

Transmedia storytelling and user-generated content: A case study on crossovers

Narrativas transmedia y contenidos generados por los usuarios: el caso de los crossovers

Narrativas transmídia e conteúdos gerados por usuários: o caso dos *crossovers*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze a special type of textuality: crossovers. The analysis focuses on user-generated content in the transmedia storytelling context. The study follows a series of 25 productions derivative of ABC's *Lost* (2004- 2010) and FOX's *Fringe* (2008-2013). After describing the scenario where these works were produced and mapping the etymology of the crossover concept, we analyzed some fan productions by applying a methodology based on narrative semiotics and narratology. Finally, we propose a taxonomy of these formats organized around four key points: media, style, genre and narrative program.

Keywords: Crossover, transmedia, storytelling, mashup, fans, *Lost*, *Fringe*.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar un tipo especial de textualidad: los crossovers. El análisis se focalizará en los contenidos generados por los usuarios de las narrativas transmedia. Para ello, se toman como caso 25 producciones derivadas de dos series televisivas: Lost (ABC, 2004-2010) y Fringe (FOX, 2008-2013). Tras describir el contexto de estas producciones y mapear la etimología del concepto de crossover, se analizan algunas producciones realizadas por fans, aplicando un método basado en la semiótica narrativa y la narratología. Finalmente, se propone una taxonomía de estos formatos, articulada en cuatro ejes: medio, estilo, género y programa narrativo.

Palabras clave: Crossover, narrativa, transmedia, mashup, fans, *Lost*, *Fringe*.

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar um tipo especial de textualidade: os crossovers. A análise se centra nos conteúdos gerados pelos usuários de narrativas transmídia. Para isso, 25 produções derivadas das séries de televisão *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010) e *Fringe* (FOX, 2008-2013) são utilizadas como estudo de caso. Após descrever sucintamente o contexto de tais produções e mapear a etimologia de crossover, o artigo analisa algumas produções realizadas por fãs, com base em uma metodologia baseada na semiótica narrativa e na narratologia. Para finalizar, o artigo propõe uma taxonomia desses formatos, articulada em 4 eixos: meio, estilo, gênero e programa narrativo.

Palavras-chave: Crossover, narrativa, transmídia, mashup, fãs, *Lost*, *Fringe*.

•How to cite:

Guerrero-Pico, M. y Scolari, C.A. (2016). Narrativas transmedia y contenidos generados por los usuarios: el caso de los crossovers. *Cuadernos.info*, (38), 183-200. doi: 10.7764/cdi.38.760

INTRODUCTION

The processes of production, circulation, translation and textual interpretation have accelerated exponentially since the diffusion of digital networks. A digitalized text is much easier to distribute, modify, remix and put back into circulation, leading to an explosion of user-generated content that permeates the media ecosystem. In contrast to what happened before the popularization of various types of software for editing text, image and sound, and the expansion of the World Wide Web during the nineties, nowadays it is very easy to find productions derived from previous cultural products. However, the hybridization and overflowing intertextuality which generally define these productions requires an adaptation of the theoretical approaches of the disciplines devoted to the analysis of different texts.

Among the variety of text formats that users can produce are the crossovers, a format where, broadly speaking, two or more cultural references intersect in one piece. The aim of this article is to explore the nature of crossover through the study of examples created by fans of the television series *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010) and *Fringe* (FOX 2008-2013). Produced by the factory of J.J. Abrams, both fictions have an extensive transmedia deployment on various media platforms and during their broadcasting, they were paradigm of a passionate following by planetary audience, which did not hesitate to move their conversations online spaces and re-appropriate of characters and plots to create derivative content. While *Lost* and the intense activity of its fans have been the subject of numerous academic papers (Clarke, 2009; Graves, 2011; Mittell, 2015; Pearson, 2009, among others), *Fringe* has not had the same impact, except some approaches from literature (Clarke Stuart, 2011), studies of television narrative (Álvarez Berciano, 2012) and transmedia narrative (Belsunces Gonçalves, 2011), in addition to the publication of anthologies of multidisciplinary studies (Grazier, 2011; Cochran, Ginn & Zinder, 2014) with very few approaches into the textual production of its fans (Guerrero-Pico, 2015). For this reason, and considering the linkages of genre (science fiction and supernatural) and authorship (Abrams) shared by these two fictions, we considered relevant to join them in the study of part of the transmedia storytelling generated by users.

Thus, starting from this context, we will describe the semantic link with of crossover with other hybrid species, as the mashup and remix, and propose a definition of this textual format. Once the concept coordinates are defined, we will analyze the crossover samples from *Lost* and *Fringe*, using a methodology that combines contributions from narrative semiotics and narratology. The analysis will conclude with a taxonomic proposal on crossovers, in which we consider variables as the media platform, the genre, the style or narrative programs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This analysis of a specific type of user-generated content in the context of two transmedia narratives (*Lost* and *Fringe*) will be based on the contributions of narrative semiotics (Greimas, 1989) and narratology (especially the work of Genette, 1989, 1997). In this section we define the main concepts on which the study is based (transmedia narrative, user-generated content, crossover) and the theoretical works on which the analysis is based.

WHAT IS A TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVE?

When defining transmedia narratives (transmedia storytelling), Jenkins (2003, 2006, 2009) proposes three key elements:

- On the one hand, the story should expand through various media; for example, the story can begin in in the form of television series, expand into a comic, incorporate some mobisodes or webisodes and ending through novels or a feature film. The bottom line is that each of these texts tell something different and expands the narrative world.
- Furthermore, this top-down expansion managed by producers is complemented by bottom-up expansions made by users and disseminated in collaborative platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, blogs, wikis or fan fiction. These productions, which can range from friendly expansions of the narrative world to hilarious parodies or mashups of narrative worlds, are often called user-generated content (UGC).

