

Intermedial Communication in Interactive Works: Dialogue between the Media in the game Fantasy Final VII

Comunicação Intermediária em Obras Interativas: Diálogos entre as Mídias no Jogo Final Fantasy VII

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ABSTRACT

Intermediality can be defined as the phenomenon in which a work of art appropriates the linguistic resources of two or more media, resulting in something that is potentially new and initially difficult to classify. The understanding of this exchange can be useful to authors who seek to overcome the traditional limits of a particular language, art form or medium. This paper sought to investigate the bibliography on this subject to primarily understand how games present themselves as a complex form of media and then draw parallels that can initiate a bridge between the intermediality theory and the study of contemporary interactive media. For this purpose, the electronic game Final Fantasy VII (1997) and its spin-offs were analyzed and from them, examples of how intermediality is applied to the franchise. Through this brief analysis, it becomes clear how videogames have the ability to absorb other media, referencing, transposing and combining them to

generate a vast framework of linguistic resources that the game developer can use to design new experiences.

Keywords: intermedia, electronic games, Final Fantasy, interactive, medium.

RESUMO

A intermedialidade pode ser definida como o fenômeno no qual uma obra se apropria dos recursos linguísticos de duas ou mais mídias, tendo por resultado algo potencialmente novo e inicialmente, difícil de classificar. A compreensão dessa troca midiática pode ser útil aos autores que buscam ultrapassar os limites tradicionais de uma determinada linguagem, forma de arte ou meio de comunicação. O artigo buscou o aprofundamento bibliográfico no tema para primeiro compreender como os jogos se apresentam enquanto mídia e em seguida, elaborar paralelos que possam iniciar uma ponte entre a teoria da intermedialidade ao estudo das mídias interativas contemporâneas. Para tal fim, o jogo eletrônico Final Fantasy VII (1997) e seus spin-offs foram analisados e deles foram extraídos exemplos de como a intermedialidade se aplica à franquia e, consequentemente, a diversos outros jogos. Através dessa breve análise fica clara a capacidade dos videogames de absorverem as outras mídias, referenciando, transpondo e as combinando-as para gerar um vasto arcabouço de recursos linguísticos que o desenvolvedor de jogos pode utilizar para projetar experiências.

Palavras-chave: intermídia, jogos eletrônicos, Final Fantasy, interatividade, mídia.

1 INTRODUCTION

Through technological evolution, cheapening of electronic components and changes in social relations and consumer behavior, new media have found fertile ground to develop. However, it can be noted that they tend to be built from the recombination of signs and language from other media, a tendency detected by Clüver (2000) as a movement that has appeared in the 19th century that sought to create and understand the intersections between the arts as exemplified in Fig. 1.

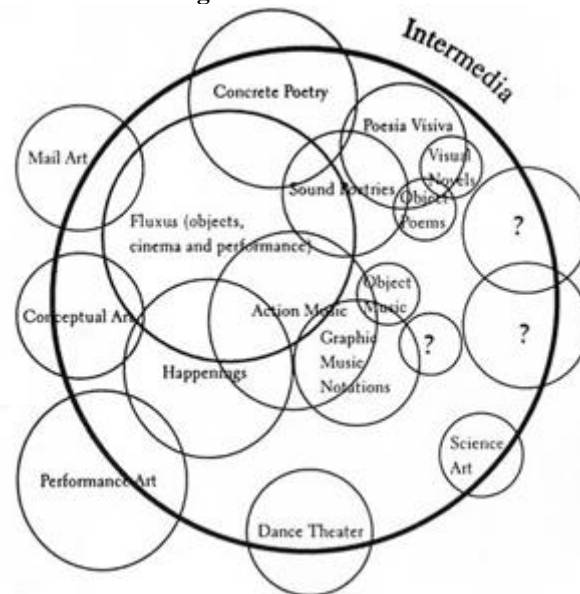
This paper proposes an interpretation of this intermedial process among the electronic games, a favorable media for understanding the linguistic exchange among the various symbolic sets that are used for storytelling and to provide various immersive experiences.

For this research, the first challenge was to conceptualize some keywords that have different definitions according to each author. As for the term "media", Couldry (2012) demonstrates that there is duplicity in its meaning, for it can be referred to as the institutions and platforms that create and distribute content, as well as the product itself.

