A Humanistic-Geek Approach to Transmedia Storytelling

- Transforming Users into Heroes and Authors to Build a Sustainable Universe

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Abstract

Transmedia is definitely a buzz word, and probably one of the most misunderstood. It seems to englobe everything and nothing. The first chapter of this work is devoted to analyze and explain terminology adjacent to Transmedia in order to clarify the limits of the practice.

Before I started my Master’s program in Cross Media Interaction Design, I wished there was one specific book in my bookshelf: The Humanistic-Geek Guide to Transmedia Storytelling, but there wasn’t, and still there is not such a book. Neither in my bookshelf, nor in the market. Pranks aside, I realized that what I wanted is a human-centered guideline of why Transmedia storytelling came into being, the techniques it uses to “lure” us in and what Transmedia storytelling offers.

I realized that to do so, it is needed a multidisciplinary approach, and I felt necessary to tap into disciplines like psychology, sociology, mythology and literary research. Since transmedia storytelling is a genre “between genres” and there is a good deal of interactive and digital weight on transmedia storytelling, I finally decided to call this approach that impregnates the whole thesis Humanistic - Geek.

Previous to my research, I had identified intuitively how participants in transmedia storytelling acquire a sense of prominence, that the participant’s involvement on the narrative is pro-active and necessary. A very different condition to the couch potato image of viewers in front of a television set that dominated in the mass media era.

To understand why and how Transmedia Storytelling came into being, I went back in time and analyzed in depth the relationship of the user with the market and the techniques utilized by Freud’s nephew to turn persons into buyers.

Further on, I discovered that thanks to the disruptive nature of the internet and the rapid evolution of media ecology, passive consumers were turned into creators of our own content, and thanks to the adhesion of collective intelligence communities, in co-creators.

It was my goal to check how the rhythmic evolution of both individual, technology and market resulted in an interactivity that made audiences turn into actors involved in narratives, and, at the best of times, heroes of the story. I looked into Joseph Campbell and Jane McGonigal’s work and brace yourselves, rituals and games, oddly as it seems, are vanguards of digital storytelling.

The third part of this thesis is employed to define a syntax and grammar of Transmedia Storytelling. With non-linearity at its very center, TS make us “recollect” bits and pieces scattered through different media to complete the puzzle of the narrative. And this take us to the end of this paper: Our veritable role in Transmedia experiences.

The subtitle of the present work Transforming Users into Heroes and Authors to Build a Sustainable Universe, represents the goal I believe I achieved through this work: To prove Transmedia narratives turn users into heroes and storytellers ... with a final twist. Moreover, I propose a new paradigmatic relationship between market and user and I dare say that the more a user gets emotional revenue out of the transmedia franchise through
her active participation as co-author and hero, the more economical revenue the industry will get.

1. Introduction

Transmedia is definitely a buzz word, and probably one of the most misunderstood. It seems to englobe everything and nothing. Some terms related to the Transmedia orbit that I have come across on my research are the following: Multimedia, Deep Media, Transmedial Interactions, Chaotic Fiction, Multiple Platforms, Connected Entertainment Product, Cross Media, Multimodality, Cross-Platform Experiences, Hybrid Media, Experience Design, Extended Reality, Full-Media Entertainment Experience, Intertextual Commodity, Immersive Brand Marketing, Participation Drama, Transmedial Worlds, Pervasive Media, Search Opera, Pervasive Entertainment, Intermedia, Story Game. And the last one I found, Cross Over Experience. Not very clear, right? That is also my conclusion and that is one of the reasons why I wrote the present thesis.

Oftentimes, when I enthusiastically describe my area of studies on a casual conversation, I have noticed that, regardless conditionings like age and nationality, there is usually a common reaction on the person I am talking with: the puzzled expression on her face. This puzzlement is the translation, I believe, of the lack of self-awareness regarding the rapid evolution of media ecology system, market behavior and our very protagonist interaction with these entities.

Before I started my Master’s program in Cross Media Interaction Design, I wished there was one specific book in my bookshelf: The Humanistic-Geek guide to Transmedia Storytelling, but there wasn’t, and still there is not such a book. Neither in my bookshelf, nor in the market. I understand the term Humanistic as concern for humanity; and geek, as computer aficionado and in a broader sense, media enthusiast.

**Thesis main objectives:** The present work is the first step towards the realization of such Humanistic-Geek Guide to Transmedia Storytelling, and serves a double purpose: On one hand, this thesis is built as a guideline for students, practitioners and transmedia curieux to apprehend the origins, elusive nature and practice of transmedia experiences. On the other hand, I pretend to uncover what’s our role, as users, in those transmedia experiences.


Transmedia Storytelling is a term coined by the scholar Henry Jenkins. Here it is how he defines it:

> Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience.

And he adds:

> In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best — so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television,
novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don’t need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa ... A good transmedia franchise works to attract multiple constituents by pitching the content somewhat differently in the different media. (Jenkins, 2006 p. 96)

That is, at its most basic level, TS practice refers to the discipline of crafting a particular and coherent universe. Such universe unfolds in an immersive and interactive experience for the user / recipient in artistic ways across a variety of media channels. All the new information provided in those channels add new knowledge valuable to the overall experience.

But, as pointed out in the abstract and introduction of this work, transmedia is not alone. Due to the gobs of terminology belonging to the same semantic cosmos, it would be necessary to dedicate a whole thesis for the purpose of analyzing them all. Nevertheless, I will evaluate some of the most compelling terminology relevant for the purpose of this thesis.


The scholar Anja Bechmann Petersen defines it as “concepts or media products designed for use in more than one medium platform and the work activities surrounding this phenomenon” (Bechmann, 2008 p. 1)

Monique de Haas offers the following definition:

Crossmedia communication is communication where the storyline will direct the receiver from one medium to the next. This makes it possible to transform from one-dimensional communication (sender -> receiver) to multi-dimensional communication (senders <-> receivers). Furthermore I believe that good crossmedia communication will enhance the value of communication in two ways: 1. Financial profits through equal or decreasing costs for the same communication effects with single medium communication. It is possible to shift costs for communicating from the sender to the receiver, if the story is attractive enough for the receiver to want to interact with it (at extra cost). 2. The level and depth of involvement will be more personal and therefore more relevant and powerful. (De Haas, blog archive July 2004)

CM can be considered then as one narrative, communication or product, spread along different media. An example of nowadays CM product is GOAB. A TV experience concept.

Figure 1. Goab Mood Chart

Figure 2. Goab TV experience
GOAB is an application that allows us to interact with our television via iPad. This app includes programing integration, smart contextual data, through which you can select programing depending on your mood, and social integration.

2. Intermedia.

Intermedia is a concept coined originally by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1812. In the 60’s, it was reintroduced by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins to designate ... works which fall conceptually between media that are already known (Higgins, 5). At its most basic level, in Intermedia, one media like painting fuses conceptually with another, theater, creating a new genre: Performing art.

