IJoC | **Transmedia Critical**

Toward a Typology of Transmedia Characters

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A *transmedia character* is a fictional hero whose adventures are told in different media platforms, each one giving more details on the life of that character. There is not a direct correspondence between transmedia storytelling and transmedia characters. In a shared narrative world, in fact, different characters can live and act, and every story can focus on a different one; moreover, the presence of the same character in different texts and media platforms does not necessarily imply that these texts or platforms share the same world. More generally, transtextuality and transmediality propose some problems to the status of the character, in particular to his identity, which is not always univocally defined. On this basis, this article investigates the different ways to construct a transmedia character in order to elaborate a first, preliminary typology.

Keywords: transmedia, character, storytelling, semiotics, text, fictional worlds, narratology, transtextuality

Transmedia Characters as Sociosemiotic Entities

This article aims to contribute to the debate about transmedia storytelling from a semiotic point of view. We believe that the notion of transmedia storytelling, first proposed by Henry Jenkins (2003), can be enhanced with a semiotic and narratological point of view, as already noted by Carlos Scolari (2009). At the same time, introducing the analysis of transmedia storytelling into the semiotic agenda can definitely help bring out semiotics—and in particular European semiotics—from its traditional closure in textual immanence, developing new analytical categories and methodologies. The discussion will focus on the semiotic construction of characters as they increasingly move across media.

Defining Transmedia Characters

From this point of view, we must go further than the traditional notion of a semiotic and narratological character as an immanent entity related to a single text. Rather, I believe that characters are cultural and social constructs, although they are manifested by a text and they are the result of

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textual procedures. Hamon (1983) and Jouve (1992) use the expression *effet-personnage* ("character effect") to suggest that character is the result of the reception of the texts by a subject (reader, viewer, etc.) and the memorial synthesis the interpreter makes in response to the text. In the case of transmedia (or simply transtextual) characters, with their ever-changing but still recognizable identities, their overall construction will result from the whole of texts that contribute to their definition.

In a sociosemiotic approach, Marrone (2003) defines the character as "a cultural element that finds its own being or 'making sense' in a wider sociocultural dimension, including transtextual and transmedia changes and intersemiotic translations. It is a semiotic object that forms itself among and through texts" (pp. 25–26).[1] According to Marrone, the socosemiotic character is similar to Levi-Strauss' idea of myth that is never completely enclosed in a single text, as in the case of legendary heroes such as those of the old German legends. But this is also true for modern serial and transmedia characters, from the classical Tarzan or Zorro, to Harry Potter or Spider-Man, from Commissario Montalbano studied by Marrone, to Conan the Barbarian.

In Marrone's view, characters are cultural rather than textual entities that are parts of the largest universe of culture. Characters lose contact with the text (and the author) to become living objects in the mind of the reader. The semiotic constructions of characters are the result of a combination of intertextual relations. They are based on:

1. All the texts (of one or more authors) in the same medium that remake, rewrite, modify, and translate the character. This is the case of transtextual (or serial) characters.
2. Texts in different media that remake, rewrite, modify, and translate the character. This is the case of transmedia characters.
3. The peritext, that is, all the texts and interpretative discourses related to the character (e.g., news, reviews, critical studies).

Therefore, it is possible to define a *transmedia character* as a fictional hero whose adventures are told across different media platforms, each one giving more details on the life of that character.[2] Thus, for example, a live action or a cartoon TV series can tell the story of Luke Skywalker's or Leia Organa's youth in a way that George Lucas' films cannot.

Transmedia Characters and Transmedia Worlds

As Henry Jenkins remarks, "a good character can sustain multiple narratives and thus leads to a successful movie franchise. A good 'world' can sustain multiple characters (and their stories) and thus successfully launch a transmedial franchise" (Jenkins, 2003, para. 12).

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[1] Translation is mine.

[2] Saying this I intend to exclude, in principle, those texts that are mere adaptation or intersemiotic translations of a primary text. As Evans (2011) states, "transmedia elements do not involve the telling of the same events on different platforms; they involve the telling of new events from the same storyworld" (p. 27).

