

The Bridge – A Transmedia Dialogue between TV, Film and Gaming

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Abstract. The goal is to discuss the transmedia (TM) relationship in the game-film and game-TV dialogue. First we will analyze previous game-film transitions and releases so that a background is set up and further examinations become sustained. Secondly, we are to find how exactly works transmedia gaming (TMG) as the main object of study, the video game *Quantum Break* (QB) sets a new trend, which leads us to take on digital media studies, communication sciences, as a framework, to better understand this new “dialogue”.

Instead of going for narratology or ludology we see this transmedia event of QB as a change in digital media. We start with concepts such as narrative, fiction, virtuality, but as the new audience condition is shaped by a TM dialogue, storytelling is marketing-driven, thus turning the public into a searcher/connector. We will explain how changes are leading to a new scenario.

Keywords: bridge, narrative, digital media, Lost, transmedia, videogames, searchers, interactivity, TV series.

1 Introduction and Problem

Transmedia (TM) is the ability in media content design of having storytelling, interaction and viewing experience of a narrative unfolding on different media. Transmedia Gaming (TMG) (Evans, 2011, 94) means this strategy applied to videogames. Games, TV and films are separate from each other, but as a new game as *Quantum Break* (QB) is determined to clear these boundaries, we expect more from game and TV-film cross-overs. Here is a new dialogue, which in practice means that the public, sometimes as viewers, or players, will watch and play on screen displays. The core formula is that the game developer, Remedy, is making “Junction Moments” to bridge the gap between passive and interactive imagery. Also, it is supposed to be a TV series where the things we see are useful for the gameplay, and vice-versa.

In this work we do not focus on the approaches of narratology or ludology. Instead digital media is the core. We see QB as a digital media phenomenon, something new, asking for a new behavior and setting up new rules. The problem in this research is “how exactly is this formula new?”, and the hypothesis are:

1. “Is TMG applying the formula used on *Lost*?”
2. “How does the *Lost* formula work out once applied to other media?”¹
3. Ultimately, “Where does QB innovates, in which features to be more specific?”

1.1 Discussion about the Related Work

Before we discuss how a game as QB sets a new trend we have to remind how a TV show as *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010) managed to revolutionize media². *Lost* narrowed the gap between viewers and users — the TV world and the computer world. Narrative was its major asset, which was non-linear and cross-media. It’s like having TV before and after *Lost*. As the Web has become a key site for engagement, and narrative devices are built to attract people in TV webcasts, as time goes by, the boundaries between film, games, Web search, TM and TMG will be more and more blurred.

From domains such as science fiction comes the idea about how all things are coming around “Narrative”. Writer William Gibson assures in the *Zero History* novel: “consumers don’t buy as much products as they buy narratives” (2010, 21). And in the same trend, Lunenfeld affirms: “now that the narrative surrounds us, it has become the new ground” (2011, 58). Of course we know the longer people consume narrative parts, the deeper will be the connection with the fiction world. Assembling meaning equals connection to media worlds.

But when it comes to post-*Lost* TV, as Sasaki underlines

“viewers had the option of following only the series on TV, ignoring any other unique content broadcasted by a different medium. At the same time someone who was not aware of the TV show could accidentally ‘see/access some of these extra content leading to the main plot, the ‘big narrative scheme’” (2012, 20).

This means narrative is no longer just content, since it is also part of the media design, in the sense that the message is medium-shaped. So, as far as narrative works, extends and splits in different media the audience is kept entertained and spends more money in all things interconnected with narrative. There is a big narrative being woven, as Sasaki points too.

2 About References and Issues

The big step forward with *Lost* is that the show was at the same level as digital media content. *Lost* appears in this discussion of TMG because it is the first originally designed TV series to integrate viewers, searchers and players.

As for the TM, and TMG, the videography we have tested for this research led us to this results, in terms of distinctive categories: we believe that until some recent TM

¹ As Sasaki asked too in 2012.

