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## Developing Enactive Political Gameplay<sup>1</sup> in Transworld, Transmedia *Genius Loc<sup>2</sup>*

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### 1. Introduction

In this article we shall examine in some detail how contemporary digital interactive social media like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and interactive 3D fictional *possible worlds*<sup>3</sup> like Second Life, Twinity

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<sup>1</sup> In the international digital game player, production and research communities, the most common understandings of the term *gameplay* at the present time are those related to the notion of client or *player activity* during play, and accordingly too, to ways of gauging or characterising systematically *player satisfaction* with respect to the specific types of *player experience* (see Leino, Wirman & Fernandez, 2008 for a recent body of research on this latter notion) a videogame or other digital social or ludic environment is able to offer them. However, the notion of gameplay is obviously also connected by proxy to a vast number of other more technical issues and functional principles related to how good, high quality videogames, or other social or ludic environments, ideally ought to be conceptualised, designed and constructed. A third important aspect of the notion of gameplay regards *normative, rule-driven* aspects of how a gameplay environment is structured. This will naturally have practical consequences for player experience also, since the design expectation is generally that actual player behaviour is to be in accordance with game- (or genre-) specific rule and norm systems that valorise certain gameplay activities as “fair”, “good”, “correct”, “valid”, “ethical”, “just” and so on.

<sup>2</sup> Comunicazione presentata al XXXVII congresso dell’Associazione Italiana di Studi Semiotici, “Politica 2.0. Memoria, etica e nuove forme della comunicazione politica”, Bologna 23-25 ottobre 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Umberto Eco pointed out quite some time ago now that since fictional (or other) possible worlds are of necessity (at least up to now) “constructed by human minds and hands” (Eco 1994, p. 74), they are easily seen by us to have possibly relevant things to say about our basic *human condition*. Narrative possible worlds – and the various fictional objects and protagonists that inhabit and animate these worlds – are not only instantly *recognisable*, they are also intrinsically *meaningful*. A second aspect of our fascination with fictional possible worlds is associated with the fact that we intentionally *allow ourselves to believe* that the depicted experiences of fictional characters may help us understand – or perhaps find ways to resolve – significant, real problems, dilemmas or traumas that have figured, figure, or may come to figure in our personal past, present or future lives. Thirdly, we know from our common sense experience of literature, cinema and other cultural artefacts, that fictional characters are destined to inhabit “small”, incomplete, “handicapped” worlds. No empirical author, designer or constructor of a fictional possible world can possibly recreate reality in all its complexity in there, even if they wanted to. They may merely allude to it by suggesting how we *might* be able to imagine reality, or aspects of it, on *other occasions in other places*, in the past, present or future. A fourth point to be taken account of here is that fictional possible worlds can play a useful role by helping us see that our understandings of ourselves and our actual world are as *imperfect* as those of the fictional characters we encounter. This is why,



and *There*, are stimulating new forms of remediated<sup>4</sup> *prosumer*<sup>5</sup> practices<sup>6</sup> that can be seen as enabling the at-a-distance co-construction of more *participatory political identities*, by facilitating the *cooper-i-tive*<sup>7</sup> creation, *remixing, remaking*<sup>8</sup> and sharing of various kinds of digital *user-generated content*<sup>9</sup>. We shall be looking more closely later at what we mean when speaking of user-generated content in this specific context, and how such content is created, shared and recycled for use in political communication. But we shall start by defining the term *participatory political identities*, used here to refer to personal and collective forms of identity that are remediated and constructed through *enactive*<sup>10</sup> engagement of individuals and groups in personal, interpersonal and collective forms of political practice that aim to engage with, and influence using specially designed communicative strategies, the opinions, beliefs and actions of a multitude of *co-present* and *non co-present* others.

These political practices may, for example, consist of commenting on or responding in negative, positive or neutral ways to “local” political discourses and message created and shared with us by co-present or non co-present others we may already know, in order to promote shared political ends. Subsequently, we may wish to solicit other appraisals of these discourses and messages – together with our *own* comments or responses to these – from other non co-present political players we come into contact with in the more “global” sphere of remediated political communication facilitated by social media and fictional possible worlds like those mentioned above. Our focus here, then, is primarily on new *forms of political practice* that are instantiated through fruition of *transworld, transmedia*<sup>11</sup> places and spaces and their *genius loci*<sup>12</sup> – which are often conceived of, rightly or wrongly, as *playful*<sup>13</sup>, or *ludic* in character.

In fact, the perception of these transworld transmedia places and spaces as ludic may well be based on one of their more interesting characteristics: the fact they offer us access to particular types of enactive experience that blend – often in quite novel, engaging and entertaining ways – fragments of our own,

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according to Eco, the most successful fictional characters are often seen as paradigmatic reference points for our understandings of our own (and others’) humanity.

<sup>4</sup> The standard reference for presentation and discussion of the more general notion of remediation is Bolter & Grusin (2000).

<sup>5</sup> For some recent definitions and discussion of the notion of ‘prosumer’, see Toffler, 1984; Toffler & Toffler, 2006. See also the *Wikipedia* entry for “prosumer” for a brief history and general overview of the concept: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosumer> (Accessed May 27, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> See Compagno & Coppock, 2009a, for a brief introductory discussion of the theoretical move in contemporary new media semiotics from studies of texts to studies of *practices*, which has been animated largely by the rise in interest for semiotic studies of computer games and other forms of ludic and social media that invite enactive forms of interaction of the part of their players/users.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Cooper-i-tion’ is a technical term used in many global business and commercial settings these days. It is generally used to refer to strategically negotiated collaboration agreements between enterprises or businesses that would traditionally be considered in competition with one another. The aim is to save money and resources by deploying one another’s specialised, often unique material and technical resources, personnel, services and so on, in mutually useful, and presumably, too, mutually profitable, ways.

<sup>8</sup> Dusi, Spaziante (2006).

<sup>9</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User-generated\\_content](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User-generated_content) (accessed February 8, 2010)

<sup>10</sup> See section 2.0 for further discussion of the notion of *enaction*.

<sup>11</sup> Transmedia storytelling has been defined by Henry Jenkins (2006) as storytelling that takes place across the boundaries of multiple forms of media where each element makes distinctive contributions to the viewer/user/player’s understanding of the story world. By using different media formats, it creates a series of differentiated “entry-points” through which consumers can become immersed in the story world.

<sup>12</sup> The Norwegian architect and philosopher Christian Norberg Schulz (1980, p. 5) describes the notion of *genius loci* as follows [present author’s italics for emphasis]: “A place is a space which has a distinct character. Since ancient times the genius loci, or ‘spirit of place,’ has been recognized as *the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with in his daily life*. Architecture means to visualize the genius loci, and the task of the architect is to create *meaningful places*, whereby he helps man to dwell.” See also Coppock, (2008, 2009b, 2009c) for discussion of the application of the notion of *genius loci* to transmedia transmedia spaces and places.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. De Jong (2009).

and non co-present others' experiences and memories of culturally constituted *past, present and future narrative possible worlds*.

### 1.1 Political Rhetoric and Narrative Possible Worlds

The strategic 'flesh and bones' of all political discourse and rhetorical practice consists of building and sharing *narrative possible worlds* that are essentially hypothetical, and quite often *fictional* in character. The alternative world-views that abound in political discourse may legitimately be considered fictional since they aim to offer potential members of a presupposed, as yet undefined, electorate sweet dreams of experiencing and enjoying credible forms of social and cultural innovation or transformation in a not too distant future that, as yet, does not exist. To manage this persuasive task in an effective way, a detailed imaginary *future possible world* must be painstakingly rhetorically constructed. It must portray a world that is essentially quite similar to the one we know we inhabit today, but at the same time differs from it in ways that must to be seen by members of a presumed electorate as *significant*, and particularly *pertinent* for them. The basic narrative program depicted by this political discourse, with its rapid progression towards an idealised future possible world, and a description of how this world might look or feel when we arrive there, must be vividly coloured and animated by words, symbols, images and ideas from familiar narrative possible worlds that are part of our shared present and past cultural heritage. These possible worlds, and the words, symbols, images and ideas used to create them – sometimes violent and traumatic, sometimes innovative and constructive, sometimes full of goodness and joy – must be *procedurally*<sup>14</sup> selected and brought to the narrative foreground with care. It must then explain how they best can be understood and managed, and woven in some way or other back into a new, more consistent, more humane, etc. cultural fabric for the future. Figure 1 is an attempt to graphically depict the dynamic historical interplay between an *actual* world of the present ( $W_a$ ) and aspects, or fragments, of past, present and future possible worlds<sup>15</sup> ( $W_{p1-n}$ ), more or less distant for us in historical and cultural time, but that we feel familiar with, and in some sense or other feel we already *share* with one another.

