

Transmedia Story-Telling (in a Holographic Multiverse)

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There's a lot of talk these days about the gap between those who are born digital and those who remain creatively wedded to the Gutenberg 'print-based' universe. Though born at the tale-end of the Gutenberg era my writing career really only began in the midst of the Digital Revolution. I guess you could say I was 'reborn digital' given I spent my childhood and youth in the old paradigm.

I suspected back in the late 1990s that my various writing selves - poet, fiction writer, lyricist/song-writer, non-fiction writer, journal editor and writing teacher - were linked in some intuitive way to the new communication technologies. I felt this most strongly whilst co-editing *The Animist* - one of Australia's first online literary-cultural ezines. However, it was not until more recently that I had a term to describe more fully the kind of writer I am - and that is a 'Transmedia Writer'. The term was birthed by the 'convergence' of media forms associated with the digital and multimedia revolutions and other communication developments - but I suspect there were Transmedia writers long before the internet came into existence.

To me a Transmedia Writer (another related term is 'holographic writing') is someone who either: a) creates 'meta-stories' with 'expanding narrative' possibilities (more on these terms in a minute) in different media formats or b) creates a meta-story for one or two media platforms with a view to permitting others to 'expand' it into other media platforms. Either way, these days a Transmedia Writer encourages others to PARTICIPATE in a meta-story as co-creators of a potentially 'boundless/infinite', 'inter-connecting', 'rhizomic' text. A Transmedia writer, consciously, or unconsciously, births 'open/unbounded' stories (though the term 'Memes' is also relevant) that can be accessed by audiences through various media platforms - e.g. a book, a movie, a website, a role playing game, a video-game, a documentary, a non-fiction book (about a fictional work), a music sound track, a movie set open to the public (as per *Hobbiton* in NZ), etc.

We can also imagine every access point (platform) to somehow contain every other access point - each point becoming a 'glowing' holographic trigger for the narrative to expand/spread to other platforms, eg a 'print book' that 'glows' with built in Augmented Reality triggers - a book that is 'informationally organic', 'pulsing', almost alive. Looking to the future a single platform version of an expanding narrative will contain trigger

images/GPS coordinates/real world phenomena (for AR linking), QR codes, html links, internet of things triggers, etc, to multiple media platforms(old and new media) including ebooks, social media sites, fan or special interest/sub-culture forums, youtube videos, mp3 etc music/podcast files, e or print comics, role playing games, video games, non-fiction studies/documentaries, art works, photo files, etc. If every piece of a writer's work embeds triggers to every other piece of his/her work there arises a holographic 'multi-platform glow' to every online or real world entry point to an expanding narrative or meme.

The Gutenberg notion of the 'author' never quite worked for me. Being 'reborn digital' I felt more creatively inspired by the chaotic, collaborative, participatory/relational notions of authorship being birthed online - instinctively I also sensed that these developments were related to postmodern revolutions concerning authorship. To reject without exploration the 'glowing holographic' book, for example, seems to me to opt for a bounded, inflexible, static, and, strangely enough, individualist, 'celebrity-oriented' notion of 'authorship'. For me, despite some reservations concerning the new media, the old model represents a constraint to my own creativity.

Transmedia writing also neutralises into coexistence certain damaging dualities implicit to literary/artistic production and audience reception in the more hierarchical pre-digital era.

1. PROCESS (OF MAKING ART) V FINISHED ART WORK (COMMODITY)
2. MONETISATION (AS SUCCESS) V NON-MONETISATION (AS FAILURE)
3. POPULARITY/CELEBRITY (AS SUCCESS) V OBSCURITY (AS FAILURE)
4. FICTION (imaginative world) V FACT (real world)
5. AUDIENCE FOR ART V (or SEPARATE TO) CREATOR OF ART
6. 'REAL ART' AS STATIC OBJECT V 'LOW' CULTURE ART AS EPHEMERAL OBJECT
7. OLD MEDIA V NEW MEDIA
8. LIVE/PERFORMED CREATIVE EVENT V RECORDED/FROZEN CREATIVE OBJECT
9. SELF PUBLISHED TEXTS (AS FAILURE) V GATEKEEPER PUBLISHED TEXTS (AS SUCCESS)

Transmedia writing blurs the lines, or dissipates altogether, these and other dualities. Indeed for the transmedia author the definition of transmedia writing embraces co-creativity (of an expanding/ spreading

narrative/meme) as well as multi-platform access to that meme. High and low culture platforms merge. Creator and audience platforms also merge, and definitions of celebrity and obscurity become more fluid. Likewise, creator anxiety over monetisation of all public works (as a sign of creative success) and the need to feature only on platforms approved by traditional gatekeepers is diminished since: a) the new media distributes writing etc cheaply and b) social media and online forum spread/chatter is the gateway to larger audiences but is retarded when all creative output is monetised, and elitist distribution platforms are presented as hierarchically superior. Worthwhile art, literature etc in our era, is possible on ANY PLATFORM, and the TM writer accepts and works with that fact without regret or excessive nostalgia for the old media.

