied to individual texts.

Hopkinson's (2003: 2) problem with the traditional arborescent, or tree-like, model of translation is that it can often be reductive and derivative, in the negative sense, because of the hierarchy inherent in it. A radically different model such as the rhizome can still preserve the idea that a source text chronologically precedes the target text while also recognizing that both texts have value as stand-alone entities (although they do not actually stand alone). They are connected with other texts and cultural practices on a plane of consistency (Hopkinson 2003: 1) which is much more active than the usual static understanding of the fixed states of texts. Deleuze and Guattari give us a vocabulary which is able to describe the complex interrelationships among texts based on their shared codes and uniting bonds of the texts or practices, as opposed to examining their relationships based on resemblance or derivation. They use the term *valence* to describe these uniting bonds among texts, which Hopkinson believes should not go unnoticed (Hopkinson 2003: 3). Valence is the term in chemistry describing the electrons of an element which allow it to bond with other elements to form chemical compounds.

Deleuze and Guattari delineate six main principles according to which the rhizome functions:

1. Connection
2. Heterogeneity
3. Multiplicity
4. Asignifying rupture
5. Cartography
6. Decalcomania

For the purposes of this paper and, as Hopkinson agrees, for relating this model to translation studies, only the first three principles are relevant: connection, heterogeneity, and multiplicity. As for principles four, five, and six, which deal with the separations and aparallel evolutions that occur between and inside cultures, and with tracing and mapping these cultures, they are not especially useful in the quest for understanding the dozens, reading, and vogue as translations of one another. They could very well be applied to these phenomena in another context, but for the scope of this paper, we will ignore them. In the simplest terms, the first three principles boil down to Deleuze and Guattari's belief that there is not a fixed place from which the branches (the translations) stem; there are only multiplicities which connect with each other in order to firm a collective assemblage.

2.3.1 Connection and heterogeneity

Deleuze and Guattari combine their first two principles in the first section, as they are inherently related in this model. They begin by explaining what exactly a rhizome is: "A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes" (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 6). They choose to use this example as the basis of their theory because it is nature's clearest illustration of how multiple connecting pieces can work together to form one amalgamated system. The following image is an illustrated example of a bamboo rhizome. The long horizontal runner connecting the other offshoots of the bamboo plants is the rhizome. Not only are the large stems branching off from the rhizome, many smaller roots extend in all directions and absorb the necessary nutrients for the plant. Presented in this manner, it is easy to see why Deleuze and Guattari would choose such a complex organism to show the principles of connection and multiplicity.

Image courtesy of bambooaustralia.com.au

In this and the next section I have chosen to include excerpts from *A Thousand Plateaus*, which can more accurately represent Deleuze and Guattari's conceptions of the rhizome model, with my own commentary.

> Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. The linguistic tree on the Chomsky model still begins at a point S and proceeds by dichotomy. On the contrary, not every trait in a rhizome is necessarily linked to a linguistic feature: semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status. (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 7)

This illustrates the versatility of the rhizome model as not only a model for natural language translation, but for virtually any other sign system as well. And, as they write, it must be so. In order for the rhizome to function, that is, the thing that makes a rhizome a rhizome is the connections among various diverse pieces and branches.

> Collective assemblages of enunciation function directly within machinic assemblages; it is not impossible to make a radical break between regimes of signs and their objects. (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 7)

Because everything within the rhizome is connected, the pieces and connections that intertwine with each other are inseparable. Much like Aguiar, Atã, and Queiroz's triadic model of translation, the parts of the rhizome can and must be viewed in relation to each other and are inseparable in their nature.

> Our criticism of these linguistic models is not that they are too abstract but, on the contrary, that they are not abstract enough, that they do not reach the abstract machine that connects a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to collective assemblages of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field. (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 7)

Here they are criticizing previously accepted linguistics models put forth by the likes of Chomsky because they set up hierarchies and dichotomies. Deleuze and Guattari believe that Chomskian linguistic methods are too highly structured and limiting. They would rather see a model that encourages the connection of language with all manner of other fields.

> A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community. Language is, in Weinreich's words, "an essentially heterogeneous reality." (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 7)

This is really the heart of the argument for these dimensions of the rhizome. Here they explicitly mention the semiotic chain as a uniting force for a wide range of possible aspects of the rhizome.

Any manner of action can be included in the rhizome, such as gestures, perceptions, and of course natural language. The important part is, though, that all of these diverse acts are necessary for the others to exist and thus cannot be ignored. In this "throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages" we can find even more meaning and view any of the individual aspects in terms of their neighboring, connected aspects.

> There is always something genealogical about a tree. It is not a method for the people. A method of the rhizome type, on the contrary, can analyze language only by decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers. A language is never closed upon itself, except as a function of impotence. (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 8)

The final sentence of this quotation ties in nicely with Torop's explanation of translation as autocommunication of culture. A language is never closed on itself because culture is made up of multiple languages—both continuous and discrete—and these languages work together to create a complex, meaningful whole. Because of this multitude of languages, we can view culture from many different perspectives and each dimension can reveal different information to us. In addition, the result of having multiple languages interacting with each other—cultural communication and translation—is that there are more connections in the rhizome available for analysis. These other dimensions and other registers appear because of the diversity of languages and objects present.

