CHAPTER 3

TRANSMEDIA COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

T he creation of a transmedia project must always make the audience access to the multi media content easier, and rouse a willingness of participation and sharing from the audience. To enable the participation of the audience and the sharing of a tale's imagery distributed on multiple media, it is necessary to guide the different audiences of each medium involved in the project towards an independent use of the story, expressing:

- frequent clarification of small parts of the plot in the different media involved;

- clear explanation of the relationships among the different media, suggesting descriptive areas and expressions that can be shared by the audience;

- presence of repeated hooks, bridges and links between the media involved in the project.

Moreover, the public needs to be able to navigate the communicative system in a non-traumatic mode, a way that is almost accidental and the most self-sufficient possible. Once 'inside' it will be up to the public itself to decide whether to take up or not the *calls to action* the different assets of the project

involve. Therefore, the 'intervention principle' of a transmedia project's audience develops into three stages:

- motivation to act (*primer*);

- sense of the action (*referral*);

- personal reward for the action done by the audience (*reward*).

Primer, referral and reward represent the 'basic grammar' of any whatsoever transmedia ecosystem. The objective of a *primer* is to give the audience a strong reason to join into the narrative. The *referral* is – on the other hand – a call aimed at giving the basic information on how and when take action. By adding up all these information, we shall dispose them into logical patterns, or scripts, structured into neural hubs creating a close knit net made of deductions and anticipations leading the audience into the reconstruction and the interpretation of the narrative. Eventually, the *reward* presents with two objectives: giving the public a straightforward answer on behalf of the system (showing them their answer was taken into consideration and appreciated) and rewarding them in a tangible way (money, visibility, consumption). A transmedia designer has the task of creating narrative environments and communicative systems which, in terms of art, creativity and technology, could satisfy at best such needs and expectations, moulding forms, patterns and techniques with some international solidity.

> Transmedia drives authors to think episodically. There is no great conclusion at the end of a medium, it is more of a corner. It asks authors to view all artforms as equal. One isn't a primary medium and another tertiary to be used purely for distribution or promotion. Authors gather all that they love into their arms and figure out how to make them work together. They need to be skilled at many trades, and a master at combining them. — *Christy Dena – transmedia pioneer and Director of Universe Creation 101.*

Designing and moulding the 'form' of the communicative system of a franchise or a portmanteau is a crucial action in the creative

and productive process of a narrative spread on different media. The transmedia designer creates style and imagery, layout and brand identity but, at the same time, the project's architecture and the essential dynamics of its communication too. The final objective of its work is represented by the production of a series of documents to be transferred to the different creative and technological departments that work on all of the project's assets. Among those documents there are some which present with an editorial nature (*transmedia bible*, *franchise universe mythology document*, *project reference document*), while others are more practical (*transmedia roll out*), or more sectorial, targeted to the different technical and creative departments working on each medium (layouts, wireframes, charts, templates, palettes, sketches, sound themes, audio & video references, and so on…) At this stage of our journey, we shall go deeper into the building and the development of a transmedia project's communicative system. Since the appendix of the present work shall specifically deal with the production of editorial and executive documents, I shall in this chapter deal with an in-depth analysis of the specific models and the concerned techniques of shaping the *mechanics* and the *aesthetics* of transmedia projects.

POINT AND LINE TO PLANE

Considering the complexity of communicative processes – both simultaneous and asynchronous – transmedia producers presently use, the most useful schemes of representation stem from different theories concerning the "shape of the universe". These come from natural physics, quantum mechanics and astronomical theories, and in the case of a transmedia project they refer to two fundamental systems:

- one *flat* and Euclidean, where the forces (the different media of a project) and the bodies that are subjected to them (the contents of the project) move on a single infinite plane, depending on measurable and classifiable sprints (after the official closing of the project as well as during the "active" time of its spectacularization);

- one *curved*, where the forces (different media of a project) and the bodies that are subjected to them (contents of the project) move around and take on different forms, which are not always predictable, as in neural or particle tissues.

It is clear that, based on the definition, the curved ones are often more complex. The publishing contents and interactions between the different technological platforms depend on the shape of the curve shared among the authors and the audience of a project[1], and according to the ratio of the *curvature*, the use of time and length of the tale, a transmedia project can take two additional "shapes":

- a *sphere* (with a positive curvature), which is a system based on perfectly balanced communication between the various media, with content that is cyclically and repeatedly distributed, with frequent shuffling and interventions of products that live a "second life" in the multiple media involved in the project;

- a *saddle* (with a negative curvature), that is a multimedia system in which the mass of bodies (media contents) tends to spread out and enlarge, but at the same time, tends to disperse. As in the case of reports distributed on multiple media, they can change and repeat until their tales become fragmented and poor.

An example? 2013 was the year of the first example of a transmedia *twin narrative*[2]: the portmanteau *Defiance*, TV series and online video game were created and aired by tv broadcaster

1. The concept of *curvature* was first applied to transmedia storytelling in 2005, in Giovagnoli, M., *Fare cross-media*, 2005. The calculation of this curve comes in part from Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity where, in his opinion, the mass of bodies is directly proportional to the entity of curvature that is used. In the case of transmedia, the mass of bodies depends on the richness of their contents and the media alterations of a project. The motion depends on the popularization process and the operational use (through the communicative system) made by each of the involved media.
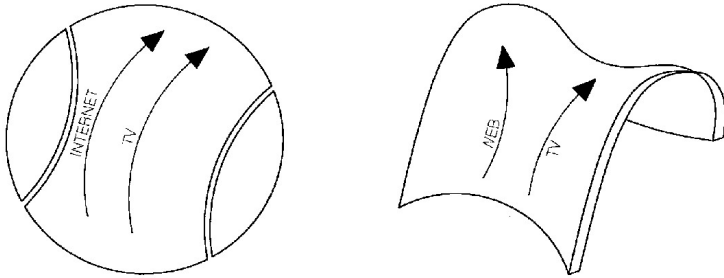
Img. 3.1 Saddle or Sphere Curvature of a two asset communicative system (web e tv), each with its own positive (lineup and amplification) or negative (repetition and dispersion) trends.

SyFy Channel and game company Trion Worlds. The story deals with life in the refugee town of St. Louis nine years after an invasion of aliens. Both TV series and video game feed off each other's content from the very start: same setting, identical characters, complementary experiences of the audience. The public could indeed interact with the narrative on a regular base, shifting from TV passive vision onto videogame engagement, all based on the very same narrative situations. Paradigmatic example of a *continual narrative interplay* between the online video game and the television series, *Defiance* was a transmedia experience with a spherical curvature. At the end of season one, *Defiance* created more active intervention spaces for the public, taking a saddle curvature form through online dissemination of content independently produced by their audience.

2. *Twin narratives* are those narrative forms which are carried out simultaneously on two different channels or media, presenting characters, plots and sets which run parallel without intersecting, as if they were running on train tracks.

Img. 3.2 Defiance (2013). Up, the official website and a tv screenshot; down the MMoRPG and character sheet of one of the narrative's main characters.

Curvature represents a vital coordinate not only for structuring the communication system of a transmedia project, but more importantly for checking its endurance during the course of its implementation, that is while the content in the different media assets are published, and later, in the months after its presence in the media, in order to estimate its effect and long-lasting grip on the public.