- A third feature (not always respected by producers) is given by the ability of the narrative world of being addressed through any of the textual units that compose it. That is, in the world of transmedia storytelling it is possible to enter the universe of *Batman* through a feature film, a comic book or a video game. However, each of these textual pieces can have a different degree of autonomy, and sometimes it can happen that a text (for example, a mobisode) is not understood unless we know a larger text (the TV series that originated it)¹.

The transmedia narrative worlds are a real challenge for narratology and textual narrative semiotics, all strongly mono-media study fields—there is a semiotic of theater, radio, cinema, etc., but still not a semiotics of transmedia— and unaccustomed to the analysis of highly complex multi-modal narrative, characterized by hyperfragmented textualities, and dozens of characters and narrative programs.

USER-GENERATED CONTENT

What defines a UGC? What determines a CGU is evidently its enunciation: it is a text produced by a “user”, that is, a media receiver who decided to create content and share it on the network. And what is a “user”? For decades, researchers of communication have dealt with “audience” (a concept developed by the sociology of communication), “consumers” (political economy of communication) or “receivers” (information theory). In the theoretical semiotic-narrative context we spoke of “enunciators”, understood not as an extratextual real subject, but as virtual figure inscribed into the text. The concept of “user”, meanwhile, is alien to the theories of mass communication; the introduction of “user” in communication studies—a key category in the investigations of the Human-Computer Interaction and usability studies—is a direct consequence of the crisis of broadcasting and its theories. The media ecology is mutating, audiences now do not only watch television or read the newspaper in silence, and feedback from the theoretical systems of the fifties has become a global activity through productions of millions of digital network users.

While the production of content by consumers is born with the cultural industry itself, digitization

processes, dissemination of graphical interfaces which facilitate handling of all kinds of texts and the advent of the World Wide Web completely changed the rules of the game. When written or audiovisual texts are digitalized, they become malleable, re-combinable and capable of being remixed with other content. The web, especially social networks and open content platforms as YouTube, allows these new texts to circulate virally around the globe in seconds. This is the breeding ground of content generated by users.

The boundary between a user-generated content and the production of the cultural industry is very porous. Contents born with a marginal and artisan spirit may end up absorbed by the large communication systems, in the same way that the culture industry is very attentive to the productions of prosumers and has no fear in broadcasting and even profit from them. Moreover, there is a gray area inhabited by hybrid textual forms that combine classical strategies with the tactics of the fan community or fandom (Scolari, 2014). Here is an example. One of the most elaborate parodies of *Lost* is the collection of comics *Pardillos*. Created by a Spanish user, Carlos Azaustre, as a textual project on the web, it has sold thousands of copies and incorporates a very high level of intertextuality that fully place it in the category of crossover. The comic reproduces the original story of *Lost*, but mutating the names of the characters, the accident conditions—in *Pardillos* a Naufragic Airlines plane suffers an accident on the flight Ibiza-Cuenca ...— and incorporating figures of mass culture, as Carmen Russo, the winner of the Spanish version of *Survivor*. The attentive reader will rebuild and enjoy these intertextualities.

Since there is mass culture, readers, listeners and viewers have produced all kinds of paratexts born in the heat of a novel, a radio drama or a film. These paratexts made by consumers can take the most varied forms, from a conversation in the hair salon where hypotheses about the next episode of a soap opera are elaborated, to a fake trailer on YouTube based on a Hollywood blockbuster. In the same way that not all paratexts are part of the transmedia narrative, not all paratexts made by prosumers should be considered an integral part of a transmedia world. A review of

a comic on a fanzine is an intertextual experience, but has little to do with the transmedia narratives. That is, the textual production of prosumers goes far beyond the phenomenon of transmedia narratives. It is for this reason that we should speak specifically of transmedia user-generated content (TUGC) (Guerrero, 2012, 2014) to describe the content that do contribute to the narrative expansion of fiction and nonfiction (Gifreu, 2013; Porto & Flores, 2012). In this article we will limit to transmedia content generated by users that expand the narrative of fictional worlds.

Before continuing, it should be clarified that transmedia narrative worlds may also include compressed texts such as recaps (for example, a season or complete TV series summary in a few minutes) and trailers. In other words, transmedia expansion (the story is told in different media and platforms) should not to be confused with textual expansion/compression (certain texts add new content to the story, while others tend to summarize). A narrative world includes both expansive and compressed texts (Scolari, 2012).

Describing and analyzing all productions by users born from *Lost* or *Fringe* is simply impossible. At the time of finalizing this article (April 2016), only on the website *Fanfiction.net* there were more than 8,400 stories inspired by *Lost*² and 2,900, by *Fringe*³. To these we must add the thousands of stories published on web portals around the world in different languages. Moreover, we cannot limit TUGC to written texts: thousands of audiovisual and graphic productions are also part of this narrative world. In this article, we will focus on the most representative productions or those that challenge the traditional textual taxonomies.

TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVES: A THEORY IN PROGRESS

Transmedia storytelling is not a contemporary phenomenon, but the profound changes faced by of media ecology in the last quarter century have placed this particular mode of storytelling on the radar of researchers and professionals (Scolari, 2014). This recognition of the transmedia character of the narrative involves a process of conceptualization in which the proposal of Jenkins, although the most disruptive for its emphasis on the textual contribution of users, is one

within a wide semantic family which includes cross-media (Bechmann Petersen, 2006), multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), transmedia worlds (Klastrup & Tosca, 2004), transmedia narratives (Ryan, 2004), multiple platforms (Jeffrey-Poulter, 2003) and intertextual commodities (Marshall, 2004), among others.

