Edited by Marta Boni

World Building
Transmedia, Fans, Industries

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Transmedia: Participatory Culture and Media Convergence

The book series **Transmedia: Participatory Culture and Media Convergence** provides a platform for cutting-edge research in the field of media studies, with a strong focus on the impact of digitization, globalization, and fan culture. The series is dedicated to publishing the highest-quality monographs (and exceptional edited collections) on the developing social, cultural, and economic practices surrounding media convergence and audience participation. The term 'media convergence' relates to the complex ways in which the production, distribution, and consumption of contemporary media are affected by digitization, while 'participatory culture' refers to the changing relationship between media producers and their audiences.

Interdisciplinary by its very definition, the series will provide a publishing platform for international scholars doing new and critical research in relevant fields. While the main focus will be on contemporary media culture, the series is also open to research that focuses on the historical forebears of digital convergence culture, including histories of fandom, cross- and transmedia franchises, reception studies and audience ethnographies, and critical approaches to the culture industry and commodity culture.

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Introduction

Worlds, Today

Marta Boni

As the camera rotates, the rings of an astrolabe bearing a sun at its centre appear on the screen. In a brief glimpse, the rings display detailed engravings: scenes of war, dragons defeating an army, the symbols of the Great Houses of Westeros and their animal sigils—a wolf, a stag, a lion, a bear. Then, following the oscillatory movement of the astrolabe, the camera descends onto a map, disclosing castles and temples within cities, towering statues and mountains, and the Wall: all progressively pop up three-dimensionally, bringing into view natural features of earth and ice, and the exquisitely crafted materials of wood, copper, iron, and stone. The opening credits of the adventure-fantasy saga *Game of Thrones* (HBO 2011–) are a moveable map, covering the territories in which the series' events take place. Such a map orients the viewer to the changing trajectories of the various characters, evoking the spaces central to the constantly evolving war for the Iron Throne. It visually gathers a complex multitude of dispersed elements. Also, it is a serial map—it changes according to the transformations the fictional world has undergone throughout each season. Its seriality echoes the proliferation of fan-made maps that fill the Internet, which, at times, offer even greater detail and insight than the original.

Mapping practices, and, more specifically, the use of a map as an official paratext—title credits—underline the relevance of space for media content producers and users today. Worlds—as imaginary territories and perennial, collectively built, semiotic realms—are necessary for the understanding of media creation and for the interpretive processes it stimulates. In fact, the tendency to read the contemporary media landscape in terms of fluidity or fragmentation is, by all means, balanced by the growing relevance of aggregation, serialization, and franchising phenomena.

On the one hand, sprawling narratives, maximized customizability, and the increased visibility of sharing practices, including remixes and mash-ups, have come to play a crucial role in media studies. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green researched the spread of media content as it travels across digital networks, where it finds a new home in a multiplicity of sites, often unforeseen by the original creators (Jenkins *et al.* 2013). Francesco Casetti describes how film and television leave their original media to find new screens, new devices, and new uses (2015). However, within this process of expansion, it is still important to draw attention to the horizons of the concept of medium: for example, for Casetti, film as a medium seems to keep its identity in spite of fragmentation, because of its high perceptive intensity or the high cognitive involvement it requires.

On the other hand, this fragmentation is complemented by a ubiquitous tendency toward the gathering of dispersed parts. This is where imaginary worlds stand as a mainstay of media creation. Worlds as artificial constructions are also dependent upon their explorers who, in turn, become world-builders. Today, the creation of official guides, viewers' reactions on Twitter or Facebook, extended critiques on blogs or discussion boards, user-generated topographic maps and infographics all highlight the need to make sense of complex narratives by interacting with them. Transcending individual perspectives and localized exploration possibilities, a world is built by networks of speculations, interpretations, and social uses, thus becoming a shared worldview. Along these lines, Michael Saler (2012) highlights a switch from "imagined" to "imaginary" and then to "virtual" worlds in the late 19th century, a period that witnesses new ways for audiences to inhabit immersive realms, for example, with Sherlock Holmes's serial narratives, thus blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction.