> In TV shows, for example, there is a very practical reason for creating content that lives on traditional media and at the same time online and on social media. The goal is to keep any narrative in the public conversation as much as possible, to create buzz and build awareness. TV shows go off the air for long periods of time between seasons (or even between episodes). It's extremely beneficial to have entrance media campaign that can bridge the gaps in the narrative when the show is off the air. — *Tim Kring – transmedia creator and showrunner* (Heroes, Crossing Jordan)

Depending on the editorial features which we have so far investigated, and once the curvature of the given project's

communication system, we shall choose one of the three possible solutions for planning the relationship between the different media asset activated, that is to say *supportive*, *competitive* and *omnivorous*.

SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

In the supportive communication system (from supportive media), the different media give all their own contribution to the success of the project, are complementary to each other and support each other's actions. The different assets that form the narrative integrate, share content and information and suggest the audiences stories, experiences and rewards. They create touch points and bridges between one medium and the other so that their communities can enjoy best communicative practices and get stimulated into carrying out interactive *skill flows*[3], thus participating into the content creation processes. In order to achieve such an objective supportive communication systems generally use a common narrative topic, that is a 'what' the audience can talk about each one using its own language and technological tools aiming at developing messages, thematic itineraries or original interpretations.

The basic dynamics acting in the audience in the fruition of a supportive communication system are:

- the passage from a synchronous to an asynchronous communication in the different media;

- the use of dramaturgical hooks to link one media to the other;

- the use of mirror content in the different media involved in the project;

3. According to Pierre Lévy (*Collective…* cit.) *skill flows* are a increase in the sensorial and emotional skills happening in media fruition thanks to the experimentation of new forms of interaction and fruition, both individual and collective.

An example, again taken from my own personal experience. In the occasion of the *Sin City: a Dame to Kill for* (2014) movie launch, film directed by Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez, I have coordinated a transmedia project partnered in Italy by Lucky Red Film, distributor of the movie, based on a complex supportive system[4]. It was called *Sin City Italy* and the bouquet consisted in:

- the official movie website;
- viral videos in CG (emulating the style of the graphic novel);
- viral live action videos focusing on the presence of the three primary colors visualized in the movie;
- artwork for social media campaign;
- 3D characters;
- audio landscapes;
- game app;
- two video mapping project sharing real/digital worlds.

The project ended with a reserved encounter with Miller and Rodriguez in Rome, and the focus of the campaign was to spread Miller's imagery and the story world of the film creating "an Italian Sin City" with landscapes, characters and videos shared on social networks and in the real world. The design of the communicative system linked the different media asset with multiple bridge and touchpoint while the design of all the artworks made it a successful example of how to contribute a movie with a precise, combined concept aesthetics and mechanics. The visual impact and the character design of the movie was replicated both in the digital and in real world.

4. Project coordinated for Lucky Red Film and IED Rome. Contributors (Video Design, Sound Design, Interaction Design, CG Animation): Franceso Della Rovere, Giulio Raimondi, Dung Botta, Tommaso Costantini, Sabrina Gnisci, Francesca Panella, Manuela Paniccia, Savino Rasola, Ilaria Trepiccioni, Marco Assenza, Lorenzo Maria Benassi, Alessandro Rinaudo, Gabriel Alvarez, Alessandro Cicione, Barbara Magrelli).
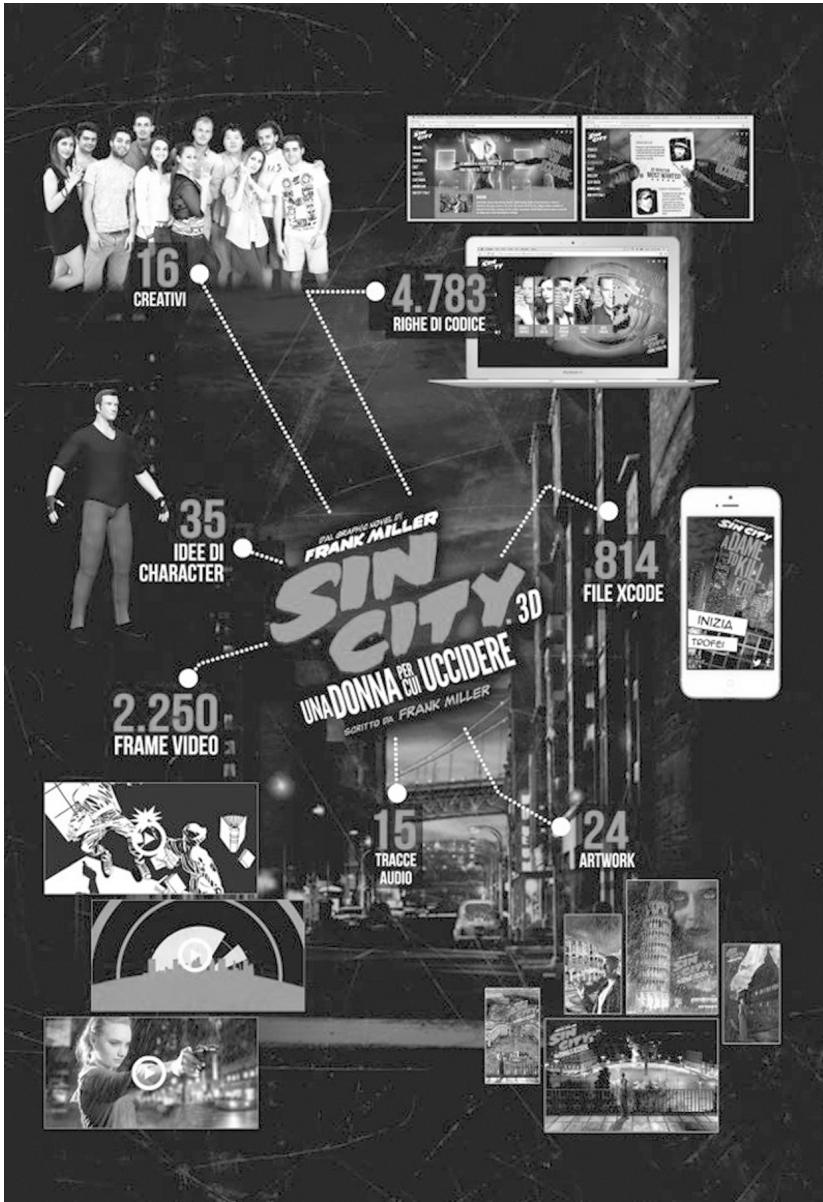
Img. 3.3 Sin City – A dame to kill for. Supportive System for the italian launch of the movie.

The final stage of the campaign was planned to be a great video mapping experience in the centre of the town. The plot of the installation began with a car entering the square at high speed, with a group of alcoholics, strange characters, on board. Men and women hopped off the car and started fighting in the street when the two protagonists, a man and a woman, jumped into the building and their silhouette immediately appeared through a line of windows. Then the villain got into the story and started fighting with the man, until he threw him out. At that point, some of the windows showed scenes from the movie and the story ended with a passionate kiss of the two silhouettes, a picture that launched the logo of the movie. Different styles and a different storytelling experiences, simple and emotional, were strengthened with a strong visual impact and a common *pidgin* (the Miller's black/white/red style) in the motion graphic and in static works and the inserts of the movie projected on the facade. Design and story, or better to say in this case: *design for story*.