² Long before we could think of a game becoming interdependent with TV series, as QB promises to work with, *Lost* was the real first TM/TV show to provide content also in gaming, and setting up Web communities as well.

products, games, TV and films were spinning off their foundries what we may call “Fake TM”, meaning that some things were taking place, except true “continuity”. So the categories in which most media we have examined fit in are “Sequentials” and “Interactive”, being TM a big amount too. However “Total TM” is only achieved in *Quantum Break*.

Sequentials are basically games and films establishing a “mention” between them, in the sense that one refers the other. There is no hybrid universe or direct dependency in narrative³.

After some time, interactivity becomes a contaminant agent, spreading its logic everywhere. We see as the first attempt to bridge games and films with *The X-Files* (Hyperbole Studios, Fox Interactive, 1999), the game based on Full Motion Video and classified as an “Interactive Movie”. Here the connection is obviously established with *The X-Files*: (Carter, C., 1993), the TV series.

More recently, games such as *James Bond 007: Blood Stone* (2010), make sense if we watch *007: Skyfall* (Mendes, S., 2012) and *007: Quantum of Solace* (Forster, M., 2008) movies. A less known relationship is the one between Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner* and the non-linear game (Westwood Studios, 1997) version. Here we literally play the movie. *Avatar* (Cameron, J., 2009), the movie, and the game *James Cameron's Avatar* are successful (2009) in just connecting. Again, connections, interactive ones, are conceived as part of the plan.

Even in *Golden Eye* (Campbell, M., 1995) Bond film, there was a success coming from the connection with *Goldeneye* (1997) game for Nintendo N64. In recent past, Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010) movie mentions a previous chapter, called *Inception Animation Prequel – The Cobol Job* (Kirby, I., 2010), which turns this animated short itself into TM. *Iron man* (Favreau, J., 2008) connects with Marvel movies and spins-off into games in consoles. Long before these strategies, games such as *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (2002) tried a straight connection with movies like *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998). People want to play movies.

More examples stand in the history of video games, providing versions of homonymous movies, as *Predator* (McTiernan, J., 1987). The trend then allowed *The Running Man* (Glaser, P.M., 1987) to become *The Running Man* (1989), the game. For quite some time, interactivity was an add-on to passive imagery. *The Terminator* (Cameron, J., 1984) became eight years later *The Terminator* by Virgin Interactive. This narrative universe links up with *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Cameron, J., 1991); and still today, *Terminator Salvation* (McG, 2011) considers previous releases as puzzle pieces.

³ For instance, *The Avengers* (Whedon, J., 2012) movie is connected with previous Marvel movies such as *Captain America: The First Avenger* (Johnston, J., 2012) and *Thor* (Branagah, K., Whedon, J., 2011). The same strategy is identified in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (West, J., 2001), which stands side by side with *Tomb Raider* (1996), the game. Many are the examples, though we highlight here the link between the *Halo* game universe and the movie *Halo 4: Forward Unto Dawn* (2012). *The X-Files: Fight The Future* (Bowman, R., 1998) and *X-Files: I Want to Believe* (Carter, C., 2008) were the kind of movies that tried to link books and movies of *The X-Files*' universe.

A story with a need to connect with digital environment is for sure *Tron* (Lisberger, S., 1982). What is unfolding now is merely the "Real TM" mode of gaming. It began in TV series as *Lost* and *24* (Cochran, R., Surnow, J., Fox, 2001-10), which pioneered the gameplay of episode stories or subplots. Now, TV series like Marvel's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*⁴ (Whedon, J., ABC, 2013) are establishing a cluster of sense with the narrative of *Thor: The Dark World* (Taylor, A., 2013) movie.

Other situations exist, like the video game *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* (Ubisoft, 2012), which release online live-action movies as *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier - Ghost Recon Alpha Official Film* (Ubisoft, Little Minx Production, Mikros Image, May 5, 2012). Since search culture is a common ground for the audiences of these media, we see links coming from different media regarding the same storytelling universes.