Game of Thrones' opening credits can be considered a contemporary Achilles' shield. Before a critical battle, Hephaestus, the craftsman of the gods, builds new armor for the strongest warrior, including a wonderfully made shield, that is detailed in one of the most suggestive sequences of the *Iliad* (book XVIII, v. 478-607)*,* where the narration stops in order to give a long description or *ekphrasis* of the artwork. The shield offers a visual representation of the world of the time, organized in concentric circles: Earth, Sea, Sun, and constellations; cities, rituals, and wars; farming, breeding, winemaking, crafts, and dances… the totality of "the real," or a condensed and shared knowledge. The shield, like any fictional map, therefore functions potentially as a "tribal encyclopedia" (Havelock 1963)

that allows participants to extrapolate meaning not only from an imaginary world, but also from their own society.

Builders, Architects, Explorers

Alternative, fantastic, or futuristic realms and characters that provide an immersive experience have become privileged objects in many fields of research. World building has become a model for rethinking media and, more broadly, storytelling. According to Henry Jenkins:

> More and more, storytelling has become the art of world building, as artists create compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium. The world is bigger than the film, bigger even than the franchise—since fan speculations and elaborations also expand the worlds in a variety of directions (Jenkins 2006, p.116).

A quick online search shows the existence of guides for world-builders, such as *Fundamentals of World Building* (Verino 2010), or *The Planet Construction Kit* (Rosenfelder 2010), and the many Reddit threads that detail all the steps necessary for world building. As Mark J.P. Wolf states, building imaginary worlds has always been an intrinsically human activity. Quoting research in the field of psychology, Wolf emphasizes the idea of world building as a staple in children's creative play (see also: the more recent Root-Bernstein 2014). Following the example of J.R.R. Tolkien, Wolf describes imaginary worlds (e.g. mythical worlds, utopias or dystopias, projected or self-made worlds) as "subcreations" or "secondary worlds", inhabited by their creators and users (2012). Michael Saler shows a more specific shift in world-building practices that become more significant within what he calls a "larger cultural project of the West: that of re-enchanting an allegedly disenchanted world" (2012, 6), giving rise to "new public spheres of imagination" during the *fin de siècle* period (Saler 2012, 17). Such practices have become a transversal tendency, particularly attuned to media creation and consumption activities typical of Western societies. Following the convergence trend and the proliferation of big media corporations in recent years, as well as a more sustained academic interest in pop culture and fan practices, a noteworthy world-building scholarship is currently growing across the globe. Many researchers have started to explore the concept of world building and employ it in narrative theory, stressing the relevance of building practices in storytelling (Ryan

2013, Lavocat 2010, Besson 2015, Alexander 2013, see also the journal *Story-worlds*) or exploring the ontology of fictional characters (Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider 2010). Media specificities are underlined in works within the fieldwork of transmedia storytelling (Dena 2009; Jenkins 2006; Wolf 2012; Ryan and Thon 2014; Scolari, Bertetti, and Freeman 2014; Ravy and Forcier 2014; Freeman 2016). Also, world building is traditionally studied in science-fiction literature and film (Saler 2012, Boillat 2014), as well as game studies (Castronova 2005). More recently, the journal *Participations* devoted a special section to world-building practices in fan cultures. Through case studies, the publication also tackles Wolf's distinction between primary and secondary worlds (Proctor and McCulloch 2016).

Taking into account such abundant scholarship, worlds cannot simply be studied as objects, but must be utilized as keys to "unlocking" the contemporary media landscape. The essays collected in this volume offer in-depth investigations of the wide-ranging phenomenon of world building, using various disciplinary approaches and heterogeneous objects. This book's most distinctive contribution is to underline the complicity between worlds and media by taking into account theoretical models, economic and industrial strategies, stylistic elements, and fan uses. Media can be defined here as ever-mutating alliances of technological settings and sociocultural uses, which have to be conceived not only as instruments of world transmission, as in top-down media channels, but also as tools that contribute to the active and participatory building of worlds. When taking up such a challenge, we need to delve deeper into the analysis of theoretical models used to understand world building, both as a practice and as a tool.

