Abstract

Contemporary franchised media production in is marked by heavily polished, highly coordinated instalments that harness and synergize multiple media concurrently in order to more effectively saturate markets with manifold iterations of singular intellectual properties. But how do the unwieldy protocols of transmedia impact upon the narratives of our pop culture icons, their identities and the fictional worlds that they inhabit? In the context of 21st Century licensing, where extended universes and (proposed) narrative coherence across various properties abound across media, it is useful to look back upon the history of how multiple iterations and continuity were handled in pre-networked production, and how the transition to franchised transmedia has worked on what we think of as narrative cohesion. Though such an undertaking may appear daunting in its magnitude, by focusing on specific aspects of transmedia production—such as worldbuilding—we can begin to make headway.

This paper takes as its object of study Gotham City, longtime home of globally-recognized pop culture superhero icon Batman. Using an interdisciplinary approach to issues of both aesthetics and circulation, the article charts traditional representations of Gotham across media and focuses particularly on how the city has been realized in videogames, where audiences become officially participating players as not only the Dark Knight himself, but as circulators in Gotham’s sprawling urban environment as well. By looking at how the map of Gotham has mutated through the Batman: Arkham game series and how the player is encouraged to navigate that environment, the paper exposes that protocols of transmedia mapping at work and theorizes the ways in which Gotham City in videogames constitutes a “real virtuality” that layers decades of transmedia Batman history upon each other for players and even incorporates aspects of our own physical world is constructing its reality.