2.3.2 Multiplicity

One of the most important reasons, for Deleuze and Guattari, for maintaining the aspect of multiplicity in their model is that it allows us to break free of the subject-object dichotomy. Because there are so many parts present in any given rhizome, there really cannot be one main focus or source of authority for the other parts. Any part of the rhizome can be subject or object at any given time, depending on where you stand.

> It is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, "multiplicity," that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image

and world. Multiplicities are rhizomatic, and expose arborescent pseudomulti-plicities for what they are. […] A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature (the laws of combination therefore increase in number as the multiplicity grows). (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 8)

This quotation emphasizes the decentralization of subject and object. Here they are saying that we can only shift our perspective when analyzing the rhizome lest we change its fundamental nature. Enlarging one part or placing the focus on one particular string changes the multiplicity and thus changes the rhizome.

An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines. (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 8)

As we see here, however, in comparison with the previous quotation, it is not impossible to change the multiplicity. In fact, it happens constantly. The multiplicity must change in size and make new connections all the time because that is exactly the point of a multiplicity. This is not contradictory to the previous point; it is complementary because it clarifies that increasing the number of the multiplicity does indeed change the nature of the multiplicity, but it is necessary and unavoidable to do so. The interconnecting lines in the multiplicity are ever-increasing and thus are not set up in an arborescent hierarchy.

All multiplicities are flat, in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions: we will therefore speak of a plane of consistency of multiplicities, even though the dimensions of this "plane" increase with the number of connections that are made on it. Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities. (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 9)

Continuing from the previous excerpt, this "plane of consistency" is an important visualization for understanding the rhizome. Since there is no hierarchy of ideas or actions or signs, etc., the space for the growth of the multiplicity is not vertical and there is no real starting point. As the number of connections increase, the multiplicity grows outward and thus expand the playing field. If we choose to look at a certain aspect of it, that is purely the structural imposition of an outside perspective. Of course it is entirely possible to look at only one piece of the puzzle, but in doing so we deterritorialize the rhizome and change it, while simultaneously connecting it with other multiplicities.

3. Three phenomena through the lenses of translation

In this chapter I will argue that the three main topic of this thesis—the dozens, reading/shade, and voguing—are cultural, intersemiotic, and rhizomatic translations of each other. The rhizome is a very complex model and it is difficult to speak of only one or two aspects at a time. Since, for example, the dozens has several common connecting threads with reading and shade, we would want to look at those in particular while temporarily ignoring the connections with voguing. But since the nature of the rhizome is that it is irreducible into smaller parts and that nothing stands on its own, it is prudent to first look at these phenomena at a more basic level. Before examining the intertwining, interconnected rhizome that encompasses these three phenomena, it is important to look at them on a case-by-case basis in order to understand how they are cultural translations and intersemiotic translations of each other.

3.1 Cultural translation

Because "cultural translation" is a somewhat umbrella term for other types of translation, given that it is the principle of culture communicating with itself in order to grow and develop, it makes sense to begin the analysis of the dozens, reading, and vogue from here. Speaking at a rather general level, it is important to look at a translation closer to its beginning an to its end, according to Torop (2008: 377). For the examples outlined in this paper, we will begin with what are arguably the source and target texts among the three examples. Because of the proximity or their origins in time and the cultural backgrounds of the people engaging in them, we will begin by analyzing the dozens and reading as source and target texts respectively. (Later, in the discussion of the rhizome, we will see that the temporal aspect does not affect the description of these phenomena as translations, but for the purposes of this section it is important.) In the following subsection the focus will be on reading and voguing as source and target. By examining the similarities and differences in these practices, we will better understand how the cultural languages that make up the phenomena influence the other phenomena and which are changed, creating the space for new phenomena. The autocommunicative aspects of the cultures become clearer when we map out the similarities and differences between two examples because we can see the process of communication between them; and being able to map out these aspects requires that we understand the metalanguage of cultural autocommunication.

