Foreword: Earth to transmedia

EARTH TO TRANSMEDIA

Toby Miller

Toby Miller is Research Professor of the Graduate Division, University of California, Riverside; Sir Walter Murdoch Professor of Cultural Policy Studies, Murdoch University; Profesor Invitado, Escuela de Comunicación Social, Universidad del Norte; Professor of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University/Prifysgol Caerdydd; and Professor in the Institute for Media and Creative Industries, Loughborough University London. The author and editor of over forty books, his work has been translated into Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, Japanese, Turkish, German, Italian, Farsi, and Swedish. His most recent volumes are *Greenwashing Culture* (2018), *Greenwashing Sport* (2018), *The Routledge Companion to Global Cultural Policy* (edited with Victoria Durrer and Dave O'Brien, 2018), *Global Media Studies* (with Marwan M. Kraidy, 2016), *The Sage Companion to Television Studies* (edited with Manuel Alvarado, Milly Buonanno, and Herman Gray, 2015), *The Routledge Companion to Global Popular Culture* (edited, 2015), *Greening the Media* (with Richard Maxwell, 2012) and *Blow Up the Humanities* (2012). He can be contacted at tobym69@icloud.com and his misadventures scrutinized at www.tobymiller.org.

Transmedia storytelling is both ordinary and extraordinary, ancient and modern, mundane and fun, normal and transformative. Why?

Cultural work has always covered a multiplicity of terrains. Marxism first lived in the form of pamphlets, journalism, correspondence, and meetings, as well as academic treatises. Dickens' novels emerged from chapters published in magazines. From the very first, Hollywood drew on plays, paintings, and novels; once sound became standard, playwrights and other writers were hired to produce dialog for cinema.

Many studio stars also worked in radio, frequently reprising or anticipating their roles in cinema, and music transmogrified with radio's advent from printed scores to recorded formats. Newspaper reporters, especially gossip columnists, doubled as broadcasters, and distance education via the radio blended forms almost a century ago. Prior to the domination of sealed radio sets, choral-response genres produced by leftists proliferated—workers changed the texts they were listening to by speaking back to them (Johnson, 1988), with Brecht (2000) an early champion and dramaturg.

Sometimes new cultural technologies seemed threatening rather than obviously additive and accretive. The televisualization and suburbanization of the United States after the War initially appeared to imperil the movie industry, because theatrical attendances quickly waned. But then it became apparent that twenty years of films— hitherto disregarded as back catalog, and seemingly doomed to oblivion or second-run and repertory houses—had potential new lives when screened on television. Something similar happened when deregulation and satellite technology thrived, starting in the 1980s. Established television networks and genres were thought to be in real trouble. But TV shows themselves began new lives, because thousands of hours of programing were needed in hundreds of countries and the major powers stood ready to sell them. Television had become the 'warehouse of culture' (Newcomb, 2005).

Today, YouTube is doing for the culture industries what TV did from the 1950s—finding new ways for Hollywood and its kind to get free marketing (in the case of so-called piracy) and new audiences for old programs. It's a warehouse, too.

Meanwhile, the cross-pollination of media and genres continues: autobiographies signed by athletes, celebrities, and politicians are excerpted in newspapers, continuing a long tradition. Genres such as talent quests have morphed between the stage, the radio, and TV into their current Newspeak life as 'reality' shows. Newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and television networks produce podcasts for the delectation and demographic targeting of their audiences.

Reporters for NBC also generate copy in the form of spoken, filmed, and written material for US affiliates, international CNBC stations, and MSNBC. They frequently do so minus the old retinue of a producer, cinematographer, and sound recordist to accompany them on location shooting. Museums vend toys, maps, books, paper, postcards, games, and other merchandising, both as forms of income and surveillance and in order to engage their visitors.

Twin theories of intertextuality help us understand these signifying movements and the function of transmedia.

One theory is concerned with hermeneutic interpretation. As per Kristeva (1997), it argues for an inevitable mosaic of conscious and unconscious quotations and influences animating cultural production. This intertextuality is decipherable hermeneutically, by 'knowing the code.' The other theory is driven by political economy. It examines the incarnation of popular figures across and between various institutions, whether amateur or professional: intertextuality as per literature's James Bond, dating back to the 1950s (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987) or television's *The Avengers*, from the 1960s (Miller, 1997). Both these franchises had lives in theater, radio, comics, fiction, music, games, fanzines, TV, toys, sunglasses, figurines, painting, lighters, clothing, fragrances, applications, cups, and cinema. I must have left some things out … The point is that they all drew upon, and contributed to, the signification of 007, John Steed, Cathy Gale, Emma Peel, *et al*. While many were the property of corporations, such work both borrowed from, and was supplemented by, fan creations.

Today, we find non-corporate and non-governmental institutions proliferating ways of telling and sharing stories by drawing on the internet as well as oral and other traditions. One of the best-established and longest-lasting is Sarai (http://sarai.net/) which is dedicated to exploring urban life in South Asia by sharing new technologies to do so with those traditionally excluded from digital pleasures. Colombia's community-radio network is promising to facilitate indigenous and African-descended survivors of colonialism,

mestizaje, and the conflict to work together and share stories (https://colombia2020.elespectador.com/pais/radio-comunitaria-dos-decadas-llevando-mensajes-de-paz). Grupo Cultural AfroReggae (http://www.afroreggae.org/) and Olodum (http://olodum.com.br/) have given racialized Brazilians dance, song, film, and education as both outlets and resources. To understand these sites, be they in South Asia or South America, one needs to appreciate both the hierarchies that structure their structuring media environments and their lived experience as alternatives.

The methods of analyzing transmedia used in this volume fit the bill. Matthew Freeman and William Proctor and their contributors give readers the relevant political-economic contexts to their work as well as very particular, granular research. This allows us to learn about institutional settings along with cultural practices and meanings, allowing us to read about the popular classes as well as dominant ones. The first approach emphasizes structural power, the second alternative forms of life. Their interplay is evidenced internationally across the volume. Such generous globalism allows us to go some way in transcending the effortless extrapolations from the global north that dog the study of globalization, where one language rules and one set of stories dominates.

Now if only we could perfect translation software, change copyright laws, test the real strength of fair use, and insist that English-only graduate students and faculty master at least one other world language instead of attending classes in how to use powerless pointless as we all transmogrify into art historians…

REFERENCES

Bennett, Tony and Janet Woollacott. (1987). *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
Brecht, Bertolt. (2000). *Brecht on Film and Radio*. Trans. and ed. Marc Silberman. New York: Bloomsbury,

Johnson, Lesley. (1988). *The Unseen Voice: A Cultural Study of Early Australian Radio*. London: Routledge.

Kristeva, Julia. (1997). *The Portable Kristeva*. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Columbia University Press.

Miller, Toby. (1997). *The Avengers*. London: British Film Institute.

Newcomb, Horace. (2005). "Studying Television: Same Questions, Different Contexts." *Cinema Journal* 45, no. 1: 107-11.