Teaching Transmedia in China: Complexity, Critical Thinking, and Digital Natives

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a reflection on our experience of teaching a module on Transmedia Narratives and Digital Literacy to BA and MA students in the School of International Communications at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China, a Sino-foreign University in mainland China.

The chapter builds its reflection on the annotated syllabus on Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment designed by Henry Jenkins (2010), published with the aim of generating "some new cultural exchanges around the topic" (948) of teaching transmedia storytelling and the two updated versions of the syllabus (Jenkins 2011, 2013), thus expanding the body of scholarship about transmedia. While some of the aims and content of our module are similar to those in Jenkins'

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course, the difference lies in the fact that Jenkins' syllabus was designed to be taught from the center of the media industry; ours from its "periphery," a decade later. Indeed, in the presentation of his syllabus, Jenkins (2010) states that his course "might only be taught at the University of Southern California or some other school that is located close to the heart of the media industry" (5). In contrast, our module was designed in a country, China, where cultural and creative industries are only recently developing (Xiang 2013) and the number of local examples of transmedia franchises is still limited.

Due to the makeup of our student cohort, composed mostly of Chinese students and a minority of international students from diverse cultural backgrounds (e.g., Poland, Australia, France, Denmark, and Brazil), module design attempted to provide comprehensive engagement with the topic, while addressing issues related to the local environment identified in a previous study on first-year undergraduate students BA studies (Brown et al. 2018). First, a generalized difficulty to understand complex concepts and critically engage with them due to language barriers, a tendency to use memorization as a learning technique, and a habit of focussing on test assessment; second, digital literacy skills that are mostly reduced to the ability to take pictures and/or videos with smartphones and create social media webpages and little willingness to engage in the development of more complex digital skills.

We will, therefore, review how we designed our module to address these key issues related to complexity of concepts, critical thinking, and the controversial idea of digital natives. This will allow us to explain our choices in designing our module, provide some examples of Chinese transmedia franchises as an additional resource for other teachers to create more inclusive curricula, and to share our syllabus with the aim of inspiring the development of further courses and reflection on teaching transmedia courses in different contexts.

COMPLEXITY

When teaching a module in transmedia, the complexity of the idea of transmedia itself should not be ignored. This complexity exists in part because transmedia represents an intersection between different entertainment products that are normally approached from several research perspectives and analyzed by using unique methods as underlined by Jenkins in his annotated syllabus (Jenkins 2010). The complexity

of teaching transmedia also results from a departure from an American-centered interpretation of transmedia as an entertainment technique, and instead, examining it from a glocal perspective. Transmedia involves the media system as a whole and influences the way we redefine fields such as journalisms, activism, play, and documentary. From a content point of view, this shift from an American perspective creates the same problem of finding examples of franchises known to all students faced by Jenkins. When common reference points were required, we indeed had to resort to globally known franchises such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe to enhance in class discussion.

In addition, despite Jenkins' characterization of transmedia as "a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience […where] each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" (Jenkins 2007), there are in reality very few transmedia universes that match this ideal definition. Transmedia has more often being understood by differentiating it from existing practices such as adaptation (Dena 2019) or by discussing its limitations and intersections with concepts such as canon and fanon (Guerrero-Pico 2016). The Chinese transmedia universe developed around the online novel series *Grave Robbers' Chronicles* (Daomu Biji-盗墓笔记) by Xu Lei, for example, is an incredibly complex story world where expansion and adaptation coexist. For instance, *The Mystic Nine* spin off online four-part series (Anne 2016a) is a continuation of *The Mystic Nine* online series (Anne 2016b) that is a prequel to the Chinese television series *The Lost Tomb* (Cheang 2015) adapted from the online novel series *Grave Robbers' Chronicles*.

An additional layer of complexity related to our specific context is that China has so far produced very few examples of what could be called transmedia. This is not surprising if we consider that industrialized production of transmedia narrative requires an understanding of Intellectual Property (IP) to enable creators and companies to act in concert and cooperate (Pearson 2017). In general, Chinese creators have a less mature understanding of IP rules, as noted in Elaine Zhao's (2017) disscusion of Chinese online novelists and their tendency to sign away their copyright.

The above-mentioned *Grave Robbers' Chronicles* is an interesting local exception as in 2014 Xu Lei (under the pen name Nan Pai San Shu) set up his own company (CRI 2016) to protect, exploit, and develop the IP created around the original online series.

The module was designed as an optional Masters-level module open to final-year undergraduate students. This would guarantee a cohort of motivated students with a strong background in communications studies who would benefit from studying media under a transmedia framework, offering a point in comparison with other approaches to media and communication studies encountered in the degree program.

The module begins with an overview of Jenkins' "ideal" definition of transmedia (Jenkins 2007), the history of the concept, and its essential characteristics as defined by Matthew Freeman (2017): world-building, character-building, and authorship. By doing so, the module raises a series of questions related to the complexity of these characteristics and their relation with Jenkins' initial definition by showing, for example, that while several characters could be defined as transmedia because their stories are told across different platforms, "there is not a direct correspondence between transmedia storytelling and transmedia characters. In a shared narrative world, in fact, different characters can live and act, and every story can focus on a different one; moreover, the presence of the same character in different texts and media platforms does not necessarily imply that these texts or platforms share the same world" (Bertetti 2014, 2344). Such is the case of the 2017 version of *Wonder Women* as interpreted by Gal Gadot compared with Lynda Carter's 1970s TV series rendition. Or, to remain in the Chinese context, the *Monkey King* and its presence in different media products such as the 1986–2000 TV Series or the more recent animation *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*.

