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Multimodality, identity, and time

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Introduction

In this chapter we will explore first the most basic issues of how media produce meaning effects across multiple timescales, and how to analyze these processes. We will consider the case of computer and video games, the most advanced forms of consumer multimedia, which are typically experienced over times as long as fifty or more hours in-game, and over periods of weeks or months. We will then consider what happens when games, films, books, and other media and merchandise are linked in *transmedia* franchises, where meaning effects are integrated by consumers across multiple media, on even longer timescales. Finally, I will identify some conceptual tools for analyzing the ways in which identity development depends on both media and peer communities organized around media, which shape our selection and experience of them, over shorter to longer timescales.

In reviewing these perspectives, I will argue that we need to extend the usual repertory of analytical tools for critical multimedia analysis from those which look at single works to those which look across transmedia clusters, and from those which focus on the formal features of the media themselves, to ones which place the experience of media within a political economy and a cultural ecology of identities, markets, and values. Throughout, we will consider how an experiential, and more generally a phenomenological, approach to multimodal analysis is a necessary (and too often neglected) complement to our much better-developed semiotic approaches.

Multimodality and time

Our semiotic traditions for the analysis of multimedia (by which I mean here multimodal media) are primarily formal. We seek to identify the formal features presented by a work that are salient for the reader/viewer/listener/user (hereafter user) in the construal of a more specific and definite meaning (which may be called the interpretation or the meaning-text) from a less definite 'meaning potential', i.e. the range of possible meanings offered by those formal features (collectively, the object-text). We then typically look for co-determinants of the meaning-text: co-texts, intertexts, situation-dependent typical meanings and patterns (e.g. genres, registers, deictic

referents), and culturally typical meaning patterns of all sorts (indexical meanings, cultural narratives, stylistic trends, etc.). Attention to intertexts and culture takes us then to biographical histories of users (what intertexts we have encountered, what interpretive dispositions we have formed) and to the cultural norms and conventions for the production, interpretation, and institutional use of works of a given type, as well as the cultural classification of recognized types.

In such a model, meaning-making is essentially selective contextualization (Lemke, 1990b, 1995). Which contexts, intertexts, and cultural patterns co-determine the construal of meaning and when (i.e. under what circumstances or conditions)? In the last 20 years or so we have taken our models for the analysis of linguistic text (Halliday, 1994; Martin, 1992), abstracted the relevant semiotic principles (Lemke, 1998b), and applied them to other media such as images, architecture, and music (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; O'Toole, 1994; Van Leeuwen, 1999). In the course of doing so, we have recognized that all texts or works, because they are material artifacts, are always already multimodal (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). You cannot make a material sign-vehicle that can only be construed according to one semiotic system. Writing is as much a visual semiotic as a linguistic one; speech encodes non-linguistic (and so-called paralinguistic) information about bodies, social origins, and emotional states as well as linguistically coded meanings. Face-to-face communication is a tightly coupled mix of gesture, posture, movement, and speech. A painting that contains no words nevertheless gets interpreted in part through our categories of verbal semantics, and so do gestures and postures, insofar as they are salient and significant for us.

Phenomenologically, however, in relation to our actual experience with media, we ought to question whether the division of meaning-making into language, gesture, drawing, action, etc. is not mostly artificial, an artifact of the idealizations we make in analyzing the semiotic potential of different aspects or moments of what are in fact more nearly seamless and unitary phenomena. Semiotically, we can attempt to recoup what is lost with such (analytically useful) separations by looking at how these different aspects of meaning-making interact or integrate with one another. When we analyze a political cartoon, we may only laugh, only get the point, when we see both the image and the caption. It is their joint meaning, our joint construal of meaning according to two semiotic codes (one mostly visual, one mostly linguistic) which produces the actual meaning-as-experienced.

