

CHAPTER THREE

Imagine Transmedia

You are in front of the black screen of your computer or comfortably sitting in a movie theater; or you're sitting in the bus, immersed in the crowd with your mobile phone in one hand; or in the kitchen, absent-mindedly walking back and forth, next to your TV there; or you're driving with your radio on; or you're in the bed with a novel on your chest. The entry medium to a transmedia system does not change very much, if we consider it as a door to enter the human imagination. When you are totally absorbed in the tale, at some point something simple and magical will be *triggered* and you will be *taken elsewhere*. The screen will light up. Letters on the page of your book will lose their ink and, as the Italian writer Italo Calvino defined it: our "mental cinema"³⁴ will begin and the words will mysteriously change into images. Radio sounds will transcend the sense that the verses give them and suddenly change into a tale. And this also happens to the endless 0-1 sequences of your computer...

³⁴ Italo Calvino, *American Lessons* (1985).

Simultaneously multiplying this process on multiple platforms, the complexity of management and the use of the story increases, and in order to “enchant” the audience, it is consequently necessary to properly follow the imaginative processes. Communication, in a transmedia project, uses two expressive elements at this point of the creative process: the *imaginative faculty* and the *cultural symbols heritage*, which are basic for the creation of the collective imagination of its audience. Hence, to do transmedia it is necessary to know the exact process of shaping the human imagination, in order to create, in the most effective way, myths, archetypes and symbols to distribute through the different *devices* available to the audience. On an imaginative level, Gilbert Durant defines the continuous exchange between the subjective dimension of the user and the more objective one of the surrounding environment as an *anthropological path*³⁵, comparing it to a sort of adventurous “path” walked by the user of a tale. In the case of the viewer, sitting alone in front of his computer or TV, for example, all the visual information he receives will be processed by his mind at high speed, as during a long run; the auditory information, instead, will be impressed in his short-term memory in a way that is three times more effective than, as in a brief trip, easing the passage from one image to another and working like the “water wheels of the mind”. Adding to each other – the human imagination develops through the accumulation and specialization of the senses – visual and auditory stimuli will be ordered in logical patterns inside of us: they are called *scripts*. And imaginative scripts will be divided into neural *hubs*. This means that they will create a close net of deductive associations and predictions that will lead the spectator to the reconstruction and interpretation of the tale.

All these steps, which happen unconsciously in the audience of traditional media, use the associative property of

³⁵ G. Durand, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (1960).

the human mind as the privileged cognitive parameter and they “automatically” involve all three cognitive stages of our psyche (conscious, subconscious, unconscious). In the case of transmedia, however, the audience lacks a specific literary process and a high number of known scripts; this unawareness and disorientation necessitates a very direct point of entry into the system, not a highly complex narrative structure, and an easy scheme of interpretation, a sort of interface, in order to overcome this dystopia. The ability to reproduce an emotional experience is given, from our mind, firstly to our memory (conscious, subconscious, unconscious). Additionally, the emotional memory of a tale that is distributed on multiple media depends both on the individual culture (the ontological one) of the audience and the imaginative scripts that the author has been able to trigger in the users’ minds during the tale. Managing a narrative on multiple media, simultaneously, always calls for a hard process of reconstructing the audience’s mind, both on the emotional level and on the highly imaginative one.

Regardless of the use of its narrative system, a transmedia tale is like the sum of stories “split” into multiple media, but all developed according to the Aristotelian three-act structure:

PREFACE / First turning point > DEVELOPMENT / Second turning point > Story RESOLUTION.

Generally, the moments in which audience’s imagination reaches its most productive points are the *incipit* and the first *turning point*, that is, the "Once upon a time" and the first plot twist that starts the tale. In those moments, anything is possible and the different media versions of the project are always “open” and always equally pointed toward an endless narrative. However, in correspondence with the *second turning point* (the transition between the second and third acts of the

story), the *suspension of disbelief*³⁶ of the audience and its associative capability are even more passive, and the situation worsens going on to the final *climax* of the story. Undertaking this inverted process, from a personal experience toward the general one reproduced by media, the audience goes from the predicted-vision and imagination of the tale to active involvement and emotional participation. This is the moment in which the spectator actually becomes part of the story; when "something in him" decides if a tale is captivating or not, if it fascinates him or fills him with disgust, if it increases or reduces his desire to see it to its conclusion. And does it make him, if possible, feel like "surfing", together with the tale, from one medium to another. An example?

