

Application-book and game:

Experiences mediated by conflicts given in materiality¹

Livro-aplicativo e jogo:

Experiências mediadas por conflitos dados na materialidade

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Book and game: between possibilities

The established and possible relations between the cultural products book and game, despite going back to mass culture, find fertile ground in contemporary times for an expansion of their interweaving. The so-called participatory culture (JENKINS, 2006), brought about by the interactive and connected logic of current gadgets, has been promoting significant changes in the referred objects and, consequently, in the experiences promoted by them. On the one hand, in addition to the rupture of the traditional materiality of books, such changes point fundamentally to the possibility of interaction and collaborative production of networked content, transforming the until then reader, into reader-interactor and also the producer of multimodal content and data. On the other hand, notably, in addition to the popularization of the use of electronic games, especially on mobile devices, it has been observed that the logic of games has increasingly invaded multiple spaces, giving rise to what has been called the gamification of cultural products. The incorporation of game mechanics in everyday activities, such as education, marketing, and even reading, have been used as strategies for engaging the people involved. As stated by Fardo (2013, p.2), gamification presupposes the use of elements found in games - such as the type of narrative, the logic of the feedback and reward system, clear objectives and rules, levels, among others -, in other activities

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in order to try to achieve the same degree of involvement and motivation that is usually found in players when interacting with good games.

Thus, given the brief scenario exposed and, still, facing the observance of convergence processes specific to the current scenario, this article aims to discuss the relationship between application book (appbook) and game in the context of the reader-player experience. The text starts from the hypothesis that, in the horizon of the production of narratives that propose to associate literary, audiovisual resources and, mainly, gamification strategies - because they are hybrid products and in the process of consolidation -, it is possible to observe dissonances between what is seen in the graphical interfaces of the different technological artifacts and what is effectively programmed and consolidated as an experience in itself. Pointing to convergence as a driver of conflicts given by and in the reading protocols (CHARTIER, 2011) inscribed in the materiality of products of this nature, the text also indicates reverberations about the reading pacts (ECO, 1996) and in the experience itself.

The discussions take as theoretical support the concepts worked by Chartier (2011), Dewey (2010), Rocha (2004) and Eco (1984, 1996) and, in addition to bibliographic research, elects the empirical object – the appbook *The Silent History* – for analysis purposes, to point out and problematize the aspects mentioned above. That said, it is important to note that the criterion for selecting the object of analysis started, fundamentally, from the fact that it is a transduced (FLEXOR, 2012) application book, which presupposes the incorporation in its materiality of aspects of other products resulting from digital culture, in this case, electronic games. Incorporation that implies a convergence process that, as will be demonstrated in the analysis, is a privileged locus for the observation of conflicts that define the experience of the reader-player.

Finally, it is relevant to emphasize that the present article chooses as an object of analysis the digital book category here called application book or appbook, which, ultimately, differs from the category called electronic book or e-book, fundamentally, in that the latter is characterized as a kind of transposition of the printed book into the digital environment that, in turn, in little or nothing comes close to the logic of games. Otherwise, it is relevant to the discussions developed here the first category, that of the appbook, since it is mediated by the logic of the software, it gets closer to the logic of the games, many times incorporating them in their strategies of engagement and

enchantment. In this sense, the application book taken for analysis proves to be a privileged object to examine the relationships exposed here.

About the protocols, the experience

In his book *Pratiques de la Lecture*, Roger Chartier (2011) ponders about the relevance of the materiality of books and its implication in the experience of reading. He also observes the traces - such as implicit or explicit marks or signs -, foreseen in the objectivity that are addressed to a model reader (ECO, 1986), which he called the ideal reader. Regarding this issue, Cordeiro (2001) points out that the text cannot be observed independently of the support that allows its reading and not even apart from the circumstances in which it is read. In this perspective, Chartier (2011) then recognizes two types of protocols, that of the author and the editor, who, in turn, would be responsible for guiding the reading experience. In particular, it is more important to the discussions presented here, the editing protocols - those traces that refer to the form of visual organization of the object -, since the objective here is precisely to recognize conflicts that conform from the syntactic orientation, as it is given as visible in the matter. It should be noted, however, that such protocols, when observed in the light of digital culture, undergo a certain transformation when it is recognized that new actors - such as the reader who produces content, for example -, address instructions and interfere in the reading experience.

