

Representing Peace in Colombia through Interactive and Transmedia Non-Fiction Narrative

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Abstract

Over the years the emergence of interactive digital communication has added new narrative structures to the audiovisual media ecosystem. Dividing this ecosystem into fictional and non-fictional narratives, the evolution of the representation of reality has led to a new area called “interactive non-fiction”. Colombia is an interesting example of the use of this new area for two main reasons: it is one of the South American countries that has invested most in the development of digital projects in recent years, and it is now in a historical moment in which it is deciding which direction peace could take. This article would like to promote debate and discussion on how producers and audience could benefit from the non-fiction interactive formats and genres to promote peace in Colombia in the forthcoming years. To explore the potential of certain narratives combining with interactive media and the peace process, we will focus on four main forms of non-fiction according to their importance and presence in the current media ecology: documentary, journalism, educational formats and museology.

Keywords

Non-Fiction, Interactive, Transmedia, Colombia, Peace Process, Documentary, Journalism, Education, Museums.

Introduction

Traditional media production has evolved in recent years, taking new directions to spread content. In the field of representation of reality, this new scenario has led to the emergence of a new area called “interactive non-fiction” or “interactive factual narratives”.

Roger Fidler (1998) defines the term “mediamorphosis” as the transformation of a media in the face of cultural changes and contact with new technologies, pointing out that when new forms of media emerge, “the oldest forms do not die, but they continue to evolve and adapt” (Fidler, 1998, p. 57). According to Fidler, throughout history we find three moments of great transformation of the forms of narrative expression that allow us to use the term “mediamorphosis”: The emergence of spoken language, the emergence of written language and the development

and emergence of new digital technologies. All analog media have had to evolve in recent years, which has led to their particular format adapting to the new discursive environments. Fidler holds that the birth of printing was a paradigm shift as profound as the digital revolution, which has invaded the entire spectrum of analog media, forcing them to adapt and reinvent themselves in order to not disappear in the resulting new environment.

Interactive non-fiction area

In the past, the media industry created two macro-genres in order to separate movies that were created based on imaginary events from those based on things that had happened in the real world. The term “non-fiction” was created in opposition to “fictional cinema” as a consequence of the great transformation of the culture industry, which needed its processes to be well defined in order to expand and break up into different categories. As film became more complex, developing its own language, the terms literary fiction and nonfiction began to be applied to cinema. The controversial but now widely applied term “non-fiction”, used by various film theorists (Barnouw, 1996; Meran Barsam, 1992; Nichols, 1991; Plantinga, 1997; Renov, 1993), is conceived as a large genre and a vast field containing documentary, journalism, film essays, scientific films, educational videos, nature and tourist travel films, etc.

The emergence of the interactive media field created new narrative structures, including the management of user actions, and forced non-fiction to undergo a new “mediamorphosis” in the last decades of the twentieth century. To explore the potential of certain narratives combining with interactive media and the present situation in Colombia, it is vital to look at four main narrative forms of the field of interactive and transmedia non-fiction: Documentary, journalism, educational formats and museology.

Representing Peace in Colombia through Interactive and Transmedia Non-Fiction Genres

Although it is still early days for the production of interactive and transmedia non-fiction projects in Colombia, the use of interactive non-fiction narrative would be beneficial for this country for several reasons:

It is currently going through a crucial historical period in which it is deciding about the future and peace of the country.

There's a need to tell stories as a collective catharsis in order to deal with the tragic events of the past.

It is one of the South American countries that has invested most in the development of experimental, artistic and digital projects in recent years.

If we combine these three dimensions, we come to the conclusion that factual narratives could be an expression form that could help and/or represent the peace process and reveal what happened in the past.

A crucial Historical Period

For the last half-century, the conservative and pro-capitalist Colombian State, with the highest rates of inequality in the region, has been engaged in an internal conflict, mainly with the FARC guerrillas, resulting in more than 7 million victims, which includes people who have been killed, displaced, kidnapped or have disappeared (Martínez, 2017).

There have been four attempts to reach a negotiated solution to the conflict. The most recent previous attempt was in 1999-2002, a time when Colombians were hopeful for a solution. The failure of this peace process was attributed to the actions of the FARC, who took advantage of the reduced national tensions to strengthen their military power. In 2010-2011, secret meetings with the FARC started in Colombia, and in February 2012, face -to-face negotiations between the warring parties began in Cuba, although still away from the public eye (Martínez, 2017).