In order to interpret the complexity of world-building practices, a transversal approach will be used, able to stress interactions between distant phenomena and to consider their short-term or long-term effects. From an epistemological viewpoint, the larger emergence of world building is linked to a systemic and complex organization of thinking, which is particularly relevant in a time of media fragmentation. According to the French philosopher Edgar Morin, a paradigm of complexity is required when scientific discoveries allow disorder and chaos to emerge. A pathway paved by complex thinking leads to a knowledge of media that is not restricted to "probable" results, and that is capable of following mutations, as well as homeostatic trends: "[a] chaotic process may obey deterministic initial states, but these cannot be known exhaustively, and the interactions developed within this process alter any prevision. Negligible variations have considerable consequences over large time scales" (Morin 2007, 4). Similarly, given the proliferation of narrative and non-narrative chunks of media

content, heterogeneous bricks that constitute complex systems, determinism proves an inadequate approach for understanding such phenomena. Against determinism, a multi-focal, transnational, and interdisciplinary perspective is required in order to establish the relationships between worlds, media, production, and cultures. Worlds will be studied as a way to re-examine media theories, as objects to be understood in their industrial, creative genesis, their formal characteristics, and, finally, as spaces that emerge from the interaction of industry and fandom.

Worlds can be considered forms of knowledge *and* forms of life. On the one hand, complex world building is a common practice in the current media landscape. Scholars build instruments to describe fictional worlds and display their complexity; diegetic spaces, transmedia phenomena, film franchises, and serial narratives are objects of study. Structural questions emerge concerning the longevity and success of an expanding world over time; logical problems appear related to the coexistence of heterogeneous entities when many worlds collide; aesthetic, technological, and cultural issues surface where various authorial practices interact. On the other hand, *worldness* can be thought of as a metaphor or a model; it can be a key to understanding media industries, audiences, and the intertwining of the two. In this case, worlds are springboards and catalysts allowing the formation of certain linguistic and cultural systems typical of the convergence era. A world is a form of life dependent on individuals and, at the same time, an aggregator of communities. Here, the term "world" also evokes a worldview: a way of conceiving and building conventions within a certain time period, according to a specific domain of knowledge and professional labor (see: Becker's *Art Worlds* 1984). This concept covers technological devices, as well as institutions, ideological apparatuses, and sociocultural organizations, each within its own context. As a canon (think of "Tarantino's world"), it is dependent upon historical, cultural, and social contexts. What emerges is a system of references, as well as a source for the extraction of material to be transferred into other worlds, particularly when they are shared across cultures and nations.

Complex Spaces

One of the bases for understanding world-building practices is the idea of a more or less organized sum of scattered parts, as in complex systems. The spatial dimension is particularly relevant for the description of this phenomenon. The concept of space can be found in film theory as an

important correspondent to the notion of time. The unfolding of territories or spaces while reading a novel or watching a film is a compelling experience for participants (Eco 1984); it invites them to forget the medium's materiality and immerse themselves in a different reality. At the inception of film studies, Etienne Souriau coined the term *diegesis*, describing a flexible environment that could contain infinite variations (1953). For this reason, an interrogation of worlds must include the multiple combinations of media forms, along with the effects they produce, consequently encouraging an anti-essentialism and an anti-textualism. In the framework of possible-world theory, Thomas Pavel considers literary texts irreducible to their linguistic dimension (1986). Furthermore, it is more compelling to study "ontological landscapes" that compose "the world view of a given community" (Pavel 1986, 139). In fact, one of the debates at the core of games studies is the analysis of interfaces as structures that are separate from their narratological perspective. For ludologist Jasper Juul, "a game cues the player into imagining its fictional world", demonstrating that the player has the choice between two positions: to see the game as a set of rules or as a set of suggestions. Either can be used to imagine a world (Juul 2005, 1). In such situations, for some scholars, it is less interesting to analyse textual and intertextual borrowings than to identify the boundaries of an overarching "fiction" that englobes more than one novel, comic, game, film, or television show. A concept coming from literary studies, but also useful for transmedial phenomena, transfiction is a tool used to describe situations such as when authors other than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle or Flaubert take characters such as Sherlock Holmes or Emma Bovary out of their original texts and place them into alternative lives, new futures, or unlikely encounters (Saint-Gelais 2011, Ryan 2013). Again, the concept of a space emerges here, allowing various, logical, or even contradictory outcomes: such a virtual space is, in fact, able to incorporate, for the consumer's delight, as many details as the actual world—and more.