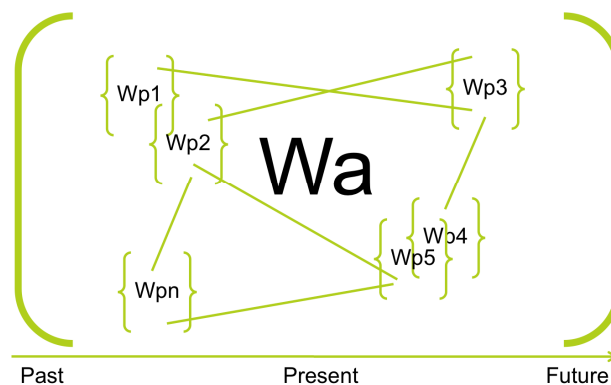


Fig.1 – Entanglements of past, present and future possible worlds

<sup>14</sup> For an in-depth discussion of what she refers to as “procedural authorship” whose aim is to create “a world of narrative possibilities”, see Murray (2000, pp. 152-153). See also Bogost (2007, viii), for an extended discussion of the notion of “procedural rhetoric”, which he describes as “a general approach to how rhetoric functions uniquely in software in general and videogames in particular.” See also Losh (2009) for a very comprehensive, well documented and critically stimulating discussion of the different procedural and other rhetorical strategies being used in national and international political – in particular security – debate settings in the United States at the present time.

<sup>15</sup> See Coppock, in press (a, b), for further discussion of entanglements of past, present and future possible worlds in player experiences of computer games and other ludic social media.



These other narrative possible worlds might have their origins “locally” in one and the same culture, perhaps our own, or “globally”, as a result of symbolic or other “contamination” processes that have traversed the physical, intersubjective and intellectual confines of one or more cultures.

Jerome Bruner<sup>16</sup> has forwarded the idea that the predominant organising principle of our inherited common-sense folk psychologies is *narrative* rather than conceptual. Indeed, our fundamental skills in creating, using and interpreting narrative forms of expression that depict and re-enact aspects of our embodied experience in the world as imagined events and processes that unfold over time in fictional possible worlds, are probably evolutionary traits that have turned out useful over the centuries for our survival as a species, and perhaps too, for the emergence of some of the more nurturing, protective aspects of our cultures over time. Our deep fascination with fictional narrative appears based on the fact that their possible worlds, and the virtual protagonists they try to persuade us to believe in and relate empathically to, all have their origins in a myriad of culturally coded forms of representations or depictions of *otherness*. Otherness in narrative terms refers to everything that is not actually us, not related to us, not created or owned by us. Fictional possible worlds, then, depict other things, other individuals, other populations, other ethnicities, other cultures or sub-cultures we are able to recognise as *potentially meaningful* on the basis of our own past and present experiences of our world and its myriad cultures and subcultures, and our ongoing relationships with a multitude of known or unknown others who belong to, or derive from these cultures.

But we are nonetheless always able to conceive of these imaginary<sup>17</sup> narrative worlds, and the objects and protagonists we encounter there, as possessing their own specific *fictional otherness*. They are, in other words, *sufficiently like* known aspects and fragments of our own lived experience to be interpreted as *possibly actual*, while at the same time *sufficiently different* to be interpreted by us as *actually fictional*.

One of the central theses of this article is that the transworld, transmedia digital possible worlds we have been talking about afford us novel opportunities for engaging enactively with, and *remixing and remaking* fragments of the enticing glimpses of non co-present forms of otherness we glean from the polymorphic ‘global’ blends of experiential content from the past, present and future possible worlds of both our own cultures, and the cultures of co-present or non co-present others we know far less about. It is conceivable that a continuing cooper-i-tive remixing and remaking of significant, carefully appraised and filtered fragments sucked out of this non-homogeneous stream of “cultural content”, may, if certain presuppositions regarding our own intentionality as political agents are fulfilled, facilitate a joint construction, together with others, of more innovative *augmented, or alternative reality models*. These political models will of course still be fictional because what they seek to depict or describe does not yet exist, but in order to be politically or otherwise effective, they must manage to evoke a real sense of how our shared cultural realities, coupled with our own positionings in these as *agents for change*, might *possibly* be restructured and reorganised in more optimal ways for us all, and for those who come after us in a near or distant future. If such alternative reality models are to optimally exercise their procedural rhetorical and narrative power, they must be seen as convincingly situated in historical and cultural terms, i.e. as “tailor-made” for the individual and collective subjects and their cultures they aim to influence, engage and evolve. As we well know, the “customisation” of political narrative rhetoric has always been achieved by making copious reference – directly or indirectly, through symbols or metaphors – to elements of past and present possible worlds that have a high degree of cultural value, and personal and *interpersonal* significance for subjects, or *addressees* of this rhetoric.

## 1.2 Contemporary Democracy, Social and Ludic Media and Otherness

In our increasingly technological and remediated contemporary democracies, one of the more fundamental presuppositions for all political communication and action is that its primary objective is –

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<sup>16</sup> Bruner (1990, p. 35).

<sup>17</sup> See Iser, 1993 for an exhaustive discussion of the role of the *imaginary* in mediating, by way of various kinds of *fictionalising acts*, between the worlds of reality and fiction.



or at least ought to be – to help us arrive quickly and efficiently at a broad public consensus to enable definition and implementation of a number of functional solutions to a long list of critical, long and short term social, practical and technical problems that need to be addressed and resolved collectively, in order to guarantee adequate, well-organised living and working conditions for us and our fellow human beings, irrespective of differences in personal, political, religious or ideological convictions, positions and preferences.

Into this more idealised picture of things, it is of course necessary to insert some reflections on the more problematic aspects of our living and organising of our lives together with other people, some whom we know, and some we do not, who are either *co-present* (readily accessible to us) or *non co-present* (not readily accessible). Here it is vital to develop communication channels that are as open as possible, and efficient ways of identifying and resolving potential conflicts of interest. Such conflicts often bring to the negotiating table parties with disparate, seemingly mutually irreconcilable, short and long term goals. The same also applies to their respective suggestions and strategies for resolving ‘local’ or ‘global’ problems that affect all parties involved in negative ways. The most obvious and worrying examples of this kind of conflict situation today are the often violent confrontations we are experiencing between our own ‘western’ models of political entities and processes like society, culture, democracy, economy, trade etc., essentially based on a blend of Christian and capitalist value systems, and other, ‘non-western’ conceptions and models of political entities and processes based on other value systems with other histories, such as those associated with the value systems of radical Islam and Islamic banking and commerce or, in the case of China, associated with a reformed mix of Confucianism and Maoist Communist values that is now gradually moving towards a state-sanctioned form of Pan-Asian neo-capitalism.

On a far smaller scale, but no less serious for that, is the tragic, long-lasting conflict between the historically intertwined states and societies of Israel and Palestine in the Middle East, whose historical development largely derives in the first place from an earlier Jewish *diaspora* and the more recent horrors of the Nazi-driven Holocaust in Europe. However, it also derives from very deep-rooted differences in core ethnic identity and religious system values that continue to divide traditionalist Israelis and Palestinians, and continues too, to serve as a kind of traumatic mirror-image of a far more global conflict of interest that has always existed between those who are very rich and those who are very poor, and between those who are in strong positions of socio-political power and those who are not. These latter two problems are, after all, still serious perennial ‘local’ problems for every single society in today’s world, even our so-called “developed” ones.

In all the examples of transcultural conflict mentioned above, we, as involved at-a-distance “observers” can often feel we quite clearly can see that what is causing most of the trouble: i.e. the apparent *irreconcilability* of the disparate goals and solutions proposed by each involved party as a means for resolving what *both* sides see as a reciprocal, or ‘global’, conflict of interest. The fact that such irreconcilability continues to exist, is unfortunately all too often interpreted by each party involved in the conflict as signifying a lack of will (or ability) on the part of “the others” to understand, or to “see things as they *really* are”, i.e. “as they would be understood when seen exclusively from *our own*, ‘local’, point of view”.

In this more general context, all the new possibilities we now have access to for engaging in and enacting political (and other) forms of intentional action at-a-distance through forms of *digitally remediated agency*<sup>18</sup> offer an increasing number of opportunities to open ourselves up more for a gradual blending of our own ‘local’ experiences and interpretations of the world, and our ‘home-grown’ *tangible* and *intangible*<sup>19</sup> cultural artefacts associated with these, with the experiences, interpretations and artefacts associated with *other* ‘local’ experiences and interpretations of the same world on the part of non co-present, unknown others, that differ from our own in nuanced, though not

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<sup>18</sup> See Coppock (2009a) for discussion of different ways of conceiving of and attributing agency to forms of otherness in actual, fictional, ludic and simulated possible worlds.

