Consuming Transmedia: how audiences engage with narrative across multiple story modes.

By

Emma Beddows

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Faculty of Life and Social Sciences,
Swinburne University of Technology,
Australia

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I, Emma Beddows, declare that the examinable outcome:

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Abstract

Research in the field of transmedia storytelling, variously known as ‘cross-media’ (Dena 2004a, 2004b), ‘distributed narration’ (Walker 2004) and ‘transmedia practice’ (Dena 2009) has grown steadily over the past ten years. As new content distribution models emerge from the creative industries it is essential that we consider how users engage with these new frameworks. Whilst many scholars acknowledge the consumption of transmedia texts, few studies detail reception of these texts using practical or qualitative measures. This thesis aims to address this issue via a synthesis of theoretical concerns and practical analysis.

Commercial transmedia storytelling presents significant opportunities for audience research because it seeks to exploit the migratory consumption patterns of media users by replicating user-led traversals in a highly structured commercial environment. Furthermore, due to the multi-faceted nature of transmedia storytelling, it can be used in a commercial setting to attract multiple market segments. The present research argues that commercial transmedia storytelling accommodates multiple modes of media use. The approach taken in this thesis thus facilitates a method for exploring complex market relations by formalising modes of use which emerge in response to this form.

The primary aim of the research is to answer the following research questions: 1) what modes of use do commercial transmedia texts accommodate? and 2) how do media users engage with commercial transmedia texts? This thesis is based on a two-tiered approach that reflects this. The first tier is conceptual in nature and uses discourse analysis to develop an argument based on modes of use accommodated by transmedia storytelling. Modes of use are explored in this tier using a Media Use Typology based on two intersecting axes: mode preference and level of engagement. This thesis argues that transmedial consumption – the dedicated consumption of a narrative across multiple story modes – is best facilitated by a combination of high levels of engagement and an undifferentiated mode preference. This implies the movement of a single audience across multiple story modes and is defined as story/content-driven use. It is argued that this mode is adopted most often by fans – a unique subset of a broader audience. Fans thus exemplify reception of transmedia narratives as comprehensive artefacts, rather than viewing each story mode in isolation. The second tier is a qualitative study which
explores how fans engage with transmedia texts, based on responses from a series of in-depth interviews. Participants in the study are fans of the case study texts: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the *View Askew-iverse*.

This thesis finds that fans conceive of their engagement with commercial transmedia texts in a number of ways. The interview data reveals three major themes: an emphasis on the author as text; the role of fans in constructing the text; and the conditions and contingencies for transmedial consumption. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the problems associated with transmedial consumption, including suggested solutions, and points of interest for future research.
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Introduction

Traversals, Convergence and Cross-media Entertainment

Transmedia storytelling is described by Henry Jenkins (2003a, p1) as the ‘flow of content across multiple media channels’. He explains that ideally, transmedia storytelling should facilitate creative expansion by exploiting the creative capacity of each media platform. The literature on transmedia storytelling suggests that transmedia texts position media users, and are engaged with by media users, in specific ways; however, to date there has been very little research in this area. This thesis seeks to address this issue by exploring engagement with transmedia storytelling in a commercial media environment.

The application of transmedia storytelling in a commercial media environment presents significant opportunities to further research because it seeks to exploit the migratory consumption patterns of media users by replicating user-led traversals in a highly structured commercial environment. According to Jay Lemke (2009, p292), traversals represent meanings made independent of commercial design across ‘media, genres, settings, and contexts of situations’. He claims that transmedia storytelling is a response to this from innovations in marketing; however, Jenkins notes transmedia storytelling may ask too much of the everyday media user (2006a, p134). Surprisingly, little effort has been made to confirm the validity of this statement, or to characterise the transmedia user to which Jenkins alludes. Few studies detail the reception of these texts (Ruppel 2009, p282). Currently, scholars seem eager to canvass the new possibilities associated with these forms – chiefly as facilitators of audience participation and content co-creation – without focusing on the audience that is central to this process. Research from this field includes how player-created tiers become primary sites for play in alternate reality games (ARGs) (Dena 2008) and how fan fiction can expand a storyworld by articulating its characters and settings in new platforms (Derecho 2006; Klastrup & Tosca 2004). While these works are instrumental in conceptualising consumption on a theoretical level, the scope and validity of their claims are limited due to their speculative nature. Research in this area risks romanticising new media ventures
and the possibilities present for new forms of consumption. This thesis argues that user-led traversals are constituted differently to those structured in a commercial environment because the latter lack the personal relevance used to characterise traversals in a convergent mediascape. The study of engagement with commercial transmedia texts demonstrates that transmedia storytelling accommodates multiple modes of media use. It thus illuminates new forms of engagement by addressing the following two research questions: 1) what modes of use do commercial transmedia texts accommodate? and 2) how do media users engage with commercial transmedia texts?

Broadly speaking, consumption of transmedia texts can be situated within the field of convergence studies. Convergence is a process highly contested in scholarship, and is described in varying ways according to field and study. Few media analysts seem able to agree on its most distinguishable components: Terry Flew (2008, p2) describes convergence as the merging of computing communications and media content; Carl Zetie (2004) defines it in terms of its relationship to divergence in the field of information communication technologies (ICTs); and scholars working in the field of political economy understand convergence as the overlap in market penetration dominated by multinational conglomerates (Gerbner, Mowlana & Schiller 1996). Media analysts Beverly Jean Rasporich and David Taras (2001, p61) offer a holistic approach which identifies ‘four realms of convergence’ described as: ‘the convergence of technologies, the convergence of corporations, the convergence of information with entertainment, and the convergence of cultures’. Comparably, Judd Ethan Ruggill (2009) offers an approach which describes convergence as synergy. According to Ruggill (2009, p110), convergence emerges from the magnification of ‘forces, meanings, and ideas’ that happen as a result of the flowing together of industrial, economic and aesthetic elements.

As it relates to transmedia storytelling and engagement, convergence is understood as the convergence of industries and their relationship to the divergence of content. This thesis draws primarily on theories of convergence as defined by Jenkins. According to Jenkins (2006a, p2), convergence can be defined as ‘the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences’. This perspective is common to the scholarship of creative industry (Christopherson 2004; Dena 2004a, 2008, 2009; Deuze 2007).
Convergence, Jenkins (2006, p18) claims, is both a ‘top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process’. It is driven not only by an economic imperative to reach dispersed audiences, but also by the consumption patterns of contemporary audiences who increasingly seek entertainment on a variety of media platforms. Importantly, Jenkins de-emphasises the role of technological convergence in the emergence of new storytelling models, instead emphasising the cultural and industrial aspects of such changes. With respect to transmedia storytelling this is an important distinction to make because the spread of content across multiple platforms implies divergence as the key technological manifestation. Essentially, convergence implies synthesis, whereas transmedia storytelling relies on the use of multiple platforms in order to express a single narrative. For example, convergence allows us to access multiple texts such as newspaper articles, related video content and social media applications using the same delivery system. Whilst this practice necessarily implies engagement with multiple media it does not utilise the distributed functionality – described by Christy Dena (2009, p57) as distribution beyond the singular – associated with transmedia storytelling. Nor does it facilitate engagement beyond the singular. Convergence in this context thus refers to convergence on an industrial level, whilst reception contexts are necessarily divergent.

Another way of contextualising this is by using cultural convergence, a term better suited to describing the emergence and subsequent implications of transmedia consumption, and which Jenkins (2006a, p323) describes as ‘a shift in the logic by which culture operates, emphasizing the flow of content across media channels’. Andrew Losowsky (2005) elaborates on this, claiming that we have become accustomed as a society to follow narratives across multiple platforms. According to Losowsky (2005, p3), we follow narratives in everyday life – such as news stories – across multiple media because we ‘instinctively understand the role of each in adding nuances to a story’. Like Jenkins, Losowsky identifies cultural convergence as one of the key cultural phenomena influencing the emergence of transmedia storytelling and user-led traversals.

Equally important in this discussion is cross-media entertainment. Cross-media is a term which has been applied to content distribution models emerging from various sectors within the culture industries (Dailey, Demo & Spillman 2003; Deuze 2007; Huang et al.
A review of the literature on cross-media entertainment reveals that, like transmedia, the field is subject to conceptual uncertainty. It is not the aim of this thesis to canvass that literature in its entirety; such a task would require more space than this document allows. Instead, it is the aim of this thesis to discuss cross-media entertainment in so far as it positions transmedia as a subset. While encompassing transmedia storytelling within its parameters, cross-media entertainment can also apply to other distribution models, for example, the use of the Internet as a companion platform to traditional media such as television (Abba 2009; Evans 2008; Ha & Chan-Olmstead 2009; Jenkins 2006a); in fact the term can be used to refer to the distribution of content across a variety of platforms (Barkhuus et al. 2001). As Dena (2004a, p5) points out, while the process of cross-mediation is by no means unique to the current media age the vast array of media available now means that content producers have considerably more access to storytelling devices.

Emphasising the distinction between cross-media and transmedia entertainment can be characterised by the emphasis in transmedia storytelling on narrative. According to Drew Davidson (2010) cross-media and transmedia could correctly be considered synonyms. He claims both refer to interrelated and integrated media experiences; however, Dena (2004a, p3) claims that whilst navigation between platforms is essential to cross-media entertainment transmedia storytelling is distinguishable by its emphasis on narrative. Transmedia consumption is thus linked to an emphasis on commercial narrative design, which is distinguishable from user-led traversals which are personally constituted.

**A Brief History of Transmedia Storytelling**

As a context for the research, and as a means of augmenting the literature review, this chapter will provide a brief history of commercial transmedia storytelling. Historically, incidents of commercial transmedial storytelling date back almost five centuries. Noel Chevalier (2004) identifies the first attempt of its kind as occurring in the early 1750s via the movement of a single character, Mary Midnight, from print journal to stage play production. Mary Midnight was an obscure transvestite created by Christopher Smart in 1751 who moved from her origins in an adult-oriented miscellany titled *The Midwife* to
being the mistress of ceremonies of a variety stage show titled *The Old Woman’s Oratory*. The magazine soon began to extend the themes in the stage play and was often used as a promotional vehicle for the show. *The Old Woman’s Oratory* became a source of material for *The Midwife*, and recognising the dual nature of the Mary Midnight character became important in understanding the magazine’s relationship to the show (Chevalier 2004, pp109-112). As Noel Chevalier notes, ‘stage show and magazine therefore coexist to act as a context for each other’ (2004, p112).

In recent years, numerous contemporary franchise projects have used a similar approach. Some of the most common examples include cartoon ‘spin-offs’ from the 1980s such as *Beetlejuice*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (Kinder 1991; Wasko 1994). According to Göran Bolin (2007, p242), these emerged as a result of market convergence and a diverging technologies sector. This view is characteristic of media scholarship during this era, which was marked by an emphasis on commodification. One of the longest running contemporary franchise projects of this nature is *Batman*. The *Batman* series originated in comic book form in the late 1930s, and since its commercial expansion in the 1980s scholars have begun to recognise the franchise for its transmedial components (Long 2007; Meehan 1991; Smith 2008a, 2008b, 2008c).

The term ‘transmedia storytelling’ did not enter the public dialogue until the end of the 20th century, and was first used in 1999 with the release and success of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). Whilst this is corroborated by a number of sources (Godest 2011; Jenkins 2006a; Tryon 2009) it is still unclear where the term originated. The small budget independent film created an immense fan following online more than a year before the film’s release in theatres, offering fans the opportunity to immerse themselves in an extended universe related to the film’s core mythology. In this context, the term was used simply to describe the presentation of back-story through another platform. This was soon followed by other films which developed similar methods of narrative expansion online, such as *Memento* (2000) and *Donnie Darko* (2001); however, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) was the first of its kind to fully utilise the functionality of the Internet as a tool for extended storytelling and transmedia marketing. As Jenkins (2006a, pp101-102) notes,
Many people learned about the Burkittsville witch and the disappearance of the production crew that forms the central plot of the movie by going online and finding this curious Web site that seemed to be absolutely real in every detail.

Ed Sanchez, a member of the Blair Witch creative team, commented that ‘the site... became an integral part of the experience’ (Sanchez cited in Jenkins 2006a, p103). The creation of added detail to the back-story revealed a community of fans who were ‘fascinated by the Blair Witch mythology’ (Jenkins 2006a, p103). Sanchez freely acknowledges that initially the site was developed for marketing; however, The Blair Witch Project (1999) was the first movie of its kind to exploit the potentiality of the Internet as a platform for story extension. Comparably, J. P Telotte (2001, pp33-35) notes that not only did the website act as another channel to deliver the marketing message, but it also provided audiences with a different context for viewing the film. Sanchez concedes that it soon became integral to the Blair Witch narrative (Jenkins 2006a, p103). Oni Press also released a series of comics supposedly based on the accounts of an individual who had met the witch while travelling near Burkittsville, further adding to the transmedia franchise.

