

Transmedia Storytelling in International Online News: Thematic and Mythical Recurrence *versus* Generic Regularities and Quality in the Digital Press

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1. Introduction: Transmedia Storytelling in News Production

The main purpose of this chapter is to analyze a sample of international online news from several digital newspapers and to study the possibilities for analysis within the fields of Convergence Culture and Transmedia Storytelling, as well as in relation to the thematic and mythical recurrence of the story.

‘Convergence culture’ is nowadays one of the main paradigms used to analyze several forms of communication. The term comes from the technological transformation of telecommunications and is, at the present, used and applied in several fields of research, the cultural one, for instance. As a new and polysemic term, it still lacks a unique and commonly-accepted definition. Instead of this, its definition varies depending on the field of research.

We are interested especially in the cultural field, that is, in the fiction and non-fiction applications of this concept. One of the main differences between these two broad areas concerns space: researchers of fiction analyze this new space, the Internet; while researchers of non-fiction focus on work and professional changes, as well as their effects on ‘the elaboration and distribution of contents

[Shaping the news online:
a comparative research on international quality media, pp. 193 - 222]

on different platforms, the professional profile of journalists and the forms of accessing contents' (Díaz Noci, 2013).

From the first point of view, Internet has been studied especially in terms of a new space of interaction for both producers and fans; as well as for media producers and media consumers (Jenkins, 2006). One interesting point in this field of research is how franchises have developed involving fictional products, such as TV series or movies (Jenkins, 2006; Long, 2008; Perryman, 2008; Scolari, 2009; 2013).

Convergence is also a question of interest to researchers in online journalism, such as Boczkowski (2004), Díaz Noci (2014), Salaverría, Masip and García Avilés (in López and Pereira, 2010). According to these authors, journalistic convergence is studied as the 'implantation of digital communication technologies', where 'journalists can elaborate contents on multiple platforms' (Salaverría *et al.*, 2010). This has to be seen as a 'process of integration of traditionally separated modes of communication' (Díaz Noci, 2014). These scholars do research on how convergence is affecting media production, from the ethnography of newsrooms (Domingo, 2010; Salaverría *et al.*, 2010; Masip, 2008) to changes in content (Díaz Noci, 2014; López, Pereira, Portilla), also studying changes related to the public sphere (Elías, Ruiz; 2011).

In relation to Transmedia Storytelling, we should recall Jenkins definition: 'Transmedia is storytelling expanded through several kinds of media' (2006). According to this definition, could online news be considered *transmedia*? Initially we would say 'no', especially because of the usual adscription of transmedia to fiction, until now mostly related to the areas of entertainment and advertising (Branded Entertainment), but also because a digital newspaper is composed of news stories, journalistic pieces that belong to several sections and inform readers about specific facts. But these news stories – and here we must refer to Jenkin's concept of 'spreadibility' (Jenkins, 2006; 2013) – are put together through links that connect topics and news reports and can be intertwined with other platforms, as we will see in detail below.

With the purpose of clearly differentiating between the industry and the users, we will distinguish between: a) an internal spreadibility of digital media (links between news and news archives), b) external spreadibility of media (media

presence on social networks, connecting specific news), c) external spreadability of the readers (to incorporate news to social networks, blogs, searches on Google or even to send news through e-mail) and d) internal spreadability of the readers (comments).

Regarding the formal structure of the news stories, we have observed that they can also be analyzed according to the distributed story diagrams, for instance Hayes' proposal (2008) or Scolari's proposal (2013). These diagrams find their oldest precedent in the interactivity grids that Vittadini (1995) and Fortunati (2005) elaborated (cfr. Tous-Rovirosa and Díaz Noci, 2009: 1081-1091). Below we present a distributed story diagram proposal from elpais.com, and also the abovementioned diagrams by Hayes and Scolari. These graphics have in common the existence of a *tentpole*, a milestone. The several interactivity issues are always structured around this *tentpole*. In the case we are studying, the *tentpole* is the news story.

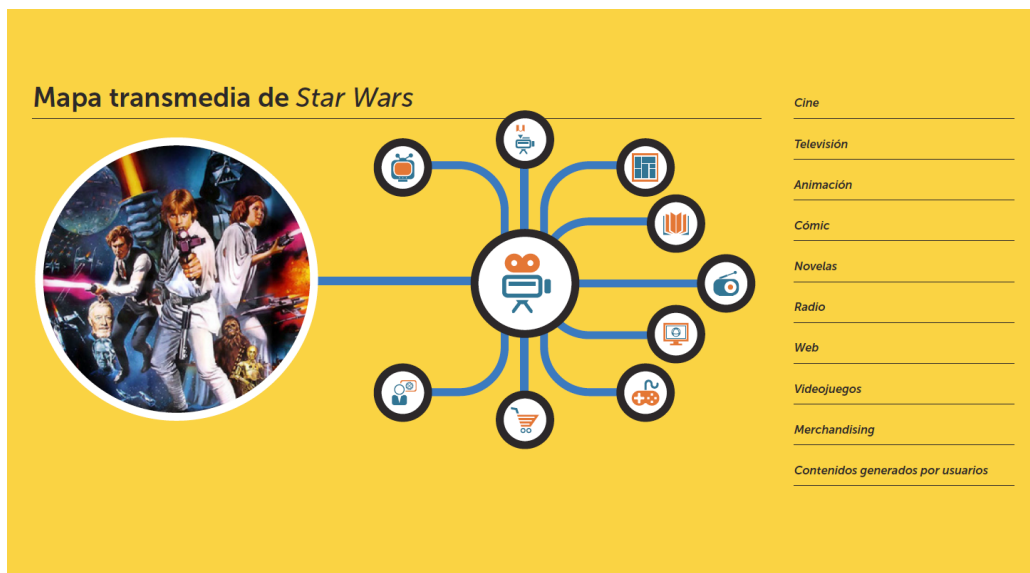


Image 1. Star Wars' Infography.