I review this tradition, to which I have myself contributed and which I use regularly, in order to move on from it here somewhat. A phenomenological perspective, which I believe necessarily complements a semiotic one, reminds us of the importance of time, pacing, feeling, affect, and embodiment, all of which are matters that can be construed semiotically, but which seem to elude being completely accounted for in formal, categorial terms. Phenomenology asks us to set aside categorizations which have become naturalized for us through history and culture and attempt to recoup the experiential feelings and nominally subjective (though not necessarily merely individual) aspects of what it means to act and be in time and with the world. Variations on this philosophical project have been described by Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, and more recently in relation to media analysis by Deleuze (1983, 1989). It is perhaps best known in discourse theory through the work of the Conversation Analysis (CA) school (e.g. Schegloff, 2006), which has a multimodal extension in Goodwin (2002).

I have proposed elsewhere that semiotics itself is somewhat deficient (at least as we use it today, though perhaps not in Peirce's original conception, which is more general than Saussure's *semiologie*) insofar as we analyze meaning as dependent on *valeur*, on values assigned to construing a sign as being of one type *vs.* another type (e.g. singular *vs.* plural, present *vs.* past, /a/ *vs.* /o/, first person *vs.* second person, declarative *vs.* interrogative, etc.). There *are* other kinds of meaning: the continuous variation in spatial distribution that gives rise to irregular, verbally

mostly indescribable shapes (irregular curves, cloud-shapes); the mathematics of the real (i.e. infinite decimal) numbers; indeed all meanings-by-degree as opposed to meanings-by-kind. Natural science, and much early mathematics arose in the effort to create a semiotics of continuous variation. Both signifiers and signifieds may be either categorial (discrete, digital) or metric (continuous, analogue).

This is an important perspective for the analysis of multimodality. Every verbal color-term is either one or another discrete element in a finite system, but every actual color belongs to a continuum (several continua in fact) of hue, saturation, and intensity (at least). Color terms can mimic with iterations (e.g. greenish blue-green) what is basically not a discrete system of meaningful differences at all: between any two colors, there are an infinity of variations, each differing by as little as one wishes from the next. Between any two shapes, likewise. So also for degrees of light and dark, or for textures. So what happens when discrete linguistic text meets continuous visual imagery? Quite a bit, which I will not elaborate on here, but see Lemke (1998b, 2002a).

I raise these phenomenological issues as a way into some other dimensions of multimodality, beyond even the metric meanings-by-degree of the visual semiotic system. Other phenomenological qualia of multimedia as experienced works – time and pacing, space and place, affect and emotion, felt movement and participatory action – are also at least potentially, and often actually, metrically meaningful-by-degree, and so never reducible to their nearest verbal descriptions, nor consequently analyzable simply by the techniques we have developed for categorial semiotic analysis.

Let me focus this project more exactly by raising some questions about time and multimodal media. Does it matter to the experience of a text in what order we read it? Our categorial model here can give us an answer: yes, because there will be different experienced syntagms. But does it also matter how fast or how slow we read it? Does it matter how many hours or days we spend over the course of reading it, putting it aside and picking it up again? Does it matter how many times we read it? Does it matter to what the text means to us that we had to decipher it, or translate it, or struggle to understand it, and that this took a very long time? Or alternatively that we breezed through it with scarcely any perceived effort at understanding it? Similar issues are raised by Roland Barthes concerning 'readerly' *vs*. 'writerly' texts, and more generally in his phenomenological projects regarding *jouissance* and the 'grain of the voice' (Barthes, 1977a).

Consider the difference between reading a short text (a page or two) *vs*. a very long one (thousands of pages). Consider the difference between savoring a lyric poem one word or phrase at a time, read over and over again, *vs*. a quick first read-through. Both total time and pacing matter. Think about the political cartoon again. How often do we return to it? How long do we linger over it? Do we linger more over its caption text or over its drawn image? How does the relative pacing and duration of our encounter(s) with each of these components matter to our experience of the text and its ultimate meaning for us?