All these approaches from disciplines such as ludology, narratology and media economy, realize the living theoretical debate emerged on the margins of the transmedia narrative. One of the main arguments focuses on delimiting the boundaries of the concept of transmedia against other multimedia expansion practices as, for example, cross-media. Although it is not uncommon to find authors who consider them as synonyms (Davidson, 2010; Hernández Pérez & Grandío Pérez, 2011), there are subtle differences between the two based on the degree of independence of the texts developed in the narrative world. Thus, in theory, the cross-media requires the user to go through all textual parts to understand the whole story, while the transmedia presents different gateways (Jenkins, 2003), and it is not necessary to access all to enjoy a complete cognitive experience. However, as mentioned above, this rule is not always true in practice, adding a layer of complexity to the boundaries between the two.

Another focus of discussion lies on the field of adaptation of a story to other media: can they be considered transmedia storytelling? The principle of unity/distinction is crucial here. The content of the various elements of the transmedia narrative world cannot be repeated so, according to this logic, adaptations would be found outside this classification (Jenkins, 2006; Long, 2007; Mora, 2014). But as clarified by Dena (2009), adaptation is a process in which the adapter “semiotically meaningful decisions” and they “subtract or contract, and also add elements” (p. 152). She adds: “An adaptation rarely, if ever, involves a one-to-one correspondence with the original” (p. 152). This position, endorsed by Scolari, Jiménez and Guerrero (2012) in their study of the compressive qualities of transmedia narrative forces us to reconsider the non-inclusion of adaptations or intersemiotic translations (Eco, 2003) in the transmedia development of a story.

CROSSOVERS AND OTHER HYBRID SPECIES

The crossover can be seen as a manifestation of culture understood as remix (Lessig, 2008), i.e., the infinite art of hybridizing cultural objects giving rise to new types of creative mixes (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008). However, like the concept of transmedia narrative, the crossover is within the same semantic field as other related terms, such as mashup or remix.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, crossover literally means “a point or place of crossing from one side to the other.” In music, the term is used to describe fusions of styles to artists in hit lists of more than a musical genre⁴, while in the realm of fiction it points to works that show characters from two or more narrative worlds in the context of the same story. With a history dating back to ancient Greece (Nevins, 2005), the practice of crossover is present in the fields of music, literature, cinema, comics, television and video games, in any media that allows storytelling. Within the field of literature, crossover are also novels that manage to transcend the public for which they were originally designed, for example, titles aimed at young readers with great acceptance among adult readers, being the Harry Potter saga a paradigmatic case of this literature (Beckett, 2008).

The term remix was born linked to the music industry

Although precedents of remixing can be found earlier, it was the introduction of multi-track mixers that made remixing a standard practice. With each element of a song –vocals, drums, etc – available for separate manipulation, it became possible to “re-mix” the song: change the volume of some tracks or substitute new tracks for the old ones. Gradually the term became more and more broad, today referring to any reworking of already existing cultural work(s). (Manovich, 2007, p. 1)

Once digital sound became the norm, all manner of music mixing and sampling techniques were applied using different kinds of hardware devices or software on a computer. (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008, p. 22)

The impact of digital technologies on music allowed the remix to expand other contexts (such as audiovisual) also affected by digitalization, until the term became used to designate “any reworking of

already existing cultural work(s)” (Manovich, 2007, p. 1). Despite the current scope of the concept⁵, its link to digital is evident, since the popularization of software to manipulate image, sound and text was key to the growth of user-generated content (Schäfer, 2011; Manovich, 2013; Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). In this sense, besides its musical significance, remix mainly refers to remixing in the field of creating and editing video, which combines more than one source of image and sound (Levin Russo & Coppa, 2012), and to visual remixes, which also hybridize various existing materials.

The combination of sources already existing, as if it were a constant copy-paste (Adami, 2012), is a *conditio sine qua non* in the different meanings of mashup⁶, a term related to remix. The word refers, among others, from the musical genre that brings together songs composed by parts of other songs, through web applications that use data and functions from various sources (Yu, Benatalla & Daniel, 2008), to videos composed of existing audio and video fragments. The latter sense, as we have just seen, is synonymous of remix.

Now that we have concluded this little etymological review, we must define what we mean by crossover as a manifestation of the fiction transmedia narrative generated by users. Both mashup and remix are very general nomenclatures that do not necessarily refer to the crossing of fictional worlds, either in its style or diegetic elements. Furthermore, the term crossover specifically involves a transformation of diegesis to facilitate a dialogue between characters who do not share the same narrative world, something that also does not need to happen in a mashup or remix. For this reason, we believe crossover to be a more appropriate choice for the subject matter of this article, and we can define it as that transmedia format where diegetic and/or stylistic features from two or more fictional worlds combine, resulting in a new cultural derived product.

METHODOLOGY

This section will review the analytical process followed and we will be briefly describing the transmedia narrative worlds of the television matrix (*Lost* and *Fringe*) of which the texts studied were extracted.

AMONG NARRATIVE SEMIOTICS AND NARRATOLOGY

Semiotics, either of interpretive matrix (Eco, 1979) or narrative (Greimas, 1989) and narratology (Genette, 1989, 1997) provide us with a powerful tool for analyzing the stories and texts that compose them. While there is a broad spectrum of textual studies of works belonging to the canon (literary, film, television, etc.), research on the narrative production of fans from this perspective is much more limited (Pugh, 2006; Thomas, 2011). In this article, we will discuss a small portion of that textual universe (also called fanon).