Besides *24*, *Lost* remains the best in connecting with gaming. In fact, *Lost* deliberate releases the TMG *Lost: Via Domus* (2008). The reference for everyone in TMG was until today *The Matrix* (Wachowski, A. & Wachowski, L., 1999)⁵. Still now, the industry model of connecting at least two releases is working good. Since the launch of *Assassin's Creed* [AC] (Ubisoft, 2007), every game in the AC universe expands the memory of the thief and its universe⁶. A smart case of linking movies to new games in a successful manner lies in *AVP - Aliens vs Predator* (2010)⁷.

Some references from the past and the present share similar positioning, as the purpose of some releases was since ever to turn watchable images in controllable images, and otherwise.

Other known releases such as *Mirror's Edge*, a PlayStation 3 game, became an iPhone release too (IronMonkey Studios, EA Mobile, 2010). Beyond that, a *Mirror's Edge Comic* (Wildstorm Productions, Smith, M.D., Pratchett, R., 2009-10) version came up afterwards. Similar launches came from Disney, by upgrading the *Tron* universe⁸.

By repositioning our discussion here about the game and film dialogue, we may see in video TM approaches establishing a more direct link. The *Lost Experience* (2004) ARG is a TM maneuver too, like *Lost: Missing Pieces* (Mobisodes/Websodes)

⁴ Especially episode 8 (directed by Frakes, J., 2013).

⁵ The movie universe of Morpheus, Neo and Trinity, along with *The Matrix Reloaded* (Idem, L., 2003), *The Matrix Revolutions* (Idem, 2003) and *The Animatrix* (Chung, P., et al, 2003) builds up a narrative so big, that only players of *Enter The Matrix* (2003) and *The Matrix: Path of Neo* (2005) were really comprehending what the whole story was all about. Not to mention, *The Matrix Online* (2005).

⁶ Players get to play different history moments in *Assassin's Creed II* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2009) or in *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (Ubisoft, 2013), but everything is related with webmovies [*Assassin's Creed: Lineage 1* (26 October, 2009) and *Lineage 2* (17 November, 2009)] and even books (*Assassin's Creed: Desmond* [comic] (Ubisoft, France-Belgium, 2009).

⁷ In which players control play any of the primary characters of the famous movies of *Aliens* or *Predator*, and manage to see the story from three points of view.

⁸ By *Tron Legacy Interactive Graphic Novel* (Disney Digital Books, ScrollMotion, Stefano, A., et al, 2011) and *Tron Legacy* (Disney Digital Books, 2011), the comic.

(Bender, J., 2007). The elements we identify are both passive and interactive footage⁹. While new narratives are stitched together now, in previous TMG what we had was more like a parallel narrative. It happens in *The Running Man* game version of the movie with the same name (1987). Even though we may witness cases of dialogue from games to film and otherwise, or from games to other media, we have say that *The Matrix* universe stands as pioneer in the TMG scene¹⁰. Before *The Matrix* the game-film dialogue is not marketing-driven from scratch. There are stories side-by-side, objects which have resemblance, there are similar universes, but no technological homogeneity nor narrative major design. It's a fragmented mediascape. This is why we call it "Fake TM", as every game becomes a comic or a movie, regardless of which medium meets release in the first place. Stories play out in a disconnected manner.

One thing is to have a big narrative to which we plug into, and interplay works; while another is to have one fiction world merely emerging in different mediums that are consumed differently. Total TMG solves this last part.

In 1991 Toffler notices a "multi-channel society" (372), and today, narratives would not be a consumer product if there would be no multi-channels to go back to, as he pointed out. For Jenkins in 2006, "convergence" or TM it is something "(...) integrating multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium" (95). The reason why we make convergence work is because we own different platforms. We are not into one medium, we are purchasing ranges of products. As a consequence, audiences can move across media.

