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Editorial: Transmedia Tourism

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Abstract

This Editorial sketches out some initial contexts and parameters for the concept of transmedia tourism – the academic neologism which the articles in this Special Issue explore in greater detail. It is argued that transmedia tourism should be understood as a historical term whose emergence is intertwined with both theories of convergence culture (Jenkins 2006) and the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1998). The Editorial also reflects upon the methodologies used for exploring transmedia tourism throughout the Special Issue, offering reflections on and dismissals of objections to autoethnography as a way of studying how mediated spaces are experienced from an anthropological perspective.

Contributor Note

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This Special Issue of *JOMEC Journal* introduces and explores the portmanteau term transmedia tourism. This neologism combines debates initiated by Henry Jenkins (2006) concerning *Convergence Culture* with the ongoing analysis of media tourism to advance debates in, and encourage greater dialogue between, disciplines including (but not limited to) transmedia, tourism, and fan studies. Jenkins (2006) defines convergence as a historical term concerning the emergence and integration of digital forms and platforms into existing media cultures. Convergence is thus characterised by 'the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want' (Jenkins 2006, 2).

Transmediality is one component of these ongoing changes and, understood plainly, means 'across media' and implies a structured or coordinated relationship among multiple media platforms and practices' (Jenkins 2014, 244). By extension, transmedia tourism can be understood as the range of processes and practices by which media(ted) content flows into the tourism sector and involves special attention being paid to how myriad media forms, platforms and technologies are harnessed to assist in the production, consumption and negotiation of these experiences.

Transmedia tourism is also a term that is intertwined with the emergence of what B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore (1998) have named the experience economy. Matt Hills (2017, 246) has noted

this point but clarification of the links between transmedia and the experience economy better demonstrate transmedia tourism's historical nature. Pine and Gilmore (1998, 97; original emphasis) argue that 'experiences have emerged as the next step in what we call the *progression of economic value*. Within this model, (primarily advanced Western) economies have developed from an initial stage of creating raw materials for sale, to aggregating commodities for the purpose of manufacturing sellable goods, to then providing third-party services to consumers, and, finally, paying a further supplement to consume those goods as an experience.

Discussions of brand-specific stores such as those of Hollister (Powell 2013, 44) and American Girl (Borghini et al. 2009) have provided immediate touchpoints. However, a spatial experience of a transmedia property, like *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge* at the Disneyland Park theme park in Anaheim, California, also demonstrates the logic of the experience economy. Visitors to *Galaxy's Edge* move away from consuming the *Star Wars* movies or their associated goods and services (e.g. merchandise such as toys or clothing) to instead paying an additional fee (e.g. the entry ticket price) to physically experience the media product first-hand. At the same time, *Galaxy's Edge* is paratextually-framed through transmedia discourses of co-ordinated expansion as visitors are told to expect a space 'where you can live out your own *Star Wars* story, fly the Millennium Falcon and explore a remote outpost where adventure awaits' (Disney n.d., para. 1).

Intersections between transmediality, tourism and the experience economy

have increased in recent years and produced a range of examples. These include theme park spaces and attractions, officially-licensed escape rooms and pop-up social spaces based upon commercial media properties including *South Park* (Comedy Central 1997-) and *Gilmore Girls* (The CW 2000-2007, Netflix 2016), and computer games which offer free-play modes where opportunities for roaming around virtual renderings of a franchise's diegetic spaces are provided (see Geraghty 2018; Lamerichs 2018). As my article argues, one of the key insights that transmedia tourism develops is analysing both physical and digital spaces derived from media franchises alongside each other. Official examples also exist alongside user appropriations of both material objects and digital technologies to enhance engagement with significant spaces. These deployments can assist in practices from identifying tourism destinations to enhancing the experience of 'being there' by assisting in negotiating boundaries between 'reality' and 'fiction'. The practice of sceneframing, which has been popularized by the website FanGirl Quest (<https://www.fangirlquest.com/>), provides an immediate point of reference regarding the latter trend. This is where screengrabs from films and TV series are stored on a tablet device and then held within the frame of a photograph taken at the relevant location.

What, then, are the parameters of transmedia tourism as a concept? What insights can developing this term offer to our understanding of how commercial media properties expand into physical and virtual leisure spaces? How are the range of location-based opportunities engaged with by audience groups who demonstrate different combinations of identity markers and levels of investment

in a media property? These are the overarching questions which this issue of *JOMEC Journal* explores with the intention of initiating further debate concerning the meaning, application, significance and development of transmedia tourism at both conceptual and empirical levels. The contributors to this volume all highlight that the way a range of different technologies employed by situated individuals occupying different cultural sites (e.g. media rights owners, tourism license holders and fans) is altering and contributing towards the increased visibility of media characters and iconographies in tourism contexts.