<sup>19</sup> See Coppock, in press a,b for a more detailed discussion of the notions of tangible and intangible cultural artefacts when seen in relation to our conceptualisations and experiences of the relative reality status of digital games and other ludic and social media.





always immediately understandable or definable, ways. In principle, then, the relative “safety” of an initial “at-a-distance” enactive engagement with the remediated experiences, interpretations and artefacts of non-co-present others – as we carefully begin to “inhabit” and construct, together with these others, new, shared *glocal*<sup>20</sup> transworld transmedia *genius loci* – ought to assist us in opening up emotionally, somatically and cognitively to developing more fluid conceptualisations and actualisations of our own subjective and intersubjective identities<sup>21</sup>.

This, in its turn, may empower us in switching more smoothly and successfully between actual and virtual forms of mobility in our work, play and study phases of life, as we become gradually accustomed to, and feel more at ease with, participating in day to day encounters with innovative, though for us, perhaps still “alien” enactments and interpretations of local and global forms of otherness. This may also help us to build a more realistic, *enactive awareness* of the creative innovation potential of our own, and others’ *intangible* cultural artefacts: of our and their *practical skills and capacities*; their and our *relative strengths* – understood as the *sum value of positive differences between us*; to envision us and them as cooper-i-tive co-constructors of glocal possible world gameplay scenarios for imagining, planning and constructing a more shareable, sustainable future possible world for all; and last but not least, to avoid feeling we need to find and exploit *weakness in others* to “defend” or “assert” ourselves and our culture, merely because we feel inadequate or unsure about how to manage the sheer complexity and potential richness of our encounters with, and entanglements in all this rich, and meaningfully pregnant *otherness*.

But as we well know – to put it bluntly – the rather too idyllic, oversimplified picture of things we have attempted to sketch out above is always considerably complicated by the fact that each and every one of us is situated as we are in our own very ‘local’, and perhaps rather ‘closed’ cultural and political eco-niches, each with *their own genius loci*. It is then rather inevitable that our entanglements in a flow of digitally remediated experiences and interpretations stemming from many at-a-distance “unknown” others will occasionally – precisely as a result of their, for us, relative “otherness” or “strangeness” – risk being negatively conceived of, and often in *mythical* or *apocalyptic* terms. If this occurs, all non-local “external” impulses of this kind, rather than leading us towards opening up for, and positive appraisals of experiences and interpretations of non co-present, non-local others, may end up being politically or ideologically redefined, especially by persons in power, as deriving from an imagined super-ordinate, or ‘global’ sphere of sociocultural, economic and political influence, and exerting a malevolent influence on our own ‘local’ environments in ways we are powerless to understand, let alone do anything about. We may then all too easily develop a form of quasi-paranoia, and begin to envision ourselves as merely *passive recipients*, or *helpless victims* of these “evil influences”, rather than as enactive, intentionally directed protagonists able and willing to play an active *cooper-i-tive* role in developing, together with non local, non co-present others a fairer, more open-ended and innovative ‘glocal’ cultural, economic and political gameplay sphere.

As we witnessed recently in the case of the heavily contested 2009 Iranian national elections that returned incumbent premier Mahmud Ahmadinejad and his government to power, the ‘local’ organization in Tehran of massive public demonstrations (Figure 2), loudly protesting that the elections were ‘fixed’ or ‘stolen’, were quickly declared unlawful by the government. The demonstrations were then interpreted as unlawful public events expressing deviant opinions designed to provoke a violent coup, with the support of malevolent ex-patriot Iranian, and other non-Iranian political agents in the

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<sup>20</sup> C.f. Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glocalisation> (Accessed December 27 2009): “The term *glocalization* originated in Japanese business practices. It comes from the Japanese word *dochakuka*, which simply means global localization. Originally referring to a way of adapting farming techniques to local conditions, *dochakuka* evolved into a marketing strategy when Japanese businessmen adopted it in the 1980s. It was also used in the Global Change Exhibition (opened May 30th, 1990), in the German Chancellery in Bonn by Manfred Lange, the director of the touring exhibit development team at that time. He described the interplay of local-regional-global interactions as “glocal”, showing the depth of the space presented and drawn.”

<sup>21</sup> See Gee (2007, pp. 45-69) for an interesting, well argued discussion of how video gameplay activities in a favourable social and interpersonal environment can encourage positive forms of identity development and learning in children (and adults).

West. In the ensuing violence following the government's declaration many people were detained, and an as yet unspecified number<sup>22</sup> of these demonstrators disappeared and some lost their lives.



Fig. 2 – A public demonstration in Tehran, 2009

During the post-election demonstrations and their chaotic, violent aftermath the government several times condemned, and blocked, local and global sharing of information in the form of text, images, sound and video through global social networking environments like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. These blended streams of live and remix-remake *user-generated content*, and the very technologies that were making their creation and sharing possible, became an easy target for those seeking to maintain positions of political power in Iran, who represented and interpreted also these technologies and content streams negatively as signs that ‘far away’ exponents of ‘illegitimate’ forms of ‘global’ political agency, were using the narrative and rhetorical power of these enactive social media as a kind of political ‘back door’ to infiltrate, subvert and destabilise, in a sneaky, grassroots-based, ‘bottom-up’ kind of way, the autonomy of the Iranian ‘top-down’ cultural, economic and political power structure.

### 1.3 Embracing “Bottom-Up” Political Communication Strategies: Obama 2008-2009 – A Case Study

A more positive appraisal of such ‘bottom-up’ strategies in political communication has – not surprisingly – been expressed by proponents of our ‘western-style’ democratic governance processes in connection with the extensive use of social media, text messaging, e-mail and other tools for sharing user-generated content as a core strategic component in Barack Obama’s successful US presidential election campaign in 2008. Here, Facebook and Twitter played a very central role, as did YouTube, My Space, e-mail, telephones and conventional mass-media such as television and radio, official and unofficial websites, weblogs, mobile phones, SMS messages and at one stage, even videogames.

A post-election report on the campaign, produced by the Digital Public Affairs Group of the independent international public relations agency Edelman, the consultants for the Obama campaign, attributes much of his campaign strategy success to it “combining social media and micro-targeting in the manner it did”<sup>23</sup>, and being built up around offering “ordinary Americans access to resources usually reserved for professional campaign operatives.”<sup>24</sup>. One of the key components of this latter

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<sup>22</sup> See the Guardian interactive database for the collection and publishing of data on the Iran 2009 election casualties here: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2009/nov/04/iran-dead-detained-protests-elections>

<sup>23</sup> Lutz, 2009: 2

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*: 3

strategy, referred to in the Edelman report as the construction by Obama of a *social pulpit*<sup>25</sup>, involved “delivering a message that is designed to be taken up and spread by others, with the tools and techniques learned during the campaign”<sup>26</sup>, and “harnessing the power of public engagement to influence the conversation across various spheres of cross-influence.”<sup>27</sup> (Cf. Figure 3 below)

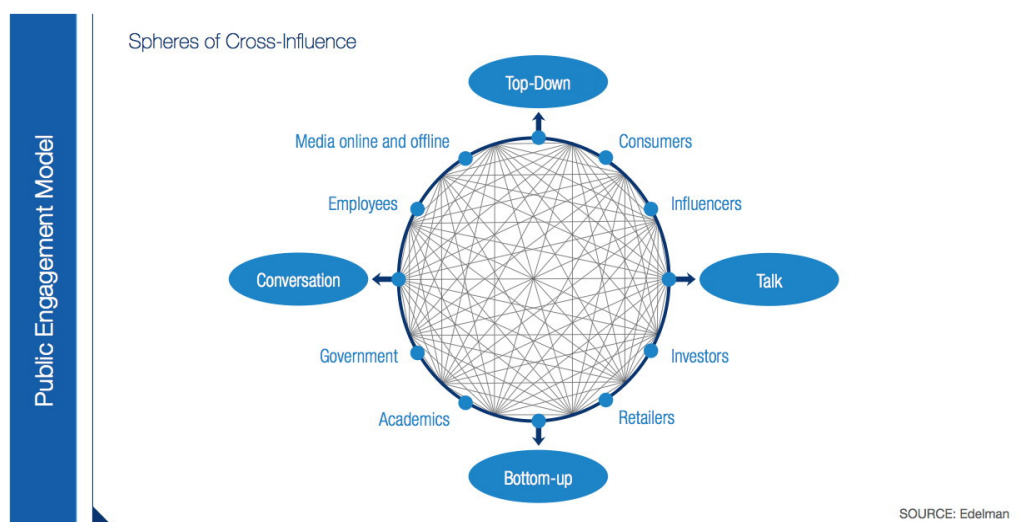


Fig. 3 – The Obama Campaign’s Public Engagement Model

A customisable “You”-focused website, entitled “MyBO: Organising for Change” (Figure 4) designed as a kind of virtual “live feedback” and interaction space, was set up so that volunteers could create their own accounts and leave messages there for the campaign organisers and others regarding issues they felt had not been well enough taken account of. Here, they could comment on specially produced campaign videos and other information materials regarding, for example, Health and Human Services policy, or other themes brought up in Obama’s weekly radio addresses broadcast on YouTube. They also has access to readymade digital campaign materials such as video, images and text they could remix and remake to adapt them to the local audiences that they were responsible for reaching out to and involving.