Take the case of the sound-film, where the film is projected outside our control and we encounter the images and the sounds in synchronization. Our attention may shift from one channel to the other, and repeated viewings may allow us to accumulate other attentional trajectories of viewing/hearing this film, but all such experiences are different from having the film on a VCR or DVD player and being able to play and replay segments, to speed up and slow down while viewing, to rewind and fast-forward. We gain the capacity to play with time. These technologies form a different medium with different affordances, and temporality shifts from a feature mainly in the control of the producers of the work to one jointly in their control and in ours. Our experience and the meanings we make over time with a work

depend critically on the temporal dimensions of our experience of the work (cf. Deleuze, 1989).

Natural science, which has much more practice with such issues, has long ago found that even while time is essentially a continuum, most material processes, including our human physiological processes, effectively segment it into ranges known by the mathematical phrase 'orders of magnitude'. Each multiple of factors of ten and experiences and processes with characteristic times (durations, cycles of repetition, typical periods of constancy punctuated by radical change) of milliseconds *vs*. seconds *vs*. hours *vs*. weeks, etc. operate somewhat independently of one another (because energy or information does not get efficiently transmitted between processes that run relatively very fast compared to those that run relatively much more slowly). This leads to the useful notion of *timescales*. A process or an experience that takes minutes is very different from one that takes hours, or from one that takes weeks, or years, etc. This concept of relatively independent timescales in turn problematizes the ways in which humans do in fact integrate or cumulate meaning, experience, or identity across vastly different timescales (Lemke, 2000).

Doing so is in some sense not-natural; that is, it is far more characteristic of cultural processes to have things we do now in a relatively short period of time (move a stone) depend on much longer processes that started far in the past (building a cathedral). Our characteristic way of mediating across timescales is with semiotic artifacts (the architectural drawings and building plans for the cathedral). *In some very basic sense the use or function of every media work is not just to link a producer and a user, but to link across the timescales of production, circulation, and use.* It matters to the meanings made and the experiences had with media works what these timescales are and how they are connected or integrated (or not).

Meanings are made across time, across space, in and through matter. Experience is experience in and through time, in place and across space, in a body and in interaction with other bodies. Media-use links us into networks (Latour, 1987, 1999) that reach across processes on different timescales and normally also across places and between bodies.

Let me end this introductory discussion by considering some of the typical timescales of media use. (We might extend this also for media production and circulation). It takes about one-half to one hour to watch an average television program, two hours to watch a commercial film, significantly longer (at least several hours) to read a typical novel. Reading the novel is usually spread out over days, maybe weeks. Not so with viewing the program or the film (even with a DVD). A typical computer game takes 20–50 hours to play through, much longer than most novels (except perhaps those serialized among many volumes). Online role-playing games have an indefinite duration for experience, hundreds or thousands of hours spread over months or years. A television series can extend itself across programs, viewed weekly, for years. Novels can be reread over a lifetime, and so now can television programs and films be viewed again over an indefinite period of time. Games can be replayed, which normally does not produce the same object-text, much less the same experience. Gameplay in online persistent worlds can be recorded and replayed *ad libitum*.

I think these examples are sufficient to raise many question about what constitutes a 'single' multimedia work, and about how to define the timescales of use (there are several, even for a 'single work'). The new medium of computer gameplay, in which players create narratives in dialogue with both a computer program and often also with other players, raises further questions about just what our unit of analysis should be (Raessens and Goldstein, 2005). I would propose that it is the experiential, meaning-construing trajectory of the user (player) that matters to phenomenological meaning, well beyond the basic semiotic meaning potentials of the object-text (or 'work') produced by the game program's authors or developers.

Generalizing from this most obvious case, I believe this experiential perspective is a reasonable one for all media.

