

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA

FACULTY OF THEATER AND FILM

DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEATER AND FILM

Cinematography and Media Domain

DOCTORAL THESIS

The Storytelling Continuum:

A Multidimensional Study of Transmedia Theory and Practice

(Summary)

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2025

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INTRODUCTION

Extrinsic Motivation

Humans have long been defined by imagination and the drive to create and share stories, from early artistic marks by Homo erectus to ancient myths, rock art, and oral performances that preceded writing. Philosophers and theorists such as Aristotle, MacIntyre, Fisher, and Ranke describe people as “story-telling animals” or homo narrans, arguing that narrative is central to how humans understand events, form identities, transmit culture, and express wishes, fears, and values. Over time, stories have continually migrated and been adapted across media—from spoken tales to theater, novels, film, and other formats—using each new technology to extend and reinterpret valued narratives. Transmedia storytelling is presented as the latest expression of this deep-rooted tendency, formally organizing the dispersal of one story world across multiple platforms where each medium adds something unique, showing that such practices are not a fad but a natural outgrowth of humanity’s enduring nature as storytelling beings.

Intrinsic Motivation

Discovering transmedia transformed my artistic and academic path. During the master’s program, the ‘Creative Transmedia Project’ course revealed a medium-flexible field that could unite all my interests—music, dance, film, photography, writing, and interactive installations—into one practice of multi-platform storytelling. Guided by my mentor, Arnau Gifreu Castells, I came to see transmedia as a bridge between theory and practice and decided to pursue it in a PhD and as a teaching specialty. After taking over the course, I spent five years as an associate lecturer, co-creating successful transmedia projects with students that reached international festivals. For me, transmedia uniquely combines research, creative experimentation, and pedagogy, offering a coherent role as researcher, practitioner, and university teacher who both studies and actively advances this evolving storytelling field.

Research Questions. Objectives of the Thesis

Transmedia should not be seen mainly as a recent technological gimmick or marketing tool, but as a historically persistent, culturally embedded practice rooted in humans’ need to extend and preserve meaningful stories across time, space and media. To support this claim, the thesis

combines four approaches: clarifying and synthesizing diverse theoretical definitions, using “transmedia archaeology” to trace multi-platform storytelling back to ancient and pre-digital examples, empirically examining why the term rose and then declined in mainstream industries after 2010, and analyzing original, educational transmedia projects as practice-based research. Together, these strands show that transmedia’s apparent conceptual fluidity is actually a strength that allows it to adapt to many fictional and non-fictional contexts, that the practices themselves survived even as the label fell out of fashion, and that its greatest value lies in fostering participatory, experimental narrative forms rather than only commercial franchises.

The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured around four major parts that move from theory and history to industry analysis and personal practice. The first chapter builds a theoretical framework for transmedia by tracing definitions from early mentions in 1971 through key thinkers such as Kinder, Jenkins, Klastrup and Tosca, Pratten, Bernardo, Mischie, Gifreu and Gaudenzi, showing how the term expanded from “transmedia intertextuality” and “transmedia storytelling” into broader ideas about worlds, audiences, interfaces and non-fiction uses. The second chapter takes a diachronic, “archaeological” look at transmedia-like practices, from ancient myths and religious narratives through 19th-century literature and early comics, into 20th-century franchises, ARGs and contemporary global case studies, arguing that multi-platform storytelling long predates the digital era. The third chapter examines transmedia as an industrial and professional phenomenon: it analyzes the enthusiasm and backlash around the formalization of the “Transmedia Producer” credit, the conceptual confusion and institutional abandonment that followed, and the ways the practice continues in more fragmented, rebranded forms while hinting at possible futures. The fourth chapter turns to my own teaching and creative work, using projects like *Sequentium* and *Concrete Nests* as practice-based case studies to show how transmedia can function as both pedagogy and art, and closes with a personal reflection on how this field, grounded in participation and interconnected narratives, has become a central professional and personal commitment.

RESEARCH METHODS

Transmedia is presented as a fluid field that spans many media and practices—from film, games and literature to installations, merchandise, theme parks and web experiences—all working together to build complete narrative universes. To study such complexity, the thesis uses four main approaches: a literature review that traces key definitions from early mentions in the 1970s through Jenkins, Klastrup & Tosca, Pratten, Bernardo and others; a “transmedia archaeology” method that looks back to pre-modern and pre-digital examples to show that expanding stories across media is a long-standing human tendency; semi-structured interviews with leading practitioners like Jeff Gomez, Ioana Mischie and Arnau Gifreu to expose practical challenges and industry tensions; and practice-based research through original projects such as *Sequentium*, *Concrete Nests*, *In-Between Worlds* and *Post-Industrial Nostalgia*, using digital storytelling and arts-based action research to treat creative work itself as a form of inquiry.

CHAPTER 1 – TOWARDS A THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE ‘TRANSMEDIA’ CONCEPT

Transmedia is a flexible and evolving artistic field that began as a term about fifty years ago but only gained clear definition in the early 2000s. While rooted in cinema, it extends across literature, comics, music, games, theater, animation, and other art forms. Its goal is to create immersive worlds that unfold across multiple media platforms, where each piece can stand alone but contributes to a larger, interconnected story. Originally emerging as a creative practice rather than a theoretical concept, transmedia has taken many forms over time without fixed rules or boundaries. It reflects humanity’s instinct to perpetuate stories and experiences—not only for entertainment but also for education, social awareness, and representation of real-world issues. This diversity made it difficult for scholars to produce a single, definitive definition, despite decades of study and theorizing. Because of its adaptable nature, transmedia retains an element of mystery and continues to evolve with new media and technologies, even though its roots predate modern digital developments. The text suggests that while transmedia thrives on innovation, it is fundamentally a timeless human practice of storytelling through interconnected forms.

1.1. What is ‘transmedia’?

Transmedia combines “trans-” (across, beyond) and “media” (communication platforms) to describe stories or themes spread across multiple channels, each adding unique elements. It’s a creative and participatory way of producing and consuming media that evolves with technology and audience needs, shaped collaboratively by creators, academics, and audiences. It differs from related concepts:

- Multimedia uses several media types (like text, video, and sound) to tell one story within the same product.
- Cross-media shares the same story across multiple platforms for promotion or accessibility, without narrative expansion.
- Adaptation retells a story in a new medium, altering form but keeping content, unlike transmedia, which builds a broader universe with original extensions and audience interaction.

1.2. Early Transmedia. Carlos Alberto Scolari on Richard Maynard

Carlos Alberto Scolari, a professor at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, notes that the term transmedia first appeared around 1971 in Richard Maynard’s book *The Celluloid Curriculum*. Maynard used it to describe comparing novels or plays with their film versions—a concept closer to adaptation than today’s idea of transmedia storytelling. This early use reflected the focus on differences between media formats rather than story expansion across platforms. Scolari also points out that some New York television companies in the 1960s–1970s used “Transmedia” in their names, such as “Transmedia Educational Services,” showing that the term existed in practice before it gained its modern theoretical meaning.

