

# Foreword

## TRANSMEDIA JOURNALISM: A WILD WEST?

It was over a decade ago when transmedia storytelling was first beginning to be talked about in industrial and academic circles as something that essentially encapsulated what digitally networked media platforms could accomplish. There was an unlimited sense of possibility for the idea of telling stories across multiple platforms. And yet, at least for the most part, these possibilities were in fact limited to commercial practices and film or television examples from an Anglo-American origin. “It is transmedia storytelling,” as *Fast Company*’s David Kushner put it back in 2008, “that ultimately lures the audience into buying more stuff—today, DVDs; tomorrow, who knows what” (Kushner, 2008). It is certainly true that commerce is closely aligned with the ethos of transmedia storytelling; after all, spreading media content across a spectrum of delivery channels and encouraging audiences to migrate repeatedly across those various channels has opened the door for innovation in the digital marketing sector, particularly in the United States and United Kingdom where transmedia sits alongside related principles of branded content as the lynchpin for engaging consumers across platforms.

But commerce is far from being the sole driving factor behind transmedia; nor is it its only function. Across the globe, people now engage with all sorts of media content across multiple platforms, following stories, characters and worlds—but also brands, charities and, indeed, news stories—across a spectrum of media channels. And so perhaps the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity for understanding this transmedia phenomenon right now is the sheer breadth of its interpretation. As I have written for *Global Convergence Cultures: Transmedia Earth*, a forthcoming edited collection of mine, “while scholarship continues to dwell on the commercial industry contexts of transmedia, smaller national communities and often far less commercial cultures around the world are now beginning to make very different ... uses of transmedia, applying alternative modes of the transmedia phenomenon to the needs and structures of a nation or re-thinking this phenomenon by reapplying it to non-fictional, cultural, political, social or heritage based projects” (Freeman & Proctor, 2018).

The same sense of reinterpretation is also true for the use and role of transmedia in world of journalism, which as everyone is fully aware is now facing enormous challenges and constant changes. Ever since the rise and dominance of new digital technologies into our everyday media landscape, it has been assumed by many that journalism will need to adapt to survive; that developing alternative and more digitally specific strategies for reporting and relaying information to the public is necessary at a time when all sorts of information is freely and readily available to everyone. Thus, applying the underpinning principles of transmedia storytelling to journalism makes a great deal of sense, despite raising a number of industrial and ethical questions in the process. For instance, can journalism become transmedial with-

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out inheriting the latter's commercial practices and connotations? Can transmedia journalism retain the objective, public-service priorities of journalism? At what point does journalism become PR, especially in the context of industrially connected corporations and platforms? And, perhaps most pressingly of all, how much does journalism really *need* transmedia?

These, amongst many others, are the sorts of questions that will be addressed in this book—itsself a hugely rich, diverse and much-needed collection of essays about the current face of transmedia journalism around the world. Gambarato and Alzamora have brought together a terrific range of scholars addressing topics as broad-ranging as narrative journalism, interactivity, social networks, media history, sport, fandom and participatory culture. In short, this collection is at the cutting-edge of transmedia studies right now, and the sheer breath and innovation at the heart of each chapter speaks of the way in which we have come full circle in terms of thinking about transmedia's potential. Back in the same magazine article from 2008, Kushner cited Tim Kring, creator of TV's *Heroes*, in saying: "We're the beta-testing ground. It's a Wild West: There are no rules. Just take something that sounds cool and go try it." Today's world of transmedia journalism, while not quite in the same Wild West territory, now has the opportunity to also try new ideas, and to adapt to new journalistic practices. Who knows where these transmedia practices will lead to next, but this book is a critical first step.

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## REFERENCES

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