These same social media channels were used to motivate, publicise and organise house parties on the part of local volunteer groups, as a way to help these channel as much support as possible for the campaign through their networks of actual world “grassroots” connections, as is sought illustrated graphically in Figure 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*: 4



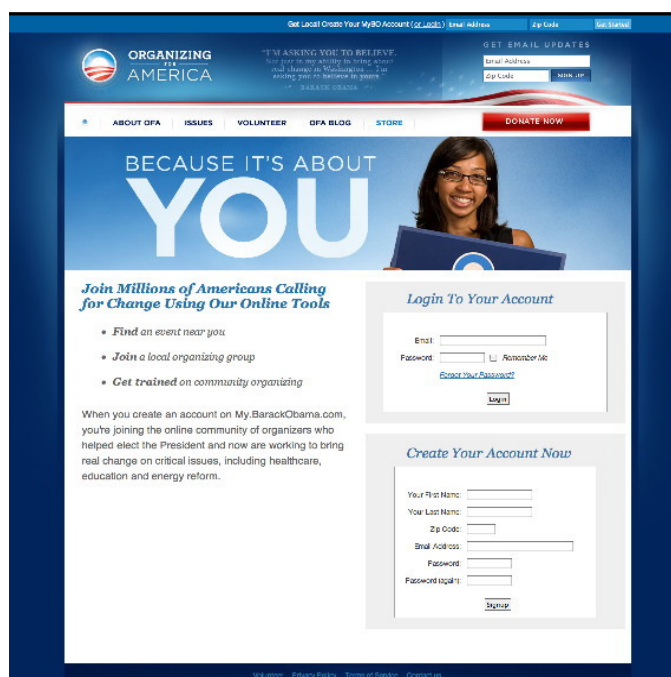


Fig.4 – The “MyBO: Organising for Change” website<sup>28</sup>

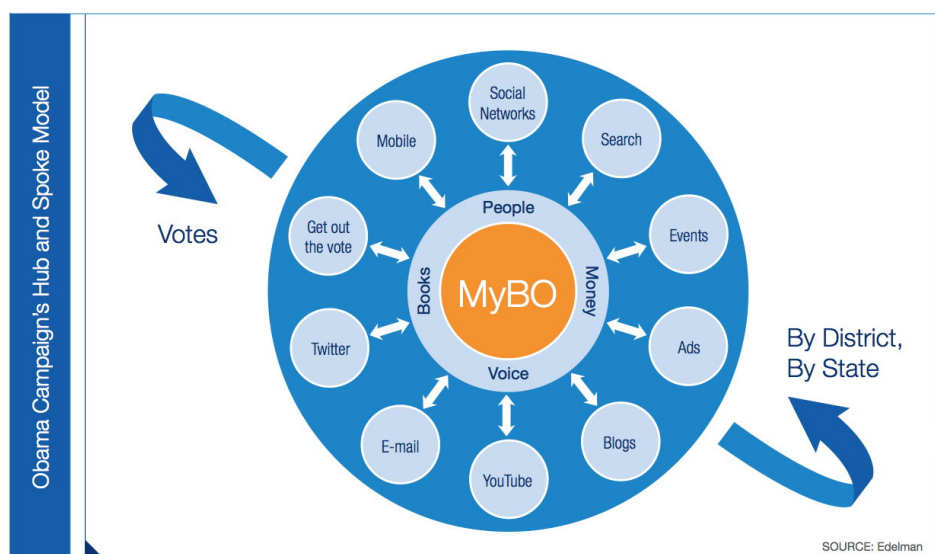


Fig. 5 – The “Hub and Spoke” presidential campaign model

The Lehman report cites large numbers<sup>29</sup> of people involved in various ways in the national effort, for example: 13 million e-mail list subscribers, 3 million online donors, 5 million ‘Friends’ on 15 social networking sites (3 million of these on Facebook alone) 2 million profiles on MyBO, 35,000 volunteer groups organised 200,000 offline events, 2,000 official YouTube videos, watched more than 80 million times, 3 million campaign sms accounts and 3 million phone calls to get people to vote, and so on. This demonstrates, according to Lehman, that the people involved in the campaign work “understood – as Obama did – that social media could inspire people, give them a voice, connect them with like minds and help to channel their support, but you still needed boots on the ground to win an

<sup>28</sup> <http://my.barackobama.com>

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*: 5



election.”<sup>30</sup>. It further emphasises that “the interplay between online engagement and offline activity was integral to the campaign’s success and will be for the administration too.”<sup>31</sup>.



Fig. 6 – Barack Obama Facebook Fan Page



Fig. 7 – White House Facebook Fan Page

So, at the end of the road, i.e. with the successful election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States, the campaign had established virtual profiles for the candidate on more than 15 social networks, including Facebook, My Space and LinkedIn<sup>32</sup>. Today, in mid-February 2010, Barack

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.linkedin.com/in/barackobama>

Obama's personal Facebook fan page (Figure 6) can be seen to have around 4.5 million adherents, while the official White House Facebook page (Figure 7) signals around 450,000 adherents. The Obama Facebook Fan page has a primary link that leads directly to the White House Facebook Fan page, which in its turn offers a series of links<sup>33</sup> to the official White House website and other White House social media pages at Flickr, Twitter, MySpace, Vimeo, YouTube and Slide Share, as well as a video-streaming Facebook page that broadcasts live events from the White House, in parallel with those that are regularly transmitted via a similar White House Live website. It is probably worth noting, too, in this connection, that on July 11<sup>th</sup> 2009, about 6 months after Obama entered the White House, a live video-stream of a speech he held in Ghana, while on a State visit there, was beamed into a virtual version of sections of the White House that has been modelled in Second Life<sup>34</sup>.



Fig. 8 – White House video streaming space in Second Life

<sup>33</sup><http://www.whitehouse.gov>; <http://flickr.com/whitehouse>; <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>;  
<http://myspace.com/whitehouse>; <http://vimeo.com/whitehouse>; <http://youtube.com/whitehouse>;  
<http://www.slideshare.net/whitehouse>; <http://apps.facebook.com/whitehouselive/>; <http://www.whitehouse.gov/live>

<sup>34</sup> See the following article from CBS News reporting on this event, which was also streamed into another fictional possible world named Metaplace, which has subsequently closed down: <http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2009/07/10/politics/politicalhotsheet/entry5151594.shtml>



Fig. 9 – White House Presidential office space in Second Life

Also, during the 2008 campaign, an avatar of Barack Obama<sup>35</sup>, developed by one of his campaign volunteers, actually appeared in Second Life for the first time as part of a nationwide publicity drive designed to stimulate the organisation of a multitude of small “garden party” events by local activists all over the country. In this case, Obama’s voice was projected simultaneously into the virtual environment as he spoke to supporters in local groups all over America from a new library in the state of Iowa by way of traditional radio and television links. In this case, however, there was no verbal or non-verbal interaction on the part of candidate’s avatar (or of the candidate himself) with avatars of other Second Life participants that were co-present together with that of Obama in the fictional possible world White House on this occasion.