Given the relevance of editing protocols in the design of the graphical interfaces of technological artifacts, it is also important to observe a certain profusion of application books available on the market and, in this sense, it is possible to notice a certain development path that, in the first instance, observing the aspects given by the visuality presented in the graphic interfaces, allows the recognition of three stages of bookish conformation in the digital environment (FLEXOR, 2012). In particular, the third stage proposed by the author, transduction², is relevant to this investigation, since these books are a little closer to the conjuncture of digital culture, establishing, for the most part, less iconic relations with printed analogs, unlike books in the implementation stage,

² In the field of physics, transduction indicates the conversion of one type of energy into another, pointing to the idea of transformation without, thereby, ceasing to be energy. The idea of a bookish transduction stage, on the other hand, alludes to the idea that a book information/content goes from one state (printed) to another (digital), remaining a book, safeguarding the bookish symbol rooted in the heart of culture, however that their iconic ties are already more diluted in relation to the printed culture.

for example. Otherwise, these are books that give up qualitative similarity and the recurrence of mimetic movements concerning the productions of printed culture, leaving aside material simulations or even strategies that, a priori, lose their original function when moving to the digital environment. Besides, unlike the second stage - the transfiguration stage - in which, to some extent, there is a tendency to dismantle the printed book's modes of organization and a shift of the imagery referentiality to other non-bookish objects, in books considered to be transduced, models of accommodation and presentation of bookish material are recognized, which tend to distance the qualitative and iconic link of the printed book. It is, therefore, a category more relevant to the paradigm of accessibility, flexibility, and constant updating established by digital culture (SANTAELLA, 2004).

It is, then, what is shown in the graphical interfaces that sustain the link between reader and book in the face of the bookish digitization process, even supporting the notion of a book that has been procedurally becoming our culture. The aforementioned interfacial dimension of technological devices, then, assumes an important role given the tangibility of bookish material, thus contributing to the narrowing between the virtual environment and the reader, diluting perceptual barriers and promoting an experience that seems to establish direct contact with information (ROCHA, 2009). These graphical interfaces or the ways of presenting the narrative seem to be, furthermore, the promoters of the symbolic link that supports the idea of a book in today's context, although it must be considered that the advances in interfacial technologies and reconfigurations in languages have gradually diluted the previous references in the repertoires of contemporary readers.

It is precisely these types of application books, in the transduction stage – as is the case of the empirical object under analysis –, that are usually open to convergence processes, incorporating gamified strategies into their operating logic. We can then see a series of bookish productions that seek to aggregate in their narrative, for example, challenges and missions that, when fulfilled, generate rewards, in an attempt to expand the subject's experience, mobilizing and engaging him in a playful and pleasurable activity.

However, in the scenario of contemporary book-game productions, it is observed in many cases, as in the example that will be detailed further below, that enchantment is not always achieved

(ROCHA, 2004), for relations are established that promote a kind of fascination, since it has a momentary effect, of rapid obsolescence.

In this regard, it is also worth mentioning the changes brought about by the graphical interfaces and their consequences, concerning the hierarchical reversal between the verbal and the visual matrix. The evolution of hardware - and the complexification of tasks made possible through increasingly intuitive affordances - started to demand an update in the presentation modes of multiple screens in order to, above all, maintain the enchantment experience, enabling a higher level of attention and permanence of the user in the applications (ROCHA, 2009). Notably, it was the graphical interfaces, through affordances, that made possible the narrowing between the virtual environment and the user space, reducing the perceptual barriers that separate these dimensions, making improper dialogs between systems and non-specialist humans possible (ROCHA, 2009b).