<div align="center">COMPETITIVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM</div>

In the transmedia competitive system, different *ad hoc* versions are created for each of the media involved in the project in terms of technology, dramaturgy and consumption. Multiple media 'split up their roles' triggering antagonistic movements within the audiences. They rely on each individual medium's autonomy in relation to the project, and aim at creating a more customized dialogue within each medium's own community. Since the creation of additional narrative versions requires further time and money and decreases the efficiency of the control exercised by the broadcaster, the use of a transmedia competitive system is often discouraged by the corporate management. Therefore, let's see two examples of competitive system, one negative and one positive, to deep into their fundamental dynamics.

The first is *24*, TV series created by Joel Surnow and Robert Cochran (2001-2010). Due to its framed-narrative structure, *24* combines the narrative pattern of a TV reality game with that of traditional fiction. Each season of the series tells about a
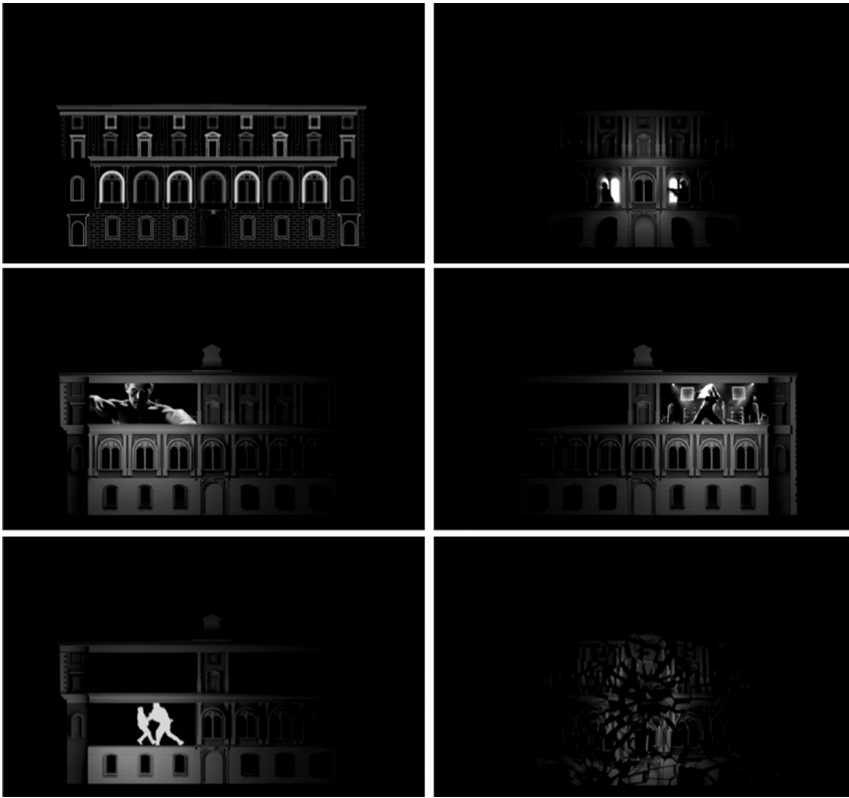
Img. 3.4 Sin City – A dame to kill for. Videomapping experience for the Italian launch in Rome.

sequence of events that takes place during a single day, through 24 episodes of 60 minutes and each lasting for an hour of real time in the fiction. By using frame narratives, that is the division of the pattern into subframes (*split screens*), the audience simultaneously follows different narrative levels and stories developed through multiple subplots. But this is not the end of the process. Throughout the years, the series has expanded into different media, specifically video games, mobile episodes, webisodes, books, mobile games and comics. Nonetheless, the story world of the tale was not based on a strong nebula, and all the media followed the same narrative pattern: The Hero's Journey of the protagonist Jack Bauer, an agent of the Counter

Terrorist Unit of Los Angeles, who through the different seasons of the tale and the multiple media of the communication system of the project, just moved from the west coast of the U.S. to Washington and then to New York. As a consequence, the different outcomes of the series (video games, mobisodes, celebrative books, and so on…) ended up fragmenting the audience and competing with each other in an excessively direct way, wearing out themselves and the series survival.


Img. 3.5 24 (2001-2010) Products and contents of the Series.

The second example brings us to the first case of TV series built on an *helix dramatic scheme*: *Heroes* (2006-2010). Created and written by Tim Kring, the story chronicles the lives of a group of people, initially unknown to each other, with supernatural powers. The structure of the project, which was originally conceived as a series of volumes (the 4 seasons) divided into chapters (the 77 episodes), was very complex and needed a deeper analysis that would have never been possible in a shortened TV series. As the show progressed, five more web series were released. This online version was not very different

from the series, and later changed its name to *Heroes Evolutions*, aiming at better explaining the 'universe' and 'mythology' (fantasy elements linked to science-fiction phenomena, to the real history of the world, to religions and communal, anthropological traditions) on which the tale was based. The transmedia bouquet counted a comic series (*9th Wonders*) too, a graphic novel (actually a long web comic in 160 episodes published by Aspen Comics after the broadcast of each episode), iStories and a serialized documentary (a 'making of' for each season) called *Heroes Unmasked*. But since the beginning of the project, Kring successfully planned for a progressive evolution of the story world visible throughout all of the media involved in an effective competitive system.