In the Italian political context, Second Life has also become a transworld transmedia *genius loci* for one of its more well-known political players. In a YouTube broadcast *machinima*<sup>36</sup> production from a July 12<sup>th</sup> 2007 political recruitment event in Second Life<sup>37</sup>, the independent Italian populist centrist politician Antonio di Pietro managed to garner a certain amount of doubtful renown as the first of his colleagues in Italy to organise and carry out an open press conference on a Second Life island called *Never Land*, that has been created for the occasion by some younger supporters of his *Italy of Values* (Italia dei Valori) party. In Figure 10 below, Mr di Pietro can be seen speaking live, by way of a head-borne microphone and a Skype phone connection from his actual world party office in Rome to a fictional possible world audience at this Second Life press conference.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBHikzs7DWM&feature=related>

<sup>36</sup> Machinima is the use of real-time three-dimensional (3-D) graphics rendering engines to generate computer animations, which can then be registered and viewed subsequently in the form of shorter or longer digital video sequences. A machinima based full-length feature film, *Vola Vola*, directed by Berardo Carboni, was recently produced in Second Life.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrRvPsWOCmI>





Fig. 10 – Antonio di Pietro addressing a Second Life Press Conference audience from his party office in Rome

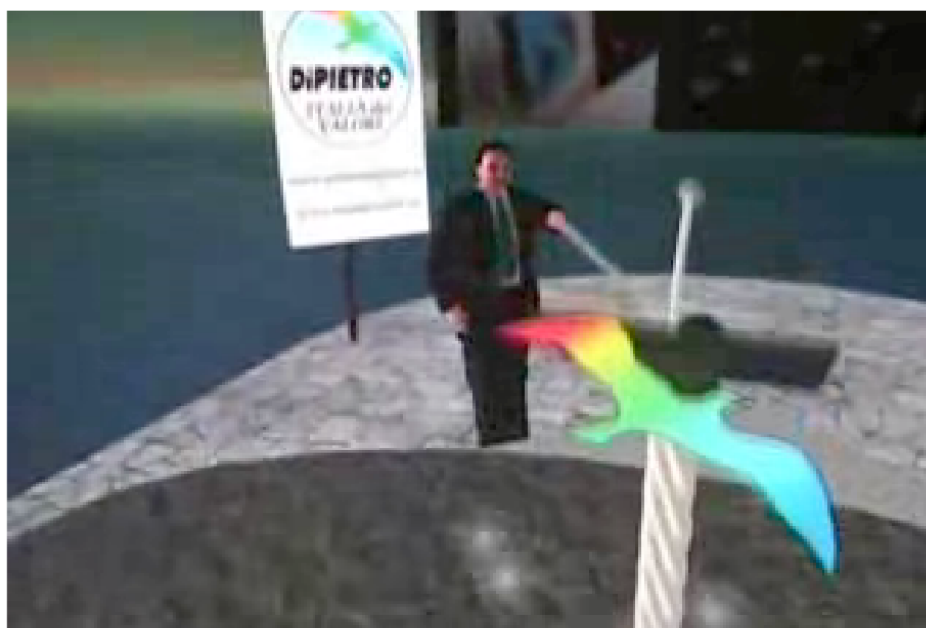


Fig. 11 – Antonio di Pietro's avatar “anointing” the *Italia dei Valori* party symbol in Second Life

Inevitably, and in spite of the fact that di Pietro, via his avatar, during the event attempts rhetorically in many different ways to configure and define the virtual press conference as a neo-democratic, open, non-filtered event with an international or global dimension (the video was sub-titled in English, while he spoke Italian), a distanced, critical viewing of the video leaves an impression of a professionally staged, carefully filtered event, created essentially as a *phatic* publicity and recruiting vehicle, and using verbal and non-verbal forms of rhetoric oriented specifically towards charismatic interpersonal and social relation-building and maintenance rather than towards conveying important information, as





it in this particular case, was probably mainly intended to attract, and recruit, young internet-savvy voters or pre-voters as party cohorts or supporters for the future.

## 2. Enacting Political Presence in Absence – Three Working Premises

The following three premises serve to open this second section of our discussion:

- Premise 1:  
Local and global streams of political communication and associated enactive practices are essentially relational in character – they are associated with seeking to fulfil specific strategic concerns regarding effectively building and cultivating affective, pragmatic and cognitive alliances with as large a number as possible of co-present and non co-present others.
- Premise 2:  
Transworld, transmedia ludic and social media are designed to remediate types of enactive experience of at-a-distance engagement with non co-present forms of otherness that are tangible: other beings, other places, other things, and intangible: other ideas, other narrative, fictional and hypothetical possible worlds, other forms of social and cultural practice.
- Premise 3:  
An important aspect of enactive remediated experience of present and non-present forms of otherness are amodal forms of perception that create a pervasive subjective sense of “presence in absence”.

The examples discussed above have sought to reconstruct some of the strategic thinking behind the Obama 2008-2009 election campaign, and the marketing of Antonio di Pietro’s *Italia dei Valori* party for a techno-savvy Italian youth market in 2007, and their respective communicative and/or rhetorical realisations of these strategies in social and ludic digital media terms. On the basis of these two cases, it would seem that Premise 1 above, regarding the fundamentally relational<sup>38</sup> character of political communication and action holds fairly well. Indeed, it now seems almost transparently self-evident that remediated forms of at-a-distance relation-building using of social and ludic media as instruments are absolutely central to thinking about and organising political communication and its everyday policy workload today. With regard to Premise 2: on the role and fruition of transworld, transmedia ludic and social media to remediate *enactive experience* of at-a-distance engagement with non co-present forms of otherness, this has already been discussed at quite some length in a previous section, and will be brought to the fore again, and re-addressed from a slightly different perspective in what follows, where we also describe in more detail what is meant by *enactive experience*.

But, what on earth is this “presence in absence” mentioned in Premise 3 above? Philosopher Alva Noë<sup>39</sup> approaches this notion by way of data from a series of empirically tested observations that indicate that *amodality* is a central component of all visual perception. “Perceptual experience” he writes, “has an uneliminable amodal component.”<sup>40</sup> This is what allows us to subjectively experience objects, people, animals or other elements of the physical world as if they are holistically co-present, although, empirically speaking, some of their key constitutive details may actually be hidden from our view. “It seems”, he also notes elsewhere, “as if you are aware, in a perceptual modality, of something

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<sup>38</sup> As Aristotle puts it in his *Politics*, having a shared understanding through language of the fact that some form of organised partnership (or relationship) is necessary in order to regulate perceived distinctions between good and bad, or just and unjust behaviour is a basic human trait, and is also what more than anything else defines us as *political* beings and enables us to live together. In his own words: “That man is much more a political animal than any kind of bee or any herd animal is clear. For, as we assert, nature does nothing in vain, and man alone among the animals has speech.... [S]peech serves to reveal the advantageous and the harmful and hence also the just and unjust. For it is peculiar to man as compared to the other animals that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and other things of this sort; and partnership in these things is what makes a household and a city.” (1253a, p. 8).

<sup>39</sup> Noë, 2004, 2009

<sup>40</sup> Noë, 2004: 67

that is plainly out of view”<sup>41</sup> and further, that “in seeing what is visible, you have a sense – a visual sense – of the presence of the [thing] as a whole.”<sup>42</sup>. A useful example often used by Noë in this connection is that of a cat, or some other animal that we happen to catch sight of while it is partially hidden from view behind something like an ornamental iron fence, as in the case of the example in Figure 12.

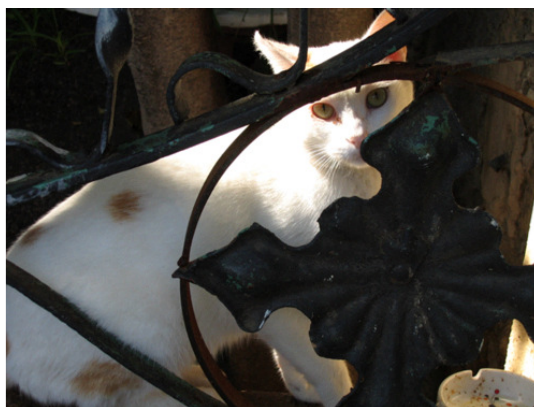


Fig. – 12

Though we are not able to see the whole cat all at once, only parts of it, we do not actually experience it as divided into separate segments, but rather as a solid, coherent whole. One of the main reasons for this, according to Noë and colleagues, is that we know that if we need to, we will always be able to gain *perceptual access* to parts of the cat that are hidden from our view at any given time by moving our head or minimally changing our body position relative to the cat. Our “knowledge” in this case is not theoretical, it is *practical*, as it is based on our prior embodied enactive experience of how the ways in which we move around in the world change our perspective on things we encounter there. This practical knowledge in its turn is coupled to our socially acquired understandings of how living beings and inanimate objects we encounter are, or might possibly be, constructed, and finally to our understandings of the practical ways we can relate to, touch, hold, manipulate and examine things in detail by moving our eyes, head or parts of our body. An *enactive* approach to perception, then, maintains that a large component of our experiential content is *virtual* in character. Relevant, empirically hidden aspects of environmental detail are experienced as *virtually present*. We know, or at least feel, that we have the practical means to access virtually present detail through our repertoire of sensorimotor skills, if it for some reason or other is necessary to confirm the *presence* of hidden environmental detail. For us to have virtual experiences of environmental detail it is not necessary to have detailed internal representations of everything we might encounter stored in our head. All we need is quick and easy perceptual access to relevant pieces of detail when necessary. Interestingly, in this connection Noë uses the following metaphorical example: “Just as you do not need to download, say, the whole *New York Times* to be able to read it on your desktop, so you don’t need to construct a representation of all the detail of the scene in front of you to have a sense of its detailed presence.”<sup>43</sup>. Our day to day experience of the world and management of our relationships with tangible and intangible forms of otherness we encounter “out there” in our familiar environments is, then, to paraphrase Noë, not something that happens to us, it is something we do, or enact intentionally as we move around in, and actively explore, this environment.