The module then challenges the concept of world-building and authorship by looking at the concept of consistency from the point of view of canon and fanon. Discussions of canon derive theoretically from a definition of the concept as works attributed to single authorship[1] and revolve around the creation of coherence within a narrative world (Long 2007). In practice, coherence is made possible as a result of the horizontal ownership of production, marketing, and distribution platforms by media conglomerates (Jenkins 2006) that make the creation of narratives "designed as canonical from the outset" (Long 2007, 40) possible. Indeed, according to Roberta Pearson, "proprietary fictional world tends toward more coherence and consistency" (2017, 117). The relationship between primary and secondary texts is explored to consider the boundaries of canonical texts and to consider how fanworks challenge or negotiate a singular view of authorship. In particular, the notions of fanon

and participative culture are used as a conduit to discuss how coherence operates within processes of collective authorship where different fans, or sub-groups of fans, simultaneously (and occasionally independently) interpret and expand canonical texts. Examples from US, UK, and Chinese contexts highlight how canonical narratives are constructed and boundaries policed or negotiated by official authors. The reclassification of novels detailing the further adventures of the Skywalker/Solo characters (and their offspring), published in the wake of the original *Star Wars* film trilogy, as non-canonical in the lead up to Disney's three-film contribution to the narrative demonstrates official policing of canon. Alternatively, J. K. Rowling's retrofitting of fan interpretation of character dynamics (such as the romantic relationship between Albus Dumbledore and Gellert Grindelwald) in the *Harry Potter* narrative illustrates some degree of flexibility on the part of the "official" author.

As previously mentioned, a relatively less mature understanding of IP by Chinese content creators has resulted in the creation of fewer conventionally recognized transmedia narrative franchises (with the aforementioned exception of the *Grave Robbers' Chronicles* series). However, a vibrant online video creation culture and the development of numerous phone applications (such as TikTok) to facilitate production and distribution have fostered unofficial narrative creation comparable to other global locations. As the same platforms are used by both official narrative producers and fan producers, there is often a high degree of crossover between official and fanworks, at least superficially. That is to say, unless a viewer is cognizant of the status of the individual or company uploading the video, the "official" status of the video can be difficult to determine if judged on production quality or style. Often, fan-made videos display high production values, while official promotional works can be designed to emulate the non-professional tropes of fan-made works. Online videos promoting the BBC series *Sherlock* uploaded to official distribution platform Youku looking, to all intents and purposes, like fan-made narrative summaries or character pairings, were utilized during the official promotion of the series when released online in China (Gilardi et al. 2018). At other times, applications (Apps) dictate the format of presentation such that works produced will be visually similar regardless of the status of the creator. TikTok imposes 15-second limits on videos uploaded to the platform and, as an App designed to be used on a phone, generally encourages vertical videos that are normally aesthetically associated with non-professional videography as opposed to the horizontal display

of conventional film and television image formats (Napoli 2016; Canella 2018; Neal and Ross 2018). Thus, both "official" and fanworks look very similar, with fanworks incorporated into the official channel of some narratives. *Onmyoji* is a mobile role-playing game with a strong narrative component that features five main characters; protagonist Abe no Seimei, Kagura, Minamoto no Hiromasa, Yaobikuni, and Minamoto no Yorimitsu. While the game offers players the opportunity to explore the narrative world from the perspective of Abe no Seimei and the other supporting characters, it is in other official platforms that the supporting characters' subjectivities are explored. The TikTok account of the game features fan fiction and fan videos that further embellish the relationships between characters (TikTok. n.d.) while at the same time legitimizing the fanworks included.[2]

This practice illustrates two points. First, that the use of social and digital media platforms, and somewhat looser regulations around IP control, result in visible integration of fanworks into the official narrative. This enables the exploration of a principle of transmedia storytelling that Jenkins found "least well represented in … [his] current incarnation of the course": subjectivity (2010, 947). TikTok videos and fan fiction on WeChat feature stories that explore the dynamics between the main character Abe no Seimei and supporting characters, or examined how the supporting characters lived. One example is a fictionalized interview with a mythical character, Ryomen, who has two faces. The interview probes this character's personal experience and focuses on how, given his two faces, he is able to enjoy food. With the inclusion of digital media platforms and within the specific context of media creation in China, the types of perspectives explored in fan creations enable students to explore how subjectivities operate across transmedia stories achieved as an exercise that negotiates between canon and fanon (albeit legitimized) texts.

Second, it illustrates the benefit of exploring the contribution of the "periphery" to the creation of transmedia narratives. Central to the discussion of canon and fanon is the relationship between media producers who emerge from the established structures of the media and entertainment industries, and the fan producers who work at the fringes. The module is taught within a degree program that is conventionally theoretically focused (although the module does represent a shift toward integrating theory and practice). Situated as it is on the Ningbo campus of the University of Nottingham, there is less access to media practitioners than Jenkins had when initially running his course, due to physical

distance from the creative hubs of Shanghai and Beijing. The focus of the module is not on the experience of media practitioners designing transmedia narratives from the "top-down," but an exploration of how the concept of transmedia operates in the media. In particular, students are encouraged to reflect upon their varied use of media, and consider how, as users/consumers, they are situated within or contribute to the transmedia narratives within their local media-scape. This is done through a political economy approach to help students to reflect on the implications of the emergence of Internet-based participatory culture and underline how many transmedia universes rely on users to create content, while platforms' owners benefit from the surplus value (Fuchs 2014).