Today Colombia is immersed in a complex political process and its society is divided between those who want to forgive and those who cannot forget. The dialogues/peace negotiations between the government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - FARC), also known as the peace process in Colombia, lasted four intense years. These dialogues, which took place in Oslo and Havana, were aimed at ending the conflict with the rebel group.

A referendum determined by Congress was used as a tool to accept or deny the peace process that arose from the dialogues. The end result of the popular vote was a victory for not signing agreements with the insurgent group. This result opened a new phase of the dialogue process, in which the ability to adjust the agreements discussed and to consider the objections of the opponents to the current agreement, including former President Alvaro Uribe, are key factors.

The Need to Tell Stories to Remember the Past

Several fiction and non-fiction projects have been produced recently that deal with the conflict that has been going on for over 50 years. Like Colombian journalism and literature, the Colombian audiovisual industry has produced numerous works in many genres on the history of the armed conflict.

A recent sampling includes full-length fiction such as *Sumas y restas* (Victor Gaviria, 2005) and *Postales Colombianas* (Ricardo Coral Dorado, 2011); documentaries such as *La Sierra* (Scott Dalton & Margarita Martínez 2006), *Los hipopótamos de Pablo* (Antonio von Hildebrand, 2011), *When the Guns Go Silent* (Natalia Orozco, 2017); and television series such as *Rosario Tijeras* (2010, 60 chapters produced by Teleset), *Escobar, el patrón del mal* (Canal Caracol, 2009 -2012) and *Narcos* (2015, produced by Netflix); as well as works of interactive nonfiction such as *Cuentos de viejos* (Hierro Animación, Piaggiodematei and Señal Colombia, 2013) or *4 Ríos* (Elder Manuel Tobar, Orgánica Digital, ongoing).

Investment in Digital Projects

Colombia is one of the South American countries that has invested most in the development of digital projects in recent years. Grants and calls such as 'Crea Digital' (Ministry of Information and Communications Technology), 'Programa Nacional de Estímulos' (National Call for Incentives in Communications), the call for interactive documentary for the web (Ministry of Culture), Fondo de Desarrollo Cinematográfico (Fund Film Development, Pro-imágenes Colombia), and markets and festivals such as Colombia 3.0, Bogota Audiovisual Market, FICCI (Carta-gena Film Festival), MIDBO Bogota, DocsBarcelona+Medellin, Ambulante Colombia or Bogota Creative Commons Film Festival, among other events and grants, make Colombia one

of the leaders in Latin American production of new media narratives (Gifreu-Castells, 2015). It seems clear that nowadays, in Colombia and other Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Chile and Brazil, there is fertile ground for experimentation and innovation in new audiovisual and interactive narratives.

Canada and France were the pioneering leaders in the production of interactive non-fiction, but nowadays, on a small scale, there are other countries encouraging these types of productions (especially interactive documentaries). Latin countries are led by emotional perspectives and approaches, and in the end these need different codes and motivations to be used, which affects and determines how the narrative is constructed. Non-fiction platforms and narratives could be suitable then for a region like central and Latin America, which may be a reason why a country like Colombia is investing in this area (Gifreu-Castells, 2017).

A review of questions and productions

There is a consistent sample of works that deal in some way with the current conflict in Colombia. While some of them are focused entirely on the conflict, others dedicate just a part of the work to it. These projects are a compendium of memories and represent, according to the director's point of view, what has happened in the country over the last 50 years.

In order to quote and briefly analyze them, we present an initial corpus of projects as key examples of digital non-fiction projects dealing with the topic:

Documentary
▪ <i>Cuentos de viejos</i> (2013)
▪ <i>4 Ríos</i> (2011-ongoing)
▪ <i>En Modo P</i> (2016)

Figure 1. Documentary projects dealing with the conflict in Colombia

Cuentos de viejos is a transmedia experience that encompasses a series of animated documentaries, a collaborative web and participatory school projects. The main goal of the project is to rescue the oral relationship and dialogue between old and young people to develop a deep conversation from both sides. This work gives voice to the elderly, integrating their stories into contemporary media, and reflects on our history and our memory in order to stop it from disappearing (project website, 2017).