One of the most widely recognised examples of transmedia storytelling today is The Matrix franchise. The Matrix is significant in this field because it pushes the concept of transmedia storytelling ‘as far or further than anyone has gone before’ (Jenkins 2003b, p1). The Matrix franchise employs a model which encourages media users to engage with the text through an exploratory framework which requires them to facilitate their own understanding of the text through a multi-layered narrative. In fact, Jenkins suggests that transmedia projects such as The Matrix might be the next step in cultural evolution; the bridge to a new kind of culture built on information, convergence and migratory consumption patterns (Jenkins 2006a, p134). One of the key issues concerning these developments is whether consumers choose their popular culture based on opportunities to explore complex worlds, or whether they prefer simply to watch (Jenkins 2006a, p134).

As a contemporary research topic, transmedia storytelling is typically understood according to Jenkins’ original definition of the subject. He claims,

In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and
At first glance this description could easily be misinterpreted. While it does describe transmedia storytelling it could also describe a range of media experiences. For example, many of the first-person shooter games from the 1990s, such as the Resident Evil franchise, include ancillary media like feature films and comic book serials. Comparably, many Disney features such as Dumbo (1941), Honey, I Shrunk The Kids (1989) and Lilo & Stitch (2002) spawned spin-off series in an attempt to capitalise on the success of the movies. Transmediation requires a more integrated approach. The Matrix (1999), for example, was built across four platforms (film, animation, web-comic and game) as a single story which relied on the unique storytelling capabilities of different media to characterise the narrative. Following the success of the original film (which grossed more than $460 million worldwide) (Proffitt, Tchoi & McAllister 2007, p239), directors, Lana¹ and Andy Wachowski released a marketing campaign for the sequel, which they used to initiate their cross-media strategy. According to Joel Silver, producer of The Matrix (1999), ‘the boys always had the idea to tell the story in multiple media’ (Silver 2003). Not only was this creatively innovative, but it involved a reform to traditional production models. The Wachowskis supervised the project across multiple industries whilst protecting the integrity of the narrative by using the same actors, film stock and crew for each component. This allowed them to ensure that transitions from one platform to another (for example from the console title, Enter the Matrix (2003) to the second film, The Matrix Reloaded (2003)) were seamless. This made the experience of The Matrix franchise much more integrated than traditional franchising models and marked it as a point of interest for the scholarship of transmedia storytelling.

Despite examples such as The Matrix franchise, transmedia storytelling is notoriously difficult to define. Whilst Jenkins has been instrumental in shaping the discourse in this field Chapter One of this thesis demonstrates that scholars hold varying perspectives regarding the constitution of transmedia texts. The establishment of a precise and functional definition has been difficult to achieve. This is due in large part to the

¹ Born Laurence and formerly known as “Larry”
conceptual confusion surrounding the term owing to its infancy as an area of academic interest.

Whilst providing a framework for contextualising transmedia storytelling is useful methodologically speaking, it is not the aim of this thesis to determine which terminology or conceptual framework in the literature is most correct or appropriate; the burgeoning nature of the field renders such a task ineffective at this juncture. As Dena (2009, p16) rightly points out,

Since the area is in flux and crosses a wide range of creative sectors, it may be that the term “transmedia” and many like it are placeholders. That is, they may operate like the term “multimedia” or the phrase “radio with pictures” – cobbling together existing terms to explain something new… something that will eventually take on its own identity and not be understood through the lens of the past.

At the least, scholars seem agreed that transmedia storytelling reflects the notion of distributed narration. This perspective is corroborated by numerous scholars in the field including Dena (2004a, 2005, 2006, 2008) Jeremy Douglas (2005), Darren Tofts (2005) and Neil Perryman (2008); that being the case, in order to pursue this subject as research it is necessary to ground the perspective in a conceptual framework which addresses transmedia as story. Therefore, a thorough examination of transmedia consumption should include a discussion of the form based on a narratological perspective in order to understand its unique constitution since this will undoubtedly affect reception.

A Narratological Perspective

From a narratological perspective, transmedia storytelling can be framed by first marking the distinction between story and discourse, or equivalently, fabula and sjuzhet, narrated and narrative (Herman 2004, p51). Seymour Chatman (1978, p19) illuminates the relationship between these terms by defining the what of narrative as ‘story’, and the way of narrative as ‘discourse’ (emphasis added). Drawing on Chatman’s conceptualisation of the terms ‘story’ and ‘discourse’, story can be understood as the content or chain of events of the narrative and discourse can be understood as the form or expression through which the content is told. These and other elements embody the narrative text (Chatman 1978, p19). However, the conception of
story and discourse as distinct phenomena implies that one is independent of the other, i.e. narrative content can be transposed from one text to another without losing any of its defining qualities. As Claude Bremond notes (cited in Chatman 1978, p20),

... any sort of narrative message (not only folk tales) regardless of the process of expression which it uses, manifests the same level in the same way... It may be transposed from one to another medium without losing its essential properties: the subject of a story might serve as argument for a ballet, that of a novel can be transposed to stage or screen, one can recount in words a film to someone who has not seen it.

Chatman claims that it is this transposability of stories which is the strongest reason for arguing that narrative works independent of medium; however, this view is largely contested in academic circles. In fact, Helen Fulton (2005) argues that adaptation illuminates distinguishable features in media by revealing ‘the different narrative conventions’ of form. Many contemporary scholars and narratologists (Brooker 2001; Herman 2004; Perryman 2008) suggest that content is in fact media dependent. The basic rule underlying this assumption is that ‘every retelling alters the story told, with every re-presentation of a narrative changing what is presented’ (Herman 2004, p53). Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1989, p160) embraces this view, claiming that ‘Instead of relegating language to a position external or irrelevant to narrative structure... we may perhaps reverse the perspective and consider it the determining factor of that structure’ (emphasis added). She claims that story is a direct abstraction from the specific style of the text, the language in which it is written and the medium through which it is presented (Rimmon-Kenan 1989, p7). In other words, the nature of the medium in which the story is revealed will influence the symbolic relationship between story and text. This means that form and content share an architectonic relationship (Mishra 2011, p7). It follows, based on this view, that transmedia storytelling provides a useful model for narrative exploration of this variety because it is built on the assumption that each media platform expresses a distinct component of a larger narrative based on platform specifications.

Another way of understanding the unique relationship between story and discourse from a narratological perspective is to conceptualise narrative as a semiotic structure. According to Chatman (1978, p25), the narrative text has exactly three signifiers –
event, character, and detail of setting; the signifiers are the elements of the narrative channel. Each text signifies narrative differently using unique methods of signification.

In her analysis of the foundations of transmedial narratology, Marie-Laure Ryan (2004a, p4) elaborates on this concept by explaining that if story is conceptualised as the signified, then this means that narrative is a kind of mental image, or a product of cognition which can be separated from the text that triggers its construction. Therefore, as Ryan (2004a, p6) explains,

> Rather than locating narrativity in an act of telling, the present definition anchors it in two distinct realms. On the one hand narrative is a textual act of representation (or presentation)... On the other hand, narrative is a mental image built by the interpreter as a response to the text.

Essentially, each channel presents narrative in a unique way, and it is interpreted by the audience differently according to the semiotic specifications of the text. In an effort to compare media and distinguish the unique storytelling capabilities of each channel, Dena, Douglass & Marino (2005, p1) developed a methodological tool described as ‘benchmark fiction’, used for creating ‘benchmarks’: sets of adaptations of the same content across different media for the purpose of comparison. Although this methodological tool is still too young to yield results from which significant conclusions can be drawn, preliminary results suggest that content is, in fact, altered depending on the form it takes. This idea forms the basis for the conceptual logic underlying transmedia storytelling. As Jenkins (2003a, p3) puts it, ‘each medium does what it does best’. From this perspective, the potentiality for success within a given transmedia franchise relies on the uniqueness of each medium to offer a distinct variety of signification. As Herman (2004, p53) explains,

> ... dance affords possibilities for creating iconic relations between sequences of physical movements and sequences of events in a storyworld; written narrative, possibilities for creating conventional relations between linguistic units and storyworld events; and conversational narrative, possibilities for creating both iconic and conventional relations via utterances and gestures.

What can be established from this discussion is that transmedia storytelling is different from creative adaptation in the sense that multiple texts are used to create ‘a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium’ (Jenkins 2006a, p95).
Traditional theories of adaptation propose that ideally, ‘the spirit of the text’ is transferred from one text to another (Elliot 2004, p222). Kamilla Elliot (2004, p221) describes this as resulting from a ‘century long heresy’ which proposes that form is separable from content. Transmedia storytelling, on the other hand, involves the sharing of a single narrative across different media. According to Mieke Bal (1997) this process can be conceptualised from within a narratological framework as focalisation. In his description of focalisation Bal emphasises the importance of the ‘connections between the events that make up the fabula’ (Bal 1997, p176). From this perspective we can define transmedia storytelling as focalisation which distributes (rather than replicates) a single narrative/fabula across multiple platforms. That is, the fabula is presented logically and chronologically as a series of connected events. Based on this understanding, we can also assume that the transmedia text should be narratively cohesive. Multiple platforms should convey a unified story as cohesive as if it were contained within a single platform. Replication is engineered at the level of distribution; transmediation on the other hand, occurs at the level of creation and this should be reflected in its material constitution.

Narratively Situated

The very fact that scholars lack a universal language with which to describe transmedia storytelling means that new researchers entering the field must define a lexicon of concepts with which to contextualise their work. For this reason, and for clarity’s sake, the following paragraphs will discuss the key concept used for situating transmedia storytelling within a media studies framework as narratively constituted: story mode.

So far, this chapter has used the terms ‘platform’, ‘form’ or ‘media’ to describe the textual components of a transmedia story. These are some of the most commonly used terms in the field to describe this feature, including channel and tier (Dena 2008; Jenkins 2006a; Meehan 1991; Perryman 2008; Proffitt, Tchoi & McAllister 2007). Given the nature of this feature, any attempt to describe it within a media studies context must be situated within the context of a definition of media. Ordinarily, the term ‘platform’ or ‘form’ is used to describe media as a channel or medium through which content can be expressed; it relies on a technological conceptualisation of media.
However, this description alone does not suffice to articulate the social, cultural and generic parameters within which transmedia storytelling operates. In fact, media is often conceptualised in one of three ways: as technology, as industry, or as culture or content (see Bertrand & Hughes 2005; Cunningham & Turner 2006; Flew 2008; Lister, Dovey & Giddings 2008).

Attempts to define media are often based on reconciling the differences between the three dominant perspectives. For example, historian Lisa Gitelman offers a model of media which works on two conceptual levels. The first describes a medium as a technological platform capable of delivering media content, and the second describes a medium as a set of social and cultural protocols associated with that technology (Gitelman cited in Jenkins 2006a, p13). Taken together, these processes are described as,

Socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice (Gitelman cited in Jenkins 2006a, p329).

Whilst this definition unites both technological and cultural concepts of media, thus emphasising existing definitions to account for the cultural and social environment of reception, it does not account for the transposability of content. The basis for this definition is still a technical one; hardware and its associated protocols. However, some forms of content are transposable between delivery systems. For example, a feature length film can be viewed in its original context (often cinema), or through an alternative delivery system such as a television, PC or portable mobile device. The process is further complicated when applied to transmedia formats because they utilise different modes and contexts as a framework for structuring a single narrative. For example, media in The Matrix franchise could refer either to the aesthetic constitution of form, such as comic serial or animation, or a delivery system for content, such as the cinema, home PC or mobile device. According to Dena (2009), any distribution across space (beyond the singular form) encompasses intra-medium expansion. That is: whilst any expansion beyond the singular can happen within what she terms a media platform (such as the use of multiple websites in an online experience) transmedia storytelling is characterised by movement across media platforms. She claims,
Any movement away from the notion of the singular is significant, but a subset of this idea—the practice of expressing a (fictional) world across distinct media—is an under-recognised phenomenon (Dena 2009, p57).

This view is shared and rearticulated in the present research. Dena’s characterisation of transmedia expansion is succinct and reflects the formalising principle for transmediation proposed in this thesis; however, as Ryan (2003) laments in her paper on narrative media, the diversity of criteria used to define media in different contexts makes it difficult to establish a consensus. Therefore, it is still necessary to formalise the discourse for this research in order to clarify the subject.