Source: Scolari (2013: 37).

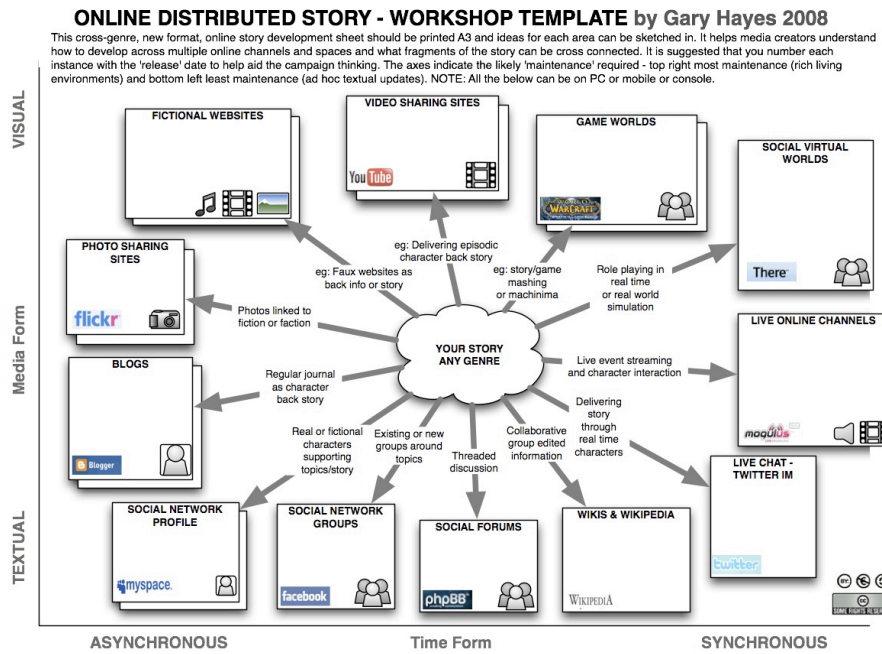


Image 2.

Source: 'Online Distributed Story. Workshop Template' (Hayes, 2008)

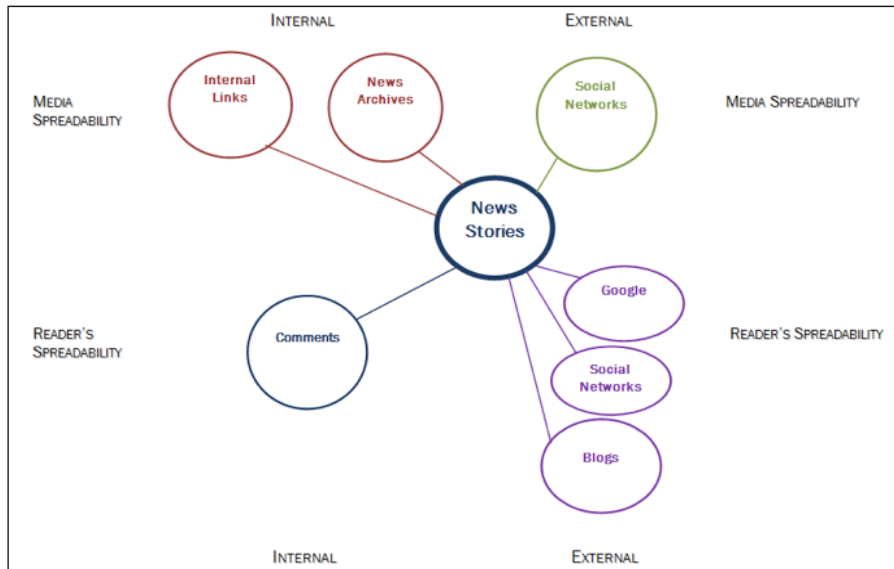


Image 3

Source: Prepared by the Author

These graphics are extremely useful for showing that Transmedia Fiction and online news stories have some issues in common. In the first place, story fragmentation, which is generated because of the introduction of videos, photos, internal links, and links to news archives; secondly, they share links to social networks and interaction capacity; and in the third and final place, user generated content, prosumer participation (comments). But this research is not only centered on the issues mentioned above, it also aims to determine which recurrent thematic or mythical ingredients can be found in online news stories. This analysis is located within transmedia storytelling and convergence culture because these are two issues that can be studied in narrative in general, no matter whether it is fiction or non-fiction.

2. Mediology in News Production

We analyze the extent to which convergence culture influences online news production, trying to apply some of the research on fiction to non-fiction issues. Besides, some of the scholars quoted have studied narratology in online news (Díaz Noci, 2011). The purpose of this paper is to analyze to what extent myth and thematic recurrence remain in international digital news production. To do so, we have to bear in mind several aspects:

- a. Mythical and thematic recurrence are present in cultural production
- b. Mythical and thematic recurrence are present in current fiction products, such as TV series and transmedia storytelling
- c. The presence of myth in news production has already been studied (Knight and Dean, 1982)
- d. Online news stories are influenced by the changes resulting from convergence culture, as well as by transmedia storytelling strategies

Bearing these statements in mind, we have to ask ourselves whether mythical and thematic recurrence remains in online news. Some of the transmedia storytelling scholars quoted have studied the expansion of narrative programs,

actants, from one media to another, that is, applying narratology tools to the study of transmedia products. As Carlos Scolari said, in this intertwined field of study, 'The scientific objective of semiotics and narratology coincides with the economic interests of media producers' (Scolari, 2009: 601).