3.1.1 The dozens and reading/shade

Beginning with the dozens and reading makes the most sense in understanding the three practices as cultural translations for multiple reasons. The dozens has the earliest origins of all the three phenomena in this paper, beginning possibly in the 18th century at the time of slavery in the United States, and reading appeared in the Ballroom scene in the 20th century. While there is indeed a large span of time separating the two, what is important is that reading clearly comes next in succession after the dozens. In addition to this, the people who engaged in their practice were/are primarily African American (with the addition of other minorities in the Ballroom scene). The temporal and ethnic connections are not to be overlooked, but what is the strongest connection between the two practices is that they are both insult games and played in rather similar ways. It is entirely conceivable that the practice of engaging in insult games, namely the dozens, in African American communities was preserved by those same people who happened to be LGBT and adapted the game to fit the culture that was created at the Balls in New York City (Bailey 2011: 365-367). These games are played in the same natural language, English, but because of the differences in the culture of those playing the games, the subject matter, slang terms, and cultural references used in the games are distinctly separate. For example, young black children playing the dozens have been documented referring to each others' mothers as the objects of insult and the rhymed forms they use so often follow a formulaic pattern. In reading, however, the mother is not of much concern and, while rhymes are certainly possible, they are not a hallmark of the game. Instead, in reading, many references to LGBT life and culture, including slang terms such as "bulldagger" in the example from *Paris is Burning*, are used and thus differentiate the game from the dozens. The split between the two games, from the dozens to reading, could be explained by the strong presence of homophobia and transphobia in African American communities. The people in the Ball scene established their underground havens in order to escape such oppression and judgment, so it would only be natural that they would want to establish their own form of insult game, separate from that of the people who oppress them and uniquely theirs. The people of the Ball scene used what they knew—their commonalities and life experiences—to create a new form of a well-known game and they called it reading or shade. In cultural semiotic terms, the form of autocommunication occurring here does not include communication between different sign systems, but between different cultural codes. The basic principle of the insult game is preserved,

but the changes are made to the subject matter, and the terminology and slang used. These changes help solidify the place of reading in the Ballrooms and, by extension, the LGBT community throughout the United States. Because the people had their own brand of insult game, something adapted for and by them, the culture of which reading is a part has become much stronger, much more developed. As a result of this cultural autocommunication, the functions of the insult games diverged. Reading developed more as a form of entertainment than of a release of aggression, although some hints of that origin still remain. And reading is not explicitly seen as educational, like the dozens can be.

Cultural autocommunication, which implies communication of the same or similar content in various cultural languages, can take place within the same sign system (e.g. natural language, like in the case of the dozens and reading), while also allowing simultaneously for variations in subcodes and/or other, extralinguistic parameters. On the other hand, cultural autocommunication can also involve more than one sign system, as is exemplified by the relations between reading and voguing—natural language and the kinetic language of dance.

3.1.2 Reading/shade and voguing

Reading and voguing are the two most explicitly related practices of the three in this paper. The connection is clear enough because of the internal evolution in the Ball scene from reading to vogue, but it is made verbally explicit by the members of the community who we see in *Paris is Burning*. The way voguing evolved in the Ballroom scene is much clearer than the way reading evolved from the dozens because it happened in the same communal space and with the same people. Participants in the Balls took the art form of reading and channeled it into a dance form which they called "vogue." The special thing about this transition is that it was a movement from verbal (discrete) natural language to a visual and kinetic continuous language. This means that the insult game was such a fixture of the Ballroom culture that through the process of cultural autocommunication the practice grew and transformed into an equally important and complex part of the culture, cementing both its own place and the place of reading in the culture of the Ballroom scene. Since voguing shares many similarities with reading, such as the competitive aspect and a focus on physical appearance, the two can serve similar purposes. These linking aspects are what makes up the intercommunication between the two practices of differing sign systems. While the insults one would hear in reading are not stated between two vogue dancers when we see them

battle, the implication of them is indeed present. When, for example, Willi Ninja mimes using the makeup compact, he is translating what would be a verbal insult into physical movements. In other words, he is bridging the gap between the two sign systems and the result is the intercommunication of the systems. When the two sign systems interact and overlap, such as in this example, they create new messages, new pieces of culture, which only serves to make that culture more thoroughly developed and defined. Ninja himself is an excellent depiction of cultural autocommunication because he, as a pioneer of vogue, is very vocal about the status of the dance style in the Ball scene and actively makes the connection between reading and vogue. He wants people to know about this dance style and what it means for him and his community. When he says that voguing grew out of shade (reading) he is demonstrating metacommunication in the culture between reading and vogue. In this case he is embodying the metacommunication that takes place between the two competing sign systems, exposing the unseen dialogue that takes place when a culture communicates with aspects of itself.

3.2 Intersemiotic translation of reading and vogue

While the dozens and reading are arguably translations of each other, it is accurate to say that to the extent that the main sign system involved in both is verbal language, they are not intersemiotic translations. They are both verbal insult games performed in the same natural language, albeit with rather different cultural codes, slang, and subject matter. The similarities between reading and voguing, however, allow for them to be seen as intersemiotic translations since the main sign systems involved are different: natural language in reading and dance in voguing. Not only are these two phenomena present in the same cultural sphere and practiced by the same people, they are expressly, directly related to each other and are described as such by those who were pioneers in their creation and dissemination to the outside world.

In the Ball scene, as it was previously discussed, reading is a form of insult game in which people exaggerate the flaws of others with the goal of entertainment and release of aggression. Voguing as a form of dance evolved from the practice of reading and shade: in the words of Willi Ninja (*Paris is Burning* 00:36:11), voguing is a safer form of throwing shade. Instead of having a verbal altercation that, while normally lighthearted, has the possibility of turning into a hurtful exchange, two dancers or groups of people can channel their disagreement into a dance battle.