Additionally, the module examines non-fiction transmedia narratives, drawing from global examples. For instance, examples discussed include the Colombian social project *4 Ríos* (Tobar 2013), which was designed to build a repository of memories of the Colombian conflict, or the documentary *Les Nouveaux Pauvres* by the Belgian director Patrick Séverin (2016). These examples helped students consider how the transmedia techniques used by the entertainment industry to hook consumers, are also used for social engagement. They were approached as case studies during lectures as due to language barriers—the former in Spanish and the latter in French—students would have more difficulty in exploring them themselves. By looking then at how transmedia is used by toy company Lego, or in journalism products such as in the *Syria Project* (Lugo Rodríguez 2018), students identify a shift in the primary role of these practices. In these case studies, the need to attract audiences takes precedence over developing the creativity of children (in the case of Lego), or providing objective information on a social issue (in the case of the *Syria Project*). After reviewing these global practices, we focused then on local examples of transmedia universes such as the one developed around the documentary *A Bite of China* (Chen 2012–2018) composed of the 3 seasons broadcast on television, a recipe book published in 2012, a film released in 2016, a mobile game released in 2018, and a WeChat public account. Another example is the "O!MEGA" project developed by Shanghai Media Group to launch Chinese electronic music through a series of interconnected projects such as an *Electronic Music Ranking List* (SMG 2018) and the 2018 movie *O! Mega China* (Si 2018). To close the module, students are provided with examples of how transmedia storytelling was used in their own university to teach language to previous cohorts (Reid et al. 2011). The use of examples from the students' own

university certainly helped them to feel closer to the implementation of transmedia techniques, when compared with studying examples from other countries.

CRITICAL THINKING AND DIGITAL NATIVES

Reflecting on the development of his syllabus and its function in breaking down established conventions that separated media, reception, and fan studies, Jenkins highlighted the need to think afresh "about what transmedia means as a set of production and reception practice" (2010, 944). His aim was both scholarly and practical. In exploring how transmedia storytelling occurred from different perspectives, students were encouraged to step outside of the organizational structures of media courses and consider texts and audiences in different ways. At the same time, students were given an opportunity to practice by developing a transmedia project around an existing media property, as aspirational media professionals, and receive "real-world" feedback from a panel of media professionals. Jenkins notes, for his group of students, the benefits of the practical work both in receiving professional guidance and to concretize concepts: "We found that students were more engaged with the course concepts when they saw them less as abstract ideas and more as resources contributing to their final projects" (946). Indeed, according to Wilhelm (2007) assessments should try to achieve "applicative understanding" (113), in which understanding of concepts is demonstrated through the creation of an original and unique work. Furthermore, Entwistle (2009) suggests that assessments should "both develop and assess understanding" (104). The challenge for the module was then not only to provide students with a space to demonstrate understanding of concepts, but to devise an assessment format which assisted students to develop their understanding.

The conventional assessment format for the institution is written tasks such as essays and exams. However, a move to innovate assessment formats in the School of International Communications, starting from 2014/2015, resulted in the creation of practical assessments within theory-based modules. The move was partly in response to low essay and exam scores across the cohort, and the need to find other ways for students to understand (as well as demonstrate their understanding of) complex concepts (Brown et al. 2018). The exam format encouraged students to rely heavily on rote learning and the memorization of facts,

but did not provide them with the necessary space and time to demonstrate understanding of concepts. For many students whose first language is Chinese, writing essays in English using complex concepts is challenging and not always appropriate for lower level cohorts. A solution was found in the use of creative assessments as a means to test application of concepts, as well as providing students with an alternative to essay writing. A first-year module, Communication and Technology, was redesigned in 2014/2015, with a new assessment format consisting of 3 creative projects + a written portfolio implemented as the mid-term assessment. The traditional essay format was retained as the final assessment. In 2015/2016, new marking criteria for projects were implemented for theory-practice-based assessments. A comparison of marks between cohorts before and after the intervention indicated an improvement in student performance (Brown et al. 2018).

The current transmedia narrative module was designed around a theoretical exploration of the concept of transmedia storytelling, its influence on the media ecology, and the practical application of concepts and principles to media production. As such, the assessment format for the module adopted a similar approach to Communication and Technology. Students were required to create a transmedia narrative utilizing three different media, supported by a reflective essay. The practical assessment not only provided an appropriate platform through which to demonstrate transmedia narrative concepts and principles, it also enabled students to demonstrate their understanding of concepts using media that required other skills (image construction, video editing, audio editing, etc.), in addition to writing skills. On the one hand, it enabled them to have a different outlet to demonstrate understanding and application of concepts they might otherwise struggle with in an essay format. On the other, students were given the opportunity to work with the media and use the professional/academic language they studied on the module, "playing" with the transmedia format in order to demonstrate their understanding and interrogation of transmedia concepts.

Unlike the students from Jenkins' course, ours are not necessarily aspiring media practitioners (although some in the postgraduate program worked in the local media industry). For students studying a bachelor's degree, the module comes in the final year of a degree program which emphasizes critical theory. The practical assessment in the module thus aims not to replicate industry processes of transmedia narrative creation, as in Jenkins' original design. Rather, it encourages students to think

critically about the media they consume and the media they create. As mentioned, students could have limited in-depth digital literacy despite being digital natives. The module design included workshops to challenge their use of creative platforms and to encourage them to assess different workflows for media creation, ranging from the use of Apps to the use of desktop non-linear editing software, drone photography, and 3D image creation. The workshops help students not only to learn new technical skills but also to use the learning process to discuss concepts such as media, digital, and transmedia literacies that were covered in the module.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion offers some insights into the implementation of a transmedia syllabus at a Sino-British University in 2018. As noted in the introduction, the development and delivery of the module of study attempted to engage with Jenkins' original desire to inspire "new cultural exchanges around the topic" (2010, 948). In particular, we sought to apply a transmedia framework to the study of the media ecology, as well as to encourage reflection and analysis through a transmedia lens. In the networked and convergent environment of contemporary global media, it is not difficult to foster an appreciation of how the notion works conceptually or in abstract terms. Indeed, by exploring international examples such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe, it is fairly easy to give students a sense of how the notion works in practice. However, the implementation was not without its challenges, a point of discussion it would be remiss of us not to address.