The analysis of such a large textual corpus in a permanent state of expansion generates many problems to the researcher (see section “The *Fringe* case”). In this regard, we will stick to the study of 25 works based on *Lost* and *Fringe* belonging to one of the most representative text formats of the process of appropriation and recreation that fans made from the canon: the crossover. The collection of texts was conducted during the months of May 2010 in the case of *Lost*, and January 2013 in the case of *Fringe*. Once the texts were selected, we proceeded to analyze them from a semio-narratological and narrative perspective, responding to the following categories and research questions:

- Crossover source: In what media were the source texts (hypotexts) combined in the crossover?
- Formal characteristics of crossover: At what level, stylistic or narrative, does mixing occurs? What is the media support used?
- Narrative features of the crossover: Under what conditions occurs the fusion of narrative worlds? How do the narrative programs combine? Are actantial roles transformed? What are the textual operations affecting this transformation? Does the generic cataloging of hypotexts affects the crossover?

To answer these questions, we used the model of hypertextual practices of Genette (1989) (table 1) and to a lesser extent, the actantial model of Greimas and Courtés (1982). Both proposals go beyond the literary field for which they were initially conceived and make suitable analytical tools for the study of textualities in the transmedia context.

It should be noted that there are some limits presented by the taxonomy of transformations and hypertextual imitations of Genette when analyzing the different TUGC fiction. Regarding the non-serious transformations and imitations, i.e., that trivialize the hypotext, it is useful to consider the commentary of Fernández Bueno (2002, p. 56) to the work of French narratologist Christoph Hein, which states that travesty is nowadays considered synonymous of parody, whose original function, according to Genette (1989), is playful, “of pure amusement or pleasing exercise with no aggressive or mocking intention” (p. 40). Fernández Bueno also extrapolates this change to the caricature, which, although it is an imitation of style with satiric or burlesque purpose, tends to be equated with the transformations by parody or travesty, forming in practice a unified set of hypertext operations of humorous nature, with a clear reference to the hypotext from which they originate.

At this point, pastiche, listed as an imitation of style with ludic purpose—different, therefore, of caricature—and dependent of the hypotext, can, according to the same Genette (1989, p. 150), serve as a vehicle for a serious non-trivializing stylistic transformation or transtylization⁷. For example, when the stylistic features of a hypotext—or multiple hypotexts—recognizable by the receiver are imitated to transform the style of another hypotext. As we shall see, the transtyle pastiches are common in the field of crossover.

Since transmedia narrative involves stories extending through different media, devices and languages, we suggest expanding Genette’s concept of transmodalization to operations that go beyond changes between the narrative and dramatic way. Thus, the term also would be extended to operations of media transposition where stories flow from one media to another, as may be the case of the adaptations.

Finally, Greimas and Courtés (1982) distinguish six actantial roles (subject, object, sender, receiver, assistant and opponent). According to this model, the sender makes a receiver responsible of an objective (object), the subject being the figure on which rests the responsibility for implementing all necessary actions to achieve the goal. During the mission, the subject can count on the support or opposition of other figures who play the roles of assistants and opponents,

Table 1. Hypertextual practices. Extract adapted from Genette, 1989.

| IMITATION | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| Pastiche (playful imitation) | "Imitation of a style without any satirical intent" (p. 38) | | |
| Caricature (satirical imitation) | "Stylistic imitation aiming to critique" (p. 31) | | |
| Continuation (serious imitation) | "When a work is left unfinished by a reason of the death of its autor or some other cause of final abandonment, continuation consists in finishing the work in the author's stead, and can only be the work of another" (p.201) | | |
| TRANSFORMATION | | | |
| Parody (playful transformation) | "Distortion" (pp. 37-39) of a hypotext through a transformation of semantics, keeping the style of the hypotext. | | |
| Travesty (satirical transformation) | "Stylistic transformation "whose function is to debase" a hypotext "(p. 37). | | |
| Transposition (serious transformation) | Formal nature | Qualitative transposition (*) | Transformation that affects the outer characteristics of a hypotext, such as language (translation), prose or verse (prosification / versification), type of poetic meter (transmetrification), writing style (transstylization), narrative or dramatic mode (transmodalization) |
| | Semantic or thematic nature | Diegetic transposition (<i>transdiegetization</i>) | Transformation affecting the diegesis –"the world wherein the story occurs"" (p 376.)– presented in a hypotext. Therefore, its elements can change, such as space-time framework, the nationality of the characters, their gender or cultural origin. At the same time, these diegetic conversions may involve changes in the action developed in the hypotext (p. 378). |
| | | Pragmatic transposition | Transformation that alters the course of events and the action of an original story. It is a "unavoidable consequence of the diegetic transposition" so its "autonomy is much restricted" than in the case of transdiegetization (p. 396). |
| | | Transmotivation | Transformation which involves the replacement of a motive, either by adding a new previously nonexistent in the hypotext (motivation), or removing an existing (demotivation) |
| | | Transvaluation | Transformation "of axiological order bearing on the value that is implicitly or explicitly assigned to (...) the sequence of actions, attitudes and feelings that constitute a 'character'"(p. 432). This can be done through two operations: revaluation –make a character more 'friendly' in the value system of hypertext than in hypotext, or simply increasing its relevance– and devaluation, the opposite operation. |
| | Supplement | "Transposition in the shape of continuation" (p. 470). | |
| (*) We have not included the quantitative formal transpositions (amplification, reduction) since the approach of this crossover study is the general analysis of its stylistic and narrative qualities. | | | |

Source: Own elaboration.

respectively. Thus, the various actions performed by the actants and their relationships fall into a succession of individual and collective narrative programs whose status changes reflect the central plot and subplots of a story (see section “[Crossovers] Based on the narrative program [NP]”).