OMNIVOROUS COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

In the omnivorous communicative system, the different media are subjected to the presence of a central platform on which all the others depend (both the official ones and the ones autonomously created by the audience). An omnivorous communication system favors the creation of a common *agorà* for all the authors of a project, and, above all, one that relies on what Umberto Eco calls the "interpretive cooperation" of the audience. This is a condition which is part of the "text pragmatics" of all content of a project and is the real conversational topic. More than what happens with supportive and competitive systems, transmedia projects with an omnivorous communicative system are based on a basic imaginative and publishing *pidgin* which is shared between the sender and the receiver. For this reason, and because of its technological, economic and publishing aspects, the most effective medium in the omnivorous system is the web. In addition to being cheaper than other media, the web can foster communities loyal to a project because of the speed at which it can be updated, the high dose of creativity that can be expressed in its frames, and the opportunity to upload – thanks to a single
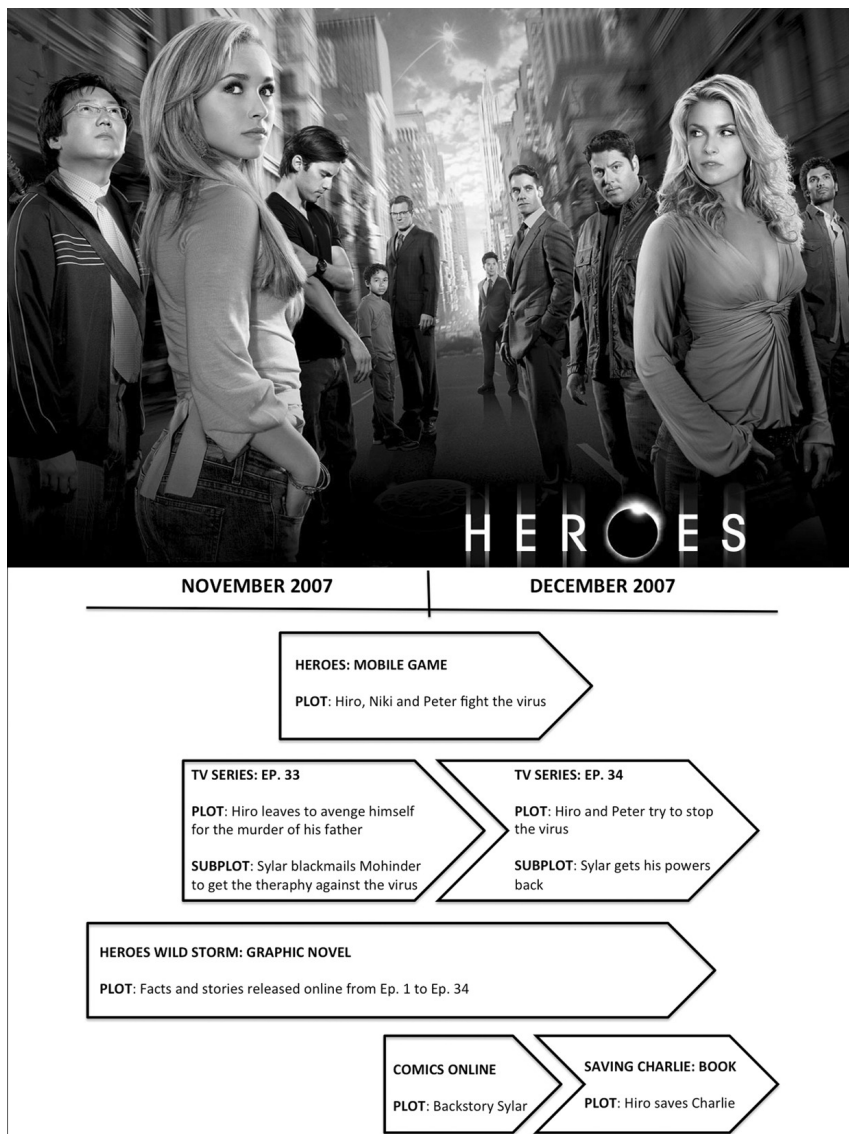
Img. 3.6 Heroes narrative space in season two finale (2007). In a month, while the TV narrative develops with the storylines of each single character, the other media involved present with an in-depth investigation of other parts of the story world. For instance, in a non-linear way with backstories of the characters (in videogames and in

the webseries), or with simultaneous narratives (in graphic novels and online comics), or also with parallel narratives and spin-offs (in the novels inspired by the series).

publishing tool (panel) – the contents of all technological platforms of the project. An example?

Madmen is a TV series (technically speaking, a *period drama*) produced by Lionsgate Television since 2007, distributed by broadcaster AMC and winner of many awards. The series tells stories of business and feelings set in a New York advertising agency in the Sixties. Its communication was from the beginning entrusted with an omnivorous communication system web centred, with an official website and many games which made the audience's familiarity with the characters grow so much as to lead the public to create fake Twitter profiles for their favourite characters. Digital voices and images which were, in a very short time, frequented by thousands of users who generated an uncontrollable viral action and success to such an extent to convince AMC, that initially had stepped in with the intent of censoring the phenomenon, to change its strategy. And it was a wise move indeed, since it was quite soon clear how those Twitterer were advertising professionals, PR manager and clerks, that is to say representative of the same world who were telling the story of the series in an omnivorous fashion.

THE TRANSMEDIA BOUQUET

Building up a transmedia communication system is a complex process, starting from the moment of the conception of the idea, to the official release of the project. It articulates in different productive steps, each with its own control and assessment mechanisms. Once form, curvature and reference model (supportive, competitive, omnivorous) are defined, it is time to work on the construction of the transmedial bouquet, that is the comprehensive definition of the complex of platforms which
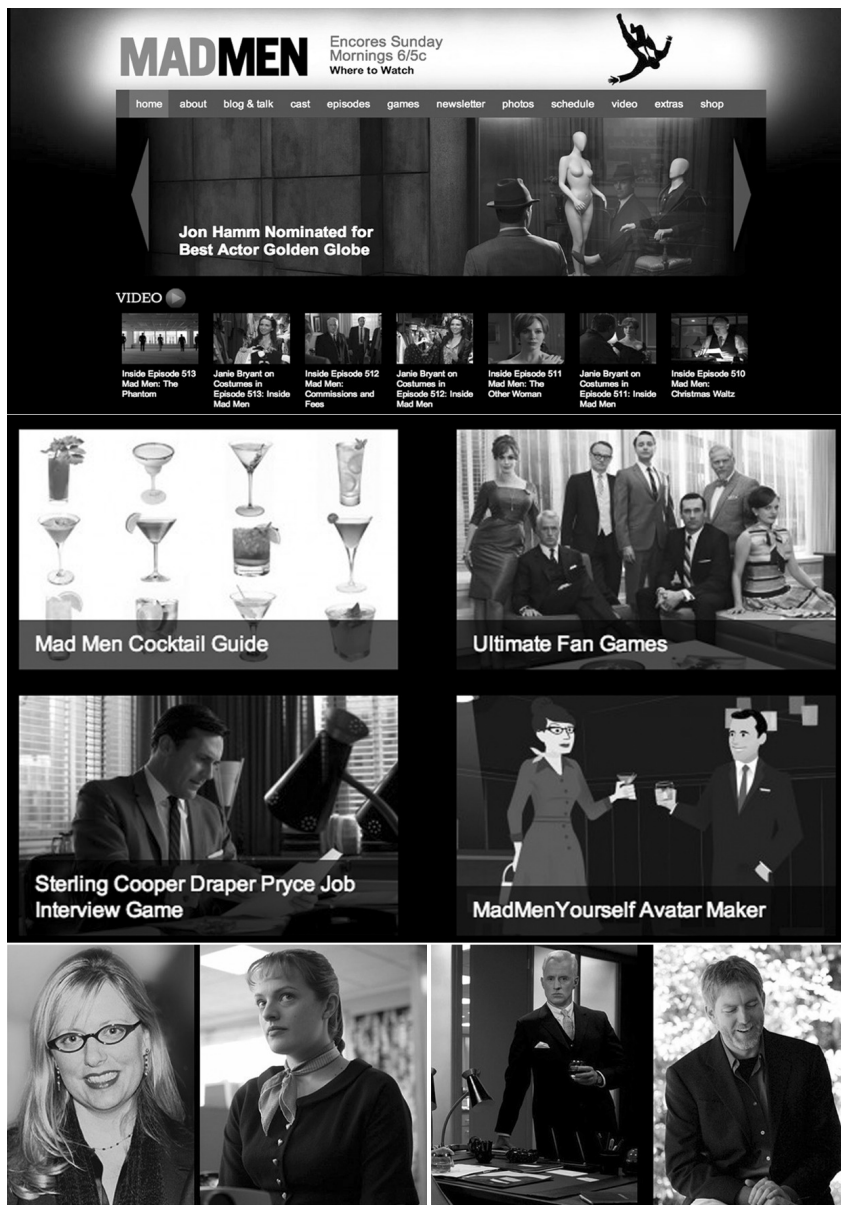
Img. 3.7 Madmen and its supportive communication system. Above to below: the series' website, the online games, the pictures of the twitter users who created profiles using the faces of their beloved characters.

shall host the project's content. There are three essential actions to do that:

- the use of the *platform selection layout*;
- the selection of the communication system's *rabbit hole* and the *points of entry* of each platform;
- the use of the *transmedia roll out*.