If, on the one hand, filmmakers have learned to build more and more tangible worlds; on the other, during the technological progression from VCR, to DVR, TiVo, DVD, and Blu-ray, viewers have been increasingly encouraged to stop, review, and compare details. According to David Bordwell, a film like *Blade Runner*, which came out in 1982, is emblematic of the practice of "layering worlds". Because of its continuities—its "minutiae" and "information overload"—viewers equipped with a VCR were able to observe details dispersed throughout the movie (Bordwell 2006, 58). Visual details, both "functional" and "indicial", to use Roland Barthes's terminology, always contribute to the consistency of a world, helping viewers to familiarize

themselves with it. They "furnish" an environment, as Umberto Eco states in reference to cult texts (Eco 1986, 3). Such details function as "world effects […] that make the text look like the world—open, heterogeneous, incomplete" (Moretti 1996, 59). Moreover, a world's sumptuousness provides for the recognition of details as a part of a collective game (Eco 1986, 3, 4, 6). Such details are also the source of a self-reflexive pleasure.

Similarly, a world's details may erupt beyond the limits of a specific medium. In fact, paratextuality has evolved into a complex process, introducing innovation to the many fields of audiovisual creation, distribution, and reception (Gray 2010). Along with DVD covers, posters, trailers, and traditional thresholds to a text, it is easy to note the upsurge of objects coming from fictional worlds in real life, like Banana Republic's *Mad Men*-inspired line of clothing. Far from mere ornamentation, such accessories are extractable elements of rich imaginary realms, which establishes their coherence and persistence. Moreover, as foreseen by Janet Murray in her 1997 book *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, it is now easy to find digital "hyperserial" phenomena that enrich a show's complexity: websites, social networks, and constellations of online platforms.

Any medium intended as either a set of devices or material channel delivering a specific content, can be thought of as a single chunk participating, among others, in the co-construction of a world. Several terms have been proposed: *transmedia supersystems* (Kinder 1991); *transmedia storytelling* (Jenkins 2006); and *transmedial worlds* (Klastrup and Tosca 2004, see also: Ryan and Thon, 2014, 14-15). Not only has the term transmedia entered the common vernacular of scholars across disciplines (see also: Kinder and McPherson 2014), but the industry is adopting its precepts in various domains. Storytellers produce their own guides (Phillips, 2012, Pratten, 2011, Bernardo, 2011 and 2014), inviting creators to concoct complex worlds displaying several networked bricks. These creations carry with them "an entertainment brand that can grow into a pop icon, a brand whose story world or hero has enough creative potential to power spin-offs and reboots, theme park rides and acres of merchandise" (Bernardo 2014, Introduction, n.p.).

Jenkins famously describes transmedia storytelling through the example of the *Matrix* franchise, in which films, comics, anime, and video games were designed to be part of the same itinerary, often intersecting, yet always providing the viewer with a more complete experience if grasped together:

> The Wachowski brothers built a playground where other artists could experiment and fans could explore. For this work, the brothers had to envision the world of *The Matrix* with sufficient consistency that each

instalment is recognizably part of the whole and with enough flexibility
that it can be rendered in all of these different styles of representation—
from the photorealistic computer animation of *Final Flight of the Osiris*
to the blocky graphics of the first *Matrix* web game. (Jenkins 2006, 113)

But such a transmedial creative model is not reducible to the phenomenon of
media stacking, nor to the "networking" of narratives, since neither of these
is new: both have always engaged readers and consumers in their own right.
In fact, Biblical narratives are dispersed across the world, found in stained-
glass windows and frescoes, in paintings and performances. Also, popular
culture has always been the source of multiple adaptations within comics,
novels, film, and television (see, for example: Scolari et al. 2014). Indeed,
the relevance of current transmedia storytelling is related to the higher
visibility of its components and their interconnections, thus highlighting,
again, the relevance of the notion of complexity. Transmedia world building
is comparable to the intertwining of many different threads forming a cloth:
the sum of each can never be equivalent to their interrelation. As in the
hermeneutic circle, we cannot know the parts if we do not know the whole;
at the same time, we cannot know the whole if we do not know the parts.

