

Book Reviews

Edited by Dr Stephanie O'Donohoe
The University of Edinburgh

The Art of Immersion: How the Digital Generation is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the Way We Tell Stories

Frank Rose (2011)
W.W. Norton & Co. £19.99
DOI: 10.2501/IJA-30-5-000-000

In 2006, noted media scholar Henry Jenkins published *Convergence Culture*, an eye-opening, prescient look at the way technology has affected storytelling and popular culture. Though the book inspired a cult following and a host of blogs and PhD theses, few mainstream books have explored or expanded upon the ideas Jenkins established. Until now.

Frank Rose's *The Art of Immersion* is a fascinating survey of how the media industry is evolving. Rose posits that, partly due to the enormous cultural power of the internet, audiences are no longer passive consumers of media content, but have become active participants in the stories and brands they love. According to Rose, the rise of social networking, empowered audiences, and what he calls 'the hive mind', has rendered traditional linear storytelling and branding inadequate to stand up to the rigorous scrutiny it will receive. A new paradigm is necessary – one commonly described as 'transmedia storytelling', and which Rose terms 'deep media'.

To illustrate the importance of deep media, Rose has assembled an exhaustive array of examples that display its creative and commercial potential. From *The Dark Knight* and *Avatar*, to *Lost* and *The Sims*, Rose cites entertainment properties that should be familiar to even the most casual pop culture fan. He also discusses marketing campaigns such as Nike+ and Coca-Cola's *Happiness Factory*, which utilised digital technology to connect across multiple touchpoints and become more ubiquitous in consumers' lives. These familiar brands provide accessible entry points into the essential concepts in the book, which Rose then explains and explores through vibrant, engaging prose.

Equally impressive is the array of talent that Rose features. *The Art of Immersion* features interviews with Nine Inch Nails frontman Trent Reznor, who describes an alternate reality game built around his music by 42 Entertainment; James Cameron, on set talking about his vision for the future and plans to build *Avatar* into an immersive fictional universe; and Will Wright, who discusses the rapid convergence of games and stories. Rose also introduces readers to innovative thinkers like Susan Bonds and Jeff Gomez, who are building powerful reputations by generating new creative paradigms.

The broad range of topics covered by *The Art of Immersion* is both its biggest strength and, arguably, its biggest weakness. Successive chapters discuss topics as diverse as the effect of video games on dopamine receptors, creating emotion through digital characters, and the art of fictional universe building. This makes the book feel occasionally disjointed, and prevents Rose from exploring any one area too deeply.

Ultimately, this is not an issue for the reader simply because Rose's book, in a funny way, practises what he preaches as a living example of deep media. If the reader becomes particularly interested in any one topic or chapter, he or she is only a Google search away from digging deeper and learning more. For instance, a reader fascinated by Rose's discussion of the additional story content created by J.J. Abrams, Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof for *Lost* may ultimately find themselves reading Ivan Askwith's exhaustive 174-page exploration of the subject, *Television 2.0* (2007). Rose himself also provides regular supporting content through a frequently updated blog and Twitter account.

Things are moving too quickly in the digital world for any single text to become a magic bullet. Nonetheless, *The Art of Immersion* constitutes an essential overview for anybody interested in the field. Applications in the academic world are clear (it is already on the syllabi for classes at USC and Columbia), but it also constitutes a prerequisite for those wishing to enter Hollywood, and marketers or PR professionals wishing to engage an increasingly fragmented audience.

References

- Askwith, I. (2007) *Television 2.0: Reconceptualizing TV as an Engagement Medium*. Boston: MIT.
Jenkins, H. (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU Press.

Simon Pulman

Transmedia Consultant &
Business Strategy, Starlight Runner
Entertainment

Game On: Energize Your Business with Social Media Games

Jon Radoff (2011)

John Wiley & Sons, £21.99

DOI: 10.2501/IJA-30-5-000-000

I'm writing this on the day that Steve Jobs died. As the whole business world pauses to take stock, Jon Radoff's book captures much of the spirit that Jobs sought to instil in the business world. I haven't often read a book that provides such comprehensive practical guidance while posing wider questions on consumer engagement in such an articulate, accessible yet nuanced manner. It takes someone who has been dedicated to something they love – and games creator and entrepreneur Jon Radoff more than meets that criterion.

Game On is focused on the rapidly growing area of social media gaming, but holds lessons that are relevant across all business. Staying on brand, the book itself is set up as a game: readers tackle a quiz to identify their interest type, and this leads to a recommended route through the book