Traversals and timescales

The notion of a user-trajectory through a work comes from the theory of hypertext, in which there are alternate possible reading pathways through the 'pages' (lexias) produced by an author (Landow, 1997). It has the advantage, in relation to all media, that it reminds us that the meaning made in experiencing a work is extended in time and is specific to the user, and not to the work alone. In a hypertext, users jump via links from one page to another. In viewing a film, our attention may wander or highlight as salient for us some, but never all, of the possible perceptions of each moment. And with DVD, we can move at will around in the work, 'non-sequentially'. Indeed this is quite common when we are using the work for the *n*-th time. Likewise with a book, and for non-narrative works, we may do this even on first use.

There is perhaps a small distinction worth noting here between reading a book in its normal serial order, constructing an experience trajectory that may not notice everything we might construe from the same object-text on future readings *vs*. the case of viewing a sound-film, where often so much is happening so quickly that it is not really possible, much less normal, to attend to all the signs being presented. That is not the case with books. We can always read every word easily if we wish (unless we have the very different experience of feeling rushed by outside pressures as we read), but we cannot do so with rich, dynamic media like sound-film or complex, fast-paced computer games.

We may refer to a story in a print text as 'fast paced' relative to texts that present new events less quickly in terms of the usual rate of reading, in time, or by the count of the number of words presented before they tell of a new event or changing scene, but this is again quite different from the sense of pacing, of feeling rushed or under the pressure of time in a game, or even in a film, where the flow of events is not under our control in real time, as it is with a printed text. (For comparison, imagine a scrolling text which speeds up to an uncomfortable rate or slows down.)

In rich media we are deploying our attention as potentially salient information passes into and out of our sphere of attention, or in the trajectory metaphor, as we pass through those semiotic spaces where such information (the signs of a presented- or object-text) are available to us. We may carve out our trajectory at our own pace, or we may feel the need to keep pace with a dynamic medium.

But we are not always dealing with what is unproblematically a single medium. Simultaneous or co-presented media (image and caption in the political cartoon; film and accompanying soundtrack; sound-film with synchronized subtitle captioning) tend to count as single multimodal genres. When the media are experienced sequentially, however, say viewing a painting and then reading the artist's account of it when we pass into the next gallery, they tend to count as separate 'texts'. We usually invoke some criteria of the intentionality of the producers regarding whether different media are 'meant' to be encountered together (serially) or not, but this is contrary to the approach we are taking here, where it is the user's experienced trajectory, not the producer's product, that provides the grounds for what is to be analyzed. (The latter enters as a condition and enabler of the former.)

In fact it is now increasingly the case that mutually relevant multimodal intertexts are experienced in a variety of different sequences by different users, across a variety of quite different media, in ways that cannot be controlled by producers, who may in fact be separate individuals

or groups for the different intertextual works, and in only occasional communication with one another. There is no putative guiding intelligence across all the works aiming to coordinate them in the same way we might imagine for a composite work (say a painting and an artist's statement, or a multimedia work that presents alternately text and video). This now common new situation is the case for 'transmedia franchises' (Jenkins, 2006).

Transmedia franchises may be seen as an evolution from classic cases of semiotic re-mediation, where a work in one medium is 'adapted' into another: books to films, plays to films, films to books, books to graphic novels, books or films to games. But the transmedia franchise is much more than this. It is a complex of books, and films, and websites, and games, and a wide variety of merchandise (from clothing to toys to candy), all of which elaborate in some way on a fictional world and its characters, ethos, and mythos. The transmedia franchises for *Harry Potter* and the *Lord of the Rings* evolved from rather traditional novels; *Star Wars* from the films; *Star Trek* from a television series; Pokemon, *Yu-gi-Oh!,* and *Naruto* from manga to anime to all the rest. These franchises comprise several to dozens or even hundreds of books, often illustrated; multiple films, videos, DVDs; multiple games; and the websites which advertise and comment on them, and thousands of items of merchandise of every possible sort.