Simon Bond is one of the authors noticing TM and marketing strategies as an interesting phenomenon. He says if we "use this knowledge to hone how screen-specific messages can work in unison in a multiscreen environment for maximum effect. No marketer has done this yet, but one soon will. And others will follow" (2012, 34). It means that now we surely are in the "multi"media age. But it has been a potential for marketing since ever. "Integration" is what makes audiences connect with the media¹¹.

3 Introducing New Perspectives

The breaking point in TMG is what *Lost* had already in its TM form: it provided "new entry-points" (Sasaki, 2012, 2) for audiences. Following this, "a transmedia fictional world is one in which the viewers can lose themselves in a range of different contexts

⁹ Some examples seem *retro* but trigger new TMG events, like the upcoming *Half-Life* movie, out of a partnership between J.J. Abrams' Bad Robot Productions and Gabe Newell's Valve Software, since the fan film *Half-Life: Raise The Bar* got online (Machinima Prime, 4 October, 2013). The idea came from fans, as it did in the *Metal Gear Solid: Philantropy Part 1* and *2* movies (Hive Division, Talamini, G., 2009), being the latter both inspired in the MGS game universe (Kojima, H., Konami).

¹⁰ Even with *The Matrix* comic prequels available in www.whatisthematrix.com (Access in April, 1999).

¹¹ Researchers as Evans notice too how "Transmedia narratives such as *Lost* and *Heroes* (NBC, 2006–2010) offered greater integration" (2011, 179).

and in which (...) the relationship between text, viewer and technology come into play" (Evans, 2011, 39). So contexts, platforms and media types are something that matters. Storytelling as to work despite the differences of any element. In TMG the challenge is one level above, because TV, film and games are speaking different engagement codes with the audience.

Usually, games are more studied as sociological issues or according to interface and programming themes, while TV causes many media studies and audience research to appear under the guidelines of reception of contents. There is a lot of concern about how games are made, and also how TV is understood. For this study of ours, since the object of study is TMG, more specifically QB, the videogame made by Remedy aspiring boldly to bridge the gap between both TV and game world, we choose to face the issue as a matter of digital media study. By examining previous media releases in terms of games, TV series, and motion pictures, we are able to point out patterns and connections between fiction domains, platforms and the kind of audiences these elements outline.

Rather than choosing narratology or ludology, we choose to understand the relationships between elements in order to see how people consume this fiction worlds (such as *Lost* is a major example); and secondly we ask "how could a TMG game establish a new domain?"

New perspectives are to be considered here. We could say, as Paul Magill, that imposed cultural authority is replaced by an "offered cultural resource" (2003, 3). And this resources work with "images". The media are making images available and we are their "connectors". The problem is that these images are no longer just "graphic". We live in a "post-image" era. "There is 'no longer any distinction between text and image, (...) everything is now image'" (Bruce Mau in Lunenfeld, 2011, 55).

In this context, audiences are consuming images, narratives, something big, digitally plastic, crossing any platform. There is a transition from text to context. In Sasaki's regard, for example, TM narrative is all about "multilayered plots" (2012, 23), which triggers new things, such as the idea of a media-environment¹². As a consequence of this surrounding, we tend to look for things, we become "searchers" (Lunenfeld, 2011, xv-xvi), a typical condition of the post-television age.

Maybe we should look at TMG and the non-linear narrative plots as a revolution in interfaces. Usually, a user interface is understood as pertaining to human-computer interaction (Shedroff, Noessel, 2013, 3). It is still "all parts of a thing that enable its use" (Idem, Ibidem). And when it comes to TMG, we are on the fringe of TV, books and film, gaming and cinema, and text and image. This is why we are all "interfacing" with contents, TV shows, websites, social media, and games with stories that never end. There is a new interface at question in TMG, especially in QB.

Dealing with TMG is about solving "technological discontinuity". And the new model is brought by *Lost*. *Lost* stands as a language format and a media system for

¹² Perhaps we are becoming "prisoners of the nexus" (Baudrillard, 2010, 37), as we are becoming more "viewers" (Sasaki, 2012, 2). It is getting harder to distinguish the viewer condition from the user condition, as all things are image, displayed on screens, and digital platforms surround us.

