Filmmakers That Think Outside the Film
By Christy Dena

In the 1940's filmmakers Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (known as "The Archers") championed a multi-artform cinema. They created films that represented music, dance, painting, literature and photography; for they believed that 'all art is one'. Now, with the proliferation of media platforms, the palette for filmmakers is stupendous. Not only is it impossible to encompass all artforms in a single film, but there are aesthetic and economic reasons for maintaining their integrity. All art is not one within the film, but in its relationships with artforms around it. Filmmakers are now thinking beyond cinema and DVD to include the web, theatre, books and mobile technology in their canvas.

In this article I'll take you through a whirlwind tour of some of the ways filmmakers are thinking beyond the film. Our first stop is a look at how the assets of a film are repurposed. This is not a discussion about distribution methods or how the medium of delivery influences the experience. Instead it is an exploration of the ways assets can be reused to create new works. The first example is that of filmmakers offering components of their film in digital format for anyone to 'remix'. Remixing is rife with fans, but it is only in the last few years that filmmakers have begun to offer their content for remixing.

Sometimes the offering is driven by a desire to create 'citizen marketers', such as New Line Cinema's release of footage and music so that people could create a new trailer of Liz Friedlanderís *Take the Lead* (2006). They also specifically commissioned 'official' remixes (see Addictive). The logic behind New Line Cinema's approach is best understood with this quote in the New York Times (6th April) by Russell Schwartz, president for domestic marketing for New Line Cinema: "Our assets become their assets, and that's how they become fans of the movie." For Darren Aronofsky's *The Fountain* (2006), assets - video, stills, audio - are provided so that audiences can create a music video at *The Fountain Remixed* . In this case, the offering is explained as giving audiences who want to contemplate eternal life the "chance to delve deeper" (from website). Peter Greenaway has made finding fragments, of a movie that is part of a large storyworld *The Tulse Luper Project*, a game. The Tulse Luper Journey involves players collaborating to complete 92 puzzles. On completion of each puzzle, a 1 minute film fragment is released to the player. It is then their task to compile the 92 minute film of Tulse Luper. The logic behind these offerings are manifold, from facilitating 'citizen marketing' to a highly personalized exploration of a storyworld. It should be noted too, that some filmmakers are experimenting with creating films specifically designed for remixing, such as Michelle Hughes' *Stray Cinema* (2006), Aryan Kaganofís *SMS Sugarman* (2007) and Michela Ledwidgeís (in-development) *Sanctuary*.

Filmmakers also engage in remixes of their own films. For the past year Peter Greenaway has been performing live VJing sessions of assets of his cross-media project *The Tulse Luper Project* . Workbook Project's own Lance Weiler is currently touring the USA and Europe with his - 'cinema ARG' of *Head Trauma* (2006). Weiler's cinema event includes a remix, live music, theatrics and mobile phones. It is a unique experience of the film's

storyworld carefully curated by the filmmaker. His cinema theatrics are helping to revive the notion of cinema as event.


[Peter Greenaway VJing]

As well as remixing their own work, and offering their assets up for others to do with what they will, filmmakers are also commissioning artists to create interactive works out of the assets. On the main website of *Head Trauma*, for instance, Lance Weiler has included an interactive graphic novel that includes footage, stills and audio of the film. The website for David Slade's *Hard Candy* (2005) has an - experience, and so too with Darren Aronofsky's *The Fountain Experience* . Indeed Peter Greenaway has also commissioned Digiscreen to create what they call a "webler" of The Tulse Luper Suitcases:

"Website constructed entirely from a film's visual and aural elements that can be navigated and interacted with by a general audience. A webler should offer both an experience of the actual film as with a film trailer and an alternative expression of that experience." (Digiscreen)

There are also non-web creative constructions of a film's assets is 'Blossoms and Blood', a 12 minute montage of Paul Thomas Anderson's *Punch Drunk Love* (2002). The short film is on the DVD and is constructed with deleted scenes. Since most of the shots included are of different points of view than those in the film, the work moves from vignette to being a kind of parallel universe. Poetic explorations of a theme are also rendered in print. Peter Greenaway has art books that accompany *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* (that he created), the Wachowski Brothers commissioned two volumes of graphic novels for *The Matrix* and Darren Aronofsky has written a graphic novel adaptation of *The Fountain* with painter Kent Williams. Aronofsky describes his entire project as "[a] story so grand, one medium couldn't contain it" (source).