From the *Harry Potter* franchise you can read the books, see the movies, buy books about the movies, visit websites about the books, play several computer/video games, and even buy Harry's magic wand or eat the candy featured in the books and films. Who is Harry Potter for a given user? How is the sense of who he is, of who we may be identifying with, formed from the cover art and illustrations of the books (different across many international editions and translations), the descriptive passages of the texts, the impersonation by an actor in the films, the opinions about Harry voiced on the websites, the Harry we see and the Harry we become or enact in the games, or the Harry who carries the wand, eats the candy, etc.?

Our encounter with these media is not simply a trajectory through a single coherent work. It is a *traversal* across the boundaries between works, media, genres, sites, institutional contexts, activities, etc. (Lemke, 2005). And along such a traversal we are construing and cumulating across timescales *transmedia meaning effects* which do not occur within single works, or between intertexts in the same medium, or indeed within the scope of any theory of meaning-making or multimodal analysis that exists today.

Transmedia meaning effects may be based around our sense of and potential identification with a character, but also around a sense of place (Hogwarts Castle), a sense of action (wielding a magic wand), and a sense of bodily experience (playing the aerial soccer, Quidditch, of Harry's world). The textual descriptions of Quidditch combine with the computer-game immersive, interactive experience of playing Quidditch, and with the sensory experience of watching a wide-screen movie shot or animation to interpret and express this experience in the films.

Games and chronotopes

I will return to transmedia franchises and meaning effects, but I want to elaborate a bit more on the phenomenological analysis of computer games as examples of multimodal systems.

I am not calling them 'works' now for the reasons already described. Video or computer games today (specialist researchers use the term *digital games*) are a new and important medium (Raessens and Goldstein, 2005). They represent without doubt the frontier of multimedia, far in advance of film technologically, semiotically, and phenomenologically, however much they may still lag artistically. In this medium, typically a player controls a representation of him/herself on a screen, showing a visually realistic three-dimensional scene, and may act through this

'avatar' to perform almost anything that might be done in such a scene in the real world, and a great many things that could not (or not safely). In many cases one scene is seamlessly joined to the next, allowing the player to move from room to room indoors, and from hill to valley outdoors. You can run, jump, duck, fly, and teleport. You can open doors and chests, drive cars, ride horses, talk to other players in real time or to simulations of animated characters. You are normally given tasks to do or goals to achieve, but you often do not need to do them and can make your own way in this artificial world.

Of course things will befall you, triggered by where you are and what you have done in the past (and also by who you are as a character type in the game). Every action you take evokes a response from the computer program, and often also from other players in the game, and these responses are displayed as events in the realistic 3D world. In the course of gameplay, you will read printed texts, view and interpret static images of a wide variety of genres, experience in many cases video scenes that have been pre-rendered and are triggered by some pattern of action, and hear music and sound-effects. You can destroy virtual objects in the gameworld and watch them disintegrate quasi-realistically. You can deploy the laws of normal physics, or alternative physics, to roll objects down hills, set off chain reactions of explosions, or use one object to move another in ways unforeseen by the program designers.

You live in these gameworlds in something very much like real phenomenological time. In part you control the pace of events, and in part external events force you to keep pace with them. Games of different genres have different 'chronotopes' in the sense of Bakhtin (1981). There are typical temporal rhythms of action and movement from place to place. In the popular role-playing game (RPG) genre, you and your party of friends and allies build up your resources and strength at a relatively slow pace and moving over long distances, then encounter a powerful adversary in a very fast-paced but localized engagement, then hang around that place to recover any valuables, and then move on to the first part of the cycle again. There are different chronotopes for real-time strategy games (RTSs), or first-person shooter games (FPSs). All involve alternations of slower and faster-paced action, coordinated with movements between specific types of places.

A player's traversal here crosses boundaries of media and genres in the sense of internal semiotic representations in the game (texts, images, videos, mini-games) and boundaries between places or sites, though it is more like a trajectory through a single work than like the true traversal across works, media, and institutional contexts and activities for transmedia.