Given this as the basis of the argument for why these two practices are translations of each other, I will explore further the underpinnings of how the translation process works between them.

3.2.1 Intersemiotic translation as a dynamic set of changes

Examining Hjelmslev's expressive and content planes of the sign can show us the parts of reading and voguing which are similar to each other and thus make up the aspects which tie them together through translation. While Dusi believes that we must go beyond the surface level of these planes in favor of examining the dynamic changes that occur in the translation (Dusi 2015: 188), it is first important, I believe, to identify what exactly those changes are before we delve deeper. Then we can gain a better understanding of the translation process at work as we examine how these traits evolved from reading to voguing. In the following, the four most significant aspects that unite the two phenomena at hand are presented.

3.2.1.1 Competition

When two people read each other, there is inherently a sense of competition. If that were not the case, then there would be no cause for the other person to respond. An insult is cast with the expectation that the one initiating the act is open to receiving a reciprocal insult. This competitive aspect of reading is probably the clearest link with voguing. We see competitors in *Paris is Burning* vogue as a group, all vying to impress the judges and out-perform their competitors. We also see individuals showing off their skills on the dance floor alone in order to impress the judges and to provoke their competition who will perform next. While there is no formal judging panel when people engage in reading, the effectiveness of their retorts can be judged by the onlookers who may be present.

In this aspect, the form of content of the phenomena is the element of competition, the desire to out-wit or out-perform one's competitor. The expression substance—the manifestation of the form of content—moves from scalar verbal exchanges in reading to increasingly complex or impressive dance moves in voguing. The shift here is the manner in which the people involved compete. They take the energy that they would have when reading somebody and channel it into their bodily movements in order to achieve a similar outcome—besting their opponent.

3.2.1.2 Aggression

Related to the competitive aspect of reading and voguing is the function of aggression and frustration. Willi Ninja describes voguing as "taking two knives and cutting each other up" (*Paris is Burning* 00:35:56) and as a dance that "two people did because they didn't like each other" (*Paris is Burning* 00:36:11). This shows clearly one of the main reasons for voguing competitions to exist. It is in direct relation to reading because reading is fundamentally aggressive. While the insults are meant to be in good fun, they are nonetheless insults and thus aggressive. In order for one person to emerge as the victor in either reading or a vogue competition, there must be some level of aggression, some motivation to have the battle. In addition, the built up aggression or anger one might have for their competition is a motivating factor to read someone or to initiate a vogue battle.

The change in this aspect is not as apparent as in the other examples because the aggression is not significantly different in reading and voguing. The sources of the aggression, however, may be divergent. Ninja talks about voguing as a way for people to battle against each other in order to safely relieve their frustrations with each other. We can infer from this that there is a pre-established dislike for one's competitor. Reading, on the other hand may not stem from distain for someone else, but is instead more of a show that is put on when someone finds a flaw to mock in another. The aggression is inherent in reading because of the nature of the practice, but is not necessarily premeditated. Here, interestingly, we can see the subtle difference between reading and shade. It was mentioned before that the two are nearly identical and sometimes the terms are used interchangeably. But the difference explained by Dorian Corey is that shade is more underhanded and subtler. In order to be underhanded in your insult and not simply laugh at others, there must be some premeditated thought that goes into it. Thus it is possible that the source of aggression in shade comes from a more genuine dislike of the other person. If we see it this way, then the forms of content, i.e. the element of aggression, come before either of the exchanges themselves, but are both seen in the expression substances—verbal remarks and physical movements—in both reading (or more accurately, shade) and voguing respectively.

3.2.1.3 Humor

While aggression and competition are necessary for these practices to exist, it is important to recognize the role of humor in all of this. Reads can undoubtedly go too far. If one were to

personally attack someone's character or degrade them in some way, the game would cease to be a game. The exchanges must be funny if they are to be effective because the aim of the game is entertainment. Likewise with voguing, the competitions are fierce but fun. The people involved have constructed a system of competition based around the dance, but they are aware that it is meant to be entertaining for the spectators and for those involved. While the dance itself may not exactly be funny, it can still be fun. This can clearly be seen in the way Willi Ninja describes how he likes to vogue, explained below.

Humor is a difficult thing to describe and tends to disappear when it is explained. The content of the humor is dependent on the expression of it. In other words, in order for something to be funny, it must be funny. This sort of circular logic makes analyzing this dimension of the translation between reading and voguing difficult. It seems that the humor in the content plane of reading is dependent on the exaggeration of flaws in another or commentary on a shared situation or experience for those involved. It is manifested similarly in the expression plane in voguing when the dancers choose to incorporate humorous actions in their dance. The example used in the next section is just one instance of how this humor can be expressed.