Now of course, there are considerable, and very significant, differences between the forms of enactive environmental exploration we practice and experience as we seek access to hidden detail in *actual world* environments together with *physically co-present* others, and the forms of enactive environmental exploration we practice and experience by way of the mechanical, physical or digital

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<sup>41</sup> Noë, 2006: 15

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*: 3

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



remediation of a mouse, a joystick, a screen, touchpad or some other sophisticated user-interface, with those forms of *non physically co-present* otherness (tangible or not, human or otherwise<sup>44</sup>) we encounter in digitally remediated *possible world* environments. But it is certainly important for our subjective experiences of remediated distant, non co-present forms of otherness, that we know from past experience that if something we encounter in this way actually exists (physically, or more ephemerally in the form of habitual behaviours, social norms and practices) somewhere else in the world, that if we are prepared to exert the necessary time, energy and other resources, it will certainly be possible for us to “gain perceptual access” to relevant details of these physical or practical realities if we should need to. This is essentially what happens every time I buy a book or some other technogadget from Amazon.com or Apple, or order a flight to a conference in Hong Kong, where I have also booked a hotel and paid my conference fee via the Internet.

Here, it is not possible to enter into detailed discussion of the multitude of differences that certainly exist between the two fundamentally different situations of i) knowing one is *actually physically co-present* with someone or something, and ii) knowing one *can*, if one desires, *bring oneself into physical co-presence* with this same someone or something over time. However, it is certainly of great interest to employ on a larger scale than is generally done today, and to evaluate<sup>45</sup> the relative efficacy of *ethnographic* research methodologies such as *participant observation* as instruments to investigate, document and compare what goes on from moment to moment as we “move around”, interact and communicate at-a-distance with non physically co-present forms of otherness – with intangible, but nonetheless *visibly* co-present fragments and aspects of other *people*, other *things* and other *places* represented by the unique *genius loci* of digitally remediated possible worlds, and ludic and social media in general. There a long tradition of anthropological and ethnographic field research into how people’s behaviours, habits, tastes, social and cultural values and their everyday movement, interaction and communication patterns shape both them and us, and our ongoing relationships with the many other people and actual world environments we construct, inhabit and use together with them. Extending this kind of experience in a systematic way to the *genius loci* of digital remediated possible world and social media environments, and documenting what is actually going on there on a larger scale at the present time, would give a lot of interesting materials for comparison of these two distinct, but closely interrelated, variants of human embodied experience.

More recently, we have been seeing an increase in the development of pervasive *Augmented Reality*, or *Alternative Reality* games that seek to entangle their players in blends of mediated and non-mediated experience in a broader ludic narrative setting. They actively require players to constantly switch their attention back and forth between relevant aspects of *physical* environmental detail in an *actual world* gameplay space and relevant aspects of *virtual* environmental detail in a technologically remediated *possible world* game-space. These games offer some very interesting opportunities for testing and evaluating different participant observation strategies and methodologies<sup>46</sup> in order to study them. Of particular interest here will be the fact that players of alternative, or augmented, reality games in an urban setting can no longer remain indoors crouched gnomically in front of a Game Boy, a computer or Wii console screen. They will mostly be outside in the fresh air, walking or running around the streets, sometimes doing unexpected things, as they look for clues and objects of fictional

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<sup>44</sup> Many virtual possible world game environments offer interactions with simulated non-human agents, often known as ‘bots’ (short for ‘robots’), that are scripted to act, and sometimes communicate in a number of limited, pre-programmed ways with players.

<sup>45</sup> Game designer, artist and cyber-ethnologist Celia Pearce (2009, pp. 193-211) has called for more focus on, and assessment of, the various types of participant observation methodologies and interpretative frameworks used today in online game and virtual world research.

<sup>46</sup> An interesting collection of recent articles in this connection is found in De Souza e Silva & Sutko (2009), which offers many useful examples and discussions of current theoretical and empirical approaches to design, and other sociocultural and technical aspects of, *pervasive* games. These games are defined as, quote: “playful activities that use mobile technologies as interfaces and physical space as the game board” (*ibid*: 1). There is, however, little discussion of methodological issues regarding, for example, how best to study player and non-player experiences of, and reactions to, these games while they are actually being played.



ludic value that they can only access information about using their mobile phones or some other GPS savvy device. This also means that they will always be potentially visible to all other *non-gamers* who happen to be in the actual gameplay arena at the time, who will certainly experience these gamers as a new kind of live, 'non-standard' *augmentation* of a *shared* everyday urban reality.

For this very reason, the *cultural and political potential*<sup>47</sup> of pervasive games of this kind is in fact quite considerable, since they are able to export, or translate, core aspects of the procedural rhetoric of traditional computer, console or networked games into actual forms of live action on the streets of our cities, where players suddenly become situated as potential agents of political action, innovation and change, but not only as in relation to the narrative fictional world of the game, but also in relation to the actual physical, cultural and political world and other non-players they come into contact with there.

### 3. Developing Glocal, Transworld, Transmedia Political Identities

At this point, we shall introduce a final pair of premises (or rather hypotheses) in an attempt to define and refine the notions of *transworld*, *transmedia genius loci*, and *global, local* and *glocal identities*:

- Premise 4:  
transworld, transmedia gameplay genius loci are digitally remediated, network-based meaningful places that function as ludic 'open' possible worlds that may facilitate development of 'glocal' political identities through opportunities for at-a-distance cooper-i-tive engagement with non co-present forms of otherness.
- Premise 5:  
'glocal' political identities will emerge over time as our enactive experiences of the 'global' and 'local' actual and possible worlds of political life – and the past, present and future political identities and associated ideologies these possible worlds seek to construct and propagate – become increasingly entangled with one another in non-predictable, non-linear ways through enactive engagement with non co-present forms of otherness in transworld, transmedia gameplay genius loci.

The digitally remediated social networking environments we mentioned initially such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Second Life, Twinity, and There, all support, in one way or another, essentially *playful* – which for their respective users/clients/players is usually not the same as *non-serious*, but often the opposite – forms of at-a-distance interaction, communication and *relationship-building*. They can thus be said, to be functioning in a broader global context as a kind of universal *innovation gameplay engine*<sup>48</sup>. They do so by offering, especially to internationally mobile young people (but not only), enactive experiences of meeting, working and playing together with others in globally networked *genius loci* where there is continual access to an increasing number of specialised tools and instruments for the creation, remixing-remaking, remediation, distribution and sharing of different kinds of digital user-created content. These instruments have been intentionally designed to make them as easy as possible to learn, configure and use by a very wide user-base, to develop new styles of

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<sup>47</sup> See Flanagan, 2009 and Mc Gonigal (2007).

<sup>48</sup> For further discussion of this theme, see Coppock (2009b, 2009c). It is important to note in this connection that the term 'game engine' is used here primarily as a metaphor for the creativity and innovation potential of contemporary networked digital possible world and game technologies. A more conventional contemporary use of this term is in reference to specially designed software tools that offer an integrated development environment that simplifies collaborative design, development and production, often carried out at-a-distance, and involving large groups of individuals all over the world, of games to be played either on computers, dedicated consoles, mobile devices like phones, or on the Internet. They consist of suites of visual development tools and reusable, reprogrammable, software components that are used to drive gameplay processes in commercial computer games. See *Wikipedia*: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Game\\_engine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Game_engine). A list of some well-known game engines is to be found online here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_game\\_engines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_game_engines).



transcultural – or, as we have adopted in this particular context: *transworld* – political communication, cooperation and innovation.

In a sense we are speaking here of an increasing degree of ever more “open access” (at least for the time being) to what is essentially a *democratically* globalising form of *massively multiplayer distributed intelligence*, that appears, at least at first sight, to be to the benefit one and all. After all, no one end-user of advanced communication and information-sharing instruments of this kind – which are often very technically demanding to construct and manage – could ever manage to muster the personal, technical and economic resources to assemble them all from scratch on their own. What is of particular interest in this present context, however, is that a distributed, digitally remediated open access to such tools, also makes it easy for potential developers with good ideas for new tools, or for improvement of existent tools, to come into contact with like-minded people elsewhere in the world who may take part in, or even provide micro-financing for, the further practical realisation of these ideas.