1.3. Foundational theorists

1.3.1. Transmedia Intertextuality. Marsha Kinder

In the early 1990s, Marsha Kinder explored ideas central to transmedia storytelling before the term was formally popularized by Henry Jenkins. In *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games* (1991), she discussed “intertextual relations across different narrative media,” using the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* franchise as an example of cross-platform storytelling that allowed audience interaction and long-lasting cultural impact. Although Kinder identified

transmedia-like patterns, she treated the term mainly as an extension of intertextuality, a literary concept describing how texts influence one another. Consequently, transmedia never became a focal point in her work nor gained traction in media studies at that time. Kinder later tried to reclaim the term in her co-edited 2014 volume *Transmedia Frictions*, but this work added little to the theoretical understanding of transmedia. By then, the field was already firmly established—validated in 2010 when the Producers Guild of America recognized “Transmedia Producer” as an official title—cementing transmedia as an independent and mature creative practice beyond interactivity or adaptation.

1.3.2. Transmedia Storytelling. Henry Jenkins

Henry Jenkins—a prominent American media scholar at the University of Southern California—brought transmedia storytelling into global recognition in the early 2000s. His 2003 essay defined transmedia as the art of telling a story across multiple media, where each platform contributes uniquely to the narrative but remains independently enjoyable. Jenkins distinguished transmedia storytelling from adaptation, emphasizing expansion rather than repetition of content. In *Convergence Culture* (2006), he deepened this idea, showing how transmedia fosters active audience participation, merges diverse fan communities, and transforms storytelling into collaborative “world-building.” He tied this evolution to broader phenomena—media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence—where audiences interact, create content, and shape media experiences together. By 2009, he formalized seven key principles of transmedia storytelling: spreadability vs. drillability – sharing widely vs. exploring deeply; continuity vs. multiplicity – consistent canon vs. alternate universes; immersion vs. extractability – entering the world vs. taking parts of it; worldbuilding – constructing detailed fictional universes; seriality – using episodic structure to sustain engagement; subjectivity – offering multiple character perspectives; performance – integrating audience participation and fan creations.

1.3.3. Transmedial Worlds (TMW). Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca

In 2004, Danish scholars Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca introduced the concept of transmedial worlds, marking a major European contribution to transmedia studies. They defined transmedial worlds as abstract content systems that generate multiple stories and characters across different media, unified by a shared sense of “worldness.” Klastrup and Tosca emphasized the shared fictional universe itself. Their concept includes works originating in any medium—

including games or independent creations—and does not rely on popularity or corporate backing. They identified three key elements: Mythos – the backstory and narrative foundation; Topos – the spatial and temporal setting; Ethos – the moral and ethical framework of the world. European scholars often favored the term transmedial over transmedia, viewing it as broader and more abstract. In 2019, Klastrop and Tosca revisited their concept arguing that transmedial experiences now permeate daily life through constant interaction with interconnected stories and media.

1.4. Innovative Approaches to Transmedia

1.4.1. Emerging Transmedia Theories. Geoffrey A. Long and Christy Dena

After publishing *Convergence Culture* (2006), Henry Jenkins launched his influential blog *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, which played a key role in popularizing transmedia storytelling. That same year, Geoffrey A. Long completed a master's thesis at MIT, where he identified three main principles of transmedia aesthetics: Negative capability – leaving gaps that encourage audience imagination; World as character – treating the fictional universe itself as central; Primary and secondary elements – designing all media components as canon that enrich each other. Long's work also referenced Christy Dena, another key transmedia theorist and practitioner. Initially preferring terms like “transfiction” and “cross-media entertainment,” Dena later embraced transmedia as part of broader creative and design discourse. After 2009, transmedia studies flourished across fields such as journalism, education, semiotics, and marketing. A milestone came in 2010, when the Producers Guild of America officially recognized the title Transmedia Producer.

1.5. Expansions and Practice-Oriented Approaches

Nuno Bernardo and Robert Pratten are leading practitioners of transmedia storytelling who both shifted from marketing into creating multi-platform narrative projects. They each wrote practical guides that outline how to design, produce, and monetize high-quality transmedia projects, and their concepts help clarify and expand how transmedia is defined and understood.

1.5.1. The Seven Tenets of Transmedia. Robert Pratten

Robert Pratten moved from telecom marketing into filmmaking, creating award-winning niche horror features. He then developed original transmedia projects like *Lowlifes*, a crime story told through a book, blog, web series, and later a game, each from a different character's perspective to deepen audience engagement. As a practitioner-theorist, Pratten became known for talks,

workshops, and especially his 2011 book *Getting Started with Transmedia Storytelling*, a practical guide that walks creators through goals, teams, budgets, audiences, platforms, and release strategies. Pratten proposes seven “future storyworld” tenets—stories should be inclusive, personalized, pervasive, participatory, connected, cloud-based, and persistent—and stresses three core components: Community, Characters, and Convenience.

1.5.2. Organic Transmedia. Nuno Bernardo

Nuno Bernardo is a Portuguese writer-director best known for *Sofia’s Diary*. In 2011, already an acclaimed “new media” expert, Bernardo published a practical book on producing transmedia projects, guiding creators from idea to funding, writing, production, distribution, and international expansion. He distinguishes transmedia from four related practices: brand extensions, “made for web” spin-offs, big-budget transmedia worlds (like *Star Wars*), and what he calls Organic/Original Transmedia Franchises, where a single story unfolds naturally across a limited set of platforms and then grows in sync with the narrative, not as a marketing gimmick.

1.6. Contemporary and Non-Fictional Perspectives

1.6.1. A Hybrid Perspective. Ioana Mischie

Ioana Mischie, a Romanian artist-scholar and pioneer in transmedia storytelling, bridges art and academia through her creative and theoretical work. Her scholarship draws on, yet moves beyond, Henry Jenkins’ theories of transmedia, proposing that transmedia storytelling is not a closed concept but an evolving continuum. Mischie’s book *Infinite Cinema* (2022) elaborates this vision through four “fundamental components” and four “essential elements” that define an enduring transmedia universe. The key elements—transdisciplinarity, multidimensionality, pluriperspectivism, and long-term configuration—emphasize interconnectedness, diversity, and longevity. Her first major concept, the *Paradigm of Infinite Narratives*, contrasts traditional linear storytelling with open, non-linear, multi-platform narratives that foster collaboration, active participation, and lasting cultural impact. The second component redefines the audience, moving from passive *Homo Spectator* to active, immersive *Homo Immersionis*, and eventually to the exploratory *Homo Explorationis*. Regarding authorship, Mischie challenges the traditional notion of the single creator through her *Paradigm of the Infinite Author*, a collaborative network of initiators, continuators, and evaluators—a system echoing scientific co-creation models. Lastly, she examines the interface as the bridge between story and audience, integrating both digital and

analogue forms. Overall, Mischie’s work reframes transmedia storytelling as an evolving, participatory, and interconnected art form—one that transcends mediums, disciplines, and even authorship to reflect the ongoing narrative nature of human experience.