All of these works augment the film, providing a poetic rendition, but they also stand on their own as a work of art. They are at times a specifically designed prologue and epilogue. Indeed, some filmmakers push administrative detail to the side and instead prefer the films website to be a meditation on the theme. Examples are the websites for Darren Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream* (2000); Christopher Nolan's *Momento* (2000); Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* (2001); Darren Lynn Bousman's *Saw II* (2005) and more recently Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales* (2007).
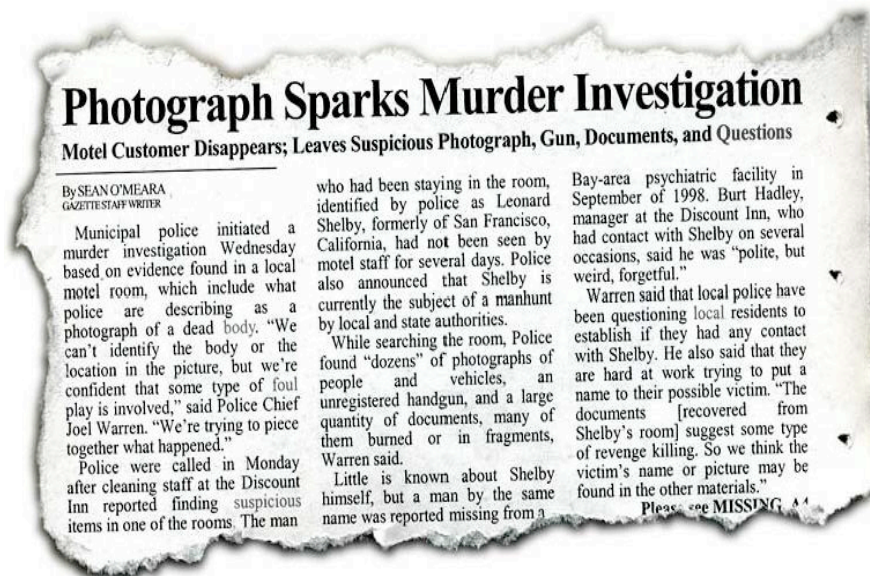
[Screenshot from *Momento* website]

This treatment of the web as an expressive medium extends even further. Some filmmakers are populating their storyworld on the web shoulder to shoulder with real world sites. Sites for fictional companies and characters in films are emerging across cyberspace, almost indistinguishable from their real world counterparts... if not for their outlandish nature. For instance, the company that erases Joel Barish's memory in Michael Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* (2004) has its own corporate site: *Lacuna Inc*. The company that provided the cloned child in Nick Hamm's *Godsend* (2004) is likewise online: *Godsend Institute*. Companies mentioned in the *Enter the Matrix* digital game (2003), such as *Omega Hardware Solutions* were also online. The company that produces the NS-5 in Alex Proyas' *I, Robot* (2004) has a site dedicated to the robot: *NS-5*. The company has even issued a press release detailing how the "NS-5″ will play several major roles in the film. Indeed, Count Olaf, the evil character in Brad Silberling's *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events* (2004) has his own website and blog, a place where he relishes in his starring role in the film.

In all of these examples it is clear that the storyworld is not married to the primary medium, to film, anymore. For some, this multi-medium existence has an immersive effect. Just like real life, it is present in all communication channels. Of course, this can

be encouraged with websites that are set within the universe of the film. Early examples of this are seen with Stefan Avalos and Lance Weiler's *The Last Broadcast* website in 1996 and Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez's *The Blair Witch Project* website in 1998. The later went on to also broadcast on the Sci Fi Channel a mockumentary, *Curse of the Blair Witch*, of the mockumentary and published a dossier of the "evidence" in 1999. Over the past few years, it is has been these practices - representing the world of the film as being real - that have emerged as a primary aesthetic for many audiences and creators. Four months before the screening of Takashi Shimizu's *The Grudge 2* (2006) a blog by Jason C was launched. Jason C is postgraduate student who is covering the making of the film as part of his research. So, the site works as both a making-of and fictional prologue. Why fiction? Jason C is a fictional character who, over the next few months, witnesses mysterious events on the set. Slowly, all of the cast and crew are affected by the strange events. In the end, Jason C disappears and his roommate takes over the blog in an effort to get help to find him.