3. Transmedial Interactions

A fascinating concept, and a truly challenge for a Cross Media Interaction Designer, coming from the digital gaming realm. TI’s main thesis conveys the access to games and games’ saved data from different devices. That is, I can start a game quest on my PC or Xbox, interrupt it and resume it on my smartphone while waiting for the bus on my way to work. It goes further by adding meta-game content to the game ...

... such as blogs, guild pages, and social network sites, strategy guides, mod sites, and so on. Most of this content is player-created and accessed through different mechanisms. Devices or interfaces that aggregate meta-game content in ways that help create coherent, if not seamless, game experiences represent another potential area for transmedial interactions to improve gaming. (Bardzell, Wu, & Quagliara, 2007 p. 307)

Moreover, it will be interesting to follow the implementation of the new wireless broadband technology, (LTE) for mobile gaming and transmedial interactions. Since this technology can substantially improve the interactions of the gamer and the game itself, in terms of control responsiveness and movement accuracy, I believe it is just a matter of (short) time that we
witness a rapid revolution on mobile and in-situ gaming, compassed by the expansion of the Transmedia Worlds of the game across different devices.

4. Transmedial Worlds

Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca define Transmedial Worlds - Rethinking Cyberworld Design as:

... abstract content systems from which a repertoire of fictional stories and characters can be actualized or derived across a variety of media forms. What characterizes a transmedial world is that audience and designers share a mental image of the “worldness” (a number of distinguishing features of its universe). The idea of a specific world’s worldness mostly originates from the first version of the world presented, but can be elaborated and changed over time. Quite often the world has a cult (fan) following across media as well. (Klastrup & Tosca, 2004 p. 1)

According to the authors, TWs share a set of core features which “glue” that sense of “worldness” mentioned before, a constant and coherent ground that allows fans and followers to perceive the different TWs as referrals to the first actualization of the world. The features proposed are:

1. Mythos.- That is, the established battles, challenges, distinctive plot settings and characters belonging to the specific world.
2. Topos.- The specific historical and geographical location of the world.
3. Ethos.- It refers to the peculiar set of values, ethics and code behaviour.

For instance, the ongoing fantasy epic novels of A Song of Ice and Fire could be considered an archetypal of TWs. Taking a look at its:

1. Mythos.- The creation of fictional continents: Westeros and Essos. Seven noble families trying to gain control over the Iron Throne located in the land of Westeros. The history of its people, nobility and family titles, extra-spiced by supernatural creatures and events created by George R. R. Martin.
2. Topos.- Westeros and Essos, its traditions, diverse languages and original game boards.
3. Ethos.- Unlike another archetypal of Transmedial worlds, The Lord of The Rings, the series of A Song of Ice and Fire chronicles more than good vs. evil, exaltation of friendship and non materialistic order or heroism. It portrays the human grandeur, ambition and weakness integrated in complex characters. Intrigues for power, plots to survive and conquer, lies and half truths, perils of idealism, and injustice and betrayal are common coin in the saga.

To my knowledge, the Transmedial Worlds developed from and for the saga A Song of Ice and Fire, comprehend nowadays:

- The selected novelettes Tales of Dunk and Egg (also written by Martin) and its graphic novel versions. Chronologically, the action is set up before the events narrated in A Song of Ice and Fire and provide back-story for the better comprehension of and immersion on the vast world reflected in the saga.
- The adaptation of the saga to a TV series from HBO.
- A book-satellite of both the book and the TV series titled: Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic cuts deeper than swords.
• The transmedia marketing campaign for the TV series, carried out by the New York marketing agency Campfire.
• Three strategy board games: A Game of Thrones, A Clash of Kings and A Storm of Swords, released by Flight Fantasy Games.
• An RPG developed by the Canadian company Guardians of Order.
• A collectible Card Game name A Game of Thrones, also released by Flight Fantasy Games.
• LARPs (living-action-role playings) all over the world.
• And three games: Game of Thrones: Genesis, the soon coming Game of Thrones RPG (both developed by Cyanide Studios), and Game of Thrones Ascent, a forthcoming strategy game by Disruptor Beam.

5. Multimedia

And the last term put to comment in this paper. Multimedia refers to any object, system or medium (analogical or digital), that uses multiple means of expression to present and convey information. Thus, it enhances a multi sensorial experience for the user.

In the words of Tay Vaughan in his book, Multimedia: Making it work:

Multimedia is ... a woven combination of digitally manipulated text, photographs, graphic art, sound, animation, and video elements. When you allow an end user—also known as the viewer of a multimedia project—to control what and when the elements are delivered, it is called interactive multimedia. When you provide a structure of linked elements through which the user can navigate, interactive multi-media becomes hypermedia. (Vaughan, 2011 p.1)

Figure 4. The Blossom, William Blake Figure 5. Iphone: A multi-media device

2.1. What is not Transmedia Storytelling

Ah, so The Lord of the Rings, Star Wars and A Game of Thrones are transmedia Storytelling developments, right? No, not quite actually.

The movie, The Lord of The Rings, and its other two installments: The Two Towers and The Return of the King, are adaptations of the original books written by J. R. R. Tolkien. It’s true that Tolkien built a sustainable World, the Middle Earth, and that sustainable world is visible and recognizable in all the transmedial worlds.
We all share that same “worldness” of the Middle Earth in the movies, the board and digital games; even the Lego version of The Lord of the Rings reflect the mythos, topos and Ethos of the world of Tolkien.

But, although all these adaptations and spin-offs can add a great deal of value to the enjoyment of the franchise, none of this secondary material offers distinctive and valuable additions to the primary narrative: The Canon, the ur-text, that is, the original books written by Tolkien.

The Lord of the Rings is a clear case, since Tolkien passed away forty years ago. But, what about the Star Wars Saga? Is that transmedia storytelling? Again, no. “But, it has got a myriad of comics, novelettes and games”, you could say. Again we turn back to the notion of Canon or ur-text, in this case, ur-movies.

In 1977, the first movie of the Star Wars franchise, Star Wars Episode IV: A new Hope, was released. It became a huge pop culture phenomenon and it was followed by two other sequels: Episode V: The Empire strikes back and Episode VI: The Return of the Jedi. Fans fired up and asked for George Lucas’s permission to expand the universe of Star Wars. A series of spin-offs resulted (comics and novels). These spin-offs expanded the world of Star Wars following up the characters of the movies, and expanding the narratives of the world with new locations, characters and plots.

But When George Lucas decided to continue with the prequels of the saga, he turned to his own movies, the Star Wars canon, and he ignored all those comics and novelettes produced by fans of the saga. The conclusion to draw is this: Although all that secondary material generated by fans proved to be significant and valuable additions to the overall world of the saga, it was not taken into consideration for the formation of the I, II, III episodes; thus, this is not a TS development.