In my opinion, the concept of transmedia character is not only a notion among others related to transmedia storytelling, but rather it is the platform for a different logic of construction of transmedia that merges with the logic of transmedia storytelling, as intended by Jenkins (2006), centered on the idea of a shared fictional (or diegetic) world. For Jenkins, world building is a key concern of transmedia storytelling: Every text of a franchise extends storytelling, exploring different aspects of the shared world and showing different courses of action, for example, focusing on events only noted in the primary ("mother ship") text.

This world-centered logic is typical of the more recent transmedia productions to which, not surprisingly, Jenkins (2006) only refers. I believe conversely that transmedia is not simply a phenomenon emerging in recent years on account of technological convergence, but rather that it can be traced back almost to the origins of the modern cultural industry between the end of the 1800s and the early 1900s.

At the base of older forms of transmedia franchises there may be a logic not focused on world sharing but on a character sharing. In this regard, Scott (2009) introduces the notion of the character-oriented franchise, tracking the origin of transmedia productions back to the age of silent movies and identifying economic and promotional strategies common to contemporary media franchises. Even Jenkins (2009), harking back to the topic, seems to suggest a similar idea:

> We might well distinguish Felix as a character who is extracted from any specific narrative context (given each of his cartoons is self-contained and episodic) as opposed to a modern transmedia figure who carries with him or her the timeline and the world depicted on the "mother ship," the primary work which anchors the franchise. As I move through this argument, I will connect transmedia to earlier historical practices, trying to identify similarities and differences along the way. (para. 13)

There is no direct correspondence (or mutual implication) between transmedia worlds and transmedia characters. There are two main reasons that can explain this. The first one is that different characters can live and act in a shared narrative world, and every story can focus on a different one. As Jenkins (2007) says, "transmedia stories are based not on individual characters or specific plots but rather complex fictional worlds which can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories" (para. 5). The second reason is that the presence of the same character in different texts and in different media platforms (even better, in different semiotic systems) doesn't necessarily imply that these texts or platforms share the same world. This is the case of Charlie Chaplin's character The Tramp, who appears in different social and even historical and geographical backgrounds. Although most films portray him as a vagrant in a contemporary setting, some, such as *A Day's Pleasure* (1919) and *Pay Day* (1922), are set in the middle class. Other movies show The Tramp in completely different space and time contexts; for example, *His Prehistoric Past* (1914) is set in the stone age and *The Gold Rush* (1925; Figure 1) is set in Klondike at the end of the 19th century.

Figure 1. *The Tramp in* **The Gold Rush** *(1925).*

But even if different incarnations of a character share the same setting, they do not necessarily share a common fictional world. As Umberto Eco (1979) notes, from a semiotic point of view, a fictional possible world is not only a common background, a shared universe of things and of places, but it also consists of the totality of actions and events that happen inside it. It is possible to say that transmedial storytelling does not involve only a shared world, but an *acted* shared world. If the narrative world is not only a state of things, including the transformations acted inside of it, then the concept of narrative coherence becomes a central topic (Jenkins, 2006). Each different medial text should avoid showing courses of action that contrast with each other. In fact, following the counterfactual logic (Eco, 1979), every different course of action inevitably originates from a different possible world. Unfortunately, this is just what happens in many character-oriented franchises in which different texts, moving from one media to another, attribute profiles and life histories to the characters that contrast with one another.

Let us take a closer look at an example: Conan the Barbarian. In all versions, the background of Conan is the pseudomythical Hyborian Age character created in the 1930s by pulp writer Robert Howard, even if the live action TV serial uses backgrounds and toponyms that are unknown to the Howard universe. A fictional world, however, as previously noted, is not only a state of things or a common background, but it also includes the transformations acted inside of it. From this point of view, the different stories and incarnations of Conan do not build a unique fictional world. In effect, only the "mother ship" of Conan (i.e., the original tales written by Howard) and most of the apochriphal novels and short stories directly inspired by him) refer to the same world, but the other media platforms (with

the partial exception of comics) do not. For example, the description of Conan's childhood in Howard's stories is very different from what we see in John Milius' movie. According to Howard, Conan grew up in Cimmeria and left his native land at the age of 19 to join the southern civilized kingdoms looking for fortune. In Milius' epic vision, Conan is reduced to slavery with all of his tribe when he is a child, and he grows up as a slave. He becomes a powerful gladiator before becoming a free man.

