Fake Rules, Real Fiction: Professional Wrestling and Videogames

Costantino Oliva
costao@iol.it

IT-University of Copenhagen
Rued Langgaards Vej 7
2300 Copenhagen, Denmark

Gordon Calleja
calleja@itu.dk

Center for Computer Games Research,
IT-University of Copenhagen
Rued Langgaards Vej 7
2300 Copenhagen, Denmark

ABSTRACT

Emerging from a legitimate contest regulated by a set of rules, professional wrestling is today a fictional product, where no actual competition takes place. Those same rules serve as a setting for a particular kind of narration: the *kayfabe*, the fictional framework for all professional wrestling's narrative, a fictional world with the characteristic of having a 1:1 ratio between real time and fictional time.

Professional wrestling and videogames deal in different contexts with the same elements: rules and fiction (Juul 2005) [13]. By combining aspects of narrative theory and game studies research, this paper will analyze the narrative of professional wrestling utilizing the tools commonly used or specifically developed for videogames. An understanding of professional wrestling elements is necessary to explain and criticize the different approaches that videogame designer have used when creating wrestling videogames, a popular sub-genre that present specific peculiarities.

The first chapter will provide a background to the history and the evolution of professional wrestling tracing the transformation from wrestling as a legitimate contest to a constructed media spectacle. The on-going constructed nature of contemporary wrestling will be addressed using Chatman's concept of narrative. We will then use the theory of scripted narrative and alterbiography (Calleja 2009) [4] to explain how the pre-designed elements in a staged match are only partially scripted. This will be the ground for three subsequent passages, each one enlarging the view on the object of study: what happens *in the ring*, what happens just *outside of the ring*, and what happens in *the fictional world* of professional wrestling. By considering the transmediality (Jenkins 2003, 2004) [11, 12] of professional wrestling, we will analyze those conclusions and see how they are used by professional wrestling videogames: the territory where real rules have to be fleshed out in order to simulate the "fake rules" of professional wrestling.

The paper concludes that theoretical frameworks developed within game studies have produced useful tools that can be deployed in different contexts, in this case to understand the constructed story that so deeply informs the agonistic (Caillois, 1962) [5] aspects of professional wrestling. The concept of scripted narrative and alterbiography clarifies how the narrative is enacted in and outside of the ring, integrating previous studies about wrestler fan behaviour (Ford 2007) [8], and claryfing the role of the wrestler as both a storyteller and an actor. By considering wrestling as a serialized fictional product, it is possible to analyze the kayfabe as a unique narrative frame, capable of keeping narrative coherence operating with a 1:1 ratio between real time and fictional time. The concept of transmediality, also discussed in game studies, proves to be deeply affected by the kayfabe. Wrestling has strong transmedial narrative elements: it is sufficient to feature few elements of the wrestling enviroment to project the contents of the kayfabe. With that said, making a game out of the mixture of dramatization, physical performance, and symbolical meaning of professional wrestling is no easy task. A theoretical framework can be useful to approach design issues: wrestling fictional elements appears in videogames thanks to its deep rooted transmediality, but the subtleties of professional wrestling's narrative are still understated in wrestling videogames.