TM, not just a TV series. We think TMGs and narratives share the same engagement type.

What is occurring is that on one side there is passive-unleashed imagery, whereas active-interactive imagery lies on the other. TMG is becoming a model to make TV-video-film concepts closer to gaming-VR experiences. It is as if wherever we go, there is the story, the experience. "Images become a meaningful text in their own right" (Freedman in Kackman et al, 2011, 207). For the casual consumer each story makes sense, while for the narrative devotee any part assembles something greater. This is why Lunenfeld's idea of the "searchers" makes sense. After all, a fragmented media landscape, the media types and the new audience behavior trigger "connecting" events. Having a versatile storytelling enhances flow, continuity and simultaneity in narrative consumption.

It is true that audiences can now move across media; from television displays to mobile media (Evans, 2011, 40). We see that new figures are popping out of the new framework. Searching is becoming a default setting in-between watch and play. These are emancipated audiences, used to turn on many media simultaneously. According to one recent Google report, "Search is the most common bridge between devices in this sequential [or simultaneous] usage" (2012, 3). In effect, a new culture is rising, which is search culture, "fundamentally, based on conversational interaction and social participation, and it is booming" (Spurgeon, 2008, 25). The reason why curious audiences engage with puzzles is that they know and want to play and watch. They don't mind at all to search¹³.

4 Providing Concrete Results

Many game to film or TV dialogues are to be considered as "Fake TM". One may distinguish these items, which are "Sequentials" (40 objects), linked between each other superficially, from those being "Interactive" (53 objects), thus interconnecting up with fiction items and/or add up interaction agency. The single total TM, and TMG object, is QB¹⁴. Despite this, we had to examine 29 video games, 35 films, 5 TV series and 2 anime movies. The total amount of videography ascends to 87 objects, already integrating the 16 TM items exclusively analyzed for this article.

After crossing theory, concepts and the media objects we have set ourselves to review, we expect to understand how before QB separate media have prepared the conditions to make TMG a reality. Besides, we hope to understand the concerns in terms of narrative design and the digital media concepts to follow in the near future. By comparing previous game-film dialogues and transmedia products, and crossing it with the information provided by QB game developers, we conclude that TMG is a working model for storytelling, digital media and truly making cross-media

¹³ They are finding meaning in connector interfaces. However with no digitization, searchable contents and TM strategies would fail.

¹⁴ By the time this research was conducted the QB version of the TV series was yet unreleased, as well as the game; this narrowed the elements necessary to finish this work in a more accurate way.

something for the masses, though it may begin with niche markets, because gamers and viewers are purchasing memberships.

Until this point, we come across a question asked by Sasaki, one yet to be answered: "how exactly the TM elements of the *Lost* formula could be applied in other cases?" As for now, we know that the reason behind *Lost*'s success is that there was TV, Web and game audience engagement. Not only looking at games and TV, but to digital media in a more wider sense, we hope to find in Google Reports, game developer officials' and media researchers' statements as well, how storytelling in a fragmented media landscape, media types and trends in audience behavior are triggering "connector" events. "Big-narrative schemes" may work well, as "continuity" is "on" too.

In present day, these are emancipated audiences, and they are product range owners. They watch, search and play. According to one recent Google report, there is a new form of interaction, whether in its sequential or simultaneous usage (2012, 3).

In our perspective TM is relying on a new "audience agency" (Evans, 2011, 95). TV wants to engage us as games do. Spurgeon believes also "consumers of these systems are more actively configured as users" (2008, 6), and this is the background in which Google states we are "multi-screener" (2012, 2). The problem is not about the new TM or TMG products' launch we witness here, but the previous TM events that anticipate QB transmedia dialogues. We label some of the events as "Fake TM" since most narratives were merely adapted, from TV or motion pictures to games, and vice-versa. No narrative world was firmly designed, just parts with pre-set links in the story.