Character's Identity

The fact that in different texts a character has different biographies, or performs an inconsistent series of actions, is only one of the possible variants of a transtextual (or transmedia) character. Characters may vary in many ways: physical appearance, social status, their relationships with other characters, the reasons for their actions, and so on. As I noted in my book about Conan the Barbarian (Bertetti, 2011), the transtextual identity of a character cannot always be defined univocally; however, it is important that the character can be recognized by the reader. As Marrone (2003) also pointed out, recognizability does not seem compromised, to some extent, by the possible changes, even if they are in conflict with each other. Rather, the reader will consider some occurrences to be more canonical, whereas others are more free and creative. That is because the definition of characters has a prototypical nature, in the sense of cognitive semantics (Geeraerts, 1989; Rosh, 1978). The identity of characters is a fuzzy concept, and some of characters' occurrences are more typical than others.

On this basis, I proposed (Bertetti, 2011) a model for the analysis of the possible changes of identity of a character in different texts and media.

As semiotics and narratology teach (Barthes, 1966; Chatman, 1978; Genette, 1972; Greimas, 1970), we can study texts at different levels of analysis: history and discourse, events and existents, and so on. Probably one of the most comprehensive models of text description is the well-known *generative trajectory* developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas (see Greimas & Courtés, 1979). In my opinion, the construction of a character's identity is based on all the different textual levels, and the identity transformations must be detected at all the different levels of analysis.

Taking up the classical Aristotelian dichotomy between action and character, namely between character as being and character as doing we can we can begin by distinguishing two different main types of identity: *existential identity* and *fictional identity.*

We could find, *mutatis mutandis*, the Aristotelian dichotomy in contemporary semiotics, particularly in Greimas' distinction between actants and actors. Moreover, the two different kinds of identities mentioned above correspond to the two main textual levels, according to Greimas' generative trajectory of meaning: discursive level and semio-narrative level. So we could also speak, respectively, of discursive identity and semio-narrative identity.

Existential identity is divided into the following:

1. *Proper identity*, which is the set of elements that relates to the character's being. (We can also speak of *semantic identity*). This can be divided into:

    A. A *figurative identity*, which consists of all figurative attributes (according to Greimas) of the character (appearance, qualities, etc.), including his proper name (Barthes, 1970) and his proper image (i.e., the image that allows the recipient to identify a character and distinguish it from other characters) (Tomasi, 1988).

    B. A *thematic identity*, which is the set of roles that a character plays, simultaneously or in succession, within a text or in a series of texts. This is related to the *thematic roles,* a term that Greimas uses to define abstract social, familiar, or cultural roles, for example, warrior, fisherman, father, barbarian.

2. *Relational identity* (or *syntactic identity*), which is based on the relationship of the character with the world around him. This includes relations of space and time (temporal and spatial relations) and relations with the other characters in the stories (actorial relations).

Within the fictional identity, we can distinguish the following:

1. An *actantial identity,* which based on the different actantial roles covered by the actor/character from time to time.

2. A *modal identity*, which is based on the character's different modalizations. In linguistics, "the term modalization relates to the procedure whereby a descriptive statement is being modified by means of modal expressions" (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 87). In the narrative grammar of Greimas, the term specifically refers to a set of features that defines motivations and skills of the subject in relation to its doing: wanting (or having to), being able, and knowing (Greimas, 1983).

3. On a deeper level, we can also recognize an *axiological identity*, which reflects the deep values that lead to the actions of the character.

At each level of identity we can identify a tension between coherence and incoherence, or between continuity and discontinuity, depending on whether the features identifying the characters at the various levels remain unchanged or vary from one text to another.

In my book on Conan the Barbarian (Bertetti, 2011), I tried to show how the possible combinations of stability (invariants) and variability (changes, modifications) regarding the different levels of analysis contribute to determining the overall diachronic identity of a character through his incarnations in different text and media. On the basis of this, in this article I will try to elaborate a typology of transmedia fictional characters.