    In the transmedia creative model, consumers are granted a main role:
they are allowed to explore these complex worlds and are encouraged to
add content. Still, transmedia labyrinths are, by definition, bridled. The
Matrix example is "a unified and coordinated entertainment experience"
(Jenkins 2006). Created as an organized and mostly fenced-in playground,
its interactivity is designed beforehand and, consequently, users have
limited freedom. Interactive practices raise the level of complexity in Al-
ternate Reality Games (ARG), those "games which are not games", such as
the famous *Why So Serious?* (2007) advertising campaign that accompanied
the launch of *The Dark Knight*. In innovative, boundary-blurring scavenger
hunts, fans had to follow clues found in their hometowns in order to find
artifacts from the story. In this case, worlds break the boundaries of fiction
and enter the viewer's reality. Not only are media worlds comparable to
heterotopias, or portals to immersive alternative spaces that help a society
understand its limits and build its identity (Foucault 1984 [1967]), they can
also be understood within the framework of the "hypertopia", a term coined
by Francesco Casetti. According to Casetti, "[w]e no longer move for film;
it is now something we acquire, we meet by chance, or we pick out from a
range of available products; it is something that offers up a world ready to
extend itself everywhere" (Casetti 2015, 148). In fact, fragments of a world
overflow in the viewers' own realms, like when players of an Alternate

Reality Game stumble upon scattered artifacts or clues (fictional worlds, then, truly become "places that one happens upon along the way," Casetti 2015, 144). Also, such boundary-breaking experiences challenge a world's identity, exposing it to clashes with divergent uses and, thereby, proving its resilience.

Still, the elements of transmedia storytelling all too often remain part of a designed, top-down experience. Commercial transmedia worlds are often built upon a deterministic vision, and remain contained by "story-telling tyrannical characteristics", as emphasized by Bordwell (2009). A distinction has to be made between transmedia as artificial machines and worlds as living machines. Concerning complex system theory, Edgar Morin writes:

> Von Neumann established the difference between living machines and artificial machines produced by technology: the components of the technical machines, having the good quality of being extremely reliable, go towards their degradation, towards their wear, from the very start of their operation. Whereas the living machine, made up mainly by components far from reliable, degrading proteins—and one understands very well that this lack of reliability of proteins makes it possible to reconstitute them non-stop—is able to be regenerated and repaired; it also goes towards death, but after a process of development. The key of this difference lies in the capacity of self-repair and self-regeneration. The word regeneration is capital here. (Morin 2007,13)

As fan scholars know, the word regeneration is also essential to the *Dr. Who* series, which, as Matt Hills has shown, is a very particular world, able to prove its resilience and to survive, mainly thanks to its fans, for over 50 years. Therefore, another important way to study transmedia involves world building as a result of distinct audience activities: worlds lived in by users, worlds as living machines. Viewers can be thought of as trace generators, whose activity means something for other viewers and can influence their experience.

For Nelson Goodman, "[w]orldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already in hand; the making is remaking" (1978, 6). Fan cultures can be studied as activators of worlds. In his definition of transmedia, Carlos A. Scolari (2009) also includes non-fictional components, such as social network posts, fan art, and discussion boards. Users are explorers as well as map-builders, who provide their own contributions to the expansion of a world, operating alone or together with fan communities.

In a time when digital networks bring about more visibility to fan practices, worlds have become more visible too, stemming from the networks of convergent operations constructed by industries and fans. The notions of grassroots marketers (Jenkins 2006), fanboy auteurs (Scott 2012), transmedia fandom (Stein and Busse 2012), and digital fandom (Booth 2010; 2015) underline a form of world-building complexity very specific to our age: the intertwining of industrial and fan practices. In a media convergence context, derivative practices, textual poaching, participatory culture, and sharing activities can also complement official marketing strategies.

Each media brick (official or fan-made) is a mini-world, a piece contributing to the constitution of a larger entity. Interest in the notion of worlds therefore seems to reside in the need to conceptualize a transcendent substrate, to which each of the texts refers. Media fragments, coming from localized spaces and origins, enter the world bearing the language and the interpretation bestowed by its producer. Eventually, the sum of different uses and interpretations creates a result that exceeds the original work—in size, in shape, and in its intentions and directions—thereby creating a complex world. Some fragments from the periphery manage to join the center, where they are fully integrated and eventually become canon. Often, some fan practices increase in value and visibility, forcing producers to recognize them and include them in the canon. Certainly, this is often accompanied by conflict between grassroots activities and licensed works, as examples of ownership issues from the hybrid contexts of fan fiction demonstrate (*Fifty Shades of Grey*, first a work of *Twilight* fan fiction, then a fictional world of its own, and the platform Amazon Kindle Worlds prove the corporate interest in capitalizing on fan productivity). For these reasons, worlds emerge as both a project and as a result.