1.6.2. Non-Fiction Transmedia. Sandra Gaudenzi and Arnau Gifreu

Early cinema began with short fictional films in the early 1900s, while documentary film developed more slowly and only consolidated as a recognized genre after the success and naming of works like *Nanook of the North* in the 1920s. Over the 20th and 21st centuries, non-fiction forms expanded into interactive and transmedia documentaries, but these faced structural problems of funding, technology, preservation and business models that limited their long-term viability compared to fiction. Fictional films primarily aim to entertain, immerse and move audiences through invented stories, complex world-building and emotional catharsis. Non-fiction films instead seek to document, explain or reflect on real people and events, foregrounding authenticity, relevance and truth-seeking through realistic and persuasive techniques. Over time, documentaries gained theatrical and streaming visibility but still remained economically weaker than fiction, which dominates global box office due to stars, effects and easily exportable narratives. From the 1980s onward, researchers and practitioners began experimenting with interactive non-fiction, a field later discussed under labels such as “interactive documentary,” “web-doc,” “docu-game,” and “new media documentary.” Gaudenzi and others traced how this terminology coalesced in the early 2000s, parallel to the rise of “transmedia storytelling,” signaling a broader media shift toward convergence and audience participation. Arnau Gifreu defines interactive documentary as offline or online applications that represent reality through navigation and interaction modalities, allowing users to explore multiple perspectives and influence the experience, while creators act more as assistants than traditional authors. Gaudenzi notes that works which are not stand-alone but part of a larger multi-platform non-fiction “storyworld” have often been called transmedia documentaries, though she views many such projects as primarily marketing extensions rather than genuinely new interactive forms. Siobhan O’Flynn distinguishes interactive documentaries—self-contained works on a single platform, often functioning as closed databases—from transmedia documentaries, which distribute a narrative across multiple platforms and may or may not be participatory or open-ended. Gifreu highlights a persistent structural issue: documentaries have long been treated as the “poor brother of fiction,” making it difficult to fund complex multi-platform non-fiction projects that require sustained investment, teams and technical maintenance.

Technological dependence deepened the problem. As technology evolved, immersive media (for example VR and related practices) emerged as a new competitor rather than a replacement, drawing creative and institutional attention away from web-based interactive and transmedia documentaries. Industry observers such as Gifreu date the decline of interactive documentary's visibility around 2018, though transmedia as a broader umbrella has persisted, especially in academic discourse and in lower-budget contexts. Non-fiction transmedia remains especially strong in participatory practices, where audience contributions and civic engagement can fundamentally shape the narrative, in contrast to many fictional universes that can expand without direct audience input.

CHAPTER 2 – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON TRANSMEDIA PRACTICE

In this chapter, after examining theories of transmedia storytelling, attention turns to its practical origins, which are hard to pin down to a single date or work because the phenomenon is fluid and debated. To address this, scholars like Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman propose “transmedia archaeology,” a method inspired by “media archaeology” that reconstructs the historical roots and evolution of transmedia by challenging simplistic, novelty-focused media histories. Their approach looks back well before the 2000s—potentially across 500 years of media history—though their own study stops at three 1930s worlds, which will be extended by exploring even earlier, pre-1930s and pre-1900s examples that shaped the entertainment industry.

2.1. Before 19th Century

The subchapter argues that what is now called transmedia storytelling has very deep historical roots, tied to long-term changes in human communication and technology rather than being a purely modern invention. The thesis then questions where transmedia storytelling truly begins, noting that if the practice is defined as expanding a narrative across different media with audience contributions, its roots could plausibly stretch back to the invention of writing or print, and even to religious narratives like the Bible experienced through stained glass, sermons, hymns and paintings. As communication technologies advanced from analogue to digital, stories—old and new—were increasingly able to cross media boundaries, blur the lines between texts, characters

and audiences, and invite publics not only to revisit beloved worlds but also to participate in and help extend them.

2.2. The 19th Century

In this subchapter I explore how the 19th century created the technological and cultural foundations for modern mass media. Overall, the century is described as a foundational period in which new technologies transformed how people informed and entertained themselves and related to one another, setting the stage for today's media-saturated world. In terms of transmedia, even though the formal concept and advanced digital tools did not yet exist, 19th-century culture still produced historical precedents: enduring characters such as *Frankenstein*, *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *Mowgli* and *Dracula* later generated rich transmedia afterlives. Early comic figures like Ally Sloper and The Yellow Kid became multimedia phenomena through strips, merchandise and fan culture, while *The Wizard of Oz*, eventually expanded into plays, films, TV, games, theme parks and merchandise.

2.2.1. The Literary Creations that Survived for Centuries

The subchapter argues that the 19th century produced an extraordinary cluster of literary characters and stories that went on to generate vast, long-lasting cross-media universes. It begins with the Brothers Grimm's *Snow White*, whose tale, spawned countless adaptations across film, animation, theatre, music, fashion, theme parks and global folk variants. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is presented as another foundational work whose tale of a scientist and his creature shaped modern horror and inspired a long lineage of silent films, studio cycles, television, stage, music and merchandise, with new high-profile adaptations still in production. Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) similarly became a global cultural industry. *Pinocchio* (1883) is highlighted as a particularly rich example. *Sherlock Holmes*, introduced by Arthur Conan Doyle in the late 1880s, is described as perhaps the most expansive of these universes, with dozens of canonical stories spawning an enormous array of adaptations, pastiches and fan practices. *Mowgli* from Kipling's *Jungle Book* stories and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* round out the 19th-century pantheon as characters whose worlds expanded across literature, comics, film, animation, music, games, attractions and tourism.

2.2.2. The Transcendence of Comic Book Characters. The Case of Ally Sloper and The Yellow Kid

Ally Sloper, a comic-strip character created in 1867 became one of the first recurring and commercially exploited cartoon figures. His image spread widely onto everyday objects such as doorstops, watches and sauce bottles, and a fan club launched around 1904 required readers to collect tokens, making it an early example of organized fan culture. With the rise of film, Sloper appeared in short comedy films around 1898–1900. Ally Sloper is regarded as perhaps the earliest example of a transmedia franchise, spanning print, performance, merchandise, cinema and organized fandom.

The Yellow Kid, created by Richard F. Outcault in 1895 became a landmark American comic-strip character widely regarded as the first comics “superstar” in the United States. The Yellow Kid triggered a wave of imitators and quickly became a powerful merchandising icon. The character also inspired early stage adaptations. The Yellow Kid secured its place in comics history through several important “firsts”: early use of speech balloons, pioneering the Sunday supplement comic section, establishing long-form, serialized comic storytelling and becoming the first American comic-strip character to generate large-scale merchandising, licensing, theatrical adaptations and costumes worn by fans.

