

Indrek Ibrus / Carlos A. Scolari  
(eds.)

# Crossmedia Innovations

Texts, Markets, Institutions



PETER LANG

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# Introduction: Crossmedia innovation?

*Indrek Ibrus and Carlos A. Scolari*

## ‘Crossmedia’ emergence

Crossmedia phenomena are certainly not new in culture. Intertextuality is an essential mechanism for culture’s constitution, and especially for its change. Intertextuality or intersemioticity among forms of media content, as industriously nurtured by media industries, have been an established practice and a strategy for at least a century. However, the reflective discourses with regard to crossmedia or transmedia phenomena among both academics and industry practitioners appeared only about a decade ago in relation to the emerging ‘convergence culture’. In less than a decade these concepts have evolved from being almost cryptic passwords used by dedicated tribes of professionals and scholars to buzzing concepts of the contemporary media system.

What is crossmedia? Is it the same as transmedia? And what about transmedia storytelling? Since these definitions often evoke heated debate, it is important to settle how we use them in this book. According to popular knowledge, *crossmedia* is an intellectual property, service, story or experience that is distributed across multiple media platforms using a variety of media forms. Such distribution is mostly a strategic endeavour by media companies and hence we opt for mostly referring to *crossmedia strategies* here. In effect, crossmedia strategies result from what, in media economics, are known as ‘diversification strategies’ (Chan-Olmsted and Chang 2003, 2006) – that is, attempts by rights’ holders to creatively adapt their property for a variety of media platforms, in order to either obtain a higher margin from that property, or strengthen it via cross-promotion among platforms. In the era of networked media and user participation, such crossmedia strategies have, of course, evolved and become ever more complex. In contrast, *transmedia storytelling* is a technique of telling a single story across multiple platforms and formats including modern interactive technologies that in turn enable user participation and contributions to the story (Jenkins 2003). We could propose the following formula:

crossmedia + narrative = transmedia storytelling

Many crossmedia experiences do not include a narrative that connects the different content entities. At the same time, all transmedia storytelling experiences are crossmedia – in the sense that they are distributed across media platforms using a variety of media forms.

Beyond the semantic issues, media conglomerates have been, as suggested above, developing crossmedia strategies and creating transmedia content for more than a century. From Walt Disney to George Lucas, from *Star Trek* to *The Matrix*, crossmedia strategies have gradually become central to Hollywood business models. Equally, user-generated content is hardly unprecedented in the history of media: the first science fiction fan communities were established as far back as the 1930s. Therefore, given all this history, why now all the heightened attention, the buzzing discourse, and the emergence of new training courses, job titles, industry associations? Is there a reason to talk about crossmedia *emergence*? We suggest there is. The reasons might be trivial, but they are omnipresent. The digitization and development of networked infrastructures have changed the media ecosystem for good, such that media, as a system, is now simply more easily accessible for both producers and consumers. It has become easier to modify a text, remix it in collaboration with others, and distribute the new productions on the Web. Twenty years ago the production of audiovisual content was much harder and more costly. It required sophisticated and expensive technologies and the distribution was limited, depending on the will of the established media conglomerates, TV licence holders or specific telecoms operators. Today's cultural production is malleable, flexible and relatively easy to share.

At the same time the media ecosystem has incorporated many new 'species' with varying functionalities: the World Wide Web, in the first place, has emerged as a 'meta-medium', a huge incubator of new communication experiences, from homepages to social network sites, from blogs to video sharing on YouTube. Or the nascent 'species' of mobile communications with their affordances to (hyper)localize many of our media experiences and, as such, incorporating 'spatial poetics' into much modern crossmedia strategizing. Therefore, in other words, creating a crossmedia production in the 1940s (working with radio, cinema, comics and print media) is not the same as developing a crossmedia project today, in the era of media pluralization and participation.

The latter, of course, is itself a major transformation. That is, the emergence of participative audiences – the 'prosumers' (Tofler 1980; Tapscott and Williams 2006). Much has been said about the logics of this emergence, about the motivations that drive or the limits that hinder participa-



tion and co-creation (Cammaerts and Carpentier 2007; Bruns 2008), but we should also recognize the empowerment that modern citizens and consumers experience: technically, any user may manipulate a text, create a new one and distribute it in a global environment. The remix and mashup cultures are central to the productive logics of crossmedia. Related to this have been the evolving 'horizons of expectations' (Jauss 1982) among media audiences. One of us has suggested before (Scolari 2008) that contemporary cultural production could be seen as being more complex than its traditional counterpart. If, as Steven Johnson puts it in *Everything Bad Is Good for You* (2005), watching TV makes us gradually smarter, participating in a crossmedia experience may contribute to transforming us into increasingly highly-skilled textual gatherers in the media environment. New audiences can be expected to be able to effectively reconstruct multipart narrative worlds and to negotiate multifaceted interpretative contracts with complex textual structures. Our grandfathers would never have understood *Lost*, but we do, and we ask for more. In other words, crossmedia emergence has been deriving from, but is also facilitating, changing expectations among audiences.