Author Keywords

Game theory, professional wrestling, professional wrestling videogames, WWE

1. Introduction

Professional wrestling is a cultural product of great complexity. During its long history, it has evolved from a form of legitimate contest or sport, to a fictional product. This product is now being called *sport entertainment*. Building on top of the current literature about professional wrestling, this paper will analyze the narrative element of wrestling utilizing the theoretical frameworks developed for understanding videogames. An understanding of professional wrestling is necessary to critically analyze the different approaches that videogame designers have used when creating wrestling videogames. Critics of professional wrestling have long argued against wrestling, often using what Mazer calls "the question of the real". (Mazer, 2005) [15]. "The fake is what distinguishes professional wrestling from "real" sports (i.e., football, basketball, baseball) and underlines the conventional wisdom that professional wrestling, unlike "real" (i.e. amateur) wrestling, is a kind of fictional enterprise […]. The fake is what ties fans to wrestlers, and to each other, creating a performance of denial and complicity that in its ambivalence and ambiguities eludes moral and academic authority." (Mazer 2005) [15]. When fans go to live wrestling events, they do not pay to see a legitimate contest, but a staged performance. This has tended to outrage critics, who judge professional wrestling by its legitimacy as a traditional sport and thus painting professional wrestling as deceptive . As Barthes (1957) argued this perspective trivializes the fictionality of professional wrestling: "There are people who think that wrestling is an ignoble sport. Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle, and it is no more ignoble to attend a wrestled performance of suffering than a performance of the sorrows of Arnolphe or Andromaque" [3]. Here Barthes outlines the dramatic and fictional elements of professional wrestling, paving the way for further critical analysis of this somewhat controversial activity . Within Cultural Studies wrestling has been discussed from a number of angles. Scholars talked about wrestling as a morality play; wrestling being a drama or a melodrama; wrestling's ethnography; gender issues; fans engagment. Notable works are "Wrestling to *Rasslin*: Ancient Sport to American Spectacle" (Morton and O'Brien 1985) [17]; "Steel Chair to the Head" (edited by Sammond 2005); and the materials produced by the Comparative Media Studies Course "Topics in Comparative Media: American Pro Wrestling", taught by Sam Ford at the MIT.

2. A brief history of professional wrestling

It is challenging to understand what professional wrestling is without a general knowledge of its history. Nowadays, the most successful company in the wrestling business is the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), running three, weekly, television shows (one of which, *Monday Night Raw*, is the longest running weekly program in the history of US television) and one monthly pay-per-view show along with a full schedule of live events. The shows are about the struggles and fights of a number of professional wrestlers and the competition for the coveted championship belts. But the nature of competition here is somewhat different from the traditional idea within sports. Wrestlers compete in matches whose outcome is pre-ordained. These fights are woven into an on-going story about the individual wrestler and their interaction with the rest of the wrestling community. The process of match "fixing" was adopted when promoters realized that matches where often the wrong length for the paying crowd; they either ended too soon or dragged on too long. The predetermined nature of contemporary wrestling is a recent convention. The first historical record of wrestling dates back to 1410 B.C. in the form of a wall painting in the tomb of Tyanen an Egyptian officer (Carroll 1988). This finding disproves the "naive assumption that Greek sports were without antecedents in their Mediterranean environment" (Carroll 1988) [6]. Other forms of wrestling are in fact the Greco-Roman style *pancratium*, as well as the still popular Japanese *sumo* wrestling. Wrestling was also practiced by Irish immigrants settling in Vermont (Kreit 1998 [14], Mortensen 1998 [16]). The sport was eventually spread during the Civil War and through the Union Army, and became a bussiness by the 1880's. (Kreit 1998) [14]. Matches took place in saloon halls and small venues.

Altough it's reasonable to think that matches started being fixed before, some authors (Kreit 1998 [14], Mortensen 1998 [16]) identifies the beginning of this practice with two famous matches involving the Russian wrestler George Hackenschmidt and american Frank Gotch in 1908 and 1911. At that point, wrestling was an international establishment. For the first time, an emerging media changed the face of the bussiness: "the spreading of newspapers and magazines now made possible to have a recognized world champion" (Mortensen 1998 [16]). The first match lasted more than two hours, and ended when Gotch applied a submission manouver to Hackenschmidt's ankle. "The 1911 rematch was held at Chomiskey Park in Chicago and was attended by 40,000 spectators who paid a record $90,000" (Kreit 1998) [14] and lasted only few minutes: Hackenschmidt wrestled with an injured leg, and claimed that the damage was caused by supposed sparring partner Ad Santel, paid by Gotch to injure him. Such wrestlers are known as "hookers". They use dangerous and banned moves in training sessions to injure opponents. This story was the beginning of modern professional wrestling. "The failure

