



Introduction to Transmedia in Asia and the Pacific

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Transmedia is a form of storytelling where multiple platforms are used to tell a common story. It is commonly used to tell complex fictional stories such as *Star Wars*; to cover complex events such as the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi; or to involve a mass audience in advertisements, for example the Coca-Cola Happiness Factory “Open Happiness” campaign.

Definitions of transmedia storytelling are generally attributed to Henry Jenkins, who describes the transmedia narrative thus:

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Transmedia storytelling 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. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (2007)

In order to distinguish transmedia storytelling from other approaches to narrative spanning multiple texts, emphasis is placed on the notion of “world-building” (Jenkins 2007), wherein a coherent narrative world is expanded through subsequent iterations of the story. As such, the text(s) which contains the transmedia story is a common locus of scholarly attention. Building on Jenkins’ initial definition, scholars examining the story consider how the narrative spreads between texts under conditions that maintain consistency and coherence, while at the same time enabling the uniqueness of each element. Marc Ruppel’s exploration of “migratory cues” (2014) suggests that the different texts of a transmedia story are connected by plot points which facilitate “contact between two or more sites ...[where] previous knowledge of a story is ‘cued’ and combined with new content and contexts” (218). These cues serve as springboards from which audiences can embark on further exploration of a narrative and through which the expansion of a narrative is connected to an existing text. While Ruppel examines the expansion of a coherent text, other scholars such as Gray (2010), Pearson (2015), Long (2007) and Wolf (2012) explore the intersections between “primary” and “peripheral” texts. In particular, Jonathan Gray and Roberta Pearson both consider the function of paratexts in the formation of transmedia narratives. Gray describes the paratext as one which concurrently “surrounds” and comprises a text (2010). He distinguishes between types of paratexts to identify how they operate to bring audiences to a narrative (entryway paratexts), or appear during or after initial entry (in medias res paratexts) to point to the text. Not all paratexts extend narrative points and thus contribute to world-building. However, peripheral texts do contribute to the formation of receptive contexts, with Gray highlighting how unofficial paratexts such as fan fiction and audience discussion can shape reactions to transmedia narratives (2010). Gray’s extension of the locus of exploration outside the narrative boundary of the text is echoed in Mark Wolf theorisation of “imaginary worlds” (2012). Although Wolf does not confine his work to a transmedia framework, he does consider the transmedial nature of many (if not most) contemporary imaginary worlds which are disseminated via a variety of media formats and encourage different modes of interaction. He discusses motivations and desires for story creation as well

as the social and industrial structures that facilitate the formation of imaginary worlds. Wolf thus provides a view on the construction of spreadable narratives that are highly embedded in a variety of (social, industrial and potentially political) contexts, highlighting the need to extend transmedia scholarship beyond the boundaries of the narrative text.

Indeed, Jenkins' explication of transmedia narratives through the development of his principles of transmedia storytelling (2009) considers how mediums of delivery affect engagement with the narrative. In his discussion of theme parks and merchandise, Jenkins suggests the immersive and extractable potential of transmedia narratives into the "real world" of reader/audiences. These personal experiences are not likely to extend the official narrative; however, they take place within official contexts. Theme parks and merchandise are the products of commercial producers whose ownership of narrative elements enables for tighter control over how certain facets of the narrative physically manifest. Costume, set and character design are subject to copyright ownership, as are plot details and (some) character backstories. The commercial interests of copyright owners and the structure of media industries thus constitute an influential factor in the creation of transmedia narratives. This influence is the concern of scholars who adopt a political economy approach to the analysis of transmedia storytelling (Edwards 2012; Fuchs 2011). For these scholars, transmedia storytelling exemplifies corporate synergy and practices that "involve media production models that profit media conglomerates by coordinating among their different divisions, and they also entail monetizing how consumers try to interact with the media, turning fan behaviours into corporate profit, or seizing the democratic promise of new media for corporate gain" (Edwards 2012, 1).

Finally, study of the transmedia text considers how audiences relate to the text. The readerly or writerly (following Barthes) nature of transmedia texts is examined when addressing questions of reader/audiences and writer/producers, with scholars often identifying the complexity and ephemeral nature of narrative production (Busse 2017).

Other "applications" of transmedia storytelling are in arenas such as education and advocacy, examples of which can be identified in *Global Convergence Cultures: Transmedia Earth* (Freeman and Proctor 2018) and *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies* (Freeman and Gambarato 2019). Both of these texts interpret transmediality in a broad sense, which aids the collection of examples that are otherwise better suited under conceptual frameworks such as cross media or

adaption. The publication of the *Global Convergence Culture: Transmedia Earth* (Freeman and Proctor) and *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies* (Freeman and Gambarato 2019) demonstrates that transmedia is a very productive field of research that increasingly examines “non-fictional” and “non-Western” cultural productions. Both books provide theoretical perspectives on varying transmedia practices, as well as re-conceptualising transmediality in order to explore uses of media in non-narrative contexts. As such, both these volumes present new investigations into the field. However, what is notable is the absence of practices from the Asia Pacific, particularly China, South Korea and South East Asia. In this regard, this volume builds upon some of the theoretical foundations of these books, but provides a perspective from the Asia and Pacific region. This fills a gap in knowledge while providing a unique and hitherto underexplored perspective on transmedia practices.