In his original 2010 publication, Jenkins reflected upon key challenges with the content of his course. First, he found that students lacked shared knowledge of media franchises, so were unable to engage in deeper discussion of narratives to explore how concepts and principles worked. Second, students were exposed to new concepts with which they were required to develop a certain level of familiarity before commencing with their projects in a relatively short space of time. This resulted in a conceptually heavy first half of the course, while the second half was relatively light. Third, due to the relative novelty of the concept, guest speakers "started at square one" (947), re-introducing fundamental concepts that the students had already covered. Finally, Jenkins noted a marked difference (sometimes contradictory) in the feedback provided to students on their practical projects from "new" and "old" media industry experts

(947). Unsurprisingly, given the different industrial context and span of 10 years, the delivery of our module revealed a number of challenges that both echoed and diverged from Jenkins' initial observations. It should be noted that the module did not invite any guest speakers, or industry assessors. For this reason, the following discussion only reflects upon the first two challenges.

Like Jenkins, the students in our cohort demonstrated varying levels of knowledge about transmedia narratives. As the students originated from a number of geographical locations, a common frame of reference was difficult to identify, particularly if the narratives of which students had in-depth knowledge were not internationally released. Fortunately, as aforementioned, global media franchises such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe became a common text through which transmedia principles were demonstrated (albeit with an emphasis on cinematic and televisual mediums). There were also Chinese examples, but few demonstrated the breadth of transmedia principles that the *Grave Robbers' Chronicles* did. While many of the domestic students were aware of the series, few had the requisite detailed knowledge of the narrative to carry out deeper discussions about the franchise. However, the benefit of an international cohort is undoubtedly in the diverse make-up of students, each able to draw from a different set of media experiences. The international students were able to share examples of transmedia storytelling from their countries of origin, some of which illustrated principles that were not demonstrated by the larger global franchises. Some examples include the creations of the French company Small Bang and the transmedia universe developed around the scrolling graphic novel *Phallaina* (2016). The work included a comic developed as a 115-meter-long fresco (Hoguet and Chauvin 2016), which required consumers to physically travel to a location to access the narrative, giving them a different understanding of the whole story.

The module ran for ten weeks. Transmedia concepts were taught over the ten-week period, with concepts introduced in weekly lectures and explored in seminars. Weekly workshops encouraged students to start developing and working on their transmedia projects from the beginning of the term. In the first few weeks, students developed the technical skills required to create the projects. Workshops focused on scripting commenced in the middle of the term once students had a better grasp of transmedia concepts. The final weeks were dedicated to working on the

projects and considering non-fictional applications of transmedia principles. Students were slowly introduced to concepts in a module design integrating theoretical exploration with practical instruction and project development. The result is a more balanced approach to the content that avoids the front-loading of concepts reported by Jenkins in 2010 (947). This design is possible due to the specific nature of our cohort of students. As mentioned, the majority of the students are not aspiring media practitioners. They elect to study the module in order to gain more specific knowledge about a form of media production, but are taking the module as part of a mostly theoretical degree. The focus of the assessments is therefore not on the creation of industry-standard output, but on the ability to demonstrate in-depth understanding of concepts. The expectation for the transmedia project are thus a little different and more amenable to a delivery method in which concepts and skills are taught in tandem.

As Jenkins noted, students "were at first surprised and then energized to see some of the fixed categories that had organized their other media studies courses break down" (944), a process of re-conceptualizing that was similarly experienced by our cohort. While students enjoyed exploring familiar media examples from slightly different theoretical perspectives, they encountered challenges placing the study of transmedia within other scholarly traditions. The concepts explored in the module drew from media studies, fan studies, and (some) literary studies traditions; some traditions were unfamiliar to students. While some of the concepts were easily understood instinctively, others required greater knowledge of the traditions of thinking from which the concepts emerged. For instance, the notion that the production of fanon reinforces hegemonies within fandoms which replicate the power dynamics of a political economy approach to the media can be difficult for students to grasp if their awareness of fan studies is limited to the liberating potential of fan fiction that concerned early fan scholarship (Bacon-Smith 1991; Jenkins 1992). Within the limitations of a ten-week module, there was little time to explain the traditions from which concepts derived. The module demonstrated where concepts from different traditions intersected through discussions of transmedia, and for students who needed to understand how ideas developed before recognizing how they contributed to the discussion, this proved a challenge. Individual discussions with tutors and lecturers outside of scheduled class time enabled students to fill these gaps and assisted their overall understanding.

The nature of the institution provided a challenge to instructors not encountered by Jenkins. As a Sino-British University based in China, the language of instruction is English, while the majority of domestic students are Chinese. International students originate from a diverse range of nationalities, many of which do not have English as an official language. Students with better English language proficiency generally followed the discussion with greater ease in class and were able to participate more during the workshops. This did not equate to student performance, as students were able to demonstrate their understanding of concepts through creative work rather than through written assessment alone.

Notes

1. "Single" is in reference to a singular copyright holder rather than an individual, although there are examples where the two are combined.
2. However, it should be noted that video content creators have reported finding their works used on official platforms associated with media products, without their prior consent.

