Exploring Transmedia Literacy.

Toward an Open Ontology for a Pattern Recognition Analysis.

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Introduction

Today the diffusion of social networking and the emerging of a transmedia culture characterizes many different experiences of learning and distributed knowledge. The forms of *Media Education* and *Digital Literacy* growth in the last 30 years are the expression of the process of disembodiment and cross-fertilization occurred during the revolution from the *Gutenberg Galaxy* — printed paper, mass distribution — to the *McLuhan Galaxy* — new media, hypertext, cooperative writing (Castells, 1996). In this scenario, the dimension of literacy has moved from a semiotically-measured geometry (De Saussure, 1916; Hjelmslev, 1966) to a dislocation and a deconstruction of contents and channels that give expression to new products (Derrida, 1974; Landow, 1994; Bolter & Grusin, 1999). The impact of new, affordable, interconnected, powerful personal devices has redefined the role of the audiences. The author not only loses his/her traditional role, but becomes an icon of himself/herself, a collective-minded producer that is self-perceived through the extro-flexed eye of network in which he/she defines his/her narrative experience (De Kerckhove, 1998).

This research will try to shed light on the concept of Transmedia Literacy in order to foster a pattern recognition about theories, technologies, and social dimensions of the phenomena to offer a critical toolkit to understand and map out the emerging knowledge and practices related to this recent discipline.

From Secondary Orality to Transmedia Literacy

Every culture has been characterized by different systems to transfer and reproduce knowledge over time, generation after generation. The invention of the alphabet was the foundation for the definition of Western philosophy and for the sciences, as we know them today (Havelock, 1982; Castells, 1996). This

invention helped to develop a conceptual discourse and "bridge from spoken tongue to language, thus separating the spoken from the speaker" (Castells, 1996). The introduction of printing press resulted in widespread literacy, where the paper was the medium that defined the shape of information. In this sense, according to many scholars of the Toronto School of Communication (Goody, Watt, McLuhan, Ong and Meyrowitz among the others), the introduction of literacy, in terms of written communication, has radically transformed the societies.

> Telephone, radio, television and the various kind of sound tape, electronic technology has brought us into the age of 'secondary orality'. This new orality has striking resemblance to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas. But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print, which are essential for the manufacture and operation of the equipment and for it use as well. (Ong, 1982: 133)

Any mutual exchange without the need of co-presence transformed the way of mass aggregation, the definition of collecting and diffusing information and the human architecture on which collectivities create their social links. Intended in this direction, the "secondary orality" is one of the most important pattern that defined the shifting from communities to social systems.

Today we are experiencing a Transmedia Culture, a model based on the convergence of traditional and new media (Jenkins, 2006), where audiences have defined their role of *prosumers* (producers and consumers of information at the same time) that allows an "explosion of new forms of creativity at the intersections of various media technologies" (Jenkins, 2001: 93).

This Transmedia Culture offers a new cross-networked and multimodal literacy, considering that we are not facing a simple adaptation of different narrative/expressive forms from one media to another: different media and languages participate and contribute to the construction of a multi-layered environment. Since the invention of the alphabet, passing through the idea of a "second orality", we are now facing a re-integration between written, oral, and audio-visual forms of human communication.

The change of perspective, by the means of the integration of text, images and sounds in the same expressive environment, interacting from multiple points, on different channels, by various media, in real, delayed or symmetrical time along a global network, is not only changing culture because it is reshaping our languages (Postman, 1985): it is changing the way people learn, define their cultural assets, understand and communicate across all communications supports.

In this sense, we are now facing a discipline we can define Transmedia Literacy. An interdisciplinary model of research, in which the aim is not to analyze and interpret the transposition of different narrative forms from one channel to another, but to define an overall framework of observation and participation, in which different media, platforms, languages and formats contribute to create a meaningful environment for users.

Defining the patterns for a Transmedia analysis

What changed in this scenario of instant communication is not only the overall model to conceive education according to the relation between educator and discent. What changed has to be analyzed by the matter of new supports, the unlimited possibilities of an extended mind sustained by global

information and a holistic 'always on' systemic knowledge (Ciastellardi, 2013). There is not a monolithic system neither a monopolistic model. As previously suggested, Transmedia Literacy is defining original codes based on several formats and different languages. According to educative purposes, this framework of production and consumption is changing the relation between *auctoritas* and audiences.