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE TEXTUAL CORPUS

Lost

Lost was first broadcasted on September 22, 2004 on ABC. Created by J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof and Jeffrey Lieber, this drama focuses on the life of a group of plane crash survivors on a mysterious Pacific island that serves as a stage for the development of a complex scheme with touches of science fiction, fantasy and suspense. The first season consisted of 25 episodes, the first of them double. The number of episodes declined over the years (24 in the second season, 23 in the third, 14 in the fourth, 17 in the fifth and 18 in the sixth and final season). We can say that this cut in the number of episodes was recovered with the creation of additional content and fruition experiences in other media and platforms (table 2).

Fringe

Fringe premiered on FOX on September 9, 2008 with a double pilot whose production costs equaled the 10 million dollars invested in the pilot of *Lost*. J.J. Abrams, Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman are the creators of this drama sci-fi focused on investigations of extraordinary events by the *Fringe* Division, and the personal consequences that past experiments of Dr. Walter Bishop had on his son Peter Bishop, the agent Olivia Dunham and the two alternative realities where the series takes place. Its first season consisted of 20 episodes which were followed by 23 in the second, 22 in the third and fourth, and finally, 13 in the fifth and final season. Unlike *Lost*, *Fringe*'s journey on audience numbers was much more rugged, starting with an average of 10 million viewers, which plummeted to 6.25 million in the second year to continue falling to 5.85 in the third, and 4.2 million viewers in the last two seasons. The series also had its own transmedia deployment that expanded the story in other media and platforms (table 3).

If a narrative transmedia universe consists of a canon plus a fanon, then to all these productions that conform

Table 2. The official transmedia narrative world of *Lost*.

| LOST | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| TV/DVD | Novels | Videogames | Web (*) | Mobisodes | Alternate reality games | Official guides | Others |
| Season 1 (2004-05) | <i>Endangered Species</i> (2005) | Lost: Via Domus (2008) | Oceanic Airlines | Lost: Missing Pieces | The Lost Experience (2006) | The Lost Encyclopedia (2010) | Collection of McFarlane action figures |
| Season 2 (2005-06) | <i>Secret Identity</i> (2006) | | Hanso Foundation | | Find 815 (2007) | | Card collection (Season One, Season Two, Lost: Revelations) |
| Season 3 (2006-07) | <i>Signs of Life</i> (2006) | | Dharma Initiative | | | | Table games |
| Season 4 (2007-08) | <i>Bad Twin</i> (2006) | | Jannelle Granger's diary | | | | |
| Season 5 (2008-09) | | | | | | | |
| Season 6 (2009-10) | | | | | | | |

(*) Most of these websites were deactivated and today sent directly to the official website of the series.

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3. The official transmedia narrative world of *Fringe*.

| FRINGE | | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| TV/DVD | Novels | Videogames | Web | Mobisodes | Alternate reality games | Official guides |
| Season 1 (2008-09) | <i>The Zodiac Paradox</i> (2013) | Fringe (2008) | Massive Dynamics | Search for the Pattern (2008) | September's Notebook (2013) | Collection of Fewture action figures |
| Season 2 (2009-10) | <i>The Burning Man</i> (2013) | Tales from the Fringe (2010) | Videocomic spin-off of the episode 'The Firefly' (3.10) | Imagine the Impossibilities (2008) | | Appearances of the character The Observer at sporting events and FOX programs |
| Season 3 (2010-11) | <i>Sins of the Father</i> (2013) | Beyond the Fringe (2011) | | There Is More (2009) | | LP Seven Suns, of Violet Sedan Chair (fictional band) |
| Season 4 (2011-12) | | | | | | |
| Season 5 (2012-13) | | | | Reward Wire (2012) | | |

Source: Own elaboration

the official world of *Lost* and *Fringe* we should add a textual set of ever-expanding content generated by users, from parodies to alternate universes and finales, through crossovers, reconstructions with video games (machinima) or action figures, false introductions, recaps, synchronized videos (Synchro), fake trailers and an almost infinite number of narratives expansions that tell new adventures of the characters of both series (Scolari, 2012).

Is a typology of transmedia user-generated content possible?

Developing a general typology that combines all TUGC seems utopian due to the multiple media products in the world, result of specific socio-cultural contexts and, perhaps most importantly, the different cultural and social affiliations of users who consume and constantly reinterpret those products. Thus, depending on geographical, cultural and social factors, we can find several terms to describe classes of TUGC, which essentially involve the same use of

a media support. This is the case, for example, of fancomic and doujinshi, the second a graphic story created by an otaku, specific name given to fans of manga and Japanese anime; or fan vid and anime music video (AMV), for audiovisual works. Therefore, instead of talking about a type of TUGC, it is more accurate do talk about TUGC typologies, according to the sociocultural environment in which they are generated.

In this article we will focus on demonstrations of fiction TUGC derived from the Western culture of mass media, mainly the United States, which explains that the terminology is determined by this context. At the same time, and in order to concrete our object of study, we will only show examples corresponding to the following four types of fiction TUGC or fanworks:

- *Fan fiction* (also known as *fanfic* o *fic*): narratives in text format.
- *Fan vid*: short videos and movies made from images and music or sounds from a third or own source.

- *Fan art*: drawing, painting and graphic art.
- *Machinima*: videos or movies made by manipulating the graphics engine of a 3D video game.

The complexity of cataloging fiction TUGC adds to the one of identifying those specific categories used by the fandom to classify their productions within each TUGC mode, especially in regard to creative practices. For example, in the case of fan fiction, the community has developed a differentiated terminology of genres or formats different than other practices such as fan vid (Busse & Hellekson, 2006). However, much of the textual changes represented by these terms can be found in other creative modalities in different media supports, which encourages the development of common textual taxonomies for fiction TUGC. Since this is a task beyond the scope of this paper, we will stop only on the analysis of crossover, one of the most interesting formats for the rich crossing of intertextual and intermedia references that it enables.