The process could be graphed as follows:

![Figure 6. Star Wars 'World Extensions](image)

The saga *A Song of Ice and Fire*, whose first book is *A Game of Thrones*, presents a rich and well built world, and a large cast of characters ideal for a TS treatment. Nowadays, the sixth installment, out of seven books, is being written. We will have to wait and see whether George R. R. Martin decides to continue the narrative of his saga in a linear way, as he has up
to now; or he decides to use a variety of channels to deliver and allow us to participate in the world of the seven kingdoms and Essos.

Transmedia did not turn up in our lives as a spontaneous generation phenomenon, since it is a product of the unstoppable constant of cultural, social and technological change. As a child of the 80’s, I am witness of those changes and the increasing interactivity of the user as protagonist of the media, instead of being a solely media consumer.

In order to display this point, and to outline the second purpose of this thesis: to prove that TS turns us effectively into storytellers, I will firstly evaluate the figure of the user towards the market. From his couch potato condition to active creator of content.


3.1 Freud, Persil and The Cluetrain Manifesto: the Consumer’s evolution

Not so Long, long ago, in December of 1918, the journalist Edward Bernays witnessed an exceptional event. In Paris, huge crowds cheered warmly the North American president Woodrow Wilson as the leader of the nation that had finally brought the 1st World War to an end. And the young journalist wondered if it could be possible to gather such crowd in times of peace.

Bernays, was familiar with the ideas on crowd psychology, whose main thesis is that people in a crowd act different from individuals, that is, the concept of collective mind. He also knew the work of his uncle, Sigmund Freud, and the murky realm of the subconscious mind, in which all our deepest desires and fears lay suppressed. Bernays made his homework.

The aftermath was this: The ideal of individual freedom at the heart of Democracy is impossible. Why? Because society is essentially dangerous and irrational and needs to be controlled.

As Bernays himself wrote in his book Propaganda:

*Universal literacy was supposed to educate the common man to control his environment. Once he could read and write he would have a mind fit to rule. So ran the democratic doctrine, But instead of a mind, universal literacy has given him rubber stamps, rubber stamps inked with advertising slogans, with editorials, with published scientific data, with the trivialities of the tabloids and the platitudes of history, but quite innocent of original thought. Each man’s rubber stamps are the duplicates of millions of others, so that when those millions are exposed to the same stimuli, all receive identical imprints. (Bernays, 1928 p. 20)*

Moreover, the individual’s dangerous libidinal drives could and should be managed and channeled by an elite for the economic benefit of big corporations. A bit before in Propaganda:

*The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. ...We are governed, our minds are*
molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society. ... In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons ... who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind. (Bernays, 1928 p. 10)

Through the manipulation of the crowd and the use of mass production, big business could fulfill the constant craving of the irrational and desire-driven masses, make a good profit and be a good citizen by stabilizing a dangerous society. Not a bad deal.

But how was this massive manipulation possible? Which techniques and platforms were used for such a purpose? Well, Bernays is considered the father of modern Public Relations and well known for the orchestration of elaborate corporate advertising campaigns and multimedia consumer spectacles. In fact, in 1939 he was the publicity director for the New York World's Fair.

In this new order, the identification of an individual as a citizen faded away, leaving in its wake a CONSUMER.

![Figure 7. Bernays' campaign for smoking women](image)

The crowd, that up to then bought products according to practical necessities and liability, was pushed to buy merchandise in order to stand out off the crowd and express their own SELF. And by the usage of symbols that fed irrational ideas, the era of a person's desires overshadowing his needs began.

Time has passed since Bernays’ manipulation of the masses, and according to the digital edition of The Guardian:

*In one 45-minute journey, the average London commuter is exposed to more than 130 adverts, featuring more than 80 different products. Only half of that information makes any impact, while unprompted we can remember none of the blur of adverts. In an entire day, we're likely to see 3,500 marketing messages.*

(Gibson, 2005 The Guardian digital Media)
What does it mean? It means that we, the crowd/consumers/users/recipients, hold better knowledge of the market and we are over saturated due to incessant flood of branding information.

And reading further on the same article of The Guardian:

... What is the role that advertising plays? There was a belief in the past that if you put a Persil advert on television, the next day they would go out and buy Persil. That’s obviously no longer the case. And how many times do you hear people say that they saw a great ad but they can’t remember what it’s for?

(Gibson, 2005 The Guardian digital Media)

If it wasn’t a rhetorical question I would reply that traditional advertising is just a cluster of coded information to which the consumer is supposed to act passively: swallowing, digesting, believing and finally purchasing the advertised object. Brands don’t look for a conversation-bidirectional communication with the customer ... at least, not up to very recently.

So, basically and according to its unidirectional aspect described before, the traditional marketing communication paradigm may be graphed as follows:

![Figure 9. Traditional Marketing Communication Model](image)

We can assume then that Bernays’ practices work partially in the postmodern society. The markets are over saturated with information that does not reach us, the target.

1999, seventy-one years after the publication of Propaganda, four visionaries: Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger, predicted that the consumer would hold the power and the corporate world could not longer be able to “push market” their
segment groups. Their reflections, 95 theses to be exact, are gathered in what they called: The Cluetrain Manifesto.

Here I quote the thesis, ordered by its number, relevant to the subject of this paper:

1. “Markets are conversations” (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberg, 1999, p. 1)
6. “The Internet is enabling conversations among human beings that were simply not possible in the era of mass media” (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberg, 1999, p. 1)
9. “These networked conversations are enabling powerful new forms of social organization and knowledge exchange to emerge”
11. “People in networked markets have figured out that they get far better information and support from one another than from vendors. So much for corporate rhetoric about adding value to commoditized products” (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberg, 1999, p. 1)
17. “Companies that assume online markets are the same markets that used to watch their ads on television are kidding themselves” (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberg, 1999, p. 1)
18. “Companies that don't realize their markets are now networked person-to-person, getting smarter as a result and deeply joined in conversation are missing their best opportunity” (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberg, 1999, p. 2)
20. “Companies need to realize their markets are often laughing. At them” (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberg, 1999, p. 2)
72. “We like this new marketplace much better. In fact, we are creating it” (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberg, 1999, p. 3)
74. “We are immune to advertising. Just forget it” (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberg, 1999, p. 3)
95. “We are waking up and linking to each other. We are watching. But we are not waiting” (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberg, 1999, p. 5)

The scenario described on the Cluetrain Manifesto manifests a shift on the market, an essential change on the relationship between customers/users and companies. What we are witnessing here is a fundamental switch on the communications model: from the linear communication, which implied the transmission of a branding concept to a passive recipient, to a bidirectional communication, in which the active participation and feedback of the recipient of the experience itself are mandatory.

