Being the Preface to the Brazilian Edition of **Convergence Culture**: **Where Old and New Media Collide** by Henry Jenkins that I got to write thanks to my mate Mauricio.

If you haven't read it I really recommend you do – although not necessarily in Portuguese.

Available from all good book stores, I'd imagine. Or just get it from Amazon. Probably easier.

"The future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed"

William Gibson

Beginning of Part One

When the world changed slowly, looking into the future was a mystic art, shrouded in secrecy, extracted from entrails, and almost always erroneous.

But today the world is changing very fast indeed. As William Gibson has observed many times, to see how the world will be soon we need only look at those who have already embraced the future: the early adopters.

No one understands the early adopters of convergence culture better than Henry Jenkins. As the founder and director of MIT's Comparative Media Studies Program, he has been examining the evolution in media, both the technologies of communication and the social etiquette that surround them, for decades.

He is the natural successor to Marshall McLuhan, the "patron saint of digital revolution". He follows in the noble lineage of Nicholas Negroponte, a predecessor at MIT, whose seminal book *Being Digital* charted the development of interactive media pretty much up to the present day.

Convergence Culture shows us the next stage of evolution, from *interactive* to *participatory*. It charts the future of media and, by extension, culture from here on in.

We live in accelerated times. Things are moving faster and faster, and in the two or three years since this book was originally published a lot of new things have appeared. Way *way* back in the summer 2006, there was no Facebook, no iPhone, *Heroes* was yet to launch, Google hadn't bought Youtube, and I was living in Australia.

But these new platforms, technologies and developments don't change the underlying truths that Jenkins has uncovered about participation – if anything they accelerate them.

[Jenkins, however, has little to say about where I live, either then or now.]

Jenkins himself pointed this out in a draft for the MacArthur white paper he later published on his blog, *Confessions of an ACA-FAN* [www.henryjenkins.org]:

Most often, when people are asked to describe the current media landscape, they respond by making an inventory of tools and technologies. Our focus should be not on emerging technologies but on emerging cultural practices.

Rather than listing tools, we need to understand the underlying logic shaping our current moment of media in transition. These properties cut across different media platforms and different cultural communities: they suggest something of the way we live in relation to media today.

The vital shift in behavior, the emerging cultural practices that Henry has mapped over the last 20 years, is the development of an intrinsically participative media consumer.

The convergence he is referring to isn't the convergence of devices and suppliers that the telecoms and technology industry is obsessed by, but rather the convergence of *modes*; of production with consumption, of the mainstream with the underground. As both academic and fan [ACA-FAN, to use his language] Henry is himself a manifestation of this convergence.

The story of participatory culture runs through reality TV, the cheap way to fill airtime that became a global phenomenon, through knowledge communities, fan fiction, Photoshop and cross platform, or transmedia, storytelling – anywhere there are gaps in the canonical narrative that people can rush to fill.
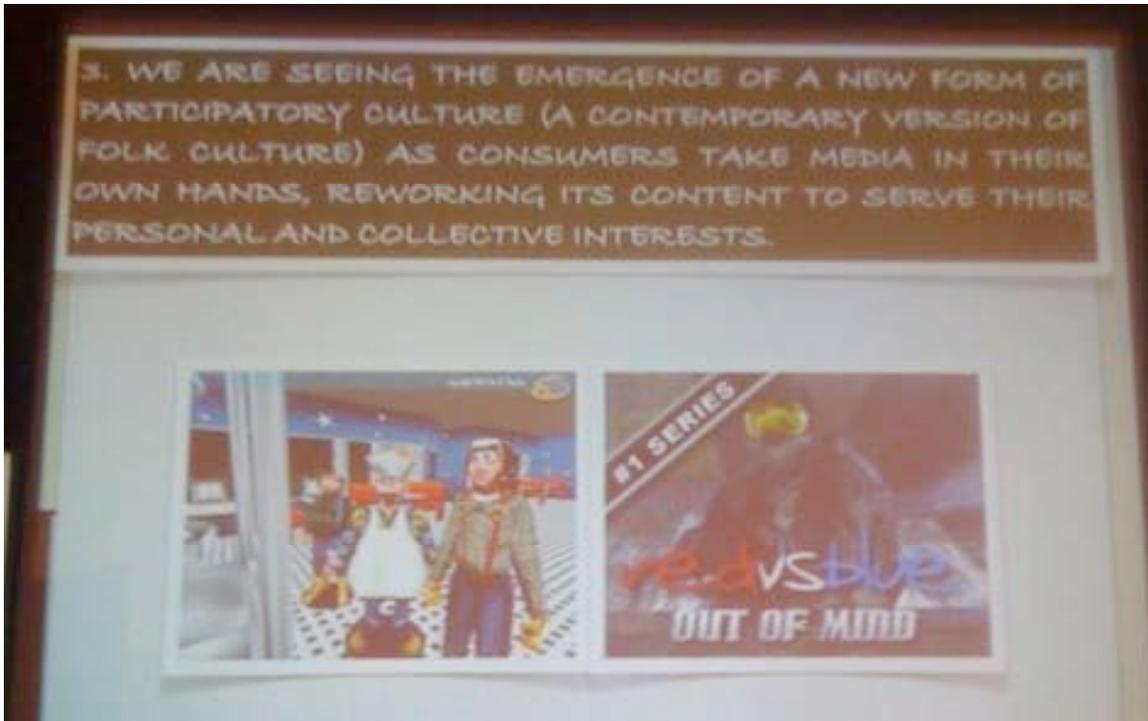
It is a story of a shift in the weight of the world, a moment of awakening functionally analogous to the development of the printing press.