Dena (2009) adds that it is possible to understand the concept of media as an industry (including its structures of production, publication, distribution and diffusion as

an organization); as a message (which considers the content itself, the objective material to travel through the symbolic meaning in a process characterized by its flow of knowledge); and experience (which considers not only the technical and narrative structures, but also the language and everything it involves, such as cognitive perceptions and interactive constructions that emanates of the experience of that media itself).

Fig. 1: Media relations



Source: Higgins (1995)

Thus, this research will adopt the broad sense of media, sometimes referring to the content, sometimes describing the form and always considering means of distribution and its artifacts.

Another disambiguation necessary for an intermedial analysis is the concept of text as it is used in this literature. Authors like Pavis (2003) and Clüver (2000) use the word text outside the common sense, using it to refer not only to written word sets, but also to any artistic work and symbolic set of which it is composed. These authors add that an intermedial or intersemiotic text is one that makes use of linguistic resources, originating two or more media, such as the cinema which aggregates elements such as the framing of photography, the *mise-en-scène* (arrangement of the elements that composes the scene) of the theater, musical insertions and other forms of media.

Hence, it is part of the experience with texts of this nature to have adequate literacy to not only read what is being said, but also what the authors have chosen to say. Form and content as a unified whole require from the reader the critical ability to understand codes and perceive discursive nuances.

Electronic games fall into the category of intermedial text and, as Luiz (2013) points out, can display a form of language created through the hybridization of the symbology of comics, the aesthetics inspired by animation cinema and the multilinearity of hypertext. That is, besides establishing itself as a form of art and communication, games provide a changing experience according to the interaction with the user and, therefore, with latent and inherent potentialities as to the immersion and active engagement of its audience.

To better understand this phenomenon, some works have been emphasized in the analysis presented in the article, such as the *Final Fantasy* franchise which was chosen because it contains characteristics such as: presence of a central and canonical narrative in a vast fictional universe shared between the games and their adaptations; mechanics that refer to other media and incorporate them in the process of solving challenges; and alternation between animated scenes with interactive content that complement each other in the process of telling stories.

2 MEDIA INFLUENCES ON DIGITAL GAMES

Each artistic category is spread through one or more media, influencing and being influenced by them. While literature tends to narrate sequences of actions over time, painting portrays static elements contained in a temporal fragment (MOSER, 2006). Thus, it is necessary to overcome some linguistic or even physical limits of these media to propose new sensations and experiences to the reader. In Clüver's words (2012), a crossing of media boundaries implies an intermedial relationship. Therefore, intermediality highlights the study of interactions, interferences, dialogues and common areas between the media (ADAMATTI, 2010).

For an understanding of games as a form of intermedial artistic expression, some of their main characteristics should be pointed out. According to Salen and Zimmerman (2010), the game is represented by the act of entering a Magic Circle, a term coined to designate another, second order reality, with its own characteristics that are established when the playful practice begins.

The Circle has previously known rules that are shared among the participants to conduct the actions that take place in it. Such creation tends to be well delimited in terms of space and time by material or conceptual limits such as trays, circuits and courts used in sports practices. Limitations can also be virtual like those established by an electronic system or can be fluid depending on the purpose of its participants. Examples are games

that take over large spaces and are based on geolocation such as *Ingress* (2012) or *Pokémon Go* (2016).

Therefore, used for the first time by ludologist Johan Huizinga, the term Magic Circle, also referred to as "sacred place", refers to the space and time of a certain game that is in essence different from what it would be lived outside the playful experience, even though it may be confused or mixed with that of external reality.

According to Huizinga (2000), within the Magic Circle, the laws and behaviors of everyday life are transformed, individuals are different and do different things. The temporary suspension of the usual world may occur from simple and unstructured activities of childhood to elaborate religious ceremonies. The author mentions as an example the initiation rituals of young people to the community of adult men, pointing out that during this period there is a suspension of the laws that would be in force in the village on an ordinary day, with a truce between conflicts and suspension of acts of war and revenge.

Fig. 2: The Magic Circle of Johan Huizinga



Source: adapted from Zarzycki (2016)

Overcoming the temporal limitation of the game, there is the possibility of the experience to last and set itself as a cultural phenomenon as indicated in Fig. 2. Even after its end, it remains as a kind of treasure to be conserved by the memory, to be transmitted to other individuals and even to be incorporated into the traditions of a people (HUIZINGA, 2000).

