RECOMBINANT FICTION THEORETICAL PAPER AND MANIFESTO.

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Recombinant Fiction defines a unique transmedia storytelling genre able to drive tactical activism and dramatic purposes.

Recombinant Fiction Introduction

In previous ages, mediums for narrating fiction such as theater, literature, cinema and television have defined languages, models and formats; each media development provided an expressive shift in forms of storytelling. Nowadays, media are multiplying, hybridizing, and mutating. The way they are used alters continually, potentially creating new ways of producing fiction and spectacle.

Networked digital media merge as a productive vehicle to create new forms of fiction. In fact, the rise of forms of storytelling such as 'Transmedia Storytelling,' 'Alternative Reality Games,' 'Transfiction,' 'Dispersed Fiction' and 'Viral and Guerrilla Marketing' is a clear sign of an important revolution in ways to tell stories.

Recombinant Fiction emerges as a political and aesthetic fiction genre of this new immersive and participative form of art. By identifying valuable, distinctive characteristics and objectives, Recombinant Fiction defines a unique genre able to drive tactical activism and dramatic purposes.

Our contemporary media environment era is characterized by the explosion of Personal Media [1] (devices with platforms for email, instant messenger, blogs, photo and video sharing services, etc.) resulting in new modes of personal expression and interpersonal relations. Nonetheless, Mass Media continues to grow as well. Networked media generates new channels and interconnected devices for consuming entertainment and news (proprietary web platforms, digital TV, portable video/reader players, screen billboard, etc.). This results in the deregulation of advertising restrictions and privacy policies by the corporate media complex to boost the flux of information. Additionally, networked digital technologies accelerate and facilitate the production of offline and analog spaces of information (print-on-demand, production of manufactures, organization of public assembly, mapping public spaces, etc.). This results in a new mass of active prosumers, and a general increase of information in interior and urban landscapes.

All of the above listed media are digital in origin, and therefore easily reproducible and transmissible through networks (Internet, GSM, Wi-Fi, etc.). Networked digital media generate an intensification of flux, interactions and processes of communication. The informative environment, created by all those media that broadcast messages, is defined as the Infosphere. [2] This conceptual sphere is the space in which modern society is immersed; where people express themselves, build their own realities and manage societal organization.

In this context, a modern form of fiction should be narrated by networked media and staged in the Infosphere, which can be used as the medium to dramatize reality and find a way to change it by a dramatic representation, as humanity has always done.

Manifesto:

1) The fiction is told through traditional news media, online social media and public space interventions. The pieces of the fiction converge and evolve in one rhizomatic stage, synchronized and organized by networked digital media.

2) The fiction has conflicts and resolutions amongst characters with engaging personalities. There are no challenges or gaming aims for the audience, it must be pure fiction and its nature should be obscured but not hidden.

3) The fiction penetrates reality by including real entities in the narrative. The created fictional reality is made from contemporary real-world patterns, which are semiologically relinked and mutable in the narrative elements.

4) The fiction is interactive and participative. It is unfolded with the active interaction of an audience that can participate in it by creating characters and reshaping the storyline through their personal media and by public interventions.

5) The fiction has activist and educational qualities to achieve social change goals, by spotting controversial identities or organizations, or by increasing awareness of real world plights. It must at all times be without commercial or promotional purposes.

Theory for practicing Recombinant Fiction:

Recombinant Fiction is composed of layered mediums, spaces, identities and modes, which can be seen as formally interconnected as a rhizome. [3] The rhizome reflects the abstract network structure, the configuration of the Infosphere. The fiction is told through the convergence [4] of narratives broadcast by networked media. Organized and synchronized, these media create a rhizomatic space of narrative information that audiences can unfold and participate with.

Stage

The convergence of narrative elements broadcast by the media is facilitated by the semiological links that can be created among them. Each media of the rhizome is directed organically to broadcast narrative elements of the story that refer to each other. The networked convergence of scenographic elements creates a rhizomatic totality, recognizable as single stage, where the story is told and evolves. This stage embodies the Infosphere, denoted by the media that broadcast messages and by the messages themselves. The broadcast narrative signs are linked together in a network of signifiers, which constitutes the rhizome in which all the signs used in the narrative build the environment of the fiction. As in semiotization [5] in theater, in the Infosphere, signs present in the narrative rhizome became functional to the construction of the fiction.

The fiction is unfolded by links that refer to each other, creating a semiotic, networked storyline within which the audience can be actively surrounded. This unfoldment should not have challenges or ludic elements. Instead, it should simply be easy to interact with and readable by the audience.

Furthermore, this process of semiotization through linking, quoting and cloning signs of reality is thought to integrate real entities into the fiction, transforming real-world patterns into fictional ones, and vice versa, fictional patterns of the story can be perceivable as real.

Characters

Characters in Recombinant Fiction use networked media to enter into dialog and articulate their messages. Characters show their digitally created masks and tell their stories through the disseminated media of the Infosphere that fit   and build their personalities.

General identities and entities are made by pieces of information broadcast; which build their existences in the Infosphere and influence directly their presence in the ordinary physical world. The informational body that is broadcast in the Infosphere through media can materialize the representation of the self, a general agency and any activity. This state of being empowers the characters of the fiction to enact their roles with masks that appear realistic and familiar to the audience. Hence, the way characters use these media reveals personality traits and intensifies the emphatic effect on audiences.

Considering the audiences present in the rhizomatic stage of the fiction, they are able to unfold the story and follow the characters' revelations with immediate ease, because characters and audience members share the same tools of expression and communication. This enables the audience to participate in stories by converging their mediated identities of the Infosphere into the rhizomatic narrative stage through their Personal Media (or other media of the Infosphere) and by having direct conversations with the main characters – or even creating new characters - and adding new elements to the dynamic storyline.

