

BOOK REVIEW

Cultura da Convergência

HENRY JENKINS

São Paulo: Ed. Aleph, 2008, 380 pp.

Reviewed by **Rogério Christofolett**

Three ideas would suffice for the reading of "*Cultura da Convergência*" (Culture of Convergence) by Henry Jenkins to be of interest to journalists and researchers in the area: media convergence as a cultural process; the strengthening of an emotional economy which guides consumers of symbolic goods and media creators; the expansion of trans-media narrative forms.

Individually or in association, these ideas not only help to understand the communication industry and the markets resulting from it, but also help to retrieve part of its recent history. This is because Jenkins is concerned with documenting rigorously and in detail the main transformations in the scenario of media creation and consumption.

The professor in the Comparative Media Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology follows closely the modifications in television series, in the movies, in advertising, in games, in the Internet, in politics and in citizenship. He notes that for more than a decade the public has abandoned a predominantly passive and convenient position and has occupied a new place in the communication process. The user wants to participate more in this experience, knows how to share his knowledge of those topics with other similar consumers and also succeeds in creating collectively spare parts than can fit into the structure of available products. An example illustrates this new public described by the author: the media industry launches a new Spiderman movie and follows this immediately with new associated products such as a videogame, a new series of comic books, a website, a bunch of television cartoons. Millions of people will have access to these contents, beginning not only to consume them but treating them as experiences. Thousands of these people will join together in networks on the Internet to discuss the movie, to give hints on how to progress in the game and

also to exchange information about the super-hero. The more fanatic ones will go even further: they will create blogs regarding the topic, will write parallel narratives changing the movie's ending or indicating new variations in the plot. That is, the public continues what the industry has offered. And these consumers only do this because they greatly admire Spiderman, since they are familiar with him as a model for some types of conduct and a possessor of other attractive virtues.

In the era of media convergence, Henry Jenkins calls attention to the fact that this convergence is not restricted to the development of technological apparatus or to the media's confluence to a single "black box". The author emphasizes that convergence represents a "cultural transformation, insofar as consumers are encouraged to seek new information and to make connections among dispersed media contents". That is, convergence does not take place by means of the equipment, but rather "inside the brains of individual consumers and in their social interactions with others"

On putting the topic of convergence in another perspective, the author does not allow us to forget that the public has changed a lot in the last twenty years. Creators of the media industry – and journalists also! – cannot ignore this fact, and need to reposition themselves in the contemporary scene.

In times such as these, cultural consumption habits are also affected by the phenomenon of franchises of media products. The studio which launches the new movie is already projecting its sequel, and with this introduces into the market other products linked to the movie, such as CDs with the sound track, versions of the script in book format, adaptations of the plot for the comics, console and computer videogames and other licensed products such as T-shirts, action figures of the characters, caps, etc. The more fanatic consumers will go through the various media supports in order to have access to those contents and products. They may not be able to achieve all the links of this chain, but by themselves write a new narrative which deals not only with the original movie but also covers their experience of consumption of the contents to which they had access. Thus Spiderman's story transcends the time of its occurrence in the movie theater. It continues in the expansion of minor episodes in the initial plot, in the addition of other elements or characters, or in a new account of the adventure. These efforts do not represent reinforcement or redundancy. The public perceives that it can encounter novelties beyond the matrix-product and looks for clues in other parts, reestablishing a new narrative, now trans-media.

Jenkins warns that this willingness of the public to encounter its favorite characters at other times, to live and relive these experiences, involves more emotional than rational appeals. It is an emotional economy which governs the forces in this field, the author declares.

Henry Jenkins defines himself as a “critical utopian”, and with this he is not dazzled by the advance of technology and by the multiplication of possibilities. He is enthusiastic about what he calls the “community of fans” and tries to foresee what type of modifications could arise in the contemporaneous cultural scenarios. According to him, in the convergence culture new and old media collide, corporative and alternative media end up encountering each other and consumers’ and producers’ powers interact in unpredictable ways. The results even lead to the way of engaging in and following politics and Jenkins sketches a dialog which suspends somewhat the tension between consumer and citizen.

It is clear that journalism and entertainment are products that are similar in their nature of symbolic contents. They are derivatives of the media, the results of cultural production, but from there on the differences are accentuated, both in form (packaging) as well as in essence (the packaged content). Journalism and entertainment are not consumed in accordance with the same rules, but it cannot be ignored that – in some situations – the difference between them becomes very small, and that the borders between one and another become porous.

Jenkins’ book deals with consumption and marketing, with joint operations for the sale of content and with great media plans. Theoretically, journalism should be remote from this, offering contents which guide people better, which enable them to understand reality, despite the commercial considerations. But it has been increasingly seen that journalism is converted into a type of merchandise, into a media product like any movie or videogame. Is journalism an experience? That is, on being informed, does a citizen have a certain experience in connection with the world and with its events? If the reply is affirmative, the following question can also be asked: Can this experience be offered in a trans-media narrative and in accordance with the logic of an emotional economy, as Jenkins described?

Perhaps it is too soon to answer this query, but some elements already enable us to reflect on the role of journalism in the midst of convergence. Newsrooms are taking steps to dialog more with their publics, enabling them to participate more and to join in some stages of journalistic production. The proliferation of news channels impels

journalists to produce differentiated contents and in various levels of depth in order to satisfy heterogeneous publics. In this way, the information agents try to find ways to make their publics more faithful, a concern until then limited to the advertising men and the creators of the media industry. One already hears talk of immersion journalism, of association of games with newscasts and of the increasingly more influential participative journalism. These are new times.

If media convergence is really a more cultural than technological process, the resulting transformations will inevitably spread to the journalists. For this reason, observing the public's movements, thinking about what to do in the newsrooms is really very timely. "*Cultura da Convergência*" is not a book about journalism, but it cannot be ignored by journalists and researchers aware of the modifications which the news area is undergoing.

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