2.2.3. Beginning of the 1900s: The *Wizard of Oz* Worldwide Phenomenon

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, first published in 1900, rapidly evolved into a sprawling storyworld spanning books, stage, film and merchandise. Very early on, Oz crossed media boundaries: a hit musical extravaganza opened in 1902, and experimental hybrids like *The Fairylogue* and *Radio-Plays* mixed film, magic-lantern slides and live performance, followed by several silent film adaptations and the stage show *The Tik-Tok Man of Oz*, which in turn inspired a new novel, *Tik-Tok of Oz*. The 1939 MGM film *The Wizard of Oz* transformed this universe into a global cinema landmark through Technicolor spectacle, memorable music and iconic imagery. The Oz universe has generated an enormous range of derivative and related works. Beyond narrative media, the franchise extends into toys, clothing, costumes, theme-park spaces and related attractions and festivals that immerse visitors in the storyworld. Scholars describe Oz as a “truly transmedia world” where new stories can originate in any medium—book, musical, comic strip or play—and then move across others while adding fresh characters, events and settings rather than merely retelling the same plot. Although it long predates the formal concept of transmedia storytelling, *The Wizard*

of *Oz* functions as a classic transmedia supersystem whose continually expanding narrative and aesthetic legacy has remained culturally powerful for more than 120 years.

2.3. The 20th Century

The 20th century represented a uniquely accelerated era in which technology, media, culture and society changed faster than ever before. Early on, print still dominated, but radio soon enabled real-time, mass communication and helped shape public opinion and national identity, followed by cinema. Mid-century, television transformed domestic life by bringing news, films, animation and live events directly into living rooms. In the late 20th century, personal computers, the internet and the World Wide Web democratized media production. Transmedia practice did not flourish immediately, but after the mid-1920s a wave of influential stories and characters began to build expansive universes across media. By century's end, especially with the internet's rise, media no longer just reflected society; it helped shape it, giving rise to complex, interconnected franchises and ultimately to the articulated concept and field of transmedia storytelling.

2.3.1. A Cautious Beginning of the New Century

Peter Pan began as a 1904 stage play and was later novelized as *Peter and Wendy* in 1911, telling the story of a flying boy who refuses to grow up and lives adventures in the fantastical Neverland. The setting and characters have come to symbolize escapism, immortality and eternal childhood, inspiring early novelizations and a long line of adaptations in theatre, pantomime, ballet, comics, games, ice shows, film and television.

Tarzan, first published as a magazine story in 1912 and as a novel in 1914, tells of John Clayton II, a feral child raised by great apes in the African jungle and often cited as one of the century's most famous fictional figures. The character spawned a vast range of related works, including long-running book series, young-adult novels, Disney and other film franchises, animated and live-action features, television and radio series, video games, comics, stage musicals, theatre productions and extensive merchandise such as action figures and coloring books. Tarzan's cultural impact even extends into science and into critical debate, since the stories have prompted substantial discussion about racial and colonial stereotypes, gender roles and representations of social hierarchies.

Winnie-the-Pooh first appeared at Christmas 1925, inspired by the author's child's stuffed bear and a real Canadian bear named Winnie in London Zoo. From the early 1930s, Stephen Slesinger's commercialization of the character through colorful artwork, licensing and a wide range of products turned Pooh into a multimillion-dollar business in the United States. Later, the bear became a global icon across films, television, games, toys and other merchandise, and was even honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

2.3.2. End of 1920s, Until the 1960s: The Rise of Iconic Characters

Mickey Mouse was created in 1928 by Ub Iwerks and Walt Disney and quickly became the enduring mascot of The Walt Disney Company. Over time he starred in more than 130 films, headlined long-running comic strips and comic books, appeared in television series and video games, and became central to theme parks, merchandise and live character appearances. Beyond entertainment, Mickey served as a cultural symbol of joy, resilience and optimism for children and adults alike, especially during difficult periods like the Great Depression and World War II. Economically, his image has been one of Disney's most valuable assets, helping to generate vast revenues across box office, television, merchandise, theme parks and brand partnerships over nearly a century.

Popeye the Sailor first appeared in 1929 as a newspaper comic-strip character and was soon adapted into popular animated shorts, quickly turning him into a widely recognized cartoon icon. His success fueled intense merchandising, putting his image on everyday products like razor blades, soap and especially cans of spinach, and he became the focus of comic books, TV series, radio shows, feature films, parodies and video games.

From 1930 onward, a dense wave of fictional characters appeared that later grew into vast transmedia franchises, including Betty Boop, King Kong, Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Bugs Bunny, Tom and Jerry, Captain America, Godzilla, The Smurfs and many others. Many originated in comics, animation, films or pulp magazines, while influential novels like *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Little Prince*, *Casino Royale*, *The Hundred and One Dalmatians* and *Paddington Bear* likewise evolved into enduring multi-platform storyworlds. These creations often reflected their historical context, especially World War II: heroes such as Superman, Wonder Woman and Captain America promoted patriotism, while characters like Tom and Jerry or Bugs Bunny offered comic relief and escapism. Their popularity helped fuel the Golden Age of Comic

Books (1938–1956), during which publishers like DC and Marvel solidified the superhero archetype as a figure with extraordinary abilities dedicated to the common good.

Alongside expanding media universes, organized fan culture also took shape. The first World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) was held in 1939.

2.3.3. The 1960s: A Time of Science-Fiction Domination

This subchapter explains how the 1960s marked a turning point for science-fiction transmedia, closely tied to the spread of color television. *Doctor Who* debuted in 1963, following an alien “Doctor” who travels through time and space in the TARDIS, and quickly became an international phenomenon. Around the show grew an expansive transmedia universe known as the “Whoniverse,” encompassing films, stage plays, escape rooms, novels, comics, musicals, audio dramas and podcasts, video games, webcasts, exhibitions, museum installations and extensive merchandise.

Star Trek: The Original Series premiered in 1966. The show follows the USS Enterprise crew as they explore new worlds and seek out new civilizations, and across nearly six decades it has grown into a huge franchise of twelve TV series (dozens of seasons and hundreds of episodes), fourteen films, and an extensive range of novels, comics, games, magazines, attractions and merchandise. *Star Trek*’s deeper legacy lies in legitimizing serious, idea-driven science fiction on screen and heavily influencing later genre series, while also pioneering modern fandom: it was a catalyst for organized conventions, fan fiction, fan videos and unusually close collaboration between creators and audiences, including fan-led campaigns that helped keep the show alive.

The 1960s were a decisive decade for science fiction, both on screen and on the page, laying the groundwork for many of the genre’s most enduring transmedia universes. The decade is described as a golden age for science fiction writers, whose novels became the seeds of later multi-platform franchises.