In the following paragraphs we shall analyse those actions one by one, considering the different progressive steps to be taken and the essential documents to be produced in order to create a project's transmedia bouquet. Before proceeding, though, let me present with an example.

In transmedia and videogame history, *Halo* is one of the most successful and long-running videogame series which, in time, was able to renovate its capacity of creating effective transmedia bouquets even after the creation of the second trilogy and the passage to a new developer, 343 Industries. More specifically, it was the second episode of the new saga that has represented a milestone in the franchise's transmedial strategies. *Halo 5: Guardians* (released in October 2015) portrayed two fireteams of human supersoldiers, respectively the Blue team, led by Master Chief John-117, and Osiris, led by Spartan IV Jameson Locke. The game was a first-person shooter integrated with exploration and quests more than its predecessors. The transmedia bouquet consisted in:

- the live-action series *Nightfall* (an introduction to Agent Locke, already present in *Halo 2*) released in late 2014, to bridge the precedent chapter of the game with *Halo 5* addictive universe;
- the comic series *Escalation*, in 4 volumes (3 published before the release of the game and 1 after it, as an introduction to the Blue Team activities);
- three novels: *New Blood* (where Buck becomes a Spartan,

released together with the second volume of the comic series, in march 2015), *Hunters in the dark* (released four months before the game) and *Last Night* (an exploration of Blue Team, released one month before the game);

- the radio series podcast *Hunt the Truth*, in two seasons, the first released simultaneously with the comic series and the second novel, who investigates the Master Chief's background, and the second with the third novel and the third volume of *Escalation*, focusing on violent attacks on human colonies;

- the animated series *The Fall of Reach* (based on the novel on the same name, focusing the origins of the Blue Team and Spartan II Program), released two months after the game.

Img. 3.8 Halo 5: Guardians (2015) and its transmedia bouquet. Videogame, novel, animated series and live action; podcast and expansion to other media (Infographics from: media.comicbooks.com).

A universe particularly rich with content, based on a 'bible' of transmedia universe mythology (*The Halo Story Bible*) created by Jeff Gomez's Starlight Runner Entertainment for the previous

chapter of the series, with the aim of defining the canonical Halo Universe, and representing just another example of a transmedia bouquet based on a consistent, supportive communication transmedia system.

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PLATFORM SELECTION LAYOUT

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When choosing the media platform that shall distribute each single part of the narrative to the transmedia communication system, it is necessary to focus on mainly to structural conditions:

- the platform must be the most adequate to the content to be published in terms of language, technology, target and audience consumer modality;

- the platform's strengths and weaknesses must be carefully balanced by the content published in the other platforms of the communication system.

Each platform has its own editorial features and specific functions which make it more or less adequate to the needs of the single asset of a project. For example, in order to favour open access to its content, a TV platform will be a better choice, while to make payment during the course of use, the net shall be preferable. Also, in order to allow a more interactive use, a game or an installation will be the best option, while if we need to manage apps on the move, we'll chose mobile. And so on… Again here, we shall present an example drawn from my own personal experience.

Like the famous article which certified the first official definition of transmedia storytelling by MIT professor Henry Jenkins, my first transmedia independent project *Proiettiliperscrittori* (*Bullets for writers*) dates back to 2003, and was a storytelling lab for writers based on a *user-determined narrative experience*[5]. Initially spread through radio and webtv, its competitive system was supported by a blog and a novel to be strongly influenced by the audience. A short resume of that experience can stress the

importance of the platform selection in the development of a transmedia project.

Proiettiliperscrittori was a radio show made of twelve episodes (30 minutes each) of advice on writing broadcast by a speaker and combined with examples taken from cinema and television narratives. At the end of each show, an expert speaking from home would give his ratings and evaluations via blog and his contribution was submitted to the show's community's own evaluation. The debate carried on during the following five days, while on the sixth, the one before the next show, a new subject would be launched, with preparatory links, bibliography and filmography shared with the public. The project went as far as to allow the listener to implement the last three radio shows and one was even read by a regular follower. A video version was, in the meantime, available on Web TV, linked to the *Proiettiliperscrittori* blog. But the most important change, and its moment of highest degree of interactivity, was reached thanks to the connection to publishing and the printed paper. In the summer of 2004, in fact, right after the end of the radio show, I launched a new format via blog: a textual web fiction divided into episodes called *Fuoco ci vuole* (*Fire, we need*). Following this format, an episode of the series was broadcast online on the blog around midnight every three days. Each episode of *Fuoco ci vuole* was divided into two parts, with a ten-minute break in the process of online publishing. Each part was enriched by a photograph or image found on the web or submitted by the readers. Moreover, as had already happened with the radio show, the following day was dedicated to the readers' comments. In the next 24 hours the episode was corrected and reorganized following the suggestions which emerged in the online debate.

Choral novel and an example of non-linear narrative, *Fuoco ci vuole* told the story of a clumsy summer when four friends go

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5. About the definition of *user-determined narrative*: Sermon, P., *The emergence of user- and performer-determined narratives in telematic environments*, in Zapp, A. (ed.), *Networked Narrative Environments: As Imaginary Spaces of Being*, 2004.

through all sorts of adventures in a deserted and hostile Rome. The characters were living, both individually and chorally, four variations of the twelve stations paradigm, and the story was rich with filmic and literary quotes, which were sent to the public in the form of a contest. The hunt for the locations named in the story was frantic, as pictures and comments were coming in a flood and soon represented a further modality of interactive consumption. The public immediately elected its favourite character among the four in the plot and kept following its role in the narrative, contributing with suggestions for plots, relationships, and dialogues (some of which were used, while others were not), always in a perspective of (online) reasoning and confrontation. Supported by a wide community of faithful followers of the whole project, only two weeks after the twenty-sixth and last episode was posted on line, *Fuoco ci vuole* was bought by a publisher and went through a further *remediation*[6]: initially conceived as a radio screenplay, it later transformed into a web fiction, and in the spring of 2005 became the first transmedia novel ever published in Italy. Thanks to its audience. Together with its audience. The second season of *Proiettiliperscrittori* (2006) was aired on the radio, on a webtv and was enriched with textual games, online video contests ('Raccontami') with an extra asset of 'merchandise for writers' specifically linked to the TV asset of the show, as it is clear in the project's platform layout[7].