We also note a softening of the lines between live/performed versions of songs, poems, stories exhibited art, etc and recorded, previously 'frozen' or 'static' versions. This is because even apparently static art, printed text, music recordings etc. once uploaded are subjected to dynamic (almost organic) new media processes that alter static material in 'real time' (often through co-creative multimedia technologies). The web can also track the 'living', 'real-time' spread and influence of both uploaded and real world versions of art works. Transmedia works seem to want to 'pulse' with energies gathered from multiple 'real world', often 'real time', inputs as well as multiple online interconnections in forums, social media sites, etc.

At face value the collapse of the difference between the Imaginary and Real listed above (an outgrowth of Postmodern cultural developments) is more worrying. However, it manifests in much transmedia writing via the appearance in expanding fictional narratives of co-existent 'real world' dimensions to imaginative works, eg a documentary, biographical elements, a factual website, movie sets as tourist attractions, a non-fiction book on a novel or film, magazine interviews with authors/actors/directors/musicians etc. For audience members to fully inhabit (immerse themselves in) a fictional world these days, factual narrative elements apparently need to be present in the expanding narrative. The embedding of stories/poems etc in 'real' locations for GPS, QR Code, Augmented Reality device/app or Internet of Things 'access' means the 'reality' v 'fiction' divide will become even more blurry and contentious in coming decades.

The 'Reality Hunger' implied above also leads to a fascination with the 'processes' that lead to the creation of art works. Again, because the new media distributes art objects cheaply, audience interest in media

detailing 'process' can be satisfied easily. Indeed there are signs that successful expanding narratives (developed by TM writers) require process elements (eg acting bloopers, draft animations, storyboard ideas, deleted scenes, alternative endings, etc) of a narrative to be embedded somewhere in the multi-platform expanding narrative. Sometimes, 'process' records of creative work may be more popular with audiences than the finished product - eg live 'unplugged' versions of an initially over-produced song. Even rough band jam sessions, early drafts of poems, novels etc though imperfect/flawed, may these days 'coexist' alongside perfected versions at YouTube, blogs, music sites etc. In short, for TM writers the perfect and the imperfect art object may both be required to facilitate successful expanding narratives.

Finally, in a fluid, low distribution cost transmedia environment the old failure/success duality dividing 'self published' (or 'vanity' published) work and work published by professional publishers also collapses somewhat. The new formula for success demands that writers be independently esconced at numerous web-addresses (representing different platform entry points to their work). Such authors are expected to offer both direct 'self published' (usually html, ebook, etc) content and links to 'gatekeeper' published, reviewed, sold etc examples of their work. In a TM environment authors are thus required to 'self publish' a great deal of material, though evidence of connectivity to, and acceptance by, new media 'gatekeepers' is also required.

In looking back at most of the creative projects I've been involved in since the early 1990s I note that quite naturally, they've implicated Transmedia aspects - especially from the mid-1990s onwards. Here are some of the humble 'memes' I've helped 'co-create' with others:

* I wrote and performed songs for *Goya's Child* in the early 1990s - the songs were performed live, recorded for radio and used on a soundtrack for a movie. Eventually they morphed into an internet experience accessible via You-Tube, Reverbnation and elsewhere.

* I explored the problems of 'chronic ennui' and 'alienation' via 1) a PhD thesis, 2) a novel (*Dream-Dust Parasites*), 3) some of my early poetry (as contained in *Facing the Demon of Noontide*) and finally 4) as published non-fiction essays and a book. Interestingly others have used the *meme* (i.e. inhabited the meta-story) to create films, poems and plays or to develop their own non-fiction works on the topic. Note: the theme of ennui/alienation was also intuitively explored in a number of the songs I wrote with *Goya's Child*

* *The Animist* was a truly multimedia/transmedia meta-story birthed by Sue King-Smith, John Holton and myself back in the late 1990s that _____

writers, musicians, artists, poets, essayists and multimedia artists from all over the world helped 'co-create' with us (from 1998-2001).

* *Scintillae 2012* was also a co-edited 'meme/transmedia' publication that I enjoyed 'co-creating' with over 50 wonderful Central Victorian writers, poets, journalists and creative thinkers.

* The **Zoetics** meme (or perspective on creativity and creative living) that I'm currently promoting with Sue King-Smith is also a kind of 'inhabitable meta-story/meme' that we hope other creatives will 'expand' and 'co-create' with us over the next few years. We'd like to offer a range of different media entry points to this developing meta-narrative including - non-fiction books, a web-site, public talks-performances and hopefully - once others put the 'zoetics' principles into action creatively - fictional, artistic, musical etc. projects influenced by the concepts underlying 'Zoetics'. Note: 'Zoetics', in turn, is influenced by TRP (Transpersonal Relational Poetics) which links to the international literary movement based on Relational Poetics. My own recent non-fiction, poetry, music and fiction has been influenced by Zoetics and TRP ideas about creativity.

I guess, then, at this particular moment in my life as a writer I'm inspired to create by the idea of the writer/author as someone who births inhabitable and expandable 'meta-stories' that can be collaboratively co-created with others. This 'Transmedia writer' also seeks to emphasise the obvious links between creative activities and the entire 'web-of being' that surrounds us. In this sense I'd like to think the individual works I create within the 'Zoetics' and 'TRP (Transpersonal Relational Poetics)' *meta-stories* are anti-oppressive and life-affirming, i.e. that they emphasise relational integrity over individualistic achievement: 'Power WITH others' as against 'Power OVER others.'