2.3.4. The Two Major Eras in Cinematography: Before and After *Star Wars*

Star Wars, launched in 1977, is portrayed as a modern mythology that reshaped cinema and became a multi-generational cultural inheritance rather than just a film series. The original film, made on a relatively modest budget helped inaugurate the blockbuster era and shift Hollywood away from 1970s personal, issue-driven cinema toward spectacular, effects-led trilogies and

franchises. Over time, the saga expanded into the Skywalker trilogy-of-trilogies, standalone films, numerous animated and live-action series, and a huge body of novels, comics, games, audio dramas and theme-park attractions, making it one of the most extensive transmedia storyworlds ever built. Culturally, *Star Wars* helped mainstream and globalize science fiction. Its influence extends deeply into fandom: *Star Wars* has been central to the evolution of fan fiction, fan films, fan music, vidding, cosplay and model-building, with fan creativity sometimes rivaling official releases in visibility. The franchise's long-term success illustrates how a transmedia supersystem can be sustained by both industrial strategies and passionate audiences, whose engagement and production help keep the universe alive and evolving across decades.

2.3.5. A Landmark of Japanese Media Expansion. *Pokémon*

Pokémon began as a pair of Game Boy role-playing games created by Satoshi Tajiri. Strong early sales in Japan were boosted by tie-ins like CoroCoro Comic, and the franchise quickly expanded into a trading card game, an anime series launched in 1997, films, toys and a tightly controlled but massive licensing program that put Pokémon on hundreds of everyday products. By the late 1990s, “Pokémania” had taken hold globally: cards were selling faster than printers could produce them, Nintendo's revenues and Game Boy sales surged and the first feature film, *Pokémon: The First Movie* broke box-office records for Japanese animation abroad. After nearly three decades, the franchise functions as a global transmedia ecosystem and shared cultural touchstone, passed from the original child players to their own children while continuing to reinvent itself across new platforms and formats.

2.3.6. Augmented Reality Games (ARGs). The How, the Why and the Aftermath

From the 1970s to the 2000s, rapid technological and social change reshaped everyday life, media production and audience behavior, creating the conditions for new hybrid forms like alternate reality games (ARGs). ARGs developed as narrative experiences that deliberately blur physical and digital spaces, asking players to solve puzzles, follow fragmented clues across media and interact in real time through phones, email, websites and real-world locations. Early proto-examples ranged from book-based treasure hunts like *Masquerade* to conspiracy fictions such as *Ong's Hat*, online tie-ins like *Webrunner* for the *Netrunner* card game, experimental newspaper projects like *Dreadnot*, and web-driven mysteries around bands like Pink Floyd or films

like *The Blair Witch Project*, whose internet campaign became a landmark in viral movie marketing.

By the early 2000s, more fully fledged ARGs appeared: commercial experiments like EA's *Majestic*, *The Beast* (for the film A.I.) or fan-led successors like *Lockjaw* showed how large online communities could co-create and sustain complex narratives. Major brands and media companies adopted ARGs to extend storyworlds and promote products. These experiences typically used real time, real-world sites, collaborative problem solving and the "this is not a game" aesthetic to deepen immersion, while fan communities documented, archived and sometimes expanded them, helping ARGs gain recognition as a distinct though overlapping practice with transmedia storytelling.

2.4. The 21st Century

This subchapter highlights how the early 21st century is an era of intense, continuous change, where digital technologies reshape everyday life faster than society can stabilize around each new medium. The internet becomes a ubiquitous, interactive environment, amplified by broadband, smartphones and social platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, which blur distinctions between authors and audiences and normalize practices such as livestreaming, memes and viral video. At the same time, cloud computing, streaming, AR/VR, AI and inexpensive production tools allow small creators to rival large studios, while crowdfunding and online communities connect artists and audiences directly. Within this context, transmedia in the 21st century mostly builds on existing franchises: films, series, games and online experiences extend pre-established worlds like *Jurassic World*, *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars* or *Game of Thrones* rather than invent wholly new universes. Much of this output is driven by large entertainment corporations that treat most cross-platform content as promotional or ancillary, focused on profit and brand maintenance. Yet transmedia methods are also taken up in more socially oriented ways, supporting activism, diversity, education, civic imagination and cultural engagement, pointing toward uses that go beyond escapist entertainment and open new perspectives on culture and society.

2.4.1. Transcending Artistic Spheres Through Transmedia

Extrasolar (2014–2018) was an experimental indie project that blended alternate reality games with a slow, exploratory casual videogame, casting players as rover operators for a fictional space

agency, presented through a convincingly “real” website, emails, documents and calls. Today *Extrasolar* survives mainly as an archived description of a bold, omni-immersive narrative where fiction and reality were carefully interwoven, widely remembered for its innovative design but discontinued due to financial constraints.

Turnton Town is a large-scale, physical narrative project by the Linz-based collective Time’s Up, which builds an explorable harbor city set in 2047, where ecological collapse forces society to imagine utopian sociopolitical responses instead of pure dystopia. Carefully crafted architecture, objects, documents and scenography construct a coherent storyworld that visitors physically walk through. The project sits at the intersection of speculative design and “physical narrative”. Although grounded in analogue space rather than screen-based media, *Turnton Town* functions much like transmedia storytelling by weaving together multiple media practices into a unified, immersive storyworld that audiences can explore but not author, blurring the line between art installation, narrative environment and experiential futures thinking.

Twenty One Pilots used their 2018 concept album *Trench* to build a fictional universe that extends across music, visuals and online experiences. The record, written in secrecy, tackles themes like doubt, mental health, faith and suicide through the story of Dema, a dystopian city. This world is mapped through symbols, hidden codes, anagrams and interconnected songs, then expanded via cryptic websites, in-character diaries, email clues, real-world murals and billboards, and an interactive Spotify video experience that lets users navigate alternative paths through Dema as a metaphor for individual mental-health journeys.

2.4.2. Latin America in Contemporary Transmedia

Pregoneros de Medellín is a low-budget but ambitious transmedia project about the “singing” street vendors of Medellín, Colombia, whose short, musical sales calls shape the city’s soundscape and reveal their daily struggles, strategies and relationships with customers. Built as a four-part system, it combines an interactive web documentary, a feature documentary, a set of short TV pieces, and a traveling photography exhibition that captures vendors in evocative still images. The project shows how a carefully designed transmedia universe can preserve and globalize a fragile urban tradition, allowing distant audiences to experience the vendors’ songs, stories and environments across multiple media and spaces.