Some of the features highlighted by Long are that extensions of a transmedia story should stay in the canon, and, if they belong to the same narrative universe, they should maintain the tone of this narrative world (Long, 2008: 163-164). We will return to these features in the conclusions. So, the principal objective of this chapter is to analyze the presence of myth in the news stories of digital newspapers. With the aim of determining the structure of myth in the news stories of online media, the methodology employed is mediological analysis (previously tested by the author), in order to determine the extent to which the themes of digital news stories are related to myths. The analysis is made concrete in its application to a sample of the online media *Asahi Shimbun*, *Clarín*, *Globo*, *La Repubblica*, *Le Monde*, *Publico*, *Globo*, *The Guardian*, *El País*, *The New York Times* and *BBC News*.

Mediological analysis consists in determining the extent to which themes, genres and myths are interrelated in the construction of the story. The abovementioned methodology (principally based on Ginzburg, Nagy and Lévi-Strauss) is put to the test, with the novelty that it is applied to news stories, and that studies previously carried out on the question that might be useful for the analysis are also employed (i.e., Knight and Dean). The methodology is divided into the diachronic analysis (relation with genre, plot, obligatory and optional regularities) and the synchronic analysis (thematic recurrence, myth, identification of recurrent themes), and the references are structured according to the already established typology (serious/ironic, descriptive/metaphoric, quotation or isolated allusion, explicit/implicit).

The presence of myth in narration is an undeniable fact and, at the same time, those who carry out research in this question themselves consider it to be subject to the interpretation of the reader (Duch, 1995, 2002). In accordance with the postulates of this anthropologist, the human being is constantly narrating herself to herself and she establishes herself in society as in the theatre of life, that is, carrying out a determinate role or function. In these configurations, the person is a limited being, due to adverbial conditions (due to the space and

time coordinates that determine us), since she or he can confront the need to narrate and the theatre of life through a limited repertoire of themes, myths and stereotypes (Dufays, 2002: 12).

In the field of fiction, the importance of myth in narration has been shown on different occasions and by different academics, to the extent that several lines of research have been created. In this respect, we can draw attention to the work of the specialists in mythology (Campbell, Dumézil, Lévi-Strauss, Duch, Blumenberg) as well as the semiologists (Eco, Calabrese, Todorov, Neale) and the theoreticians who have analyzed the presence of myth in fiction (Gubern, Balló, Pérez), amongst whom the author of this chapter would situate herself, in her analysis of myths in current US. fiction series (Tous-Rovirosa, 2008a; 2010).

Amongst the considerations of this analysis, the following can be underlined:

1. The presence of myth was established as an initial hypothesis, which was indeed found in the five United States fictional dramatic series¹, repeatedly in some cases, demonstrating the applicability of thematic and mythic recurrence.
2. The study of thematic recurrences and references also confirmed that the literary, traditional and mythic recurrences coexisted with specific and current characteristics of television, especially with respect to self-referentiality (see below: metatelevision intertextual recurrence).
3. An analytical grid was configured with the reiterated references and recurrences in each of the dramatic series analyzed, which we reproduce below and which we can divide into two broad groups: television references that constitute a new field (a) and traditional references (c).
 - a. Metatelevision intertextual recurrence
 - a.1) References to other television series
 - a.2) References to other programs
 - a.3) Cinematographic references
 - a.4) Heterogeneous references

1) *Lost*, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, *The West Wing*, *Desperate Housewives* and *House, M.D.*

- a.4.1) Lynchean
- a.4.2) Videogames
- a.4.3) Internet
- a.5) References to news programs
- a.6) References to comics and cartoons
- a.7) References to musicals
- a.8) References to sports
- a.9) References to competitions
- a.10) Advertising references
- b. Socio-cultural references
- c. Traditional and literary recurrences
 - c.1) Literary intertextual recurrences
 - c.2) Scholarly references
 - c.3) Biblical and religious references
 - c.4) Thematic and mythical recurrences
 - c.5) Timeless theme

3. Variables to be Studied

When it comes to transferring the methodology of analysis that led to the construction of this grid (which we could call a palimpsest due to its similarities with television, specifically the first part, (a)), consideration should be given to the most relevant aspects whose applicability is effective, as well as to the earlier studies made on the subject. Amongst the bibliography consulted on the analysis of myth and news (Knight and Dean, 1982; Luengo, 2009), we underline what interests us, particularly the presence of myth in journalistic news stories. We consider, a priori, that this sociological and ideological aspect, developed by these authors, should be considered as part of a subsequent analysis. Knight and Dean analyze the function of social legitimation carried out by the news, in consonance with the postulates of Durkheim (1964) especially.

In an attempt to keep to the initial thematic formulation of our methodological proposal, we have configured an analytical file that has a theoretical substrate that we will define next. The research, in our understanding, should start with the

verification of the presence of invariants – the term proceeds from the theory of literature (Villanueva, 1991: 208) – with which thematic and mythical recurrences are defined, the themes that are reiterated in human cultural production. These invariants can principally be analyzed from two basic points of view: through diachronic analysis (the relation of the text with its genre, the inscription of the concrete cultural product in a determinate genre, its genealogy) and through synchronic analysis (mythological comparison and, especially, the updating of myth in cultural production).

The exposition of the two analyses answers to the need for realizing an investigation into the relation of the text with its genre and the genealogy of the product, in order to understand it in its dimension before placing it in relation with myth, following the methodology proposed by Ginzburg (1989) and Nagy (2006). Once the analysis has been made, it can be observed that the updating of myth belongs to the level of content (signified), and in these cases we speak of serious thematic or mythical recurrence (communication really takes place), and that the reiteration of stereotypes or themes belongs to the level of expression (signifier), when it is a case of the mere repetition of a theme, barely communicating anything (this occurs in the framework of parodic referentiality or in reference to a shared field of knowledge, in order to guarantee the receiver's pleasure).