Regarding the aspect related to the media fascination specified above, it is observed that such an issue tends to happen when registering traces or editing protocols that raise the conflict here under discussion, frustrating the very experience of the reader-interactor. As stated by Dewey (2010), the notion of experience involves understanding it as elastic, with broad outlines, making it possible to understand it through bonds dependent on other accumulated experiences, as a kind of web of relationships immersed in a given environment. Thus, the aforementioned frustration also seems to be achieved because each new experience is first intermediated by previous experiences that end up promoting a given prediction, an inference, at the time of a new experience, as will be discussed below.

An insight into *The Silent History*

In order to put into action the premises previously developed, an analysis exercise of the appbook *The Silent History* is proposed. In this approach to the empirical object, the focus is on the strategies materialized in this work, which, on the one hand, are due to the potential offered by the characteristics of the digital medium, and on the other, provide an experience of participation by the reader, summoned to contribute to the making of the narrative. The analysis seeks to problematize the tensions that are built during the experience itself, pointing out the object inscriptions that are

configured as promises of interaction and participation, generated by previous experience with other cultural products, and that are not fulfilled - at least not in all the potential offered by the digital medium.

As a presentation, it can be said that *The Silent History* is a science fiction literary narrative, made available in the form of a series of first-person testimonies of the characters that inhabit this fictional world, whose basic premise lies in the fact that, around the year 2010, children begin to be born without language skills. A strange condition that works as the vector of the narrative, the epidemic quickly spreads and mobilizes parents, medical, school, scientific, and government institutions to deal with these people who do not express themselves or communicate verbally. At a certain point in the development of the story, these characters, called *silents*, start to organize themselves in communities, with their own culture and institutions. Ultimately, a cure for the condition is discovered and the testimonies of some people with the disorder become part of the narrative.

The central story is therefore presented to the reader through these first-person testimonies (Figure 1). As extensions of the central narrative, the work has an area where *field reports* are inserted (Figure 2), excerpts from the story produced by collaborating readers around the world, linked to geolocation coordinates and which can only be accessed by other readers at the same point in the space where they were produced.

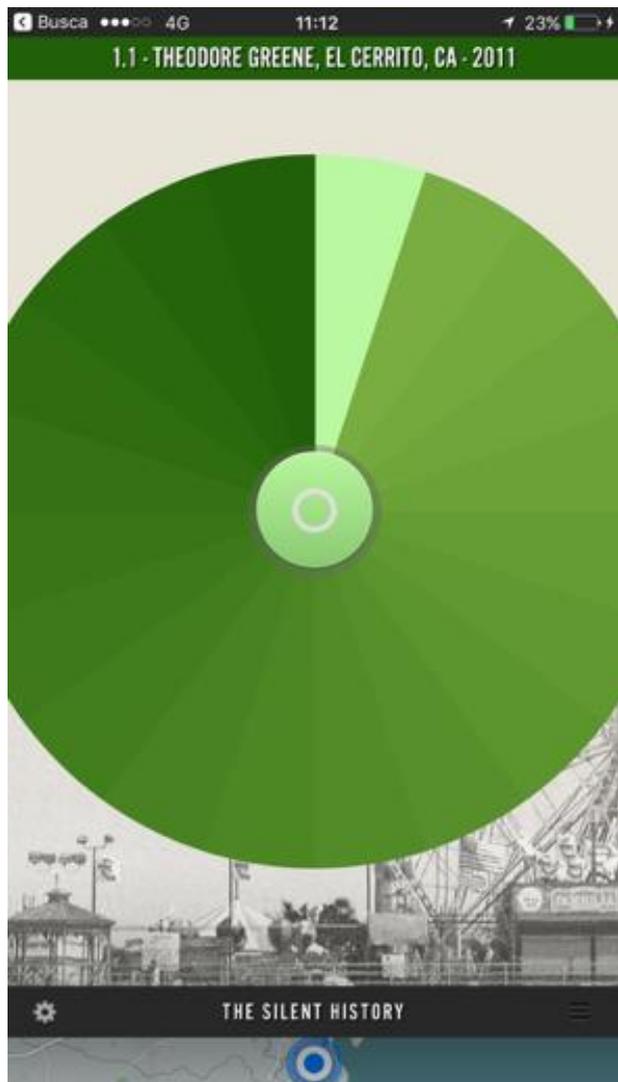


Figure 1: Screen showing testimonials on the application book *The Silent History*.
Source: Authors' archives