Appendix 1

Module Description and Outcomes

Module Outline
This module examines the concept of transmedia narrative. This refers to narratives spread across multiple delivery channels such as movies, video games, books, comics, TV products, and websites with each part making distinctive contributions to an understanding of the proposed universe. The module look at the history of this idea, its definition, and the conceptual challenges that transmedia introduces to the classical idea of narrative and other key media concepts such as journalism, authorship, entertainment, and creativity. We will also look at how it is changing the idea of adaptation in terms of fidelity/intertextuality/synergy. In addition, we will analyze how this way of storytelling is related to media companies' structures, new technologies, and the concept of "Participatory Culture."

Students will be asked to produce a transmedia narrative, contextualize, and analyze it using relevant media theories focusing on the production process, and reflect on their experiences as users.

At the end of the module students should:

- have knowledge of the concepts of transmedia storytelling, narrative, adaptation and participatory culture;
- have specialized knowledge, understanding and ability to engage critically with at least two media theories; have an ability to examine a variety of materials including literary texts, movies, TV Series, Plays, Video Games, Websites, Comics;
- have an ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources;
- have an ability to support arguments with evidence;
- have an ability to understand and evaluate the different factors that influence user's experience; be able to select, sift, and synthesize knowledge from various sources;
- be able to identify key elements of a complex narrative, analyze them critically, and link them in a complex and coherent structure;
- be able to use a range of software and IT tools to complete assignments; be able to engage in individual research and present it effectively;
- be able to interpret immersive digital environments;
- be able to work productively with others in problemsolving; be able to remix media content.

Required Readings

Johnson, Derek. 2013. *Media Franchises: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Creative Industries*. New York: New York University Press.

Freeman, Matthew, and Renira Rampazzo Gambarato, eds. 2019. *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies*. New York: Routledge.

Freeman, Matthew, and William Proctor, eds. 2018. *Global Convergence Cultures: Transmedia Earth*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge.

Handler Miller, Carolyn. 2008. *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment*. Oxford: Elsevier.

Ibrus, Indrek, and Carlos Scolari. 2012. *Crossmedia Innovations: Texts, Markets, Institutions*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Jenkins, Henry. Confessions of an Aca-Fan. http://www.henryjenkins.org/.

Phillips, Andrea. 2012. *A Creator's Guide to Transmedia Storytelling*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Assignment
Assessment type percentage length 100%: transmedia project (3 products–one must be a video production equivalent of 3500 words) + portfolio (1500 words portfolio focused on media production and user experience)

Class Schedule

Week 1

Lecture 1—Introduction
In this lecture, we will introduce students to the main topics and objectives of the course and advise them on teaching, seminars, workshops, and assessment methods.

Seminar 1:
Set reading:

Jenkins, Henry. 2007. "Transmedia Storytelling 101." Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog). 21 March. http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html.

Watch:

Gordon, Ullyses. "What Is TransMedia?" Published on 17 October 2010. YouTube video, 00:02:04. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9uX_65IFpY&feature=youtu.be.

Workshop 1:
This week's workshop will focus on the art of storytelling and on how to find the idea for your story.

Week 2

Lecture 2—Classical Narratives vs Transmedia Storytelling
This lecture focuses on the differences between the classical concept of narrative and the idea of transmedia narrative. We will define "transmedia" and give an overview of the historical context within which transmedia storytelling first developed.

Seminar 2:
Set reading:

Jenkins, Henry, and Matthew Freeman. 2017. "Yes, Transmedia HAS a History! An Interview with Matthew Freeman (Part One)." Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog). 17 January. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2017/01/yes-transmedia-has-a-history-an-interview-with-matthew-freeman-part-one.html.

Jenkins, Henry, and Matthew Freeman. 2017. "Yes, Transmedia HAS a History! An Interview with Matthew Freeman (Part Two)." Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog). 19 January. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2017/01/yes-transmedia-has-a-history-an-interview-with-matthew-freeman-part-two.html.

Jenkins, Henry, and Matthew Freeman. 2017. "Yes, Transmedia HAS a History! An Interview with Matthew Freeman (Part Three)." Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog). 24 January. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2017/01/yes-transmedia-has-a-history-an-interview-with-matthew-freeman-part-three.html.

Workshop 2:

This week's workshop will focus on screenplay, script, and storyboard. Students will learn how to keep their screenplay writing pared down, how to apply different script and storyboard formats.

Further reading:

Bertetti, Paolo. 2014. "Toward a Typology of Transmedia Characters". *International Journal of Communication* 8: 2344–2361. Accessed 21 January 2020. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/2597/1201.

Freeman, Matthew. 2017. *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*. New York: Routledge.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Long, Geoffrey A. 2007. "Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company." Master diss., MIT, USA. Accessed 24 January 2020. https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/39152.

Wolf, Mark J. P. 2012. *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*. New York: Routledge.

Week 3

Lecture 3—Film Adaptation: Fidelity, Intertextuality, and Synergy
This lecture focuses on the concept of adaptation by underlining how artists have always sampled others work to derive innovation and creativity. We will then look at the concept of transmedia adaptation. This concept diverges from classical concepts of adaptation as it transforms the fiction through different media while staying true to the consistency of the fictional universe.

Seminar 3:
Set reading:

Gilardi, Filippo, and James Reid. 2014. "Transmedia Storytelling: Paradigm Shift in Literary Studies. Narrative, Adaptation, Teaching and Learning." In *Deterritorializing Practices in Literary Studies*, edited by María Costanza Guzmán and Alejandro Zamora, 103–120. Toronto: York University.

Jenkins, Henry. 2009. "The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling (Well, Two Actually. Five More on Friday)." Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog). 12 December. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/the_revenge_of_the_origami_uni.html.

Jenkins, Henry. 2009. "Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: The Remaining Four Principles of Transmedia Storytelling." Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog). 12 December. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/revenge_of_the_origami_unicorn.html.