RESULTS

TOWARDS A TAXONOMY OF CROSSOVERS

Now we will show a first taxonomic approach to the world of crossovers. As far as possible, we will exemplify with texts inspired by *Lost* and *Fringe* and created in a variety of media supports. Only in exceptional cases, when certain types have not been identified in those narrative worlds, examples from other stories texts will be provided. It is also important to note that this is a dynamic classification, where the same crossover may fit within more than one category depending on its media, formal and narrative-textual qualities.

MEDIA-BASED

Intramedia crossovers combine characters or situations from the same media, while intermedia crossovers combine characters or situations from other media. For example, the classic crossovers of the world of comics or animation –when Batman and Superman appear in *The Dark Knight Returns* (Miller, 1986), or the Marvel Comics saga *The Avengers*–belong to the first type. In the case of *Lost* and *Fringe* we can find many crossovers with other television series, also evidence of intramedia crosses:

- *Lost – The Office*⁸
- *The Lost Files – 1 – Pilot*⁹
- *Time and Dimension II Doctor Who/Fringe Crossover*¹⁰
- *Fringe/Battlestar Galactica Credit Sequence Mashup*¹¹

The crossovers between *Lost* and *The Simpsons* should also be considered within the intramedia category. *The Springfield Punx* project by artist Dean¹² is a good example of this type of fan art rewriting, which is implemented through a transtyle pastiche where all the characters of *Lost* are drawn imitating the classic style of *The Simpsons*¹³. *Fringe* also features crossovers by transtylization within the scope of fan art: a poster of the animated series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*¹⁴ mimics the style of the promotional poster of the fourth season of *Fringe*.

Regarding the second category, as the transmedia narratives become an increasingly widespread phenomenon, it can be said that we are increasingly witnessing the production of intermedia crossovers. *Lost* and *Fringe* are television matrix products, but this does not stop the fans of producing fake trailers, with stories from feature films whose story, in turn, may originate in other media supports:

- *Lost Sin City*¹⁵
- *Shutter Island - Lost - Mashup*¹⁶
- *Fringe vs Girl with the Dragon Tattoo – Trailer Mashup*¹⁷
- *Fringe - GI Joe Mashup*¹⁸

Or from video games:

- *Lost Season 7 (Zombie Season) Promo*¹⁹

STYLE-BASE

The transtyle pastiches displayed in *Springfield Punx* and fake trailers of cinema or 'gamer' inspiration, help us to introduce a new category: crossovers born of a mixture in the aesthetic or formal level. Perhaps this is the more general category because, on the one hand, all crossover involves to some extent a stylistic transformation; and secondly, there are many combinations and styles, resulting in hypertext crosses *ad infinitum* that challenge the user encyclopedic responsibilities, depending on the hypotexts and the specific style elements that the author has chosen to use. We will limit ourselves therefore to a review of examples where transtylization sources are widely recognizable.

Synchronizations are a paratextual subpractice emerged from *Lost*. The series included dozens of characters and played constantly with temporary leaps. Over the first three seasons, viewers learned about the previous life of the characters, and mentally rebuilt what each of them made at certain times (before, during and after the crash of Flight 815). In another example of transtylization, some *Lost*-based synchronizations use a multiscreen aesthetic similar to the series *24*, to show what the different characters lived simultaneously. This synchronized story that viewers built mentally and retrospective (*Lost* was a series that worked for aggregation/accumulation: each episode added a new information layer that answered some questions, but generated other) can now be seen on YouTube thanks to the concern and capabilities of some users who dominate the language and audiovisual technology:

- *Lost: Flight 815 Crash in Real Time*²⁰

Arguably, in this type of crossover, a series (*24*) provides the way while the other (*Lost*) gives the content.

The aesthetic appropriation is a common practice in the environment of video games, for example, in *The Sims*. Its customizable interface and narrative is the perfect platform for creating machinima, productions that summon researchers of video games and new forms of communication. In short, it could be said that every game is a potential storytelling machine, which turns the user into a mini-film director capable of manipulating actors, stage scenes and dialogues on the screen. *Lost* does not escape the 'sim' transtylization, as can be seen in this machinima of the opening scene of the second season of the series:

- *The Sims 3: Lost Season 2 Opening*²¹

Video clips, made from the juxtaposition of images and music, are another sign of transtyle pastiches. In *Lost* there are crosses that can range from techno house from Vinylsharkerz and its hit *One Night in Bangkok* – remix in turn of the title track of Murray Head – to the Beetlejuice soundtrack. In the latter case, the video becomes practically a fake trailer for the opening scenes of the sixth season:

- *Lost Tecno Dance*²²
- *Beetlejuice/Lost Mashup*²³

In both video clips, music style transformation re-contextualizes the television hypotext, resulting in a change in its generic features. As we shall see, this is another of the possible consequences of crossover.

GENRE-BASED

In this category we must distinguish two variables: genre of the pre-crossover combined hypotexts and genre of the post-crossover. Within the first we find intragenre crossovers, those in which hypotexts belong to the same genre; and intergeneric crossovers, which belong to different traditions. According to the second variable, we highlight the homogenic crossovers, which do not modify the genre of the source text; and heterogenic crossovers, where the mixture transforms the affiliation of one of the hypotexts, or all of them, producing a hypertext of different genre.