The printing press freed knowledge, taking learning out of the hands of the few. Participatory technologies of creation and free distribution give the many access to the means of cultural production, and increasingly the voices of the many are as important, if not more important, than the voices of the few.

That said, "the few" - the mass media - is still where most of these conversations begin. They create the seed content that inspires fandom and participation.

It is, like so many cultural developments, a tale not of the new replacing the old, but rather of a synthesis of different models: a collision of the old and the new media.


End of Part One

Beginning of Part Two

It is difficult to overstate the impact that ***Convergence Culture*** has had on my life in the last couple of years.

When I read it I found a voice that resonated with how I thought about the world. Looking to participate, I wrote a post on my blog in October 2006 that was inspired by one chapter of the book. I applied transmedia narratives to my own field: advertising.

I took Jenkins' model and proposed an idea called transmedia planning, a model for how brands could communicate in a converged culture.
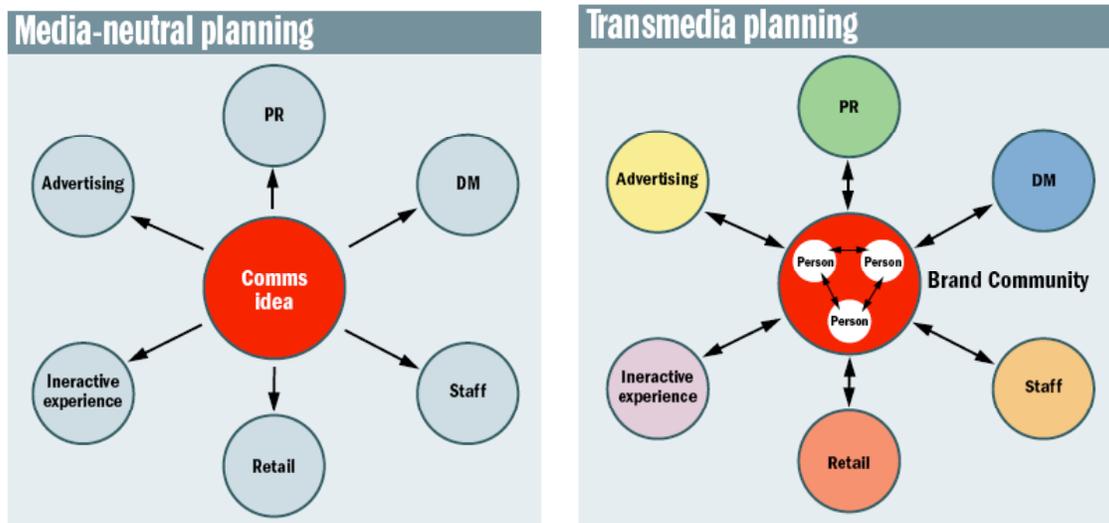
In a manifestation of the very ideas that the book puts forward, the idea was picked up by another blogger in a follow-up post that developed it further and into different territories. It was broken into pieces, and a knowledge community coalesced around it, championing a new way for brands to tell stories. I wrote a thesis on the idea and the experience of blogging about it, which was published in the UK advertising trade magazine *Campaign*.

