

The Role of Place as Medium in the Transmedial Ecology of Play

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INTRODUCTION

We will present our currently ongoing investigation about the role of place in transmedial ecologies centered around games (Kennedy, 2018). For game producers, place becomes another medium that they can work with in order to communicate messages, create enchanting narration or "gamify" aspects of real-world interactions. Sometimes, the players knowledge of real-world locations is invoked as an attraction factor to get immersed in the fictional universe of the game, while others, players are invited to visit locations in the real world, either as part of the game or as a playful "touristy" addition. This is to the best of our knowledge a new angle, both in transmedial studies and in game studies. We use the city of Kyoto as a case study, concentrating on games or game-like products that are at the center of different transmedial/media mix combinations.

TRANSMEDIAL PLACES

McLuhan famously defined medium as an extension of ourselves (1964), something that allows us to do something more than our bodies could do on their own. To see place as medium, we must rethink it not as a static background for human action, but as a channel that enables us to do something *more*. In relation to a transmedial ecology of products, place becomes something that designers can mold and connect to the rest of the network of products. Place as a medium allows game producers to establish connections to the real-world, which can benefit them by affording different kinds of playfulness. Place in game studies usually just refers to location in the real world, or how virtual worlds can recreate a sense of place (Purzycki, 2019). Our approach sees place as another playful component to work with, where players can participate in ongoing world building process (Jenkins 2006), both virtually and in the physical world, which thus become assembled in interesting ways.

We base our theoretical discussion in the existing literature of *space* and *place*, beginning with Lefebvres conceptualization of space as a complex, dynamic, concept

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that has three sides: conceived space, lived space and perceived space, and where place is a potentiality for action (Lefebvre, 1974). We also build upon de Certeau's idea of space as "practiced place" (1984: 117) to show how locations/spaces become places by virtue of being imbued with human life, also in relation to transmedial game ecologies. Augé's definition of place as "relational, historical and concerned with identity" (77) helps us incorporate relationships, emotions and memory into the discussion. The situationists' view of place and the psychogeography of cities is also incorporated (Pinder, 2020). Finally, we draw upon Varnelis & Friedberg's point that material places are augmented because of modern connectivity, creating new forms of community and identity (2007) in order to understand the new operations where producers attempt to connect users to places and their media products in different ways. The newer field of locative media, where place is seen as relational is also useful to us, as it highlights other dimensions of place that have to do with mediation, such as the concept of "image of space" which will let us cover the topic of the expectations towards places that are created through representational media (Fazel, M., & Rajendran, L. 2015: 19). As to games literature, we will integrate selected writings from the related fields of locative games (Montola et.al, 2009; Frago et.al, 2016; Stokes, 2020) and games and tourism (Ramírez-Moreno, 2019; Sugawa-Shimada, 2015; Williams, 2017).

OUR LOCATION: KYOTO

We have chosen the city of Kyoto as a case study, due to the many games and media products that use it as setting at the center of rich transmedial ecologies/media mixes (Steinberg, 2012). There are many to choose from, but we have made a selection of different media types. We will be incorporating the producer's perspective through a grounded method-inspired analysis of a series of interviews and the study of reports and media coverage of the following different projects.

- *Haruka: Beyond the Stream of Time/ Harukanaru Toki no Naka de* (遙かなる時空の中で) is an otome game set in Heian Kyoto that has given birth to many other products (film, a manga series, an anime series, drama and music cds, and live-action theatre). Kyoto's geography is the source of different storylines and game plots.
- *Get on! Kyoto City Subway/Chikatetsu ni noru* (地下鉄に乗るっ) is a transmedia advertising campaign which uses Moe characters to promote subway use (gamification through playfulness in the real world). It has spawned anime commercials, and light novels.
- *Hannari Kyoto/Otori Danshi* (はんなり京都～お通り男史) is an otome game in development where the main streets of Kyoto are personified as characters with their own distinct personality (which reflects that of their real-life neighborhood) which the player can interact with.
- *Hello World* (ハロー・ワールド) an animation film which has spawned both manga and a novel, but not a game yet (we are hoping it will). The city of Kyoto is re-imagined as a virtually preserved world that relates to the real world in multiple ways full of possibility.

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