This thesis accounts for the relationship between content and delivery system by conceptualising delivery system as platform or channel and introducing the concept of *story mode*. By story mode I refer to the storytelling conventions associated with a particular narrative form. This is comparable to Ryan’s (2003) criteria for media which proposes media should ‘make a difference to what kind of narrative messages can be transmitted’ and should be presented using a unique combination of features. This approach emphasises the materiality of signs, thus privileging the content system over delivery system. For example, film is understood in the context of its associated storytelling conventions. Nick Lacey (2005, p5) refers to this as the ‘language of film’. The language of film includes specifications of: *mise en scene*; genre; temporal, graphical and spatial editing; and framing (Lacey 2005, pp5-46). Other narrative forms have different storytelling conventions. For example, games require nontrivial effort of the player to traverse the text (they are *ergodic*; Aarseth 1997), whilst comic books rely on the sequential ordering of image-based panels. Consistent with Ryan’s approach, this thesis does not consider the use of different delivery systems unique unless they alter the material constitution of storytelling conventions. Delivery systems are the technologies via which we access content. Their influence is typically greater on the reception of content than its constitution. Whilst this is not always the case (for example, portable tablets offer a degree of interactivity which can alter the constitution of audio-visual material) content is typically constituted by the conventions of mode. For example, the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television series (1997-2003) is materially consistent whether viewed through a television set, laptop, or via YouTube on a portable tablet. Comparably, when a delivery system *does* alter the constitution of the text, for example in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Season 8 Motion Comic* (2010), it alters
the materiality of the content thus formalising a new mode. Furthermore, due to technological convergence, multiple story modes can be expressed on the same platform (e.g. a laptop can be used to view a film, web-comic or animated shorts), thus formalising the distinction between the two.

By conceptualising platform and story mode this thesis avoids the issue of transposability in two ways: firstly, by distinguishing content from delivery system and articulating the relationship between them as it relates to story mode; and secondly, through acknowledging distinguishable features associated with particular storytelling modes. This avoids mitigating the unique characteristics associated with each mode by assigning them collective status of ‘content’.

The Present Research

As new content distribution models emerge from the creative industries it is essential that we consider, and reflect on, how users engage with these new frameworks. The present research argues that commercial transmedia storytelling accommodates and encourages particular modes of media use. While many scholars working within the field have acknowledged this issue, few yet have approached it from an audience studies perspective. To date, the audience view in this field is demonstrably under-researched. Addressing this requires a synthesis of theoretical concerns and practical analysis, which this thesis offers.

The primary aim of this research, as previously stated, is to answer the following research questions: 1) what modes of use do commercial transmedia texts accommodate? and 2) how do media users engage with commercial transmedia texts? In this sense, this thesis takes a two-tiered approach in its discussion of transmedia consumption. The first tier is conceptual in nature and uses discourse analysis in order to describe modes of use accommodated by transmedia storytelling. Due to the multifaceted nature of transmedia storytelling, its commercial application can be used to attract multiple market segments. For example, users may choose only to engage with story components fitting to their media preferences; however, this thesis argues that transmedial consumption – that is, the dedicated consumption of a narrative across multiple story modes – is characterised by a specific mode of media use which is unique
to transmedia storytelling and which is best characterised by fans – a unique subset of a broader audience. Whilst this thesis acknowledges the ability for transmedia storytelling to attract multiple markets via selected entry points, as a mode of consumption this is too similar in effect to the reception of traditional franchise texts and thus does not constitute a unique area of study.

Whilst this thesis can be situated in the literature on audience and fan studies, it is necessary in order to address the first research question – how transmedia storytelling accommodates multiple modes of use – to explore the nature of transmedia design. This is particularly important for the present research where the form itself is complex and subject to a number of conceptual frameworks. In doing so, this thesis seeks to reconcile audience research with an interrogation of form, thus looking at the relationship between audience and text when exploring reception. The formalising principle of transmediation is framed in this thesis by a synthesis of actor network theory with narrative theory which positions the transmedia text as a story network. This approach is inspired by Jill Walker (2004, p1) who claims that distributed narration occurs across connections rather than within the space of things. That is, networks of connections are as significant to narration as the fixed space of storytelling itself. In particular, this thesis focuses on the connections between audience members and story modes.

The second tier of this thesis is based on qualitative data gleaned from a series of in-depth interviews conducted both face-to-face, either in person or via Skype, and via e-mail. The interview data are based on individuals who identify themselves as transmedial consumers, and aims to characterise how these consumers, theorised as fans, engage with commercial transmedia texts. Given the significant lack of audience research in this field, findings from the interview data also reflect considerations for transmedia design which would otherwise be unknown. The sample group are fans of the case study texts Buffy the Vampire Slayer\(^2\), and the View Askew-universe\(^3\). These case studies were chosen based on their commercial nature, their qualification as transmedia

\(^2\) Buffy the Vampire Slayer is used in this thesis to refer to the Buffy transmedia text. When appropriate, this thesis also uses the term ‘Buffyverse’ which performs the same function. Due to its variable nature and complexity the Buffy transmedia text is not referenced as a single text. Instead, included story modes are referenced if and when they are referred to in isolation.

\(^3\) The ‘View Askew-universe’ is a term used in this thesis to refer to the View Askew transmedia text. Instead of using ‘View Askew- Universe’ it is referred to in the same way as it is on the official View Askew website, as the ‘View Askew-universe’. Due to its variable nature and complexity the View Askew transmedia text is not referenced as a single text. Instead, included story modes are referenced if and when they are referred to in isolation.
stories based on a synthesis of perspectives from the field and the existence of a
dedicated audience for each. More detail on this is provided in Chapter Four of this
thesis. The aim of the second tier is to explore how fans conceive of their engagement
with commercial transmedia texts. This thesis is based on a critical approach which
explores the relationship between these two tiers.

This thesis is split into seven chapters based on the two-tiered approach. The first
chapter aims to canvass the literature on transmedia storytelling in the field, discussing
dominant themes, perspectives and frameworks. This involves a review of the current
literature towards a formalising principle of transmediation.
Chapter One: Transmedia Storytelling

The aim of the following chapter is twofold: firstly, it aims to provide an overview of the literature on transmedia storytelling revealing dominant themes through which the subject is commonly understood; and secondly, it aims to review the current literature including theories of practice towards a definitional framework of transmedia storytelling in the commercial field. The chapter is split thematically into three segments. The first two centre on dominant themes in the literature. A review of these themes reveals that transmedia storytelling is commonly framed through an analysis of its aesthetic structure or the economic imperative associated with its application in a commercial setting. Whilst aesthetic and economic concerns are not mutually exclusive, key debates can be defined by the tensions which exist between these two areas of focus. The third segment is about theorising the practice of transmedia storytelling. This segment begins with a review of perspectives on the subject and is followed by a description of principles through which transmedia storytelling is conceived of in this thesis using actor network theory as a theoretical framework.

A review of the literature on transmedia storytelling reveals two important insights: firstly, that the term itself is one of a number used to describe similar or related concepts, and secondly; the term is applied indiscriminately to a variety of case studies and phenomena. The terms used include: ‘cross media storytelling’ (Dena 2004a, 2004b), ‘synergistic storytelling’ (Jenkins 2006a), ‘intertextual commodity’ (Marshall 2004), ‘transmedial worlds’ (Klastrup & Tosca 2004), ‘distributed narration’ (Walker 2004), ‘transmedia practice’ (Dena 2009), and ‘multimedia storytelling’ (Perryman 2008). Critically, it matters that each of these theories and perspectives are discussed and reviewed here because, when compared, they present different outcomes for consumption. In other words, they are important because of how they can be seen to position user responses. From each perspective, different modes of using, consuming and engaging with content are assumed; this means that certain modes of engaging are enabled or disabled depending on which perspective is taken. It is the aim of this chapter to critique the inconsistencies between each perspective and through doing so, develop a framework for defining transmedia
storytelling which informs the methods of this thesis. The chapter following this one contributes to this discussion by responding in more detail to what is at stake for theories of consumption based on these views. For consistency’s sake, the following two chapters use the terms ‘transmedia storytelling’ and ‘story mode’ in the author’s conceptualisation of the phenomenon, but adopts the terms used by other scholars when discussing their work.

The Aesthetic View

The literature on transmedia storytelling can be characterised by a central debate. This debate is based on the tension underlying two different perspectives which can be used as a framework for discussing transmedia storytelling within a critical dialogue. The commonality of this divide is evidenced in this chapter through the presentation of bodies of literature representing both perspectives. As Jenkins (2003a, p1) explains,

Transmedia storytelling is trying to take an economic imperative (the need to build up franchises in an era of media conglomeration) and trying to turn it into a creative opportunity. There remains an uneasiness about what is ruling this process—art or commerce.

One of the most common approaches to transmedia storytelling is the aesthetic view, which seeks to position it as a variety of creative output emerging from the media arts tradition. The foremost oppositional view defines transmedia storytelling as a function of economic imperative. This discussion begins by looking at the former.

The roots of the creative/aesthetic perspective emerge from the media arts tradition and independent production. In fact, transmedia storytelling as ‘contemporary art piece’ (Hill 2000) can be classified as a sub-category of the creative/aesthetic perspective. According to Darren Tofts (2005) transmedia storytelling can be described from a media arts perspective as distributed aesthetics. By this Tofts (2005, p4) refers to a concept of art which seeks a departure from ‘the singular idea of the art object’, and bases itself instead on the conceptualisation of the ‘post-object environment’. This view concerns questions surrounding what art is, and what art can be. The post-object environment is a space wherein structured systems of signification are replaced by a massed gathering of ‘methods, processes, systems, and performances’ (Brophy 1989,
According to Jill Walker (2004) it is difficult to think about narrative this way because our languages are designed to identify discrete objects. She claims that conceptualising distributed narration forces us to think about ‘things that aren’t things’ (Walker 2004, p3). In this sense, post-object art can be characterised as a network of distributed signifiers. Tofts (2005) likens this to the cultural concept of social networks which dominated academic discourse in the 1990s. To clarify this concept, he appropriates the term ‘relational aesthetics’ from French theorist Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) as a way of conceptualising distributed aesthetics within a networked framework. Bourriaud’s (2002) concept bases itself on a postmodern perspective which emphasises a theory of art based on inter-human relations as a product of, or inherent within, a work of art. The relational aspect refers to the relationship between the art work and its social context. In its appropriation in the context of transmedia storytelling, the relational aspect refers to the relationship between each storytelling mode. Transmedia storytelling can thus be characterised, within a contemporary media arts framework, as distributed networked aesthetics.

These qualities – relational links and aesthetic distribution – are conveyed well in Richard Wagner’s (2004, p80) concept of the total work of art or collective art work, which describes the use of multiple media as embodying the ‘highest art-form’. He claims,

Not one rich faculty of the separate arts will remain unused in the United Artwork of the Future; in it will each attain its first complete appraisement (Wagner 2004, p89).

The United Artwork of the Future to which Wagner referred is performative drama; the theatrical stage as the place in which these processes would come to pass. While these processes are more characteristic of convergence than divergence (Wagner’s discussion is comparable to Dena’s (2004b, p3) concept of transfiction – described as a single story told over multiple channels at a single-point-in-time), they nonetheless contribute to a conceptual framework which can be used to characterise transmedia storytelling in a media arts context. From a cultural studies perspective, Wagner’s conceptualisation illustrates the potential for multiple story modes to be used in the telling of a single narrative. Coupled with Bourriaud’s (2002) concept of relational aesthetics, which implicates a networked spread, this perspective
illustrates how transmedial art has emerged which is relationally distributed across multiple story modes.

Another example is the work of installation artist and scholar Peter Hill (2000). According to Hill we can best understand networked art projects as ‘superfictions’; a term used to describe contemporary art works resulting from an increase in the use of fiction and fragmented narrative in art. His analysis focuses primarily on story-driven installation art; that is, art imbued with a sense of narrativity unfolding over space and time. This is similar to the use of distributed narration in spacious areas such as art exhibitions, where visitors are led from one site to the next based on conceptual and aesthetic links (Hoffmann & Herczeg 2005). Examples of such projects include the works of Ian Breakwell, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and Ralph Rumney. Hill’s primary work, The Art Fair Murders (see, Hill 2000), forms part of a thesis project which seeks to critique contemporary art and literary fiction by combining the two forms in what can only be described as a networked installation-novel. In this sense, Hill’s work represents a near perfect approximation of the theoretical concept of transmedia storytelling popular in the literature on media arts; a distributed yet linked narrative artwork. The only problem with Hill’s project, conceptually speaking is that each narrative component is expressed through the same story mode (in this case a postcard).