Interactive, immersive gameplay is a strongly embodied experience. Reading a book, we might squirm or feel anxiety; viewing a film, we might feel fear or cry or scream; playing a state-of-the-art digital game, however, you not only do all these things, but you have active experiences of exerting effort, racing against the clock, taking leisurely strolls, devising and executing short-term and long-term plans, and much more. It seems that it is easier to fool the human brain than we once thought, if you combine action that produces results with multimedia simulation of experiencing those results.

A phenomenological perspective on reading or film-viewing (or music-listening) has always been relevant to understanding the experience of meaning-making in these media, but digital games foreground and amplify its importance because the presented texts in digital games (i.e. what is in your eye and in your ear at each next moment) depend critically on user actions, which in turn depend critically on user feelings, on the experienced response to the last moment of presented stimuli, far more than in the case of traditional reading or viewing or listening. If I feel pressured by time and pacing, if I feel fear or apprehension, I will act differently, the game program will respond differently, and my trajectory of experience will be different along with the meanings and feelings I construe/experience. Multimodality itself,

the combination of the semiotics of language, image, video/animation, sound effects, music, and action, makes this new medium feel immersive. When the medium is not just interactive, but cumulatively responsive to user actions, not just in one moment, but over longer timescales as well, the sense of immersion is greatly enhanced, and with it the need for phenomenological modes of analysis for gameplay.

Transmedia franchises: media, identification, and peer networks

In seeking to understand how to analyze transmedia meaning effects in terms of the phenomenological experience of user traversals, we need to identify some of the principles of engagement with the media of the franchise complex that can ground cumulation and integration of meanings and feelings across media and timescales. I have already mentioned one key principle: identification. Why do users desire to engage with more and more media in the *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, or *Naruto* franchise? Why read your tenth or fifteenth *Star Wars* spin-off novel, often of mediocre quality? Why buy Harry Potter's wand in replica, or Darth Maul's light sabre? Why wait eagerly for the twenty-fourth manga installment of *Naruto* (the story of a Japanese boy-ninja possessed by a fox-demon spirit)? The answer in large part is because of identification: users identify with a character, or more generally with the ethos, the spirit, the mythos, the 'feel' of an entire franchise world.

Identification is a key aspect of what we might call second-wave identity theory. The earlier theories began from prior psychological theories of personality and ego-identity and rebelled against the notion of a unitary, integrated coherent identity. Perhaps that is a goal if your ego-identity is radically fragmented in ways that are upsetting to your life, but for most of us, fragmentation is functional. We are different selves in different roles and relationships and settings. We produce a conventionalized 'core' identity insofar as we are taught to do so or expected to do so, but in reality we don't pay much attention to the contradictions between our different selves. We ignore them, thereby gaining the kind of social and psychological flexibility needed to survive in a complex and contradictory world. The second-wave of identity theory, influenced more by critical feminism and queer theory than by post-modernism as such, rejected the reification of 'an identity' or 'identities' altogether, in favor of a more processual notion of 'performing identities' in the sense of the actions we take to enact or perform our various public and private selves (Butler, 1990). In this model there is far more agency for us to strategically blend and cobble together the identity of the moment, balancing bricolage with habitus (Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema, 2007).

But how do we acquire our sense of how to perform the useful identity of the moment? How do we assemble our toolkit of identity-performing practices? What are the elements of these practices and where do they come from? How is it that we each have unique repertoires of such practices and yet collectively share in common systems of them? The answer to this is *identification*: at many points in our lives we adopt identities, or the elements of performing them, from the common culture. We identify with real persons, of course, but also with fictional and idealized identities. More than this, we specifically identify with the elements or building blocks of identities: what foods we like, what clothes we wear, how we wear our hair, how we walk and talk, how we want our bodies to look and feel, what objects we want to be surrounded by, etc. We often identify today, especially in our earlier years, with elements from popular culture and peer culture. We identify with a particular brand of shoes, a particular fictional character or world, a particular opinion about adults or school, a particular music group or kind of music. In various settings, when it suits us, we mobilize these identifications to perform the identities we wish to project and have recognized or ratified by others.