This develops associations between tourism and technology beyond the established focus on photography (see Lester and Scarles 2016) to include other media forms (e.g. video, gaming), platforms (e.g. social media) and technologies (e.g. smartphone functionality and applications). Additionally, the migration of media content into tourism-coded experiences occurs alongside the desire of fan-tourists to seek out or create encounters that increase their proximity to, and investments in, the fictional world of their favourite media products. This special issue therefore provides a number of starting points and case studies for understanding transmedia tourism as an area of scholarly inquiry. By doing this, it casts light upon intersections between transmedia and tourism with the intention of providing timely interventions for researchers.

To achieve these goals, the contributors each adopt qualitative methodologies with autoethnography proving especially prominent as it features in five of the six articles. Reflection on why autoethnography might be well-suited to exploring transmedia tourism, and the

possible consequences of this for the term's future development, is therefore appropriate.

Autoethnography and Researching Transmedia Tourism

Autoethnography, or 'ethnography of the self', can [...] be defined as when the researcher becomes 'a participant observer of [their] own world' (Chin 2007, 336) with the intention of making a particular aspect of that individual's everyday routines or consumption habits 'alien, strange and sometimes unrecognizable' (Chin 2007, 336). Les Roberts (2018, 7) explicitly names autoethnography as a useful component for researching and documenting the experience of spaces (transmedia or otherwise), arguing that conducting research in spatial anthropology requires adopting the identity of 'the researcher-as-bricoleur' (Roberts 2018, 3). That is, analysing spatial embodiment from a cultural perspective can necessitate that the researcher 'goes about his or her business equipped with a set of tools rather than a fit-for-purpose methodological strategy' (Roberts 2018, 3) to capture the vitality and dynamism of the experience under investigation. From this perspective, autoethnographic investigation seems well-aligned with studying transmedia tourism as it permits capturing what is 'peculiar to a historical moment, constructed by the researcher as important by virtue of choosing it as that moment' (Booth 2015, 107) where research takes place.

Autoethnography is therefore useful for establishing and exploring a neologism like transmedia tourism because it helps develop initial knowledge of that term by drawing from direct experiences of the

phenomenon under investigation. As Janet Wolff (1995, 35) argues, 'cultural studies is not just about theories or texts: it deals with lived experiences, and with the intersections of social structures, systems of representation, and subjectivities'. Adopting this culturalist disposition (Hall 1980) validates beginning with personal experiences as the entry point for identifying and theorizing developments in commercial popular culture such as, in this instance, those concerning spatialized experiences of media franchises. From these beginnings, dialogue with existing knowledge structures – both within and across disciplinary boundaries – can begin with the intention of granting visibility to emergent and/or overlooked cultural practices. Additionally, exploring these initial conceptual parameters through alternative methodologies and further empirical research can be encouraged.

Despite the insights that autoethnographic reflection on spatial experiences can generate, scholars in both tourism studies and cultural studies have critiqued the method. For example, Giampetro Gobo argues, 'An autoethnography should not be [...] the account of a single event, incident or experience' (2008, 63) therefore implying the method's potential to slip into uncritical summaries of subjective activities. Such critiques could become problematic when establishing an academic neologism like transmedia tourism for two reasons. Firstly, within the context of tourism research there exists an entrenched set of ideas that arguably devalue qualitative research when compared to findings produced through quantitative methodologies. For example, Xavier Matteucci and Juergen Gnoth (2017, 49) have noted 'the largely dominating positivistic and post-

positivistic cultures of [...] tourism management departments' whilst C. Michael Hall, Allan M. Williams and Alan A. Lew mention 'persistent tensions [...] between the often contradictory requirements of critical social science and the extent to which industry and policy-makers influence the research agenda' (2014, 11). With specific reference to media tourism, Joanne Connell (2012, 1008) likewise identifies a long-standing strand of research which

follows a predominantly applied approach to the study of film tourism [...] Research in this category more usually comprises empirical study of a particular destination or film/TV production. It offers an applied, activity-oriented and real-world understanding of observed cases, focussing on understanding, recording and mapping activity and outcomes and an understanding of the phenomenon primarily from a management perspective

Deployment of quantitative and positivist-informed methodologies therefore speak to tourism's social and cultural status as a service-orientated industry and the assumption that research into the sector should a) support and develop service provision and b) that abstract interventions are alienating to industry stakeholders because of the theoretical propositions offered (Weiler 2001). These assumptions would potentially dismiss autoethnographic research into trans-media tourism by suggesting that the arguments developed across the articles within this Special Issue lack industry-friendly statistical and numerical data.