To be able to confirm thematic recurrence it is necessary for there to be isomorphism, the identification of a recurrent theme and its form (Ginzburg, 1989: 54), since isomorphism founds identity. In the diachronic analysis one can go more deeply into obligatory, optional or independent regularities (Ryan, 1979). Generic regularities are the ingredients that delimit genre, which they constitute through their contribution. These recurrences have no relation to intertextual thematic references (through which one comes to define the presence of myth). Ryan (1979: 261) divides generic regularities into obligatory (the genre requires them), optional (for example, with the recreation of a subgenre within the genre) and independent (contributing difference and novelty to the genre).

A question of vital relevance for the analysis of news stories, with respect to their content, is thematization and the postulates of agenda-setting (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Tomasevskij (1928) differentiates between themes of current interest, which do not withstand the variability of the public's interests, and

themes that are ‘resistant in time’, ‘timeless themes’, which guarantee the viability of the work, thanks to emotional realism (the themes continue to be of current interest because they are updated through the feelings of the public), and which have an unalterable content (love, passion and death). Umberto Eco reminds us that the first popular prints of the sixteenth century were ephemeral (first characteristic of media culture) and dealt with the following themes: love, death and passions, presented according to the effect that was sought after (Eco, 1965: 16).

Facing the differentiation of Tomasevskij, Bakhtin (1979) prefers to reduce the opposition and integrate it into one single postulate: themes of current interest are formulated according to those resistant in time, which could be considered a criterion for being newsworthy. Since the updating of myth occurs at any time and in any human production, and all the versions of the myth are valid (Lévi-Strauss, 1958: 199), a news story and a fiction story are two materializations of an archetypical theme.

4. Analytical File

We believe it is opportune to apply the foregoing methodology and to test its basic and pertinent elements in the news stories analyzed. Thus, the methodology of analysis is developed through the following proposals

Recurrences	
Cultural recurrences	Literary
	Biblical
	Religious
	Artistic
	Erudite
Social recurrences	

Mythical recurrence	Sacrificial princess
	Heroes
	Traditional hero
	Hero who doubts
	Anti-hero
	Antithetical comic couple
	Sin and redemption
	Others

Themes	Love		
	Deaths		
	Passions	Sentimental relations	Maltreatment
			Gender violence
		Family dysfunctions	Sexual abuse
			Sexual promiscuity
			Doubts about paternity
		Crime	Robbery, crimes
			Prostitution
			Sex and Internet
			Kidnapping
			Suicide
			Prevarication
			Murder
			Humiliations
			Animal instinct
			Drugs
		Sexual dysfunctions	Rape
			Incest
			Others
		Others	
	Others		

Degree of isomorphism	Formal homology Coincidence of content
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References	Cinema		
	Music		
	Advertising		
	Media	TV	Fiction
			Non-fiction
			Competitions
		Radio	
		Newspapers	
		Internet	

Typology of references	Serious
	Ironic
	Descriptive
	Metaphorical
	Quotation
	Isolated allusion
	Construction
	Explicit
	Implicit
	Verbal
	Visual
	Scenic
	Others

Diachronic analysis

Genres	
History of the genre	Informative [news]
	Interpretative
	Dialogic
	Argumentative
	Others (literary)
Regularity	Optional
	Obligatory
	Independent

5. Typologies

As we have discovered in other research (Tous-Rovirosa, 2008a), in spite of not finding a lot of cases related to thematic recurrence, we do find some interesting issues for debate related to the presence or absence of myths and themes in fiction. For this purpose, we have organized this part of the chapter, dedicated to the analysis of the news stories, in two broad parts: a) the absence of thematic recurrence (5.1. Compulsory Generic Regularities; 5.2. Compulsory Generic Regularities... and more besides; 5.3. Formal Recurrence) and b) the presence of thematic recurrence (5.4. Intertextuality; 5.5. Thematic Recurrence; 5.6. The Hero(es)).

5.1. Compulsory Generic Regularities

The news story by Justin Gilis on the spillage of petrol in the Gulf of Mexico ('Plumes of Oil Below Surface Raise New Concerns', *The New York Times*, 8-6-2010) is an example of the absence of thematic or mythical recurrence, and of adscription to the obligatory generic regularities, neither optional nor independent (Ryan, 1979). The report is accompanied by several video and infographic compilations, a map, an interactive map, an interactive and diachronic review of similar catastrophes and a multimedia collection, all of them demonstrations of the capacities for storage and rapid consultation of current and past news on Internet, with the corresponding consequences with respect to the production and reception of the information.

The news story by Dexter Filkins on the investigation into the relation between Afghan guards and insurgents ('Afghan Guards Face an Inquiry over Ties to Insurgents', *The New York Times*, 8-6-2010) is based on institutional sources, especially NATO and the Afghan Interior Ministry. It deals with suspicions about private security in Afghanistan relating to the Taliban (in the form of bribery) and suspicions that these same companies increase the sensation of insecurity on the roads. It notes that the rule when dealing with the Taliban is confrontation if the attack is small, and agreement if the Taliban presence is too great, according to the anonymous source from the Interior Ministry.

There is an absence of thematic or mythical recurrence, and an adscription to the obligatory generic regularities, in the news story 'Militants attack Nato tanker convoy in Pakistan' (BBC, 4-10-2010), through the war lexicon: 'incident', 'attack', 'threat', 'troops', 'carrying supplies', 'convoys', 'a new wing of the Group'. It is important to stress that even news stories related to a greater or lesser extent to death, passion or love (the three main cultural topics, which could possibly contain thematic recurrence, as stated previously, cfr. Eco, 1965; Tomachevskij, 1928), contain compulsory generic regularities and are characterized by an absence of thematic recurrence.