Figure 2: Field reports on the application book *The Silent History*.
Source: Authors' archives

As a book in the transduction stage, concerning the dimension of visuality, *The Silent History*, to a large extent, moves away from the traditional ways of presenting the printed book object. The two structures that unfold the story, *testimonials*, and *field reports*, are given to the reader in the form of two distinct visual systems, although interconnected. In the upper section of the graphical interface (Figure 3) that is shown/read, circles subdivided into bundles temporarily display the testimonies of the main narrative, which comprises a period from 2011 to 2044, divided into six

blocks with twenty testimonies each. In the lower section of the interface (Figure 4), a map informs the current location of the reader, as well as the spatial points at which it is possible to access the extensions produced by the collaborating readers.

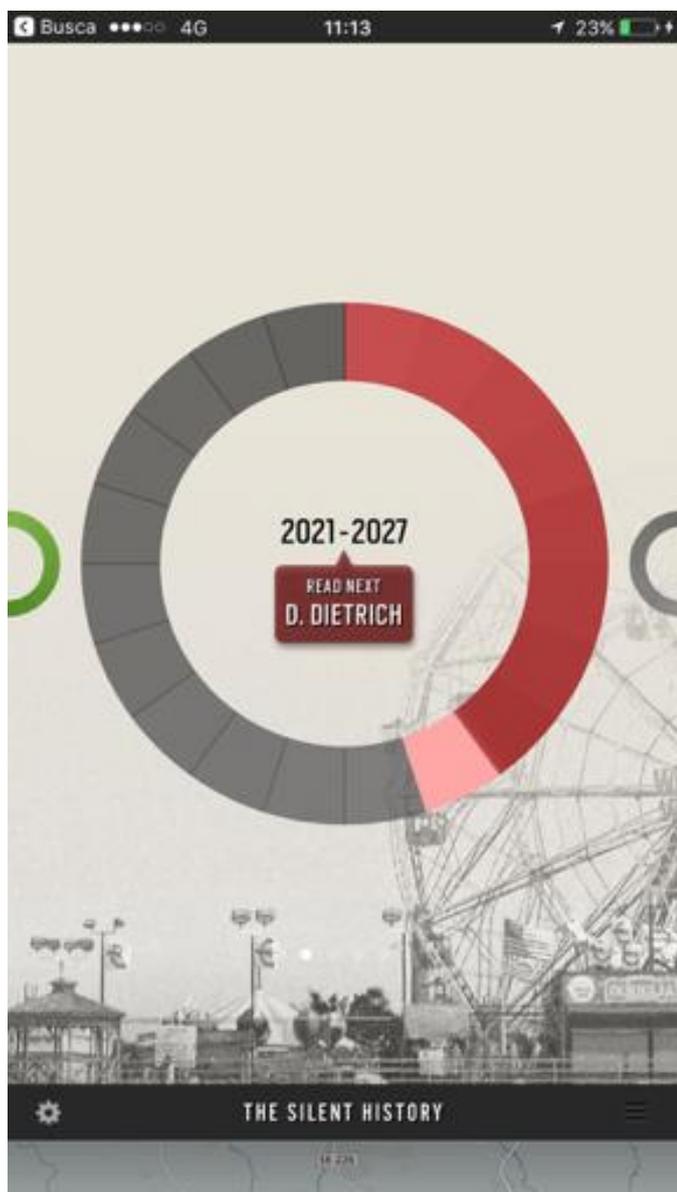


Figure 3: Opening screen – upper part shown in the graphical interface – on the application book *The Silent History*.
Source: Authors' archives



Figure 4: Opening screen – bottom part shown in the graphical interface – on the application book *The Silent History*.
Source: Authors' archives

It is noted, therefore, that the experience of the narrative, in what refers to traditional modes of reading, is anchored above all in the relationship with temporality. The temporal structure of the narrative is linear, chronological, both with regard to the succession of narrative events (there are no flashbacks or significant flashforwards³), and with regard to the reading experience provided by the platform since the testimonies are only available after accessing the previous passage. Also, it is worth remembering that the work was originally made available in the form of a serial narrative, with one testimony daily, for a period of six months⁴.