Summing up, we, people in networked markets, reject the “passive consumer status”. We are actors and creators on this new market paradigm, and since brands pretend to dig in our pockets, we demand to be listened by them. As a result, companies that don’t know, don’t want or cannot catch up with the new market panorama, are missing out.

My proposal of the new paradigm market expressed graphically:
I personally do not believe that big corporations will give up all their power to users. But on the other hand, there are numerous cases in which users, who act to influence big corporations get positive results with just a click away. Let us take a look to the case of Change.org. Change.org is a Spanish online platform whose purpose is stated very clear on its website: “...We are united to create the biggest platform of activism online worldwide, so that you can keep on fighting against injustice.” (Change.org website, May 2012)

![Figure 11. Change.org home page](image)

This platform is a paradigmatic example of digital activism. Anyone can create a petition in change.org and everyone can sign it. Amongst the triumphs of the platform, we can count the successful campaign carried out by the blogger Pablo Herreros, who started a campaign through Change.org and his blog.

He requested to advertisers to withdraw their advertising from a TV show called La Noria. In this show, relatives of convicts are paid large amounts of money to be interviewed. More than 30,000 people embraced the campaign signing the petition. In turn, those signed petitions were sent to the brands which advertised themselves in La Noria. As a result, the mentioned TV show fell off from the television schedule grid.

### 3.2 We Think, therefore, We Share: Pierre Lévy & The Beast

The story line described in the Cluetrain Manifesto is precisely the scenario that the French media scholar Pierre Lévy describes in his book *Collective Intelligence: Mankind Emerging World In Cyberspace*.

Lévy describes his vision of Collective Intelligence as a reachable utopia more than a present reality, something to work on and to strive for. Unlike the social orders portrayed in films like the nightmarish-bureaucratized society in *Brazil*, Levy’s utopia is characterized by its collaborative sharing-knowledge nature. Thanks to the internet, these sharing-knowledge communities gather up with no territorial strains. At the same time, its social bond is held together thanks to mutual interest and reciprocal apprenticeship, that is, exchange of knowledge.

How can this situation be plausible? Because according to Levy, each subject, each human being is a unique knowledge entity. “No one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity.” (Levy, 1995 p. 14). And this statement is the formative basis of our more collaborative knowledge culture.
Henry Jenkins points out in his book *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*, that online fan communities might be one of the most fully realized examples of Levy’s utopia. Moreover, chat rooms of games and ARGs are crowded with fellow gamers interacting by discussing and sharing relevant information coming from websites, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and even phone numbers. They know that in order to put together all the pieces of a story together, it is easier and probably much more fun not to do it alone. Two other good examples of CI are Wikipedia and Youtube.

An extract of Frank Rose on his conversation with Weisman, creator of the ARG, The Beast, that illustrates superbly the principle of CI:

*When he [Weisman] and Lee were planning the game [The Beast], Weisman had argued that no puzzle would be too hard, no clue too obscure, because with so many people collaborating online, the players would have access to any conceivable skill that would be needed to solve it. Where he erred was in not following that argument to its logical conclusion.*

*“Not only do they have every skill set on the planet,” he [Weisman] told me, “but they have unlimited resources, unlimited time, and unlimited money.” Not only can they solve anything -- they can solve anything instantly. He had dubbed his game The Beast because originally it had 666 items of content -- Web pages to pore over, obscure puzzles to decipher. These were supposed to keep the players busy for three months; instead, the players burned through them in a single day* (Rose, 2007 Blog post)

**Key Concept:** Thanks to the internet and the rapid evolution of media ecology, passive consumers are turned into creators of our own content, and thanks to the adhesion of collective intelligence communities, in co-creators.

I have stablished the shift of the user from consumer to co-creator. Now, I will delineate the transformation of the user from couch potato to actor and hero.

### 4. Search Operas, Participatory Dramas & The Monomyth

*We [4orty 2wo Entertainment] tell our stories in the form of “search operas” -- narratives that spill off the page, the screen, the web, the phone--and into peoples’ lives. We don’t send an advertising message into the maelstrom of other competing messages: we reverse-engineer the process, so that the consumer comes looking for our campaign and our client’s product. We create communities passionately committed to spending not just their money but their imaginations in the worlds we represent.* (Dena, 2004 p. 1)

This is how one of the designers of The Beast describes the experience. This ARG, created to promote the film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, started with a fictitious credit and a telephone number printed on the film advertising poster. From then on, the audience got immerse on a participatory experience in order to solve a murder. The game involved the user on a myriad of webpages, phone and fax lines, email accounts and live events.

ARGs, like The Beast, set us forth in the midst of a fictive reality, in which the lines between the game and our everyday life blur. The question is: Are these “Search Operas” or “Participatory Dramas” any new to us? (drum rolls) No.
The mythologist and scholar, Joseph Campbell states how the myth was one of the earliest forms of story. His seminal works: *The Masks of God*, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and specially his treatment of the Monomyth (the mythological adventure of the hero), influenced media personalities like George Lucas, who made a wide use of the latest on his sci-fi saga *Star Wars*.

According to Campbell, “Ritual is mythology made alive” (Campbell, 1960 p. 466, and ... “a clue to what may be permanent or universal in human nature” (Campbell, 1960 p. 466). That is, a religious ritual is a participatory drama whose function is the re-enactment of a myth, and it is performed by the entire community. The mythologist also stated that rituals hold three basic concerns: **Pleasure**, **Power**, and **Duty**. By **Power** I refer to the ability to influence and control events. Rituals that were practiced as **Duty** to the gods, also brought entertainment and **Pleasure**.

The individual engaged on a participatory drama looses his ego by embracing an experience that snaps him from his mundane reality.

An example. If you go to Spain during Passover, probably you will witness a religious LARP (live-action-role-playing). Every year, millions of people gather up to re-enact the mythical cycle of Jesus since his arrival to Jerusalem, going through his judging by Pilatos, and his subsequent martyrdom, death and resurrection. Some of the enactors incarnate the roman soldiers that caused Jesus a good deal of pain; others, Jesus’ devote followers, who carry a heavy image of the man-god. All the stagings are kept in time to the incessant drumming of drums and bass drums.

In the Spanish Passover, there is even a re-enacting of the supposed earthquake that took place right after Jesus’ death. Such stage is called *La Rompida de la Hora* (The breaking of the Hour). In this spectacular participatory drama, the trembling ground and sound effect-like an earthquake is produced thanks the constant drumroll of thousands of drum and drum bass playing for more than 24 hours straight. True story.

Some years ago, I approached a friend that participated in *La Rompida de la Hora* as drum bass player. I knew she wasn’t religious, so her participation on the act didn’t make any sense to me. I asked her why did she do it. After a short moment of thought, she answered with a puzzled and almost ecstatic look: “When I play in *La Rompida*, ... I mean, we ... all of us are playing together towards, some ... something bigger than us.”