This is the case of 'Japan hangs 3 murderers in first executions since 2010' (*Asahi Shimbun*, 29-3-2012), 'Vendas de prótese de silicona são suspensas no país' (*Globo*, 21-3-2012), and the majority of news stories related to the raid

on Toulouse ('Raid on Toulouse... France shootings', BBC, 21-3-2012, 'El sospechoso de la matanza en Toulouse sigue atrincherado', *Clarín*, 21-3-2012, 'La policía acorrala en Toulouse a un joven islamista sospechoso de las muertes', *El País*, 21-3-2012). In the BBC news story there are plenty of compulsory generic regularities ('weapons'; 'siege of the man suspect of killing several children to avenge Palestinian children', 'how French Police tracked down the gunman', 'catch him'; 'prosecutors'; 'arrested'; 'jailed'; 'identified'; 'a huge manhunt was launched'; 'memorial service').

In *El País* we found a similar lexicon related to the siege. The only exception would be the use of the word '*masacre*' (massacre) in the Argentinian digital newspaper. This word can be seen as an exception because it is more scabrous than the rest of the lexicon in these news stories and on several occasions the appeal of the three main themes – love, death and passion – is their scabrous nature (cfr. Eco, *op.cit*). Some other news stories more or less related to these main themes, like 'Arbitro portués sai de casa depois de filha ser ameaçada' (*Publico*, 25-3-2012), or 'PJ do Porto e Scotland Yard retomam caso Maddie' (*Publico*, 9-3-2012) do not contain thematic or mythical recurrence.

Some other news stories will not be commented on in detail because of their lack of thematic recurrence, such as 'En medio del embate oficial, YPF anunció nuevos hallazgos de petróleo en Mendoza' (*Clarín*, 29-3-2012); 'Illegal logging makes billions for gangs' (BBC, 21-3-2012); 'Un sondage place Sarkozy devant Hollande au premier tour' (*Le Monde*, 12-3-2012).

5.2. Compulsory Generic Regularities.... and more besides

The news story about the Chilean miners ('Trapped Chilean miners 'could be reached by Saturday'', BBC, 8-10-2010) emphasizes, in the first place, that progress is being made towards rescuing them, followed by a call for patience to the population and encouraging messages ('Mr Manalich also praised the 'maturity and manhood' of the miners'), to conclude with the story's *background* and details related to its imminent resolution. The mining lexicon is used especially at the beginning of the information ('Carved', 'rock', 'engineers',

‘surface’, ‘mine hammer’, ‘coated’, ‘metal’), but it is not employed more than the lexicon of rescue (‘rescue capsules’, ‘drilling gear’, ‘final rescue equipment’) nor to the lexicon related to social and media expectation. The obligatory regularities are also the ones related to the mining lexicon as well as the ones related to the rescue and social expectation, due to the long duration of the news about the mining accident, which occurred three months before this news story (August, 5th). Minister Golborne is one of the main sources of information, as we can see through direct and indirect quotation, on five occasions. The Health Minister, Jaime Manalich, is also quoted on four occasions. At the end of the news story there is a reminder of the theme’s importance: ‘The miners have now been underground longer than any group before’. This would be a case of the inverted pyramid, stressing some information at the very beginning, but this is due to contextual reasons, not so as to bias the information.

In other cases, we can observe the usage of an hyperbolic language related to scandals in politics, relating to political corruption and lies (*Clarín*, 9-3-2012) or even in social life (‘extensas demoras’, ‘intensos congestionamientos’ in ‘Por el corte en Retiro, la ciudad habla de una ‘extorsión’ de los vecinos de la Villa 31’, *Clarín*, 2-2-2012), as often occurs in the Argentinean digital newspaper *Clarín*. Hyperbolic language can also be found in the depiction of ‘Companies abandoning disaster-stricken areas’ (*Asashi Shimbun*, 5-3-2012). This news story, which starts with a vivid metaphor (‘Where once a bustling electronic parts plant was filled with workers in the Hirono industrial complex, the only object inside a spacious building is a chair with a phone’), has a tone that is not only hyperbolic but also apocalyptic.

From the beginning of the information ‘Security contractors in Afghanistan ‘fund Taliban’’ (*BBC*, 8-10-2010) we can observe an opposition between the ‘local recruits’ and the ‘warlords’, in relation to the ‘personal security service’. This opposition articulates this news story, as it emphasizes the warlords’ link to the Taliban (‘Heavy US reliance on private security in Afghanistan has helped to line the pockets of the Taliban, a US Senate report says’), as a threat to US troops (‘These contractors threaten the security of our troops and risk the success of our mission,’ he added.), their limited training (‘The report paints a disturbing picture of how some of those hired have little training or experience in firing

weapons’) and the fact of their being a cheaper option (‘The tendency among Congress is simply to go for the cheapest things they can find, the cheapest contractors, and that undermines, I think, the more quality contractors’). The opposition leads to one to wonder about the ‘personal security service’ that should have been hired (more expensive, trained, not linked to the Taliban, and not threatening to the US).

In sum, this news story is a severe criticism of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. The sources of information placed at the beginning are constantly legitimated (Study by the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Chairman of the Senate Committee, Democratic Senator Carl Levin) through a continued criticism of the ‘risky’ situation in Afghanistan (‘These contractors threaten the security of our troops and risk the success of our mission,’ he added; ‘The report paints a disturbing picture of how some of those hired...’). Criticisms are tough and specific: ‘The report also says that –by funding warlords with their own private militias– the US is undermining its declared aim of creating a more stable Afghanistan’. Doug Brooks, who represents private security contractors, argues that they have no option but to contract somebody apart from warlords or ‘headman’, as they would become targets immediately. This news story contrasts with *The New York Times*’ ‘Afghan Guards Face an Inquiry Over Ties to Insurgents’. The *BBC* news story focuses on US responsibility, while the other story focuses on the Taliban’s palace intrigues.