When it comes to QB, it positions itself as true TMG. Not to mention that it sets up story worlds, characters, multi-stranded plots, and audience-user engagement. In fact, we may understand, TV programs are becoming an experience. And "narrative" is *that* product we are all buying in one way or another (Gibson), because it is designed to develop storytelling across multiple media in order to provide different 'entry points' in the story (Nicoletta Iacobacci [2008] apud Sasaki, 2012, 19-20). Due to this, perhaps we should talk about "story 2.0" (Gottschal, 2013, 2), as we are not only concerned with linear reading, watching or gameplay. It seems that at Remedy studios [QB game developer] the future of TMG will be about "connections"; this is why they speak of "Junction Moment[s]" (Sam Lake in Trussler, 2013, 1)¹⁵. The rules applied by QB seem innovative.

The benefits for TMG are more audience engagement, more Web traffic in search engines, more ads in TV series streaming sites, and people playing games with friends and sharing moments in social media. The entire brand narrative of TMG benefits this machination. As long as people are looking for ways to get inside the story, this system works. On the audience side, the benefits are more engaging stories available. The problems are such as: narratives will be made of a text-image fusion, media

¹⁵ Which "lead into the next episode of the show. Immediately the first scene of the show is affected by the choice you made. It's very much alternate content depending (...). The idea is that it will feel relevant to the plot of the show. You'll learn important things that you'll need for the game" (in Futter, 2013).

purchase will be exclusively digital and audience experience is entirely controlled in webcasts, game streams and social media¹⁶.

In sum, a new media audience is outlined, being passive optionally whenever participation is on pause mode. Cloud computing improved story connection and enhanced gameplay videos shared on social media (like in Sony PS4). We have learned with Sasaki that whenever consumer and spectator are the core of a campaign; or whenever a consumer performs many roles (viewer, player, reader, Web surfer), a TMG campaign is more likely to work nicely, because the same person is targeted for that purpose (2012).

In this sense, the question here is “what is TMG exactly?”. We could advance something as a “narrative system for bridging gaps in media types”. It is interesting that Evans notices too that the creation of a ‘platform’, becomes central” (2011, 173). In a strategic point of view, TMG is designed to improve purchase and consumerism, customer control and audience involvement¹⁷. Again, we may call to the discussion the issue of “interfaces”, because TMG is a new interface for viewing and playing. If “Sci-fi interfaces” help create a reality that is coherent, and makes sense for audiences, then “audiences are a class of users” (Shedroff, Noessel, 2013, 310). TMG is definitely a sci-fi interface. Film becomes somehow playable and games turn out to be viewed, rendering all of us into user-players.

The central issue is “audience agency” (Evans, 2011, 95), which is a part of TMG. Like gamers are loyal to games rather than to the hardware, so TV viewers rather follow shows, than programming. We see new demographics in our time, because social geography changed. Even human interaction with digital media is altered¹⁸. There is a new dialogue in town, and it is called transmedia.

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¹⁶ There is also the danger of having audiences to pay for every single bit of the experience in the name of pursuing the next story chapters or in customization modules of characters, stories and items. Memberships are an industry “must” to spread even more.

¹⁷ In Marsha Kinder's perspective, TM is more associated with the creation of “‘supersystems’, described as ‘a network of intertextuality’” ([1991] in Evans, 2011, 19). TMG stands up in this logic. The greater the network of intertextuality, then the deeper the involvement.

¹⁸ For Simon Bond: the multiplicity of screens surrounding us enhances our attention and improves engagement (2012, 34). However it is odd, the more different the screens, or media gear, we have, the more content is spread. Doubts grow, curiosity leads to searching in separate media. The new thing is that somehow contents are held hostage in a sort of “metaconvergence”, to which we are heading to at high-speed, as noticed by Toffler (cit. in Ries; Ries, 2005, 58).

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