Two ways of considering transmedia phenomena are possible: first, mixing business and design stresses the predictability of a world's development; the other highlights semiotic processes that evolve for years after the apparition of a matrix text. The former is inclusive, centripetal, and marked by the need to balance unity and order, typical of storytelling, with users' accessibility. The latter is centrifugal, and open to unpredictable results that exceed and dilate the borders of a system, which, as a result, calls for intersectional instruments in order to grasp how it mutates over time. The study of worlds favors a synergetic and systemic approach to intermedial and transmedial relationships, each with its specificities often functioning as catalyzers. Within this framework, it is impossible to limit the research

to one field of study: according to Morin, complexity is "invisible in the disciplinary division of the real" (Morin 2007, 2). A plurality of perspectives and methodologies should be considered in order to examine how the problem of world building is relevant in various contexts and in various disciplines.

A Systemic Perspective

In light of such premises, this book aims to understand better worlds as forms of knowledge, as well as forms of life. Essays written by 22 scholars from a variety of fields study world building as a transversal practice contained within the arenas of production, distribution, storytelling, and reception, and the constant negotiations within them. Such a global undertaking is organized around five sections, each containing different contributions and viewpoints that explore the multifarious dimensions of world building: theories, economy, the notion of immersion, the relevance of world building across domains, genres and cultures, and social uses.

The first section, Theories of World Building, analyses world building as a key to understanding the media landscape as studied in narratology, philosophy, and art history. The notion is extended in order to cover all its meanings, from its more recent use in transmedia storytelling to the description of cosmogonic projects in contemporary art. In the first chapter, through the example of *Cloud Atlas*, Marie-Laure Ryan studies the cultural phenomenon of transmedia storytelling, analysing the full range of relationships between texts, worlds, and stories. These relationships include a world with many stories, a text (or story) with many worlds, and many different texts of varying media converging within the same world. From the viewpoint of semiotics, Paolo Bertetti studies fantasy/science fiction as a structural and thematic framework for constructing story worlds that cross multiple media. Such solid tools help us to define more clearly the links between structure, genres, and aesthetic features of worlds emerging in today's landscape, including the analysis of the content of media franchises. Within such a framework of interconnections between worlds, various issues appear. For example, the relationship with complex characters is extremely intricate. Julien Lapointe's chapter delves more deeply into the research of epistemological tools for understanding characters that cross the boundaries of many words, including ours, like patently non-existing objects, ranging from unicorns and centaurs to round-squares, and Sherlock Holmes. The concept of worlds proves useful

as a conceptual arena, drawing for the work of logics and possible worlds theories. This section on media theories stresses the relevance of worlds as theoretical tools allowing descriptions of overlapping entities and providing examples of practices consisting of aggregating scattered fragments: as a conclusion of this section, from the field of contemporary art, Cristina Baldacci traces the evolution of a world-related mapping phenomenon of knowledge, the "atlas form". Since Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas*, the atlas is a way to reconsider the organization of contemporary knowledge. The approach of some contemporary artists is described as characterized by a montage of visual fragments: grid arrangement; simultaneous views of the singular and the plural; non-hierarchical relationships among elements; heterogeneity, open structures, intertextuality; and a desire for wholeness.

The second section explores the economic dimensions of world building, as it is devoted to the analysis of the actors, strategies, and tactics (both industrial and grassroots, more and more marked by a tendency towards transmedial proliferation) involved in the building of fictional universes. By incorporating some of the work on franchising and licensing, Matthew Freeman explores the building of The Walt Disney Company transmedia storyworlds during the 1920s and 1930s, a period characterized by the rise of consumer culture in America, and analyses their intertextual, as well as their reflexive, dimensions. Indeed, worlds are not only spaces of narrative elaboration; they are sites shared by media professionals who utilize their resources to form collaborative relationships with one another. Roberta Pearson explores the industrial rules that lie beyond the existence of "floating signifier[s]" (Uricchio and Pearson 1991), such as Sherlock Holmes or Batman, utilizing both legal perspectives and narrative theory. This essay demonstrates how the concept of character, and even the role of the author, is highly elusive, as worlds necessarily "rest upon legal and business practices that create, sustain and protect them". Yet, it is important to understand that different elements converge and intersect within worlds, but also that they create frictions with one another, in accordance with complex systems theory. From the viewpoint of production studies, Derek Johnson highlights the importance of the concept of media "struggle". His essay focuses on the practices of media franchising, looks beyond the construction of cohesive and branded narrative spaces, highlighting the struggle between media industries and stakeholders regarding these constructions. In another context, focussing again on media aggregation, the necessity of a solid, cohesive commercial basis for media mix production can be highlighted. Marc Steinberg describes the relevance of the role of Game Master and Platform Producer in Japan, with the example of Kadokawa Books in the

1980s and the 1990s. Here, a world stems from a strong individual project, collaboratively developed across media within a specific industrial system.

