Chapter 17

The Message Is the Medium:
Ecology, Mobility and Emergent Storytelling

Verónica Perales
Murcia University, Spain

ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to examine in depth the potential for ecological awareness that emerging artistic and creative narrative practices involving mobility may possess. In order to do so, this chapter will analyze the current situation in reference to several projects that exemplify this potential. Our time sees the coming of the Creative Activist in a practice that uses art and media to scale up the ecological message to a global level, to reach a lot of people and to move them.

INTRODUCTION

From an ecological viewpoint, we live in a situation of obvious emergency. Global warming and the alterations that human beings have imposed on the planet (biodiversity losses derived from agricultural and cattle raising processes, building, pollution, extreme exploitation of resources, etc.) have produced a lethal blend with outcomes that seem increasingly difficult to foresee.[1] A feeling of uncertainty spreads as a fine low-density layer through our consciousness and into our projections for the future.

Citizen involvement is crucial in addressing any possible change of conscience or perception of who we are at a planetary level. A change that might allow us to live in harmony as part of the shared planetary body of which we are a part and which we belong to. As Daniel Quinn explained in his novel *Ishmael*, as long as humans are convinced that the world belongs to them and that their destiny is to conquer and rule it, then they are heading for destruction. Changing this attitude by means of legislation is impossible – what is needed is to change peoples' minds (1990). Hypermedia, locative media and transmedia creation may be able to tackle one of the key issues for a shift of environmental paradigm, defined by Donna Haraway (1991) as the invention and reinvention of nature: "perhaps the most central arena of hope, oppression, and contestation for inhabitants of the planet earth in our times" (p.1). This paper is about the role of transmedia and mobile content in ecological art and ecological thinking.

BACKGROUND

In ecological thinking everything is interconnected (Morton, 2010). It is not difficult to join the dots and reach a clear picture of the crisis we face. As expert in ecological critique Timothy Morton (2012) asserts, "ecology isn't just about global warming, recycling, and solar power – and also not just to do with everyday relationships between humans and nonhumans. It has to do with love, loss, despair and compassion. It has to do with depression and psychosis. It has to do with amazement, open-mindedness, and wonder. It has to do with doubt, confusion, and skepticism. It has to do with concepts of space and time. It has to do with consciousness and awareness. It has to do with ideology and critique. It has to do with reading and writing. It has to do with race, class, and gender. It has to do with sexuality. It has to do with ideas of self and the weird paradoxes of subjectivity. It has to do with society. It has to do with coexistence" (p.2). From this position, ecological thinking has to do with art, philosophy, literature, music, and culture. It has as much to do with the humanities as with the sciences, and it also has to do with factories, transportation, architecture and economics. In this way, "[h]uman beings are each other's environment" (p.4).

As far as art is concerned, recent decades have witnessed a progressive shift in strategies that address the environment, migrating from the production of art objects to the development of participative proposals. New approaches give priority to the creation of synergies and the articulation of practical actions in the field, involving collaborative strategies and people participation. These practices are linked to social rather than aesthetic considerations, and in some cases take advantage of, or rely on, emerging technologies and formats. Infiltrating the technological mainstream in order to convey a message to the highest possible number of people is a strategic issue. The new narrative forms imply bidirectionality, inviting not only interaction but also participation and writing.

The concept of Media Ecology was first theorized by McLuhan (although it has also been attributed Neil Postman). The intellectual background of this current includes Lewis Mumford, Harold Innis, Walter Ong, and Jacques Ellul among a vivid set of resources (Fuller, 2005). The concept-metaphor operates according to the following formula: medium/media = environment(s); and like environments, media mutations depend on the shifting dynamics of the global system. Scolari, Aguado and Feijoo (2013) assert that media operate like species that coexist in the same communication ecosystem. But this communication/ecosystem exists in the context of a bigger one – planet Earth. At the Inaugural Media Ecology Association Convention in 2000, Postman declared that the term 'media ecology' was a good choice "since we wanted to make people more conscious of the fact that human beings live in two different kinds of environments. One is the natural environment and consists of things like air, trees, rivers, and caterpillars. The other is the media environment, which consists of language, numbers, images, holograms, and all of the other symbols, techniques, and machinery that make us what we are" (p.11). This essay attempts to address the dialog between these two environments in the belief that – as Postman (2000) concluded– media ecology exists to further our insights into where we stand as human beings and how we are faring morally on the journey we are taking.

The essay will not tackle issues of responsible, ecological and sustainable production of the technologies involved in creation (computers, smartphones, GPS and so on). This question has already been studied by Sy Taffel from the University of Bristol who has put forward an ecological conception of media and materiality stemming from the work of Gregory Bateson and Felix Guattari (2012) "arguing that if we are to take generational responsibilities regarding social and environmental justice seriously, we need to look beyond content in order to critically engage with the materiality of the technologies

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