Peter Greenaway’s The Tulse Luper Suitcases: a personal history of uranium is a faithful attempt at utilising these processes towards crafting a single complex narrative which unfolds over space and time, across multiple storytelling modes (see, Noys 2005); what Edwina Bartlem (2005, p6) refers to as a networked art event. The project is an historical narrative based on a personal history of uranium which is developed using: a series of feature films; a television series; numerous DVDs; a suitcase exhibition; a live cinema VJ (video jockey) performance; an ARG (this concept is discussed in more detail later in the chapter); a library of 92 books (92 being the atomic number of uranium); and various theatre events, exhibitions and installations (Peter Greenaway 2006). Unlike Wagner’s (2004) concept of the United Artwork of the Future, the ‘total work of art’ is realised through the user’s journey. In this instance, transmedia art requires the user to traverse the work across several modes and installations thus manifesting as a networked series of aesthetic nodes rather than a confluence of styles.
One of the chief advocates of the aesthetic view of transmedia storytelling is Jenkins. In his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Jenkins (2006a) argues that it is important that the entertainment industry embrace transmedia storytelling as a unique form of creative production. According to Jenkins (2006a, p105), not only does transmedia storytelling offer young artists new avenues for creative expansion, but it is imperative that the trend be approached from a creative perspective rather than a marketing/franchise perspective. While he claims there are obvious economic benefits to transmedia storytelling, the current franchise licensing system generates content which is typically redundant, watered down, or riddled with sloppy contradictions. As Jenkins (2006a, p105) explains, ‘franchise products are governed too much by economic logic and not enough by artistic vision’. As an alternative Jenkins encourages what insiders are calling ‘co-creation’, or ‘synergistic storytelling’. This model allows for greater creative collaboration between producers, and works to harness the creative potential of each story mode. According to Jenkins (2006a, p105).

In co-creation, the companies collaborate from the beginning to create content they know plays well in each of their sectors, allowing each medium to generate new experiences for the consumer and expand points of entry into the franchise.

While the presence of a single author is desirable in order to sustain links between story modes, ideally, Jenkins suggests that to exploit the creative capacity of the transmedia model, the collaboration of many groups is necessary, which each contribute to the project with specialised creative talent, but which are led by a primary producer who defines the creative vision; however, certain responsibilities can be shared by multiple creative teams. Jenkins (2006a, p104) cites *The Matrix* as an example of this, explaining that *The Matrix* franchise was shaped by ‘a whole new vision of synergy’. The methods used to produce *The Matrix* franchise allowed the Wachowskis to create a coherent narrative dispersed across multiple story modes where production within each mode was developed by different individuals, but individuals who were working within the creative vision outlined by the franchise’s primary producers. In this sense, each individual needed to be engaged with each story mode in order to contribute to the creative work. As a result, the Wachowskis were able to construct a coherent storyline which exploited the creative potential of each mode.
This method allows the primary producer to manage characters and story arcs within a larger narrative structure. It also allows the producer/s to exploit each medium’s potential for extended storytelling (Jenkins 2003a, p2). This is not to say that it is strictly necessary from a conceptual perspective that a transmedia text is developed by a single author; however, it does suggest that the single author production model is the best way to successfully execute a transmedia narrative in a commercial environment. Often, transmedia stories which are told across multiple texts by multiple authors lack narrative consistency. The presence of a single author/creator means that consistency is more likely and the storyworld is more easily sustained. Jenkins (2006a) refers to the ways Lucasfilm cultivated its Indiana Jones and Star Wars franchises as examples of this. When Indiana Jones went to television, for instance, the Young Indiana Jones Chronicles offered viewers extended character development set against the backdrop of various historical events, thus fully utilising the potential for storytelling in small screen production. Comparably, when Star Wars moved to print consumers were offered extended story arcs which often expanded the timeline to show events not captured in the screen trilogy, or re-cast events from a secondary characters perspective (Jenkins 2003a, p2). This means that the work’s creator invests as much time expanding the narrative as the fans do consuming it. Ironically, for Lucasfilm this process has allowed fans of Star Wars to address their grievances about the expansion of the series towards a single individual. The antagonistic relationship between George Lucas and fans of Star Wars is well documented (see The People Vs. George Lucas, 2010) and demonstrates that when a single author assumes creative control over a transmedia property they also assume responsibility for its reception across multiple story modes.

Whilst synergistic storytelling has proven a successful method for transmedia design, contemporary transmedia projects often result from an emphasis in the industry on creative experimentation. In an address to MIPTV & Milia in 2004, the Director of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Worldwide Networks, Jana Bennett, explains that the success of the BBC’s television programming will depend mostly on a ‘creative revolution’ in the ways in which the network develops transmedia content. She claims,

I believe one of the biggest challenges ahead will be creative rather than technical. I see consumers becoming just as concerned with the quality of the experience as the quantity... If we’re honest, while we’ve found ingenious new ways of serving up television, the content itself can be pretty familiar fodder. How and where we can
watch comedy, drama and entertainment have undergone a revolution. The programmes themselves have not. So what’s needed now is a creative revolution every bit as ambitious as the technical one we’ve seen (Bennett 2004).

As Bennet suggests, networks are increasingly recognising the importance of upholding the creative integrity of their programming endeavours and accept this as critical to the pursuit of economic profit. Furthermore, this move is motivated by the fact that consumers are just as concerned with quality of experience as they are quantity. Transmedia storytelling offers commercial networks new opportunities to combine both by creating quality, immersive experiences which achieve longevity across multiple story modes. The BBC’s first attempt to create a sustainable transmedia franchise utilised the long-running science fiction franchise, Doctor Who (Perryman 2008). The corporation’s Director General, Mark Thompson (2007) described the process of creating a transmedia narrative out of the science fiction series Doctor Who as a ‘complete creative operation’. He claims,

... my sense is that the sheer scale of the possibilities, the potential to link different titles and different platforms has been creatively inspiring and liberating (Thompson 2007).

As Jenkins suggests, it is preferable to approach transmedia franchising from a creative perspective. Most of the transmedia programming decisions made by the BBC were successful and consequently secured the network a new demographic of fans (Perryman 2008, p35). Perryman claims that the ‘creative factory’ model used by the network to create distinctive, yet linked programming spanning platforms, audiences and channels is now regarded by the BBC as a template for all future transmedia programming decisions (Perryman 2008, p37).

Dena (2006) elaborates on these ideas, offering a unique perspective which positions transmedia storytelling as the privileging of each platform as an artistic channel. This is somewhat comparable to medium specificity, which argues that ‘a successful work of art must observe their distinctive, inherent properties’ (Gotthold cited in Dunn 2009, p1159). Dena (Dena 2006, p2) explains that from an aesthetic perspective, transmedia storytelling is ‘the drive towards a work of art that includes all art and media forms’. This is comparable to Wagner’s (1993) concept of a ‘total work of art’. Essentially, a transmedia project can be viewed as a single work fragmented, where the user must
access each fragment to experience the whole. This view positions transmedia storytelling as a *narrative gestalt*. In other words, the whole is worth more than the sum of the parts. Dena (2006, p2) refers to this as ‘polymorphism’. As she explains,

> Rather than repeat, a polymorphic approach to the production and experience of a work is informed by a schema where all media are created equal... Each media is a valid artistic platform that provides a unique window to the world. Polymorphism privileges the complexity of many forms above reproduction.

Polymorphism produces art which is superior to adaptation because it allows each medium to do what it does best. Dena (2006, p16) claims that the shift from a mono-text paradigm to a polymorphic one results from a conscious decision to create aesthetic links between texts. However, as an art form, polymorphic texts are also more complex. Due to the dispersed nature of polymorphic texts, experiencing the ‘total art work’ requires the reader to traverse multiple story modes and assemble the work themselves.

**The Economic Logic of Transmedia Storytelling**

Although there are undeniable creative and aesthetic gains to be drawn from transmedia storytelling there are also profound economic incentives for its development in a commercial setting (Bolin 2007, p246). This field of analysis is concerned with the idea of transmedia storytelling as franchise development and describes the function of transmedia storytelling as commercial entertainment. In fact, much of the literature concerning transmedia storytelling describes it using a variation of the terms ‘franchise’, ‘transmedia franchise’ and ‘franchise blockbuster’ (Dena 2004a, 2008; Long 2007; Picard forthcoming; Schauer 2007). Within this field transmedia storytelling can be understood through a conceptual framework which positions the phenomenon as a significant component of commercial popular culture. One of the key features of this perspective is that it champions economic incentive over the narrative criterion for defining transmedia storytelling in its discussion. These studies contribute significantly to the literature on transmedia storytelling.

The commercial origins of transmedia storytelling emerged from a trend towards market convergence in the 1970s (Bolin 2007, pp241-242). According to Bolin (2007, p242), this coincided with a diverging technologies sector that allowed new media channels to
function as different platforms for diverging film texts. According to film scholar Thomas Schatz (1993, p18), films such as *American Graffiti* (1973), *Jaws* (1975), *Star Wars* (1977), and *Saturday Night Fever* (1978) were released during a new era of filmmaking, where market considerations, ‘commercial tie-ins and merchandising ploys’ became as important as the filming process itself. Other sectors soon followed suit. As Bolin (2007, p241) explains,

... media organisations that had previously concentrated on a specific medium, say print, such as Bonniers, Schibsted, and others ... developed into media houses that move into other sectors such as the broadcast media, [and] the film industry.

Over the past few decades this trend has grown and given rise to what Bolin (2007, p243) refers to as ‘the liberation of textual components’. In the same way that digitisation led to the liberation of information from traditional media, trends towards market convergence emerging in the 1970s led to the liberation of textual components, such as narrative. Despite the emphasis most scholars place on digital media in influencing the emergence of transmedia formats (Evans 2008; Jenkins 2006a; Murray 1997) this thesis argues that the liberation of textual components has been more influential in the emergence of transmedia storytelling than the effects of digitisation. While the effects of digitisation may have made narrative expansion easier, as the following discussion will illustrate, attempts to exploit the popularity of digital media often negate the narratological principle underlying transmedia storytelling. That is, they do not reflect the narrative structure unique to transmediation. It is thus an aim of this section to define the differences between expansive franchising and commercial transmedia storytelling.

In recent years, the growing trend of a story franchise told across multiple story modes has provoked the entertainment industry to consider how it might better garner profit based on this creative trend (Dena 2004a, p2). Rather than approach multiple media independently, it was discovered that a collaborative effort which strove to develop a single story across several platforms was more financially shrewd than mere adaptation (Dena 2004a, p2). This has presented the entertainment sector with new opportunities to harness profit. By directing users from one medium to the next, the entertainment industry is able to exploit the profit capacity of each text and refresh the franchise in each to sustain consumer loyalty (Jenkins 2003b, p1). Creators who do not want to be
confined to a specific medium now have the opportunity to maximise profits from ‘hits’ no matter what the original platform (Picard forthcoming, p6). Consequently, the ways that texts are produced has been affected to account for the increasing fluidity of media content.

Media production training today privileges textual products that travel across technologies (Bolin 2007, p243); however, the recent shift in emphasis to cross-media design has proven problematic for smaller corporations attempting to reinvigorate their content output. According to Anne Dunn (2009, p1159) cross-media design is difficult for established industries because they are based around medium-specific cultures. In a study conducted on cross-media strategies at the Australian Broadcasting Industry (ABC), Dunn (2009, pp1162-1163) found that each medium has its own production culture and professional ethos which is difficult to accommodate in a cross-media environment. She claims strategies used at the ABC to expand local radio stations using interactive web content were not as effective as strategies used by its British counterpart, the BBC, because practitioners paid little attention to the differences between media and neglected the need for ‘a distinctively original text’. This demonstrates the need for specialised practitioners for managing both creative and cultural strategies across distinct media. It is not the aim of this thesis to address this issue in detail; however, for an extended discussion see Dena’s *Theorizing Transmedia Practice* (2009).

When executed correctly, cross-media strategising is referred to as ‘platform independent’ production; a form of cultural synergy, wherein mega-corporations benefit from moving commodities (such as characters) between different formats. As Wasko (1994, p252) explains,

> The economic logic is compelling, as once a character or story is created and developed (and, of course, owned), there are advantages in moving it into different formats.

Wasko (1994, p252) claims that typically the divergence of content across multiple formats results in a multiplicity of content, whereby we experience recycled culture. She cites the Walt Disney franchise *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* as an example of this. Wasko claims that the main incentive underlying the transference of Roger Rabbit from film to cartoon was economic in nature. Not only did the transference save on
production costs, but the promotional value inherent in such a move was obvious (Wasko 1994, p252). Following the success of the film, the cartoon serial had the advantage of being immediately recognised by loyal fans. Bolin (2007) elaborates on this, claiming that transmedia storytelling often involves examples of how texts are promoted through other media; most notably (and more recently) the Internet. The Blair Witch Project (1999), which was promoted through the website blairwitch.com, is often cited as an example (see, Jenkins 2006a). Not only did the website offer detailed backstory as part of an immersive online universe, but it generated large interest in the film and encouraged discussion and speculation about the film’s core mythology a year before its official release (Bolin 2007, p245). This trend in online marketing has since expanded with production companies serving up complex interactive dramas played out both online and in physical spaces.