In this dimension, the participation evoked by the formal structure that supports the text is very similar to forms already known and based on the universe of contemporary serial narratives, such as television series, graphic novels, and even serials, founders of this tradition. In this case, it is a call for activity at the level of accompanying the narrative. Driven by curiosity to know more about the fictional universe, to know how the story evolves, to expand its familiarity and affective relationship with the characters, the reader accesses, day after day, the narrative fragments that the app makes available, in a manner similar to the procedure adopted by a soap opera. Thinking about the possible experience of a model reader who has contact with this work today, when the central narrative is already fully available for reading, the action of accessing the successive testimonies, is very little different from going through chapters - if not in the dimension of visuality and gesture, essentially about the experience with the story that is presented.

Thus, there is a conflict here between what the work foreshadows, in the syntactic plane, and what it provokes, in the experience dimension. *The Silent History* moves away from the formal logic of the culture of the printed book and appropriates a syntax that is typical of the universe of applications. Despite this, as previously argued, at the level of pragmatics it is a work in many aspects anchored in mass culture.

Although it is necessary to relativize any tendency to adhere to a logic of absolute rupture – which is possible analytically by identifying the elements that maintain the link with tradition even in a case of a digital book considered innovative – it is also useful to observe in which aspects and

³ With the exception of the prologue, available in the introduction to the book, which takes the reader to the end of the story, already in 2044.

⁴ Originally, *The Silent History* is a serial narrative whose excerpts were made available daily between October 1, 2012 and April 19, 2013.

through which strategies a particular product can give rise to a new model of the reading experience. In the analyzed case, it is through collaborations in the field reports that *The Silent History* tends to approach the horizon of potentialities of a game logic offered by the materiality in which the book now presents itself. And with regard to the dimension of the strategies that invite the reader to participate in the writing process, it is observed that this experience is based, in this work, on a spatial relationship.

The dimension of effective reader participation, which is where the book approaches gamification strategies, occurs on two levels. The first level is found in the possibility for the reader to move in urban spaces in search of field reports produced by others. The basic rule of the game, in this case, is that the reader (and his reading device connected to geolocation networks) must be physically present in the place where the report was added to the platform to have access to this content. Such a strategy is present in Location-based games (LBGs), in which the physical space merges with the electronic space, ceasing to be a background of the game to become a constitutive element of the playful experience.

For LBGs, location is part of the game and is decisive for gameplay. In them, the magic circle operates by changing the function of the place and its temporality, having, however, to recognize and negotiate with the physical space where the game takes place [...] The LBGs create a space-time with computational properties integrated into the physical space, producing a playful form of temporary use of space-based on relationships established between players, technological devices, physical space, and electronic space (LEMOS, 2010, p. 62).

In *The Silent History*, this negotiation is demanded both from the reader-writer who elaborates his story and must, as a rule, make that point in the space of his narrative, as well as from the reader who, in search of expanding his experience with the universe of *silents*, goes hunting, in urban spaces, for fragments that expand their enjoyment and knowledge about the story narrative.

Then, the participatory and immersive dimension becomes evident when the system allows readers to contribute literary productions through the field reports, which incorporate aspects of the locality to which they were linked through geolocation coordinates in the narratives. It is an opening that creates a tension related to the conventional places of reader and author, that calls for a collaborative experience and that refers, to a certain extent, to the experience created by open-world games in which the user is responsible for building universes (not necessarily narrative ones). It also comes close to the production of *fanfics*, since writing extensions requires prior knowledge,

a willingness to engage, and an affective involvement with the product that is similar to those found in the fan experience.