A short recap describing the basic actions necessary for a correct selection of the most adequate platform in transmedia communication systems can be at this stage very useful to authors, designers and producers. The essential coordinates of platform selection layout therefore are:

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6. Bolter, J. D., Grusin, R. *Remediation*, 2003.
7. The *platform selection layout* is a diagram representing how the content are spread in the different platforms of a transmedia project. It does not contains chronological information but portrays all the different relations between the media and the authority of the various works created by the authors (up) and by the users in grassroots modality (down).
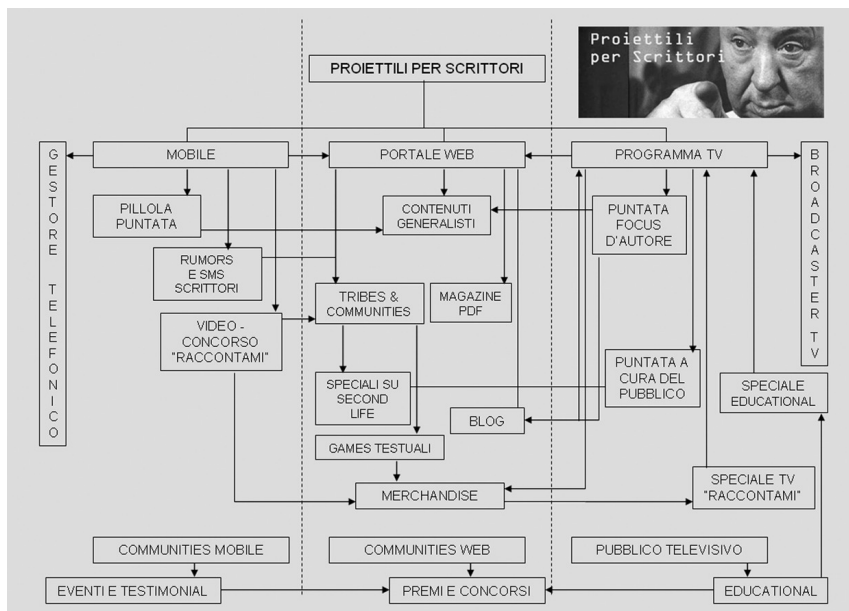
Img. 3.9 Platform selection layout of the transmedia communication system of Proiettiliperscrittori season two (2006). Centre: the project's main asset (the web) along with mobile and TV. In the upper side of the template the authors' contents; in the lower side those created by the audience of each asset of the project.

- the creation of projects structured in different narrative segments, rather than on large portions of tale entrusted with a single media asset;

- using all the characters in a story, so that the public has the possibility of sympathizing with their own match and hating their own opposite;

- using all the most symbolic location of the imaginative universe, so to contaminate different narrative genres and create more contest arena for the public;

- planning experiences that can easily migrate from a narrative segment to another, from an asset to another of the transmedia bouquet;

- creating experiences forcing the public to act (calls to action), so that their actions become public and provoke debate and emulation;

- planning reward mechanisms, either direct or indirect, in different assets of the communication system;

- considering editorial spaces in which it is possible to receive feedback from the users, thus connecting them with the assessment of the general endurance of a project;

- insert secondary paths where to shift new parts of a narrative – or its mutations – had one of the platforms produced the expected performances;

- disseminate the different parts of a narrative with clues and details in order to create the possibility of future spin-offs or sequels of the original story;

- choose the platforms and – once the strengths and weak points are checked – it is time to finally set the communication system.

RABBIT HOLE AND POINT OF ENTRY

At the end of a frenzy chase, Alice meets the White Rabbit and suddenly starts falling into the void. This is how her adventure in Wonderland starts, in a universe where anything can happen because anything is possible; just like it is with transmedia. For this reason *rabbit hole* is also the definition by which the primary point of entry of an editorial project distributed on more media simultaneously goes. For example we can think of a claim at the end of a TV spot, a link on a website, a message reaching the public at home or a viral video which starts mysteriously to be watched on the net…

If the point of entry is the 'entrance door' of each medium involved in a transmedia communication system, the rabbit hole (RH) is its primary doorlock. If the point of entry is the bomb, the rabbit hole is its primer. If the point of entry is a moment

where to get information, the rabbit hole is – on the contrary – immersive. The rabbit hole is the first singing voice, the first content published, the flint that starts it all.

The number of entrance doors of a communication system depends on the opportunity of fruition we want the public to have, not the other way around. The most used practice is that of creating project with one single rabbit hole and different points of entry, one for each platform. At the beginning of transmedia studies, the Australian pioneer Christy Dena was the first to notice that if a project integrates many different media platforms, it inevitably offers more points of entry for the audience. Having multiple points for an audience to get involved is a great opportunity, but at the same time, can prove to be very risky. The points of entry, both primary and secondary, of a project have to be set and organized in the system with great attention, understanding their role and how they interact with the project's fundamental moments of navigation. The audience must not get to a project's primary point of entry in a traumatic or unsuspecting way, but rather, by consciously moving towards it. In some occasion it is possible to replicate the same rabbit hole or the same point of entry on more platforms, even though this generally creates some confusion. At the same time it is risky to use a single rabbit hole in one medium because it can pointlessly limit and obstruct the audience's access to the project, just like building one single elevator for a whole shopping mall. On the other hand, using one point of entry for each asset of the project would inevitably lead to the creation of a multidirectional system where audiences might risk to unawarely move away from the narrative core of a story, thus creating a sort of spinning or star system.

For all of these reasons the most frequently used solution is that of planning at least two entrance doors for a single transmedia project: a rabbit hole and a priority point of entry, to be activated one right after the other on two different channels so that the

primer of the story shall be evident to at least two different typology of consumers[8]. An example?

Two years after its project *Voyeur*, which shot the different apartments of a building giving the spectator the opportunity to autonomously choose which window to enter to consume the story, HBO came up in September 2009 with a new narrative experiment called *Imagine*, using a physical rabbit hole, to which it immediately added a digital point of entry. New York, Philadelphia and Washington hosted, with no previous notice or announcement, in sequence, the installation of a huge black cube on whose sides the images of an innovative hyperserial were projected[9]; it was possible to enjoy it in a different way according to the angle one was watching it from. At the same time, online, the official website of the project (hboimagine.com) allowed users to enjoy the very same interactive experience by spinning – in a 3D menu – the same cube and changing the point of view of the narrative.

In the form of a 41 pieces puzzle game, content including video, audio files, letters and images connected to each other created a unique, complex tale, as if they were parts of a gigantic tapestry. And the audience passed from the real world to the online project (and back) enjoying an interactive story and game-like experience that deepens the more one explores it (realized by the BBDO NY agency and released online by The Barbarian Group).

8. To those of rabbit hole and point of entry another definition must be added: that of *cheese holes*, that is 'narrative voids' the public can use to customize or create original content, distancing from those created by the authors in the transmedia narrative. They represent a quite risky opportunity which at the same time might turn out to be very productive and satisfying from the point of view of new audiences.

9. The *hyperserial* is a serial audiovisual product broadcast on the web, which has links and references to other online resources useful for the fruition of the narrative.

Img. 3.10 Imagine (2009). Rabbit hole with its physical street installation and virtual point of entry on the web.

TRANSMEDIA ROLL OUT

Time management in a transmedia communication system is crucial for the creation of the best sequence for the publication of its content. It depends on the combination of three variables:

- beginning and duration of all the stories of the communicative system;

- beginning and duration of the experiences within the communicative system;

- beginning and duration of the project in all the different assets of the communicative system.

The narrative forms and the technological platforms used in a transmedia narrative always generate a *metaverse* which connects authors and users for a definite time that goes from the discovery (through the rabbit hole) to the closure of the story. In this view we have:

- transmedia projects introducing a following narrative (for example, a movie launch campaign);

- project running parallel to the narrative (for example, a videogame created with the aim of 'playing' the character of a TV series);

- projects following and 'stretching the life' of a narrative (for example a number of documentaries bringing temporarily the characters of a novel back to life).