Similar evolutionary interdependency characterizes also the relationship between crossmedia emergence and industry structuring. On the one hand it could be suggested that textual dispersion is conditioned by the above-described diversification strategies on the part of dominant players in the oligopolistic media markets who would then further strengthen their position. On the other hand, the direct relationship between audiences and content producers that has been enabled by the Internet, together with generally higher degrees of freedom of choice for audiences, is seen to facilitate media pluralism and to empower smaller players. Since the jury is out when it comes to assessing which agents are eventually empowered by crossmedia phenomena, this aspect is therefore discussed in the several chapters in this book. What matters for now, however, is that the related discussions have started on several 'levels' and 'sites' in the industry and in academia, a process that is expected to contribute to the initial codification of both the practices of production as well as the reflective meta-discourse. The steps towards the codification of practices, together with professional identities, include the new Hollywood credit title: the *transmedia producer*. According to the Producers Guild of America, the transmedia producer is responsible "...for a project's long-term planning, development, production, and maintenance of narrative continuity across multiple platforms, and creation of original storylines for new platforms". Similar job descriptions are also emerging elsewhere, facilitated by the development of new study

programmes in television and film schools, or in media studies institutes across much of the world. In these same institutions of academic training, the development of meta-languages has also been advancing. After Jenkins' early writings on transmedia storytelling, which activated not only the industry but also many of his academic colleagues, there has been an explosion of papers, conferences and round tables, and several insightful monographs have hit the shelves of academic bookstores. Works like *Convergence Culture* (Jenkins 2006), *Third Person. Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives* (Harrigan & Wardrip-Fruin 2009) or *Transmedia Television* (Evans 2011), among many others, have enhanced our comprehension of crossmedia phenomena. We do hope that this volume will contribute to this list.

## Crossmedia innovations?

Based on the above, we should take note that crossmedia has *emerged*, both as a practice and as a discourse. Its emergence has been conditioned by a variety of historically contextual factors, but this emergence itself has all the potential to contribute to the further shaping and evolution of our media systems. The question posed by this book is, how does it take place? How is innovation happening in this field? As the title of the book suggests, what we are aiming to discuss here is not simply the nature of crossmedia phenomena and their presentation in our media environments. Instead, we are interested in the dynamics of these phenomena – if they disrupt the media systems, then what agents are behind this emergence, and what are the relevant innovation processes like? In other words, we aim to discuss how the evolution of media's (inter-)textual forms could be understood as interdependent from the market dynamics and from institutional evolution in the media domain. We aim to investigate and articulate how neither 'crossmedia', nor the forms of transmedia storytelling, can be conceived as only textual phenomena, but exist also as economic and social phenomena – i.e. they are conditioned by a very specific, but complex and historically circumstantial mesh of forces such as industry power struggles, market inertia, audience empowerment, interpretative continuities among various engaged 'speech communities', etc.

To start addressing such a multifaceted nature of crossmedia emergence, we attempt to investigate here how 'innovation' is defined from the perspectives of the academic meta-languages that 'cover' these interdependent domains. This means we aim to compare how, within interpretative

domains such as cultural semiotics, evolutionary economics, innovation studies or 'cultural science', the innovation phenomena tend to be conceptualized and, then, to discuss if the convergent domain allows also for the convergence of disciplinary academic metalanguages.

To start conceptualizing 'textual innovations' in the digital media era we should first look towards academic domains, such as digital rhetorics and media archaeology, in order to provide some useful analytic tools. Similarly to the positions of Juri Lotman (1990, 2009) on the dynamical evolution of culture and, indeed, some of those on evolutionary innovation theory (see Schumpeter 1939; Freeman and Louçã 2001), Huhtamo (1994) has argued that the media does not only evolve cyclically, but these apparently cyclical phenomena that disappear and reappear over and over again in media history, seeming to transcend specific historical contexts, are not random, produced indigenously by conglomerations of specific circumstances. Instead, he claims, all these cases 'contain' certain commonplace elements or cultural motives which have been encountered in earlier cultural processes. He proposed that such motives could usefully be treated as *topoi* – referring to classical rhetoric and Quintilianus, according to whom the *topoi* were 'storehouses of trains of thought' (*argumentorum sedes*), systematically organized formulae serving a practical purpose in composing orations. These *topoi* can be considered as formulae that make up the 'building blocks' of cultural traditions.

Within the evolving domain of 'digital rhetorics', this idea of rhetorical *topoi* as building blocks for new generations of culture has evolved into a form of innovation strategy for new media. The context for such strategies are ideas such as *bricolage* as articulated by Levi-Strauss (1966), de Certeau (1984) or Turkle and Papert (1992) or Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001: 113) who conceptualized culture as a storehouse of semiotic resources, where new media designers can shop to generate new forms of media. In this context, Liestøl (2003) has proposed his synthetic-analytic approach that focuses on a pragmatic strategy for generating new textual forms by creatively repurposing and combining the existing *topoi*. In a similar vein, Lotman's theory of cultural dynamics and innovation has focused, first, on the role of the recombinant use of modally different rhetorical tropes to create new, principally innovative texts, and second, and how, on a more meta-level of culture, similar dynamics could condition the emergence of new genres and 'creolized' cultural domains. Innovation, as Lotman (1990: 137) contends, happens when the texts of one genre invade and restructure the space of another genre, while all the remixed genres "...preserve a memory of their other systems of encoding". Such intertextual 'memory' not only enables

interpreters to make sense of the new convergent genre, but also constitutes a mechanism for creating new, meaningfully connected intermedia wholes. This suggests that, given their intermedia structures, crossmedia or transmedia phenomena could be understood as being quintessentially innovative. As is demonstrated in Chapter 1 by Torop and Saldre, boundary crossing – translating culture's elements across its existing systemic boundaries – could be understood as the core mechanism for how innovations happen in a culture in terms of Lotman. And crossmedia, of course, is all about such boundary crossing – about translations from one modality or genre to another, about the adaptation of an 'intellectual property' for different media, about developing both semantic continuities as well as meaningful discontinuities among them. One of us (Scolari 2009: 587) has previously suggested that crossmedia and transmedia phenomena could be understood as being among the most important sources of cultural complexity of our era. But it is also more than that – they are important sources of innovation, not only for the institutions executing the related strategies, but for our late modern cultures in general.

