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Textual practices in the age of media convergence: transmedia storytelling, multimedia franchising and cross-platform transferring. A study of the post-*Matrix* narratives and their infinite universes

This doctoral thesis investigates the multidimensional nature of textual practices (i.e. established methods and customary, habitual procedures within texts and among texts) in the age of media convergence (i.e. the flow of content across different media platforms) and their influence on the way a story and its storyworld are told. Undeniably, the media are changing and, subsequently, storytelling is changing. These alterations are not only the result of technological and economic evolutions, but they also arise from a viewer's capability to keep up with new ideas and trends that reinforce his/her expectations of an offered media text. In the face of changing mediascape, one media platform (i.e. media delivery and presentation system) seems to be insufficient for the contemporary viewer to experience a given storyworld (or universe) more intensively, and due to these needs a story and its narrative elements are presented across multiple delivery channels, such as movies, literary texts, blogs, video games, graphic novels. Such a viable solution enables both audience members as well as authorized creators to constantly update a particular story and expand its universe without limit.

Depending on how this universe is developed and the reasons of its expansion, one can observe the growing number of different convergent phenomena that are commonly subsumed under the same category. Fundamentally, the notable feature of all textual practices adopted in the age of media convergence is the employment of multiple media platforms for presenting fictional storyworlds. This makes these phenomena seem to be very alike, at least at first glance, which may lead to close associations with the concept of transmedia that literally means "across media". Nevertheless, the emphasis placed solely on the implementation of various media channels in the process of storytelling and building story universes is insufficient to describe a full spectrum of all convergent textual practices and a more detailed approach is needed.

Although it seems that the subject of convergence phenomena has been explored from many different angles, the topic is still not exhausted due to the recent interest in convergence processes and the fact that these processes are complex and ongoing. Thus, the current state of

research on differentiation of textual practices in the age of media convergence is unsatisfactory. To date, as it will be indicated in the thesis, theorists have focused on these phenomena from media, cultural, sociological, literary and economic perspectives with the priority given to historicizing and theorizing particular practices as well as analyses of given case studies in mass entertainment, independent arts or gaming, which consequently resulted in isolated research sectors. Albeit, there are some categorizations of transmedia/ multimedia/crossmedia processes, they lack insight into the intrinsic nature of these practices and their elaborate comparison has remained somewhat unrecognized. Therefore, my claim is that another, more accurate, classification of convergent textual practices is advisable, especially considering that, in some cases, they are the outcome of different factors.

This dissertation attempts to elucidate the multidimensional nature of current textual practices. My purpose is to define and distinguish these processes, constructing a typology of contemporary textual practices into transmedia storytelling, multimedia franchising and cross-platform transferring. Although all three terms refer to the convergence model of presenting a story, they describe diverse intercultural phenomena. Transmedia storytelling, as Henry Jenkins explains, "represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (2006: 95-96). In contrast, multimedia franchising pertains to a multichannel project that is funded (mostly) by one entertainment company and consists of derivative works set in a single universe (or storyworld) whereas cross-platform transferring describes the process of rewriting an original text into different media platforms. Clearly, this brief explanation of the broad concepts requires detailed definitions and comparative analyses that are provided in particular chapters.

Thus, the dissertation is divided into the introductory part, one chapter containing explanation of factors that determine the convergent nature of the contemporary media landscape and its specificity, three chapters devoted to the textual practices that arise from this nature, and conclusion. Since the thesis is aimed at characterizing three different, yet confusingly similar, types of textual practices as well as their differentiation, much of the focus is on the theoretical perspective. The practical application of the study is of secondary importance as it simply provides proofs of various textual practices established in the age of media convergence. The analyses of diverse transmedia, multimedia and crossmedia projects should indicate that these practices cannot be unequivocally identified with one another. Hence, the case studies are provided to demonstrate whether theoretical assumptions, which are made in

the thesis about the trifurcated structure of convergent textual practices, are valid. The various case studies, which have been chosen on the basis of their features as transmedia/multimedia/crossmedia projects, include texts whose development intensified especially after the emergence of the *Matrix* series (regarded as the first "true" transmedia project). Most of these projects (e.g. *Borderlands*, *Clockwork watch*) have not been analyzed academically, which underlines the value of this thesis and its contribution to the research field of convergence practices.

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