of these two matches to satisfy audiences, and the accusations of fraud marked a temporary decline in the popularity of wrestling." (Ball 1991 [2] cited in Kreit 1998 [14]) . To deliver a more compelling entertainment product, matches started being fixed. This shift turned the wrestling industry into a "closely protected, closed society [with] strongly guarded secrets" (de Garis 2005) [9]. *Kayfabe* was born. The glossary from "Steel Chair to the Head" (edited by Sammonds 2005) defines "kayfabe" as follows: "maintaining a fictional storyline, or the illusion that professional wrestling is a genuine contest". If the press gave visibility to wrestling champions, another media changed wrestling forever: television. Before television, radio was the most popular media available in america's households. Baseball was the most popular radio broadcasted sport, but for wrestling, you "had to be there" (Mortensen 1998) [16]. Wrestling became a widely popular televised event. . Wrestlers augmented their popularity and were recognized as "stars", as a part of the television stardom. Wrestlers' characterizations became more complex, thanks to the blending of audio and visual techniques of conveying the spectacle of wrestling. The media placed more emphasis on the background stories and characterization surrounding the matches. . "Gimmicks" (the character played by a wrestler, resulting in the sum of fictional elements, attire and wrestling ability) switched from more generic themes to more defined characters with specific personalities, often derived from contemporary events and social issues.

3. Professional wrestling as narrative

"Structuralist narrative theory argues that narrative has two parts: a story *(historie)*, the content or chain of events (action, happenings) […]; and a discourse *(discours)*, that is, the expression, the means by which the story is communicated. In simple terms, the story is the *what* in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the *how*. […] The *story* [is] the formal content element of narrative; and it is communicated by the *discourse*, the formal expression element." (Chatman 1978) [7]. Although his framework is most readily applicable to linear media like literature and film, Chatman doesn't overtly tie "narrative" to a specific medium. He refers to narrative's "appearance in a specific materializing medium, verbal, cinematic, balletic, musical, pantomimic, or whatever" as its *manifestation* (Chatman 1978) [7]. We will use this tool to analyze professional wrestling's narrative; in doing so, we will broaden our view on the object, looking at what happens *in the ring*, what happens just *outside of the ring*, and what happens when professional wrestling become a serialized fiction.

By insisting on the representation of the fight, wrestling switched the attention of the audience and its *raison d'être* from the outcome of that fight to the actual staging of the fight in itself. The importance of the performance is therefore crucial. Storylines are a fundamental part of today's professional wrestling: currently, the WWE strings together its weekly shows through an on-going storyline and resolves them or introduces major changes during pay-per-views. WWE wrestling therefore follows a similar narrative structure to television series, with each match developing the relations between characters and pushing the story forward. For example, one recent storyline (written by *SmackDown!* writer Michael Hayes) involving superstar Jeff Hardy saw him defeating "main eventers" (respected wrestlers that are usually present in the most important match of a wrestling event) Triple H and The Undertaker to get a spot in a match for the WWE Championship at the 2008 edition of *Survivor Series*. But on the day of the match, WWE's official homesite *www.wwe.com* featured an article about Jeff Hardy being found unconscious and later being hospitalized for unknown reasons. The storyline drags on well know, real life Jeff Hardy's drug problems happened in the past. The story was believable enough to be picked up by a news outlet not participating in the kayfabe, like NBC or WCVB Boston (only to be removed after being proven it was false), as well as fansites and wrestling sites [19, 25, 26]. But even the most experienced fansite couldn't tell for sure if it was a real event or not. In this example, the manifestation of narrative is spanned on different media. In order to experience the discourse in its entirety, it is necessary to access different sources, that constitute "the means by which the story is communicated" (Chatman 1978) [7]. By taking inspiration from real events, the storyline's author Michael Hayes added depth to the kayfabe.