Alternatively, different types of worlds' growing can be taken into account: for example, those narratives that are not specifically planned to cross multiple media, but that become significantly sizable worlds thanks to their longevity. Guglielmo Pescatore and Veronica Innocenti tackle the concept of "vast narratives", used to describe television programs characterized by continuous replicability, an open structure, and a permanent expandability. Their developing process employs methods from various disciplines, including television studies and information architecture.

The third section, Immersion, focuses on the intertwining components and forms of imaginary worlds across several domains: media, film, and video games studies, along with sociology. World-building theories and contemporary creation practices are explored, as many elements merge in the construction of filmic worlds. As Justin Horton shows, sound plays a crucial role, providing a degree of realism to an image that would otherwise appear removed from the "real world"—dialogue and sound effects create a more perfect mimetic representation of life. Sound is not simply used in the construction of a single world, but of many worlds, each multiplied and layered on top of one another. World building is then to be considered as a possibility for creators and producers that want to develop a very particular experience for consumers. Some models of imaginary universes can be defined through notions such as immersion, gaming, non-linear storytelling, and interactivity. Mark J.P. Wolf's essay starts with the premise that the experience of imaginary worlds can produce various types of immersion: physical, perceptual, and conceptual. Using the metaphors of absorption, saturation, and overflow, he highlights what lies beyond immersion, studying the effects of each of these stages on a world's audience. Also, he describes how world-makers actively use these processes to enhance the experience of a world, increasing the illusion of completeness and consistency, luring audiences back to their worlds. Pursuing the examination of immersive realms, Bernard Perron analyses the spatial dimension of the experience in transmedia work, namely zombie fiction. He addresses the attraction of spatial constructs that draw individuals, again and again, to a designed complex world. He also considers the intense motivation of moving through space as a character/player, like running through the varied media forms of *Resident Evil* and *The Walking Dead*. In transmedia storytelling, immersion is an ongoing phenomenon that unfolds, mutating, over time, across various sets of experiences. Laurent Di Filippo addresses how immersion manifests itself in gaming by applying Erving Goffman's

"action places" theory to his analysis of a MMORPG (Massively Multi-player Online Role-Playing Game).

Worldness, intended as a form of knowledge, is also a key to unlocking some of the specificities of different forms and genres found in contemporary media cultures. In the fourth section, Media as World-Building Devices, various media and genres characteristic of popular culture are examined through the lens of world building: animation, film franchises, comic books, and science fiction. Examining animation from the perspective of world building, Karen Redrobe (formerly Beckman) maps the contours of the debates about what she calls worlding in cinema and media theory, highlighting why these debates become particularly relevant at specific historical moments. Early theories about animation prove an important field for understanding worldness within the discipline of film studies and they raise crucial questions that are pertinent to the contemporary phenomena that we face today. Expanding the notion of worlds as linguistic and semiotic domains, Victor Fan's essay describes a key conceptual framework that shapes the debate in Chinese academic studies of media, *yujing*, or linguistic terrain. This term indicates overlapping and, at times mutually contested, linguistic environments that require remediation. Fan addresses this "global gift-exchanging" economy and the need to theorize the role of media in shaping such worlds from an historical, geopolitical, and culturo-linguistic approach.

Another essential notion, convergence, appears as a key term for understanding media as world-building devices. Dru Jeffries analyses Marvel Studios' *Thor* franchise, showing that today's convergences—between analog and digital technologies across the entire contemporary media ecology—inform not only the conditions of production, marketing, and distribution of superhero blockbusters, but their narratives as well. Concluding this section, Denis Mellier works on metalepsis in comic books. As he argues, metalepsis strengthens the illusionism and creates an effect of "real presence" in the fictional worlds represented within a narrative. This exposure of narrativity and fictionality appeals strongly to readers in the current media landscape. It could also be considered, retrospectively, as a new departure point to make the notion of immersion, seen in the preceding section, more complex.