Example of an intrageneric crossover is *Ship's Business*²⁴, a fan fiction in which the fan 'kerithwyn' makes a diegetic transposition of *Fringe* and *Star Trek*, featuring characters from the series of J.J. Abrams²⁵ as crew of the *USS William Bell* of the Starfleet of the United Federation. The name of the ship that replaces the mythical *Enterprise* is a clear reference to William Bell, the perfidious scientist from *Fringe*. Also, we can include in this category other diegetic transpositions in the field of fan vid, as *Fringe DW mashup – I went somewhere*²⁶ or *Fringe DW mashup - She's trapped there*²⁷. In this case, the kidnapping of Olivia Dunham in the alternate universe during the third season of *Fringe* is tapped organically to introduce a couple of meetings of the character with the tenth incarnation of *the Doctor*, the alien protagonist of the BBC's classic *Doctor Who*.

All these works can be counted at the same time as homogenic crossovers, as the combination of narrative worlds does not alter the genre of hypotexts interacting in the crossover. However, a mix's intrageneric condition does not automatically imply that hypertext is homogenic, as can be seen in the video *Fringe/TSSC: A Short Story About Love*²⁸. The fan 'chaila' does not limit the diegetic transposition of *Fringe* and *The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, the TV series spin-off of *Terminator*, but the images are arranged so that a motivation –or a new individual narrative program– is introduced on the characters of Olivia Dunham and Sarah Connor, when a mutual romantic interest

between them becomes manifest. The video revolves solely around this reason: hence, the resulting hypertext changes its sci-fi roots and moves to the romantic genre. Therefore, this is a heterogeneric crossover.

Regarding intergeneric crossovers, there are some videos that re-contextualize *Lost*, especially the opening of its episodes—by a transtyle pastiche, and re-propose it with the television and film aesthetics of past decades. These re-contextualization operates on the time axis, for example, translating the opening sequence in a similar style to which Saul Bass used in *Anatomy of a Murder* of Otto Preminger, and juxtaposing it with the original soundtrack of *Hawaii Five-0*, CBS's police classic:

- *Lost Intro 60s version*²⁹

Another variant of the re-contextualization is based on the placement of the text in other genres, such as sitcom or musical. Some of these productions take the form of a fake trailer that presents an imaginary alternative version of *Lost* imitating the aesthetics of texts belonging to the genre, such as for *Cheers* for the sitcom, and *The Phantom of the Opera* for the musical:

- *Lost: The Sitcom*³⁰
- *The Lost Musical*³¹

BASED ON THE NARRATIVE PROGRAM (NP)

Within crossovers by diegetic transposition, it is possible to deepen into the configuration of these crosses by analyzing the interaction of narrative programs (NP) from hypotexts. We understand as *symmetrical crossovers* those in which diegetic worlds

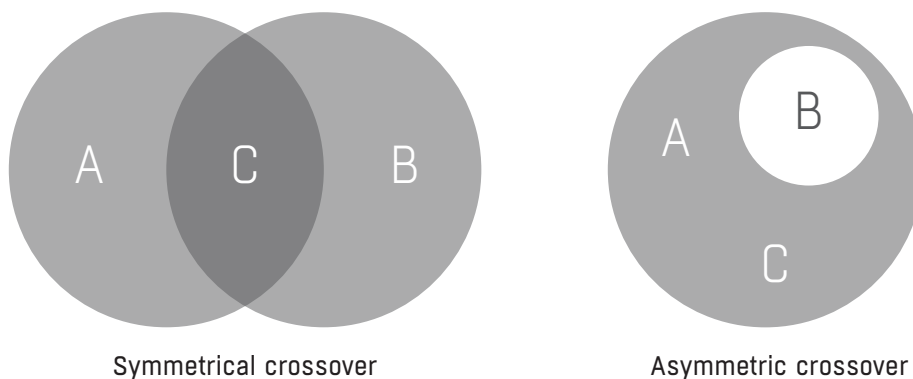
are implemented in the same conditions, so that between them a shared NP is constructed (C). By contrast, *asymmetric crossovers* have a situation where one of the diegetic worlds provides a framework for the expansion of another or others: a diegesis B acts as host of a collective NP already established in diegesis A (figure 1). In other words, the collective NP for actants of diegesis A becomes the collective PN for actants of diegesis B, also (C).

Let us illustrate both types of crossover. *Sims 2: FRINGE vs House MD Parody: Dr House treats Dr Walter Bishop (Dr vs Dr)* is a machinima created by the fan 'aldohyde', in a parody of *Fringe* and medical drama *House MD*. The narrative program is built around an overdose of substances suffered by Dr. Bishop, leading him, Olivia and Peter to visit the hospital where the sarcastic Dr. House and his team works for a solution. Actants share a completely new narrative program for both diegesis, creating a symmetrical crossover.

Another example of symmetrical crosses is in the absurd parodies of *Lost* made by The Fine Brothers³² from plastic dolls. In these short videos—which have already exceeded several million visits on the web—*Lost* characters mingle with dozens of characters of global mass culture (Darth Vader, Indiana Jones, Batman, Mr. Spock, Harry Potter, etc.). Similar to the machinima of *Fringe* and *House*, the actants structure original narrative programs full of references to the canonical universes of hypotexts involved in the crossover.

As for *asymmetric crossovers*, the fanfic *The Red Balloon*³³, written by fan 'syllogismos' is a brilliant example. The fic creates a bridges between *Sherlock*,

Figure 1. Crossovers according to the narrative program.



Source: Own elaboration

the BBC's modern series about Sherlock Holmes and *Fringe*, but the fiction of FOX only provides the narrative infrastructure for the expansion of *Sherlock*, as the detective and John Watson join the New York *Fringe* Division to help solve the case of the episode "Bad Dreams" (1.17). The author presents the plot of mass suicide from a New York roof like a flashback caused by memories of Watson during his mourning for the –fake–death of Holmes after jumping from the roof of the London hospital of St. Bartholomew in "The Reichenbach Fall" (2.03) of *Sherlock*. Fans of *Sherlock* are the obvious model readers of this crossover: the story is told from the point of view of Watson in the first person, imitating the style of personal diary novels of Conan Doyle and the personal blog that Watson writes in the series. *Fringe* collective PN does not change, but draws on new assistants with Holmes and Watson, at the same time, are subjects of their own PN that they borrow from *Fringe*.

