

INTRODUCTION

Cross media as a practice and a socio-cultural phenomenon has been analyzed from a variety of positions, from media studies to communication studies, narratology, poetics, issues of democracy and philosophy.¹ Still there is no reason to believe one methodology will become predominant with regards to the others.

Most of these theories try and combine different methods borrowed from different forms of entertainment and communication structures; also they compare or assimilate cross media with very different objects such as broadcast television, interactive fiction, alternative reality games, and social networks.

While a number of individual efforts strive towards the construction of a theory about cross media and several different points of view are being built, still the specificity of cross media interaction is not very clear.

ARGUMENTS

In order to better understand the moment of interaction in the cross media experience, be this moment collaborative or directly interactive, my proposal here is to take a closer look at the affective² notion of trust and the epistemological issues of the real and the fake (fictional) with regards to how we relate to the cross media message.

In this perspective, is the comparison between the cross media experience and the gaming experience constructive to the definition of an “ontology” of cross media interaction?

The notion of the real or the fake is of great importance in understanding a media experience, and much more so in the case of cross media.

Aside from the soon-to-be obsolete distinction between old and new media, we can distinguish a class of “realistic”, thus trustworthy, media, television, newspapers, mobile devices, the internet, blogs, wikis, email, podcasting, Cdroms; and “fictional media”, (deceitful) media specifically made for fiction, books, cinema, videogames, virtual worlds, hypertext fiction.

Of course fictional media can tell the truth, like documentary films or serious games. Likewise realistic media can lie, like in television fiction, mobiles in locative games, fake websites in alternative reality games and as additions to reality shows.

This distinction is quite relevant to cross media studies because in the proliferation of media forms the channel or platform of communication is now much less important than our relationship to it.

A first basis to analyze the cross media experience could lie in understanding how we incorporate the information perceived and how we react to it.

¹ By respectively Jenkins, De Haas, Walker, Ryan, Dena, Gilmor and Alexander, see References below

² Affective gaming and affective computing are the areas we can draw from in order to analyze the affective aspect of the cross media experience

Cross media and collaborative media up to a certain point fictionalize reality and make fiction real, reading every message within the frame of a “magic circle” in a perspective of play, which is necessary to leave the openings for interaction and collaboration.

The core of the hybrid nature of cross media communication (otherwise called transmedia storytelling, polymorphic narrative, etc) is maybe related not only to the category of spectatorship but also in that of a game relationship.

If we consider for instance the cross media experiences arising from the “Lost” universe, where the user cuts out her personal experience among the many components of the “Lost” virtual world (TV series, the alternative reality game, the online encyclopedia, tie-in websites, novels forums, mobisodes, podcasts etc), we can find various elements specific to gameplay, such as quests, rules, the “mapping” of player’s time and actions in a game world, and many more.

The quality of the experience and the opening to collaborative and interactive action is granted at a first level by the skillful blur between reality and fiction.

We can see similar processes enacted by media products as different as “Survivor” or “American Idol”, where reality becomes soap opera or fan fiction, and “Current TV” or “FourDocs“, where the game is called “send your own film”.

At a second level, a “gamer’s” attitude allows participation without disrupting suspension of disbelief in spite of eventual chronological jumps or diegetic interruptions, expanding the notion of diegesis to all the elements connected to the virtual universe.

CONCLUSION

A number of issues arising from cross media, such as the “call for action”, “handles”, “virtual worlds” or “transmedia worlds”, and many more are also similar to those found in game studies.

Like the above, affective attitudes of “belief” or “trust” that make cross media interaction possible are reducible to the game experience.

Should the main role played by these issues persuade us of the utility of including a number of notions borrowed from games studies to the study of cross media?

A non-literal application of the notion of play to cross media issues brings some evident benefits.

It untangles the intricate issue of the “core” of cross media interaction across platforms and channels.

It helps classify phenomena as different as interactive storytelling, virtual worlds, user generated content, “experience” as a product, as belonging to the same realm.

It also offers another layer to spectatorship and classical media studies research, along the line of work indicated by the latest media studies and the analysis of “prosumers” culture³.

The issues of “affect” and epistemology in cross media interaction are possibly even more layered than the same issues in a game world.

Whereas the classical game statement “this is not a game” is often at the basis of a cross media experience, its being told in the context of the real world and sometimes intermingling with real life events makes the distinction much more subtle and worthy of thorough attention.

³ See Jenkins about transmedia storytelling and “prosumers”; also pertinent “The Pro-Am Revolution”, Leadbeater, Charles, Miller, Paul, 2005

REFERENCES

- Brian Alexander, blog <http://infocult.typepad.com>, and his contributions in www.smartmobs.com
- De Haas Monique crossmediacommunication.blogspot.com
- Dena Christy www.crossmediaentertainment.com
- Gillmor. Dan, *We The Media*, O'Reilly Media 2004
- Giovagnoli, Max, *Fare cross media*, Dino Audino Editore, Roma, 2005
- Harrigan, Pat, Waldrup Fruin, Noah, *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Event* MIT Press, 2004
- Harrigan, Pat, Waldrup Fruin, Noah, *Second Person: Role Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media*, MIT Press 2006
- Jenkins Henry, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, 2006
- Jenkins, Henry, *Fan, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, New York University Press, 2006
- Jenkins Henry, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Routledge, 1992
- Juul, Jesper, *Half Real: Videogames between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*, MIT Press, 2005
- Picard,
- Ryan, Marie Laure, *Avatars of Stories*, University of Minnesota Press, 2006
- Walker, Jill, "Distributed Narrative: Telling Stories Across Networks", 2004