T*ransmedia roll out* is a form of systematic representation of the sequence of publication of all the content of a project's communicative system, from rabbit hole to official release and the temporary follow up in the days immediately after the release. The roll out is divided into platforms and tells the duration and the type of interaction and relation existing between the different media involved in the project. It is possible to visualize those relations by using visualization and hierarchy tools such as arrows, lines, segments, dotted lines, boxes and so on. An example?

In 2012, for the launch of his sci-fi movie *Prometheus*, a work structured as a prequel of the *Alien* saga, director Ridley Scott and Scott Free Entertainment chose to distribute the narrative using what I call a *bungee narrative experience*[10], that is when the content are produced going forward and backwards in the narrative universe of the story, revealing step by step small segments of the story itself. In Scott's case the objective was to mark a precise distance from the movies of the previous saga.
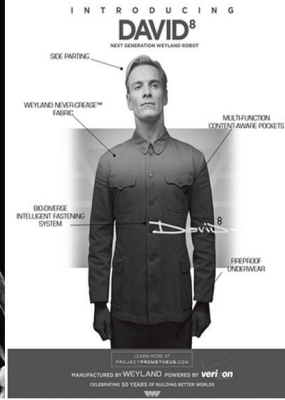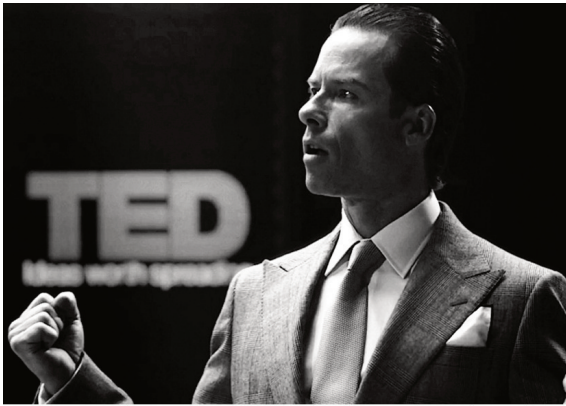
Prometheus tells the story of a group of scientists who starts searching for the origins of human life, following the traces of an extraterrestrial species in an exploratory mission funded by Weyland Industries in 2073. The rabbit hole of the transmedia project, which lasted three months in total, was made of three

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10. What I call *bungee narrative* are those narratives endlessly going forward and backward in time in the course of the story, with one or more characters to whom the different dramaturgical lines of the story refer to. This is what happens, for example, in Tom Tykwer's, Andy and Lana Wachowski's *Cloud Atlas* (2012), taken from the 2004 novel with the same title, written by David Mitchell.

viral videos promoting secondary aspects of the story, which were not in the movie or would come before the story's beginning. The first portrays Weyland Industries President, Peter Weyland who, as a young man, talks at a TED Conference in 2023 telling us his personal vision for our future. Future will start with fire, he says, as it happened in the myth of Prometheus. Men and women are the new gods of the technological era, and their goal is to change the world. How? With an ultimate, interstellar expedition on another planet.

The movie's imagery was in that way transcodifying the most important brand of conferences devoted to technology, entertainment and design and was broadcast on the portal of TED itself where it reached millions of viewers. A fake blog promoting the conference completed the picture. To those content the fake Weyland Corporation website was added: it presented with an animated gif allowing the audience to discover some preview footages of the movie and, later on, *Prometheus*'s official website and its social network profiles. Some days later, during his talk at the Wondercom in Anaheim, Scott had business cards with a phone number which gave access to the vision of a second clip distributed. Also, a spot promoting the production of the new droid David 8, which, in the movie, supports the Prometheus spaceship crew.

The spot is also quoted in an ad on "The Wall Street Journal" and on a Twitter profile created to answer the clients interested in buying the droid. Later in the campaign, single events in London (a special show) and Paris (a metro station branded with images and materials inspired by the movie) anticipate the publication of the third video: *Quiet Eye*, where the protagonist, Noomi Rapace, addresses in a videolog the now old Peter Weyland asking him to fund her mission. All these artworks were not a hard sell for the movie, but they built up a curious and original experience intimately connected to the film. Another clue to dig into its complex imaginative universe.

Prometheus — Transmedia roll out   **Release**

	28/02	05/03	16/03	17/03	04/04	10/04	17/04	29/04	16/05	31/05
WEB SITO WEYLAND	SITO WEYLAND INDUSTRIES	(2073) Anniversary Weyland + GIF animata	Nuovi Indizi su TIMELINE	News e Info	News e Info	News e Info	News e Info	News e Info	News e Info	News e Info
VIRAL VIDEO	RH VIDEO 1 (2023), Il giovane Peter Weyland al TED + final LINK			SPOT WEYLAND androide DAVID 8 / VIDEO 2 TRAILER NUOVO			EXTENDED SPOT WEYLAND androide DAVID 8		VIDEO 3 "Quiet Eye" - Antefatto Naomi Rapace chiede aiuto a Peter Weyland	VIDEO 4 Weyland legge "Così parlò Zarathustra", linkato nei titoli di coda del film
WEB SITO PROMETHEUS			Lancio sito con IMG film	News e Info	News e Info	News e Info	News e Info	News e Info	News e Info	VIDEO 5 Il capitano Janek prepara la nave alla partenza
SOCIAL NETWORK			twitter / facebook	Streaming on **twitter** / Streaming on **facebook**	Messaggi da **twitter** / **facebook** immagini speciali - reward -	Commenta su **twitter**	Info sul profilo di David 8 **twitter**	Commenti in diretta su **twitter** / Biglietti omaggio online Zeebox	**Twitter** immagini / **facebook** immagini	
CREATIVITA'		Anteprima Immagini del film - reward -	SMS / Weyland Inc. **tickets** con n. telefonico					post to	Sul sito Fios Verizon, **virtual** tour della nave **Prometheus**	"Prometheus: *The Art of the Film* - **Book** / **Action Figures**
REAL WORLD				Ridley Scott al WONDERCOM		Special 13' al Cinema VUE di Londra	Inserzione Wall Street Journal, di DAVID 8 **Weyland**	**LAUNCH TRAILER** in diretta su CHANNEL 4, UK	**Dressing** della Stazione Saint Martin a Parigi	

Img. 3.11 Prometheus (2012). The TED Conference presented as a rabbit hole for the launch of the movie. The advertisement published on "The Wall Street Journal" right after the video of the start of the production of the android David 8 and the transmedia roll out of the American launch of the movie.

The production of extra content of the movie's editorial project did however not stop even after the movie was launched. In American cinema theatres, thanks to a link in the final credits it

was possible in fact to access to the vision of two more video: in the first Weyland recited an abstract from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by Friedrich Nietzsche; in the second Captain Janek prepared the spaceship and showed all the detail of his mission. And all these contents were collected and disguised as an official Weyland Corporation app. The road to the movie was already paved and the corpus of material for the transmedia project supporting the narrative gave a significant contribution to its success, particularly in countries where the different content had actually reached and contaminated the audience, as the transmedia roll out of the American launch of *Prometheus* clearly shows.