Some Preliminary Proposals for a Typology of Transmedia Fictional Characters

The model proposed has been developed on the basis of the study of several transmedia characters, but at a certain level it more generally applies to transtextual characters.

If, as we said, characters, like others fictional entities such as stories or worlds, are not textual entities but cognitive constructs built by the interpreter in response to the text (Ryan, 2005), that means that they have some sort of existence independent not only from texts, but also from the semiotic system (medium) of manifestation.

Saint-Gelais (2005) and Ryan (2013) use the term *transfictionality* to refer to the migration of fictional entities across different texts, regardless of whether they belong to the same medium or to different media. Following Ryan (2013), transmedial storytelling can be regarded as a special case of transfictionality that operates across many different media.

In effect, from a semiotic point of view, fictional entities like characters, events, or worlds are independent from the semiotic systems of manifestation, even if every semiotic system can actualize in its peculiar modes a fictional world (Dolezel 1998), event, or character. As already noted by Metz (1968, 1972), the forms of content are the most permeable between different semiotic systems, while the forms of expression, such as montage or framing in films, refer more specifically to the unicity of each sign system.

Greimas (1983), from his point of view, explicitly states that narrative analysis completely belongs to the signified and narrative forms that are particular organizations of the form of content and are situated at an immanent level, logically antecedent to the manifestation in different semiotic systems. It is precisely because there are levels of sense more or less independent from the language of semiotic manifestation that interlinguistic (from language to language) and intersemiotic (from semiotic system to semiotic system) translations are possible (Dusi, 2003).

If this is theoretically true, we must consider that even at the nonsemiotic system–specific level of content, every medium has developed peculiar forms of narrative discourse (Bertetti, 2012) and peculiar strategies (and constraints) of character building determined mainly by historical and cultural contingencies (that is, cartoons might not be for children, or cinema might not be fictional in its essence). However, the difference will emerge not at the level of our methodological grid, but rather in specific analysis on the different discursive praxis that match with every medium.

In exposing the model, I start from the narrative identity, focusing on the question of its consistency. In other words, do the texts concerning the character have a single time line and a consistent bibliography, or do they attribute stories that are not consistent or are even reciprocally alternative to the character?

We can distinguish: (a) characters based on a single course of events and (b) characters based on multiple courses of events. Inside each of the two classes, we will analyze the possible changes in fictional and existential identity. For now, however, the analysis won't be deep in actantial, modal, and axiological subcomponents (which need to be analyzed in a more complete typology).

Characters Based on a Single Course of Events (Narrative Continuity)

In this case, the actions of the character, told in different texts and media, refer to the same course of events; each text shows different moments that may or may not be consecutive or chronological but are still logically and fictionally consistent. This is the typical "continuity" of Marvel Comics and other American comic books, based on the idea that all the episodes of a series are like chapters in succession: a single story that unfolds from text to text. This also coincides with the classical notion of transmedia storytelling because it involves a consistent fictional universe intended as a course of events. There are no variations in the fictional identity of the character, but this does not rule out that his existential identity can vary; in particular, variations can be both in terms of relational identity and proper identity.

Variations of Relational Identity

There are characters whose identities, to a greater or smaller extent, are relationally strong or relationally weak. In the first case, characters have strong bonds with their specific fictional worlds, which change little or not at all, not only within the single narration but also within the whole series. One example of this is in sitcoms, in which the same characters interact in the same setting in each episode or even move from one medium to another.

In the case of relationally weak characters, however, the relationship with the surrounding environment is much more elastic. In extreme cases, the character acts in different times and spaces in each text, interacting every time with new secondary characters. A strong example, again, is Robert Howard's Conan the Barbarian, a solitary hero whose adventures are always set in different places of the Hyborian World and in different moments of his life. However, we must observe that, depending on the medium, Conan changes his identity status; for example, in the TV series and in cartoons of the 1990s, we find a fixed setting and a recurring group of side characters (see Figure 2).