On the other hand, such productions by readers-writers are effectively extensions of a narrative that is enriched by them, but that previously exists and works autonomously. This is not an invitation to build the game, but a possibility to expand the experience with the story and its characters. Moreover, the process of incorporating the reports into the book is mediated. Readers-writers submit their accounts (sending them by email, a strategy that is not very organic from the point of view of the book's platform), which are examined by the authors of the work and may or may not be accepted. Unlike the experience of fanfics, where fans seek other channels to make their productions available and interact with the community engaged in their appreciated universe, the price to pay to have your creation incorporated into the actual narrative in *The Silent History* is to submit to the scrutiny of the authors – who, despite the participation strategies they foresee in the structure of their work, seem unwilling to give up their control.

As a hybrid product, born at the intersection of different fields of cultural production – the literary field and the field of games and electronic applications –, *The Silent History* highlights, on its surface, a series of conflicts arising from the digitization of culture. The digital culture is configured as an ongoing process, permeated by transformations and reluctances, in a becoming that is present in the products in the form of strategies that sometimes incorporate the potential offered by technological advancement, sometimes denounce resistant social structures, despite material possibilities. This conflict is very clear when examining the type of participation to which the reader-writer is called – participation that only occurs through submission, mediation, and authorization, attending to the interests of the authors (in fact, socially recognized as such) rather than of those who experience the narrative.

This mismatch is also due to the fact that the reader brings his perceptions and learnings accumulated in contact with other cultural products to fruition – triggering what Eco (1986) called an encyclopedia and which Dewey (2010) already signaled as characteristic of the experience, which is continuous and elastic. Going back to the notion of the horizon of expectation in Jauss, it is necessary to remember that:

A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. It awakens 'memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the "middle and end," [...] the question of the subjectivity of the interpretation and of the taste of different readers or levels of readers can be asked meaningfully only when one has first clarified which transsubjective horizon of understanding conditions the influence of the text. (JAUSS, 1982, p. 23).

If the reading protocols in the syntactic plane do not correspond to the probable meanings in the semantic plane the reading pact is broken (Eco, 1996) and the probable effect of this relationship, in the pragmatic plane, seems to be frustration.

Thus, when coming into contact with the visual system of *The Silent History*, a certain horizon of expectations is established about what the work should be and how to perceive and interpret it, based on previous experiences with applications, games and information systems that are not directly related to the printed book. Concerning the spatial dimension, the interface sends its user to geolocation systems that allow, for example, the socialization of data between users, an interaction that does not occur in this case. Concerning the temporal dimension, the syntactic structure that makes the text segments available, both in the discs that present the testimonials and in the points that close the field reports, seems to promise a multilinear reading, which is also not effective. Regarding the possibilities of participation, although the gamification strategy is present, it is not fully in line with the digital culture since these contents are not available after being accessed at the geographical point, going against the logic of availability and sharing typical of this culture. Also, it should be noted that, depending on the regional context in which the reader is, the dimension of the gameplay is not effective due to the fact that there are no reports available. In Brazil, for example, there are no fragments to be unlocked so far, and in all of South America, the only reports available are in Chile and Ecuador - the latter being one in the continental portion and one in the Galapagos Islands⁵.

⁵ Data collected from the application on Aug.13.2020.

Final considerations

The relationship between book and game – observed from the perspective of convergence, in the adoption in this case of the gamified logics in application books –, shows itself in process, which is natural when it comes to the settlement of new technology and its productions within the culture. In this sense, as seen through the empirical object analyzed, the tensions manifested in the matter itself tend to promote a praxis oriented by a media dazzle (ROCHA, 2004), as it is ephemeral, compromising the aesthetic experience of the work. Otherwise, the frustration initially promoted is accentuated when the reader-player is invited to interact with the object in question – implying in this experience a repertoire already strongly consolidated in the culture of games – and is faced with an application that does not reach the same experiences promoted by the games themselves.