Immediately after the final episode aired on May 23, 2010, began to appear on YouTube *Lost* alternate endings. Within these alternate endings there are *asymmetric crossovers*, as *Alternative ending of Lost*³⁴ an intermediated mixture in which Chuck Norris and other action movie icons become assistants of the PN collective imagined by the fan 'luispunto' for the series.

CONCLUSIONS

As already proposed at the beginning of this work, changes in the media ecosystem have theoretical consequences in the disciplines responsible for analyzing texts. Taxonomies and traditional methods were designed for a much more static and less fluid textual environment than the current. As in a biological ecosystem, the existence of numerous 'textual species' circulating in an accelerated manner on the semiotic sphere favors the emergence of new hybrid formats, such as crossovers, that challenge any classification. Our proposal, focused on the study of 25 crossovers inspired by *Lost* and *Fringe* series, has resulted in a number of categories that allow us to classify and define this type of format in which the scenarios, speeches and styles from two or more narrative worlds combine. Thus, we distinguish different kinds of

crossovers according to the media (intramedia and intermedia), style, genre (intergeneric/intrgeneric, heterogeneric/ homogeneric) and the narrative program (symmetrical/asymmetric), all that can be detected in other fictional transmedia universes that inspire the creativity of the fandom, such as the recent case of the Spanish series *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (RTVE, 2015-) (Establés Heras & Rivera Pinto, 2015; Meléndez Malavé & Sedano Amundarain, 2015).

However, we must repeat that we are in a context that requires signing a reading pact in which any textual typology has a transitory nature, so we may want to start thinking about evolutionary or in progress taxonomies. In this sense, we believe it is possible to identify certain continuities with the textual dynamics that have always characterized the semiotic sphere. Hence, our methodological approach, far from presenting a rupture, bases on a review of the contributions of classic authors of narratology and narrative semiotics, as Genette and Greimas. It is in this tension between continuity and renewal where the analyst's work of new textual forms and narratives is located.

Narratology and textual semiotic approaches should continue, therefore, working on enlightening the taxonomies of new formats, with particular attention to short textualities, and further study of the strategies of expansion and compression of transmedia narrative. This article, by proposing a typology of crossovers, can be considered a contribution in that direction. Surely the knowledge accumulated in the study of literature and cinema will be useful to understand these new narratives, provided they put aside certain prejudices forms. Often microfiction is only recognized as an object of academic study if it is published in a book form, and short audiovisual formats, or broadcasted in digital environments like YouTube or Twitter, territories largely dominated by fans and users located outside official channels, are neglected. In this scenario, researchers must assume that we are facing transmedia narrative phenomena in which the construction of meaning is an integrated effect, which arises from the articulation of texts in different languages and supports, regardless of their duration, extent or authorship.

FOOTNOTES

1. The TV series 24, of FOX (2001-2014), can be considered a good example of transmedia narrative: the narrative world began as a television product, and finished including mobisodes, webisodes, consoles and mobile video games, comics, novels, games table and countless websites both official and of the community of fans (Scolari, 2009).
2. En <http://www.fanfiction.net/tv/Lost/>. Recuperado 18 abril 2016.
3. En <http://www.fanfiction.net/tv/Fringe>. Recuperado 18 abril 2016.
4. On http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crossover_%28music%29. Retrieved on 18 April 2016.
5. In a more global sense, Nobel and Lankshear (2008) argue: "Remix has not simply emerged with digitization. It has always been a part of any society's cultural development (see Pettitt's analysis of remix in Shakespeare, 2007)" (p. 22)
6. On <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mashup>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
7. "The manifest ludicity of parody or pastiche, for instance, contaminates the operations of travesty, caricature, forgery transposition, even though, the status of this practices is in principle less purely playful than theirs, and this contamination accounts for their merit" "(Genette, 1989, p. 496).
8. On <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxYmZSKc774>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
9. On <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpPdGTTevmw>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
10. On https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQ0ei_QsnBw. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
11. On <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KEgGEPEQ0g>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
12. On <http://springfieldpunx.blogspot.com/>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
13. On <http://springfieldpunx.blogspot.com/search/label/LOST>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
14. On <http://www.deviantart.com/art/Fringe-448581093>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
15. On <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkbBQyUEw8o>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
16. On <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDNLd1f2vGA>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
17. On <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=807achjXnZ4>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
18. On <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MNN4PHgHcQ>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
19. On https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_uaroraLoY. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
20. In <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKcKtjrL5bc>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
21. In https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgocvy5Ae_M. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
22. In <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xPOXSfPQGE>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
23. In <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxA1Bzb-JMU>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
24. In <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/9265479/1/Ship-s-Business>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
25. In an explosion of intertextual references, is worth remembering that J. J. Abrams is the director of the new film version of the Star Trek universe.
26. In <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPRJNqKsp8E>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
27. In <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MVEijCVtuY>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
28. In <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpMtmWzivoE>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
29. In <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vr-r8sXy5Kg>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
30. In <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYv0Haigvgs>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
31. On https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZ46YnFJw_g. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
32. On <http://www.thefinebrothers.com/?Show=LOST-Parodies>
33. On <http://archiveofourown.org/works/808562>. Retrieved 18 April 2016.
34. On <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5PMZ-Xdse0>. Retrieved 18 April 2016G.

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