3.2.1.4 Focus on appearance

In part of his interview in *Paris is Burning* (00:36:31), Ninja describes how he likes to mime a makeup compact and pretends to apply makeup to his face in order to upstage his competitor who of course has very bad makeup. His example showcases the fun side of voguing while also relating it back to reading. Dorian Corey explains that one may insult someone's tacky clothes or their appearance when reading them (*Paris is Burning* 00:35:01). While this emphasis on physical appearance is not the only subject matter that you would find in vogue and reading, it is indeed significant because the Ball scene is largely built on competitions for looks.

This is perhaps the clearest example of the transformation that takes place in the expression plane between reading and voguing because there is a direct, stated link between the two. Corey and Ninja both explain the role of physical appearance in reading and voguing respectively. The forms of content in reading—the desire to mock someone's appearance—are manifest in the expression plane as insults focusing on someone's ridiculous shape, saggy face, or tacky clothes. This is transformed in voguing, in the expression plane, into the physical mimetic action of doing one's face in the imagined compact and holding it out to one's competitor as a sign that they should

check their own poorly done makeup. The intention is the same in both instances—to belittle the appearance of one's opponent—but in reading it is simply done verbally while in voguing it must be done physically.

3.2.2 The triadic model of IT as transformation of the conceptual space

Using a triadic model for conceptualizing the translation of reading into voguing, we can reveal more than just individual aspects of each practice as parts of a whole. With the interpreter standing as an individual or group of people who interprets signs and objects of reading and voguing based on their social and cultural context, we can understand the habits which are conveyed in the translation process as habits instead of simply messages. Because, as Aguiar, Atã, and Queiroz (2015: 14) state, meaning is a relational property and is not fixed in a given sign, it makes sense to look at these two cultural practices as a translation of practices, or habits. A wisecrack that one would make while reading has a very different manifestation and a very different effect compared with a given dance move done while voguing. So individual signs or remarks are often not very useful in viewing these phenomena as translations. Instead we should consider the commonalities that they share, such as those listed in the previous section: competition, aggression, humor, and focus on appearance. When we consider the role that competition, for example, plays in both reading and voguing, it is fair to say that the way in which it manifests in each practice is rather different while still maintaining a link between the two. This difference, though, shows the transformation of the conceptual space as a result of the translation process. Competition in reading is verbal, scalar humor. The conceptual space here is one of building on each others' insults in order to win the imagined competition. This space changes in the competitive voguing arena, where physical movements are the tools for outdoing, outshining the other contestant(s). The spirit of competition is present in both, but the way in which the players compete is fundamentally changed due to the nature of this particular intersemiotic translation—natural language to kinetic language. The same can be seen in the fourth aspect, the focus that these two practices have on the physical appearance of the competition. The verbal signs in reading and the physical mimetic signs in voguing are related to the objects of disdain for one's opponent's appearance and the interpreters in both cases use the tools at their disposal (words and dance moves) to express the same message. The habit of mocking someone for their appearance is preserved in the translation and helps build

the case that it *is* indeed a translation, not only because it is present in both, but because it works to change the conceptual space.