Workshop 3:

This workshop will introduce students to post-production workflow and file management, as well as to Premiere Pro.

Further reading:

Carroll, Rachel. 2009. *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities.* London: Continuum.

Hutcheon, Linda. 2006. *A Theory of Adaptation.* London: Routledge.

Leitch, Thomas, ed. 2017. *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Murray, Simone. 2012. *The Adaptation Industry.* New York: Routledge.

Sanders, Julie. 2006. *Adaptation and Appropriation.* London: Routledge.

Stam, Robert. 2000. "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation." In *Film Adaptation*, edited by James Naremore, 54–76. New York: Rutgers University Press.

Week 4

Lecture 4—Digital and Media Literacy

The lecture will offer an introduction to the concepts of digital and media literacy and by focusing on the question of the blurring line between media consumers and producers, it will question the existence (or non-existence) of a transmedia literacy and try to define its characteristics.

Seminar 4:

Set reading:

Negroponte, Nicholas. 1995. *Being Digital.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Scolari, Carlos A., Masanet, Maria-José, Guerrero-Pico, Mar, and María-José Establés. 2018. "Transmedia Literacy in the New Media Ecology: Teens' Transmedia Skills and Informal Learning Strategies." *El Profesional de la Informacion* 27, 4: 801–812.

Workshop 4:

This workshop will start by introducing students to mobile moviemaking. Students will then practice using their phones with the techniques introduced in the first part of the workshop.

Further reading:

Hoechsmann, Michael, and Stuart R. Poyntz. 2012. *Media Literacies: A Critical Introduction*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hobbs, Renee. 2017. *Create to Learn: Introduction to Digital Literacy*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hobbs, Renee, and Amy Jensen. 2009. "The Past, Present, and Future of Media Literacy Education." *Journal of Media Literacy Education* 1, 1: 1–11.

Levy, Edmond. 1994. *Making a Winning Short: How to Write, Direct, Edit, And Produce a Short Film*. New York: H. Holt and Co.

Week 5

Lecture 5—Participatory Culture and Media Companies
This lecture will take a political economy approach to digital media, outlining ownership structures in digital media and charting the flows of capital in the digital media market. The lecture focuses on the emergence of Internet-based participatory culture by underlining important concepts such as "Consumer," "User," "Creator," and "Participants" and it will focus on how many transmedia universes rely on users to create content, while owners of media platforms benefit from the surplus value.

Seminar 5:
Set reading:

Edwards, Leigh H. 2012. "Transmedia Storytelling, Corporate Synergy, and Audience Expression." *Global Media Journal* 12, 20: 1–12. Accessed 21 January 2020. http://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/transmedia-storytelling-corporate-synergy-and-audience-expression.pdf.

Fuchs, Christian. 2009. "Information and Communication Technologies and Society: A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy of the Internet." *European Journal of Communication* 24, 1: 69–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323108098947.

Workshop 5:
Building on the previous two workshops, this session will introduce students to editing fiction.

Further reading:

Burgess, Jean, and Joshua Green. 2009. *You Tube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Boyd-Barrett, Oliver. 1995. "The Political Economy Approach." In *Approaches to Media: A Reader*, edited by Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Chris Newbold, 186–192. London: Arnold.

Delwiche Aaron, and Jennifer Jacobs, eds. 2011. *The Routledge Handbook of Participatory Cultures*. London: Routledge.

Flew, Terry, and Stephen McElhinney. 2006. "Globalization and the Structure of New Media Industries." In *Handbook of New Media: Social Shaping and Consequences of ICTs*, edited by Leah A. Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone, 287–306. London: Sage.

Fuchs, Christian. 2011. "The Contemporary World Wide Web: Social Medium or New Space of Accumulation? In The Political Economies of Media." In *The Transformation of the Global Media Industries*, edited by Winseck Dwayne and Yong Jin Dal, 201–220. London: Bloomsbury.

Fuchs, Christian. 2011. "Against Henry Jenkins: Remarks on Henry Jenkins' ICA Talk 'Spreadable Media'." Christian Fuchs (blog). 30 May. http://fuchs.uti.at/570/.

Fuchs, Christian. 2013. "Capitalism or Information Society? The Fundamental Question of the Present Structure of Society." *European Journal of Social Theory* 16, 4: 413–434. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431012461432.

Fuchs, Christian. 2014. *Digital Labour and Karl Marx*. London: Routledge.

Jenkins, Henry, Clinton, Katie, Purushotma, Ravi, Robison, Alice J., and Margaret Weigel. 2009. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. Chicago: The MacArthur Foundation.

Week 6

Lecture 6—Transmedia Fandom, Authorship, and Canon/Fanon
This lecture will explore the roles of fans in transmedia storytelling. It builds on Jenkins' principles of transmedia storytelling to examine how fan activities and fan fiction can be theorized using the concepts of transmedia storytelling. Through the lens of Canon v Fanon, the relationship between media producers and fans is explored to consider where fans are located within the transmedia media-scape.

Seminar 6:

Set reading:

Busse, Karen. 2017. "Intimate Intertextuality and Performative Fragments in Media Fanfiction." In *Fandom Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, 45–60. New York: New York University Press.

Workshop 6:
Building on the previous three workshops, this session will introduce students to editing non-fiction.

Further reading:

Bennett, Lucy, and Paul J. Booth, eds. 2015. "Performance and Performativity in Fandom." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 18. https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2015.0675.

Gray, Jonathan, Sandvoss, Cornel, and C. Lee Harrington, eds. 2017. *Fandom Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. New York: New York University Press.

Pearson, Roberta. 2010. "Fandom in the Digital Era." *Popular Communication* 8, 1: 84–95. https://doi.org/10.1080/15405700903502346.