Henrik Örnebring (2007) claims that transmedia marketing is built around the concept of an ur-text. In his analysis of the American television franchise Alias, he explains that the ur-text (in this case the Alias TV series) is the text that is marketed through other texts, such as books, comics and ARGs. Contrary to Jenkins’ (2006a, p334) claim that transmedia projects offer an integrated approach to franchise development, Örnebring argues that secondary texts such as books, comics and games are used as marketing tools which serve only to refer to characters and events from the ur-text. He claims that flows in the opposite direction are much rarer (Örnebring 2007, p448). In other words, additional texts are ‘add-ons’, not additive. In an example of this, Örnebring maintains that most high-profile ARGs are used purely for marketing purposes. He explains,

Industry-produced ARGs are part of a larger sub-type of marketing known as viral marketing or buzz marketing, where encouraging consumer purchase is viewed as secondary to generating talk about recognition of the advertised brand (Örnebring 2007, p450).

Örnebring (2007, p450) claims that while convergence is opening up new possibilities for interactivity, transmedia texts are typically produced by ‘the usual suspects’; transnational media conglomerates who build texts to fit in with ‘cultural industry goals and strategies of brand building’ and with the aim of ‘creating a loyal consumer base’. This assumes that the transmedia model is built upon a system of intertextual commodity branding which directs the user from one text to another.
Many of these methods were used extensively during the franchise boom in the 1980s. Marsha Kinder points to the success of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (TMNT) franchise as an example of this. She claims TMNT fulfilled all the key criteria required for a successful entertainment supersystem, a networked structure formalised by the following principles:

... the network must cut across several modes of image production; must appeal to diverse generations, classes, and ethnic subcultures, who are in turn targeted with diverse strategies; must foster “collectability” through a proliferation of related products; and must undergo a sudden increase in commodification ... (Kinder 1991, p123).

The TMNT supersystem, which originated in comic form in 1984, grew to include a feature length film with a sequel, two successful Nintendo home video games, a popular arcade game, a television series, a top selling original soundtrack album, a new syndicated comic strip, videos of the television series and over a thousand turtle products—a commodity frenzy the media dubbed ‘Turtlemania’ (Kinder 1991, pp121-122). Kinder claims that the reason the TMNT franchise was so successful was because it appealed to children of all ages, and cut across social, racial, and economic divides. Essentially, everyone was able to participate in the system to varying degrees, whether through playing the arcade game for a mere quarter, or buying more expensive items such as the comic book or other Turtle paraphernalia (Kinder 1991, pp123-124). In this sense, Kinder defines the success of the transmedia supersystem through the commodity reach of its various networks.

Eileen Meehan (1991) elaborates on this view, describing the transmedia model as a ‘commercial intertext’, using the success of Batman as an example. Like TMNT, Batman originated in comic form, first appearing in 1939 in Detective Comics #27 (Wilde 2011, p104). Since then the franchise has expanded to include numerous feature-length films, a variety of video games available on multiple gaming platforms, magazines, comic strips, film clips and soundtrack albums (Meehan 1991, p47). This does not include the deluge of ancillary Batman paraphernalia which flooded the United States in the 1980s and 1990s following the release and success of the blockbuster film Batman (1989). Meehan claims that the flood of material associated with the Batman brand (a trend the media dubbed ‘Bat-mania’) created a complex web of cross
references which spanned from Bob Kane’s original vision of the caped vigilante to the
dystopian reimagining *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) (Meehan 1991, p47). She
argues that contemporary transmedia franchises can be understood as commodity
intertexts due to the ‘economic logics of profit and cost efficiency’ (Meehan 1991, p61)
which underpin their development. From this view, text, intertext and audiences can
simultaneously be understood as commodity, product line and consumer. While text
refers to the various narrative components of the transmedia story, intertext refers to
ancillary paraphernalia associated with it; in other words, Meehan’s conceptualisation
can be defined as transmedia network and franchise network respectively. The
transmedia network refers to the system of story modes narratively linked and the
franchise network is inclusive of this, but also constitutes ancillary material such as
collectible merchandise and toys. According to Meehan, the reason the commodity
intertext system works is because the structure is invisible to the consumer. As she
explains,

... the commodification of text, the commodity fetishism of intertext, and the
management of consumption are obscured behind the “soft and fuzzies” feeling of
experience (Meehan 1991, p61).

Kinder (1991) refers to these phenomena as ‘entertainment supersystems’; or the
intertextual extension of a franchise across multiple platforms. In an historical analysis
of Saturday morning television in America, Kinder (1991, p40) found that television
creates complex systems of transmedial intertextuality between television, movies, and
toys. She claims that the most successful transmedia supersystem often develops from
spin-offs from successful movies (and vice versa), because the profit motive is less
blatant; however, her analysis revealed that most of the spin-offs from the 1980s,
including *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1987), *Dink, the Little Dinosaur* (1989) (a
companion text to 1988 film *The Land Before Time*), and *Beetlejuice* (1989) involved
ancillary toys and associated commercials. In fact, she describes some of the features as
‘program-length commercials’ and ‘half an hour of TV cartoons specifically designed to
sell a new line of toys’ (Kinder 1991, p40).

Although toys are not traditionally associated with narrative, they are defined by Dena
(2004b, p5) as ‘commodity channels’. Examples include plush dolls and replicated
items from the franchise such as weapons or dress. In an analysis of action figures by
Jason Bainbridge (2010, p830) commodity channels are constituted as *media texts* which carry meaning in culture. Using *G.I. Joe, He-Man* and *Transformers* as examples, Bainbridge demonstrates how toys have been used in the past as vehicles for transmedia and intertextual expansion through a complex series of marketing strategies popularised in the 1980s, similar to those discussed above. Furthermore, many of the case study texts, including *Transformers*, continue to attract new audiences today.

Dena (2004b, p5) claims commodity channels are characterised by their low level of relevance to the story world and their low level of impact on story comprehension and story creation; however they can be constituted narratively when they inspire or facilitate story creation. Whilst they are typically ancillary, commodity channels can become story modes when they are used to express a performative narrative, thus facilitating creation. Examples include role-playing or table-top games. Furthermore, Jenkins (2006a, p150) claims action figures provided a generation with some of its ‘earliest avatars’, citing fan-made *Star Wars* films as examples. Indeed, fans use commodities such as toys and figurines in fan films as performative acts of narration (see *Potter Puppet Pals: The Mysterious Ticking Noise* 2007). Whilst toys can facilitate creative expansion by fans, Dena (2004b, p5) claims that these items ‘refer the consumer to the storyworld and story channels rather than extend or clarify the narrative’. Geoffrey Long (2007, p32) describes this strategy as *transmedia branding* and suggests that they should not be thought of as transmedia storytelling due to the absence of a narrative component. From this perspective, the concept of the commodity channel can be conceptualised as a branch of the franchise text, but not of the transmedia text. The transmedia text can be seen as existing within the franchise network; however, the links between story modes within the transmedia network are narratively based, whereas the links between nodes in the franchise network are brand based or content based. Whilst toys can facilitate expansion, they are not themselves constituted narratively, unless enacted by a user.

These issues point to the subtle tension between branding and storytelling. For example, while Meehan’s (1991) model of the commodity intertext is similar in structure to the networked model of transmedia storytelling, she does not implicate narrative in the ‘text’ component. As this chapter has demonstrated, a distinctive feature of transmedia storytelling is that the network is linked narratively. While the marketing potential of
transmedia storytelling is obvious, models popularised in the 1980s do not demonstrate whether attempts to market texts using multiple story modes during this time were consistent with the narrative view of transmedia today. It is also unclear from these perspectives whether attempts to lead users between linked story modes were built around the concept of narrative consistency, or whether the economic imperative to create linked texts resulted in a *multiplicity* of content, symptomatic of what Wasko (1994, p252) refers to as *recycled culture*. It is not surprising that genuine examples of transmedia storytelling emerging from this era are difficult to find; the literature itself suggests that it requires far less effort to lead consumers through a tenuously linked franchise network than a complex transmedia text (Jenkins 2003a, 2006a). Whilst they contradict contemporary transmedia design in terms of narrativity, the marketing strategies popularised in the 1980s serve as an important context historically for the evolution of more integrated franchising approaches which lead to the emergence of commercial transmedia storytelling today.

As this chapter has already demonstrated, the economic motive underlying transmedia storytelling requires that the model harness as much profit as possible by reaching dispersed audiences. Ethan Watrall and Patrick Shaw (2008, p1) explain that transmedia storytelling attracts a more diverse audience than any single text can by pitching content differently on different platforms. Not only does this allow producers to garner profit from several demographics, but it also creates a crossover market which expands the potential gross within any single media. For example, people who might not play video games but enjoyed *The Lord of The Rings* movies might experiment with the title on a gaming platform (Watrall & Shaw 2008, p1). As Jenkins (2003a, p3) claims, ‘reading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption’. He claims consumers are rewarded for migratory consumption through the placement of narrative cues used to enhance story comprehension. The cues signal important story arcs which would have otherwise gone unknown had the consumer not engaged with a secondary story mode; however, this model is based on the assumption that most media users will be compelled by narrative cues to pursue the story through another mode. There is little evidence to suggest this behaviour can be expected. Whilst commercial transmedia storytelling allows producers to harness profit across multiple markets, it is still unclear whether engagement can be sustained *across* story modes.
Recent analyses of transmedia storytelling offer few insights on engagement, but do point to recent efforts to exploit the profit capacity of transmedia design. Jonathan Hardy (2011, pp12-13) suggests that the dimensions of a contemporary proprietary transmedia text are based on the dissemination of controlled communications. In this model, the story is first initiated in an *ur-text*, or cluster of central texts used as a common entry point by audiences and is then followed by corporate paratexts, which can include bonus material, trailers and social media. The following stage is ‘controlled communications’ which involves advertising, marketing and PR placement. Finally, the last two stages comprise official merchandising, licensing and retail products. Hardy claims HBO’s *True Blood* – a fantasy/horror entertainment series – was disseminated using a similar model, which relied on complex intertextual branding and licensing of online spaces to create a cult following for a commercially oriented text. At a tertiary promotional level, HBO promoted minisodes for the series which were marketed on its cable network. Other dimensions included a cross-promotional rap homage performed by Snoop Dog, promotional billboards used in the USA and other countries, and numerous online blogs and websites. HBO invested heavily in shaping the textual space; their efforts were to order consumption and control communicative exchange surrounding the intellectual property (Hardy 2011, p14). Furthermore, control of the intertextual web allowed HBO to channel audiences through the commodity system according to their design. Many of the strategies used involved manipulating online spaces to create the illusion of freedom or agency in a commodity network. This approach is becoming common as new proprietors looks to the Internet as a space for commercial colonisation.

David Marshall (2004, p23) writes extensively on these issues, describing digital transmedia as a ‘cybernetic commodity system’ facilitated by the convergence of digital technology and interactivity. He explains that one of the defining features of contemporary cultural production is that most cultural products are released through multiple media formats coordinated to structure play within a closed system of organised engagement. Marshall (2004, pp23-24) describes this process as the commodification of playful consumption:

> The very idea of play is commodified and structured with increasing range and variation even as the impossibility of commodifying something as rich and diverse as play seems to be more realizable in the era of interactivity and customization.
In other words, Marshall suggests that transmedia texts are coordinated so that playful consumption is commodified through commercial systems of structured engagement. The so-called ‘liberation’ of textual components (Bolin 2007, p243) is structured by commercial imperative, and playful consumption is absorbed into artificial systems of commodification. This is comparable to a recent study by Marianne Martens (2011, p50) who posits that teenage fans of The Amanda Project – a transmedia fiction utilising web functionality to enhance an inspiring novel – create lucrative content for publishers who exploit affective labour (labour done freely that creates value for the user) as a means of syphoning profitable goods from their users. The site allows fans to participate in the mystery-fiction based around the disappearance of Amanda, the book’s protagonist, in a number of carefully structured ways. Like Marshall, Martens (2011, p54) is quick to demonstrate the illusion of freedom inherent in this system:

> Teens have agency as reviewers and creators on sites they create as long as their views suit the overall goals of the site ... ‘being-against’ is simply not possible on publishers’ carefully controlled proprietary sites as the site would remove subversive voices that interfere with their marketing plans.