The Truth About Marika (*Sanningen om Marika*), an original and effective case of transmedia storytelling, is the title of a transmedia project created by The Company P. for the Swedish SVT TV broadcast and winner of an Interactive Emmy Award for the best Interactive TV Service Category in 2008. Presented as a "participation drama", it was a TV series, which, during its broadcast, changed from a traditional fiction into an alternate reality game that became very popular in Sweden. To that end, *The Truth About Marika* involved the TV, radio, web, social networking, mobile phones and most importantly... the Swedish at all. During this tale's fiction, in fact, the point of entry of the system was a woman's appeal to the audience in order to find her friend, who had just gone missing. News spread on the web and the hunt soon began throughout the whole country. Is Marika one of the 20,000 people that are still missing in Sweden today? Each news broadcast, each report and each reconstruction had public space in a panel discussion, which was reconstructed through

³⁶ *Suspension of disbelief or suspension of doubt*, expression coined through the narrative technique by Samuel Taylor Coleridge: it is the will of the reader or the spectator to suspend their critical faculties in order to ignore the secondaries insubstantialities and enjoy at most one imaginary work.

some actors of the same broadcast, simulating an actual disappearance. Meanwhile, the hunt involved online associations, search engines, online games, GPS, chat rooms, conflict rooms, a QR code, an official website (*Conspirare*) and a secret society (*Ordo Serpentis*), mysteriously linked to the disappearance. Fear, anxiety, desire to act: considering the success of the project, the most important parameter, on which the emotional sharing was based, was the audience's unconscious and subconscious satisfaction. In this phase of the imaginative process, the most important aspect is that all information and implications of the tale pass invisibly through the cognition of the common *pidgin* speaker (the author, the medium, witnesses or the project itself), the story (in the *fabula*, plot or scenes) and its receiver (that is he himself) in all the settings (the media versions) of the story.

The Nuclear Power of the Story

The complexity of the pidgin shared in a tale derives from all those narrative elements and signals that act as *amplifiers of meaning* in the multiple media of the communicative system. It is like a sort of energy, distributed and mixed, depending on fine ingredients that are able to blow up in any moment. I call this *the Nuclear Power of the Story*: a strength able to contain the whole energy of matter in its core and release it, if not controlled, as emotions and the magic of the imagination in our lives.

But from where does the strength and intensity to tell a story to an audience, or better yet, to multiple audiences simultaneously, as in transmedia tales, come? From the presence and combination of some narrative and imaginative components that are crucial for any tale: *universal synthetic structures*, *semasiological isotopes* and the *archetypal features of the tale*.

UNIVERSAL SYNTHETIC STRUCTURES

Universal synthetic structures are the basic coordinates of the narrative universe on which a transmedia tale is based; they are the signs and dimensions able to catch and transmit to the audience the *reference situational context* of the project. For example, Aristotle's three unities (space, time and action) or the characters' ways of expressing themselves and all the other conditions that structure the ordinary and extraordinary worlds of the story (so, the "rules of a game")³⁷. In the case of *Truth About Marika*, for example, the universal synthetic structures were, at the beginning, the processes of feedback and notifications (written, broadcast or televised) developed for the audience; and only after, there was the *urban quest* activated by the authors, who were involved in disseminating clues day and night (with QR codes that could be photographed by smartphones, for instance) all around the national urban fabric and the digital space on the web.

SEMASIOLOGICAL ISOTOPES

Semasiological isotopes are iconic elements directly addressed, in terms of points of view and interpretations, to the subconscious of the user. To explain them easily, they are like symptoms of other realities, different from the ones on the surface of the story, or which are hidden beneath. In this sense, semasiological isotopes of a tale don't enter the narrative on an upper level, but it is like they have always been there. The result is to give the audience the impression of the right track, to properly face the challenge of use and, thus, be part of the game³⁸. The use of semasiological isotopes during transmedia projects is necessary to accelerate the entry of an

³⁷ To better analyse the imaginary as an instrument for knowledge, ref. to: Anderson, J. R., *Cognitive psychology and its implications* (1980).

³⁸ M. Giovagnoli, *Fare Cross-media...* cit. (2005).

audience into the story and help the passage from one medium to another within the communicative system. In fact, the *immediacy* created by the subconscious' intervention in the audience easily changes into a sense of presence, and it quickly involves the user of the project, directly and with great chance for success. In the case of *The Truth About Marika*, the semasiological isotopes used were all the key-words repeated on the TV show and in the online pass-the-word developed by the authors, particularly during the young lady's and her husband's appeal, due to their desperation to find their missing friend. They were short messages that indirectly talked to the audience about one of its worst fears: disappearing or not having one more day (as happened while you were reading the tale) with the person that was beside you on the couch, who was very important for you.