El Cubo: Historias Tridimensionales is a Colombian interactive, transmedia theater project launched in 2021 that mixes stage fiction, audiovisual production and web interactivity to tell interwoven stories about power, abuse and everyday struggles through six main characters whose perspectives intersect in complex ways. It offers 105 short videos that audiences can navigate via three modes—chronological, reflective (with questions about viewers’ beliefs) and labyrinthine, where users jump between characters and plotlines—so each person assembles a different “cube” of meaning and is ultimately invited to position themselves inside the story. The project aims to cultivate empathy, tolerance and a nuanced view of truth by avoiding simple “good vs. bad” binaries, and has been widely recognized with national and international awards.

2.4.3. Asia’s Contemporary Transmedia Practices

70mK (“70 million Koreans”) is an ongoing transmedia video-archive project created at Sungkyunkwan University’s Transmedia Research Institute to collect and exhibit interviews with people across both Koreas on themes of unification, education, environment and women. Initiated in 2011 and steadily expanded through on-site shoots, fixed interview booths, mailed cameras, a custom app and a website, it has generated over 1,600 filmed testimonies that imagine an ideal, unified Korean peninsula while fostering empathy and dialogue. *70mK* functions as a living, participatory transmedia platform for community-building and healing, offering participants and audiences a way to reflect on identity, division and shared everyday life across the two nations.

2.4.4. Romanian Contributions to Contemporary Transmedia

Planeta Petrila began as a documentary by Romanian filmmaker Andrei Dăscălescu about the closing years of Petrila, once Europe’s deepest and oldest coal mine, but grew into a broader cultural phenomenon that revitalized the local community. Through artistic interventions, exhibitions, and community events, Petrila turned into a living artwork and a space of memory. Today, the former mine functions as a museum and creative space, symbolizing how art and activism can preserve history and reshape a community’s future.

The Museum of Abandonment, founded in 2021, is a digital, participatory museum exploring the theme of abandonment, primarily focusing on Romania’s institutionalized children after the 1966 abortion ban that led to mass abandonment. The museum digitally preserves the memories and testimonies of survivors of Romania’s child protection system and seeks to foster public acknowledgment and healing of this collective trauma. Internationally awarded for its cultural and

social impact, the museum stands as a model of transmedia storytelling and social activism, with long-term plans to expand its research on abandonment beyond Romania.

Government of Children (GoC) is a transmedia project created by Ioana Mischie. The project explores children’s visions of the future and how they would shape society if given the power to lead, using multiple interconnected media forms: a 3D documentary film, a virtual reality experience (Tangible Utopias), a web series, and a participatory online platform where children worldwide can share their ideas. Through GoC, Mischie promotes “transmedia futurism” — using storytelling as a tool for civic imagination and societal transformation — proving that multi-platform storytelling can inspire empathy, collaboration, and tangible change across generations and cultures.

CHAPTER 3 – CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS ON CONTEMPORARY TRANSMEDIA PRODUCTION

The chapter traces the evolution, institutionalization, and ongoing challenges of transmedia storytelling as both a creative and academic field. It explains that transmedia gained visibility after 2007, largely due to Henry Jenkins publicizing his theories online. The early 2000s marked its experimental peak, with ARGs, Hollywood franchises, and independent creators actively expanding narratives across media. However, the field lacked formal professional recognition until 2010, when the Producers Guild of America introduced the Transmedia Producer credit. This milestone sparked significant backlash and debate. The following years saw growing confusion, criticism, and fragmentation within both practice and theory, causing transmedia’s prestige in the media industry to decline. Academically, it remains a contested and evolving concept with no stable definition or consensus. Despite its struggles, transmedia still holds cultural and creative significance.

3.1. Institutional Recognition: Transmedia Producer Credit

This subchapter details the historical context and importance of the Producers Guild of America’s (PGA) decision to recognize Transmedia Producers in 2010 — a milestone that formally legitimized transmedia storytelling within the entertainment industry. The credit’s creation was led by Jeff Gomez, who drafted the official credit text and spearheaded the campaign to have the role

recognized. Gomez explained in subsequent interviews that the push for recognition stemmed from years of frustration among practitioners who were contributing significantly to multi-platform projects but received no formal acknowledgment. The PGA's ratification brought legal and professional clarity to the field, defining responsibilities, budgets, and industry standards.

3.2. Industry Echoes: The Aftermaths of PGA's Decision

The PGA's 2010 introduction of the Transmedia Producer credit split the creative community. Supporters welcomed it as long-overdue professional recognition, ensuring clearer roles, fair pay, and industry legitimacy. Critics, however, found the definition too narrow, especially its "three-storyline, three-platform" rule, which they said excluded many creative approaches. Figures like Christy Dena, Brooke Thompson, Brian Clark, and Lance Weiler argued that transmedia was still evolving and shouldn't be rigidly defined. In contrast, Jeff Gomez, who led the initiative, defended it as a necessary step to formalize transmedia within the industry. Despite the backlash, the move ultimately brought standardization, legitimacy, and new opportunities for practitioners, even as debates about creative freedom and industrial control persisted.

3.3. The South by Southwest Debates

After the PGA formally introduced the Transmedia Producer credit, backlash erupted, particularly during the 2011 SXSW Interactive Conference, where many creators criticized the term "transmedia" as overused and meaningless. Several creators dismissed it as jargon lacking clear purpose, while others expressed frustration that transmedia panels offered little substance. Amid this confusion, some creators emphasized that "people, not companies, make transmedia" and sought ways to support each other professionally. This led to the idea of forming the Transmedia Artists Guild.

3.3.1. Transmedia Artists Guild

The guild aimed to address issues like lack of recognition, isolation among practitioners, and absence of industry standards. Planned as a small nonprofit and community network within the U.S., it would provide mentorship, credit guidelines, job resources, and professional advocacy. Though the guild's website is now inactive, it represented an early effort to build solidarity and protect creators within the emerging transmedia storytelling field.

3.4. Practitioners' Discontent: Voices from the Field

This subchapter recounts how, after the Producers Guild of America's definition and the 2011 SXSW debates, the term "transmedia" triggered confusion, backlash, and calls for clarity, while gradually being accepted as a useful but inherently fluid concept. Looking back more than a decade later, practice and scholarship have since helped stabilize the notion—acknowledging that transmedia is not new and will not disappear, that strong storytelling matters more than short-term marketing, and that in a world where individuals build multiple online personae and audiences, everyone does live in a kind of personal "multiverse," which brings new responsibilities along with new narrative power.

3.4.1. Superpositioning

This subchapter introduces Jeff Gomez's concept of "superpositioning," where individuals use multiple digital platforms at once to release "drops" of communication that can ripple outward and sometimes scale into massive waves of impact. In this model, a single, powerful message can reach exponentially large audiences, enabling social movements to mobilize people, and helping companies grow through highly interactive, story-driven engagement, while also allowing ordinary users to rapidly escalate PR crises. In a technologically advanced, convergent media environment with widespread AI and constant connectivity, understanding how we communicate and tell stories across platforms is essential, since almost anything can either already function as transmedia or be expanded into a transmedia universe.