5.3. Formal Recurrence

The news story that refers to the Estonian language exams for schools in Estonia, by Clifford J. Levy, is a totally negative exposition of the ‘imposition’ of the Estonian language in Estonia: especially in the headline (‘Estonia Raises Pencil to Erase Russian’, *The New York Times*, 8-6-2010) and in the first part of the news story. It stresses that the Russian language is discriminated against, that the exams have been ‘unpleasant’, that older teachers have to learn a ‘diabolically complicated’ language, and that Russian was used to unite disparate peoples (‘The tension over the status of Estonian reflects a debate across the former

Soviet Union over the primacy of native languages and the role of Russian'). It is not until the end of the news story when the point of view of the agency's director is given (civil servants must know the language, there is no wish to discriminate against anybody) and the headmistress of the school (no one likes the exams). We can thus observe that a case of formal recurrence (the inverted pyramid) is used with the intention of stressing, in the first place, certain specific positions, without reaching the extreme of ignoring any of them, but using the abovementioned structure to reduce their importance.

As we have said, in the news story 'Security contractors in Afghanistan 'fund Taliban'' (*BBC*, 8-10-2010), criticisms are tough and specific. It is also being explicated that the private security business in Afghanistan has been lucrative and dangerous. Finally, through the inverted pyramid, as we analyzed in the Estonian language news story, the other point of view is set out, at the end of the information.

The inverted pyramid strategy is also used in the news story 'Marcha atrás de Abal de Medina: ahora dice que nunca descartó una estatización (YPF)' (*Clarín*, 21-3-2012). The 'Spanish issue' is mentioned at the end of the news story, an interesting fact bearing in mind that YPF is an Argentinian company which was, at that moment, the property of a Spanish company, Repsol (Repsol YPF).

Another news story using this strategy is 'Beijing clamps down after self-immolations in Tibetan areas' (*Asashi Shimbun*, 9-3-2012). In the first paragraphs we can read all the information related to the Chinese government, as well as the institutional criticism of the immolations ('encourage individuals to self-immolate themselves so they can be treated as heroes'), and the relationship established by the government between self-immolations and delinquency (criminal records; no hope for social honor, they have become despondent with this world and choose suicide.). It is not until the very end of the news story when we can read the Tibetans' point of view ('An immolated woman: "Unless I do something for Tibet, there will be no meaning to living"; 'large concentrations of Tibetans').

So, we cannot talk about thematic recurrence in the cases mentioned above but we must emphasize that this formal recurrence is used to create a false idea

of objectivity. The journalistic style is used and preserved but it also serves to underline one specific point of view, against the interests of journalistic ethics.

5.4. Intertextuality

There is a cinematographic reference in the news story ‘Security contractors in Afghanistan “fund Taliban”’ (*BBC*, 8-10-2010) to Quentin Tarantino’s violent film *Reservoir Dogs* (‘The document gives several notorious examples, including a man the Americans have nicknamed Mr. White – after a character in the violent film *Reservoir Dogs*’). In fact, this is also a social reference, as the *BBC* journalist is interpreting and quoting the reference to the ‘Americans’. There is another cinematographic reference in the news story ‘La palabra de Kicillof, las consignas de la Cámpora y un Gabinete alterado’ (*Clarín*, 29-3-2012), as this title evokes cinematographic titles such as ‘Sex, Lies and Videotape’. In the same news story, there is a case of thematic recurrence (palace intrigues). As Genette (1982) stated, it is usual to encounter two different cases of intertextuality in a single case.

5.5. Thematic Recurrence

The news story by Dexter Filkins ‘Afghan Guards Face an Inquiry Over Ties to Insurgents’ (*The New York Times*, 8-6-2010) contains some thematic recurrence. The presence of thematic recurrence is observed in the following palace intrigues: the complexity of the plot is constantly adduced (Afghans, Taliban, security firms, drug trafficking). The situation is complicated by the family links of the Afghan rulers with the Taliban (the reality of the country prior to the war), or due to the connection of the Afghans (powerful families) with the profitable business offered by the private security firms – but no mention is made of the participation of US firms. In a report on a war situation like this, mention of palace intrigues constitutes an optional regularity, as there is a certain tradition in the war genre that involves such regularity, which constitutes a strengthening of

some of the premises of the report, and which we corroborate due to the absence of references to a similar complexity in the US social, political and military framework.

Another news stories that contains thematic recurrence, in particular palace intrigues, is ‘La palabra de Kicillof, las consignas de La Cámpora y un Gabinete alterado’ (*Clarín*, 29-3-2012). This is an interesting news story because it contains thematic recurrence, intertextuality (in the title) and there is an explicit criticism towards the government strategy (‘resulta paradójico’; ‘como si el expresidente continuara manejando los hilos de ese negocio’).

The first news story that was analyzed on the BBC website, ‘Rouseff falls short of outright win in Brazil election’ (BBC, 4-10-2010), shows an impartial point of view towards the presidential elections in Brazil, apparently. During the whole news story the idea of struggle is emphasized, for Lula’s continuist candidate (‘We are warriors, and we are accustomed to challenges’; ‘We do well in second rounds’), as well as for candidates Silva (‘We defended a victorious idea and Brazil heard our cry’) and Serra (‘For Serra’s supporters, a second round is an achievement in itself’). The impression of an open fight is upheld during the information, but there is also an emphasis on Rouseff’s greater possibilities of winning – unless she is involved in a scandal (‘Many analysts believe a scandal involving her directly would be the only scenario under which she could lose a runoff’). The idea of a political fight must be considered an obligatory regularity in a political and electoral news story, as this is the news story’s genre. On the other hand, a mention of a scandal is a thematic reference linked to passions. This news story can be compared to ‘Mitt Romney wins Illinois primary’ (BBC, 21-3-2012), a political news story related to elections with compulsory generic regularities (victory, win, had enough) and an absence of thematic recurrence.