Having established the relationship between crossmedia phenomena and cultural innovation in general, we should also ask for their potential economic and social determinants as well as their outcomes. The fragmentation of media offerings (that is, the divergence in media forms) takes place, by and large, in parallel with the fragmentation of media audiences among the variety of media platforms and channels. The latter in turn could be understood to result from autonomous innovations on the part of a variety of technology vendors or telecommunications operators. However, as argued above, what it results in are 'diversification strategies' that derive from the economies of scope logic – i.e. the attempts to generate higher margins by repackaging and adapting an intellectual property or a franchise for multiple use circumstances (territories, channels, platforms, 'windows', etc.) and to gain from the related opportunities for cross-promotion among the diversified outputs. However, not only are such crossmedia strategies very difficult to execute effectively as well as to control (Kolo and Vogt 2003), but it is also increasingly apparent that 'diversification' rarely happens one-sidedly these days – as initiated and controlled by a production company or by the holder of an intellectual property. Instead, it might be the various groupings of more or less skilled users who take the content to new contexts, translate, adapt and modify it. This recognition might be trivial, but it is important for our conceptualization of 'crossmedia innovations'. For the question arises: what or who innovates?

In the Schumpeterian ‘market first’ tradition of evolutionary economics, it is perceived, of course, that the core source of innovations is the ‘creative entrepreneur’ and his/her institutional frame, the producing firm. As has also often been demonstrated within innovation studies (Tether et al., 1997; Tether 1998), the stronger and bigger the firm, the more it has resources to systematically invest and innovate – resulting in notably more innovations being generated by sizable companies. However, as has been repeatedly demonstrated by Von Hippel and his colleagues (Von Hippel 2005; Baldwin and Von Hippel 2009), there are areas in the economy, including media and creative industries, where alternative sources of innovation emerge. Von Hippel and Baldwin have described 3 different sources of innovation with regard to digital economies. First is the traditional ‘producer innovation’ in which the firm anticipates profiting from the introduction of its innovative design to users. If sales of the innovative design are encouraging, the firm is expected to continue to have enough resources to continue improving the design. In this case the firm can be assumed to be the foremost expert with regard to the design, and the innovation process incorporated by the firm can be thought of as being the most effective. But Von Hippel and Baldwin demonstrate that it is the historically circumstantial conditions in the techno-economic environment that have conditioned the prevalence of producer innovation. As the costs of product design and communication among potential participants in the design process have, through most of history, been relatively high, it has generally been the established firms that have had sufficient resources for the related investment. However, these costs have been decreasing in the last couple of decades and this has facilitated the growing importance of two alternative sources of innovation: ‘user innovations’ and ‘community innovations’. The first of these refers to situations where innovation results from ‘expert users’ (individuals or enterprises) tinkering with existing designs and products, and coming up with appropriate, incrementally improved designs. As the design costs in the media sphere have dropped, this has invited an increasing number of amateurs and semi-professionals to participate in such appropriation activities that potentially have led, in aggregate, to radically different ways in which crossmedia has happened and has been innovated. The various agents who have participated in the above-described diversification, translation and adaptation activities are often multitudinous and, as such, outside the control of the holder of the particular intellectual property involved.

The latter aspect explains the emergence of forms of ‘community innovation’ or ‘open collaborative innovation’. In this case, enabled by low com-

munications costs, non-rival contributors share their design efforts openly with everybody. Without going into the motivations of those who are willing to share freely, it is important to briefly emphasize that there are perceived to be a variety of rewards for such agents – starting with enhanced reputation and social capital and ending with the potential for economies of scope-type synergy effects, including ‘free labour’ (Terranova 2004) input. The latter refers to the possibility that, on the micro level, there are feasible business models emerging which are built on ‘community innovation’ dynamics.

However, on the macro level, this should make us reconsider some of our existing understandings with regard to how value is created in the creative industries. Can we imagine a ‘creative economy’ not based on an ‘expert pipeline’ model of copyright-protected creativity, but on the participation of the *whole population* as posited by John Hartley (2010)? Hartley has described the evolution of the conceptualizations of creative industries from the early phase when focus is on the clusters of creative companies that together produce creative works in the form of *outputs*. The second phase in the evolution of conceptualizations has been the hybrid system of creative services – that is, the creative companies or professionals providing value-add *inputs* to the rest of the economy, making the whole economy ‘creative’. But only with the third phase of such conceptualizations have both governments as well as academic critics started to move away from an understanding that it is only the companies or professionals that are the sources of change in this sphere. For the third type of conceptualizations the central constituents are all citizens as well as enterprises (with varying functions and sizes) who act as agents, and the ‘open innovation network’ they constitute in aggregate. According to this view, the central structuring concept for modern creative industries is the ‘network’ – to the extent that Potts, Cunningham, Hartley and Ormerod (2008) have suggested a new market-based definition for creative industries – ‘social network markets’. The concept is based on the simple fact that the value of creative ‘products’ is mostly undetermined, and therefore it is recommendations by friends and trustees, in effect ‘social networks’, that mostly condition consumption decisions. However, as facilitated by the physical infrastructures of the Internet, these social networks increasingly and visibly include all of society to the full. As these networks recommend they also filter, and as they adapt or modify, they eventually innovate. They facilitate innovation by all, and filter out what is valuable (and what should be further innovated). As such, the social network markets emerge as one of the main innovation coordination mechanisms of the post-industrial era (Potts et al., 2008).