3.5. Assessing the Landscape: The current Status of Transmedia

This part focuses on how *Imagining Transmedia* (MIT Press, 2024) gathers scholars and creators to show that transmedia remains a flexible, evolving practice rather than a fixed, settled concept. Henry Jenkins presents "transmedia" as an adjective and a broad logic that adapts to new technologies, which helps explain why attempts at precise definition keep failing, especially in a fast-changing landscape where trends like NFTs can rise and vanish between writing and publication. Other practitioners, such as Andrea Phillips, now favor labels like "immersive storytelling," but these names matter less than giving projects continuity and long-term strategy, and transmedia has proved it is not a passing fad. Instead, it has grown into a stable field with deep historical roots, a solid theoretical corpus, and applications beyond entertainment, while editors

like Ed Finn suggest that most contemporary stories already use “transmedia logics,” blurring lines between narrative and reality and demanding that people learn to navigate these pervasive story systems critically.

3.5.1. Transmedia, Technology and Culture Nowadays

Although transmedia can take many artistic and media forms, it still relies on a core set of shared characteristics. Maureen McHugh Yeager defines transmedia as narratives composed of multiple, self-contained media pieces that are complete on their own yet clearly belong to the same universe or storyline. She also notes that a single story can be distributed across several platforms, using the *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* campaign as an early, widely recognized example. *The Beast* remains worth discussing because it shows why a project from two decades ago can still be seen as relevant to contemporary debates about transmedia storytelling. *The Beast* became a landmark in interactive storytelling, later recognized with a Peabody Award in 2022 for pioneering large-scale internet-native narrative. This belated recognition shows that transmedia and its adjacent practices are still alive, recalibrating, and seeking more sustainable, creatively driven models beyond earlier, overly commercial approaches.

3.6. After the Hype: The Fall of Transmedia as a Label

Although Henry Jenkins helped popularize ‘transmedia’ in the early 2000s and identified its creative potential, he also warned early on about economic pressures, poor industry collaboration, and power imbalances between corporations and audiences. Over time, these flaws have intensified: large media companies, especially in Hollywood, have often treated transmedia as a vehicle for profit maximization, restricting fan participation through tight control and legal threats, and turning what could be a participatory, co-creative practice into a top-down, consumption-focused system. The corporate takeover has discouraged independent creators and fans, threatening to reduce active co-creators back into passive consumers, and that theorists, practitioners, and audiences now face the urgent task of reclaiming transmedia as a more democratic, collaborative, and open storytelling practice if the field is to survive and flourish.

3.7. Omni-Transmedia. Towards Emerging Transmedia Possibilities

Transmedia’s early ‘small flaws’ have grown into serious problems: corporate control and profit-driven strategies have turned many transmedia worlds into hostile spaces where co-creation

is discouraged and fans are treated more as passive consumers than collaborators. In response, Ioana Mischie proposes “omni-transmedia,” a more ambitious, civic-minded model that links transmedia systems to social change across technologies, arts, sciences, communities, and institutions, guided by principles such as being infinite (continuously adaptable), transdisciplinary (mixing many fields), transgenerational (engaging multiple age groups), transreal (combining digital and physical realities), transspatial (scaling geographically), transtemporal (ongoing over time), and transmeaning (constantly evaluating impact). Although still theoretical and somewhat utopian, omni-transmedia is presented as a flexible toolkit rather than a rigid checklist and as a desirable alternative to corporate domination, suggesting that the future of the field depends on reclaiming open access, collaboration, and long-term, socially oriented storytelling instead of leaving it in the hands of profit-first companies that fragment beloved storyworlds behind paywalls and restrictive platforms.

3.8. Speculative Horizons: Imagining the Future of Transmedia

For transmedia to do more than merely survive, it must confront cultural, technological, and ethical challenges, especially around audience engagement, equity, media overload, ownership, and the blurring of fiction and reality. Creators need to treat audiences as active participants rather than metrics, design accessible and non-exploitative experiences, and balance immersive digital worlds with analogue touchpoints to avoid addiction, isolation, and financial fatigue from paywalls and subscriptions. A central emerging challenge is epistemological: in an era of AI-generated content and deepfakes, transmedia must shift from making fiction feel real to clearly distinguishing fiction from an increasingly “fake” reality, integrating media literacy and source verification into its narratives so stories can be immersive without deceiving. Both creators and audiences share responsibility: creators must prioritize ethical, inclusive, changemaking storytelling instead of profit-first strategies, while audiences must actively build critical media skills to verify information, resist disinformation, and help preserve a shared, trustworthy narrative space in the digital age.

3.8.1. Artificial’s Intelligence Impact on Transmedia

Moreover, transmedia, like other creative fields, is being rapidly reshaped by artificial intelligence, which both destabilizes trust in media and offers powerful new tools for storytelling. On the risk side, AI-generated images, videos, and texts make it increasingly hard even for trained people to distinguish real from fake content, eroding the evidentiary value of media and enabling

large-scale disinformation and manipulation. At the same time, AI can help creators analyze audience emotions and behavior, generate dialogue and story ideas, support adaptive and interactive narratives, and maintain complex storyworld continuity, especially when combined with technologies such as virtual production. Creators must balance these tools with human creativity and confront unresolved legal and ethical questions about authorship, intellectual property, addiction, over-personalized “cultural silos,” and the standardization of stories as AI increasingly trains on AI-generated data. Ultimately, both creators and audiences share responsibility: transmedia artists should use AI as an accelerator of human ideas to build rich, participatory universes, while audiences must cultivate strong media literacy so that, in an emerging post-truth environment, they can critically evaluate synthetic media and help shape the next phase of storytelling rather than being passively shaped by it.

CHAPTER 4 – A PRACTICE-BASED APPROACH TO TRANSMEDIA

The thesis’s final chapter retraces my practical path in transmedia, from first contact with the concept as a master’s student to later work as project leader and educator. It shows how hands-on involvement in creating and coordinating projects like *Mad4*, *Sequentium*, and several student-built “universes” (*Concrete Nests*, *In-Between Worlds*, *Post-Industrial Nostalgia*) revealed both the creative potential and the conceptual and practical challenges of multi-platform storytelling. Teaching transmedia is revealed as a creative act that merges theory and practice, while the move into doctoral research is framed not as a break from practice but as an expansion of perspective, turning lived experience into structured knowledge intended to support future scholars, creators, and educators.

4.1. *Mad4* – A Transmediatic Approach on Different Kinds of ‘Love’

This subchapter recounts my first encounter with ‘transmedia’ during a 2017–2019 interactive multimedia master’s program, taught by Melissa Lee Price, whose industry background and reliance on Henry Jenkins’ ideas framed transmedia in terms of media convergence, spreadable media, and participatory culture. Together with my colleagues, we produced a collaborative project, *MAD4*, a multi-format exploration of “love” (family, culture, life, spiritual, obsessive) using stories, photos, video essays, and interviews, all gathered into a single website that is no longer online.