![Figure 12. Rompida de la hora](image)
Now subtract the religious component of La Rompida. Keep my friend’s words in mind while reading the reflections of Phaedra, a participant of I love bees (the ARG engineered to promote the computer game Halo):

“We experienced being part of a collective intelligence ... participating in a search for, or perhaps creation of, a greater, shared meaning” (McGonigal, 2008 p. 1)

Phaedra, I Love Bees player

Thus, my friend and Phaedra, by involving themselves on a participatory drama, be it a religious LARP or an ARG, took an active part on a collective experience. Such experience snapped them out of their mundane reality, reaching something bigger, greater than the sum of the individual efforts of each subject.

We can conclude then, that the individual participating on a participatory drama, whether it is a LARP or an ARG, he becomes an actor of a participatory experience, enhancing the particular Universe of such immersive experience. He is emotionally engaged and most important, committed to the action.

Why? In my opinion, because he has a duty to fulfill, the power to take decisions relevant for the flow of the narrative, and the pleasure of carrying out that duty fully empowered.

Taking another example, the Wargaming Club in Baltimore, Darkon. Darkon is also an award-winning feature-length documentary film that follows the real-life adventures of the group of fantasy LARP (live-action-role-playing) gamers.

I extracted from the documentary two sentences, out of a large speech provided by two characters of the documentary, that I found specially revelatory:

“We want to live adventures, everybody wants to be a hero, and in everyday life you don’t get to be the hero ...” (Meyer & Neel, 2006. Minute 22)

“Over time Keldor helped me becoming the man I wanted to be in real life, it helped me ...” (Meyer & Neel, 2006. Minute 46)

It’s hard not to mention here the scholar and game designer Jane McGonigal. In her own words explaining the goal of her last game, “Find The Future: The Game”. She enunciates that:

The game is designed to empower young people to find their own futures by bringing them face-to-face with the writings and objects of people who made an extraordinary difference ... Like every game I make, it has one goal: to turn players into super-empowered, hopeful individuals with real skills and ideas to
help them change the world. (McGonigal 2011 Jane McGonigal and NYPL present Find the Future: The Game)

Which curiously and non coincidentally, reminds of the mythological adventure of the hero. In the words of Joseph Campbell:

*A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.* (Campbell, 1949 p. 30)

McGonigal’s description on her game portrays a heroic journey that includes a duty, a task to make. There is power of decision and action; a sense that through the game, you transcend the limits of your everyday life and you come back to the worldly living after gaining knowledge. And by doing so, there is pleasure. The description provided by the scholar depicts as well the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation (from your everyday routine) followed by initiation (overthrown challenges) and return, fully empowered and sharing the knowledge acquired in your heroic journey.

**Key Concepts: Interactivity made audiences turned into actors involved in narratives, and, at the best of times, heroes of the story.**

**Rituals and games, oddly as it seems, are vanguards of digital storytelling.**

Accordingly, are we heroes and storytellers when we purchase an action figure or enjoy our coffee on a Star Wars mug? No, and here it is why.

### 5. Transmedia Branding & Transmedia Storytelling

As I stated on the beginning of this thesis, Transmedia and transmedial are equivocal terms. They accompany so many nouns that we get lost on the myriad of concepts: Transmedial interactions, transmedial worlds, transmedia storytelling, transmedia branding ... I provided a description and analysis of transmedial interactions and transmedia worlds at the beginning of this work. Now I would like to focus briefly on transmedia branding as a different practice to transmedia storytelling.

Geoffery A. Long proposes on his thesis *Transmedia Storytelling Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company,* the use of transmedia as an adjective attributing the following noun. I agree with him. “Transmedia” per se means simply “across a variety of media” and all the associations on its semantic galaxy are prone to be mixed up. For this reason, I feel necessary to note the differentiation between transmedia storytelling and transmedia branding.

TS cannot and must not be equalled to transmedia branding. In which sense? In the sense that transmedia storytelling refers to the realm of the narrative, and transmedia branding to the marketing arena. In other words, an action toy of Neo does not provide any significative contribution to the narrative of The Matrix saga, so it cannot be regarded as a transmedia storytelling development. Instead, this Neo-doll is merchandising; a product resulting from the transmedial branding of a franchise called The Matrix.

Hence, and connecting with section 1.1. What is not Transmedia, the transmedial exploitation of a branded property is not and must not be confused with TS.
6. Transmedia Storytelling & The Art of World Building.

Having set forth the distinction in nature of the two practices, I will concentrate on the analysis of TS.

Transmedia storytelling is the art of world making. To fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience. (Jenkins, 2006 p. 102)

The narrative characteristic to TS that Henry Jenkins describes is a disjointed, non-linear one. Filmic narratives before The Matrix and TS were not alien to disruptive narratives. Can you recall how Quentin Tarantino shocked you with movies like *Pulp Fiction* or *Kill Bill* due to their unconventional pastiche style? He presented us an out-of-order collection of episodes or chapters within the same film; way far to the narrative of most conventionally structured films.

Transmedia storytelling is by no means different to the disjointed structure presented in Tarantino movies, but it is got some additions. Recognizing and analyzing those additions are the subject of these last chapters.

So basically, those “integral elements of a fiction dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels to create a unified and coordinated entertainment experience”, constitute chapters or episodes that portray a particular fictional world and deepen our knowledge, emotional engagement and immersion within such world.

In the words of a scriptwriter appearing in *Convergence Culture*:

*When I first started, you would a pitch a story because without a good story you didn’t really have a film. Later, once sequels started to take off, you pitched a character because a good character could support multiple stories. And now, you pitch a world because a world can support multiple characters and multiple stories across multiple media.* (Jenkins, 2006 p. 114)

Henry Jenkins offers an extensive treatment of The Matrix franchise on his work *Collective Intelligence* presenting the work of the Wachowsky brothers as a paradigmatic case of Transmedia Storytelling. The Matrix world began with the movie and it was further expanded through the production of the Animatrix (a collection of nine animated short movies), a collection of graphic novels, two other movies (The Matrix Reloaded and The Matrix...
Revolutions) and three games (Enter the Matrix, The Matrix online and The Matrix: the Path of Neo). Merchandising a successful franchise is not a new phenomenon. But the Wachowsky brother did more than marketizing their blockbuster movie. Larry and Andy had been comic writers and declare themselves game players. What they did, instead of redundantly adapting the movie to different media, is to utilize those different media to develop further their primary story. Thus, all those secondary media (games, comics, animation short movies) represent episodic chapters that push forward the action.