Figure 2. Frame of the work *Cuentos de viejos* (2013)

4 Ríos is a transmedia project that tells stories of the armed conflict in Colombia using various platforms: a short film, an interactive comic, a printed comic and an Augmented Reality application. The project aims to show the reconciliation processes, social articulation and the search for peace in the country, recognizing the lessons learned and formulating pacts of non-repetition of the violent actions that have generated so much damage in the civilian population (project website, 2017).



Figure 3. Frame of the work *4 Ríos* (2011-ongoing)

En Modo P was born in January 2016 as a platform that makes it possible to create high quality contents on the subjects that matter to Colombians. One of the first projects in development is around the Peace Agreement, creating a transmedia narrative composed by a participatory platform, documentaries, videos and interviews in various locations of Colombia and Ecuador.

The platform allows Colombians to include their voices in the Peace Process by giving them a minute to respond to questions about this process. The main objective is to capture the voices of the people who have something to say about the negotiation with the FARC and the outcome of the process, beyond what happened in the plebiscite (project website, 2017).

Figure 4. Frame of the work *En Modo P* (2016)

Journalism	
▪	<i>Detrás del camuflado</i> (2010)
▪	<i>La hoja sagrada</i> (2010)
▪	<i>Colombia refugiada</i> (2015)

Figure 5. Journalism projects dealing with conflict

Detrás del camuflado is an interactive report that explores the life of a Colombian soldier from different perspectives. In order to obtain the content, the production team spent seventy-two hours behind the soldier to share in the stories and sacrifices of the soldiers who live in the High Mountain Battalion (project website, 2017).

Figure 6. Frame of the work *Detrás del camuflado* (2010)

La hoja sagrada is a multimedia report that tells the story of the sacred coca leaf and the alternative uses of this plant that is rich in calcium, iron and phosphorus. Although the war against drugs has demonized the coca leaf and ignored the potential and qualities of this millennial plant, for some indigenous people from Andean and Amazonian cultures the coca leaf is a food,

has medicinal effects and is part of their culture (project website, 2017).

Figure 7. Frame of the work *La hoja sagrada* (2010)

Colombia refugiada is a production by the El Tiempo Newspaper that shows on a map where the displaced people from Colombia were living in 2013. According to 'UNHCR Global Trends report' (2015), three countries produce half the world's refugees: Syria at 4.9 million, Afghanistan at 2.7 million and Somalia at 1.1 million together accounted for more than half the refugees under UNHCR's mandate worldwide. Colombia at 6.9 million, Syria at 6.6 million and Iraq at 4.4 million had the largest numbers of internally displaced people.

Figure 8. Capture of the work *Colombia refugiada* (2015)

According to the study, "in Colombia, few internally displaced persons returned to their places of residence and the Government reported 113,700 new displaced persons" during 2015, when more than 65 million people were forcibly displaced in the world. 59.5 million people were recorded twelve months ago (UNHCR Global Trends report, 2015).

Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Plan Digital Teso</i> (2012-ongoing)

Figure 9. Educational projects dealing with the conflict

Plan Digital Teso is a socio-educational initiative of the Mayor of Itagüí in partnership with EAFIT University. TESO is an acronym for ‘Transformar la Educación para crear Sueños y Oportunidades’ [Transforming Education to create Dreams and Opportunities]. This is the great goal that began in 2012 as an ambitious plan in order to improve the quality of education and develop competencies and initiatives in students and their families, teachers and administrative officers, by integrating Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into their learning environments (project website, 2017).



Figure 10. Frame of the work *Plan Digital Teso* (2012-ongoing)

Museums/Exhibition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Cartofonías de San Nicolás. Estudios sobre la memoria sonora de la industria gráfica en Cali</i> (2015)

Figure 11. Museum/Exhibition projects dealing with the conflict

Cartofonías de San Nicolás. Estudios sobre la memoria sonora de la industria gráfica en Cali deals with the urban space as cultural heritage, creating a digital map to preserve the sound-space memory of the graphic arts industry in the San Nicolás neighborhood of Santiago de Cali over the period 1894-2013. The project was developed with the economic support of Colciencias.

The purpose of this and other projects on sound landscapes promoted in the Department of Humanities of Icesi University (Cali) is to create spaces for meeting and reflecting on the sounds that shape our daily life

(project website, 2017). The project, currently in production, is looking for other ways to expand into the city of Cali by creating exhibitions in museums and using sound in public performances.