ARCHETYPAL FIGURES OF THE TALE

While universal synthetic structures are the first available "bridge" to start the conscious involvement of the audience, and isotopes have to get the users' subconscious involved, archetypal features provide the project with the main emotional connection in order to have the unconscious participation of the audience, both on the personal level and the collective imagination level. The existence and use of archetypal features, that is, the primordial symbols shared among several cultures on the imaginative level, correspond to a crucial area in the communicative systems and the *homination*³⁹ of their stories. In the case of *The Truth About Marika*, for example, the archetypal features of the tale were

³⁹ About relation among time, imaginary and omination, ref. to: P. Lévy, *L'Intelligence collective...* cit. (1994).

the shape-shifter archetype by Jung, the “double identity” theme and the biblical prototype of Original Sin (also represented by images through the emblem of *Ordo Serpentinis* and the name of one of the official sites of the project: *Conspirare*).

The Importance of the Emotional Competence

These are known as *media sensing*, that is the study of sensorial perception that is linked to the use and consumption of media, and emotional *labeling*, the identification and explication of the emotions during a tale. These are necessary activities for both the author and the producer in order to determine empathy and inference, or likewise, the irritation and disregard of the audiences in a transmedia project. Subjects that still aren't well understood by transmedia experts, emotional competency, sensorial literacy and emotional intelligence are decisive factors in the success of a brand or franchise that simultaneously uses multiple media to create or promote their contents and tales. The human brain, in fact, contains two “mnemonic systems, one for the regular facts, and one for the facts that have an emotional worthiness”⁴⁰. This means that, before rational intervention by the cerebral cortex, which interprets the signals coming from our sensory organs and prepares our body for a rational reaction, in our mind “something” has already happened, and that “something” caused an emotion. It is a signal that is part of our emotional mind, and, in particular, of the *limbic system*, an area of our brain that consists of three elements: thalamus, amygdala and hippocampus⁴¹. *Amygdala* (actually there are two of them, one for each part of our brain) is a gland which is able to react to sensory impulses, starting in our body and in a fraction of second, innate physiological responses, caused by

⁴⁰ D. Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998).

⁴¹ J. LeDoux, *Emotion and the Limbic System Concept*, “Concept in Neuroscience”(1992).

survival instinct (even though in front of the seemingly undefended screen of a computer!): a real trigger for the emotions, whose function, in transmedia, is to worry or reassure the user at the beginning of a content or in the moment of transition from one medium to another, or from one language to another. The human brain, in fact, is composed of a thalamus, before arriving at amygdala, to which the perceptions coming from the sense organs arrive. The thalamus is a sort of *modem* that has to transform the language of the five sense organs into synaptic cerebral language. During its translation of the signal to the cerebral neocortex (*rational mind*), it simultaneously sends the message also to amygdala (*emotional mind*). Considering the latter is more immediate than former, it happens naturally; the emotional responses always precede the rational ones in our mind. This can have different, more or less undesirable, effects during the use of a transmedia project. In the worst of cases, that signal must be corrected and this can lead the individual (also meant as collective entity, or audience) to disorientation or disappointment. In the first milliseconds of perception, we unconsciously understand what the perceived object is, but we also decide if we like it or not. This kind of *cognitive unconscious* analyzes the identity of what we see and formulates a proper judgment. A judgment that, well-considered, is not in the amygdala or in the thalamus, but, rather, in a third organ: the hippocampus, whose main function is to provide an emotional memory of an environmental context, like that of the story. An example: can mobile communications and the web save TV instead of being its killer? Not satisfied by the outcome of its main series on the female audience, both adults and teens, Showtime production decided, in 2009, to entrust its series *Dexter*, which in the second season started to be criticized as a “bloody horror series with an evil protagonist”, to transmedia strategies. Its plot is dedicated to the adventures of the most popular serial-killer of all serial-killers, a hematologist in Miami’s forensic department; in the emotional mind of a part