Similarly to the Magic Circle, which metaphorically dissolves external reality, virtual interfaces aim to conceal themselves so that their presence as an intermediary entity aims to be as invisible as possible. This effect is called transparent interface (BOLTER, 2000) and it is not exclusive to games, visual arts such as painting and

photography seek this effect through the interaction between techniques such as linear perspective, erasure and automaticity.

The search for immersion and transparency was already a concern during the Renaissance period. The academic Leon Battista Alberti wrote in 1435 a book called *Della Pittura*, in which a number of steps to apply linear perspective to painting and drawing were documented. His greatest contribution, known as *Alberti's window*, was a structure made with perpendicular lines through which the artist could see the scene to be painted and then transfer it to his canvas without losing proportion and scale (EDGERTON, 2006). In the eyes of the author, a painting is like a window with translucent glass, through which one observes a scene with objects represented through the depth of the image portrayed (ALBERTI, 1999).

As in Alberti's ideal, digital graphics are generated by mathematical processes that simulate three-dimensional scenarios and carry information regarding color, reflectivity, texture, lighting and perspective. Artists and developers can evoke linguistic resources typically found in photography and cinema, such as switching between lenses, variations in the shutter and exposure time with the aim of expanding immersion in these environments (BOLTER, 2000).

In this way, like the relationship between so many other media, video games seek, in the language developed by other means, resources that when applied to a new sensory experience, gain new meanings and offer a rich sensory experience for those who play, either as an individual action or as a common collective and collaborative construction.

Electronic games are built through the balance between aesthetic elements, narratives, and the exploration of mechanics, as can be seen in works such as *Never Alone* (2014), a hybrid between documentary and game created at the initiative of Native Americans to tell their tales to the world. *Valiant Hearts* (2014) is another example of a game composed by a fictional narrative that appropriates real ideas and historical elements. While in the first example, the experience seeks to convey legends of the *Inupiat* ethnicity, interspersed with playable documentary scenes that refer to the culture and imaginary of these people, the second is based on historical events that offer an in-depth reading of life in the early 20th century during World War I.

In works like *Comix Zone* (1995) there is the explicit media appeal. The game portrays the adventures of a comic book hero who traverses the pages of a comic book in which he faces challenges "drawn" in real time by a virtual comic book artist, as seen in Fig. 3. The boundaries of each frame impose barriers to the character that are only

transposable after the player solves the conflict contained therein. In addition to these elements, the work incorporates in its game mechanics the narrative clichés, dialogue balloons and typical colorization of comics to build a maze through which the player has the freedom to choose the path to be followed, setting up variations of the central narrative himself.

Fig. 3: *Comix Zone*



Source: TecToy (2017)

Adjacent to electronic games, works such as *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018) bring the interactivity of games to platforms typically focused on movies and series, in this case, Netflix. The experience allows the viewer to take decisions that impact the characters' path, modifying the story and the narrative outcome. The possible variations are pre-determined by excerpts from recordings with real actors and are recombined by the user, generating the perception of control absent in a usual episode.

Whether in fictional narratives or not, the games add, adapt and reference several artistic forms, seeking an updated resignification of the code in order not to emulate its bases, but to offer something new and meaningful to its audience. In topic 3, examples of how the intermedial dialogue may happen between traditional and interactive media are listed.

3 INTERMEDIALITY IN DIGITAL GAMES

Rajewsky (2012) explains three ways that intermediality may occur, which can be summarized as follows:

- Media transpositions - it occurs when there is an adaptation of a work to a different media to that of its origin. They are film productions based on or inspired by

literary texts, novelizations, creation of games inspired by historical facts, among others.

- Combination of media - it is characterized by hybrid works such as opera that unite theater and music or comics that mix literature and visual arts. They are built from the language of two or more media.
- Intermedial references - it happens mainly when one medium is cited by a different one. For example, a TV program may be mentioned during a dialogue in a play, influencing its plot.

With the concepts of intermediality defined, this study aimed to validate through exploratory analysis how such content applies to the *Final Fantasy VII* game and the audiovisual works derived from its main narrative. The objective is to understand how the breaking of boundaries and exchange of linguistic symbols happens in electronic games.