A review of other recent titles indicates that both regional concerns and intersections between actors (i.e. producers, fans, audiences and texts) are prevalent in contemporary transmedia scholarship. A geographical difference is the main feature distinguishing this volume from Gómez, Freeman and Velásquez’s 2019 edited collection *Transmedia Archaeology in Latin America*, which focuses mostly on Latin America. *The Handbook of Research on Transmedia Storytelling and Narrative Strategies* (Yilmaz et al. 2019) focuses specifically on storytelling using a variety of media platforms, as well as strategies to engage audiences. Unlike the previous volumes—which considered both transmedia practices and theories—their text is more practical in nature. Its narrower focus is directed towards a readership interested in advertising and storytelling techniques with an emphasis on attracting audience attention. *World Building: Transmedia, Fans, Industries* (Boni 2017) adopts both theoretical and practical perspectives on the concept of world-building as a key thematic and practical concern with an emphasis on the impact of the various industrial and cultural contexts in which the narratives are constructed and consumed. *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling* (Guynes and Hassler-Forest 2018) examines the historical and socio-political contexts within which corporate and fan production of the *Star Wars* narrative took place, examining the ways in which transmedia storytelling intersects with the industrial logic of corporate media franchises through an examination of both corporate top-down and fan bottom-up strategies.

This volume extends the concerns of recent publications on the topic by bringing scholarly attention to transmedia practices emerging from the Asia and Pacific region. Like Boni (2017) and Guynes and Hassler-Forest (2018), the chapters in this volume consider the interplay between audiences, fans and transmedia texts in specific socio-political contexts, providing insight into how transmedia narratives are appropriated and re-appropriated by fans in a number of cultural and transcultural contexts within the region. Additionally, the interplay between top-down and bottom-up narrative strategies is explored through a focus on both institutional and grassroots approaches to transmedia narratives and practices. The former involves government and industry-driven practices, and the latter focuses on grassroots convergence, transcultural dialogue facilitated by transmedia activism among countries and communities from the region. It also explores transmedia as a framework facilitating inclusiveness and the role of transmedia narratives in formal and informal learning.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The volume is organised into three parts that address three overriding concerns: the influence of industrial and cultural factors on the construction of transmedia texts; the way audience and fans utilise texts to create counter-public spheres; and the way transmedia practice empowers individuals and communities. The parts are as follows: Official and Unofficial Transmedia Narratives: State, Corporate and Grassroots Convergence; Transcultural Dialogues: Cultural Flows and Appropriation; and Transmedia Communication: Inclusiveness and Communities. Part I outlines examples of government and industry practices and examines the friction between these top-down approaches and audience/fan bottom-up responses. Part II explores how tensions between top-down and bottom-up approaches facilitate transcultural exchange and appropriation. Part III provides in-depth exploration of a number of independent practices in arts that serve to empower communities. It also explores examples of transmedia practices in educational sectors in Japan and China to examine how transmedia can facilitate intercultural communication.

*Official and Unofficial Narratives: State, Corporate and Grassroots
Convergence*

This part includes three chapters that provide insight into top-down transmedia practices within highly centralised media environments such as China (at governmental level), Malaysia and South Korea (at industry level). These chapters are followed by two case studies examining the tensions between top-down approaches and bottom-up grassroots transmedia practices.

Jie Gu and Xijing Zhao's chapter *From Telling a Story to Telling an Idea: A Transmedia Narrative of Amazing China Under New Propaganda Initiatives in China* examines centralised transmedia storytelling through the analysis of *Amazing China*, a documentary series and film released in 2018. Gu and Zhao develop the notion of an "idea universe" that is generated around propaganda themes and is connected by multiple media platforms, and fictional and non-fictional media texts. They highlight the centrality of non-fiction texts in a transmedia narrative that is driven by political rather than commercial interests, and suggest the "idea universe" as a concept that can accommodate more diverse media formats and forms of audience engagement. The diversity of media formats is also of central concern in Sung-Ae Lee's chapter *The Web of Story Across the Multiple Platforms of South Korea's Cheese in the Trap*. Discussing the commercially centralised South Korean media industry, Lee examines how intertextuality and audience discussion shape the spread of narratives that originated as online comics across media texts (television series and films). She argues that the formal characteristics of different mediums (comics, televisual and cinematic) influence viewer engagement insofar as shifts in genre afforded by the application of different filming techniques (such as camera angles) can affect how the transmedial text is assessed in relation to the comic. Umar Hakim Mohd Hasri and Md Azalanshah Bin Md Syed's chapter *BoBoiBoy and The Contextualisation of Transmedia Storytelling in Malaysian Animation Industry* provides insight into the animation industry in Malaysia through their examination of one transmedia narrative. The chapter outlines the specific narrative techniques employed to distribute the narrative via the mediums of television and film. The authors suggest that, like other global media industries, centralised corporate control of the narrative enables for coherent world-building to occur.