And it is in the case of convergent crossmedia phenomena that the ‘social network markets’ as the core source of dynamics become most visible.

Relatedly, the aim of this book is to discuss how ‘crossmedia innovations’ are conditioned by the dynamics that exist in modern social network markets. Throughout the three sections of this book we look at what conditions the emergence of new textual forms, what the market dynamics are like, what happens to institutional forms of media production and how the related knowledge accumulation takes place – how are the appropriated educational practices codified and institutionalized. And, of course, whether or not all these dynamics can be interpreted as being interdependent.

## Context

The need for this book emerged within the framework of the First Motion initiative – a consortium of national and regional film funds, clusters, incubators and educational institutions from all around the Baltic Sea. In 2008, these institutions came together to cooperate in learning how to best facilitate the newly emergent crossmedia and transmedia phenomena. In the years that followed, these institutions, supported by the EU Interreg programme, co-produced many guidelines for facilitating ‘crossmedia clusters’ or working in a new and uncertain environment when it comes to intellectual property law and its applications. In addition, however, the consortium has also funded crossmedia projects by small production companies from the participating countries and, as described in Chapter 12 by Indrek Ibrus, has learned a great deal about how to fund and facilitate such production. One of the ways to facilitate these productions has been for the Tallinn University Baltic Film and Media School in Estonia to run several ‘crossmedia labs’. These labs have focused on educating the new ‘transmedia producers’ and have also established grounds for the new Crossmedia Production MA programme to be developed by the same institution. The labs and the new study programme have also become the foundation for an evolving network of European crossmedia/transmedia educators in which the constituting idea for this book was also devised. That is: to integrate the insights deriving from a variety of disciplines – from semiotics, media ecology, cultural studies, media management, political economy of media and communications, etc.

## Structure

Although the objective of the book is to encourage multidisciplinary analysis, it is still structured in terms of the various perspectives with regard to change in the media – first textual innovations, then economic innovations and lastly institutional/organizational innovations. Although, as we are aiming to demonstrate, despite the structure-creating distinctions, the disciplinary analyses are cross-fertilized between the academic fields.

In fact, the first section of the book on textual innovations opens with the analysis of such cross-fertilization – i.e. how translations/adaptations of texts among media, genres and texts affect new ‘transmedia spaces’ as articulated by **Torop and Saldre**. In the chapter that follows, **Scolari** demonstrates how, as such translations take place, the resulting ‘spaces’ can sometimes be enlarged, but sometimes they may shrink. The adapted narratives could get smaller and tighter – a realization that accords with Lotman’s thesis (see Schönle and Shine, 2006: 24–28) on the parallel centrifugal and centripetal forces in culture. From there, **Harvey** continues with an analysis on the disconnections and disharmonies that might exist within these textual spaces, and the ways in which the content producers, together with fans, might negotiate and ‘fix’ these occasional inconsistencies within transmedia narratives that tend to result from the autonomous operations of various industry factions.

**Atkinson** discusses the inherent richness of such textual spaces from a different angle – she asks how the emergence of mobile camera aesthetics in contemporary culture has affected the poetics of film, how the inclusion and adaptation of ‘more real’ modalities of ‘prosumption cultures’ into professional audiovisual storytelling have shaped the evolution of filmic forms of culture. The chapter by **Belsunces Gonçalves**, in turn, analyzes the textual consistency of a specific TV-centred transmedia production *Fringe*. The chapter focuses on the question of the extent to which the innovative form is derived from the practices and expectations of its audiences, and realizes that the relationship is complex – audience support enables production companies to experiment, but the companies take care not to invest in ambitious and complex transmedia projects until the audience is recognized to be generally aware and willing to actively explore the ‘transmedia space’. The ‘textual innovations’ section ends with a chapter by **Berger and Woodfall** that discusses the challenge that the uncertain and constantly innovated ‘convergence culture’ presents to the education institutions teaching media practice. Their chapter calls for a new peda-



gogy which allows for a position whereby crossmedia events are not seen as an array of loosely connected and interrelated texts, which are examined and taught within now outmoded academic silos, but as a type of ‘digital heteroglossia’, where different media are seen as ‘utterances’. They argue that, as new digital forms of media arrive, older forms become ‘remediated’ (within them) and media history is flattened out – all media can be arrayed on a spectrum incorporating varying stable and unstable situated ‘utterances’. Berger and Woodfall argue that it is the dialogic dynamics between such utterances that should be of concern to all of those involved in media education. They propose a new pedagogic strategy that is focused less on individual media, and more on the dynamics among stories, audience agency and collaborative practices.