4. Professional wrestling as scripted narrative and alterbiography

The previous example doesn't tell all about the professional wrestling discourse, that is problematized when considering the specific part of professional wrestling's storytelling taking place during its core performance *in the ring*. This important element has not been thoroughly investigated in the available literature about the argument, with notable exception being de Garis's work [9]. In order to do so we will use a theory developed for videogames, even though the two forms of entertainment have considerably different formal properties. As mentioned, both media, wrestling and videogames, share some common materials, namely rules and fiction (Juul 2005). In the academic debate about videogames, a number of studies have addressed the

problematic notion of games as a storytelling media. Calleja introduces the notion of scripted narrative and alterbiography in virtual environments (2009). In videogames, the scripted narrative consists of the "narrative content and structures that have been written in by the designers" (Calleja 2009). The designed narrative is thereofore pre-scripted by the author of the object, and is unfolded by the player through a number of different structures of narrative progression. On the other hand, "alterbiography is […] a cyclical process afforded by the formal properties of the game; it's representational, mechanical and medium specific qualities; and actuated in the mind of the player; […] a mental construct [11] generated by the properties of the media text" (Calleja 2009). Modern professional wrestling is a complex media text, capable of generating mental constructs. We will apply the notion of scripted narrative and alterbiography to professional wrestling, underlining the feedback loop existing between the wrestlers, the fans, and the meaning of the signs in the wrestling environment. Using this tool to analyze the previous example about Jeff Hardy, we can identify part of the scripted narrative as a plot written by an author (in our example, Michael Hayes) and enacted by the wrestlers (in our example, Jeff Hardy, Triple H and The Undertaker). Each wrestler acts according to another element of the scripted narrative, the "gimmick": the character played by a wrestler, resulting in the sum of scripted fictional elements, attire and wrestling ability. The staging of the bout, the exchange of moves, is actually left to the interpretation of the wrestlers, that apply and exchange moves in what de Garis calls a "logical" way. This continuous exchange of signs, happening in the larger frame of the scripted narrative, produces a feedback loop between the two (or more) wrestlers performing in the ring. In videogames, "an alterbiography refers to the active construction of an on-going story that develops through interaction with the game world's topography, inhabitants, objects, game rules and coded physics" (Calleja 2009); considering professional wrestling, alterbiography refers to the active construction of story through the wrestlers interaction with the wrestling environment topography, inhabitants and objects. The absence of "game rules" is the main difference between alterbiographies in this two medias; however, the presence of participants acting in the boundaries of a scripted narrative, but capable of being active producers of meaning, is of critical importance. In fact, while playing videogames, the player experiences "alterbiographies […] about someone, something or a group of things. The subject of an alterbiography can be a unit of marines marooned on an uncharted island or a teenager's forays at a new high-school" (Calleja 2009). In wrestling, the wrestlers' in-ring performance makes him experience an alterbiography about the character he's interpreting. This happens because wrestling moves are closely related to the motifs and personality of a

wrestler's gimmick, and are the fundamental part of wrestling storytelling. The ability of the wrestler to use them in a "logical" way influences the alterbiography. In this sense, the role of the wrestler is not to be confused with that of, for example, an actor in a theatrical performance, where the actor interprets the scripted narrative, but does not produce the feedback loop required for an alterbiography. In professional wrestling, the signs possess a structured narrative value that is decoded by the audience according to the plot they're currently being used in. In other words, they are "intellegible" (Barthes 1957) [3]. The gimmick's scripted narrative is interpreted as follow: "as soon as the adversaries are in the ring, the public is overwhelmed by the obviousness of the role. […] Wrestling is an intelligible spectacle". (Barthes 1957) [3]. That is, it is always clear who is a "babyface" (good character) or a "heel" (bad character). This claim is clarified by de Garis, that introduces the idea of the performer as an active producer of meaning: "each move is not inherently intelligible, as Barthes seems to suggest. Rather, *in a good match*, it is made intelligible by the performers". Wrestlers with good skills can perform good matches permitting an "immediate reading of the juxtaposed meanings" (Barthes 1957) [3]; on the contrary, wrestlers with poor skills can only stage "a bad match, [making] each moment unintelligible" (de Garis 2005) [9]. In fact, it is impossible to tell "who did what to who" when a move is poorly performed or completely missed: for example, the result of a poorly executed "superplex", a spectacular move executed from the third rope, is two bodies slamming simultaneously onto the mat with apparently identical amount of damage delivered to both. It is possible to interpret the meaning of a move by reading the juxtaposed elements that are part of the gimmicks: size, skills, and the pre-defined role that the wrestler is enacting; being a babyface or a heel. Let's evaluate this example: "I was working as a heel. At the beginning of the match, I dominated my opponent with technical wrestling, which displeased the six hundreds or so fans in attendance. That was the point. My opponent, being somewhat green [inexperienced], became confused after a couple of minutes. Instead of staying aggresive in order to garner fan support, he would do something and then back off, causing an awkward pause. During one of those awkward pauses, I launched across the ring and hit him with a pretty solid clothesline. Immediately, I could hear the fans turn in my favor. If I wanted to stay out of favor, I had to back off, which I did. In that respect, I "stole" the match when I won because I was weaker. The basic story of the match is that I had better skills; my opponent was stronger and more rugged, but I managed to steal the victory by a combination of guile and luck." (de Garis 2005) [9]. Here, the meaning of the clothesline (a move where a running wrestler lifts an arm from the side of the body and parallel to the ground, hitting the opponent) is related to brute power, an element associated