Stanfill, Mel, and Megan Condis, eds. 2014. "Fandom and/as Labor." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 15. https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0593.

Stein, Louisa Ellen. 2015. *Millenial Fandom*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press.

Stein, Louisa Ellen, and Kristina Busse. 2012. *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom*. Jefferson, NC: McFarlan and Company.

Willis, Ika, ed. 2016. "The Classical Canon and/as Transformative Work." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 21. https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2016.0807.

Week 7

Lecture 7—Creativity and Transmedia Franchise
In this lecture, we will argue that when transmedia applies to play; the development of consumer's creativity is limited rather than enhanced.

Seminar 7:

Set reading:

Gulden, Tore. 2016. "Plenteous and Limited Play, Transmedia Storytelling-Toys in Light of Individualist and Social Esthetics." *International Journal of Play* 5, 1: 77–92.

Workshop 7:
During the workshop, you will be able to discuss your projects with your tutor and peers and examine how to link your projects together.

Further reading:

Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer. 2013. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." In *The Media Studies Reader*, edited by Laurie Ouellette, 13–30. New York and London: Routledge.

Caillois, Roger. 2001. *Man, Play, and Games*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Huizinga, Johan. 2016. *Homo Ludens*. Kettering, OH: Angelico Press.

Ihde, Don. 2006. "Technofantasies and Embodiment." In *The Matrix in Theory*, edited by

Kline, Stephen, Dyer-Witheford, Nick, and Greig de Peuter. 2003. *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture and Marketing*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
Myriam Diocaretz and Stefan Herbrechter, 151–166. New York: Rodopi.
Murray, Janet. 1997. *Hamlet on the Holodeck*. New York: Free Press.

Week 8

Lecture 8—Transmedia Politics and Activism
This lecture will focus on how transmedia is used by political parties and social movements and consider areas that digital media have irrevocably changed in politics, and those areas that have remained largely unchanged.

Seminar 8:

Set reading:

Casero-Ripollés, Andreu, Feenstra, Ramón, and Tormey, Simon. 2016. "Old and New Media Logics in an Electoral Campaign: The Case of Podemos and the Two-Way Street Mediatization of Politics." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 21, 3: 378–397.

Workshop 8:
In this workshop, you will be introduced to software for making games and developing interactive stories.

Further reading:

Blumler, Jay G., and Michael Gurevitch. 2001. "The New Media and Our Political Communication Discontents: Democratizing Cyberspace." *Information, Communication & Society* 4, 1: 1–13.
Coleman, Stephen, and Jay G. Blumler. 2009. *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Dahlgren, Peter. 2009. *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Fenton, Natalie. 2012. "The Internet and Radical Politics." In *Misunderstanding the Internet*, by James Curran, Natalie Fenton and Des Freedman, 149–176. Oxon: Routledge.
Jenkins, Henry. 2014. "Rethinking. Rethinking Convergence/Culture." *Cultural Studies* 28, 2: 267–297. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2013.801579.
Neumayer, Christina, and Jakob Svensson. 2014. "Activism and Radical Politics in the Digital Age." *Convergence* 22, 2: 131–146. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856514553395.
Siapera, Eugenia. 2012. *Understanding New Media*. London: Sage.

Week 9

Lecture 9—Transmedia Storytelling: Documentary, Journalism, Cultural Heritage Curation

This week's lecture will give an overview of the different non-fiction production that has been using transmedia techniques to tell their stories. This will give students an overview of the different fields in which they could apply their learning in the future.

Seminar 9:
Set reading:

Rampazzo Gambarato, Renira, and Peret Teixeira Tárcia, Lorena. 2017. "Transmedia Strategies in Journalism." *Journalism Studies* 18, 11: 1381–1399. Accessed 21 January 2020. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1127769.

Brown, Melissa, Evers, Clifton, Fleming, David, Gilardi, Filippo, and James Reid. 2018. "Transmedial Projects, Scholarly Habitus, and Critical Know-How in a British University in China." *The International Journal of Transmedia Literacy* 3: 45–68. Accessed 21 January 2020. https://doi.org/10.7358/ijtl-2017-003-gila.

Workshop 9:
This session will introduce students to aerial photography and show them how to fly a drone.

Further reading:

O'Flynn, Siobhan. 2012. "Documentary's Metamorphic Form: Webdoc, Interactive, Transmedia, Participatory and Beyond." *Studies in Documentary Film* 6, 2: 141–157.

Logan, Robert K. 2016. *Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan*. New York: Peter Lang.

Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin, Williams, Andy, and Claire Wardle. 2010. "Audience Views on User-Generated Content: Exploring the Value of News from the Bottom Up." *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 8, 1: 177–194. https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.8.177_1.

Week 10

Lecture 10—Summary and Conclusions
This lecture will draw together the diverse topics encountered on this module and will seek to conclude the module by making connections between them. This lecture will also provide students with the opportunity to ask any questions they might have regarding the module and its assessment.

Seminar 10:
There is no set reading for this week. During the seminar, you will be able to discuss your project with your tutor and classmate before submission.

Workshop 10:
This session will introduce students to Tilt Brush, a room-scaled 3D painting virtual reality application.

Further reading:

Ryan, Marie-Laure. 2001. *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Inter-activity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bibliography

A Bite of China. 2012. Directed by Chen Xiaoqing. China Central Television, 14 May.

Anne, J. 2016. "The Mystic Nine (2016)." DramaPanda (blog), February 4. http://www.dramapanda.com/2016/02/old-nine-gates.html.

Anne, J. 2016. "The Mystic Nine Spinoff (Movie)." DramaPanda (blog), 21 October. http://www.dramapanda.com/2016/10/the-mystic-nine-spinoff-premieres-oct-20.html.