I think that a relational weakness is not easy to maintain in a transmedia strategy because some textual formats, such as TV serials, seem to need stronger and recurring relational structures, or at least a gradation of weakness/strength. Another strong example is the character of Jessica Fletcher, heroine of the well-known TV series *Murder She Wrote*. Some of the episodes are set in Cabot Cove, a charming seaside town in Maine where Mrs. Fletcher lives, surrounded by some recurring supporting characters (such the doctor Seth Hazlitt and the sheriff Amos Tupper), but in other episodes we follow Mrs. Fletcher in her travels around the world, in the most varied settings.

We can find a different mix of weakness and strength in the *Star Trek* classic series, in which the same group of characters (Captain Kirk and his crew) is placed in a common setting (the starship *Enterprise*), but in every episode they have different adventures on different planets and meet different people.[3]

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[3] However, in the case of a single course of events, the grade of spatial and temporary variation of the settings of each text of the franchise (or episode of a series) depends on the structures of genre. In particular, radically different settings are only possible for science fiction or fantasy works; this kind of

Figure 2. **Conan and the Young Warriors** *(1994).*

As to the temporal order in a series in which the course of events is unique, there can be: (a) a temporal continuity when the different narratives are placed in chronological order, or (b) a *temporal discontinuity* when the different narratives are not placed in chronological order, provided that there is no prejudice to the coherence.

Temporal discontinuity is at the basis of the series that Umberto Eco (1985), in his well-known typology of seriality, calls *flashback series* (or *loop series*), "in which the character is not followed along in a straight line during the course of his life, but is continually rediscovered at different moments of his life, obsessively revisited in order to find there new opportunities for new narratives."[4] One of the most

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text allows settings in completely different environments (e.g., alien planets) or ages (e.g., the Count of Saint Germain, the immortal protagonist of a series of horror novels by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro that are set in different historical periods).

[4] Eco continues:

> [This] does not change the psychological profile of the character, which has already been fixed, once and for all. . . . Instead of having characters put up with new adventures (that would imply their inexorable march toward death), they are made continually to relive their past. . . . Characters have a little future but an enormous past, and in any case, nothing of their past will ever have to change the mythological present

common devices in transmedia strategies is also based on temporal discontinuity: Given a primary time line (a macrostory from a TV series, for example), the creation of other texts in different media takes place by expansion, with the creation of *interstitial microstories* (Scolari, 2009). These not only can fill the gaps in the macrostory, but they can also narrate events that occurred before the macrostory time line (prequels) or enlarge the description of events that are mentioned but not detailed in the main series. A good example is the TV series *24*, studied by Scolari (2009). Even if it is theoretically possible that a transmedia expansion follows a chronological order (and therefore a temporal continuity), such an eventuality is not traceable in existing transmedia products.

Variations of Proper Identity

With regard to thematic identity, the character can obviously assume different roles at the same time (e.g., to be a detective or a father, depending on different contexts) and also progressively, provided that such variations are narratively justified and do not conflict with the singularity of the course of events. The variability from one occurrence to another is a function of the features of the character. However, a transmedia narrative strategy will usually tend to maintain a substantial uniformity of roles.

The figurative identity can change consistently. Apart from changes over time (the character grows old or his intrinsic features change, like his appearance or his clothes, such us the costumes of certain superheroes), changes may appear in the graphic realization, in the passage from one medium to another, or due to the interpretation by different actors (James Bond, Doctor Who), and so forth. However, this does not necessarily compromise the recognition of the character and the perception of the coherence of the diegetic world by the receiver. Of course, the tension between the different realizations, in the interaction with target audiences, may create peculiar effects of meaning.

Characters Based on Multiple Courses of Events (No Narrative Continuity)

In this case, we deal with characters that, in different episodes of a series or in different transmedia renewals, don't refer to a single course of events. Each occurrence tells a different story, with no relations or references to the others.