These aspects also point to the fact that the transformations now operated in the bookish context naturally take the structures previously consolidated in the printed editorial field, replicating and re-adapting their structures, until, procedurally, as a natural result of the forces operating at a given historical moment, changes pertinent to the demands imposed are promoted. Notably, there is a kind of woven gap between subjects and technology, implying dissonances that previously conform to a natural process, since technology seems to advance in an increasingly faster way and culture, on the other hand, seems to walk at a slow pace, supporting structures previously based on the social fabric. It is noteworthy that these cultural products are transformed in response to the needs silently woven into the culture and, in this sense, it is clear that not only do these adventures bring a culture of their own, but they encounter at the beginning a kind of resistance from subjects already adapted to previous models.

Lastly, in addition to the formal aspects that remodel themselves in line with culture – offering distinct stages of book development –, it is observed that the application book operates a mismatch between the order of seeing and experiencing. Otherwise, the formal development process that anchors the idea of a book seems to go in dissonance towards the incorporation of strategies that allow the participation and collaboration of readers, practices more consistent with the culture now in vogue. It is recognized, then, that although information and communication technologies and current technological artifacts have structurally affected the convergent relationship between book

and game – and all the culture that surrounds it –, signs of the resistance imposed on the collaborative model of digital culture are still frequent.

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Abstract

When observing the convergence processes, the article aims to discuss the relationship between book-application and game in a context of the reader-player experience. In view of the productions that propose to associate literary resources and gamification, it is possible to observe tensions inscribed in the materiality that promote experiences that, far from reaching the enchantment, are fixed in the media dazzle. From Chartier (2011), Dewey (2010), Rocha (2004) and Eco (1984, 1996) and the empirical object *The Silent History*, there are dissonances between what is shown in the graphical interfaces and what is programmed as an experiment. It is inferred that, although the object no longer preserves a qualitative similarity in relation to its printed referent, it is still anchored in massive culture, either through seriality and mediated participation, signaling the fact that convergence has asserted conflicts that will reverberate in the reading pact and the experience of reading itself.

Keywords: Appbook and game. Reading protocols. Reading experience.

Resumo

Ao observar os processos de convergência, o artigo tem como objetivo discutir as relações entre livro-aplicativo e jogo em um contexto da experiência do leitor-jogador. Diante das produções que se propõem associar recursos literários e gamificação, é possível observar tensões inscritas na materialidade que promovem experiências que, longe de alcançarem o encantamento, se fixam no deslumbramento midiático. A partir de Chartier (2011), Dewey (2010), Rocha (2004) e Eco (1984, 1996) e do objeto empírico *The Silent History*, apontam-se dissonâncias entre o que é dado a ver nas interfaces gráficas e o que é programado enquanto experiência. Infere-se que, embora o objeto já não resguarde semelhança qualitativa em relação ao seu referente impresso, ainda se apresenta ancorado na cultura massiva, seja pela serialidade e participação mediada, sinalizando para o fato de que a convergência tem asseverado conflitos que vão reverberar no pacto de leitura e na experiência do ler em si.

Palavras-chave: Livro-aplicativo e jogo. Protocolos de leitura. Experiência do ler.

Resumen

Al observar los procesos de convergencia, el artículo tiene como objetivo discutir la relación entre la aplicación del libro y el juego en un contexto de la experiencia lector-jugador. En vista de las producciones que proponen asociar recursos literarios y gamificación, es posible observar tensiones inscritas en la materialidad que promueven experiencias que, lejos de alcanzar el encanto, se fijan en los medios deslumbrantes. De Chartier (2011), Dewey (2010), Rocha (2004) y Eco (1984, 1996) y el objeto empírico *The Silent History*, hay disonancia entre lo que se muestra en las interfaces gráficas y lo que es programado como un experimento. Se infiere que, aunque el objeto ya no conserva una similitud cualitativa en relación con su referente impreso, todavía está anclado en la cultura masiva, ya sea a través de la serialidad y la participación mediada, lo que indica el hecho de que la convergencia ha afirmado conflictos que reverberarán en el pacto de lectura y la experiencia de la lectura misma.

Palabras clave: Libro-aplicación y juego. Protocolos de lectura. Experiencia de lectura.