The section on the economic aspects of crossmedia innovation starts with an important discussion on the exploitation of users’ input by the media industries. In the case of ‘economic innovations’, perhaps one of the central questions is how, by whom and in what circumstances is value created, and how is it subsequently distributed? **Rodriguez-Amat** and **Sarikakis** approach this question from the political economy perspective, analyze in detail several crossmedia productions, and posit ultimately that, although the prosumer position could be perceived as being empowering for the ‘independent authors’, still the platform providers or institutional content providers tend to use legal schemes that openly exploit the contributing authors. However, in the chapter that follows, **Bolin** offers a slightly contrasting position, and proposes that the activities of media users are acts of ‘wilful exploitation’ and, relatedly, the phenomenon of transmedia storytelling is rightfully endorsed by users and producers alike, since both parties may feel empowered, and gain from the processes of ‘productive consumption’.

In the next few chapters that follow in this section, the related questions of value creation are approached from the perspective of a more pragmatic tradition of media management analysis. Firstly, **Colapinto** and **Benecchi** analyze what it means for major film companies to utilize the various methods of ‘connected marketing’ in an era of networked consumption and audience empowerment. **Wiklund** et al. present a case study “The Mill Sessions” – a recent Finnish transmedia production. Their chapter discusses the transmedia-specific particularities of innovation management: how to bring a transmedia production to the market considering all the conditioning relationships that might affect the success of the endeavour – i.e. audience expectations, industry relationships, platform affordances, etc. **Ellingsen**, in turn, offers a detailed overview of the emergence and rapid

ongoing evolution of *webseries* as a specific instance of the contemporary 'convergence culture'.

The third section of the book focuses on institutional innovations and examines the ways in which the practices and organizational settings of media content production are innovated. Therein it discusses both the micro and the macro aspects. It starts out with two chapters discussing how either the micro-sized independent producers meet the challenges of multiplatform production, or what dynamics are inherent to new collaborative film-production platforms. The first of these chapters by **Ibrus** discusses methods to interpret 'media innovations', and then applies the suggested analytic framework to interpret the innovations that have resulted from the activities of several micro-sized production companies in the Baltic Sea region. Ibrus demonstrates the paradoxical nature of such innovation processes and their related challenges: on the one hand, the ability to experiment with hybrid forms and to output content to multiple platforms was experienced as empowering by the micro-companies studied, but on the other hand, there are new insecurities for such companies that make them seek quicker conventionalization of the new field, standardization of practices, and role divisions in the production process. The chapter by **Kouts** in turn discusses a new form of independent film production as enabled by the Internet – initiatives of collaborative filmmaking on new dedicated platforms. Her chapter demonstrates the tension inherent in such productions and platforms – although the associated claim is a total collective production experience, a form of 'democratized innovation' in terms of Von Hippel, still a certain form of hierarchical management is sooner or later installed for such productions – a phenomenon characterizing the nature of a modern 'hybrid economy' (Lessig 2008).

The last three chapters discuss organizational reforms within larger media institutions, with special focus on the production of journalistic content for multiple platforms. The topic is opened by **García-Avilés** whose chapter analyzes how the varying interrelationships between cross-media news operations and journalists may condition innovations. His chapter provides a framework of newsroom change, and demonstrates what tend to be the related challenges to journalists and media managers alike. **Franquet i Calvet** and **Villa Montoya** in turn compare the leading Danish broadcaster with its Catalan counterpart in order to identify and describe the features that define the transformation of European public broadcasters in smaller regions. Their chapter analyzes in detail the range of crossmedia content that these institutions have, and what appear to be their specific methods for driving the expansion of television content on

new platforms. The authors discuss how these new methods of programming have enhanced the value of the content or services, and whether or not these public service broadcasters could arrive at a model of sustainability that would protect them from marginalization. Lastly, in his chapter, **Erdal** asks whether there are any significant differences between print and broadcasting organizations in terms of utilizing the features of the web. Building on Altheide and Snow's (1979) concept of 'media logic', the chapter investigates how easy is it for institutions with either print or broadcast origins to adopt what may be called 'web logic'. Erdal's analysis shows that the origin of each newsroom plays a far less important role in this matter than the hierarchical status of online news within the organization.

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# **1 Crossmedia innovations: Textual**





# Transmedia space<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

The disciplines that have taken part in the explosion of research into transmedia range from linguistic and pedagogic to cultural, social and economic sciences, and to media and narrative studies. Accordingly, the conceptualizations of transmediality itself vary significantly. Transmedia in the broadest sense constitutes the communication of information across<sup>2</sup> more than one medium or sign system. The framework in which it has been studied most prominently is transmedia storytelling: communicating a story using the medium-specific devices and narrative potential of several media. Whether or not the sequence of reading or consuming the story should be predetermined for the reader; whether the project should be ‘natively’ transmedial or could be developed into such after initial success in a single medium; whether the reformation should be done by the initial or another (group of) author(s); whether or not adaptations and fan art qualify; whether it all started with *The Matrix*, *Star Wars*, *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, the *Bible* or the *Bhagavad Gita*, and innumerable other questions about the nature of transmedia are answered differently by different perspectives.

One of the reasons why studying transmedia is exciting albeit complicated is its apparent novelty, not only in the academic discourse but transmedia storytelling is itself emerging as a consistent communicative strategy. Practitioners struggle with theoreticians in defining the limits and scope of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, certain concurrent aspects in the discourse as a whole can be located, and one of them is explaining transmedial phenomena in spatial terms. In other words, cognitive spatiality is an implicit character of most of the descriptions of transmedia storytelling proposed so far.