of the audience, this caused a negative emotional repertoire that the Starlight Runner studio of New York was charged, in the brand transmedia campaign, to transform in an ad hoc competitive communicative system for female consumers, using as the main products an animated series titled *Early Cuts*, a gaming application for iPhone, a role-playing card game and a very teen-oriented portal, titled *Follow the Code*. The result? A considerable TV rating increase and the most successful season for *Dexter*. How did they succeed? First of all, they gave an ironic taste to the promotion of the most paradoxical side of the series, the bizarre ethical code by which the protagonist commits his tortures. Then, decreasing the horror side of the series by using it just for Dexter's work as a member of the forensic department, regularizing and bringing out his background relation to blood, as a regular aspect. This is to say: deceiving the hippocampus and the emotional memory of audience by going straight to the thalamus, rational memory and anthropological structures of the audience's imagination. That's it.

Transmedia producers have to know the emotional processes of the human mind very well in order to be able to foresee and imagine solutions that are effective, satisfying and shareable among all the media audiences involved in their projects. Transmedia audiences, in fact, do not simply search for the creation of reasonable and exciting universes and narratives, but evocative universes and narratives, through which they can be spurred to an active intervention in unusual and curious media and cultural and communicative environments. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, in this sense, there are two basic components of the emotional provocation that are particularly effective. The former is the use of an emotional repertoire shared by the members of the audience, and it is important, in particular, for:

- the initial presentation of the project to its multiple audiences;
- the moments of deepest emotion and pathos;
- the relation to the eight main emotions (the primary six of anger, fear, joy, surprise, sadness and disgust, and two more, love and shame) to be transmitted on multiple media simultaneously;
- the moment of the official envoy (climax) in the multiple media of the project.

The second one is the emotional *labeling*, that is the power to “tag” in order to recognize and reproduce the emotions of the protagonists of the tale with the multiple audiences. It is an ability that humankind achieves during the very first months of life and its development depends on *feedback* processes, based on the parallelism among the emotional states and the mimic expression of the human body. A key role in the transmission of emotions in the transmedia is the one of *emotional contagion*, the immediate and unaware transmission of emotions from a sender to a receiver, who is inclined to experiment with them, as if they were his own.

Among the scientific theories that are linked to the emotional contagion, the most suitable one to the planning of tales distributed on multiple media undoubtedly is the *Perception-Action Model* (PAM); in accordance with it, the empathetic sharing of a story or content can be more easily obtained when the representation of the emotion’s subject in the audience is activated by a perception already held by the object/man who observes it. Thus, the subject (audience) gives its emulators (tale’s protagonists) the sensations it has already felt in similar situations. This ease drives them to live

and share experiences and thinking patterns which are gratifying and memorable⁴². An example?

In 2009, on the occasion of the launch of the 22nd edition of “Shark Week” on the Discovery Channel, the Campfire Society managed by Mike Monello, one of the creators of *The Blair Witch Project* created the “Frenzied Waters” campaign, defining it as “a transmedia experience that used influencer outreach, Facebook Connect and a website to bring the visceral terror of a shark attack directly to its audience”⁴³. The web, social networks, satellite TV and the actual world all shared one of the most atavistic fears of contemporary collective imagination in a project that planned different stages for the involvement of audience, namely:

- the creation of a certain number of stories about people that died because of shark attacks (from the Second World War until today), with which any single user could identify;
- the creation of glass containers of clothes remnants, written pages and other proofs of victims’ lives, until the fatal attack;
- the viral dissemination of containers in eleven U.S. cities, sending them to influencers, entertainment press, moviebloggers and radio personalities in order to popularize the campaign;
- the victims’ profiles activation on Facebook, that can be signaled and shared on the social network before the program’s broadcast.

Thus, an advertising campaign that used all the essential aspects of emotional competency in the transmedia: the emotional labeling during the TV presentation of the campaign (with trailer, teaser, pay-off), the emotional intervention of the

⁴² To have an analysis about the role of psycotechnologies in the behaviour of media consumption, ref. to: D. De Kerckhove, *Brainframes. Technology, Mind and Business* (1991).

⁴³ <http://campfirenyc.com>

amygdala (for the audience's identification with the poignant victims' points of view) and the use of the hippocampus for the enhancement of context shared by the audience (11 American cities, the ocean, containers with victims' reports and their diaries...) throughout the project narrative. Additionally, the emotional repertoire of a generalist audience achieved through the viral campaign on the territory and the emotional contagion of the audience in the social networks (Facebook), ordinary receivers of digital sharing and personalization of stories, combined into a campaign which really succeeded.