All of which led me back to Henry: **on the Internet, conversations *about* you eventually find their way *to* you.**

He posted on his blog about the exploration of his ideas we were undertaking:

> **When you write a book, you usually have no idea which ideas will get picked up or by which communities. That's part of the fun of sending your brain children out in the world.**
>
> **Today, I want to explore a case in point -- the ways that the idea of transmedia narrative in my new book*, Convergence Culture*, has started to evolve into a concept of transmedia planning as it has been taken up by bloggers interested in branding.**
>
> **Will transmedia branding make a lasting contribution to contemporary marketing theory? It's too early to say. As an author, I am delighted to see some of my ideas are generating such discussion.**

As someone interested in marketing my own intellectual property, these discussions are themselves a kind of transmedia branding: after all, the more people talk about my book, the more people are likely to buy it.

I don't have to control the conversation to benefit from their interest in my product. The key is to produce something that both pulls people together and gives them something to do.

In that regard, the book may have had greater impact on the discussions of branding because I didn't fill in all of the links between branding and transmedia entertainment, leaving the blogosphere something to puzzle through together.
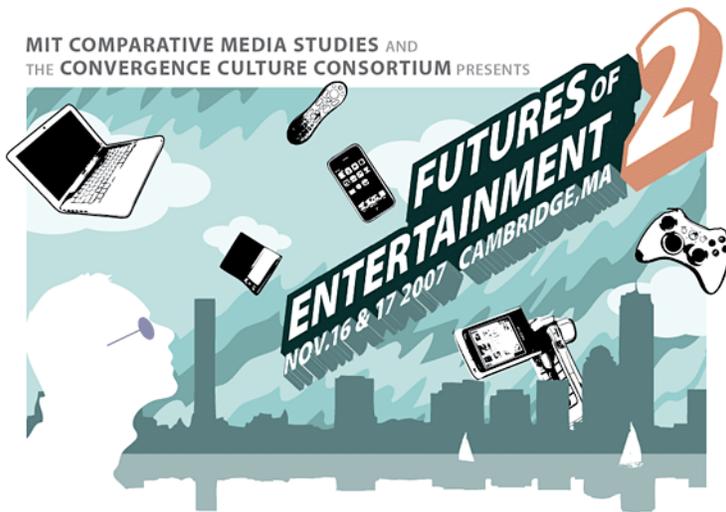
Finally, Henry invited me to speak at the Futures of Entertainment conference that his Convergence Culture Consortium was hosting at MIT, and I got to meet the man himself.

After the conference, over a plate of rice and beans, we chatted about this and that, and I nervously attempted to sound intelligent.

It was *fan*-tastic.

If anything is testament to the power of participation, it is that. Reading the book I felt compelled to write about it, participate in it, and that led me all the way back to the author himself.

Transmedia narratives are just one idea in a book packed with them, with sparks that will push you to think about how the world is developing in new ways.

Just as one idea inspired me, it has inspired others.

Jesse Alexander and Mark Warshaw found a structure and language that described what they had been reaching towards in previous cross platform narratives. The founded the transmedia department at television network NBC.

Jesse and Mark work on the hugely popular television show *Heroes*, pushing the narrative into new places, under the banner Heroes Evolutions, which exists online, in comic books, games and webisodes. The "Create your own Hero" promotion enabled viewers to become part of the production of the show, blurring the boundaries between viewer and producer.
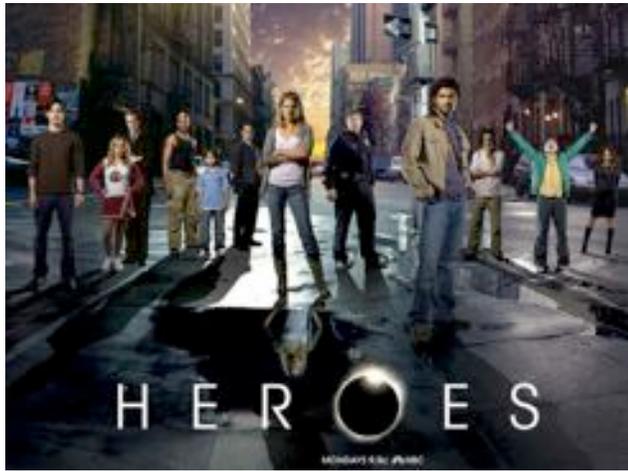
Heroes is the first of a new kind of entertainment property, designed for convergence culture. It is inspired, in part, by Henry Jenkins: someone who both describes what he sees and, by describing it, helps creates it.