We frequently meet terms and phrases such as ‘universe’ and ‘world’ (Klastrup and Tosca 2004; Long 2007; Scolari 2009; Evans 2011), ‘environ-

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2 Hence the parallel term ‘crossmedia’ (See for example Dena 2009, Jenkins 2011).

ment' (Dena 2009; Herman 2011), 'networked narrative environments' (Zapp 2004), 'platforms' (Jenkins 2003, 2006)<sup>3</sup>, 'sites' (as 'cross-sited narratives' in Ruppel 2009), 'outlets' (Evans 2008), '360 degree content' (Thompson 2006), 'traversing the transmedia landscape' (Lemke 2009; Perryman 2008), 'migratory cues' and 'story bridges' (Ruppel 2009), 'maps' (Long 2007) and several others suggesting both width, depth and the immersive nature of transmediality. Inseparable from the discourse are also prefixes – trans-, (a)cross- and inter-<sup>4</sup> – that likewise suggest cognitively spatial relations. Consequently, stories which are 'so large that [they] cannot be contained within a single medium' (Jenkins 2006: 95) are either 'distributed' by author(s) or 'travel' by themselves, while audiences 'follow' them, and any given piece of narrative or storyline serves as a 'window'/'door'/'portal'/'gate'/'access point' for entering the whole. Jeff Gomez, one of the leading figures among the practitioners of transmedia storytelling, has also proposed 8 defining characteristics of transmedia product<sup>5</sup>, all of which implicitly involve aspects of spatiality. The above is first and foremost a heterogeneous field of metaphors which, at times, refer to the overarching story told and, at others, to the media of telling it<sup>6</sup>.

Recognizing the complexity of the notion of space, we still argue for it to offer a conceptual basis for researching both textual and medial aspects of transmediality. In addition, describing transmedia storytelling in spatial terms could facilitate the teaching of its underlying mechanisms. In what follows, we are seeking to contribute to the discussion in the field by first conceptualizing the textual aspects of transmedia narratives, which pertain to the narratological category of storyworlds as well as to spatial understanding of text, which is inherent in the field of the semiotics of culture. This is followed by the spatial aspects of media, which include influences of medium on mediation and meaning along with transfers between different forms of mediation. Space of medium as well as intermedia and transmedia space are operative notions for a deeper understanding of tex-

3 See also Bordwell (2009) *Now leaving from platform I*: <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2009/08/19/now-leaving-from-platform-1/>.

4 "Transmedia storytelling can also be seen as what literary critic Julia Kristeva calls intertextuality writ large" (Long 2007: 10).

5 The widely discussed list of these characters can be found on the blog of the Producers Guild of America's New Media Council: [http://pganmc.blogspot.com/2007\\_10\\_02\\_archive.html](http://pganmc.blogspot.com/2007_10_02_archive.html) (Retrieved March 27, 2012).

6 The usage of spatial metaphors as cognitive tools is of course by no means exclusive to the domain of transmedia. For example, 'memory' and 'translation' both of which are very relevant for the current subject, are also concepts that have often been explained in spatial terms.

tual processes in cultural space. The latter are reflected upon in the third part of the chapter, in which steps towards a systematic analysis are also proposed.

The empirical example discussed stems mostly from J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*<sup>7</sup> and its adaptations to cinema and to the interactive online reading environment Pottermore, which has been regarded as a pathway for a new generation to enter the extensive fandom of the wizard boy.

## Space of text

Speaking about the space of text, we should perhaps first refer to the notion that one of the constitutive properties of texts is creating a world. This pertains to different types of texts<sup>8</sup>, and we also have Goodman's influential undertaking of describing worldmaking aspects of symbol usage in general. Yet, the process of creating a world is probably best observable in artistic texts, as: "[b]eing spatially limited, a work of art is a model of an infinite universe" (Lotman 1977 [1970]: 210). The world in or of artistic texts has been theorized by manifold authors under different terms (e.g. Pavel 1986; Ryan 1991; Doležel 1998; Werth 1999), most relevant of which are hereby 'storyworld' (Herman 2002, 2009) and 'artistic world' (Lotman 1977 [1970]). Needless to say, the two approaches bear differences as well as overlappings but both regard worldmaking as a fundamental condition of texts. That condition seems especially relevant in the context of transmedia storytelling, as it is first and foremost the world that provides coherence between subtexts, and facilitates recognition of the relations between the parts and the whole. That is why Geoffrey Long, who authors one of the earlier theses written on the subject, claims that crafting a transmedia narrative is not so much about crafting the story (that could be adapted to different media) as about crafting the world in which the story exists (Long 2007: 60). Storyworld thereby becomes a topological invariant of all the subtexts of the transmedia whole.

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7 Very briefly, the story is about an orphan boy who lives with the conservative family of his aunt who seem to constitute all the negative characteristics of the so called Muggles (people without wizarding powers). Until one day, when Harry is old enough, the wizards contact him and he heads for the wizarding school called Hogwarts. The book retells his adventures at the school.

