

THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING IN *PLOT 28* (2013)

Characteristics of transmedia storytelling: a personal approach

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ABSTRACT. In a communication era where the “narrative turn” is on the present, managed by storytelling and digital technology, the paper presents, briefly, the characteristics of the identity of transmedia storytelling, continuing with introduction and analysis of *Plot 28*, the first transmedia universe of Total Fiction format, a pioneer project in Spanish transmedia storytelling.

Keywords: transmedia, storytelling, PLOT28

We live in the communication era where the “narrative turn” is on the present. Everything is managed by storytelling and digital technology.

This is the notion that everything is a story, and that story-telling is our primary, perhaps only, mode of understanding, our cognitive perspective on the world. Life is a story, this discussion is a story, and the building that I work in is also a story, or better, an architectural narrative.

(AARSETH, 2004)

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This paper is based on the plenary presentation at the Digital Media International Conference, Media Culture Days, at Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, România, on 25 May, 2017.

And finally a new protagonist is on the stage: the digital community. We're now in a participative digital era, that's the key why we need a "transmedia mentality" (DENA, 2012) in the frame of a "convergence culture" (JENKINS, 2008). The postmodern subject is a transmedia consumer (SÁNCHEZ-MESA, 2012: 209-210).

There isn't a definitive definition of transmedia storytelling; actually, the discussion about this subject continues in our days. We don't pretend to possess the commandments of this new narrative of the digital era, but we could propose our personal point of view, based in the most relevant studies and on our experience as a transmedia creator. Which is the identity of transmedia storytelling in our personal overlook? We're going to explain the main items:

- *Worldbuilding*: KASTRUP & TOSCA are talking about transmedia worlds in the contemporary mediascape (2004).
- *Intermediality*: serial products in an online and offline interactive display
- These products rule in a dialectical way: continuity vs. multiplicity, immersion vs extractability, spreadability vs. depth, etc. (JENKINS, 2009).
- Access to the fictional universe through several gates in a progressive display that is going to be revealed by users step by step.
- Participative audience: to shape a fandom and to promote crowd creativity and activism. Users as practitioners/ experiencers who want to be prosumers.
- An interactive, ergodic multi-genre and multimodal storyworld experience (*ecology of narrative interpretation*: HERMANN, 2002, p. 13):

we must accept that stories are "entangled in an experiential network that comprises their producers, their recipients, and the events and existents that they semiotically represent"

(Merlo, 2014: 84)

- Particular experientiality: user as an active explorer immersed in a ludo-narrativism (RYAN, 2006) when the enhanced strategies and ARG are important:

The experience of playing games can never be simply reduced to the experience of a story (JENKINS, 2004: 120).

This is not theory. There are many examples of transmedia storytelling building a specific universe. We can find all of these characteristics in one of the pioneer transmedia universes in the Spanish Language Cultural Area, *Plot 28* (2013), www.plot28.com, that became an authentic case study (GÓMEZ DIAZ *et alia*, 2016: 94-99).

A case study: *Plot 28*, the first transmedia universe of Total Fiction format.

Several “surfing novels”, fake documentaries, blogs, social networks, comics, filmed theater, games, pictures, thematic webs, blogs, ergodic narrative and challenges, music, activism, etc. Compose the kaleidoscope (worldbuilding) of this pioneer project in Spanish transmedia storytelling, the first universe of Total Fiction format *Plot 28* had his first landing in January 2013, through an exclusive application for iPad designed by computer engineer Alfonso del Barrio. It’s an independent production by BBD, rules by a kind of Spanish “transmedia showrunners” Hernán Ruiz & Agustín Serra V.1., with the collaboration of a young multidisciplinary team, mainly from Madrid (Universidad Europea) and Zaragoza (Videar Company). This transmedia world was displayed with a conscious intermediality targeted at interactive users.