However, tourism research is not entirely hostile to qualitative methods. Studies utilising interviews are especially prominent (Williams, Hall and Lew 2014,

627) whilst deployments of ethnography are used in the analysis of different forms of tourism (for example, Salazar 2005). Within media tourism research, qualitative studies have been praised for adopting 'a predominantly conceptual and/or theoretical focus [and so] contributing to the understanding of film tourism primarily from a cultural perspective' (Connell 2012, 1008). However, when Matteucci and Gnoth (2017, 49) posit that grounded theory may have become a popular approach in qualitative tourism research because this represents 'a method that could be considered competitive with those used by their quantitative counterparts', the entrenched belief that quantitative-leaning data generates greater currency amongst tourism stakeholders is further implied. The point I am arguing, then, is that autoethnographic accounts of trans-media tourism place potential limits on the term's ability to generate attention outside of arts and humanities contexts as it fails to produce the type of data that market-orientated audiences value.

Secondly, autoethnography's contribution to establishing transmedia tourism risks being devalued because of the method's reputation amongst culturally-orientated scholars as well. Studies either mentioning or employing autoethnography frequently highlight that the method's legitimacy is far from secure (see Coffey 1998; Hills 2002, 65-89; Gobo 2008, 63; Garner 2018, 93). Roberts (2018, 2-3) also alludes to this status by reflecting that selecting from the spatial anthropologist's toolbox – of which autoethnography is one component – in an *ad hoc* manner 'invite[s] accusations of superficiality and lack of rigour. In such a scenario the researcher-as-bricoleur comes across as a 'jack-of-all-trades' (and, by implication, master of none)'. In

other words, the researcher's findings are open to accusations of opportunism, not pre-planning research encounters and ultimately lacking the rigour expected of scholarly research. Roberts (2018, 2-3) provocatively addresses these attitudes as follows:

it is hard to think of a formula less compatible with the instrumentalist and impacts-driven logic that decrees what is or is not deemed 'legitimate' research-wise in the neoliberal academy. That the researcher may 'put something of herself' into whatever it is she is researching is not merely to draw attention to the subjective influence brought to bear on the object of study, it is also to acknowledge that the researcher is herself part of any outputs of that study. These 'outputs' might conceivably be limited just to what the researcher has made of herself (i.e., experience, knowledge, skills, insights, emotional rewards, sense of wellbeing and accomplishment, and so on) but not anything tangible in terms of a deliverable product that can be measured, quantified, evaluated and affirmed as part of a national research assessment exercise.

Academics who dismiss autoethnographic understandings of (mediated) space as lacking in either methodological rigour, representativeness or scope are therefore (whether consciously or not) operating in support of neo-liberal research agendas and therefore contributing towards silencing the study of particular areas of media and cultural life. In other words, whilst market-orientated tourism stakeholders might overlook the findings of this Special Issue due to their qualitative or 'subjective' nature, market-aligned academics would adopt a dismissive attitude towards debating transmedia tourism as this has been

conceptualised through methods that are harder to align with performance metrics. I therefore agree with Roberts (2018, 7) that 'a spatially immersive reading of the world is fundamentally not premised on its reproducibility of a rigid methodological template that can be procedurally aligned' (Roberts 2018, 7) and that such shortcomings should not be used to dismiss cultural analyses of (transmedia) spaces. Qualitative, subjectively-initiated studies of spatial experiences which work with numerically small samples should instead be recognized on their own terms for the insights that they produce rather than being sidelined by individuals who support neo-liberal agendas. The articles included in this Special Issue each utilize appropriate methodologies for tackling their themes and produce legitimate findings that assist in initiating discussion of transmedia tourism as an academic neologism.

Overview of Articles

The articles in this Special Issue can either be read independently of each other or as a complete collection that seeks to develop 'appropriate generalisations [...] which can then contribute to the systematic advancement of knowledge' (Connell 2012, 1012) regarding transmedia tourism. In addition, the articles are organized so that they can be approached as two groups of three that develop different components of transmedia tourism.