in this particular match to youth and inexperience: something that de Garis` gimmick wasn't supposed to have. Insisting on it would have made the match unintellegilble. This meaning, however, is shared by the wrestlers and the crowd, therefore making possible a clear, shared interpretation. The example shows how the non-scripted interaction between the wrestlers produces an alterbiography that influences the match. The alterbiography is deeply affected by the quality of the execution of the moves and to incidents like injuries, an unfortunate but very common event in professional wrestling. An injury can incapacitate a wrestler to perform the necessary actions scripted in the scripted narrative, leading often to radical changes.

The overrall narrative of a wrestling match is the resulting product of:

1.   The scripted narrative of the match, usually written by an author. It has specific gimmicks, it can feature "turning points" (a scripted sequence of events that leads to points of specific importance) and has a fixed outcome;

2.   An alterbiography of the wrestlers, produced by their in-ring interaction. It's based on their interpretation of the characters and on the execution of a set of moves tied to their gimmick and chosen moment by moment during live improvisation.

The use of the concept of scripted narrative and alterbiography is productive with reference to Chatman's theory. Professional wrestling is a bordeline example of narrative: in fact, part of the *story* actually gets generated during the *discourse*. "The formal expression element", the discourse of professional wrestling, has its core in the match. The match not only is able to "communicate" the *story*, "the formal content element of narrative", but also to produce changes and interpretations to it, changing its "chain of events".

In the game *WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW 2009* (THQ 2008) [23], the complexity of wrestling narratives has been approached in two distinct ways: *Career Mode* and *Road to Wrestlemania*. In the first mode, the player starts with a wrestler of his choice, and chooses different paths, that leads to different opponents and belts. In the second mode, the player chooses from a narrowed list of wrestlers, and follows a fixed path that will lead, after completing the script, to win at *Wrestlemania*. This two modes represents the designers' solution to the problem of

scripted narrative and alterbiography in professional wrestling. In *Career Mode*, the designers gave more room to an alterbiography, allowing for a non linear progression through the game. In *Road to Wrestlemania,* the player have to follow a linear progression path: if a match is lost, the player will have to compete again in order to get the necessary output that make the narrative progress. This mode features cut scenes and voice overs done by the actual wrestlers, and permits to have an elaborated scripted narrative, taking inspiration from the dramatic situations that are one of the key tropes of wrestling's narrative; however, it has little room an alterbiography, that is better featured in the *Career Mode*.

5. Expanding the concept of wrestling as scripted narrative and alterbiography: outside of the ring

As previously said, the concept of wrestling as scripted narrative and alterbiography is intended to work for understanding the core element of professional wrestling: the match. But wrestling's narrative works far away from the match in itself, involving in the discourse a number of elements around its core. One of the key elements in a gimmick is the wrestler's ring entrance, used by the scripted narrative to assert moral orientation or other characteristics of the wrestler. In contemporary professional wrestling, the entrance is an important, carefully prepared narrative moment, but the concept of scripted narrative can be used to explain the result of unpredictable and specific cases. "In 1999 […] the harness worn by WWF Superstar Owen Hart failed, and instead of flying into the ring from the ceiling fifty feet above, he fell to his death in front of 14,000 spectators at Kemper Arena (Kansas City, Missouri). […] In retrospect, a narrative which moved from denial to eulogy was constructed." (Mazer 1998) [15]. In this example, a tragic event caused by a technical issue provoked an alterbiography that required to design an all new scripted narrative.