Creating complex imaginative universes

Creating transmedia products means, above all, dealing with the creation of imaginative universes. And creating new worlds – original or pre-existing ones – is always equivalent to creating “complex systems of reference” which are able to enrich the traditional narrative through *further semantic stratum*. These operations, which are respectively defined as *world making* and *milking*, are useful to enhance a tale's imagination, taking complete advantage of its rules, myths and creative *spin offs*. It is a dual process that all creative people use daily in their work on a single medium, but which has a more complex and systematic meaning developing tales distributed on multiple media simultaneously. First of all, in the narratives that are part of multiplatform publishing projects, locations and characters change from one medium to another and they often have to be fixed or created *ex novo*. To create them, there are often narrators that don't know each other, who work at a distance of a thousand kilometers and operate after receiving recorded publishing inputs, using libraries of objects, character models and formatting rules prescribed by corporations or brands. For this reason, the use of fixed dramaturgic rules and

narrative paradigms are so important that they have to be enhanced by the use of identifiable cultural symbols and key-tools of the collective imagination⁴⁴. An increasingly common case is the transposition of the traditional comic world into the comprehensive symbols and languages and in the affective-imaginative repertoire of new digital media. An even more frequent case is the transposition of the comics world into the whole digital media universe of symbols and languages, in particular joining them with video games and alternate reality games⁴⁵. An example?

During the winter of 2007, the Italian software House Artematica created *Diabolik: The Original Sin*, a video-game based on a comic which, over the years, has been adapted into the movie and cartoon worlds. The video-game's narrative space started from a painting's theft on a train and concluded with the adventurous rescue of Diabolik's partner, Eva Kant, who was apparently abducted for no clear reason. The video-game's difference – a graphic adventure that could be played in real time and could be changed at any moment, depending on the choices of the narrator-player – compared with previous versions lied in the creation of the same dramaturgic imagery of the tale through a variety of plot twists. Moreover, in the video-game, both the world-making of the new adventure and milking of *Diabolik's* traditional imagery integrated with and complementing each other. In fact, the game can be played in two different ways: the first based on image and direct experience; the second included many secondary games and trials that were based on perception and choices made by the player. In this second mode, the game continuously used a graphical mix between game animations

⁴⁴ An excellent example of this kind of process is represented by the so-called *god games*, videogames where communities or worlds are managed and the game to adapts itself to the identity of the one who rules, and the user does not have to follow determined narrative patterns in order to create the universe of tale again.

⁴⁵ McGonigal, J., *Making Alternate Reality the New Business Reality*, Op Ed. "Harvard Business Review" (2008).

and comic paintings, commented with captions, balloons, and interval filmed sequences, in order to comprehensively enhance the imaginative context of the story. Finally, in both narratives, the tale followed objective shots, and developed considering the player's choices (the *choice option process*) based on experiential scripts and cognitive frames that were easy to identify (for example, in the choice of paths to follow or the operations to start, in order to achieve the aims of game).

To Perceive, and to Imagine

In his essay *L'Imaginaire* written in 1940, Jean-Paul Sartre analyzed the forms of reality's interpretation and the human mind's fiction, distinguishing between *perception* and *image*. The use of these two "monads" of fantasy today is a basic reading key for the creation of actual and fictional worlds and the locations of a transmedia tale. According to Sartre, in fact, during perception the knowledge shapes slowly, while in the image it is immediate. Exactly as a user can pay attention to an image as much as he wants, he will only find the things he brings to it. Unlike perception, in the image there is a sort of essential poverty. And, the image as image is describable only by an act of the second degree in which attention is turned away from the object and directed to the manner in which the object is given⁴⁶.

This means that perception and image operate in a continuous dialogue between the rational mind and the emotional one, enhancing or stigmatizing the different components of the transmedia tale, in single or many assets of the narrative. Sometimes there are mysterious short circuits

⁴⁶ J-P. Sartre, *The imaginary: a phenomenological psychology of the imagination* (1940).

operating in the mediasphere, creating “cases” of stories and characters that, like meteors, become mysteriously popular all around the world through word-of-mouth on the web. Thus, word-of-mouth is also a way to think about the image and imagination, and it spurs thousands of authors and users to mingle their fantasy with some pre-existing ones, and not just for fun. An example?