This category is similar to the concept of *iterative* or *recursive series*, developed by Eco (1985) to describe classic detective series such as *Columbo* or *Derrick,* in which

> the order of the episodes is completely interchangeable . . . [and] there is no temporal link between an episode and the other, if not the generic link that all stories must take place in a specific period of time. Each episode tells a self-contained story, and the episodes are linked by the protagonists and actors they have in common, as well as by a quite similar narrative structure. (Barbieri, 1992, p. 46)

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in which they have been presented to the reader from the beginning. (1985, pp. 168–169)

Apart from a number of recurring essential properties, the character can vary greatly from one textual occurrence to another (events that happens to the character may contradict those told in other texts), both in fictional and existential identity.

Variations on Fictional Identity

The fact that different texts refer to multiple courses of events does not necessarily imply that their stories and events are in contradiction with each other.

Although completely independent of each other, stories may still refer to a single diegetic universe, provided that the single self-contained narrations don't contrast with each other. However, because this kind of seriality is detached from constraints of continuity, the biography of a character can be freely reinvented; in most cases, there is no maintenance of a single diegetic universe.

This is especially true in the transfer from one medium to another. Very often, a time line ascribed to a character in a medium is not the same in another medium, as in the case of Conan's youth, described previously.

The same situation can be found in the case of user-generated content (UGC) based on mass media fictional characters: fan fictions, parodies, mashups, alternate endings, and so on. The case of *Lost* UGC studied by Scolari (2010) is a good example. It's those kinds of transmedia strategies that Scolari (2013) calls "permutations."

Variations in Existential Identity

Variations in Proper Identity

1. *Thematic variations*. The character may play different thematic roles every time, and sometimes they are incompatible with each other. A strong example is Walt Disney's character Goofy.[5] In the 1940s "how to" series cartoons, Goofy would demonstrate, clumsily, how to do everything from snow skiing, to sleeping, to playing football, to riding a horse. Sometimes, such as in *How to Play Baseball* (or *Double Dribble,* 1946), all the characters are different versions of Goofy. In the 1950s cartoons, Goofy has various alter egos, the best known of which is George Geef, a family man going through the trials of everyday life, such as dieting, giving up smoking, and the problems of raising children (Figure 3).

2. *Figurative variations*. I can repeat what I previously wrote about the single course of events–based characters. However, figurative identity tends to remain relatively stable, or at least the essential traits remain stable, in order to ensure the character's recognizability by the reader or

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[5] Besides my personal knowledge and readings, information about Goofy is taken from Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goofy), Paperpedia (http://it.paperpedia.wikia.com), Topopedia (http://www.topolino.it/archivi/topi), and Inducks (http://coa.inducks.org).

the viewer. This is true primarily for the proper name, but also, in the case of visual media (comics, film, television), for the proper image (Tomasi, 1988). There are many transtextual characters whose model of seriality is essentially based on figurative identity because the other identity components are changing. This is the case of Goofy, whose variations involve not only his thematic identity (as discussed) but also his figurative identity, which preserves only some essential properties (in particular, his physical appearance), accompanied by changes in several

Figure 3. Goofy/George Geef in **Tomorrow We Diet** *(1951).*

other traits. In the 1950s shorts, Goofy was smarter, had smaller eyes with eyebrows, often his whole body was pale instead of just his face (while the rest was black), and sometimes he had a normal voice. In some shorts he even lacked his droopy ears, the external pair of teeth, and white gloves (see Figure 3). Even his proper name changes, as discussed previously. In his first appearance in the 1932 short *Mickey's Revue*, his name was Dippy Dawg (Figure 4), then he became Dippy the Goof, and finally Goofy in 1936.[6] There are many different incarnations or alter egos of Goofy, such the Arizona Goof (in Italian, Indiana Pipps) (Figure 5), a parody of Indiana Jones created in Italy by Bruno Sarda and Maria Luisa Uggetti in 1988, or the French

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[6] Moreover, in some recent (2000s) comics, the character's full name has occasionally been given as Goofus D. Dawg.

Sport Goofy (who first appeared in 1980). However, these alternate characters are often, but not always, presented as cousins of Goofy.

1932

Figure 4. Dippy Dawg.

Figure 5. Arizona Goof.