One of the delightful things about cultural exegesis is that, by and large, you will already be familiar with the cases in this book. Media is all around us. We spend more time consuming media in the western world than doing any other single thing (even sleeping). So when Henry talks about Harry Potter, or The Matrix, or Star Wars, you will have seen what he has seen.

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer once said:

> **"The task is not so much to see what no one yet has seen, but to think what no body yet has thought about that which everyone sees."**

And that's what Henry does: he thinks what no one yet has thought about some of the most popular cultural artifacts of recent years.

Enough from me. Get out of here. Go enjoy the main event. But keep an eye out for that idea that inspires you, that drives you to participate.
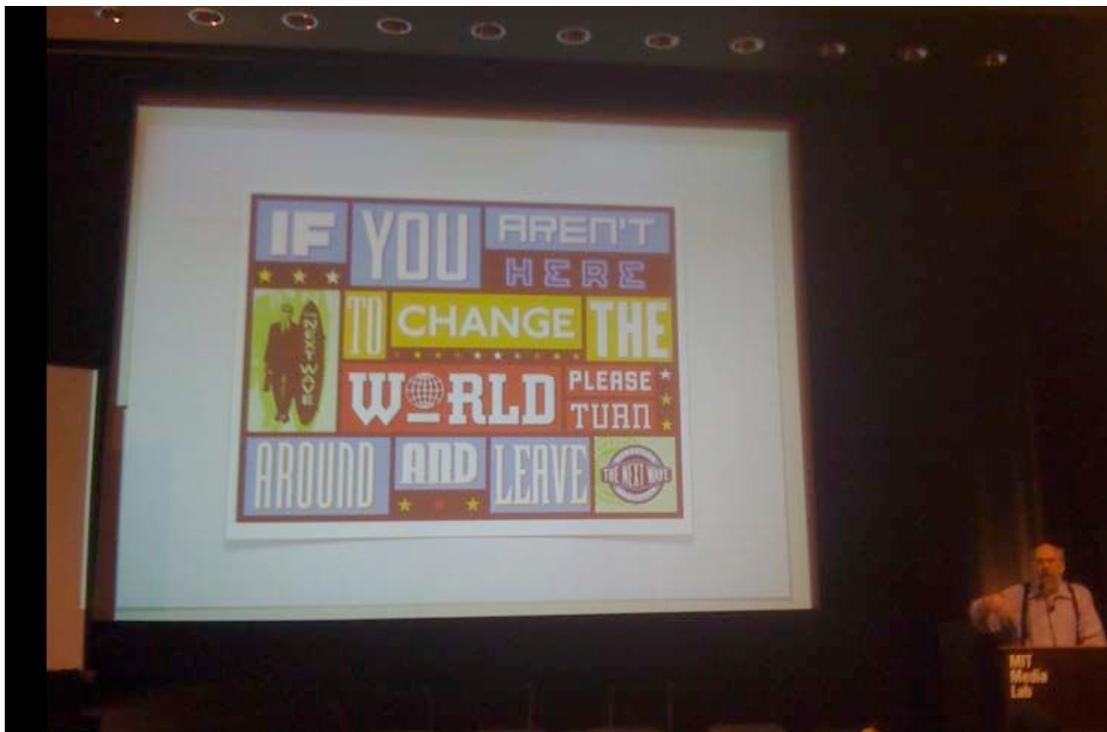
Who knows where it may lead?

Faris Yakob

New York, August 2008

www.farisyakob.com

End of Part Two

[I'll leave the final word to Henry – from Future of Entertainment 3]