Final Fantasy VII (FFVII) is a JRPG (Japanese Role-Playing Game) originally developed for the *Playstation* console. The game released in 1997 was developed by *Squaresoft* company, currently known as *Square Enix*. The narrative of the work takes place in an alternative and dystopian reality that addresses themes that allude to the privatization of essential services, political corruption, confrontation between social classes and the consequences of a state of civil war in the lives of the poorest people. To engage the player in this universe, *Final Fantasy VII* transits between media and uses them to give depth to the conflicts presented.

3.1 INTERMEDIAL COMBINATIONS

In the same way that cinema has been considered a hybrid media since its inception (NAGIB, 2013), electronic games are in essence the result of combining media such as music, animation, traditional games and the cinema itself with other computational features, especially gameplay mechanics. Both have the power to emulate and absorb preexisting art forms in their own composition. By inheriting characteristics of the original media (STAN, 2005), the image of a hypermedia text brings with it the history of plastic arts while its audio carries influence of music, dialogue and sound experimentation.

In *Final Fantasy VII*, director Yoshinori Kitase sought a dark and realistic setting for the game through 3D graphic arts that was unusual until the mid-1990s. The team of artists had to become familiar with creation processes that virtualized sculpting

procedures to model three-dimensionally the scenarios and characters, define colors, manipulate cameras and lights (FAMITSU WEEKLY, 1998).

As for the sound, 85 songs were composed summing more than 4 hours of soundtrack without including the sound effects of the environment, characters and interface. The style was inspired by the classical orchestra and choral singing, chosen to reinforce the feeling of sadness and fantasy that the game builds (SCHWEITZER, 2006).

Fig. 4: Final Fantasy VII Remake Orchestra World Tour.



Source: Final Fantasy Orchestra (2020).

The plastic and sound arts together with the cinematographic and gameplay techniques of analog games were mixed to produce the experience of *Final Fantasy VII*, an example of heterogeneous media resulting from the intermedial and transversal combination of other art forms.

3.2 INTERMEDIAL TRANSPOSITIONS

Like a puzzle, there are asynchronous scenes from the past of the character *Cloud* - a *FFVII*'s protagonist - hidden in the game. This narratological cut is presented in different parts of the narrative and can go unnoticed by the player, it is necessary to visit determined areas of the scenario at specific moments to reveal the events that precede the beginning of the experience.

Jenkins (2020) defines this multifaceted construction of a universe composed of different media products as a transmedia narrative, which is nothing more than a pulverized structure of a fictional world that involves different works that have a purpose by themselves but work in a transversal way to broaden and deepen the main narrative.

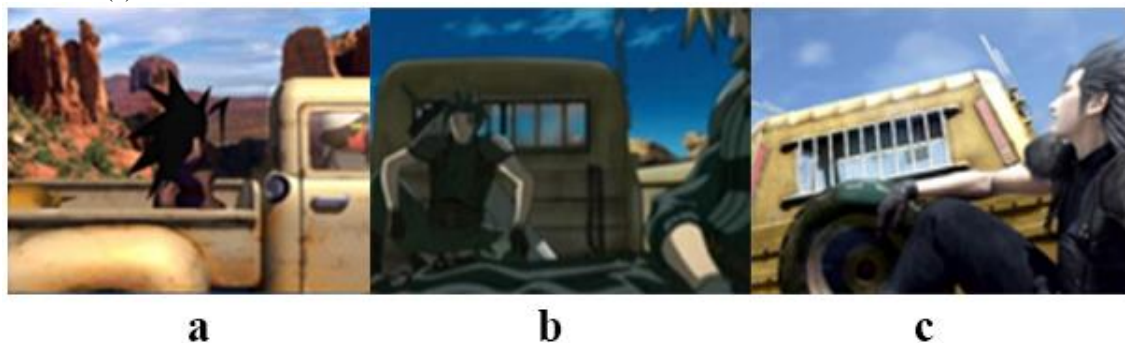
Last Order: Final Fantasy VII (2005) is a short animated film produced by *Square Enix* in 2005 that recounts a part of the story of *Cloud*. It is an adaptation of the game experience to the cinema, that is an intermediate transposition as illustrated by Fig. 5.

New dialogues and characters were introduced to expand details of the character from another point of view within the limitations of a linear media.

For Dena (2009), this kind of work may be considered as an intra-compositional content, which means that the understanding and appreciation are connected to a previous knowledge about the original experience or main work. Without the game itself or the macro context where the narrative fits, this material has its value diminished and even made impossible.

Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children (2005) is a feature film produced by *Square Enix* also in 2005 that follows the narrative of *Final Fantasy VII*. The story explains what happened in the two years following the events experienced in the game. While the film can be understood without repertoire about the franchise, some of its scenes shows the transposition of artifacts from the game, whose recognition expands the perception and understanding of the work.

Fig. 5: Transposition of the scene of Cloud and Zack's escape between games and cinema, being represented by the works *Final Fantasy VII* (a), *Last Order: Final Fantasy VII* (b) and *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (c).



Source: *Final Fantasy VII* (1997), *Final Fantasy Wiki* (2020), *The Lifestream* (2020).

In this film, scenarios and characters were redesigned to suit the cinematic format while still giving narrative clues that provide an extra layer of understanding about the original media. In other words, the game *Final Fantasy VII* and the movie *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* are both works with an end in themselves and can be enjoyed independently of each other, but when together, they add an even greater experience than the sum of their parts.

Just as *FFVII* was adapted for the cinema, the films were also transposed to the game that followed the series, *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (2007) released for the PlayStation Portable (PSP). New dialogues and extra scenes were added along with the possibility of player interaction with the characters.

An intermediate transposition may occur even within the video game media when there is the adaptation of a game to a different platform other than the original. *FFVII* was rewritten to include new mechanics and graphical features that were not available at its launch in 1997. The new version was called *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (2020) and although its goal is to retell the original story, it was heavily influenced by the mechanics of the new game engine together with the storytelling techniques used in current electronic games which resulted in a totally new experience.

3.3 INTERMEDIAL REFERENCES

Mentioning previously told narratives is a key point of intermedial reference, as for example in the death of one of the central characters of *Final Fantasy VII*, named Zack, the scene of this event is retold between games and movies, as seen in Fig. 6, each one adding details and new points of view to the transpositions but always referencing the media events that previously portrayed it.

Another intermedial reference happens in *Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII* (2006) originally released for *PlayStation 2*. The protagonist reflects on his relationship with a character who does not appear in the game, but was present in the narrative of the original *FFVII* released in 1997.

Fig. 6: Zack's death in *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (a) and his tomb in *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (b).



Source: Final Fantasy Wiki (2020)

Connecting the events and consequently the works, the film *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* uses diegetic hallucinations and dialogues between the characters to activate flashbacks that portray events that happened in other media of the franchise. In the same way, in *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*, the player accesses a new point of view by

becoming the character Zack from the beginning of his journey to the key scene of his death.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The existence of media boundaries does not imply that they are fixed and stable (RAJEWSKY, 2012). The possibility of interactions between the existing media offers ways to dissolve the barriers between them, resulting in new forms of expression. As mentioned before, the media hybridity detected in cinema also happens in electronic games, since both have absorbed pre-existing art forms.

If it is true that the language of electronic games differs from that which preceded them to the point that they are seen as something new, it is also valid to say that several of their defining elements derive from that which was once consolidated. It is also worth mentioning that the inverse dialogue is as true as it is, since the so-called more traditional media - such as television, cinema, literature, theater, among many others - have also tried to incorporate sedimented elements in the still recent history of video games, such as multilinear constructions, narrative ramifications, interactivity and others.

The paper sought to approximate the research on intermediality to the studies of video games and, in the light of this bibliography, it was illustrated how the relationship between the media in the *Final Fantasy VII* game and adjacent works takes place.

It is clear from the clippings described in the examples that a work itself should not necessarily be classified as part of the references or of the intermedial transpositions by itself, in a dichotomous or even antagonistic way. On the contrary, there are possible subtleties and nuances - perhaps even desirable - that transit between both characteristics. The above division aims at a strategically didactic presentation to illustrate the perception of these concepts in the work selected for the scope of this research.

Finally, it is clear that electronic games are not only able to absorb the language of the other media not only in terms of message, perhaps the most visible layer of this comparison, but also they can work as a support for the interactive experiences on *streaming* platforms while coexisting with more conventional narrative productions, such as interactive films and graphic novels set on *consoles* or computers.

Media conglomerates and independent producers increasingly move across different media and languages, maintaining media invisibility to produce considerable immersion and interactivity, yet challenging us to a more sophisticated literacy to decode and understand the various layers of codes expressed in such works. Faced with this

knowledge, developers and theorists in the field may recombine a vast number of linguistic elements and resources to tell their stories and design brand new experiences.

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