That much is identification regarded sociologically or functionally. Semiotically, identification positions us among sets of somewhat mutually exclusive choices. Indexically, each identification marks us by the conventions of a community as more masculine or feminine, more cool or geeky, more straight or queer, more conforming or transgressive, more middle or more working class, more raver or more goth. In fact, a prime dimension of power in society today is the power to assign hierarchical statuses to various identifications: super-premium vodka brands *vs*. cheap beer, Armani *vs*. Marks and Spencer or H&M, opera *vs*. rap music, etc., not just for the sake of profit in the division of the market, but for the sake of privilege in the division of society.

But what is identification phenomenologically? The classic psychoanalytic theories define identification in terms of desire, either a desire that binds us to the desired object, or a reversal of desire that binds us to its opposite. We want the objects we identify with, we want to be them, to be them so completely as never to be separated from them because so long as we exist, they remain ours. We feel good when we are identifying with and participating in the franchise world: watching the movie, playing the game, acting out the character, speaking the discourse, making the moves. We feel better insofar as we have more elements of the repertoire, and insofar as we are more successful in mobilizing them in identify performances that are ratified by peers and others. Sociologically, again, this is cultural capital that is mobilized to increase social capital. Phenomenologically, it is the feeling we get when we are our chosen self, when we feel the power – especially important perhaps when we are young and not confident of our power – to identify with what we wish to identify with, and to perform identities we wish to perform.

Such identities, or clusters of identifications, grow and develop. In the work of James Gee, developing out of new approaches to defining multimedia literacy and its interaction with identity, we find both a useful discussion of the various kinds of identity we may perform or have ascribed to us by others (Gee, 2001) and detailed first-person accounts of how performance identities can develop and feel when playing a video game (Gee, 2007).

Many of the clearest examples of identification in multimedia and particularly in gameplay come from commercially well-developed franchises for younger users. But equally we might consider franchises with an older target demographic, like *World of Warcraft* or *America's Army*. The latter is a franchise started by the US Army as a recruiting tool, a game spin-off from its military combat training simulations. It offers the opportunity to identify as a good soldier, to identify with the US combat doctrine (principles of combat warfare), to identify with the United States as a dominant world-power in relation to swarthy and keffiya'd peoples everywhere. Many millions of young men have participated in this opportunity for identification, and no doubt some have continued their traversals among high-tech weaponry and idealized camaraderie and self-sacrifice by enlisting to fight in the US army. Harry Potter's wand or Luke Skywalker's light sabre are available in replica online, but the genuine combat weaponry realistically simulated in *America's Army* and other games of this class can most readily be obtained by enlisting.

In these cases, as for *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, or *Naruto*, users' interpretations and identifications, and indeed, I believe, a good part of their phenomenological experience along their traversals through the franchise, are mediated by something more than just the designs of the franchise producers. In the work of Constance Steinkuehler, as in that of Jenkins and many others, we see that they are also mediated by participation in fan/user communities: online peer social networks that provide additional cultural and social capital to fuel users' identifications (Jenkins, 2006; Raessens and Goldstein, 2005; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006). For every franchise there are fan communities: websites, discussion forums, and large databases of useful and merely copious information about the books, games, films, and merchandise. Not only do these fan-produced

and fan-maintained online communities ferret out and disseminate information, and sponsor discussions, they also lobby the producers for the desires of the community, and they produce collateral media in the world of the franchise mythos.

