Towards a poetics of multi-channel storytelling

Christy Dena
Jenkins’ ‘transmedia’

‘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, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption. That is, you don’t need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa.’

(Jenkins, 2003)
The X,Y,Z of multi-channel works
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$X = \text{Channel(s) Role in Narrative}$
A story channel is:

- Designed as primary source of information about characters, setting and plot;
- Designed and experienced as an entry-point to the whole multi-channel work;
- The experience of it has a strong impact in story comprehension;
- If collaborative user participation can impact story creation;
- Consistent information about characters, setting plot;
- Being a product that cannot be separated from a particular fiction;
- Can be self-contained (if transmedia) or one of the primary texts (if transfiction);
- Are familiar and preferred channels;
Storyworld Channel

Storyworld channel characterised by:
Experience with the channel has lesser impact on story comprehension;

• Not primary source of information about characters, setting and plot;

• Provides further information about characters, setting and plot that are primary or secondary in the story channel;

• Does not play a direct role in the unfolding plot;

• Augments story comprehension;

• Medium-level influence on comprehension of story;

• Consistent with characters, setting and plot in story channel;

• Allows the fictional world to be accessed in the real world through character identification and scene extension;

• Must perpetuate story channel and not break fictional setting;
Storyworld Example

Introducing the world’s first fully automated domestic assistant.

What will you do with yours?

Storyworld Example

Harry Potter scarf

Harry Potter student hat

Harry Potter products available at: http://harrypotter.wbshop.com/catalog
Commodity Channel

Commodities are characterised by:

• Their low-level of relevance to story world;
• Little to no impact in story comprehension;
• No impact on story creation;
• Their lack of plausibility of existence in the story and storyworld;
• Can be inconsistent with characters, setting and plot as set up in the storyworld and story;
• Have a larger role as an attractor to the storyworld and story channels than as narrative devices.
Examples of Commodities

Hagrid plush doll

Harry Potter 'In Potions Class' Giclee

Harry Potter products available at: http://harrypotter.wbshop.com/catalog
'XII - 10:33pm Jul 8, 2004 PST
I jokingly ran a search for fight club 2 hoping I would find nothing but to my surprise it was not a sequel I found, but a game..... this is terrible..... this stands against everything that fight club stands for..... its not about marketing and merchandise and advertising..... its about the message.... this is the worst game I have ever heard of.... even the actual fight club in fight club was not about making your opponent bleed or about slamming them into the ground and breaking their spine as this game suggests.... it was about feeling... about the sensation of life...

...

http://community.vugames.com/WebX?13@156.UMo2dE8KGk5.0@.f020c44

Pics sourced from: http://www.fightclubgame.com/us/
The X, Y, Z of multi-channel works

Mutable work stages

Y

X

Z

Story

Storyworld

Commodity

Role in narrative

Pre-publication

Initial publication

Post-publication
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Production</th>
<th>Initial Publication</th>
<th>Ongoing Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>conception, drafting and editing; Pre-distribution.</td>
<td>intended medium and mode; first edition; first reading by the reader/user; without updates.</td>
<td><strong>Within the work</strong> by either the producer or users (updates on a webpage, patches in software, new edition); <strong>To the work</strong> (different cover, library stamp in a book, viewed on a different platform and operating system); <strong>Around the work</strong> (reviews, fan fiction, forums, cultural shifts, ‘re-entry’ (Tabbi), reading environment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The X, Y, Z of multi-channel works

Mutable work stages

Y

Pre-publication

Initial publication

Post-publication

Z

Participatory Continuum

X

Role in narrative

Story

Storyworld

Commodity
Controlled comment

Vivendi Universal Games Forum available at: http://www.vugames.com/forum.do
The X,Y,Z of multi-channel works

Mutable work stages

X

Role in narrative

Y

Z

Participatory Continuum

Author

Pre-publication

Initial publication

Post-publication

‘Narrative architect’

User

‘Ergodist’

Co-creator

‘Assembler’

Story

Storyworld

Commodity
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