8 See for example Lotman's explication of the world of a telephone directory (1977 [1970]: 237).

Juri Lotman, the founder of Tartu-Moscow semiotic school<sup>9</sup>, developed a holistic understanding of culture which is based on the complementarity between two types of primary cultural languages – human language and the structural model of space (Lotman 1992). Meanwhile, in his framework of the semiotics of text (1977 [1970]), the world of narrative texts is established by artistic space, plot, and character(s) that are mutually inducing, frame, and artistic point of view. The spaces represented in artistic texts are not exhausted in a mimetic relationship with the space of the extratextual world, but bear a semiotic, meaning-generating function. In stories, the value systems tend to acquire spatial expressions as places, boundaries between places and articulation of space in general, also organizing the nonspatial characteristics of the artistic world (Ibid.: 220). For example, the street where Harry Potter's stepfamily lives is a quiet linear drive fringed with street lamps and well-kept front gardens, a decent and arguably dull place. In contrast, the first acquaintance with the world of wizards takes place in a 'small and dirty' pub The Leaky Cauldron which leads to Diagon Alley, a 'cobble street that twisted and turned out of sight' and which fascinated Harry to the point where he wished he'd had 'eight more eyes' to grasp everything around him. These two streets constitute a binary opposition which is adapted to the movie and to Pottermore in the form of visually monotonous repetitions versus curves 'behind' which the audience cannot see. These verbal and visual descriptions of the two places correspond well to the attitude towards the Muggles versus the wizards in general. This understanding of the modelling qualities of the representations of space echoes the Kantian claim that Goodman makes in the introductory pages of his book: "[...] conception without perception is merely *empty*, perception without conception is *blind* (totally inoperative)" (1978:6) (*Italics original* — M.S., P.T.).

Another fundamental principle of worldmaking understood similarly by Lotman (2005 [1984]) and Goodman (1978: 6) is that any creation is recreation, all worlds must be preceded by previous ones. This is also reflected in the six possible strategies for worldmaking proposed by Goodman (Ibid.: 7–17): composition and decomposition; weighting; ordering; deletion and supplementation; deformation. In the world of Harry Potter we can recognize elements of fantasy literature, Bildungsroman, boarding school, detective and the ugly duckling type stories, moral fables and others. All these pre-existent genre worlds are incorporated herein as a recomposed, rehierarchyed and reformed amalgamation.

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9 For an overview of the history of the school, please see Chernov 1988 and Grzybek 1998.

Understanding transmedia projects in terms of worldmaking instead of storytelling is justified by the scope of its applicability to both artistic and nonartistic as well as to narrative and nonnarrative texts. This allows firmer incorporation of the subtexts of games as the game theorists often neglect the narrative theoretic approaches, claiming that the latter do not suffice in understanding the complex nature of ludic events (see for example Aarseth 2006; Thon 2009). Gameplaying might not be storytelling but it is definitely worldmaking. A game-conscious approach to transmedia worlds is presented by Klastrup and Tosca (2004) who outline the categories of mythos, topos and ethos that should ensure the coherence between the medium-specific subtexts of the transmedia world. Ethos, the codex of behaviour, takes on an interesting shade in *Pottermore*. The four houses of Hogwarts School are described rather schematically in the first book and the screen version: Gryffindor being the house of the main heroes, Harry and friends, Slytherin inhabited by Harry's insidious antipathies, and the other two very seldom mentioned altogether. In *Pottermore*, however, all the users get to be sorted into one of the four houses and playful competition between them is one of the central motifs of the environment. This brought along the need to complement the three houses which compete against Harry Potter's house (which always wins the house cup when Harry is at school in the books) with additional positive characteristics, which at the same time would not contradict those provided in the book and the film. The ultimate goal being a working competition between the houses without the back being turned on the values of camaraderie and readiness to save the world from evil – so central to the ethos of the previous versions of the story.

Herman's definition of storyworlds as mental models for understanding the discourse (2002: 5) could – despite the term – be extended to media that is not strictly narrative but is included in a transmedia storytelling system via meta- and intertextual links. It is the cognitive structure of mental maps that constitutes a necessary link in the dialogue between a text and a cognate mind. Such mental maps are dynamic in nature, being frequently updated along the process of decoding a text or a system of texts. Therefore, their function is not merely mapping the relations between all the represented existents, or living and non-living objects included in the discourse, but once again, meaning-generation. What matters is equally what is represented and the understanding of what might (alternatively) be there as well, and what might yet occur as a result of what is actually represented (Herman 2002: 14). Discerning between what is impossible and what is possible albeit actually non-represented in the given world is the

basis for understanding the world, acquired in the communicative process between the reader and the text.

Another central term for analyzing artistic worlds, is ‘point of view’, the notion of perspectival mediation as opposed to the supposed aperspectivism of extratextual reality. Characters, narrator, author, artistic world as a whole, and even genre could be regarded as bearing distinctive points of view. The term encompasses both a physical position from where events are perceived and the subjective meaning-generation by the bearer of the point of view, ending up with a selective and hierarchized account of events. An amount of literature is dedicated to discerning between the terms of ‘point of view’, the more recent ‘focalization’, and ‘gaze’ that entered the narratological discourse through feminist film criticism (see Herman et al., 2005). What matters here is the idea of multilayered perspectives of any artistic text and the potential that transmedia texts hold for explicating the diversity as each subtext could mediate a different dominating perspective.