This last function is of great importance, I believe. User-fans, who range from novices to experts on the franchise world, write 'fan faction', produce fan-made videos, create fan-made art. Some of this is entirely original except for the identities of the characters and other elements of the fictional world, and some of it is montage of elements copied directly from the original media (e.g. photo-montage from film posters online, video-montage of shots from digital versions of the films). User communities act as if (and in my opinion represent valid evidence that) many commercial fictional worlds have crossed over from the domain of proprietary ownership into the domain of folk culture. Legally, the franchise owners or claimants sometimes tolerate these activities and sometimes try to control or stop them (always unsuccessfully). There are more than a quarter-million fan-authored short stories and novels set in the *Harry Potter* mythos available online. There are at least dozens if not hundreds of *Star Wars* fan-produced videos, one a fully acted 45-minute additional episode to the canonical film sequence, complete with special effects.

When users encounter transmedia franchises today, the fan-community websites are as natural and integral a part of the traversal route as the officially sanctioned franchise websites and media. The fan-produced media are becoming additions to the transmedia complex that go beyond and in general now outnumber the franchised media as such. To the extent that users encounter interpretations and expressions in this extended transmedia complex (franchise media plus fan-made media), the cumulative meanings, feelings, and sense of characters, settings, events, etc. cannot help but be influenced by the fan-made media. Some fan-media tries to remain as consistent as possible with the authorized media of the franchise, but inevitably it extends events, enlists characters in new situations and relationships, etc. Some fan-media deliberately or incidentally violates factual or conventional aspects of the official franchise. Best-known are the so-called 'slash' fan-fiction stories and videos in which romantic relationships are constructed between franchise characters A and B (denoted A/B). These are often between two male characters, and are written by female fans. This is a very common genre across almost all popular culture media franchises (television, movies, games, etc.). It shows in a particularly strong way how fan-made media can potentially alter identifications with elements of franchise media.

Even apart from slash fiction of this kind, another popular genre is simply to set a video montage to unrelated popular music, synchronizing image content and lyrics, as well as the timing of musical rhythms/phrases and visual cuts (as long ago proposed and practiced by Eisenstein and Prokofiev, following the lead of Walt Disney). These 'music videos' can also readily recontextualize interpretations and identifications with the primary franchise content through the powerful effects, sometimes humorous, sometimes satirical, sometimes poignant, of popular music, which already has indexical and emotional meanings for many in the user community. This is another excellent example of how multimodal analysis needs to take into account affectivity and the experiential qualities of multiple modalities, here co-presented.

Summary

Semiotic and phenomenological analyses are key complementary approaches to the study of multimedia as experienced in real time. They are, however, often thought to be insufficiently critical in the strong sense of failing to make connections to macro-social models of political economy. Semiotic models can fail to recognize that key contexts for media analysis include those of their production, often for profit or to benefit an interest or ideology, and circulation (e.g. limited by

cost or directed by marketing to particular users). It is, however, possible to develop a political economy of transmedia signs (Lemke, 2008) and this is an important task for the future.

It has long been a commonplace of critical media analysis (Williamson, 1978) that advertising media sell not just products and services but lifestyles and ideologies. Today we can say that they sell identities: identities which imply dispositions to buy some kinds of products and services rather than others. Global producers market identities. So when we analyze transmedia franchises, we need to be aware not just of the identities they are selling and the dispositions they appeal to, but also of the larger identity markets to which these belong. Who is this game, movie, book *not* directed to? *Why* do some social groups identify with this franchise, while others may detest it?

Media mediate not just among us as we play with our identities, but also between us and the interests of large-scale producers. Into this traditional balance now come more and more the effects of peer social networks that mediate our engagements with media. Research on multimedia in the future needs to focus attention and theory-development on rich instances of consumer re-mediation of identity markets and to attend to the longer-term inseparability of meaning relations and power relations.

Further reading

From among the key works I have already cited, I would recommend that the interested reader first consult the discussion of identity in Gee (2001) and the accounts of multimodality as a dynamic and experiential phenomenon in computer games in Gee (2007) and Raessens and Goldstein (2005). For an overview of multimodal meaning making along traversals, see Lemke (2002b); and for a compendium of recent research on multimodality, including discussions of the wider social and political dimensions, Baldry and Montagna (2008).