The main plot of this narrative cluster of *Plot 28* starts trough the investigation of cyber-journalist Joana T. Silveira. She has recovered the writings by philosopher, professor and journalist Jaime Miñana, her close friend now auto-exiled on a remote island. These texts, mainly literature, reveal the hidden interests of the Water World

Exhibition held in Zaragoza in the summer of 2008. *Plot 28* focusing on a “glocal radiography” of *modus operandi* in the complex networks of the contemporary social and political powers. The cyber-journalist Joana also had recovered materials in other formats –film, theater performances, photographs, music, etc.- around this subject of Expo Agua Zaragoza 2008 in order to fill the transmedia cluster where intermediality and inter-genre exchanges are the rule. Joana, a kind of “demiurge diegetic storyteller”, focuses on contemporary consequences and challenges of a society on the verge of the first mega-crisis of global capitalism that starts the same day when Water Exhibition closed its doors: September 15th, a date to remember (HERNÁNDEZ, 2015).

Plot 28, the first product of Total Fiction (a diverse but converging format enabled transmedia storytelling), develops a new way of dealing with integrating fiction reading, viewing, web browsing, gamification and interactivity, as befits polyhedral universes and mutually conducive XXI century technologies. This project was shaped more than four years taking as its starting point the "fake documentary" by Agustín Serra v.1, *La Parcela 28*. This is the story of criticism about the social-political system and the dark intentions of world expositions. Hernán Ruiz had found this story very interesting and convinced Serra this could be continued in a cross-media multichannel cyber-tale. From there, it started an expanded story through various meanings, following the pioneers of this kind of cyber-narrative trials in the United States of America.

Hernán Ruiz & Serra v.1, as production and content designers, have been drawing a fictional universe with a modular structure and dialectical relationship between all the different contents. To reach this complex universe, users could enter by several gates... Amidst these creative and improving processes, the iPad came as appropriate technological support to collect these claims of *transmedia*. Thus, *Plot 28* was born as the first Spanish proposal of a new total fiction transmedia display. An active and interactive diegetic universe that aims to generate a fiction adapted to the challenges and approaches 21st century: today, fiction could be created and produced converging

on different platforms and using its narrative synergies. In this particular challenge, both authors know that the story is essential and they understand that it's a priority to entertain audiences and inform them to enjoy them in a new experience/immersion of fiction. Telling as playing..., because the ludo-narrativism is such a very important instrument.

Life is not only play. That's the reason why this project doesn't reject the engagement; in fact, *Plot 28* provokes critical reflection on perversion and corruption of the contemporary powers. For these reasons, this transmedia challenge is aimed at a wide audience that wishes to attract youngsters to this subject, with many classic thriller elements and provide greater access to this new form of storytelling. The immersion in that fictional universe does not claim only interactivity but also crowd creativity. The ideal users of *Plot 28* are not interactors but prosumers, meaning members of fandom able to create new products for that fictional worldbuilding. But we're in the new millennium and this transmedia universe also has promoted activism, for instance, Group 28, the historical collective in permanent fight against the power, an underground social-benefit activism that claims to continue in the new users, as the polemical action of Comando 28... But this is another story.

As transmedia identity was defined before, *Plot 28* became an expansive universe. Firstly, the product was put on the market in an Apple app January 2013. Then, arrived the ebooks of "cybernovel", the short stories of *Bitacora a la deriva* and *Laura's Diary*, as well as the compilation videobook *Plot 28 Conspiracy*. The next expansive item was the book's edition of *Bitácora a la deriva. Para una rebelión* (2015), an "engagée literature" composed by several short tales about the increasingly hidden Power and its disturbing social and political consequences today (HERNÁNDEZ, 2016). This enhanced book promotes an expansive reading toward *Plot 28* transmedia universe through Twitter calls (selected sentences and hashtags), photographs of Eva Amaral (one the most relevant Spanish popstars) and QRs codes. This pioneer expansive book in Spanish literature was

published by Esto no es Berlín, an independent publishing house from Madrid that launched in Amazon an *eBook* version titled *Bitácora a la deriva. Para una rebelión #2.*, with new short stories and enhanced photos. Thanks to this first edition success, in September 2017 a new analogical edition will put on the market.

In the end, after this analysis of such particular example of Spanish digital culture, we can conclude that all transmedia identity remarks were defined previously fit in *Plot 28* fictional universe, an expansive diegetic challenge that hadn't concluded; in this case it is not a common motto: to be continued.

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