It’s the 4th of November 2002 when a chubby fourteen-year-old boy went into the labs of a Canadian school and started to film himself with a broom in his hand, trying to act as if he was in a *Star Wars* lightsaber fight. Some of his schoolmates downloaded this film video on Kazaa, and in a few days it started the most sensational case in the history of broadcasting via Internet in that year. In fact, the video went viral on all the most important global online players (YouTube, Google Video, Crackle...) and little by little it started to get crossbred by the audience.

The Star Wars Kid’s image (the nickname/tag of the boy) was cut and imagined through an “act of the second degree” by professional and amateur authors who transformed and inserted it in comics, or quoted it in important video-games (*Tony Hawk*) or in some episodes of the planet’s most popular cartoons (*Family Guy*). The duel in Darth Maul-style was edited into hundreds of different situations based on images taken from action movies (*The Matrix*) and live action serials (*Star Trek*) among the most important ones in world entertainment. After billions of page views (in 2007 alone), the amount of money generated by the “Star Wars Kid phenomenon” quickly became incalculable. The Star Wars Kid’s imaginary recreation, even if it is extremely simple and minimalist in the content, testifies, in this way, to the great dramaturgic and publishing power of another peculiar narrative technique of transmedia tale: the use of parallel narratives, able to quickly describe the story from completely different points of view, both in the actual and virtual universe. Another example?

Molotov Alva and His Research for the Creator was the first virtual documentary created in the Second Life metaverse in 2007. The project was launched online through a video that said: "In 2007, a man named Molotov Alva disappeared from his house in California. Recently, a series of videos distributed by a anonymous traveler started to appear in a popular online universe called Second Life. Douglas Gayeton, the director, studied those videos and gathered them in a single documentary composed of ten episodes".

In the fiction, the tale was a "video-diary" of the protagonist, composed of ten dispatches of 10 minutes each, framed as the last witnesses of his life/Odyssey in Second Life. Because the project staked everything on the distance between perception and image, and the modified presence of the hidden user "by-laws" in digital features, the web began talking about it, and a movie was made out of it with the protagonist as the first person narrator; it was distributed by Submarine Channel and bought in 2008 by HBO, and was even nominated for the Academy Awards of that year for its originality and innovation.

The "Affinity Spaces" of the Transmedia Universe

To create transmedia universes, marketing and advertising techniques converge in an even more emphatic way in the primacy of experience, taking advantage of the world-making techniques that I have analyzed, and enhancing, most of all, those that James Paul Gee calls "affinity spaces" that exist among the different ways of using a story. The aim, in fact, is to let multiple transmedia audiences communicate as much as possible, to provoke a more active and privileged contact with the brand. New narratives based on intermediate affinity spaces overcome the limits of traditional stories, transforming them into real multi-sensory experiences. They tend to

constantly research avant-garde technological universes and narrative experimentation to create them, together with the audience. Considering the creation of imaginative universes, the most effective “affinity spaces” for transmedia tales are *moving experiences*, *choice excitement* and the use of *expanded environments*.

MOVING EXPERIENCES

One of the most decisive requirements of the transmedia universes is motion, meant both as the fluidity of digital spaces and the simultaneous presence of different wandering users (connected or isolated). Dramaturgies that are based on a “nomadic” and dynamic consumption, make the use of a project through multiple media an experience in movement, first for scheduling the learning of a system's rules, and then for timing related to the management of narrative (for example, through physical movement or that simulated via mobile, tablet, GPS, console, controller...). Considering the creation of a narrative scheme, particularly in transmedia universes, these are the most important:

- the comfortableness of the tale;
- the plot's simplification (that is the use of mainstream and traditional narratives of the tale);
- the presence of pressing rhythm in the dialogues and stories;
- the explicit visualization of main phases of the tale;
- an aesthetics with tone and visualization (textual and audiovisual) that are not too elaborate.

An example? In September 2011 an emotional walkshow has been organized in the city centre of Rome, in Italy, to allow its audience to live for two hours in the ancient heart of Urbe Aeterna. The most evocative and transmedial essences of the project were two: the sacred (imperial and then Christian) and the profane (baroque and linked to the cinema myth of “dolce vita, or sweet life”) both using a geo-blogging platform

which was linked to a site with videos, soundscapes, 3D reconstructions, whisper talks and mini-documentaries; these were also physically accessible through the territory of the walkshow, disseminated with QR codes on panels and postcards. The tale developed by stages and almost “Socratic, or Peripatetic” experiences users could follow and proceeded, through the experimental use of multiple media, with the experience in movement of the physical crossing of two and a half millennia of history.