In the Wii version of *WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW 2009* (THQ 2008) [23], the concept of scripted narrative and alterbiography has been implemented during the entrance of the wrestlers, that is no more a non-interactive sequence (like in the previous editions of the game). By performing a set of scripted moves with the Wii controller, the wrestler will interact with the crowd, gaining advantages for the match. However, this game feature is poorly developed, and can produce strange results. During his funereal entrance, The Undertaker will suddenly clap hands and cheer the crowd like a more high-spirited wrestler. Allowing to choose what to do, the scripted narrative permits an alterbiography that clashes

with other elements of the game: given the wrestling context, Barthes would call the "joyful" Undertaker unintelligible.

Another important element to expand the aspect of alterbiography in professional wrestling is the interaction of the crowd and the wrestlers. "[Sharon] Mazer observed that wrestlers responded to the all-too-common "boring" chants by immediately picking up the pace of the match." (de Garis 2005) [9]. Wrestling's alterbiographical possibilities allow for adaptation from the part of the wrestler to fit the reaction of the crowd. In the long run, crowd reaction can also influence scripted narrative: for example, the popularity of The Undertaker's gimmick made higly unintelligible his role as a heel: whatever dishonarable actions he perpetrated, he got cheered by the crowd anyway. This led to a switch where The Undertaker is now a face. The active participation of wrestling fans is the basis for Sam Ford's ethnographic research (Ford 2007) [8], that underlined the knowledge and competencies of the wrestling fan. "Most fans realize that they are expected to perform […] at wrestling shows, even if all do not actively engage in this mode of interaction with the text. Further, the fans who are actively performing also know that the writers have scripted their performance a certain way, so that the fans know who the promoters "want" them to boo or cheer, and fans sometimes take joy in straying from the script, in performing against the text instead of along with it." (Ford 2007) [8]. But the basis for an interpretation of the script are subject to change, according to cultural and social changes or for the introduction of new media: "Barthes's account focuses entirely upon the one-on-one match as isolated event within which each gesture must be instantly legible apart from any larger context; […] Barthes could have not predicted how this focus upon the discrete event or the isolated gesture would be transformed through the narrative mechanism of television" (Jenkins 1997). If the introduction of the press popularized competitors and thus made them more recognizable the coming of television altered wrestling's scripted narrative aspect. Televised wrestling allowed for a greater integration of the wrestler's repertoire of moves making them more legible to the audience.

6. Wrestling as serialized fiction

Working as the fictional frame for anything that wrestling is, the WWE's contemporary kayfabe is a continuous narration of events, with different story arcs spanning in a number of episodes,. Other kinds of serialized fiction are popular in different media. Examples are soap operas, TV series (like *Lost* or *Heroes*), american super hero comic books, serialized novels (like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series). In all these examples, the story arcs are divided in different episodes. WWE's kayfabe works in a similar manner: if a wrestler from one of the brands (currently SmackDown, Raw and ECW) appears in another brand, that event is placed in a continuum. However, the kayfabe differs from other examples of serialized fiction in regards of the passing of fictional time. When discussing Chatman concepts of story and discourse, Juul [13] explains that "to read a novel or to watch a movie largely consists of reconstructing a story on the basis of the discourse presented (Chatman 1978) [7]. […] We reconstruct the story even if the events are presented to us in achronological order." (Juul 2005) [13]. This concept works well to understand other examples of serialized fiction, but in order to be used for the kayfabe, we need to clarify some aspects. Professional wrestling, of course, doesn't exists only as a televised spectacle, but also as a live show. Therefore, the narrative of wrestling experience a double mediation: by the live show first, and by its televisation secondly. If the televisation of wrestling makes ample use of common narrative techniques like the flashback, this is evidently not possible in a staged live event that offer to the audience a show happening in real time, exisisting on the negation of any fixed script. Even non-televised matches, known as "dark matches", are inside the kayfabe, but they rarely feature events of particular narrative importance. The live professional wrestling event cannot feature flashbacks, flashforwards or any other narrative techniques that influences the time *in order to be intelligible*. The story time (that we could call in this case the kayfabe time) and the real time have a 1:1 ratio. Given this, the kayfabe possesses a key feature of a MMORPG, that of having events happening in real time.

