Transmedia Franchises and the Digital Humanities

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ANTI-ANXIETY DH:
TRANSMEDIA FRANCHISES AND THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES
Superhero movies account for 25% of domestic box office revenue.

In 2018, 6 of the 10 top grossing films in North America featured superheroes.
Superheroes Then and Now

Superman
(Dir. Richard Donner, 1978)
Superheroes Then and Now

Transmedia Storytelling: A narrative that unfolds across multiple platforms (ex. film, tv, video games, special events). Their emergence is facilitated by conglomeration.

WARNER MEDIA
Superheroes Then and Now

Transmedia Storytelling: A narrative that unfolds across multiple platforms (ex. film, tv, video games, special events). Their emergence is facilitated by conglomeration.
Anxiety as Research Problem

- Obstacles to Transmedia Studies
  - Instructors: Tough to evaluate; expense
  - Students: Production anxiety; expense
- One Approach Forward: Using low-tech DH tools (geocaching, storyboarding), reduces “new-technology anxiety.”
- DH also helps students understand a key debate in transmedia franchise studies: storytelling as a mode of content v. storytelling as a mode of marketing.
Key Transmedia Debate: Content v. Marketing

• In what ways is transmedia storytelling a mode of content? In what ways is transmedia storytelling a mode of marketing?

• Marketing: Merchandising and synergy made possible by conglomereration

• Content: Rather than film as self-contained, a story unfolds across multiple platforms. Fans often participate as “authors,” changing how the story unfolds
Star Wars as Game-changer

- Transmedia Marketing
- Merchandising
- Cross-promotion

- Transmedia Content
  - Novels, video games, TV shows, etc.
  - Encyclopedic enough for individual fantasy
How should we think about transmedia’s “participatory” ethos? What’s the appeal of transmedia efforts like this?

Key Transmedia Debate: Content v. Marketing
DH & Transmedia Marketing

Possible Low-Stakes Assignment

- Task:
  - Students design a scavenger hunt/geocaching experience in small groups for a given media property
DH & Transmedia Marketing
Possible Low-Stakes Assignment

- Task:
  - Students design a scavenger hunt/geocaching experience in small groups for a given media property

- Goal:
  - Analysis over scavenger hunt design
  - Students understand the creation of participatory, “top-down” marketing efforts.
  - They also learn how participation affects viewers’ sense of ownership/fantasy investment in the franchise
Key Transmedia Debate: Content v. Marketing

- Bandersnatch and Storyboarding
- Transmedia franchise
- Interactive storytelling
- How do you plan such a complicated narrative?
Bandersnatch

NETFLIX
Key Transmedia Debate: Content v. Marketing

- How do you plan such a complicated narrative?
- Charlie Baker used free, open-source software: Twine
- Open Question: Should students create a project in Twine OR study an existing project?
Key Transmedia Debate: Content v. Marketing

- Twine Example #1
- Twine Example #2
- Open Question: Should students create a project in Twine OR study an existing project?
Key Transmedia Debate: Content v. Marketing

*Bandersnatch* is a monumental storytelling effort AND elaborate data-mining experiment

Assignment goal: understand what transmedia authorship/participation looks like in a digital world.
Final Assignment: Transmedia Franchises

- **Task:** Students build their own transmedia extensions for one of the media properties we’ve studied that semester.

- **Goal:** This assignment would require them to theorize the industrial incentives (marketing) for such projects as well as think through the narrative structure (content) of transmedia franchises.