Transmedia worlds are forms of life, or spheres of discourse, inhabited by their users. As a result, it is possible to speak from a pragmatic point of view of "cult worlds", or narrative worlds fashioned by audiences. The last section is centered on appropriations and fan practices, and explores theories and methodologies for the study of audiences in the new media ecology.

The discussion pertaining to the value of metalepsis proves pertinent when describing the relationship between worlds and audiences. Valentina Re studies television series that systematically use metaleptical strategies to mix the worlds of comics, TV, and cinema. Keeping up with the analysis of television series and their audiences, the following chapter examines *Doctor Who*, which first aired in 1963, a very potent example of the intertwining of grassroots and industrial processes. Matt Hills describes it as a "rickety" world: its survival over the years happened almost completely by accident. Despite some tension and friction, fan cultures built it as a space and as a "fan brand".

Fandom is a cultural practice that builds, maintains, or transforms worlds. It is interesting to understand how some of the defining features of such a cultural practices change over time, being mainly related to technological devices. Such a perspective is offered by Jim Collins, who describes world building by stressing its pragmatic nature, as a taste formation, animated by what he calls a transmediaphilic relationship between cultural value, digital technology, and subjectivity. Finally, Dan Hassler-Forest demonstrates the political potential of world building by addressing the relationship between heteroglossia and power. A fantastic world like Janelle Monáe's Afrofuturist Wondaland can destabilize absolute distinctions, therefore becoming a weapon capable of questioning the present and speculating about the future.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

In conclusion, the model of worlds covers phenomena across the boundaries of individual media. Some worlds are experimental labyrinths, others result from corporate strategies and industrial struggles aimed at saturating the market. Some, thanks to the accumulation and intertwining of uses and interpretations over time, become sacred monuments or foundational texts of a culture. For literature, Franco Moretti writes about the "world-epic", describing heterogeneous structures not reducible to coherent masterpieces that reach beyond the sum of their parts, each component interacting with the others on both formal and narrative levels (Moretti 1996). Monumental works like *Faust*, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, *Moby Dick*, and *Ulysses* are all made of an aggregation of episodes and themes situated by collage and juxtaposition, and depend on a process of interpretation over time. In a similar way, *The Matrix*, *Harry Potter*, *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Twilight*, *Game of Thrones*, or *Dr. Who* result from industrial transmedia design and become vast playgrounds for fan activities that are comparable to complex systems. Not only do they include official textual and narrative parts, they also contain heterogeneous material produced by fans.

Consequently, a world cannot be interpreted as the mere sum of individual media bricks, but instead as a life form, determined by a set of texts and their interpretations, superimposed over the years. A multi-layered conception of media history is needed: on the one hand, we have to consider the history of media as a larger container; on the other hand, we must examine it from a microscopical viewpoint, we have to examine the histories of individual worlds within their own evolution. Within this framework, worlds are artificial objects, made by the researcher who looks for repetitions and transforms remote individual phenomena into homogeneous series. This approach suggests "a reversal of the hierarchy between the exception and the series, where the latter becomes—as it were—the true protagonist of cultural life" (Moretti 1999, 150). The unique and the exception, traditionally found in romanticism and modernism, are not helpful here: instead, world building has to be considered as a key to unlock the contemporary landscape through promoting a history of serialized content and transmedia narratives.

The essays reunited in these pages contribute, from very different viewpoints, to tackling such a phenomenon of dispersion and reunion of non-discrete units, a constant process of repetition and innovation. They also commit to shape a growing field of knowledge, the one on world-building practices, by underlining the inextricable link between media and worlds. Offering in-depth analysis of specific concepts or particular case studies, each one of the contributors points out that media are not merely channels that convey messages. The growing "world building trend" that has emerged in media studies in recent years, and that is explored here from different perspectives and approaches, reveals that media truly are complex systems, since they are aggregations of technologies, forms, characters, institutions, and cultures. Within the current, interconnected panorama, they do not only transmit worlds, they become worlds themselves, individually or thanks to their networking. Spread over a transnational dimension, they become spaces of cultural experimentation and interpreters of communities.

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