Despite many diegetic web to film references, there are not many instances of references to fictional sites within films. *Movie Poop Shoot*, was in Kevin Smith's *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* (2001) and the character Paul Duncan in *Godsend* does search the Net for the *Godsend Institute* website mentioned earlier. But the only explicit referral by a character I've seen is Professor Bedlam's mention of his website in Ivan Reitman's *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* (2006): *ProfessorBedlam.com*. The cross-platform traversal was not well executed however, as the website featured content that was set in the plot at the beginning of the film, not the end. These traversals need to make sense in terms of the flow of the narrative, which means creative control over them. Despite this flaw, the explicit referral of another element of the storyworld in another medium is a sign that the craft of multi-platform expression is maturing. Each component is not divorced of the others, in other words, it is a carefully constructed experience.

The majority of examples I have given thus far are adaptations of some kind. There are examples emerging of a storyline being extended. For instance, at the end of the *Donnie Darko* website (which requires moving through various levels by solving puzzles) the viewer/player is rewarded with press clippings that detail what happened to some of the characters after the events of the film. The *Grudge 2* blog I cited previously is also an example of a metafictional prologue. A different approach to the extension of a storyworld is found in the DVD of Brad Bird's animated film *The Incredibles* (2004). Near the end of the film, the mother (Elastigirl) listens to messages left by the babysitter of her child Jack-Jack on her mobile phone/cell. As we progress through the messages it is clear the babysitter is getting more and more frantic. The film ends, however, without us knowing what happened with the babysitter and the son Jack-Jack. We find out what happened, though, in the short animated film in the DVD: "Jack-Jack Attack". Here we have a change of POV and an elaboration of narrative point in the film. Filmmakers are also starting their narrative in books. Unlike the adaptation model that has dominated, these books are designed to start the plot, which will then continue in the film. Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales* (2007) begins with three novels, and Chair Entertainment has begun their *Empire* story with a specifically written novel by Orson Scott Card. Chair Entertainment describe their approach as follows:

Chair's unique value proposition is that we (1) create compelling original stories, (2) own and maintain creative control of our IP, and (3) create marketing synergy around that IP in 5 core franchise areas: video games, books, movies, comics, and merchandise. Each product we develop offers a unique perspective of the story and works together to expand the franchise. [source]

A similar multi-platform approach to addressing unexplored elements in a film is seen in EA Game's *The Lord of the Rings, The Battle for Middle-Earth II* (2006). It is set during events that coincide with the events in Peter Jackson's films, but take place in areas of Middle-Earth not covered in it. They are, of course, known from J.R.R. Tolkien's books. With massively multiplayer online games, we have the *Matrix Online* (2005) as a good example of the continuation of a storyworld into a game. The gameworld is set after the events of the last film and although there have been mixed reviews, there are interesting plot developments such as the death of Morpheus. Due to the popularity of the genre, there will be many more integrated game and film projects over the next few years. Of note is the project Titanic director James Cameron has been working on for the past few years: *Project 880*. Once it comes out (a year or so apparently), it will be the first project that will begin as a multiplayer game and then continue in a feature film. But before looking too far into the future, lets return to the innovative transmedia expansions that are happening now and in the not-too-distant past.

[Screenshot from EA's *Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth II*]

The most referred to past project is the Wachoswki Brother's *The Matrix* universe. Their storyworld existed in films, anime, comics and games. But unlike tie-ins and franchises of the past, the Wachowski Bros. creatively controlled each element and designed a continuous narrative across them. A highly cited example is the narrative thread of ëthe messageí. In the short anime, "The Last Flight of Osiris" (2003), the character Jue and her crew discover the machines are boring to Zion. Their aim is to warn Zion of the impending danger by sending a message to the Nebuchadnezzar crew. At the end of the story Jue just manages to post the letter (thus ending a narrative thread), but we do not know what happens to the letter (a continuing thread). What happens to the letter is addressed in the digital game, *Enter the Matrix* (2003). The first mission for the player is

to retrieve the letter from the post office. The player succeeds in continuing the narrative but we still do not know of the consequences of our actions. It is at the beginning of the second film, *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), when Niobe (who is one of two characters in the game) reports on the 'last transmissions of the Osiris'. The transmissions posted in the anime and retrieved by players in the digital game.