As Jenkins note:

*The Wachowski brothers played the transmedia game very well, putting out the original film first to stimulate interest, offering up a few Web comics to sustain the hard-core fan's hunger for more information, launching the anime in anticipation of the second film, releasing the computer game alongside it to surf the publicity, bringing the whole cycle to a conclusion with The Matrix Revolutions, and then turning the whole mythology over to the players of the massively multiplayer online game. Each step along the way built on what has come before, while offering new points of entry.* (Jenkins, 2006 p. 95)

The upside and mastery of this kind of transmedia planning is I believe:

- The effective creation of transmedia worlds that feature the same mythos, topos and ethos (that shared mental image of the “worldness”).
- None of the transmedia worlds, meaning that secondary material, fall into redundancy. Neither the games, nor the animation short movies, nor the comics are adaptations of the movies. Moreover, all these “episodes”, although they can be enjoyed individually, are interlinked with each other in “The Matrix experience” providing “distinctive and valuable information.”

The downside of utilizing this secondary media and turn them into “units with own meaning” is that, as Jenkins and the very Keanu Reeves pointed out, you had to “do your homework.” To fully understand and immerse yourself on The Matrix world, you had to go through all the “episodes” or components of the franchise. If you hadn’t watched The Animatrix, you wouldn’t know why the machines rose against humanity. Moreover, you wouldn’t know that Jue collapsed dead after posting a warning letter to Zion; this letter explained that an army of Sentinels was tunneling towards Zion and would reach it within 72 hours. Likewise, if you hadn’t played the game Enter The Matrix, you wouldn’t be able to retrieve such letter and handle it to captain Niobe.

To finish with this section I will point out the fact that the story of The Matrix movies is the story of Neo; his rising and victory against the machines, death and a suggested resurrection exemplifies the classical cycle of the hero’s journey that Joseph Campbell spoke about, also seasoned with messianic connotations.

But on the other hand, Long assets that if we attend the story of The Matrix franchise, with all its additional material and installments, it is “...the story of the fall of humanity, the rise of the machines, and their continual conflict.” (Long, 2000 p. 48). Basically, I agree with this description, but I will refine it slightly: It is the story of the fall of humanity, the rise of the machines, their unbalanced conflict and, finally a truce between the factions (at least a temporary one).
Thus, the optimal building of all those components of the franchise, which are in fact, transmedia worlds, allowed us to enjoy them separately. But, and it is a big BUT, to fully comprehend and enjoy The Matrix experience, you could not just lay off on your couch and watch the movies. Instead, you had to participate actively by immersing yourself in the experience to enact the plot and make the story go on.

Next, I will address both narrative techniques and participation of human agents in TS.

7. Narrative Grammar of Transmedia Storytelling

Marie-Laure Ryan predicates in her book Narrative across Media that:

*A complete grammar of language comprises three elements: semantics, syntax and pragmatics; syntax becomes the study of discourse, or narrative techniques; and pragmatics becomes the study of the uses of storytelling and of the mode of participation of human agents in the narrative performance. (Ryan, 2004 p. 354)*

This section is devoted to the syntax and the pragmatics of transmedia storytelling. I will begin with the Syntax of TS.

7.1. Syntax of Transmedia Storytelling

Attending the definition of Henry Jenkins that I provided at the beginning of the present work, TS is a process in which integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels. That is, TS presents a disrupted, non-linear narrative soaking through a variety of digital and/or non-digital media channels.

Are non-linear narratives TS custom? As noted before, Tarantino offered good examples from the filming industry that it is not the case. What about literature? I will answer posing you with a question: Have you ever read Choose your Own Adventure books? I have, as a kid. I can safely say now that it was the first interactive experience towards a narrative I ever had. By just going back to a certain page and choosing another possibility, I was re-designing and changing the fate of my favorite character and thus, affecting the resolution of the story. And following McGonigall’s thread, that is a really empowering feeling for a kid in the pre-internet era.

Choose your Own Adventure books were marketed as children product consumption, but there are no scarce examples of nonlinear narratives in literature. Rayuela by Julio Cortázar, can be read both linearly and non-linearly. The Ulysses of James Joyce is perhaps the most singular case of non-linear storytelling before the digital era. Ulysses is a multi sensorial narrative where the author reveals poetically the cognitive process of the individual. Moreover, Joyce is regarded by media scholars as the precursor of hypertext and a good number of websites are dedicated to “decipher” the images, auditory stimulus and associations reflected on his volume. The best I found on the Net? A work in progress by Amanda Visconti, shown below:
In chapter 3, I noted the interactivity and non-linearity of ARGs, and its intimate structural and ontological connection to rituals and the monomyth. These ARGs, or participatory dramas, are fundamentally interactive narratives that use the real world as a platform and spread information across a variety of media to deliver a story. This story may be altered by the participants’ ideas or actions, as we saw when analyzing the Collective Intelligence phenomenon in section 2.1. ARGs are truly a genre of Transmedia Storytelling.

So the question now is: How this nonlinear narrative can be sustained while attracting users to the discourse? The answer is by using the two following techniques:

1. **Negative Capability**
2. **Migratory Cues**

What is then negative capability? The poet John Keats used it for the first (and curiously last) time on a letter to his brothers. In his words: “... I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Keats, 1817, letter excerpt).

Long describes this technique on his thesis as: ... “the art of building strategic gaps into a narrative to evoke a delicious sense of ‘uncertainty, Mystery, or doubt’ in the audience.” (Long, 53). The function of the user is to fill those gaps using her imagination. Some relevant cases in which negative capability is used are as follows:

- In the book *Coraline*, by Neil Gaiman, it is stated that there can be only one key that opens the door to the world of “the other mother”
- George Lucas made a mastery use of negative capability by starting his saga *Star Wars* *in media res*. That is, we know that there was a galactic republic before the Empire and we know that before Darth Vader, there was a jedi called Anakin Skywalker. But the director doesn’t provide information of the events that resulted on the story disclosed in Episode IV, leaving the possible origins and plots open to our imagination.
- Widely used in Horror movies (the conscious delay to show the monster by directors).
- In fairness, we use negative capability all the time. Let’s say you are in a country -old house, it’s pitch dark out there, and ... in the stillness of the night you hear noises; are those noises product of country mouses scratching the floor with their little paws? or is it a
psychopath fan of One flew over the cuckoos nest, trying to find a way in? Your imagination fills the gaps.

**Migratory Cues** are defined by Marc Ruppel as “a signal towards another medium - the means through which various narrative paths are marked by an author and located by a user through activation patterns” (Long, 2007 p.42). He sets as example of migratory cue the letter delivered by Jue in The Last Flight of Osiris.
The second installment of The Matrix, The Matrix Reloaded, opened up with the aforementioned letter warning Zion of the coming peril. Ruppel adduces that this letter is directed to the audience as a hint to look for its origin in Animatrix and Enter the Matrix. But the reality is that, at that time, the audience that were used to consume just movies, would hardly look back in search for the source of that letter. On the contrary they would likely fill the “gap” of that “sudden-coming out of nowhere” letter using their imagination, that is, thanks to negative capability.
Probably a good and according marketing campaign would have helped to “bridge” those gaps in between the episodes of The Matrix franchise, but apparently, there wasn’t such campaign. And this fact leads us to two clear conclusions: The first one is that there are different entry points to “enter” a transmedia franchise, like The Matrix, and not everyone will be up to join all of them. And second, if the movie industry back at the end of the 90’s wasn’t quite ready for a transmedia franchise, the industry proved to be much less ready to brand effectively The Matrix.