QUESTIONS ON TIMING

In 1967, John Archibald Wheeler, an American theoretical physicist, was the first to put a name to "black holes" even though he realized that they were neither totally "black" (because they produce particles whose weak evaporation can be recorded), nor were they "holes" (but dying celestial bodies, whose surface escape velocity is so high that it exceeds that of light, making them seemingly invisible)[11]. They are a type of cyclopean tunnel with an intense and concentrated gravitational field that attracts everything during its rotation, even light[12]. Wheeler's theories about mass, charge and angular momentum as well as those about the universe's wave function greatly contribute to today's transmedia studies. These theories are particularly influential in the creation of a hypothesis about the future of new narrative, as well as new technological methods of global storytelling. One of Wheeler's most popular quotes is: "A black hole has no hair", referring to the fact that any object or signal, once consumed by a black hole, disappears without any chance of coming back. Even so, it leaves a trace because its mass and charge affects the gravitational attraction of the black hole[13]. How is this relevant? Well, what happens in a dark and atemporal black hole is

11. Wheeler, P. A., Rees, M., *Black Holes, Gravitational Waves, and Cosmology*, 1974.
12. Davies, P., *The Last Three Minutes*, 1994.
13. Bekenstein, J., *Black-Hole Thermodynamics*, "Physics Today", 1980.

comparable to the story of new transmedia: the collective imagination of oral, analogue and digital traditions that has been developed over millennia is now at death's door, but it continues to influence modern day storytelling. Black holes are ruled internally by "other" thermodynamics, which require adaptations and exceptions to universal laws. This also happens in the contemporary storytelling: traditional paradigms and narratives are still used in the new transmedia interfaces, but they are subject to revolutions concerning how stories are perceived, imagined and created, not to mention the horizon of events or laws of falling bodies in the cone of a black hole… The similarities and possible implications are numerous. So, the following sections are dedicated to different kinds of intervention – whether temporary or permanent – between one or more media platforms in a transmedia project.

Although I shall, in the following paragraphs, take into consideration only the most important and frequent forms of mutation, it must be observed how the genesis of 'open processes' in this field is one of the most vivid front in transmediality. A permanent research lab to investigate on techniques and experiments frequented with deep curiosity and on a regular basis by producers from all over the world.

STOP & GO EFFECT

During the course of the story, one of the middle segments of a project is suspended, while other parts continue their course, and then the stalled segment restarts as if nothing has happened. In the meanwhile, though, the alteration of the time-line of the story has forced the audience into new directions and the media to temporarily take full possess of the story, or to exploits its subplots or marginal aspects, thus growing in self-sufficiency and giving a significant contribution to the story's endurance. An important strategy, especially under the perspective of making cohesion and inner balances of the communicative system more solid. For example, in a transmedia promotion of a movie, online trailers all around the world simultaneously disappear from the

web as soon as TV and radio commercials are aired, and then return online a few days after the movie has come out.

DOMINO EFFECT

A particularly emotional narrative in one of the multiple media platforms or a particular asset of a transmedia project becomes temporarily more important than the others. This dominant asset changes the flow and direction of all the other assets and acts as the dominant 'driver' until the conclusion of the project. Result: the project allows the different assets of the communication system to 'talk' to each other in a different way and at the same time to amaze the public in its perception of the narrative. An important strategy especially when it comes to 'rejuvenate' the imagery of a transmedia franchise or portmanteau.

SPIN-OFF EFFECT

Like some satellites that take advantage of a planet's gravity to move somewhere else, one of the platforms in a transmedia project can temporarily stick to another medium in order to strengthen or revive its role or its content and continue towards a secondary goal with respect to the project as a whole. This is a strategy which forces the author and the transmedia producer to attentively and frequently supervise the comprehensive integrity of the system, in order to avoid collisions and imbalances in the distribution of a project's contents. Such a strategy proves very effective when we need to strengthen the role of an asset whose performance is not meeting the expectations, or which is having a weak start and an uneffective merge into the communication system.

DOPPLER EFFECT

At some stage during the development of a project, one of the media involved in a transmedia system changes its identity or language, altering its appearance as well as the comprehensive

balance of the narrative. This mechanism mirrors what happens in nature with energy and sound: from an animal's cry as reaching out to us, to the different shades of a "color," or the temperature of the stars. This editorial strategy is especially useful in order to expand the media universe of a narrative whose asset and language are not initially planned as part of the communication system. The expected result new communities and users to join the project.

An example? Since 2012, a mysterious killer has been stalking Italian Renaissance courts. His name is Ezio Auditore (or should I say, Desmond Miles), and as it is with avengers, he is very determined and very skillful with both 'time' and… blades! For the publication of the second game in the *Assassin's Creed* saga Ubisoft decided to use for its first time, to improve and expand upon the transmedia variations that were created for the first installment of the game (in 2007). Ten days before *Assassin's Creed: Discovery*'s official release a Playstation Portable game: *Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines* was published. Then, after the game's launch, Ubisoft published both online and on TV *Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines*, a series of three short movies dedicated to the *backstories* of the imaginative universe of the game[14]. Soon a series of novels dedicated to the various adventures of the protagonists, additional online videos, and a collection of action figures were published too. Each platform in the project added something to the universe of the game, and each publication provided a useful point of entry which allowed further explorations into the story. The brand's world making, based on historical and adventure literary genres, was thus supported by the milking actions carried out by means of movie suggestions (for example with the cut scenes from the movie the public could find both in the game and in the short movies), or in the literary references used for the chronological and geographical re-enactments in the saga.

14. *Backstories* are events or episodes in the life of the characters of a story which happened before the plot starts; they are inserted into the narrative through flashbacks, digressions or narrative frames.

Img. 3.12 Time shift in the Assassin's Creed's story world. From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, to the American Revolution, with

movie cut scenes supporting the game experience, until the 2016 movie and further.

Assassin's creed tells the story of a New York barman whose ancestors were part of the Assassins Cult who, captive in some Pharma Corporation labs controlled by the Templars, is forced to live into his forefathers memories through a time machine called Animus.

From Altaïr Ibn La-Ahad to Ezio Auditore and Connor Kenway, and so forth, the imaginative universe of the narrative goes from the Middle Ages to the Age of Crusades (with the 2007 game), from Humanism to Italian Renaissance and American Revolution, and on, all this thanks to a transmedia bouquet in continuous progress. It is made of video games, short movies, novels, graphic novels, a dedicated encyclopedia, online games and, more recently a 2016 movie directed by Justin Kurtzel and starring Michael Fassbender, which, also in this case, presents a version of the story which is slightly different from the mothership we all know from the videogame. Yet, this story too has proven to be productive and effective in order to reinforce both the expanded universe and the *additive comprehension* of its audience. The goal? An evolving universe which change day by day, like the one of *24*, but in this case, without loosing the continuity and empowering the anti-heroic portrait of the main character/punisher which works as the main driver in all the transmedial declinations of the story world.

WORKSHOP 3 – THE COMMUNICATIVE SYSTEM

The ideas, stories and experiences which can be part of the communication system of the project are on the table. It is now time to give the things their form and mould the communication system according to the duration and the curvature of its own content. It will be useful, at this stage, to answer the question we have so far made. Shall my communication system develop on a flat or curved plane? Does it have a positive curvature? Shall

it be a 'sphere' or a 'saddle'? Make up your mind and verifying the endurance by investigating all the stories and the experiences of your project one by one. The move on to evaluating the relationship between the different media and create a communication system either of the supportive, the competitive or the omnivorous type. At that stage, once the grid is defined and all the pieces of the jigsaw are laid down, verify the presence of spaces for interacting with the public and of mechanisms for possible mutations – if necessary – using those 'special effects' we have dealt with in this chapter.