The Wachowski Brothers weren't the only ones to persist their storyworld across media platforms though. In 2003 a group of fans conceived and implemented a unique project. Fan production is nothing new, but the form of this continuation of the Matrix storyworld was with a creative type that was only two years old. This group created an 'alternate reality game' (ARG): a storyworld that requires players all over the world to collaborate to find it and solve. Stories are distributed across numerous websites, emails, faxes, phone calls and real life events. Characters have blogs and chat to players via email, fax and phone. Fictional companies have sites that players have to 'hack' into and retrieve information from. The entire narrative is played out in real time, 24 hours a day and requires players to work together to solve very difficult puzzles to access information. The outcome is never fixed, for the creators always alter the world in real time according to the actions of the players. The ARG for The Matrix, *MetaCortechs*, is one of the most successful ARGs, with over 125,000 players from 115,000 countries. An invaluable book for those considering creating an ARG is the *Project Mu Archives*, for it documents *The Matrix* ARG from the player's perspective. It is also available online. An ARG design book is also available: ARG designer Dave Szulborski's *This is Not a Game: A Guide to Alternate Reality Gaming*.

Other films augmented by fans in the Jim Miller's web-only *Exocog* in 2002. He chose the then forthcoming *Minority Report* as his storyworld and produced a 5-week project played in the build up to the film's release. In 2004, VirtuQuest created an ARG set in the universe of George Lucas' first feature film: *THX 1138* (1971). *SEN 5241* continued the narrative after the events of the film and was created to coincide with the launch of the DVD.

Fans are the not the only who have created ARGs though. Indeed, the first ARG (as it known now) was actually a commissioned by Microsoft and Dreamworks to publicize Stephen Spielberg's *A.I: Artificial Intelligence* (2001) but ended up being described by Internet Life magazine as the 'Citizen Kane of online entertainment'. *The Beast* was played by over 3 million people all over the world and created the new form of entertainment. Players who followed 150 characters across hundreds of websites, emails, faxes, files and puzzles for months and generated over 300 million impressions for the film through mainstream press such as Time, CNN, and USA Today, as well as niche outlets such as Wired, Slashdot, and Ain't it Cool News, and won numerous awards including best idea (New York Times Magazine) and best web site (Entertainment Weekly). [4orty 2wo Entertainment]

[Screenshot of the Monster Hunt Club website for *The Host*]

In 2007, Magnolia Films commissioned ARG Studios to create an ARG for Bong Joon Ho's The Host (2007). The ARG, *Monster Hunt Club*, helped market the release of the Korean film in the US. It was, I believe, the first 'horror' ARG (and Lance Weiler's 'cinema ARG' the first of its kind, for scary movies too). More recently, an ARG-like campaign has started for the upcoming Batman film by Christopher Nolan: *The Dark Knight*. So far there have been fictional sites, such as the political campaign site for the character Harvey Dent (who becomes 'Two-Face') and clues left on playing cards left in comic book stores. One of the techniques that ARGs use is to remove all cues to fictionality: fictional sites almost indistinguishable from real ones. But as we have seen with the various projects mentioned in this article, this trope is not unique to ARGs. Indeed, making a fictional world seem as real as possible, extending it across media platforms, playing with it and enabling audiences to share and participate in its construction are just some of the key drives for filmmakers now.

In a keynote speech delivered at the Cinema Militans in September 2003, Peter Greenaway described the *Tulse Luper Suitcases* (a work that includes 3 feature films, a TV series, 92 DVDs and CD Roms, books and numerous websites) as: "an attempt to make a gathering together of today's languages, to place them alongside one another and get them to converse." Creators of film, print, TV, radio, theatre, games, new media and painting are all moving into this new paradigm of creation. Indeed, the future will not be the domain of artists who adapt or extend from their primary medium, but the domain of people who are transmedia artists from the beginning. Filmmakers donít create films anymore, they create worlds.

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