Truth to be told, the best exemplar cases I have found of migratory cues come from the ARGs realm. For instance, the use of t-shirt and USB flash drives in the Year Zero campaign, the ARG created to promote the album Year Zero of the band Nine Inch Nails.
It all started on the first concert of their european tour in Portugal. One fan observed that in the T-shirt he had purchased, several letters were boldfaced. Putting them together, the boldfaced letters spelled “Imtryingtobelieve”. He rapidly posted his t-shirt with the discovery in the fan website of the band. And when those fans typed the strange sentence on the web, they found the site below.

![Figure 16. NIN European tour T-shirt](image1)

![Figure 17. IAmTryingToBelieve website](image2)

The site revealed the existence of a drug, called parepin, used by the government to sedate citizens. More material in the form of migratory cues, like different phone numbers and USB
flash drives, were provided along the campaign in order to expose a conspirator plot that evokes a North America besieged by terrorism, severely affected by climatic change and ruled by a Christian military dictatorship.

Therefore, users behave as “hunters and gatherers” as Jenkins appoints in Convergence Culture. However, is that all?

7.2. Pragmatics of Transmedia Storytelling: Heroes & Authors.

The pragmatics of a narrative is the study of mode of participation of the human agent in the narrative performance.

In the Marx brothers’ movie, Duck Soup, Mrs. Teasdale (Margaret Dumont), the most fervent supporter of Rufus Firefly (Groucho), the new dictator of the Freedonia Republic, says: “The future of Freedonia rests on you. Promise me you will follow in the footsteps of my husband.” (McCarey, 1933, 8 minute)

Firefly (Groucho) looks straight into the camera and in a conspiratorial wink to the audience, replies: “How do you like that? I haven't been on the job five minutes and already she's making advances to me” (McCarey, 1933, 8 minute)

Figure 18. Groucho Marx & Margaret Dupont in Duck Soup

No doubt that the long years of Marx Brothers in the vaudeville circuit earned them some lessons on how to engage with the audience and keep its interest fresh. I believe one of their master powers, not to mention their comic genius, is their ability to transfer to the screen that quick, witty and sardonic real-time communication with the audience.

There we are, that is the key, to communicate with the audience, the spectators, the ultimate addressee of all unity content. Nevertheless, addressing a question to a public that cannot respond, like in Duck Soup, is not enough on a crammed market, as the Guardian points out in section 2.1. The solution is to involve the audience on the co-creation of a narrative that transposes the individual to another reality, the transmedia franchise.

And as Henry Jenkins points out in his book, Convergence culture:

Pierre Lévy speculates about what kind of aesthetic works would respond to the demands of his knowledge cultures. First, he suggests that the “distinction between authors and readers, producers and spectators, creators and interpreters will blend to form a “circuit” (not quite a matrix) of expression, with each participant working to “sustain the activity” of the others. (Jenkins, 2003 p. 95)

In 1968, Roland de Barthes states in his work, The Death of the Author:
Barthes marks a distinction between writerly and readerly texts. Readerly texts are those whose meaning need not to be written or produced by the reader, and consequently offer little room for interpretation. These are the majority of texts we have in hands.

On the other hand, writerly texts do rely heavily on the user to make the reader not a consumer, but a producer of the text. Barthes also notes that examples of writerly texts are rare, if not impossible to find. A good strategy to make a book less readable and more writeable is, as Long makes note, to make more use of negative capability. That is, to leave gaps, mysteries open to the reader/viewer to fill the gap with their imagination. Moreover, with the purpose of striking a balance between my creation and the co-authors interpretation of the mystery-gap seed I planted on my creation, I would add the inclusion of migratory cues. If I leave a narrative gap open in one chapter of my TS development and direct the audience to the next chapter where the gap is being filled by me, the audience would just have to imagine what happened in between.

Thus, communication with the audience is widely used and mandatory, I would say, in Transmedia practices. An example, in his book The Producer’s Guide to Transmedia, Nuno Bernardo points out the two-way communication between the producers and viewers/fans of his interactive drama, Sofia’s Diary. He highlights the importance of imitating how people actually used and communicated on the internet. For instance, if Sofia found herself on a dilemma: comfort a friend or go out with her boyfriend, she would ask the audience by MSN, text and email. Then, the audience would write back their opinion. Which, in itself, it is a more writerly text.

Negative capabilities and migratory cues are in fact the two sides of the same coin, which is essential in TS: How to provide a tale interesting enough to the viewer/reader/storyteller, so that he is compelled to get back to the story for another enthralling tale.

There are even funny cases in which mistakes are used in a writerly approach. The campaign for the HBO series Game of Thrones provided a good example with Always support the bottom and letting the audience to tell the story. One of the fans who received the box with scents and scrolls and maps of Westeros didn’t content himself with mixing up scents and checking scrolls and went on for searching hidden clues. He found on one of the maps of Westeros a faint lettering whom he interpreted as a message, a migratory clue. It read ALWAYS SUPPORT THE BOTTOM. Fans started a speculative race to decipher the meaning of the sentence, whilst the creatives of Campfire, the agency in charge of the campaign, were mystified. It wasn’t a clue, and it had nothing to do with them. Finally, there was confirmation by the agency, that the sentence was in fact a printing mistake and not a real clue that would take you to another piece of the game. However, after so much thought and speculations by the fans, the latest decided not to let go “Always Support the Bottom”, and became the blog’s motto, a symbol of fan dedication.
As a result, Campfire incorporated the message into one of its puzzles and it was merchandised in the shape of T-shirts.

I have pointed out the capacity of users to be co-authors and influence the story and TS narratives. Still, what about heroes? TS enables to turn users into heroes? You have to deliver a letter to warn an entire population of the massive destruction of their city and way of life. It is of extreme importance, since an army of Sentinels is tunneling towards Zion and will reach it within 72 hours. Will you be able to do it? Apparently, if you are a player of the game Enter the Matrix, yes; you will warn the citizens of Zion of such peril, so that they can be eventually prepared for the attack.

The importance of playing Enter the Matrix doesn’t vest the merely fact that you play a game related to a franchise, in this case, The Matrix. It is the fact that by delivering such letter, you “enact” the second movie, The Matrix Reloaded, which starts with the reception of that communication. And in a deeper level, and following the logics of the story, you are the hero that alerts the residents of a specific society of a coming danger.