3.3 Application of rhizome model of translation

While the framework of intersemiotic translation is very interesting and useful for describing the translation of verbal signs into nonverbal signs, it does not quite live up to the task of describing cultural translations of varying sign systems. The dozens and reading can be analyzed as cultural translations, while reading and voguing are an example of intersemiotic translation. But in order to understand how all three phenomena fit together, we need a more complex model of translation. Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome is just the model for the job. Because it emphasizes connections among many diverse texts, practices, events, models, etc., and how they are related to each other instead of adhering to the usual source text/target text binary structure, the rhizome can reveal relationships between the three phenomena at hand which would normally not be seen in one of the previous understandings of translation. The dozens may seem to be too different in comparison with vogue, given that they are made up of entirely different sign systems and are performed by different groups of people. And it may be easy to say that reading forms the bridge between those two. But I will argue that in fact voguing is a translation of both reading and the dozens simultaneously, because of the similarities that they do share, and it may even be possible to view reading and the dozens as translations of vogue. The question of translatability among languages is not necessarily important in the rhizome model because the languages themselves are not a limiting factor. Instead this model looks at cultural texts, practices, and codes as uniting forces for each other because they intertwine in order to form a collective assemblage. Chronology is not important in the rhizome because of the lack of hierarchy, which means we can compare vogue— the most recent of the three—and the dozens—the oldest—without necessarily having to consider reading as a median point. Their shared characteristics are enough to connect them within the rhizome and therefore connect them as translations. In the following sections I will expand on the rhizomatic relations of the dozens, reading, and voguing on the basis of the three main principles according to which the rhizome model operates. Before that, however, is included a potential map of the rhizome formed by the three phenomena.
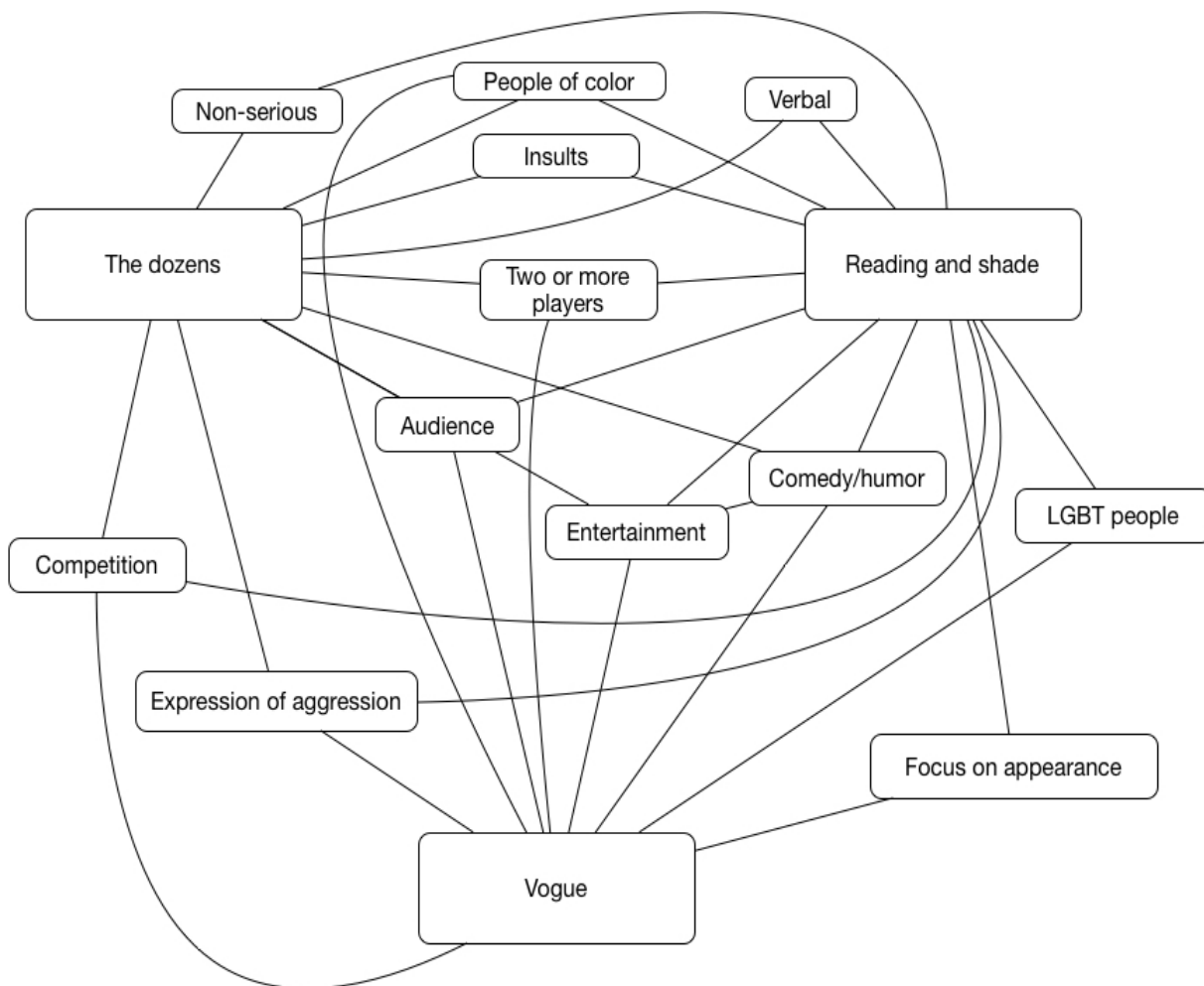
Rhizome diagram

3.3.1 Connection and heterogeneity

The diagram above shows just how complicated a rhizome can and must be. While there are only three main topics, they are connected by a multitude of shared aspects. These links often connect all three topics, but in some cases are only appropriate for two, such as the focus on appearance in reading and vogue, or the connection of verbal language between reading and the dozens. The connections are not placed in any specific location (except to make the diagram a bit easier to read) because the rhizome does not account for any specific placement of the connections. Much like the wild root systems of the bamboo plant, there are many offshoots and connecting roots that all work together in harmony. The offshoots especially make the root system even more complex and varied. In the interest of having a cleaner example diagram I have not included any extraneous branches to the dozens, vogue, and reading, but there are of course many more aspects of these

phenomena that could be enumerated and documented. For this paper, though, they are not particularly relevant.

The connections in the rhizome among the dozens, reading, and vogue are not only important because they are links between the phenomena. They must be there in order for the others to exist. Because this is a model of translation, the connections among the phenomena are essential as they show us the origins of each branch and the transformations made from them. These links do not necessarily have to be linguistic features either, as is clearly evidenced by the previous discussions. Aggression, for example is not a linguistic feature but an emotion or even an emotional product of external influences. Nonetheless, it is a uniting factor for all three branches.