Whilst fans are allowed to create fiction, write reviews and even blog, the assumption is that The Amanda Project’s teenage audience is unaware that their participation is used for commercial purposes (users are encouraged to purchase Amanda-related items on the site) and exploited for the lucrative mining of additional content. This is similar to Louisa Stein’s (2009, p117) analysis of The CW’s teen TV drama, Gossip Girl. According to Stein, in response to the target demographic’s perceived interest in new media, The CW created an online component of Gossip Girl in Second Life, where players can experience the world of Gossip Girl and engage with other members of the fandom. Gossip Girl’s use of Second Life represents new modes of online marketing targeted specifically at young women (Stein 2009, p118). According to Stein (2009, p119), Gossip Girl in Second Life converges fannish traditions with multiple strategies of reaching women by emphasising engagement with characters and storyworld through consumption of fashion. She claims that The CW takes its cues from fans, ‘co-opting fannish tradition and learning from successful fan communities’ in an effort to commodify Second Life through the service of the Gossip Girl marketing machine (Stein, 2009, p119). Susan Murray (cited in Brooker 2001, p459) notes similar methods were used by the producers of Dawson’s Creek, who posted in-house surveys on the
Dawson’s Creek website to collect demographic information about the viewers. While the site itself could be seen to encourage creativity and fan-produced works, it was driven by an economic imperative. As Jenkins (2000) explains, media convergence implies producers marketing a text across multiple story modes in an effort to drive ‘structured interactivity’.

Jennifer Fogel (n.d, p1) claims that consumers experience transmedia texts in a ‘highly structured and economically strategic environment’. She claims that transmedia channels which encourage participation, such as the Internet, merely give the illusion of agency. While some of the activities invited by television networks could be understood as creative and participatory in nature, viewers are encouraged to engage with the content through a consumerist framework (Brooker 2001, p469). Audiences are therefore easily fooled by the illusion of power over fully integrated and branded entertainment (Fogel n.d, pp1-2). As Fogel (n.d, p2) explains,

Fans’ interaction with transmedia texts becomes simply another means for content producers to create targeted communities for digital advertising and promotion.

Like Marshall, Fogel finds that transmedia storytelling is a marketing strategy which commodifies consumption. According to Fogel, television networks are steadily incorporating online interactive elements into the storyworlds of their programs in order to exploit the collaborative and participatory nature of the online environment. As she explains,

... the extensive foray of major media corporations into broadband, which to this point has been heavily promoted as a desire to give more personal control to consumers, merely disguises the tight rein they intend to keep on consumers’ personalised television and Internet capabilities (Fogel n.d, p1).

In this sense, Fogel (n.d, p2) challenges the assumption that the Internet heralds a new era of audience participation driven by interactive media. Instead, she claims that the emerging participatory media culture is driven by ‘branded entertainment’ which creates the illusion of personalisation and volitional mobility. Many scholars working from within the franchise perspective share this view (Ha & Chan-Olmsted 2004; Murray 1997; Scolari 2009; Stein 2009). Essentially, television networks use transmedia storytelling to control and manipulate viewers’ accessibility of program content, thus forcing them to engage in online experiences not of their own design.
Carlos Alberto Scolari (2009) refers to the commercial aspect of transmedia storytelling as ‘brand fiction’. According to Scolari (2009, p599), brand fiction describes an advanced form of transmedia marketing whereby the fiction is the brand, rather than a mere promotional vehicle for the brand. This view positions the fiction as the most important component in the commodification process. As he explains,

This mutation in brand fiction – from the product placed inside the fiction to the fictional world becoming the product – closes the analytical path inaugurated by semioticians two decades ago: from “brands as narrative worlds” to “narrative worlds are brands” (Scolari 2009, p599).

From a semiotic perspective, the brand is a device which can produce meaning and therefore semioticians treat brands as ‘narrative worlds’ which can be analysed using the same theoretical tools as are used to analyse fictional texts (Scolari 2009, p599). Brand fiction effectively turns this process on its head, starting with narrative and turning the storyworld into a brand. Scolari (2009, p592) describes this as a semiotic tool for targeting implicit consumers (a term derived from Umberto Eco’s (1979) concept of the implicit reader – based on the idea that every text is constructed around a reader implied) across multiple channels.

Scolari’s (2009) analysis is instrumental in demonstrating how the narrative structure of transmedia storytelling can be exercised within a commercial framework. It can be useful, for this reason, for challenging the issues associated with delineating transmedia storytelling from commercial franchising models. Whilst the two differ conceptually, a difference in reception of these texts has not yet been well demonstrated. By conceptualising the storyworld as brand, his analysis offers a perspective which is built on the idea of harnessing profit through the expansion of a fictional world across multiple story modes without sacrificing the creative integrity of the narrative. In fact, in Scolari’s conceptualisation, profit is dependent on narrative expansion. That being said, his theory is limited due to the fact that it is largely speculative. It does not take into consideration the ways in which media users engage with transmedia texts, if at all. While Scolari’s argument contributes to the field by theorising both economic and semiotic components of transmedia production, the practical implications are yet to be measured.
The present research focuses on consumption of transmedia storytelling in a commercial context. In addition to the reasons listed in the introduction of this thesis – chiefly, that commercial transmedia texts seek to replicate user-led traversals in a highly structured environment, thus enabling new modes of use – a study of commercially produced texts allows for critical analysis of both aesthetic and economic outcomes in this field. Whilst a review of transmedia from a media arts perspective permits an aesthetic analysis, as this chapter demonstrates, the study of commercial transmedia permits an analysis of aesthetic trends and the economic logic driving them.

An analysis of transmedia storytelling within a commercial realm thus permits a more critical approach to the issue of transmediation which addresses both aesthetic and economic considerations of production. Furthermore, as transmedia has become more commercial the literature has grown to reflect these considerations. As this thesis has already discussed, such an approach is also better suited as a method for exploring modes of use associated with these forms due to the complex market relations which emerge in response to commercial entertainment. The next section of this chapter provides an overview of literature relevant to constitution theories: that is, how the organising principles of commercial transmedia texts are conceived.

**Constitution: Theorising Transmedia Storytelling**

Presently, transmedia storytelling is conceived of in various ways within media scholarship. This is due in part to its infancy as a field of enquiry and as practice. This section of the thesis offers a brief summation of perspectives on constitution (for a more detailed approach, see Dena’s *Theorizing Transmedia Practice, 2009*) in an effort to situate the present research on audiences of this form in a media context.

**Storyworld**

One of the most frequently used terms to describe the constitution of transmedia storytelling is ‘world-building’ (Abba 2009; Örnebring 2007; Apperley 2007; Klastrup & Tosca 2004; Long 2007). Jenkins (2006a) describes this process as ‘the art of world-making’, and he cites the Wachowskis’ efforts on *The Matrix* as an example. He claims
The Matrix franchise was developed with such iconographic consistency that each instalment of the franchise was recognisable as part of the whole (Jenkins 2006a, p115). He cites dozens of recurring motifs in The Matrix franchise including the falling green kanji, Morpheus’s bald head and Trinity’s acrobatics as examples of this. According to Jenkins (2006a, pp116-117), the creation of a robust storyworld has become the new creative paradigm by which producers work. No longer do screenwriters strive to create a popular story or a popular character; their efforts are now governed by a market logic which puts them in the business of creating popular storyworlds which can support multiple characters across multiple media. As Long (2007, p45) explains,

The entertainment industry has learned that yes, popular recurring characters can increase repeat revenue, but better still is a rich story world that can host multiple sets of recurring characters ... Intriguing, well-rounded characters will engage audiences to a certain extent, but captivating universes will bring those same audiences back for multiple series' worth of content.

Some of the most obvious examples of this include the complex storyworlds of Star Wars and Star Trek (see, Long 2007). Both sustain multiple audiences spanning several generations and demographics. Whilst transmedia storytelling exemplifies a new shift in emphasis, this practice has also been used in the comics industry for years, an industry which is known for creating complex seriality, long-term continuity and rich character backlogs (Ford & Jenkins 2009, p304). Despite differences in the perspective, it is generally accepted by scholars in the field that the storyworld is one of the formalising principles of transmediation.

This trend is governed both by an economic imperative to create a rich storyworld for accommodating licensed goods, and by the aesthetic constitution of a highly complex structure for storytelling across multiple story modes. The dual nature of the storyworld structure – as both economic linchpin and aesthetic structure – is comparable to Scolari’s (2009) notion of brand fiction, which allows a reconciliation of the aesthetic perspective on transmedia storytelling with its commercial imperative; indeed, the two should not be considered irreconcilable. For example, George Lucas has created numerous ancillary products associated with the secondary character Boba Fett, from the Star Wars franchise, suggesting that the creation of a rich narrative storyworld can increase the franchise’s potential to harness profit through its various elements. As the
art of world-making becomes more advanced, the role of art direction also becomes more important in this process. Tim Burton, for example, is famous for creating stunning and evocative storyworlds, such as in *Planet of the Apes* (2001) and more recently, *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) (Jenkins 2006a, p117). In fact, he is sometimes referred to as a cultural geographer rather than a storyteller or director (Jenkins 2006a, p117). Whilst many of his works do not necessarily share a relationship canonically with their predecessors, as adaptations they create evocative new storyworlds for the narrative to live in.

Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca (2004, p1) offer a similar perspective, describing the transmedia storyworld as follows,

> Transmedial worlds are abstract content systems from which a repertoire of fictional stories and characters can be actualized or derived across a variety of media forms ...

> The idea of a specific world’s worldness mostly originates from the first version of the world presented, but can be elaborated and changed over time.

This closely resembles the conceptualisation of a storyworld used in this thesis: an abstract world in which the narrative unfolds. The world, like the narrative, should be consistent across story modes. Klastrup and Tosca (2004, p1) cite *Middle Earth*, the *Star Wars Galaxy*, and the *Cthulu Mythos* as examples, claiming that each has such devoted followers that recreating the universe across multiple texts is almost guaranteed to be successful. This view positions the storyworld as more important than the story itself. The transmedia structure can thus be conceived of from this perspective as a story space. According to Klastrup and Tosca (2004, p1), ‘a transmedial world is more than a specific story, although its properties are usually communicated through storytelling’. They claim that a transmedial world can be initiated in any medium, but it is usually expanded across several channels including novels, films, board games, and even theme park rides. It can be likened to genre in the sense that it consists of specifically recognisable elements which are consistent across numerous manifestations. The main difference is that each incarnation shares a basic foundational narrative (Klastrup & Tosca 2004, pp1-2).

Klastrup and Tosca (2004, pp2-3) argue that a focus on worlds allows them to go beyond a media-centric approach and explore instead how the storyworld is experienced. Like Jenkins, they propose that different story modes have unique
storytelling capabilities, and thus the story world is experienced differently depending on the mode of reception. In an example of this, they identify online games as one of the most interesting actualisations of a storyworld, which they identify as cyberworlds. According to Klastrup and Tosca (2004), cyberworlds are interesting because they allow the user the opportunity to become a part of the world, rather than merely experience it from the outside; however, cyberworlds lack the expansive, multi-modal structure unique to transmediation. In fact, one could argue that analyses of cyberworlds are influenced by a media-centric approach based on the actualisation of the story space online.

One of the most recent iterations of transmedia storytelling which exploits the world-building principle more than any other format is alternate reality gaming (ARG), a storytelling phenomenon described by McGonigal (2004, p4) as an ‘interactive drama’ which provides ‘unique elements in a variety of media platforms ... delivered through so-called real world media such as e-mail, fax, SMS and websites’ (Dena 2008, p42). Rather than immerse the user in the fictitious world of the narrative, ARG play immerses the narrative into the reality of the player’s life (Szulborski 2005, p33). In this sense, the storyworld becomes embedded in the player’s reality. As McGonigal (2004, p4) explains,

[An ARG is] An interactive drama played out in online and real spaces, taking place over several weeks or months, in which dozens, hundreds or thousands of players come together online, form collaborative social networks, and work together to solve a mystery or problem... that would be absolutely impossible to solve alone.

The ARG phenomenon is recent. The first of its kind in a commercial setting was The Beast (2001), developed as a companion text to the 2001 film A.I. Artificial Intelligence. Others soon followed and it is estimated that between 2001 and 2006 there were ‘seventeen commercial alternate reality games (ARGs), fifty-two independent ARGs, and many dozens more smaller and lesser-known ARGs’ (McGonigal 2006, p262). Some of these include I Love Bees (2004) (an interactive component of the Halo franchise), and The Lost Experience (2006) (a part of the American television franchise Lost (2004-2010)). In the few years since their inception, ARGs have become considerably widespread. ARGs are now produced both professionally and by amateurs and fans, they are available both in the US and
globally (having since been launched in the UK, Germany and India, among other countries), and companies such as 42 Entertainment and No Mimes Media have emerged which practice chiefly in the production and design of commercial ARGs (Örnebring 2007, p447).

The sense in which alternate reality gaming can be classified as a component of transmedia storytelling is two-fold. In the most obvious sense, ARGs are often a component of a larger transmedia network spread across multiple story modes such as films and literature. However, ARGs use multiple technologies and media channels, including ‘real world’ channels to guide users through the experience. ARGs thus constitute transmedia texts in themselves. As James Bono (2008) points out, unlike traditional computer games ARGs use as many interfaces as possible to frame the narrative. He explains,

... rather than being limited to the confines of the computer screen, the only conceivable frame for the game becomes reality. To successfully navigate the narrative across multiple media players requires a range of literacies or access to others with those literacies (Bono 2008, p3).