The first three essays offer more theoretical arguments which aim to identify current areas of absence in media tourism research and suggest starting points which theories of transmedia can help to address. I begin the Special Issue

by critically reviewing current terminology such as 'film-induced tourism' (Beeton 2005) and 'mediated tourism' (Månsson 2011) for their oversights, highlighting that issues including institutionality and intertextuality are currently downplayed by these concepts. Garner then indicates that addressing these absences requires paying greater attention to areas including appropriations of technology and copyright negotiations when analysing transmedia tourism by referencing to a case study of *Disney-Pixar's Finding Nemo* (Santon and Unkrich, 2003; Stanton, 2016). Next, Abby Waysdorf argues for addressing the concept of paratextuality (Genette 1997, Gray 2010) within transmedia tourism analysis by examining the meaning of Portmeirion in Wales to fans of television series *The Prisoner* (ITV 1967-8). Waysdorf posits that Portmeirion (where external scenes for the series were filmed) operates as an 'unintentional paratext' that was not meant to sustain interpretations of *The Prisoner* but has subsequently become heavily interweaved with discourses of value that circulate amongst the show's fans. Waysdorf therefore highlights the importance of discursive framings circulated amongst invested groups as these re-appropriate Portmeirion for the purpose of imaginatively extending *The Prisoner* beyond its seventeen episodes.

Coming after Waysdorf, Bethan Jones offers a counter-position to assumptions linking transmediality and tourism to promises of authenticity and immersion by arguing for greater theorizing of the role of dissonance. Focusing upon tours linked to AMC's *The Walking Dead* (2010-) in Atlanta, Georgia, Jones builds upon arguments by Garner (2016, 2017), Hills (2016) and Michael T. Saler (2012) to convincingly posit that dissonance is an

important but understudied component of transmedia tourism and that academic work should seek to better acknowledge and address this. Cumulatively, each of these articles establish conceptual parameters which future research into transmedia tourism can probe, debate and expand upon.

The next three articles examine emergent trends relating to how audience groups practice transmedia tourism. Rebecca Williams offers a fascinating auto-ethnography of a vacation to Florence, Italy as a fan of the Lecterverse (e.g. the transmedia world surrounding Thomas Harris's fictional serial killer, Hannibal Lecter) and her attempts to mediate boundaries between 'reality' and 'fiction' by inserting Funko Pop! Vinyl figurines of characters from NBC's *Hannibal* (2013-15) into photographs of filming locations. Williams highlights how material and digital cultures intersect within transmedia tourism whilst also arguing for greater consideration of what she names 'paratextual-spatio-play' where merchandise such as toys become important assistants in how meaningful locations become playfully mediated. Paul Booth then considers pop-up transmedia tourism via the example of the Rickmobile – a themed car depicting Rick Sanchez from *Rick and Morty* (Cartoon Network 2013-) - which toured around cities in the US offering visitors limited edition purchasable merchandise whilst also encouraging tourists to document their interactions with the Rickmobile through social media hashtags. Booth considers these affordances as examples of fan labour and so highlights the diverse range of commercially determined subject positions that transmedia tourists have to negotiate when engaging with these experiences. The final article is by Inger-Lise Kalviknes Bore who widens the

parameters of both transmedia properties studied in the volume *and* ideas concerning tourism to address audiences' use of social media platforms to engage with how celebrities negotiate travel spaces like airports. Studying Pinterest boards dedicated to archiving images of female celebrity travel fashion, Bore argues that these represent a form of surveillance where female bodies are evaluated whilst also contributing towards how tourists create their own sense of identity by using these platforms. Recurrent across these chapters is how digital and participatory media are becoming integrated into the provision, preparation and experience of trans-media properties relating to tourism experiences and contexts.

Ultimately, I hope that the arguments developed across these six articles provide a starting point for further discussion of transmedia tourism's parameters and practices at the same time as provoking debate concerning how applicable the ideas might be to other contexts where tourism and transmediality intersect. For example, aside from Bore's article, each of the contributors to this Special Issue focus on examples linked to the sphere of screen media, namely film and television. This means that the applicability of transmedia tourism to other areas of popular culture-indebted tourism such as (popular) music

have been overlooked (Bolderman and Reijnders 2018, 2019). This is but one example of an area where the arguments offered by the contributors to this Special Issue can be advanced and I encourage scholars who are working in these areas (and others) to take up this invitation. What these articles do provide is a starting point for initiating discussions across disciplines concerning how historical processes of social, cultural, media and technological convergence are enabling intellectual properties to develop into spatial experiences of transmedia brands.

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