Bacon-Smith, Camille. 1991. *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bertetti, Paolo. 2014. "Toward a Typology of Transmedia Characters." *International Journal of Communication* 8: 2344–2361. Accessed 21 January 2020. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/2597/1201.

Brown, Melissa S., Clifton Evers, David Fleming, Filippo Gilardi, and James Reid. 2018. "Transmedial Projects, Scholarly Habitus, and Critical Know-How in a British University in China." *The International Journal of Transmedia Literacy* 3, 45–68. Accessed 21 January 2020. https://doi.org/10.7358/ijtl-2017-003-gila.

Canella, Gino. 2018. "Video Goes Vertical: Local News Videographers Discuss the Problems and Potential of Vertical Video." *Electronic News* 12, 2: 75–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/1931243117705417.

Cheang, Pou-soi. 2015. *The Lost Tomb*. China: iQiyi.

CRI. 2016. "Bestseller Writer Announces Entertainment Development." China.com.cn, 13 July. http://www.china.org.cn/arts/2016-07/13/content_38873431.htm.

Dena, Christy. 2019. "Transmedia Adaptation: Revisiting the No-adaptation Rule." In *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies*, edited by

Matthew Freeman and Renira Rampazzo Gambarato, 195–216. New York: Routledge.

Entwistle, Noel. 2009. *Teaching for Understanding at University*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Freeman, Matthew. 2017. *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early Twentieth-Century Transmedia Story Worlds*. London: Routledge.

Fuchs, Christian. 2014. "Digital Prosumption Labour on Social Media in the Context of the Capitalist Regime of Time." *Time & Society* 23, 1: 97–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X13502117.

Gilardi, Filippo, Lam, Celia, Tan, K. Cohen., White, Andrew, Cheng, Shuxin, and Yifan Zhao. 2018. "International TV Series Distribution on Chinese Digital Platforms: Marketing Strategies and Audience Engagement." *Global Media and China* 3, 3: 213–230. https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436418806406.

Guerrero-Pico, Mar. 2016. "Dimensional Expansions and Shiftings: Fanfiction and Transmedia Storytelling." *International Journal of TV serial Narratives*, II, 2: 73–86. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2421-454X/6593.

Hoguet, Benjamin, and Manon Chauvin. 2016. Interactivité et transmédia : les secrets de fabrication. Paris: Dixit.

Jenkins, Henry. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York and London: Routledge.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Jenkins, Henry. 2007. "Transmedia Storytelling 101." Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog), 21 March. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html.

Jenkins, Henry. 2010. "Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment: An Annotated Syllabus." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24, 6: 943–958. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2010.510599.

Jenkins, Henry. 2011. "Back to School Special 2: Syllabus for my Transmedia Entertainment Class." Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog), 6 September. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/09/back_to_school_special_2_sylla.html.

Jenkins, Henry. 2013. "Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment: A New Syllabus." Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog), 27 August. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2013/08/transmedia-storytelling-and-entertainment-a-new-syllabus.html.

Long, Geoffrey A. 2007. "Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company." Master diss., MIT: USA. Accessed 24 January 2020. https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/39152.

Lugo Rodríguez, Nohemí. 2018. "Immersive Journalism Design Within a Transmedia Space." In *Exploring Transmedia Journalism in the Digital Age*, edited

by Renira Rampazzo Gambarato and Geane C. Alzamora, 67–82. Hershey: IGI Global.

Napoli, Maria Donata. 2016. "The 'Mobile Effect' on Screen Format: The Case of Vertical Videos." *CITAR* 8, 2: 45–49. https://doi.org/10.7559/citarj.v8i2.169.

Neal, Dave, and Miriam Ruth Ross. 2018. "Mobile Framing: Vertical Videos from User-Generated Content to Corporate Marketing." In *Mobile Story Making in an Age of Smartphones*, edited by Max Schleser and Berry Marsha. Cham: Palgrave Pivot.

Pearson, Roberta. 2017. "World-Building Logics and Copyright: The Dark Knight and the Great Detective." In *World building. Transmedia, Fans, Industries*, edited by Marta Boni, 109–128. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Reid, James, Yuka Hirata, and Filippo Gilardi. 2011. "Student-centred Transmedia Inspired Language Learning Projects." In *Proceedings of the Asian Conference on Technology in the Classroom 2011*, 80–96. Osaka: IAFOR.

Séverin, Patrick, dir. 2016. *Les Nouveaux Pauvres*. Accessed 24 January 2020. https://www.rtbf.be/lesnouveauxpauvres/.

Si, Weiwei. 2018. *O! Mega China*. Film. Directed by Weiwei Si. Shanghai: SMG.

SMG. 2018. *Electronic Music Ranking List*. Accessed 24 January 2020. https://www.smg.cn/review/201801/0164284.html.

TikTok. n.d. "Onmyoji." Accessed 24 January 2020. https://www.tiktok.com/tag/onmyoji.

Tobar, Elder Manuel, dir. 2013. *4 Rios*. Accessed 21 January 2020. https://4rios.co/.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey. 2007. *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry*. New York: Scholastic.

Xiang, Yong. 2013. "2011-2015: Principles of National Cultural Strategy and Cultural Industries Development in Mainland China." *International Journal of Cultural and Creative Industries* 1, 1: 74–80. Accessed 19 October 2020. http://www.ijcci.net/index.php?option=module&lang=en&task=pageinfo&id=160&index=9.

Zhao, Elaine Jing. 2017. "Writing on the Assembly Line: Informal Labour in the Formalised Online Literature Market in China." *New Media & Society* 19, 8: 1236–1252. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1461444816634675.