Looking back, although *MAD4* was creatively rich, it failed to meet key transmedia criteria: the story lived on only one platform, offered limited opportunities for audience co-creation, and its journalistic framing constrained world-building, yet it still became a crucial learning experience and a practical stepping stone toward more mature transmedia practice.

4.2. *Sequentium* – A Narrative Exploration of Loss, Memory and Legacy

After earning a master’s degree in Interactive Multimedia in 2019, I began doctoral studies under coordinator Rodica Otilia Mocan and soon collaborated with researcher Arnau Gifreu Castells, an expert in transmedia storytelling. Together with students from related programs, we developed *Sequentium*, a complex transmedia project exploring death, memory, loss, and legacy through interconnected media experiences. *Sequentium* consisted of three main components:

1. A short documentary featuring six interviewees of different ages reflecting on death and inherited or memorial objects.
2. An interactive online platform that offered two experiences — an interactive documentary exploring Day of the Dead traditions in Romania, Sweden, and Mexico, and a short interactive film where viewers’ choices shaped the narrative.
3. A physical exhibition launched in January 2020 in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, which integrated the other media forms, displayed physical artifacts, and encouraged direct audience interaction with the subjects.

The project sought to deepen cultural understanding of mortality, promote empathy and reflection, and blur boundaries between audience and participants. Despite setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, *Sequentium* was later showcased internationally at the Sehstücke International Student Film Festival in Germany and the Intermedia Festival in Portugal. Our team received positive feedback, though technical aspects of the interactive platforms could have been more refined due to time and experience limitations. Overall, *Sequentium* represented an ambitious and collaborative example of transmedia storytelling’s power to engage audiences emotionally and intellectually across multiple formats.

4.3. *Concrete Nests* – A Transmedia Universe About Life During COVID-19 Pandemic

In 2020, after becoming a full-time associate lecturer at Babeş-Bolyai University, I coordinated *Concrete Nests*, a transmedia project created with 13 students that documents how the pandemic

affected people living in apartment blocks worldwide through self-filmed stories. Using an online open call and detailed guidelines, we gathered over 50 video clips from 17 submissions in 10 countries, focusing on emotions, daily life, and the psychological impact of confinement. The material was turned into a rich transmedia universe: an interactive film set in a virtual block of flats, an interactive world map of contributors, a contextual pandemic timeline, and additional installations and photography exhibitions once limited cultural events became possible again. Exhibited at venues such as Casa TIFF, TIFF, Sehnsüchte in Germany, and Intermedia Festival in Portugal, and being critically acclaimed, *Concrete Nests* was praised for transforming private experiences of isolation into a collective, participatory conversation. By integrating film, interaction, photography, and online engagement, it invited empathy, reflection, and a rethinking of human connection during crisis. As both an artistic and pedagogical experiment, it demonstrated transmedia storytelling's potential as a medium for social awareness, emotional education, and community building.

4.4. In-Between Worlds – An Exploration of Myths, Creatures and Traditions

During the 2022/2023 winter semester, a mixed group of Digital Interactive Arts, Documentary Filmmaking, and Erasmus students collaborated in the Creative Transmedia Project course to build a shared *In-Between Worlds* transmedia universe centered on Romanian mythological creatures, after initially considering a global scope but narrowing the focus due to time. We researched myths with help from museum and anthropology experts and produced multiple interconnected elements: a medium-length documentary based on field trips and interviews in rural Romania, an original social-deduction card game using 12 mythic beings grouped into Love, Blessing, Trick, and Evil, four interactive/immersive installations (including VR and AI-processed visuals), and a community-sourced photography exhibition selected from over 100 submissions via an open call. The most permanent component was a bilingual website (now offline) that hosted the film, documented the installations, organized the 12 illustrated creatures into thematic groups with short explanatory texts and references, and presented the team and project information, turning Romanian mythology into a participatory, educational experience that links folklore with contemporary media, gameplay, and digital storytelling.

4.5. Post-Industrial Nostalgia – Rebuilding a Community Through Memories and Archives

Post-Industrial Nostalgia is a transmedia project (2024–2025) created by Documentary Filmmaking and Digital Interactive Arts master’s students at Babeş-Bolyai University that explores the emotional and social legacy of Romania’s former factories. The concept merges two student ideas: documenting post-industrial sites where nature is reclaiming abandoned factories and examining nostalgia through interviews and memory-laden objects. The team researched more than twenty former factories around Cluj-Napoca and beyond, producing analogue ‘before and after’ photographs, location soundscapes, archival searches, and interviews with former workers from sites such as the major Refractara brick factory, who described the factory as a tight-knit community rather than just a workplace. Although a planned pop-up event inside Refractara to reunite ex-employees was cancelled by a snowstorm, the group repurposed the materials and continued developing interactive installations and an audiovisual experience. The final exhibition in February 2025 included a photography show of current factory remains, an ‘ephemeral archive’ on an old computer containing photos, videos and documents, several object-based interactive installations, and a live musical performance on nostalgia with real-time visuals. Overall, the project uses transmedia storytelling to act as cultural archaeology, turning collective memories of industrial labor into participatory visual and sonic experiences that question how deindustrialization reshapes identity, community, and intangible heritage.

CONCLUSIONS

This doctoral thesis examines transmedia as both theory and practice, arguing that it is not a fleeting buzzword or mere marketing tool but a flexible, historically rooted way of extending stories across media, time and space. It first clarifies the concept by synthesizing many overlapping definitions and shows that, rather than a rigid formula, transmedia is best understood as a fluid methodology that combines multiple platforms, disciplines, perspectives and long-term world-building in both fiction and non-fiction contexts. The second part uses ‘transmedia archaeology’ to trace proto-transmedia practices from myth and serialized literature to franchises like *Star Wars* and *Pokémon*, concluding that today’s digital forms mainly differ in scale, speed and coordination,

while serving the same deep human need to expand valued narratives. The third part analyzes how the term briefly gained institutional status in the film and television industry and then declined as an official label due to conceptual confusion, economic pressures and practical difficulties, even as its underlying practices were normalized and rebranded as ‘immersive storytelling’, ‘franchise storyworlds’ and similar notions. The final part presents practice-based projects (such as *Sequentium*, *Concrete Nests*, *In-Between Worlds* and *Post-Industrial Nostalgia*) developed with students, showing how educational environments can function as laboratories for collaborative, participatory transmedia that foster empathy, critical thinking and media literacy while also exposing challenges of coherence, sustainability and resources. Overall, the thesis argues that transmedia’s enduring value lies in its capacity to support cross-disciplinary collaboration and engaged, multi-platform storytelling at a moment when synthetic media and a “post-truth” environment are eroding trust in narratives, and it calls for future research to develop new conceptual and ethical tools for maintaining credibility, authorship and responsible storytelling when human and AI creators share the same narrative space.

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