In this sense, ARGs are uniquely positioned as both components of a larger storyworld and as facilitators of reality-based storyworlds which uses the player’s life as a context for the fiction. Whilst ARGs can be understood as a form of self-contained transmedia storytelling, commercial projects mostly use ARGs in the context of other media as a means of marketing the text by allowing fans to participate in its storyworld. This method worked particularly well for _The Dark Knight_ (2008) ARG, _Why so Serious?_ (2007-2008): a transmedia marketing campaign in which it is estimated 10 million unique players participated (Hepburn 2009), thus allowing a massive audience to engage with the world Nolan created for his _Batman_ series. The film which followed, _The Dark Knight_ (2008), grossed over 158 million in its first weekend at the box office (see boxofficemojo.com).

**Game-play and Narrative Constitution**

Transmedia properties often incorporate story modes which encourage play. The view of transmedia storytelling as pervasive gaming is one of two dominant perspectives on
its constitution. The previous discussion on ARGs demonstrates this principle well. Espen Aarseth (1997) describes this class of literature as ‘ergodic’. Ergodic literature is that which requires the activity of the reader (such as following a hyperlink, or accessing secondary media) to propel the narrative forward. This implies passivity on behalf of design, and places the responsibility for meaning construction with the ‘assembler’ (Apperley 2004; Dena 2004a, p2). The perspective taken by Aarseth places transmedia in a game-oriented context, which positions each story component as an equivalent level or stage of game-play. It also invokes debate surrounding the distinction between narrative and game-play. Increasingly, scholars use agency as a measure of discrimination between the two forms. As Ernest Adams (1999, p4) notes, 

In most games the world is static and dead until the player arrives; the player is the only thing that makes it move. Interactivity is almost the opposite of narrative; narrative flows under the direction of the author, while interactivity depends on the player for motive power.

This perspective is oddly misplaced in the context of transmedia given that many scholars describe gaming components as part of a larger narrative. Furthermore, many qualities associated with game-play, such as agency and playfulness, are needlessly dissociated from non-interactive media such as film or television. Whilst many scholars, such as Jenkins (2004), Dena (2009) and Ryan (2006) advocate a kind of ‘ludo-narrativism’ (Ryan 2006, p203) for conceptualising the relationship between narrative and games, a dichotomous rendering of these perspectives still dominates the field. The gaming perspective is particularly evident in the discourse surrounding ARGs that emphasise interactivity, mobility and experience over narrative design. For example, in Dena’s (2008) work she claims that ARGs promote separation between the two – narrative and game-play – using tiering as a means of explicating the difference. As she explains, ‘tiers provide separate content to different audiences and in doing so facilitate a different experience of a work or world’ (Dena 2008, p43). Dena’s conception of world tiers and work tiers are materially similar to the narrative/gaming dichotomy which currently informs views on transmedia design. Tiers at the work level represent separate content within a single work or world channel, where the aim is to create unique challenges which address the needs of discrete audiences in a number of ways. According to Dena (2008, p43), ‘players are targeted with different segmentations that they can engage with as an individual or sub-group’. She claims that work tiers cater to
puzzle players, story players and real world players. They can also be either player-produced, producer-triggered, or a combination of both (Dena 2008, pp44-47).

Tiers at the world level represent extant media in the narrative constituted outside of the ARG, which consist of other media such as films (2008, p43). Dena (2008, p43) explains,

... the logic behind this approach is that producers provide works in different media platforms and art forms to address audiences with persistent alternating preferences for, and access to, media platforms and art forms.

In this context, tiering is evidenced in the transmedial extension of a narrative (or world) across different media channels. According to Dena (2008, p43), a ‘world’ is ‘the sum of productions that are set within the same fictional universe’. Critically, Dena’s work positions ARGs as exploratory terrain for audiences who want to interact with the text. The use of the term ‘work’, which connotes agency, labour and performative experience, is dichotomously constituted against the term 'world' and a connoted purpose as structure or context.

In 2007, Nine Inch Nails front-man Trent Reznor created an elaborate ‘Internet scavenger hunt’, which operated according to a similar logic, to promote the band’s forthcoming album Year Zero (2007). The Internet campaign formed the body of the Year Zero experience by expanding on the album story through interactive activities online. A source with knowledge of the project claimed,

It is the CD booklet come to life. It precedes the concept album and the tour. And it will continue for the next 18 months, with peaks and valleys. No one has assembled the full story yet. The new media is creating the story as it goes (source cited in Online Odyssey Stoking Interest In New NIN Album, n.d).

Year Zero online (2007) aimed to build on the album’s narrative by creating an elaborate interactive storyworld that allowed fans to ‘experience’ Year Zero rather than merely receive it. The campaign aimed to make the Year Zero experience as immersive as possible. Reznor claims,

What you are now starting to experience IS “year zero”. It’s not some kind of gimmick to get you to buy a record – it IS the art form ... and we’re just getting started. Hope you enjoy the ride (Reznor cited in Perrin 2007, p1).
Websites created by 42 Entertainment as a part of the scavenger hunt depict a sinister future where dark forces reign supreme; a story theme which bolsters the dystopian, apocalyptic themes pervasive in the album. Critically, the project encouraged immersion, interactivity and user participation. The multifaceted ‘Internet scavenger hunt’ allowed fans to help build the story of the project by following links, solving cryptic word puzzles and sharing leaked music files online; the aim being to immerse the user in the storyworld. Comparably, Why so Serious? (2007-2008) prompted players, via an in-game webpage, to meet at a designated location at the 2007 San Diego Comic Con to receive a phone number written by a sky writer which put them in direct contact with the Joker. These examples, and the lexicon associated with them – which includes experience, players, immersion and interactivity – connote game-play as the fundamental logic via which these projects operate.

Despite the growing interest of transmedia scholarship in game-play, the narrative view is still the most commonly used. Walker (cited in Dena 2009, p190) defends her use of the term ‘narrative’ in this context, stating:

> By using the term narrative, rather than discussing the larger group of texts variously called “contagious media” or “crossmedia”, I wish to emphasize the ways in which our basic knowledge of narrative structures allows us to see connections between fragments that may have no explicit links.

This view champions narrative as one of the main ways we understand ourselves and the world. It shares a similar emphasis with the narratological view of transmedia storytelling discussed in the introduction. Proponents of this perspective, including Perryman (2008), Rimmon-Kenan (1989), Ruppel (2009) and Ryan (2004a), argue that content is media dependent, thus situating transmedia in a uniquely narratological context. This approach is useful as a conceptual framework for understanding the function of transmedia storytelling as a narrative process. For example, Watrall and Shaw (2008, p1) describe transmedia storytelling as the telling of different parts of a single story across multiple platforms. They explain that the resultant text is conceived of as a ‘meta-story’ that ‘transcends any one specific delivery platform’. This is a sentiment echoed by Stephen E. Dinehart, head of Narrware transmedia story studio. Dinehart (2010) describes transmediation as the process by which a story may reach into multiple forms of media, creating an ‘intertextual media rich palate of story
consumables for audiences’. Marc Ruppel (2009, p283) argues that the use of narrative as an organisational tool is critical to the study of ‘cross-sited narratives’, a term used to postulate:

… stories told across multiple media platforms, or … sites of meaning … that are used as instruments to enact a network binding locationally separate content into whole, coherent expressions.

Others render this perspective as a practical analysis of core design principles by which transmedia narratives are articulated. Jenkins is a key figure in this field. His work draws explicitly on narrative concepts used as analytical tools to describe and classify storytelling techniques used in transmedia design. For example, drillability in transmedia storytelling refers to:

The ability for a person to explore, in-depth, a deep well of narrative expansions when they stumble upon a fiction that truly captures their attention (Jenkins 2009b).

Comparably, seriality speaks directly to the narrative structure of transmedia storytelling: the notion of breaking up multiple discrete story instalments and spreading them across multiple media systems or story modes. This is similar to Ruppel’s (2006) concept of ‘cross-sited narratives’. Furthermore, Jenkins (2009b) conceives of the spreadable functionality of transmedia storytelling according to a core duality characterised as continuity versus multiplicity. Continuity is preferred as a structure by hardcore fans who appreciate coherence and plausibility in fictional worlds. Continuity is also comparable to seriality, or as Dena (2007) describes it, the ‘heteromedial series’, a series of self-contained narrative units which can be chained together to form a larger narrative structure. An example of this is Joss Whedon’s Buffy the Vampire Slayer, a series comprising multiple story arcs, including several seasons published in comic book form. This allows fans to follow or reassemble narrative components in ways which are meaningful and cohesive. Multiplicity, as an alternative allows fans to ‘take pleasure in alternative readings, seeing the characters and events from fresh perspectives’ (Jenkins, 2009b). In this approach, the text presents ‘alternative versions of characters or a parallel universe version of their story’ (Jenkins 2009b, p3) instead of an ongoing coherence to a canon. Critically, this view champions a narrative perspective of transmedia storytelling. Whilst Jenkins acknowledges the use of games in his
definition of transmedia storytelling, he conceives of them as storytelling media thus formalising a narrative view of the subject.

In respect to formalising the narrative view of transmedia practice, Long’s (2007) notion of ‘negative capability’ and Ruppel’s notion of ‘migratory cues’ are comparable to the work done by Jenkins. Both have contributed significantly to this area of research and their work is instrumental in establishing a narrative composition of transmedia storytelling. In Long’s (2007) research on transmedia storytelling at the Jim Henson Company, he proposes a theory of expansive capacity based on the notion of ‘negative capability’. The term ‘negative capability’ is used to explain the role of allusion in transmedia storytelling: ‘the artful application of external references to make stories and the worlds in which they are set even more alluring’ (Long 2007, p9). Critically, negative capability refers to the invocation of something via the use of space. This method is central to a narrative conceptualisation of transmedia storytelling because it relies on the strength of intersections in the narrative to propel consumption forward. In other words, narrative gaps are unavoidable due to the intertextual nature of the story; however, the reader requires cues or signals in order to direct their movement from one story mode to another and to compel them to traverse links which are hitherto conceptually constituted. Long (2007, p53) describes this process as:

… the art of building strategic gaps into a narrative to evoke a delicious sense of ‘uncertainty, Mystery, or doubt’ in the audience. Simple references to people, places or events external to the current narrative provide hints to the history of the characters and the larger world in which the story takes place.

In Long’s research, gaps in the narrative signal the possibility for further content. He draws on several examples to illustrate this point, including Whedon’s Firefly (2002-2003), which ended abruptly as a television series after one season leaving fans wondering about many story arcs, including the true story of Reverend Book, the historical context of the Browncoats and the horrors visited on River Tam by the Alliance (Long 2007, p59). Some of these concerns were addressed in the R. Tam Sessions (2005): a series of web videos chronicling several in-universe interviews with the character River Tam. Other examples, such as the fully history of the Browncoats, are never fully addressed, thus the series fails to fulfil the negative capability of that particular storyline. According to Long, the function of negative capability is: ‘to
provide potential openings for future migratory cues’ (Long 2007, p68). In other words, negative capability is a narrative tool used to build expansion into the structure of the text.

Ruppel’s notion of migratory cues is similar, but distinguishable as a narrative technique from Long’s negative capability. According to Ruppel (2006), migratory cues are: ‘signs within a text that point towards content present in other channels’. He points to the usefulness of this technique as a method for facilitating ‘ideal’ consumption, claiming,

These cues are not only the means through which the narrative is compounded, but also the models through which the ideal reader becomes an ideal textual consumer (Ruppel 2006).

In other words, migratory cues are used to engineer transmedia consumption by enticing audiences to move from one story mode to another. According to Dena (2009), diegetic cues in the text can be conceived of as ‘catalytic allusions’. The function of this as a narrative technique is comparable to the traditional literary perspective on allusion, described as ‘a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts’ (Ben-Porat 1976, p107); however, where traditional allusion is founded on reference to a pre-existing text, catalytic allusions refer audiences to a new text (Dena 2009, pp308-309). The catalytic properties of the allusion allow audiences to act upon the reference. This concept is therefore uniquely situated within a transmedia framework because it accounts for structured exploration across media rather than the referential function of allusion or intertextuality. Critically, there is little research to substantiate any claim to these techniques working; however, the notion of migratory cues and, indeed, negative capacity provide very useful frameworks for conceptualising transmedial consumption in a narrative framework.