The audiences know how to have control over their own characters, since they build their identities and related relationships with others through networked digital media in everyday life. Often the projection of the self onto the Infosphere is characterized by the attempt to appeal to others. This sort of internalization of the spectacularization of representation of the self facilitates the personal reinvention for the performative acting in the fiction.

Through their participation, audiences turn into characters of the fiction. As they develop their personas and create new narrative aspects, the storyline takes shape and opens to new dramatic concepts. In their new participatory role, the audience consciously performs a responsible act in the fiction's dual being, which is both inside the actual social reality and in the fictional story. As the audience shapes the story, they become aware of its fictitious double identity.

Drama

The fiction uses variable forms of dramaturgical structures with interweaved situations among characters. The story is told with dialogs, statements, monologs, public interventions and actions about a fictional scenario that take place in a storyline over the Infosphere's stage.

Characters tell of discoveries, conflicts, reversal, resolution and twists of their existences, through background dramas of interior feelings and foreground plots of public fights. The fiction should trigger the original aims of dramatization of the human condition for cathartic functions, representation of possibilities, and escapism from daily pressures through engaging stories.

In the first person narrative voice, main and minor characters communicate their experiences and claims directly to the audience with their masks. Characters' voices are broadcast over social and any media functional to the expression of the characters. Concurrently other media broadcast information to build the scenography and the atmosphere of the drama.

The fiction is broadcast live. Narrative situations happen in real time. Narrative information is communicated simultaneously with the characters' declarations and dialogs, creating a spectacle that occurs during a concentrated span of time. Audiences permeate the story as they find themselves engaged with the progress of fiction or as they attend scheduled dramatic events.

The action line oscillates on a variable mutable timeline. Multiple references among situations and characters on the timeline make it unbroken and comprehensible as a complete reticulated sequence of narrative occurrences. After the live broadcast, the final documentation of all the narrative elements allows audiences to browse the fiction permanently.

The drama is set in the present, with scenarios contextual to the contemporary society and scripts similar to the ordinary behaviors of the audience. In order to thoroughly penetrate reality with an active fiction, the topic of the main conflict in the fiction should be a real world social matter familiar to the audience and engaged with mainstream media content.

The fictional nature is declared; the audience must notice or perceive to attend at a fictional drama, through narrative patterns blurred with real patterns, to involve the audience in an immersive fiction. Real and illusory events come to inform each other. Memory and associative processes are subtly moving and shifting at all times in relation to the present context.

Tactical functions of the fiction

Over the course of human history, stories have always been used to understand and interpret reality, from religions to ideologies, beliefs and identifications in large narratives have defined civilizations. However, it is in our mediated society that stories replace realities in creating fragmented artificial worlds and capturing people's minds and imaginations within them. Reality continues to be redefined not only by its narrated image as fabricated by the entertainment and media industries, but recently also by the single individual who thinks and produces his/her own image to fit the artificial worlds.

Only by dramatizing the artificial reality of the Infosphere can audiences understand and then change their physical reality, over which they have recently lost control. Recombinant Fiction is about staging a drama inside the hyper-reality and spectacularization of society to engage participants in a process as political agents.

The endeavor toward an efficient modern drama with effective outcomes requires strategy on stages and mediums as well as the employment of a language and aesthetic that speaks to the mindset of an individualized audience. The educational, informative and transformative purposes of the dramatic actions should be developed for motivating and transforming audiences usually indifferent to social issues and for mobilizing victims of oppression. This can be accomplished by infiltrating the audience's language and environments with stories and characters that tempt the attention and interest of the target. Through identification with the characters' dilemmas and public claims, Recombinant Fiction becomes a useful tool to reach new and large audiences whilst creating concern for social issues.

Tactical Recombinant Fiction is a powerful art form to exchange in human consciousness, demystify absurd beliefs, undermining unethical powers and inform on social problems.

Theories that have inspired Recombinant Fiction:

"Recombinant Theatre" by Critical Art Ensemble
"Invisible and Forum Theatre" by Augusto Boal
"TransMedia Storytelling" and "Convergence Culture" by Henry Jenkins
"Dispersed Fiction" by Jason Nelson
"TransFiction" by Alok Nandi

References and Notes:

1. *"The digitalization and personal use of media technologies have destabilized the traditional dichotomization between mass communication and interpersonal communication, and therefore between mass media and personal media."*
   Marika Lüders, "Conceptualizing personal media," New Media & Society Vol. 10, No. 5 (2008): 683 - 702.
2. *"The infosphere denotes the whole informational environment constituted by all informational entities (thus including informational agents as well), their properties, interactions, processes and mutual relations."*
   Luciano Floridi, "Ethics in the Infosphere," in The Philosophers' Magazine 6 (2001): 18 - 19.
3. *Related to the theory of Rhizome as "Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be."*
   Giles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004).
4. *"'Convergence' must be understood as a process that has several different manifestations." Henry Jenkins, "Convergence? I diverge." MIT Technology Review, June 21, 2001, http://www.technologyreview.com/article/401042/convergence-i-diverge/.*
5. *"The semiotization of an element of performance occurs when it appears clearly as the sign of something. Within the framework of the stage or the theatrical event, all that is presented to the audience becomes a sign that 'wishes' to communicate a signified."*
   Patrice Pavis, Christine Shantz, Dictionary of the theatre: terms, concepts, and analysis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).
6. *Jean Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange and Death (London: Sage, 1993).*
7. *Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed (London: Pluto Press, 2008).*

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