Variations in Relational Identity

1. *Spatial variations.* These occur when stories are set in different places in different texts and media*.*

2. *Temporal variations*. Sometimes stories are set in different times; a strong example is *Gotham by Gaslight*, a famous graphic novel by Brian Augustyn and Mike Mignola, which featured Batman in a Victorian age Gotham City hunting Jack the Ripper.[7]

3. *Both spatial and temporal variations*. Examples of this include the DC Comics *Elseworlds* stories. Most of them take place in entirely self-contained continuities, where the only connection with canonic DC continuity is the presence of familiar DC characters. Another classical example is Charlie Chaplin's *Gold Rush* (1925), in which The Tramp lives in Klondike during the second half of 19th century.

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[7] On the different incarnations of Batman, see Uricchio and Pearson (1991), who say that even if the construction of character's identity is different in terminology and approach, the essential traits allow the readers to recognize it.

Spatial and temporal variations may or may not be accompanied by changes in the actorial identity. The characters and their relations sometimes remain unchanged through space and time transfers: to return to the example of Goofy, the "Topolino e Pippo Sei Colpi" comics series by Guido Martina (1978) depicts the classical Mickey and Goofy couple in the old West.

Conversely, some variations in the actorial identity may be completely independent from space and time variations. In some theatrical shorts of the 1950s, for example, Goofy has a son, Goofy Junior, and a wife, who is always nameless and faceless. In 1992, Goofy Junior reappears in the *Goof Troop* series under the name of Max. Goofy and Max are protagonists of two movies, *A Goofy Movie* (1995) and *An Extremely Goofy Movie* (2000). Max also appears in 2001 TV series *House of Mouse* (as a parking valet) and as a playable character in the Super Nintendo video game *Goof Troop* (1994), the PlayStation 2 video game *Disney Golf* (2002), and the PC video game *Disney's Extremely Goofy Skateboarding* (2001).

In relation to transmedia, it is natural that the transfer from one medium to another often changes the nature of the relationships between the characters. This is case of Conan the Barbarian; in Howard's original stories, in the comics, and to a lesser extent in the movies, Conan was a solitary and wandering hero with a weak relational identity, whereas in the animated and live action TV series of the 1990s, Conan is always surrounded by a large number of characters to whom he is connected by a stable and extensive network of relationships (Bertetti, 2011). As I noted (Bertetti, 2011), this is a typical feature of television narrative discourse, which is polycentric by nature and tends to multiply characters and points of view.

The possible variations at the differents levels of identity are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Levels of Identity and Variations

Variations in fictional identity		**Characters based on a single course of events**	**Characters based on multiple courses of events**
		No variations	Actantial variations Modal variations Axiological variations
Variations in existential identity	*Variations in relational identity*	Actorial variations Spatial variations Temporal variations	
	Variations in proper identity	Thematic variations Figurative variations	

Conclusions

This study proposed a character-centered approach that aims to enlarge the common conception of transmedia storytelling that revolves around world building. I tried to demonstrate the existence of a different logic of construction of transmedia that is not centered on shared fictional worlds but rather on shared fictional characters, a logic that was at the base of older forms of transmedia franchises.

As shown, there is not a direct correspondence between transmedia worlds and transmedia characters; worlds are inhabited by different (main) characters, and the presence of the same character in different texts and media platforms does not necessarily imply the same shared world. In a character-centered franchise, transmedial fictional coherency and consistency are less central than the recognizability of the character and his identity; however, the character's features, in passing from one text to another and from one medium to another, are not always univocally defined.

The typology of characters proposed, based on a textual semiotic approach, takes into account the sharing or not of a common fictional universe (intended as a single course of events), as well as of the possible variations in each textual level. Future work could be improved based on the possible combinations of the different variants and invariants of the identity elements at the various levels, and it should consider, as I already said, the modal, actantial, and axiological subcomponents of identity fiction that we cannot discuss here.

The heuristic value of such a typology should then be proved by its application to a higher number of examples. It shall be, in any case, merely a methodological grid without a fixed variety of narrative solutions, which is virtually endless. At the present, this grid shows the most general transtextual strategies of construction of the character (even only within a single medium), rather than those specifically transmedia strategies that should emerge only from more extensive comparative studies about the different ways of construction in each medium.

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