We did find another news story that presents a relationship between politics and the war lexicon: ‘Vaccarezza anuncia que deixa liderança do governo na Câmara’ (*Globo*, 13-3-2012). Vaccarezza, a PT-SP congressman, says he will be ‘soldado o general’ (soldier or general) after Dilma’s acceptance of his resignation. Another war metaphor, ‘rebelião da base aliada’ is used at the end of the information. On the other hand, we can also find a lexicon of struggle

in sports news: ‘Los hinchas del Inter gritaron por Mourinho en la práctica del Barsa’ (*Clarín*, 29-3-2012).

5.6. The Hero(es)

As we showed in the analytical grid, the hero can be: a) the traditional hero; b) the hero who doubts; c) the anti-hero. First of all, we would like to stress that the hero is a recurrent thematic character and that this has been the most predominant in the news stories analyzed. These are the news stories which contain the hero: ‘Messi, crack argentino con ADN catalán’ (*Clarín*, 21-3-2012), ‘MLB/ Ichiro thrills packed Tokyo Dome as M’s down A’s on Opening Day’ (*Asahi Shimbun*, 29-3-2012), ‘Kidnapped Briton killed in Nigeria as PM sends in special forces’ (*The Guardian*, 9-3-2012), ‘Idoso de 86 anos realiza sonho e cursa matematicas na USFM’ (*Globo*, 13-3-2012) and ‘Marc Gasol desvela la ausencia de Pau en el Mundial’ (*ABC*, 26-04-2010).

In relation to the hero as the main character in literature and narrative in general terms, we must emphasize that this depiction of some ‘real people’ as heroes (Messi, Gasol, Ichiro, Briton, Idoso) in the news stories analyzed corresponds to the traditional, modern idea of the hero. Meanwhile this idea of the traditional hero is being replaced in fiction (especially in TV series, but also in cinema and literature) by the idea of the hero who doubts, the weak hero (Tous-Roviroso, 2010); it is interesting how the traditional idea prevails in non-fiction, and is, besides, the main recurrent thematic figure. We can observe that the hero is a figure which is changing, showing his weakness in fiction, but maintaining his traditional traits in non-fiction.

In relation to the news stories analyzed, we can see that the majority of them belong to Sports (those *starring* Messi, Gasol and Ichiro), and the rest of them belong to Society. The soccer player Messi, who is Argentinian and plays in the Catalan soccer team Futbol Club Barcelona, one of the most important Spanish teams (and worldwide), is often criticized by the Argentinian press, but not in this news story: ‘Messi, crack argentino con ADN catalán’ (*Clarín*, 21-3-2012), which shows admiration for the football player in the title. Some of

the *epithets* used to depict Messi as a hero are ‘Rosarino de ley’, ‘La Pulga’, ‘el crack’, as well as the comparison to other ‘excellent’ football players such as ‘Fábregas’ and ‘Piqué’, and sentences like ‘Anoche escribió un capítulo más en su larga y laureada carrera’. The news story emphasizes the initial difficulties of the player and his final success, as is usual in the depiction of the hero – he overcomes some difficulties at the beginning due to his personal value and effort and finally obtains what he deserves (Propp, 1928; Greimas, 1979). Also shown is Messi’s humility because of his earlier admiration for Maradona, which leads to a comparison with his idol – ‘con el que luego le compararían’; ‘vaya si se le cumplió su sueño’. He is depicted as an *official hero*, as stated by Casetti (1990: 181), because he reproduces the values accepted by the society.

In the news story ‘Marc Gasol desvela la ausencia de Pau en el Mundial’ (ABC, 26-04-2010), the basketball player Marc Gasol, brother of Pau Gasol, another basketball player, shows an extraordinary humility (‘ilusión’, ‘reto’, ‘no es fácil jugar ahí, contra el Oklahoma’), and, besides, an astonishing admiration for his brother, whom he puts on a superior footing, when Pau cannot play in the Basketball World Cup (‘la gente lo va a entender perfectamente porque la afición quiere mucho a Pau’, ‘Pau ha dado ya muchas alegrías’, ‘es un jugador único y especial’). He even talks about the team without his brother only in terms of possibility (‘obviamente España cambiará mucho sin Pau’, ‘intentaremos hacerlo lo mejor posible’, ‘nueva experiencia y nuevo reto’). We must emphasize a word which appears twice, ‘scepter’ (‘cetro’: ‘Mundial de Turquía, donde la roja defiende el cetro’, ‘cetro mundial’). The metaphorical usage of this term, in the sense of reign or leadership, is an optional regularity of the sports genre and fits exactly with the depiction of the hero as a missing character (Pau Gasol).

Ichiro, in the news stories ‘MLB/ Ichiro thrills packed Tokyo Dome as M’s down A’s on Opening Day’ (*Asahi Shimbun*, 29-3-2012) is being depicted with an hyperbolic language, explicitly receiving the epithet of *hero* (‘slap-hitting hero did not disappoint’), and his success and power comes especially from his effect on the crowds (‘it was Ichiro who sent his legion of Japanese fans home happy’; ‘each swing of his bat was greeted with exaggerated ‘ooohs’ and ‘aaahs’ from the crowd’; ‘These games are providing local fans their first opportunity to see Ichiro perform in an MLB uniform’).