The fact that these three cultural practices are done by black and Latino people is also non-linguistic, but is a very important characteristic for understanding the cultural context of all three practices. Not only are factors such as race and emotional significance important in understanding these phenomena and how they are related to each other, they are, much like the triadic model of translation, inseparable from our understanding of it. If we as the interpreters want to understand cultural phenomena that we are not a part of, we must realize that our context for viewing the phenomena is quite different from those taking part in it. The young black boy playing the dozens or the person voguing with their fellow drag queens have a perspective on what they are doing that we can never have. Their view of the rhizome and what constitutes its similarities may very well be different from mine as an outside observer. This is only one factor in understanding the rhizome, but it shifts the perspective drastically. And, keeping in mind Aguiar, Atã, and Queiroz's triadic model we know that that perspective is critical to understanding the subject matter.

The role of natural language cannot be underplayed here as well. In the dozens and reading the people involved use specific types of language that are not found in the other. While those who play the dozens use many rhymed forms and direct their outlandish insults at their opponents' mothers, those who read are much less structured. They have no convention of rhyming and there is no evidence of targeting mothers. Instead they go for outward appearance and uniting in-group factors like sexual orientation. While these may sound drastically divergent, the linguistic spirit is still present to unite them. The agonistic verbal exchanges take on different forms, but they are nonetheless agonistic or even antagonistic. The ritualized verbal insult is a common practice all over the world and transgressive language such as that used in the dozens and reading can be grouped in its own linguistic category.

So-called semiotic chains are what Deleuze and Guattari say make up the rhizome (1987: 7). They encompass diverse elements which are necessarily linked to other chains in a crisscrossing, weaving web. The throng of languages and codes and gestures allow us to see the dozens, a verbal insult game performed by young black boys, as linked to voguing, a dance form created in an underground subculture of LGBT black and Latino people, without being an intentionally crafted translation from source to target. Because these varying branches exist and play a part in the composition of the main three aspects, they cannot be ignored. We cannot say that because the dozens has not historically been played by specifically LGBT people that it is not related to reading and vogue. That is just one chain which unites reading and vogue. There are still plenty of other factors that link the dozens with the other two and they are no more or less important. The chains which bond these three phenomena are varied and complicated because that is the nature of the reality, and the rhizome reflects that.

3.3.2 Multiplicity

The main idea of multiplicity in the rhizome model is that there are many connecting lines which make up the collective assemblage and they are not part of any hierarchy. The multiplicity of the rhizome is always changing and growing, but only outwards, not upwards. The concepts of subject and object, which are inherently hierarchical, are not important when you consider that any aspect of the rhizome can be examined in its own right, depending on your perspective.

Deleuze and Guattari call arborescent models "pseudomulti-plicites" [sic] (1987: 8) because they believe a simple one-after-the-other model does not actually provide enough information to fully understand a given phenomenon or text. In our examples that is arguably true. Granted, it is indeed possible to create a chronological hierarchy of the dozens, reading, and vogue (in that order) in order to call them translations of the previous in line. But that method takes into account mainly time as a structural factor. In the rhizome model, time is not relevant because the focus is on the commonalities among the objects of scrutiny.

These commonalities as the integral part of the model help to decentralize the subject and object. It allows us to view different dimensions of the phenomena. The universally uniting factor of comedic entertainment is a strong bond that the dozens, reading, and vogue all share. If we look at each phenomenon individually we can see how humor is manifest in each one. In the dozens the insults are meant to be fantastical and absurd and often follow a formulaic pattern. In reading,

those taking part are often making jokes among friends or at least in-group onlookers, with the intention of making everyone laugh and kiki, as Dorian Corey would say. Voguing may not be as funny as the other two, but there are clear comedic elements, such as Willi Ninja's makeup compact. Even though comedy is not a universal language and is not even always achieved by natural language, its diverse manifestation in these three cultural phenomena is an angle that unites them. We can focus on comedy as a uniting factor temporarily rather than trying to see how certain words or phrases are rendered from the dozens into reading.

The multiplicity is not only decentralized; it is also constantly evolving. The number of links and points in the rhizome increases all the time as new connections are made and new phenomena appear in a culture. The dozens, for example, has spawned other iterations in the past decades. The emergence of rap battles and television shows mixing insult games with hip hop such as MTV's *Yo Mamma* are a more modern take on the familiar insult game but with different conventions and expectations. Voguing has also evolved over time. As was mentioned earlier, I have only focused on one style of vogue in the interest of simplicity, but Vogue Femme and Dramatics have gained traction all over the United States and even globally. The rhizome is ever expanding due to the increase in connections and the branching out of new multiplicities. The multiplicity becomes more and more complicated as culture evolves and translation in turn becomes a much looser concept.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the three phenomena presented for analysis are instances of translation. By examining the dozens, reading, and vogue through three lenses of translation, it has become clear that they can be interpreted in several different, yet equally viable ways.

First, at a rather general level, we have seen that, by way of Peeter Torop's theory of cultural autocommunication, the dozens, an insult game in African American communities, has been translated into reading/shade, a similar form of insult game done in the underground New York Ballroom scene; and reading/shade gave way to a new translation—done in a different sign system—the dance style known as vogue.