Interestingly enough, the passing of time in wrestling videogames does not follow this relationship. In that sense, the wrestling videogame is more similar to the televised spectacle of wrestling than to wrestling itself: the in-game time gaps are comparable to those of an edited and aired wrestling show. However, in the Nintendo DS version of *WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw 2009* (THQ 2008) [23], a small part of WWE's fictional world, the one tied to the decision-making and the management of the business, is relegated in a fabricated WWE office. The managing decisions are an important part of the kayfabe (with more importance given to kayfabe general managers in contemporary wrestling), but this game's designers decided to have this aspect simulated in a localized in-game facility, that has the effect to normalize the storylines, but also to disempower the fascination of the general manager, that becomes an easy localizable character efficiently administering the wrestling's requests.

Ford also noted, addressing the fan's participation in the wrestling live envent, that "pro wrestling is a space, like the online virtual worlds of *World of Warcraft* and other similar massively multiplayer online games, in which the consumer plays a pivotal role in the construction of the narrative." (Ford 2007) [8]. This comparison between two different "consumers", the wrestling fan and the MMORPG player, is of problematic understanding when considering their participation. Both of them are actors with "a pivotal role in the construction of the narrative" (Ford 2007) [8], but this concept can be better understood by framing it into the system of a scripted narrative and an alterbiography. During the professional wrestling live event, the fans can modify the progression of the bout, by cheering or booing specific actions. In this case, a feedback loop is created between two levels: *in the ring* and *outside of the ring*. But whetever fan participations happens or not, the interaction between the wrestlers occurring *in the ring* will produce alterbiography. The wrestling live event permits to the non-active fan the possibility to experience alterbiographies, by tapping on his ability to decode the signs exchanged by the wrestlers. This is not the case of *World of Warcraft* or any other MMORPG, where the player's active participation is a fundamental element in "the intersection of the semiotic surface, the coded structure of the game environment *and* the player's cognitive faculties" (Calleja 2009) that generate alterbiographies . Applying Calleja's theoretical framework to Ford's comparison [8] is therefore productive to understand the consumer's participation in different media.

7. Transmediality in WWE's wrestling

Emerging from a regional promotion, the WWF (World Wrestling Federation, name changed to WWE after a suit from the World Wide Fund for Nature) is now an internationally recognized company. With an aggressive economical policy, the promotion bought during the years direct competitors like WCW (World Championship Wrestling) and ECW (Extreme Championship Wrestling). Born under the televised era of professional wrestling, the WWE is responsible for relating wrestling to other medias: movies, internet, videogames, aligning those product alongside other pieces of merchandise such as t-shirts, action figures, replica belts, and so on. The transmediality (Jenkins 2003, 2004) [11, 12] of wrestling started during the 80's, when some wrestlers achieved popularity at times comparable to movie stars. Also, some popular actors from movies or tv series competed in wrestling matches. To clarify which content is being shared or referred by different media and how this process happens,we need to understand a specific effect produced by the kayfabe. By permeating some wrestling paratext