Another case study: The Truth about Marika. TTAM is a participatory drama produced by The Company P and Swedish Television (SVT). One part of TTAM is the weekly traditional drama that features the disappearance of Marika right before her wedding. The second part is the ARG which includes a TV debate focus on the disappearance of Maria, the “real character” behind Marika. This debate is possible thanks to the intervention of a friend of Maria, who accuses SVT of building a drama series out of the real event, the vanishing of her friend Maria.

During those debates, the audience was invited to participate on the search of the real Maria, whose vanishing would be connected to a large series of missing people in Sweden, and presumably, an organization called Ordo Serpentis could be the responsible for the disappearances.

The audience was turned effectively into heroes, searching in a detective style for clues to find a fictitious character named Maria. Some participants of the game didn’t even realized they were playing a game, and after confronting the reality there were all kinds of reactions:

The ever-believers, even after unfolding the fiction:
“If it had not been for the series and the collaboration with SVT I don’t think Maria would have come forward.” (Waern & Denward, 2009, p. 5)

The disappointed:
”In spite of the information at SVT’s homepage I do not think it was crystal clear that it was only a game. I was sceptical all along but several friends were sure it was real and will probably become very disappointed when they find out.” (Waern & Denward, 2009, p. )
“BLOODY DISGUSTING LIARS” (Waern & Denward, 2009, p. 5)

And the “it is only a game” players:
“I understood it as a game rule. If you join you have to pretend it is real to expand your game experience.” (Waern & Denward, 2009, p. 5)
“In the beginning I thought it was reality, so I got a bit shocked when these messages appeared but then I accepted it I guess” (Waern & Denward, 2009, p. 5)

8. Heroes & Authors? For Real?

No. Not quite. Sorry for the final twist, but you didn’t find a missing person called Maria, saved a city called Zion and your interactions in Sofia’s Diary were not meaningful enough to alter the main story of Sofia.

As Nuno Bernardo points out in his book, The Producer’s Guide To Transmedia:

*We found if you allow the audience power over the story they will get rid of your antagonist, solve all the major problems and erase all the drama. If the audience connects with your hero they will do everything to protect their hero and solve all their problems ... after a month, your hero will be wealthy, have the most romantic love-life in the world, best friends ... and nothing bad will ever, ever happen to them. Fortunately, we realised this early on and so created what in television terms is called the “A plot”. The “A plot”, or main story plot has to be controlled solely by the writers. Accordingly, the audience could not touch, interact with or in any way interfere with the “A plot”. What they could alter was the “B plot”, which contained all the minor episodic dilemmas that were contained in Sofia’s life.* (Bernardo, 2011 p.54)

The situation described above could be expressed graphically as follows:

![Figure 21. Graphic on the narrative levels on Sofia’s Diary](image)

Therefore, what is the mechanism that allow us to be heroes and authors on a TS system? It is more than a conscious suspension of disbelief. Moreover, it is more an acting “as if”, a
conscious belief that you have a determinant role within a narrative and thus, we have the illusion of control over the narrative and a sense of achievement.

The more a user gets emotional revenue out of the transmedia franchise, the more economical revenue the industry will get.

![Figure 22. User & Industry Revenues’ Chart](image)


The main purpose of this thesis is to analyze and clarify the role individuals play in transmedia narratives. I realized that to do so, it is needed a multidisciplinary approach, and I felt necessary to tap into disciplines like psychology, sociology, mythology and literary research. Since transmedia storytelling is a genre “between genres” and there is a good deal of interactive and digital weight on transmedia storytelling, I finally decided to call this approach that impregnates the whole thesis Humanistic - Geek.

The subtitle of the present work Transforming Users into Heroes and Authors to Build a Sustainable Universe, represents the goal I believe I achieved through this work: To prove transmedia narratives turn users into heroes and storytellers ... with a final twist. Moreover, in the last chapters, I pay special attention to how we are driven through that mare magnum of “broken” dramaturgical structure and different literary techniques used profusely in transmedia storytelling.

Nevertheless, during my research I found overwhelming the profusion of terminology related or analogous to transmedia. That is the reason why I decided to devote the first part of this thesis (Chapter 2), to the study of semantic adjacents of transmedia.

As mentioned before, the main purpose and research subject the present thesis deals with is the human role on transmedia storytelling. Previous to my research, I had identified intuitively how participants in transmedia storytelling acquire a sense of prominence. That the participant’s involvement on the narrative is pro-active and necessary. A very different condition to the couch potato image of viewers in front of a television set that dominated the previous decades.

I decided to look in depth at this switch, from passive consumer to pro-active actor. Why is this switch generated? How it emerges? Is it a spontaneous phenomenon? or rather the
product of old practices adapted to new technology? Can I identify the “right buttons” to arouse a user and glamour her into my story?

To answer these questions, I analyzed in depth the relationship of the user with the market. It was my goal to prove the rhythmical evolution of both individual and market as a human in Chapter 3. Through my research, I realized how in less than one hundred years, and specially since the emergence of the internet, users hold a better knowledge of the market and traditional marketing strategies and advertising are no longer effective. We demand a more “conversational” relationship with corporations. We are no longer passive consumers, but pro-active.

How do users get that more emotional revenue? by gaining attention and prominence, and transmedia storytelling used as a marketing tool can provide that sense of attention and prominence.

In Section 3.2, I point out that thanks to the internet and the rapid evolution of media ecology, passive consumers are turned into creators of our own content, and due to the adhesion of collective intelligence communities, in co-creators and possible storytellers.

All through Chapter 4, I provide three case studies of living action Role Playing (Darkon, I love bees and La Rompida de la Hora), analyzing them as rituals following a mythical structure. I note that interactivity makes audiences turn into actors involved in narratives, and, at the best of times, heroes of the story. And thus, rituals and games, oddly as it seems, are vanguards of digital storytelling.

Once I had set up the role of users within transmedia narratives, I devote Chapters 5 - 8 to the analysis of transmedia storytelling per se. First, I establish the distinction between transmedia storytelling and transmedia branding, to continue with the analysis of the transmedia storytelling: its capability of building narrative worlds and the “broken” narrative structure that sustains such world.

In order to conclude, I will say that transmedia storytelling is the product of the multimedia era and goes intimately linked to the figure of hero and co-author or storytellers. Our performance as if we were “heroes” and “co-authors” of a transmedia narrative enacts the system, by immersing ourselves in the story as active participants. Moreover, by engrossing fully the experience, we enjoy not just an entry point: a movie, a comic, a game, but the overall universe of the franchise.

And as pointed out previously, the more emotional revenue users get from companies, the more economical revenue the industry will get (Figure 22, Chapter 8). The emotional manipulation by marketing is still there, but unlike Bernays thought off, we are no longer libidinal individuals whose dangerous desires must be controlled and harnessed through massive consume. Nowadays, we are “heroes” and “storytellers” who contribute actively on the fabrication and thus, purchase of industry products.

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