CHOICE EXCITEMENT

Among the most crucial functions of an interactive tale, the increase of attention to and enhancement of the decisive power of the audience are the basic dimensions in transmedia narratives. In particular, in tales based on choice excitement, there is not only a different narrative choice corresponding to each of the user's choices (as for example, in the role playing games, gamebooks or videogames), but the results of those choices prove more or less significant, because they are more or less effective in having a direct influence on all the basic elements of the story. For this reason, choice excitement is a way to manage the tale that requires simplified and universal platforms, servers and high-quality graphic tools, able to ensure effective, gratifying and impressive experiences to authors, participants and the audience. Finally, considering the dramaturgic point of view, in stories that “stake everything” on the choice excitement of different audiences of media involved in a tale, the following are fundamental:

- effective choice-autonomy;
- a seemingly provisional aspect of the general pattern of the tale, which has to be linked to an actual flexibility of the main narrative sequence in the imaginative universe of the stories;

- the audiences' direct and unanimous experience of trials faced by characters, and basic stages of the story.

An example? *Life-Size Games* are games and experiences directly animated by the audience within interactive spaces, depending on gestural or sound choices, linked to action-narratives. These vary from roughly ten-meter floor-puzzles or 3D animations, to the transfer of video-games into urban spaces to holograms and movie theaters changed into locations for alternate realities, played personally or by teams of users. Even more often, however, the transmedia audiences, based on choice excitement, aspire not only to become users, but also creators of content, directly taking part in the mythopoeia promoted by the narrative. Another example for this case?

In *The Horrors* web reality shows, distributed by Stream.tv in 2008, video broadcast online live from a house that was thought to be infested by ghosts, were, together with a *chatroom*, open 24 hours a day and reserved for the spectator community, lovers of ghosts, ectoplasms and similar people⁴⁷. In this way, the inexorable static aspect of images (because of the empty and mute environments, experienced in the continuous expectation of moving objects, suspicious sounds, etc.) was broken by the ability to simulate and pre-tell the tale through the real-time communication of its fans, who were involved in meeting each other, making minimal choices, taking part in extempore contests, and entertaining themselves by chatting, waiting for the final beat of the tale: the ghost's appearance. Thus, more talkers than passive spectators, the game players immediately moved their attention from

⁴⁷ To have an analysis of TV reality narratives used for a specific "genre" of tale: C. Freeland, C., *Ordinary Horror on Reality TV*, in: *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, 2004.

emulation to self-identification with protagonists of the tale, just as happened, a year later and also in the movie theater, with the worldwide success of low budget movie *Paranormal Activity*, by the Israeli director Oren Peli. In the meantime, it passed from *on demand* consumption of narrative to the *on my idea's* one.

EXPANDED ENVIRONMENTS

Aristotle writes, in Chapter VI of *Poetics*, regarding the tragic tale's nature, that it is just the "imitation of an action". If applied to transmedia narratives, this axiom is most effective within universes of the tale based on so-called expanded environments, "augmented" real or digital places, where "to live" is the same as creating a tale by using dynamic technologies like walled gardens, augmented reality platforms and tools, devices and consoles provided with movement sensors able to react to vector forces and orientation in the space. On a dramaturgic level, expanded environments are characterized, above all, by:

- a space that is an active part of the narrative;
- plots or stories directly organized by the action/reaction of the audience with the environment;
- a tendency toward community and interpersonal communication, inside and outside the environment;
- the disruption or re-creation of dimensional couples typical of space interpretation: open/closed, actual/virtual, natural/fictional, and story settings.

An example? The Canadian Hololabs Studio launched, in 2011, one of the many iPhone applications dedicated to augmented reality. But this one, named *MixAR*, had

something special. It was not an application aiming at re-considering the space in an exponential way or displaying invisible things in the surrounding space, but to create a new space "that will enable users to create 3D objects in an augmented reality without any coding knowledge". Not only that, but *MixAR* could add some pretty interesting special effects like the 3D title effect used in Fox's show *Fringe*. The object/marker can be attached to a person, for example, and move with the subject. Here the integration with other media, web and, in particular, social networks begins, because, above all, the system "brings users the ability to snap pictures of an object and watch it turn into a 3D model that can later be overlaid in AR and recorded as mini-movies". It means to proceed from actual frames to digital ones, going through the direct co-creation of the imaginative universe of an audience inside and outside the arena set for the tale.