Next, these phenomena have been explained as intersemiotic translations. Here the focus is on reading and vogue, as they are more immediately related and, unlike the dozens and reading, they exist in different sign systems. Using Louis Hjelmslev's model of the sign as the basis of analysis, we can see that a translation can be thought of as a dynamic set of changes between the content and expression planes of signs. Reading and vogue share a few aspects—competition, aggression, humor, and a focus on appearance—which are key to understanding the changes which have occurred between sign systems in these examples. A triadic model of translation, based off of the classic tripartite model of a sign, can also help us understand these two phenomena as translations because it allows us to decenter our focus and explore other perspectives regarding the relations of the phenomena. By examining the connections between parts of reading and vogue instead of viewing them only through the eyes of an interpreter, we can more fully understand how and why they are related.

Finally, and most importantly, Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome model of translation has been used to conceptualize the dozens, reading, and vogue as translations *of one another*. This model of translation is the culmination of the two more basic theories of translation. Having explored what kinds of translations are present among the three phenomena, we could move onto the complex, all-encompassing rhizome. Using the model of the rhizome, we have relinquished the traditional source text/target text binary and Jakobsonian system of categorizing translations in favor of a multitudinous, intricate web of connections, perspectives, people, settings, practices, sign systems, and virtually any other aspect one could think of. The rhizome, while indeed very complicated, frees us from the theoretical restrictions of previous models and as a result welcomes the analysis of heretofore unrelated (in academic discourse) cultural practices. The dozens,

reading/shade, and vogue can now be seen in a new light and conceptualized as cultural and intersemiotic translations which reside in an endlessly complex and interconnected rhizomatic web.

Resümee

Tõlketeoreetiline lähenemine kolmele omavahel seotud nähtusele: *dozens*, *reading* **ja** *voguing*

Kasutades kultuuritõlke, intersemiootilise tõlke ja risomaatilise tõlke raamistikke, uurib käesolev magistritöö, kuidas toimivad oma kultuuris nähtused, nagu *dozens, reading* ja *voguing*, kuidas nad omavahel seostuvad; ning kuidas nad on üksteist mõjutanud, kui neid mõtestada omavaheliste tõlgetena.

Töö esimeses osas tutvustan kolme analüüsiobjekti lähemalt. Kõik kolm on üksteisest selgesti eristatavad, ent samuti on neil mitmeid ühendavaid tegureid. Esimene uuritav nähtus on nn solvangumäng (*insult game*), mis tavaliselt kannab nimetust *the dozens* ja mis on Afro-Ameerika kogukondi iseloomustanud aastakümneid. Teine nähtus on *dozens*'iga väga sarnane: see on samuti solvangumäng, mis tavaliselt kannab nimetust *reading* (või *throwing shade*). Viimane solvangumäng leiab aset üsna erinevas, ehkki osalt ka kattuvas kogukonnas — rassiliste vähemuste *queer* kogukonnas. Selles kontekstis täidab see solvangumäng pisut erinevat eesmärki. Peale selle võib samas kogukonnas täheldada ka solvangumängu evolutsioonilist arengut võistluslikuks tantsustiiliks, mis kannab nimetust *voguing*. Kõigi kolme nähtuse puhul on võimalik näha nii sarnasusi kui ka erinevusi, mis on seotud nii nende osalejatega ehk nende praktikate loojate, arendajate ja levitajatega, kui ka sellega, milliseid funktsioone need praktikad täidavad vastavates kultuurides. Töö järgnevates osades käsitletakse mainitud nähtuste ajaloolist algupära ning arutletakse, milline on nende koht vastavates kogukondades, kuidas inimesed neid teostavad, ning milliseid sotsiaalseid funktsioone need täidavad.

Olen otsustanud uurida neid kultuuripraktikaid kasutades tõlketeoreetilist raamistikku, kuna leian, et selline raamistik võimaldab ainulaadset pilguheitu nii nende nähtuste funktsioonidele kui ka evolutsioonietappidele. Jälgides kõigi kolme nähtuse evolutsioonilisi muutusi, kuidas nad paigutuvad üksteistega võrreldes ja suhestudes ning vaadeldes neid seejuures läbi tõlkeprisma (kasutusel on kultuurilise, intersemiootilise ja risomaatilise tõlke mudelid), võib välja tuua, et *dozens*, *reading* ja *vogueing* on seotud ehk lähemalt kui varem arvatud. Need kolm nähtust või protsessi elavad edasi seetõttu, et nad on näited tõlkimisest, ja tõlkimine kui niisugune on kultuurist lahutamatu. Kui mõista keskselt olulist rolli, mida mängib tõlkimine kultuuris, suudame lisada uue perspektiivi, mille kaudu näeme kultuurievolutsiooni 'uuena.' Teisisõnu tekib meil uus raamistik, millesse maailm paigutada.

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