

INTRODUCTION

THE TRANSMEDIA CREATOR: STORYTELLER, PRODUCER AND NOW...DESIGNER

Welcome in *transmediasphere*, where stories float all around us and inside us. Stories and brands, trends, conflicts, experiences, ways of being. A new ecosystem, rich of technology and complex, deep and charming. A *transmediaverse* where audiences and creators share multi-platform story worlds, stack up pieces from all the messages and products, the works and the experiences mixed in the global flux, and reconstruct their *invisible scripts*. Create new sensorial combinations and new conversational artforms.

Making transmedia means creating complex imaginative universes for stories distributed on different media platforms, spreading multilayered plots and managing complex characters for entertainment, information and communications, for brand and public institutions, for cultural heritage and the Arts, for education and for goods. Look around you: screens, devices, texts, brands... Transmedia is everywhere, even if we don't perceive it, most of the time. Digital tales are available 24 hours a day ready to be told, crossed or matched by intangible authors hidden in the real and in the digital worlds. Transmedia is *not-or-just* a new "geography of the tale", though. It's about our way of imaging our emotions and interpreting the reality. Using the stories we love, the places we own, the products we buy, the devices we keep in our pockets, the trends we share and all the other *status* of presence and identity we use – day by day – to be part of the worldwide game of contemporary communications. In this perspective, a branded series as well as the launch of

a movie, a fashion show, a social benefit project or a political campaign, an urban game or an interactive installation can all be pieces of the same, amazing, sprawling mosaic.

At the reckoning with the even more liquid, complex and messy communicative contemporary ecosystem, transmedia storytelling is now taking over a more adult and compelling role. Every day, new ways of consuming and sharing contents are growing out. Industrial and social processes get more complex and chaotic. Media platforms and technologies are multiplying themselves, and all these changes urgently need highly functional, advanced design skills. A wider and a wiser perspective. A new way to imagine and to tell the present with immediate, less mechanical and furthermore long-lived tools¹. And the transmedia author? The creative storyteller? The producer? As with every pioneering organism, they are evolving and anticipating some of the global incomings. This is why transmedia needs today storytellers, showrunners and producers but also... *designers*, to succeed. This is the reason why the term 'project' appears to be so crucial for the present work and its narrative is often broken by images of projects and frameworks or jottings of works in progress, all elements which integrate my text, thus making it more like a whole.

Sketches and patterns, charts and prototypes, experiences and new models of collaborative working are even more crucial in transmedia experiences, works and campaigns involving simultaneously story crafting and game design, web design, interface design, sound design, video design, graphic design, brand identity creation, social media and marketing strategies,

1. Simon Staffans seems to share such a point of view when he defines contemporary communication system as "Now Media" and, specifically on transmedia storytelling, he writes: "We can achieve a great initial impact with a message, a story, that is clearly and shingly black-and-white – easy to grasp, easy to encompass, easy to react to and easy to find like-minded people to ally with around. But for a longer-lasting impact, we need to think deeper, further and longer" in: Staffans, S., *One Year in Now Media*. Vol. 6, p. 12, accessed december 31, 2016, simonstaffans.com

cultural promotions, educational patterns, arts management and all the possible crossing of these different disciplines.

Mixed with advanced storytelling and multi-platform production procedures, *design* is today a practical tool, a stylistic breakthrough and an essential linguistic blend along the transmedia way. An example?

Angry Birds is the most popular app of all time, with over 3 billion downloads and over 100 million monthly active player. It is about a group of funny and unrepentant birds, each with a superpower, each armed with a sling, fighting against an army of little green pigs that are threatening their eggs. Created in 2009 by Finnish Rovio Entertainment, *Angry birds* has been ahead of and later fully ridden the transmedia revolution. It has conquered the world and influenced an entire generation thanks to series of books, comics, cartoons, video games, theme parks and an overflowing merchandising. It is a success based on simplicity and immediacy, on narrative and, most of all, on design:

- that biting of characters and game environment;
- that simple and direct of the story (story design);
- that immediate of the dynamics of use (game design);
- that of the production and of multilinear marketing;
- that of the delivery and content use (experience design).

In 2016, *Angry Birds* hit the big screen too. At the release of *The Angry Birds Movie*, first full-length feature 3D film produced by Rovio Animation, Sony Pictures spread its transmedial power and created a \$400 million promo campaign for the film in 100 countries, involving more than 50 big partners. The objective was that of creating a new audience for the brand (the first players were fastly growing up...) and the idea was to throw (catapult) the audience onto a network of experiences to bring them back on to that of the game, again betting on design. Several

campaigns were created (*Makes Angry Birds Happy* with Citroen, for instance, or *The Official Stunt Animal* with Jack Links, and many more) which simply did not only make narrative content boom out, but also enriched the brand's expanded universe. In order to achieve such an objective, the semantic basin² of the story was renovated to create a 'perennial pop culture property', and therefore not a simple *portmanteau*, but a much more complex transmedial franchise.³

This is also why at the time of the first release of the movie a brand new video game was also released. *Angry Birds Action* combined the traditional story world of the game with the design character of the movie, thus creating not only a simple tie-in with the movie but an extensive augmented-reality promotions tool. Fans could interact with the characters in a funny prequel to the movie. Then, thanks to more than 1 billion 'Birdcodes', they could play mini-games and virtual experiences distributed in different products and places (with partners like McDonald's, Lego and H&M, for example). Finally, one last BirdCode was hidden in the end credits of *The Angry Birds Movie*. Triggered by an inaudible watermark in the audio, the game unlocked the notorious pigs and activated an extra end-credits scene⁴. The result was the creation of a new story world, an expanded communicative system and a richer and more diversified relationship with the game's users, thanks to easter eggs and other consumer experiences enriched by the new design and developed thanks to the approach to augmented reality and to the movie's narrative contents.

2. For a definition of "semantic basin" of a story, seen as the relationship between its lifespan and the duration of its related imaginary, see: G. Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, 1960.

3. In transmedia storytelling *franchise* is a narrative universe given to a communicative system which creates diverse experiences of individual use on different platforms. *Portmanteau* relies on a communicative system which transfers creative forms connected to the same experience of use on different platforms.

4. Briant, J., "*Angry Birds Action*" Game uses Augmented Reality to Promote Movie, *Brands Tie-Ins*, accessed april 27, 2016, variety.com



Img. 1 The Angry Birds Movie (2016). Poster, screenshots of the game and “birdcode” in the end credits of the film.

The best transmedia storytelling experiences invite audience members to immerse themselves in the story world, exploring different aspects of character and incident, journeying to “distant mountains” which are aspects of the story world that may not be obvious but are worth finding. The best of these experiences also invite audience members to somehow contribute to the dialog that is the best of what storytelling communication holds. A truly interactive transmedia experience is signified by the participant’s ability not simply to choose between two threats of narrative but to impact the narrative itself. The best transmedia storytelling experiences drives authors to consider the audience members’ engagement with the narrative, particularly as it is mediated through various technologies. And because we live in an age where the very media that delivers the story can be used by the participant to invite more people to the experience (or tell them to stay away), authors must make an extra effort to enrich and refine the story itself. Quality is the winner of the Digital Age. – *Jeff Gomez – transmedia producer and CEO of Starlight Runner Entertainment*