

Diversions in the *Hunger Games* Franchise: A Fragmented Narrative of Hijacked Images

Biographical notice:

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Sujet de thèse : La Jeunesse dans le Cinéma Nord-Américain à l'Ère de la Culture de la Convergence, ou l'Identité Narrative à l'Épreuve de l'Intermédia et du Transmédia.

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Summary :

The study of the *Hunger Games* franchise offers a specific angle on the subject of cinematic seriality, as its transmedia form may require its narrative strategy to be considered less in terms of what happens within each film but rather what happens in between each release. The narrative flow is diverted from a linear course into a more complex form, one that also requires the use of media as diversion, thus echoing the diegesis. Indeed, Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* book trilogy proposed a study of the dangers and impact of contemporary media. In the dystopian nation of Panem, totalitarian leaders subjugate their purposefully divided people by organising heavily mediated Hunger Games, in which children from all parts of the country are forced to battle to the death under the eyes of all. The story of the *Hunger Games* is one of image consumption. For the diegetic audiences controlled by the politics of *Panem et circenses*,¹ images are used as distractions and young people are presented as the victims and participants of these political games in which projecting the right image is the condition of survival.

While this was a focus of the novelist's criticism, ironically, it may also be the key to its reading as a series of transmedia films, since the franchise's success depended on the caesura between each release and the production company's ability to divert and thereby attract audiences in that time. Lionsgate's marketers itemized characters and fragments of the films, distorting the narrative, at times in seemingly counterintuitive publicity, and producing what Melanie Bourdaa defined as an "augmented narrative."² They experimented with immersive strategies that placed audiences in ambiguous roles, inviting them to play a part in the hybrid adaptation. It resulted in fragmenting the series' spectatorship, as the ambivalent marketing games diverted the contents of the diegesis and were met with disparate reactions. The *Hunger Games* phenomenon³ led to a series of fan engagement going beyond simple fan productions, as various active viewers hijacked the *Hunger Games* images and brand for charity fundraising purposes or political agendas, thereby fuelling the debate on the outcomes

¹ Latin: Bread and Games

² Laurichesse, Hélène. *La Stratégie de marque dans l'audiovisuel*. Paris: A. Colin, 2013,

³ Balkind, Nicola. *Fan Phenomena: The Hunger Games*. Bristol; Chicago: Intellect, 2014

of convergence culture and the idea that “consumer capitalism will always fully contain all forms of grassroots resistance”⁴ that Henry Jenkins finds too pessimistic.

In my talk I will use different acceptations of the word “diversion” in order to foreground their degrees of relevance in our understanding of both the diegesis and the form of transmedia film series. I will discuss how the narrative of the *Hunger Games* series expanded in unpredictable ways, underlining the highly volatile nature of convergence culture in which the participatory fans are both the diverted and the diverting components of a hybrid film narrative, which my talk will aim to analyse.

⁴ Jenkins, Henry. "Rethinking 'Rethinking Convergence/Culture'." *Cultural Studies* 28.2 (2013): 267-97