This global innovation gameplay engine – understood here in its widest possible metaphorical sense – can then be seen to be contributing in important, subtle, and sometimes almost *subversive* ways new opportunities to change and develop – “from the bottom up”, so to speak – larger and smaller cultures and societies all over the world. One of the key tenets in this article is that it is doing so by motivating, and facilitating, a gradual *glocalisation* of our individual and collective identities – and more generally speaking, of our individual and collective “senses of place”<sup>49</sup>. In the process, it is influencing and changing – often in radical ways – many of the systems of established cultural norms, practices and meanings we normally associate with the *genius loci* of *actual world* places and spaces – private, public, economic, commercial, social, and last but not least, *political* places and spaces – that we habitually frequent in our day to day lives. Not only in historical, but also metaphorical and symbolic terms this global innovation gameplay engine can be seen as a type of hybrid, man-made, artificial “being” – a sophisticated technological ‘juggernaut’ that is both emergent on, and simultaneously participating “actively” in, an extremely complex, historically constituted web of intertwined socio-cultural, economic and political innovation processes that feed continual change, upheaval and *cultural evolution*. Sometimes, too, these cultural innovation processes involve extremely traumatic confrontations between very different, often completely opposing understandings of what ought “really to count” as we seek to recognise, valorise and ethically balance “local” and “global” aspects of *political*, and other more substantial, interests, needs and requirements.

As we have seen over the last twenty years or so, these traumatic aspects of rapid and diffuse cultural innovation and change become especially noticeable in historical periods like our own, where there is extremely rapid technological, economic and cultural development occurring in a limited number of larger societies in the world, while many others are still lagging behind. A current example of traumatic aspects of global development processes is the many, often pressing, environmental, economic and social problems recently brought into play, discussed and argued about in December 2009 in Denmark at the United Nations COP15<sup>50</sup> Copenhagen Climate Conference. Many conflicting, sometimes even violent differences of opinion were seen and heard all across the board at this event, stemming not only from the various member countries’ delegations officially attending the conference, but also from large numbers of national and international non-governmental lobby and protest groups. Each of these brought with them their own, more or less well-documented and well substantiated points of view on how we best might, or ought to, conceive of, document, plan for and manage a vast spectrum of more or less urgent environmental issues seen to be in play today, and increasingly often brought to our attention by the various governments and businesses involved, the international mass-

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<sup>49</sup> This is of course an explicit reference to Joshua Meyerowitz (1985, p. 328) “prophecy” pronounced over two decades ago that processes of information and communication technology-driven cultural and social change are undermining “the relationship between physical place and social place”, and our own sense of “difference between here and there”, which is also seen as related to “an enhancement of our roles as new-age hunters and gatherers”

<sup>50</sup> The official COP15 website: <http://www.denmark.dk/en/menu/Climate-Energy/COP15-Copenhagen-2009/>; See also the website of the Danish Ministry of Climate and Energy: <http://www.kemin.dk/en-US/Sider/frontpage.aspx>.





media, via the internet, especially by way of social and ludic media. There are clearly no easy ways for us to arrive at a broad consensus on the most valid political and practical solutions to these kinds of problems at a global “top-down” level, so all means of “bottom up” face-to-face and at-a-distance political and other activity that can facilitate the individuation and discussion with like-minded others, of possible ways to find and develop solutions to these problems over time are clearly very welcome.

As mentioned initially, one of the more general premises for our present discussion is that day to day fruition of the still relatively underutilized, often experimental and only partially realised potential for developing new forms of remediated at-a-distance interaction, intimacy, immediacy and cooperation, especially on the part of the young, is generating ever-growing streams of a very wide range of shareable, re-mixable, re-makeable digital “user generated content” in many different aesthetic, conceptual and experiential formats. In fact, since there is seldom anything new under the sun, a large part of this content consists principally of “remake/remix” materials that creatively blend – in an “open source”-inspired fashion, more or less without paying attention to traditional commercial or “ownership” issues – *actual* and *fictional* narrative possible world depictions of own and other cultural realities, created by and shared with, like-minded young people all over the world. The following table sums up just a few of the many different types of user-generated digital content involved.

In digital games, fictional possible worlds and social media we find numerous examples of creation, peer to peer sharing and appraisal of:

- Personal avatar customisation and styling, speed-runs, modding<sup>51</sup>, hacks and cheats<sup>52</sup>, game level design<sup>53</sup>
- Second Life island and property development (requires micro-financing and/or monthly or yearly subscription fee), establishment of shops, businesses. Also with offers of in-world services of various kinds, sharing and sale of virtual objects, clothes, scripts for avatar actions
- Creation and sharing on YouTube and Facebook of personal profiles, links, video archives and channels, photo galleries,
- Development and sharing of online, or downloadable, applications (“Apps”), games etcetera, that are specially designed for augmenting the functionality of Facebook, Twitter, iPhone
- Open Source Code development and sharing in general
- Wiki, Google Docs, Wave – offer collective forms of at-a-distance cooperative/cooper-i-tive authorship and other forms of collaboration on joint authored documents, indexes, encyclopaedias, information archives, databases etcetera
- Creative Commons = a global movement connected to the broader open source initiative that

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<sup>51</sup> *Modding* refers to user-generated *modifications* of the basic source code of computer game engines to produce results and effects on gameplay not intended by the original designers of the game, which can also produce a new version of a game that is completely different than the original, perhaps as a satirical, or even political comment on the implicit value systems behind the design of the original. See Galloway, 2006: 107-108 for discussion of this. *Mods*, *hacks* and *cheats* are often shared or exchanged via the Internet with other players in a kind of parallel non-profit sector of the conventional commercial game market.

<sup>52</sup> *Hacks* and *cheats* are forms of code-modding that sabotage the original gameplay design, and allow the hacker or cheater to play the game in ways that give him or her an advantage with respect to other players. A recent article from IEEE Spectrum takes up this latter issue: <http://spectrum.ieee.org/consumer-electronics/gaming/steamed-valve-software-battles-videogame-cheaters>. See also Galloway (2006, pp. 13, 21) for discussion of these.

<sup>53</sup> *Game level design* is a typical prosumer activity that may be either sanctioned, or not sanctioned by game copyright-holders. It involves the design and production of new gameplay segments or *levels* in existing computer games, console-based, games, or multiplayer games online. Some game development and production companies actively encourage the development and sharing of this type of user-generated content by offering micro-payments for work of this kind that is particularly well done, and sometimes, too, by actually recruiting young level designers as programmers for their game business enterprises. See also Coppock in press, b for discussion of the role of gamer prosumer practices in transworld, transmedia gameplay *genius loci* in creating international visibility and eventual career opportunities for gamers. See also Compagno & Coppock (2009a), for a discussion of game-internal collection, sharing and commercial activities in *World of Warcraft*.



promotes new conceptions of rights of “fair use” and collaborative sharing of program code, digital text information and other forms of user-generated content as an alternative to traditional commercial copyright agreements

The rapidly growing, as yet poorly documented enactive experiences of the millions of often youthful content remixers, remakers, shakers and sharers as they continue to develop their own local, highly personal, forms of creative engagement with the ongoing flux of dynamic multimodal texts deriving from similar activities on the part of non-present others living “somewhere else”, is fuelling a continual reframing, remixing and remaking of their own, and of the others they cooper-i-te at-a-distance with, “local” conceptions of both themselves and others as intentional *actors*, or *agents*, political, creative, commercial or otherwise, in a larger “global” *transworld, transmedia gameplay space*. This is contributing to create in them a sense of beginning to possess what I have referred to elsewhere<sup>54</sup> as *glocal transworld identities*.

The veritable multitude of at-a-distance sharing, *cooper-i-tion* and last, but not least, *peer-appraisal* activities of this growing tribe of glocal transworld, transmedia actor/agents, are contributing to bridging, or “subverting” (depending on your point of view) in subtle, almost “viral” ways, the *physical* distances that exist between the multifarious interlocutors and protagonists involved in these content creation, sharing and appraisal processes, and the essentially “local” origins of the various tangible and intangible cultural artefacts created, exchanged and consumed. But not only: perhaps too, they are also filling in, or enriching, if we like, some of the emotional, conceptual and cultural distance that might have been seen to remain between each and every one of these protagonists and their respective cultural identities, if enactive experiences of cooper-i-ting at-a-distance with non co-present others had *not* been so readily available to them as it is today. In fact, it seems quite clear already that the continual sharing and blending of remediated forms of locally and non-locally produced digital content is fuelling a rapid blending and *hybridisation* of our more traditional *production, marketing and consumption practices* too, as these become increasingly *intertwined* with, and interdependent on, one another.

Established cultural roles and professions such as artist, photographer, designer, producer, distributor and consumer are beginning to merge more and more into single individuals and identities. This is the beginning of an emergent *prosumer* culture, a hybrid system of cultural and economic exchange that will be both coexistent with, and at the same time “parasitic” on, our more conventional forms of market economies and consumer cultures, since we all as erstwhile “passive” isolated consumers are now constantly being offered new opportunities to master innovation gameplay engine technologies and techniques in a global loosely formed tribal community, or “hunter and gatherer” context, and to acquire the practical and social skills and means that are necessary for us to become fully fledged enactive cooper-i-tive producers, distributors and peer evaluators of many different kinds of commercial, artistic, political, or other digital content matter, ourselves.