The two society news stories which contain the hero are ‘Kidnapped Briton killed in Nigeria as PM sends in special forces’ (*The Guardian*, 9-3-2012) and ‘Idoso de 86 anos realiza sonho e cursa matematicas na USFM’ (*Globo*, 13-3-2012). The main difference between the two stories is that the first is an elegy for a British citizen killed by terrorists, honored for this reason through news stories with the Prime Minister, David Cameron, quotations, extracts from his family, and the depiction of the Briton, his life explained in detail; meanwhile the other news story, ‘Idoso de 86 anos realiza sonho e cursa matematicas na USFM’ (*Globo*, 13-3-2012), can be considered a depiction of the traditional hero, as the main *character* of the story (the old man) is appearing in the digital newspaper because he is studying maths at the age of 86 years. He is shown as a model, in terms of the traditional hero, which was a role model for the whole society. As we could observe with the Messi news story, the initial difficulties of this old man are stressed, as well as his success (studying maths at university). As he has had a difficult life and has obtained what he deserved due to his effort, he is a role model for young people.

To sum up, the hero in the news stories analyzed is a role model (Idoso) or has followed a role model and reproduces his values (Messi). He is characterized as a modest person (Marc Gasol, Messi), and, on the other hand, with all the positive values and his *grandeur* (the word ‘cepro’ in the Pau Gasol news story and the positive *epithets* in the rest, for instance the hyperbolic language used in the Ichiro news story).

6. Conclusions

News stories can be analyzed as part of transmedia storytelling and convergence culture because they belong to them. They are of course affected by convergence culture in the newsrooms and share some features with transmedia storytelling in fiction and advertising, especially spreadability (Jenkins, 2006; 2013) and the fragmentary story, amongst others. To study myth and thematic recurrence in news stories is a way to study their narrativity.

There is a notable absence of thematic or mythical recurrence in the international news stories analyzed, and there is usually adscription to the obligatory generic regularities, which are neither optional nor independent (Ryan, 1979). But in spite of not having found many cases related to thematic recurrence, we did find some interesting issues for debate related to the presence or absence of myths and themes in fiction.

‘Security contractors in Afghanistan ‘fund Taliban’ (BBC, 8-10-2010) is a severe criticism of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. The sources of information placed at the beginning are constantly legitimated through continued criticism of the ‘risky’ situation in Afghanistan. Criticism is tough and specific. This news story contrasts with *The New York Times*’ ‘Afghan Guards Face an Inquiry over Ties to Insurgents’. The *BBC* news story focuses on U.S. responsibility, while the other focuses on the Taliban’s palace intrigues.

Some cases of formal recurrence (the inverted pyramid) are used with the intention of stressing, in the first place, certain specific positions, without reaching the extreme of ignoring any of them, but using the abovementioned structure to reduce their importance. This is a case of recurrence that is more usual than thematic recurrence in the news stories analyzed. We must emphasize that this formal recurrence is used to create a false idea of objectivity. The journalistic style is used and preserved but it also serves to underline one specific point of view, against the interests of journalistic ethics. In relation to style, on some occasions we found usage of hyperbolic language, in particular in *Clarín* and *Asahi-Shimbun*.

In the news stories analyzed, we found only two cases of intertextuality. One of them in the title of one news story, the other within the news story. Besides, the second of the references is a social one – it is a quotation proceeding from ‘reality’. Both of them are cinematographic references. The former one contains two cases of intertextuality. As stated by Genette (1982), it is usual to encounter two different cases of intertextuality in a single case.

There are few cases of thematic recurrence. The presence of thematic recurrence is observed in palace intrigues, especially in news related to Afghanistan (*The New York Times*) and politics in Argentina (*Clarín*). There are also cases of references to fighting and war, both of them linked to politics (*BBC*,

Globo); in some cases these references were linked to sports (*Clarín*). We also found some references to passion and scandal (*BBC*). It is important to stress that even news stories related to a greater or lesser extent with death, passion or love (the three main cultural topics, which could possibly contain thematic recurrence), contain compulsory generic regularities and are characterized by an absence of thematic recurrence. That is, the reference to one of these topics does not lead compulsorily to a thematic or mythical recurrence.

As we have seen, there is more maintenance of generic regularities than usage of myth in the sample analyzed. As Long (2008) states, remaining in the canon is an essential characteristic of transmedia storytelling. We consider that this feature must be related to the fact that online journalism, despite its crisis (Starr, 2009), can still maintain its generic regularities. Probably, if we had studied the absence and presence of thematic and mythical recurrence in some other news productions, such as TV news stories that have been switched to a spectacular and banal model (Pomares, 2010; Oliva and Sitjà, 2011), we would have found more results in our sample. Even though this is a question for separate research, we can state here and now that the lack of usage of thematic and mythical recurrence is, at least, not bad news for the journalistic model, the qualitative one. At least for now.

And last but not least, we did find several news stories containing one single case of thematic recurrence: the hero. The main difference that we found between fiction and information is that, in this second case, the prominent recurrent thematic figure is the hero and he is treated in the traditional, modern manner (as opposed to the post-modern). We must relate this to the fact that 'Narrativity is a matter of degree. Postmodern novels are less narrative than simple forms such as fables or fairy tales; popular literature is usually more narrative than avant-garde fiction' (Ryan, 2001). So, information is more narrative than some kinds of fiction, in the cases analyzed.

News stories are 'simple forms' and some TV series, for instance, belong to the category of 'avant-garde fiction'. This is the main reason why some news stories still star the traditional hero, while in fiction we find plenty of post-modern heroes – heroes who doubt, have imperfections and do not hesitate to show their weakness (cfr. Tous-Roviroa, 2010). The maintenance of generic

regularities and canonic features is confirmed by the most important case of thematic recurrence found in this research, the traditional hero.

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