In order to define specific patterns to cross analyze the new artifacts and the processes at the base of Transmedia productions/practices, the present research proposes a mixed qualitative and quantitative method. It has been organized around three deeply interconnected approaches: a) historical, b) descriptive and c) analytic.

a) The historical approach try to discover the tendencies emerged over the years in the definition of new formats, languages, codes, narratives and devices that allowed the experience of specific contents.

b) The descriptive work rearrange the previous analysis to establish a critical taxonomy of artifacts and typologies of media/channels/supports and, consequently, to foster the analytic work. The theoretical models applied to analyze the corpus can be resumed in Semiotics, Literary Theory (rhetoric) and aspects of New Media Literacy, Critical Theory and Poststructuralist models of text analysis.

c) The analytic phase. The research will introduce a multimodal approach (Kress, 2003) to map out the transmedia processes and to recognize specific patterns in order to create a visual ontology.

It can be argued that traditional criteria of analysis cannot be applied in discussing transmedia artifacts and productions. In this sense, C. Hayles insists on the necessity of studying the specific materiality of the support or better she suggests the MSA – Media-Specific Analysis (Hayles, 2004).
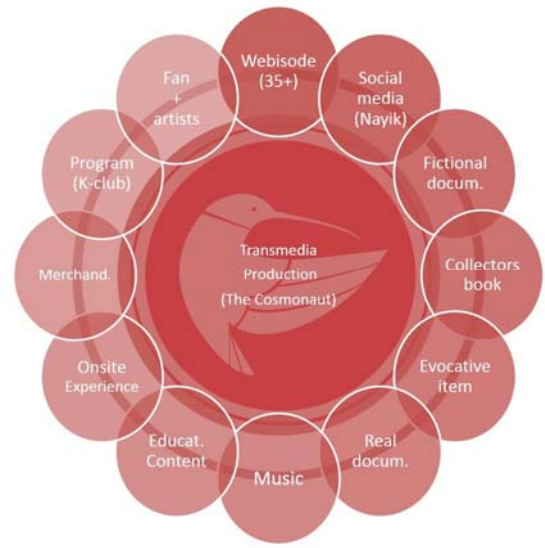
The visual ontology will offer as principal outcomes:

a) The TransmediAtlas: a pattern tendencies toolkit to visually represent and map out the quantitative and qualitative analysis of case studies,

b) An action theoretical framework (reinterpreting Houkes, Vermaas, Dorst, Vries) to analyze supports, media and their behavior.

c) A Replication protocol analysis to compare and to forecast pattern tendencies in transmedia productions.

Transmedia experiences and artifacts are precious and flexible examples to connect the different peers of a network, and to connect not only contents with people but also people with other people, sharing information and increasing the level and the frequency of communication. In order to trace the possibilities behind every experience, the idea is to define the Transmedia features of every case (e.g. Table 1), maintaining updated via a public and open repository the different case studies.

Table 1. Transmedia features of the case study "The Cosmonaut" (2013).

Transmedia Features – The Cosmonaut (2013)
1.) Webisodes (35+) - explain parts of the universe of the The Cosmonaut which remain more obscure in the film, by presenting secondary plot lines.
2.) Social media (Nayik) - through the use of 13 different Facebook profiles, with 7 main characters and 6 secondary ones, to create a fiction which will interact with the personal profiles of the fans who wish to join in.
3.) Fictionalised documentary (Hummingbird) - about a group of filmmakers who visit the set of "The Cosmonaut" in former USSR territories. They will interview people and follow ambiguous clues which will bring them closer to the elusive truth.
4.) Collectors book - Evocative marketing item, Memento Album, Poetry for Cosmonauts.
5.) Real documentary.
6.) Music - soundtrack, album inspired by the plot, transmedia sessions.
7.) Educational Content - special pack, workbook on indie cinema, different cuts.
8.) Onsite Experiences - theather + party, premiere.
9.) Merchandising.
10.) K-program (club).
11). Fan+artist.

Conclusions

The aim of this ongoing research is to offer, on one hand, the theoretical and critical tools to approach the concept of Transmedia Literacy as a new discipline, on the other hand, to understand and map out the emergent patterns and the different practices we can inscribe in this specific framework of comprehension. According to the idea that "the media are the expression of our culture. And our culture works primarily through the materials provided by the media" (Castells, 200: 365) the present research aims at defining an open ontology of transmedia practices, in order to understand the circular influence between our creative practices and our culture.

References and Notes

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