The next two chapters address transmedia storytelling from grassroots perspectives. Jenna Ng and Shen Jiang's chapter *Transmedia Non-fiction in China: Mapping the Transmedia Story of "Yiyi", the Youngest Survivor of the 2011 Wenzhou Train Crash*, examines the use of social media platforms for citizens to discuss and debate official reporting of a train crash in 2011. The chapter conceptualises the reporting and online discussion of the incident as a multifaceted transmedia narrative, and takes as a case study the story of Xiang Weiyi, the youngest survivor of the crash. Ng and Shen argue that, due to the nature of online social media, the strongest element of the non-fiction transmedia narrative is the longevity of the story as a consequence of its proximity to "real" life (tracking the developing story of a survivor). They offer the case study as an example of bottom-up transmedia authorship. Yue Wang and Tingting Hu further examine bottom-up authorship in their chapter *Transmedia Storytelling in Mainland China: Interaction Between TV Drama and Fan Narratives in The Disguiser*. They examine how the novel-turned television and online drama *The Disguiser* (2015) inspired fan works that revealed a re-working and re-negotiation of the official narratives of nation-state building and political struggle present in the top-down transmedia texts. In this regard, the authors argue that transmedia storytelling in China is characterised as much by the multifaceted and less controlled bottom-up fan creativity as it is by top-down forces that meet ideological demands.

Transcultural Dialogues: Cultural Flows and Appropriation

Part II further explores bottom-up transmedia practices through an investigation of how transcultural exchange and independent practices are fostered through creative practices in response to official transmedia narrative texts.

Keith B. Wagner and Meng Liang's chapter *Love and Producer as East Asian Transmedia: Otome Games, Sexless Polyamory, and Neoliberal Choice for Chinese and South Korean Young Women* focuses on different reception of the same media products in two countries from the region (China and South Korea) and discusses how audiences from different cultures influence the flow of media.

Susana Tosca's chapter *Appropriating the Shinsengumi: Hakuoki Fan Fiction as Transmedial/Transcultural Exploration* broadens this exploration, illustrating how appropriation of cultural context is not limited

to audiences from the region, through her examination of the appropriation of Asian cultural products in fan fiction from English-, Spanish- and French-speaking countries. The chapter demonstrates how, during this process, fans extend and reshape the original content.

Transmedia Communication: Inclusiveness and Communities

This part focuses on independent grassroots practices to highlight the potential for transmedia practices to empower disadvantaged communities. The first chapter in this part, Martin Potter's *Intimate Connectivities: Local Dynamic Networks in the Big Stories, Small Towns Transmedia Documentary*, provides an example of independent transmedia practices used by underrepresented communities in Cambodia, Malaysia and West Papua to reject mainstream "deficit discourses" that marginalise them and their ways of life. Potter emphasises the empowering potential of transmedia practices to give voice to local communities, arguing for a shift away from the exploration of narratives by "digital monoliths". Instead, he suggests a conceptualisation of transmedia practices that is transformative as it facilitates collaboration and co-creation, dissemination and recording of local experiences.

Kim Munro's chapter *Transmedia Activism and Future Dreaming: Big hART's Yijala Yala* outlines how transmedia activism is applied in the Australian context through an exploration of the arts activism and social change organisation Big hART and their long-term community-based, interdisciplinary, participatory projects with disadvantaged communities in rural and regional Australia. Through close discussion of three projects, Potter argues for the need to expand understandings of transmedia activities through its ability to activate multiple approaches to non-fiction storytelling and invoke multiple mediums of expression.

In contrast to Munro's multi-project approach, Hongwei Bao's chapter *The Power of Communication: Transmedia Storytelling in Documentary Theatre About My Parents and Their Child* explores how performance art in contemporary China functions as a pathway to creating spaces for discussion of social and political issues. Through an examination of discussions provoked by the play and film *About My Parents and Their Child*, Bao highlights how the performance of the play enabled for the discussion of sensitive issues including homosexuality and China's history of famine, war and political turmoil in a way that effectively circumvented censorship.

The final chapters focus specifically on the applications of transmedia practices within the field of education, exploring attempts to integrate transmedia approaches in formal educational settings to design more inclusive content and curricula. James Reid’s chapter *Transmedia Education in a CLIL Paradigm: An Investigation into Bicultural Learning* explores the cultural differences in teaching and learning within a Japanese context, while Filippo Gilardi and Celia Lam’s chapter *Teaching Transmedia in China: Complexity, Digital Natives, and Critical Thinking* examines the challenges and successes of implementing a transmedia curriculum inspired by Jenkins’ published syllabus at a Sino-British university in China.

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