Figure . 12. Capture of the work *Cartofonías de San Nicolás Estudios sobre la memoria sonora de la industria gráfica en Cali* (2015)

Taking the previous examples as case studies, we propose some questions that could stimulate debate:

-How has the “mediamorphosis” process shaped new media formats and genres in Colombia?

-How could the field of interactive non-fiction contribute to the peace process?

-Which representations of reality can influence decisively taking into account the importance of the current historical moment in the country?

-Which strategies and dynamics of each format and genre of interactive non-fiction could help build an imaginary of peace?

-How could the development and production of these types of narratives be promoted in Colombia and Latin America?

Case Study in Development: *The Negotiators* (working title)

After analyzing some representative works in some important areas of interactive and transmedia non-fiction that deal with the Colombian conflict, now we introduce our own project in development as a case study. Its working title is *The Negotiators*, and our aim to design and develop a transmedia documentary about the Colombian armed conflict and the peace process in Havana between 2012 and 2016 (Martinez & Gifreu-Castells, 2017).

In order to generate this narrative, we propose using multiple media and communicative platforms to present a non-fiction narrative, gradually and incrementally explaining the nature of the Colombian conflict from its origins to the present, including three unsuccessful attempts to reach peace, up to the present relative stability and a fourth agreement signed by both sides.

We propose to recount the history of the conflict beginning with a historical timeline from the earliest stage of the armed conflict in 1964 through the key events of following decades. Second, we envision a linear documentary of a little under two hours that follows the progress of the peace negotiations in Havana in 2012-2016. Third, an interactive documentary will allow for a conversation with the different parties to the conflict, provide content to users, and offer them a set of in-depth interviews regarding the most closely guarded secrets of the peace negotiations. Then, users will be invited to participate more actively through social networks where victims will contribute to a participatory forum. Finally, to increase visibility and raise consciousness about the Colombian experience, all the documentary content collected will be made available for classroom use in an educational project with guided viewings for groups all around Colombia (Martinez & Gifreu-Castells, 2017).

The following are the three key goals of the project:

- To offer current and future generations a realistic and even-handed transmedia narrative of the Colombian peace process promoted by President Santos.

- To produce an audiovisual and transmedia project that will help reinforce the peace process by educating viewers about the conflict's origins and evolution, the terrible suffering that it brought, efforts at reconciliation, and the participation of the warring parties in peace talks.

- To create a platform for an interactive conversation in which the voices of all who have been involved in the conflict and in its resolution can be heard and will feel represented.

The target audience of this project is aged 15 years and above. It is principally directed at young people as a tool to understand the peace process and what has happened in Colombia over the last several decades, but it is also directed at older people whose voices were silenced during that period of time and who may find in the project a useful way to be represented in the solution of the conflict, and may use it as an opportunity to add their testimony to the public record in the hope that such

tragic events will never be repeated.

The challenge now is to make the existence of this material known and have communities and organizations that consider it valuable request a 'guided tour' through the recent history of Colombia and its successful peace process. If there is demand, a physical space will be secured for an audiovisual installation (video projector, computer, and sound system) programmed to provide custom navigation through selected elements of the transmedia documentary (Martinez & Gifreu-Castells, 2017).

Conclusion

Non-fiction works encourage us to interact and deal with facts, so we can make an impact on reality, and even eventually shape and transform it. Producing non-fiction works in the digital age means that it is possible to include several forms of dialogue and integrate media to promote certain behaviors and simultaneous processes that can enrich and enhance the user experience of non-fiction formats and genres (watch, browse, play, learn, interact, share, etc.).

Like in the case of audiovisual genres, merging factual material with new interactive formats can have a deep impact and influence on audiences, and even finally affect and transform the real world, one of the highest social values of non-fiction in general: taking ideas and technology to use them for the better and to promote social change. Moreover, these works constitute a real testimony and contribute to the digital and cultural legacy of what happened in Colombia during several decades of armed conflict.

We believe that the material that has been generated in *The Negotiators*, the project in development introduced in this article, constitutes a unique and exemplary testimony regarding the Colombian conflict over the course of the last 50 years. This is one of very few projects that tell the four-year story of the peace negotiations in Havana using recorded images. It constitutes a valuable audiovisual and interactive resource for future generations and the country in general.

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