This same kind of prosumer culture and its various remediation and communication practices is clearly making its way into the wider global political sphere too, and is gradually beginning to influence methods of production, diffusion, reception, recycling and reuse of many different kinds of political messages and discourse both globally and in more regional or local contexts.

In fact, the more general movement towards an increasing glocalisation of production and diffusion of evermore varied forms of “home grown”, “bottom-up” political communication and discourse is quite probably *reactively* connected to the fact that we for quite some time now have been experiencing an increasingly omnipotent “top-down”-oriented professionalization, commercialisation and, first and foremost, *spectacularisation* of mass-media based political discourse and communication. Political messages in these more traditional contexts are now generally constructed in ways that are essentially *promotional*, and more specifically, *brand-oriented* in character, as if the principal aim of the project is to sell the population as many units as possible of a pre-packaged consumer product, rather than seeking, as might perhaps have been the case in our more distant past, to open for dialogue and build participatory, trust-based intersubjective relationships between local political candidates and their

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<sup>54</sup> Coppock (2009b, 2009c).



potential constituents, based largely on situated face-to-face encounters framed in different social settings, with informal conversations and open discussion of how best to arrive at satisfactory solutions to matters on hand in both local and more global environments needing urgent strategic and political intervention. Increasingly, we are seeing a growth in the use of *cheerleading* and *evangelising* strategies at the core of much political messaging, many of which ape, or borrow from, traditional forms of *testimonial based* rhetoric, as practiced in popular religious movements<sup>55</sup>, and also associated with a long tradition of direct fundraising events for churches, sports, and other cultural associations that use essentially phatic forms of advertising typical for popular television commercials<sup>56</sup>, particularly in the United States, but also in Europe, here in Italy and elsewhere in the world.

This tendency towards using very direct forms of personal testimony as a modality of popular political discourse and rhetoric seeks to build, and strategically exploit, strong emotional bonds, grounded in a strong sense of personal identification with the pronounced *personal experiences* and *deep emotions* of the charismatic person delivering the testimony, on the part of each *individual* audience member.

In this respect here in Italy, the extremely charismatic, and clearly convinced believer in phatic forms of political rhetoric, studded richly with personal testimonies of his profound passion for his mission, his excellence and supreme ability to govern, Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, who is also – anomalously for someone in his position – the owner of an entire private television network covering several national channels, is rather in a class of his own. Antonio di Pietro, one of Mr. Berlusconi's most determined opponents, and whom we have already mentioned, as ex-magistrate turned full-time politician and party leader, always plays a good deal in his political rhetoric on his relatively simple social origins and his personal experiences with the he successful heading of the famous “Mani Pulite<sup>57</sup>” anti-corruption process in the early 1990's, carried out by him and a pool of like-minded magistrates at the office of the Public Prosecutor of Milan. A couple of other more visible exponents of this kind of phatic testimonial-based approach to political rhetoric who are active, and enjoying some success, at the present time are the one time comedian and, more recently, independent centre-left politician, Beppe Grillo<sup>58</sup> and the more internationally renowned Tuscan actor, film director and comedian Roberto Benigni<sup>59</sup>, who has not ever stood as a political candidate himself, but has always personally promoted a strongly populist left-wing political alignment. Both Benigni and Grillo are avowed, and extremely vocal opponents and critics of Mr. Berlusconi.

As has been briefly noted above, in confrontation with Mr Berlusconi and his vast economic, mass media, sporting and advertising empire interests, Grillo and Benigni can hardly be considered mainstream political figures or commentators here in Italy at the moment. They seek rather to act as loudly dissident voices at the margins of the sphere of conventional political power, by loudly criticising those in positions of power through essentially ludic forms of parody and satire, and by doing so, to animate popular opinion in favour of other potential “outsider” or “bottom-up” candidates. Grillo (Figure 13) and Benigni (figure 14), of course, both depend a good deal on their own personal charisma, and their characteristic irreverently playful and emotionally engaging rhetorical styles.

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4tIB5im4bY>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjNjMrJL2M&feature=related>

<sup>57</sup> [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mani\\_pulite](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mani_pulite)

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.beppegrillo.it/>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJJ9rzReXso>

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUZdjwbFX-M>



Fig. 13 – Beppe Grillo in the midst of his audience at one of his political mass meetings.



Fig.14 – Roberto Benigni in action on the national television channel RAI Uno

This prevalent tendency must, I think, be seen as part of a more general trend that involves a general “rewiring” of the basic politician-constituent interface toward more varied and richly endowed “bottom-up” rhetorical and political gameplay strategies that seek to use the potential of cooperative engagement in creating sharing, and evaluating forms of user-generated content in transworld, transmedia *genius loci*, as a way to stimulate new forms of *enactive* constituent involvement and participation in the ideation, creation and realisation of politically based, but in some sense more



democratically “shared” narrative future possible world scenarios.

#### **4. Conclusion: Blending a Politics of Production and Consumption with a Politics of Cooper-i-tion and Prosumption – Might it Work?**

Aiming to succeed in this rapidly burgeoning arena of contemporary political gameplay is now clearly seen as necessary in order to gain as much leverage as possible from the ongoing shift from a broad, “top-down”-based, “hypodermic needle-like<sup>60</sup>” diffusion of what was largely a television- and cinema-based political mass-communication apparatus, towards rather more agile “bottom-up” models of political relationship-building that are increasingly moving towards ever more differentiated, more complex and more enactive forms of consumer/audience engagement and participation in both political narrative world-making, and in the design, production and continual peer-evaluation of local and global political communication processes. The recent success of the Obama 2008-2009 election campaign certainly seems to have shown that it *is* quite possible these days to begin to tip the scales of the balance between “top-down” and “bottom-up” communication and consensus-building strategies somewhat more in the direction of the latter. In the longer run of things, what would probably be the most desirable, realistic and optimal situation would be one where there is a broadly consensual, efficiently organised, self-regulated balance between “top-down” and “bottom-up” strategies.

We began our present discussion by presenting a schematic model that sought in its own rather impoverished way to illustrate, or perhaps better, to *evoke*, the rich dynamicity and creative potential of the entanglement of past and future narrative and rhetorical possible worlds with those emergent on our present actual world local and global cultural spheres. So, let us now try to sum up – again in an extremely simplified, schematic and impoverished manner – on the basis of most of the key themes we have touched on in the course of this present discourse – some core relational elements and dynamic configurations of these that might be deemed sufficient to animate the painfully naive notion that it just *might* be possible to combine fruitfully both “top-down” and “bottom-up modalities” of political, economic, social and cultural rhetoric, discourse and practice in order to create a felicitous set of “win-win” (rather than “I win and you lose”) local and global conditions that may help us construct *together* a better, more humane future for one and all, and for all those who may come after us, too.

In this highly idealised picture of things, a popular delegation (of responsibility) is seen as leading to (good) governance, and (good) production as leading to (responsible forms of) consumption on the one hand, while on the other hand, (good) forms of peer-to-peer sharing and appraisal practices lead to (responsible forms of) engagement, and (good) prosumption activities as leading to (responsible forms of) cooper-i-tion. And finally, these two top-down and bottom-up approaches are seen as potentially cooper-i-tively informing and strengthening all of that which is meritocratic and ethical in them both ...

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<sup>60</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypodermic\\_needle\\_model](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypodermic_needle_model)



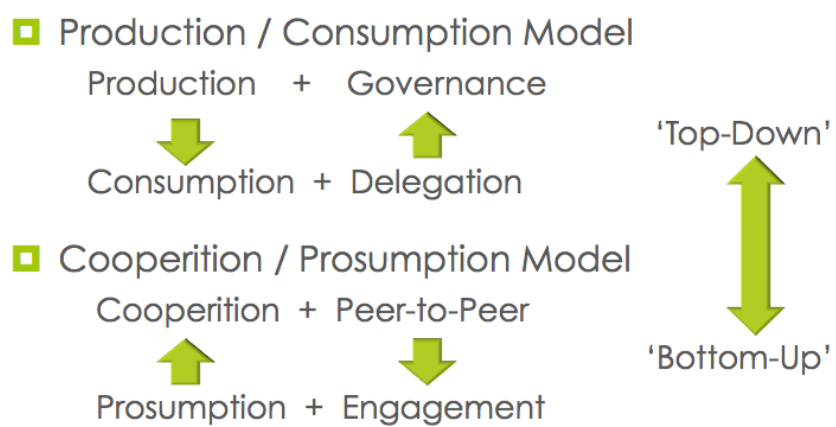


Figure 15 – Blending Production and Consumption with Cooperation and Prosumption

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