So far, it has gone without saying that any text is already by definition included in the space of a network of texts (Barthes 2001 [1967]: 146; Foucault 2002 [1969]: 25–26). Still, it would be operative to turn to the notions of inter- and transtextual space. Transtextuality is a Genettean term designating ‘all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts’ (1997 [1982]: 1). The notion includes the subcategories that the author has termed inter-, para-, meta-, archi- and hyper- (or hypo-) textuality. Genette’s *Palimpsests* (1997 [1982]) concentrates on hypertextuality, which in his framework includes various instances of amplification, reduction (condensation) and substitution – operations that are particularly relevant for analyzing the poetics of transmedia worlds. All these forms of textual practices call for relational reading. Simultaneous awareness of two texts and the relationship between them renders the reading experience as a communicative event much richer. This means that both texts are meaningfully transformed in the process – not only is the understanding of the later text facilitated by the knowledge about the previous one, but also the rereading of the previous text will be affected by the awareness of the later one. In this case the question might be raised as to whether the categories of before and after are relevant at all, as the two texts rather form a nonlinear mental whole. This is made explicit with the case of Pottermore where the reader is given a chance of rereading the original text with multimodal transformations and additions that Rowling has ‘been hoarding for years’<sup>10</sup>. Also, the readers can upload their own visualizations of the literary text

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10 See the author’s video announcement on the opening page of Pottermore.

into the environment, and one can recognize how the cinematic representations are influencing the subjective visualizations of the verbal text<sup>11</sup>.

An important consequence of the transtextual nature of texts pertains to the aspect which Lotman termed the 'frame' or the 'boundary' of text, the element that ensures the integrity of text's composition, its cause and goal (Lotman 1977 [1970]: 214). In the case of transmedia text, it becomes less clear where the text begins and ends. The subtexts of transmedia wholes might function as autonomous wholes themselves, possessing all the characteristics of a whole text yet belonging to a higher level whole via specific relations. Not only does our experience of Pottermore begin already with marketing-oriented pretexts, such as the video introduction by Rowling, but also the experience itself depends on constant dialogue with the memory of the books and the movies. Meanwhile, the dialogue is facilitated also by a certain isomorphism between a part and the whole as it is possible to discern an invariant or a core that is repeated in all of the subtexts.

In the Tartu-Moscow school's *Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures* it is stressed that one and the same message can function as a text, as a part of a text or as a set of texts (Ivanov et al., 1998 [1973]). Thus, Pottermore is a text that can be divided into subtexts (e.g., episode of the Diagon Alley as a holistic unit, an autonomous whole) and at the same time it is a part of the set of all Harry Potter texts. Meanwhile, in the memory of the reader who is familiar with the novels, the movies, Pottermore and other subtexts, it is practically impossible to distinguish which aspects of the mental whole originate in which particular subtext. In the reader's memory the discrete (verbal-linear) and the continuous (iconic-spatial) languages are complementary and intermingle as there are no pure examples of each of them and this becomes especially clear in the narrative domain. Reading a verbal text creates mental visual images and looking at a visual image, a verbal description is processed in the mind.

We can thus speak of reader's communication with the text and simultaneous metacommunication of the text with other texts. When the reader reaches Diagon Alley, the shopping street of the wizard world, in the Pottermore, s/he not only communicates with what is depicted on the screen, but there is also the metacommunicative process of knowing where and what is going to happen according to the story (e.g., most importantly, s/he has to find the shop for magic wands, where wands choose their owners and

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11 This seems to be particularly so with the appearance of the characters and somewhat less with the locations.

not vice versa.). All in all, the strict bounding of a text in culture becomes impossible due to the constant dynamics of the point of view of the relations between part and whole and the complementarity of the discrete and continuous languages. Transmedia texts make these principles of textual dynamics particularly explicit in culture.

## Space of media

We move on to extratextual space which implies the relations between a text and its transformations into other media. The central question here is the influence of media on mediation and meaning. From a Goodmanian viewpoint we could infer that the role of media is paramount as '[we] are confined to ways of describing whatever is described. Our universe, so to speak, consists of these ways rather than of a world or worlds' (1978: 3). Although this statement is not confined to media, it unifies the meaning and its medium into an inseparable whole. Lotman, on the other hand, has approached the question of transferring meaning from one sign system to another, or more specifically, the switches between discrete (e.g. novel) and continuous (e.g. picture) languages. While defining the relationship between such languages as nontranslatability, he regards the transfers as possible, but not without alterations in meaning (i.e. Lotman 2001 [1990]: 36–38). The outcome of such translation process is nonexact but consequently also nontrivial. This means that different versions of one text (or text part) exist and that such variations of a text in culture constitute the path of meaningful growth for the textual whole. The questions of the modelling influence of media are perhaps most conveniently addressed in the comparative perspective, i.e. in the context of adaptation or, in Jakobson's (1966 [1959]: 233) terms, 'intersemiotic translation'.

This translation process, 'interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems' (Ibid.), is the building principle of all transmedia texts, no matter whether they are transmedial at birth, extended to be transmedial after initial success or regarded as transmedial *post factum* in the cultural memory. When one storyworld is mediated in different sign systems, every given system models it within its modal affordances (Kress 2010: 27), and thus unavoidably accents certain aspects of the world while suppressing others. The alterations of the storyworld are first recognizable on the level of form. It appears that there are no semantic equivalences even between the signifiers of different human languages, let alone between those of discrete and continuous languages. In the latter case '[t]