(for example, fansites can be inside or outside the kayfabe, in the latter case providing "insider" or "behind the scene" informations), the kayfabe extends its influence well outside the live wrestling event and his televisation, but includes a number of paratexts such as official sites, fansites, magazines etc. However, a character that exists in a narration that takes place in real time produces a problematic understanding of the fictional character/real person relation. Here's an example: "The character and the people performing, all become interrelate, they're one and the same. If you go to a movie premiere and get to shake hands with Tom Cruise, you're shaking hands with Tom Cruise, not with Jerry Maguire. If you shake hands with Ric Flair, you are shaking hands with two facets of Ric Flair: the actual and the fictional one. The actor and the character are the same" (Morton 1998, interview from *The Unreal Story of Professional Wrestling*) [16]. Of course, Ric Flair has got a life outside of his character. However, we will call the perception described by Morton an *effect*, caused by the peculiar characteristics of the kayfabe: being a persistent narration and having a 1:1 real time/fictional time ratio. That produces a *tendency* to expand this 1:1 ratio also to the relation between fictional gimmick/actual person. When talking about the *Star Wars* transmediality from a movie to a videogame, Jenkins states that "we inhabit a world of transmedia storytelling, one that depends less on each individual work being self-sufficient than on each work contributing to a larger narrative economy. The Star Wars game may not simply retell the story of Star Wars, but it doesn't have to in order to enrich or expand our experience of the Star Wars saga." (Jenkins 2004) [12]. The same applies to movies such as *Suburban Commando* (Kennedy 1991), starring Hulk Hogan: it enriches and expands our experience of the wrestler Hulk Hogan. This claim is corroborated by other two examples. The first is that in the front cover, the name "Terry Bollea" never appears, with the actor only being mentioned as "Hulk Hogan". That reinforces the fact that the wrestler known as Hulk Hogan is acting in a movie, and not that the actor Terry Bollea has temporarily dismissed his wrestler's attire to star in a movie. The other example is that, in contemporary wrestling, when a wrestler stars in a movie, this fact is always mentioned during air time (mostly due to promotional reasons). The wrestler himself or others openly talks about it, so that his movie career became a part of the character (as happened in the Monday Night Raw episode aired November 24, 2008, where Mr. Kennedy talked about his experience in shooting his first movie). Therefore, even if the events portrayed in the movie have nothing to do with the wrestler's gimmick, the movie is inside the kayfabe; a kayfabe where the wrestler starred in a movie.

Videogames are also part of professional wrestling

transmediality. Starting in 1989, the videogame industry tapped into the popularity of the then called WWF to produce fighting games featuring the famous *Superstars*. *WWF Wrestlemania* (Rare/Acclaim Entertainment 1989) [20] was the first videogame to feature actual wrestlers such as Hulk Hogan or Macho Man. Before *WWF Wrestlemania*, wrestling videogames do not used licenses from any federation, using fictional characters specifically invented for the game. For example, in *Pro Wrestling* (Nintendo 1986) [18], the player can choose characters like *Giant Panther* or *Fighter Ayabusa*, presumably inspired by famous wrestlers Ric Flair and Antonio Inoki. The game does not feature the complex narrative structure described in previous chapters; the player has to beat all the other wrestlers to become the champion, following a linear progression path. But in this early videogame, without any license from a real federation, few elements of the usual wrestling environment were sufficient to project the fictional world of professional wrestling. Even without other narrative elements, the knowledgeable wrestling fan can use some physical characteristics of the wrestler to determine if he is a heel or a face: "As soon as the adversaries are in the ring, the public is overwhelmed with the obviousness of the roles." (Barthes 1957) [3]. The intellegibility of the wrestling spectacle remains in *Pro Wrestling* [18], thanks to the kayfabe´s effects on the transmediality of professional wrestling.

8. Conclusions

Game studies produces useful analytical tools, that can be used to understand the fictional elements of professional wrestling. The concept of scripted narrative and alterbiography clarify how the narrative is enacted in and outside of the ring, integrating previous studies about the wrestler fan behaviour (Ford 2007) [8]. By considering wrestling a fictional world, it is possible to analyze the kayfabe, a unique narrative frame with unprecedented characteristics, capable of keeping narrative coherence operating with a 1:1 ratio between real time and fictional time. The concept of transmediality, also discussed in game theory, provides to be deeply affected by the kayfabe, and finds in wrestling a powerful transmedial narrative: it is sufficient to feature few elements of the wrestling enviroment to project the contents of the kayfabe. With that said, making a game out of the mixture of dramatization, physical performance, and symbolical meaning of professional wrestling is no easy task. A theoretical framework can be useful to approach design issues: wrestling fictional elements appears in videogames thanks to its deep rooted transmediality, but the subtleties of professional wrestling's narrative are still of problematic understandment in wrestling videogames.

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