The way in which Ruppel’s work differs from Long’s (2007) is based on his articulation of movement. Taken together, migratory cues represent the second phase of migration where negative capability is the first. Whilst Long’s research reveals capability spaces used in transmedia design to create the potential for expansion, Ruppel theorises the mechanism via which transmedia users are invited to traverse story modes. This type of activity is described by Ruppel (cited in Dena 2009, p306) as,
… a signal towards another medium – the means through which various narrative paths are marked by an author and located by a user through activation patterns.

Ruppel cites as an example a sequence from *The Matrix* narrative where a sachet of documents featured in *The Animatrix* (a series of short animated films, 2003), is retrieved by the players of the game *Enter the Matrix* (2003) and then delivered by characters from the second film in the series, *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003). Another example can be drawn from the *Alien versus Predator* (AvP) franchise. Before the release of the first AvP comic in 1991, a relationship between the two series was implied in a scene from *Predator 2* (1987), in which a view of the alien spacecraft reveals a wall of trophies including an alien skull recognisable as the xenomorph from Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979). In the first series of the comics, the Predators, led by their group leader ‘Broken Tusk’, collect xenomorph skulls as trophies. Incidentally, in the interim, many viewers wrote fan fiction which explored alternate worlds and scenarios in which the two species met (see fanfiction.net, which boasts an extensive archive of Alien/Predator fan fiction dating back to at least 2001). Whilst it is difficult to demonstrate whether these fans responded directly to the migratory cue provided in *Predator 2* (1987), the scene alluded to content later created by fans. Critically, this means that fans can respond to the text by filling negative spaces with content which is otherwise unavailable through other story modes in the text. Whilst this implies that audiences can ‘act upon’ the text – a form of engagement that is usually associated with game-play – the conditions for this form of engagement are based on the narrative properties of the text. Together, both Long’s and Ruppel’s contribution to the field support the narrative view of transmedia storytelling because they describe it using core principles of narrative design.

**Theorising Transmedia: a Networked Conceptualisation**

Each perspective on theorising transmedia discussed here offers something unique to the conceptualisation of transmedia storytelling; however, as it pertains to the present research, the narrative view is the most useful as a framework for understanding consumption. There are several reasons for choosing the narrative view of transmedia storytelling as a framework: firstly, the case-study texts used for the research in this thesis are *narratively oriented*, that is, they invite forms of engagement associated with
a traditional narrative structure; secondly, the ‘gaming’ view of transmedia can be situated within a narrative framework, thus necessitating a narrative view unless the aim is to explore game play as a specific mode of engagement; and thirdly, there is already an emphasis in the field on play (discussed to an extent in the next chapter), a concept commonly associated with gaming, thus pointing to the need for more research in the field on narrative reception where game-play is presented as an alternative. This thesis explores engagement, on which there is less research in the field and which is more commonly associated with narrative reception than play.

Whilst this thesis focuses primarily on consumption it is important to establish a conceptual framework for the text in order to understand its reception. This task is particularly important for the present research due to the variable nature and complexity of the text. The framework for transmedia storytelling used in this thesis revolves around a networked conceptualisation which operates at two levels: firstly, at the level of defining the transmedia text as a networked system which incorporates both textual components and human actors, thus accounting for consumption; and secondly, as a means of describing the relationship between transmedia storytelling and franchising; whilst the two are distinct it is important to acknowledge the relationship between them in a commercial context. Critically, instead of delimiting the properties of transmedia storytelling, the concept is conceived of in this thesis as an instance of a principle based on recurring perspectives in the field. Furthermore, such an approach is more effective as a method for framing engagement with transmedia forms because it does not delimit modes of use.

According to Jenkins (2009b), transmedia storytelling is understood according to numerous logics, including storytelling, marketing and branding. This implies that the formalising principle of transmedia can be adapted across multiple contexts. As a result, rather than offer a definition of transmedia storytelling per se, this thesis proposes a principle of transmediation. This principle is based on the following logic formalised as a process: the coordinated distribution of a single narrative across multiple story modes set within a single storyworld. This principle can be applied in either a storytelling or marketing context. For the purpose of this thesis the practice of transmediation forms the cornerstone of a fundamental process underlying transmedia storytelling.
comparable, in so far as it is characterised as a process, to adaptation. Essentially, it describes the formalising principle of transmedia.

The second and related concept which needs to be defined is transmedial consumption. Just as transmediation describes a process involving movement across multiple story modes, transmedial consumption describes a practice to this effect. Simply, transmedial consumption refers to the dedicated consumption of a narrative across multiple story modes. In a study on how media users engage with commercial transmedia texts this distinction is necessary because users can engage with transmedia components in isolation. Whilst Jenkins (2006a) suggests this function is necessary in order to attract multiple markets, story modes do not perform a transmedial function in this context. In other words, consumption of a single story mode in a transmedia text should be distinguished from consumption of several story modes in a transmedia text. Use of the term ‘transmedial consumption’ is an effective method for clarifying ‘pure’ engagement with these forms.

The relationship between transmediation and transmedial consumption can be conceived of using an adaptation of actor-network theory (ANT). According to Jonathan Murdoch (1998, p359) ANT concerns itself with,

... the heterogeneity of networks; that is, ANT seeks to analyse how social and material processes (subjects, objects, and relations) become seamlessly entwined within complex sets of association.

Transmedia storytelling lends itself easily to a networked conceptualisation because the narrative is already coordinated across discrete story modes. The use of networking discourse is common in the field (see Ruppel 2009; Walker 2004); however, a networked conceptualisation is slightly different. According to Peter Bearman and Katherine Stovel (2000, p76) an analysis of narrative through a networked perspective can only be accomplished by coding each discrete component of the narrative as a node and then representing links as the author’s explicit connections between elements. In the case of transmedia storytelling these associations are already established via the spread of content across distinct story modes coordinated in a networked structure. Joost van Loon’s (2006) critique of ANT based on the assertion that networks defy narrative is surmountable due to the fact that transmedia stories are built as networks from the outset, rather than subject to the imposition of a networked conceptualisation on a linear
model. Furthermore, the interaction between multiple human and non-human components in a transmedia text verifies its networked structure due to the presence of multiple discrete nodes; moreover, the author-text relationship is not the only relationship constituted in a transmedia structure.

The spaces between subjects and objects in transmedia storytelling are networked spaces. It is the interaction within these spaces between human and non-human actors which allows the network to endure over space and time (Latour 1994, p792). This chapter suggests that both author/creator and, critically, audience are part of this network. The transmedia text is thus constituted by four different kinds of networked spaces: author-story mode space; story mode-story mode space; author-audience space; and finally, audience-story mode space. Unfortunately, these relationships are too difficult to represent diagrammatically due to the complex network of links. The formalisation of the author-story mode space is based on the view that one of the key indicators of a successful transmedia network is the presence of a single author/creator. The networked space between author and story mode is critical to the outcome of the storyworld, thus making ANT a suitable theoretical foundation for conceptualising the author-text relationship. The formalisation of audience spaces – author-audience and audience-story mode – (comparable to Barthes’s (1977) notion of the writerly text) is explored in greater detail in Chapters Two and Three and the findings chapters of this thesis. The remainder of this chapter chiefly discusses the formalisation of the story mode-story mode space as it pertains to the constitution of transmedia design.

The use of networked theory as a way of conceptualising transmediation is based on an emphasis on the relationship between its associated nodes. One of the most important concepts used to describe this process in the present research is transitional capacity. Story modes are linked narratively in a transmedia context on the basis of transitional capacity. Furthermore, this relationship facilitates consumption. The role of transitional capacity is comparable to Long’s (2007) negative capability, but more closely resembles a combination of Ruppel’s (2006) migratory cues and Dena’s (2009) catalytic allusions. Transitional capacity can be described as: the capacity signalled by a transitional threshold for one mode to signal the presence of successive content in another. Transitional thresholds refer to the point at which the signal to successive content in another mode has been fully articulated. Successive content in this case refers to the
sequential relationship between content linked by transitional thresholds. This does not necessarily imply linearity in the network. On the contrary, the network can include numerous tangential properties without compromising the successive relationship between individual nodes. The links between them are successive in the narrative structure. The logical structuring of links in the story allows audiences to better identify them, and provides a greater reward for traversing them. The space between story modes is conceived of in this thesis as a transitional space because the relationship between story modes is only formalised once someone traverses the space between them, thus substantiating the link.

Unlike Long’s (2007) concept of negative capability, which signals the possibility of more content, a narrative’s transitional capacity is articulated by transitional thresholds at the mode level which point to successive content in another mode. Capacity in this case refers to a level or degree of traversable potential in the mode. This means the transitional capacity of one mode may be articulated via multiple transitional thresholds. An example of this can be found in one of the opening scenes from Mall Rats (1995) wherein the character Brandi informs TS that their previously arranged vacation has been cancelled because she has to fill in for a contestant on her father’s game-show after the contestant died swimming laps at the YMCA. The impromptu workout was provoked by concern that she was overweight (Mall Rats, 1995). This conversation marks a transitional threshold in the text, thus pointing to its transitional capacity. It refers to successive content in a short animation featured on the Clerks (1994) DVD titled Clerks: The Lost Scene (1994). The animation features two characters from the View Askew-universe, Dante and Randal, visiting the funeral of Julie (the contestant who died) in their home-town in Connecticut. Comparably, in episode twenty from season five of Angel (1999-2004), the characters discover that Buffy has been romantically linked to their demon nemesis, The Immortal. Angel thinks he sights her with The Immortal in a nightclub in Rome, but her face is never revealed (Angel, 1999-2004). In a sequence from Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Long Way Home (2007) in volume one of the Buffy season eight comics (2007-2011), it is revealed that Buffy used a decoy in Rome to distract her enemies. She was never there. This is comparable to Jenkins’ (2006) notion of additive comprehension: the use of additional cues to enhance the reader’s understanding of the narrative across multiple media. Transitional thresholds are somewhat different due to the fact that they articulate a position in the narrative
space where two story modes can be linked, thus formalising the mode’s transitional capacity. The link can only be substantiated when it is acted upon by an audience who would traverse the space. In this capacity, transitional thresholds are similar to catalytic allusions in the sense that they invite action by a user. In this case, action is required by the user in order to substantiate the link.

The role of human actors in the transmedia network is significant because both author and audience can influence the structure of the text. According to Latour (1991, p111), the difficulty of describing this relationship is as follows:

We know how to describe human relations, we know how to describe mechanisms ... but we are not yet expert at weaving the two resources together into an integrated whole.

In van Loon’s critique of ANT, he claims that Latour’s undifferentiated notion of actant is too rigid because it defies the required fluidity central to the concept of the network. In other words, Latour’s work described networks as entities which evolve steadily, rather than transformatively. As a result, Van Loon claims that Latour is unable to address ‘radical (r)evolutionary processes’ which may emerge within the network due to the interaction between human and non-human actors. Whilst story modes in a transmedia network are relatively static (their constitution is difficult to alter), the ability for actors to affect and influence the growth of the network belies the rigid structure implied by Latour. In fact, transformation can be conceived of as part of the steady evolution by which actor-networks are commonly theorised.

The role of actors in the network can be theorised based on the spaces in which they operate. A useful way of conceptualising this without relying on the notion of symmetry (a critique levelled at ANT based on the levelling of power relations in the network (Murdoch 1998, pp367-368)) is Murdoch’s notion of prescription and negotiation. As well as conceptualising spaces in the network, this model examines how human action affects emergent structures through recurrent interaction with non-human nodes (Orlikowski 2000, p407). According to Murdoch, prescriptive spaces are those wherein codes and rules of behaviour within the network are clearly formalised. Negotiation occurs when actants within the network resist prescription (Murdoch 1998, pp362-363). The relationship between story modes and the author can be seen as prescriptive because the space is constituted by prescription at the level of design. Interactions
occurring in the network between audience nodes and story modes can be seen as enacted by processes of negotiation. Negotiation in this space is enacted in two ways: firstly, via the interpretive act of reading, which constitutes the space between audience and story mode (occurring in the transitional space); and secondly, via the production of new texts by audiences, which share a varying relationship with the inspiring artefact. These actions allow audiences to affect the structure of the text by negotiating both its structure and meaning. The relationship between the author and audience nodes is slightly more complex. This process, as well as those enacted by the audience, is elaborated on in the following chapter which discusses audiences for commercial transmedia texts.

Finally, ANT can also be used as a means for describing the relationship between transmedia storytelling and franchising within a networked context. This is done by assigning functionality to networked spaces based on their relationship to specific nodes. Transmedia story modes, for example, are linked by transitional thresholds. That is, their association is based on narrative expansion rather than replication; meaning is coordinated between story modes in the network. Franchise nodes, on the other hand, find their associations based on the movement of brand or content; however, this does not mean that the two cannot interact. Based on this model, the transmedia text is always also part of a franchise network because the links, while based on narrative expansion, also feature content traits (such as character or setting) which can be found in other nodes. The reverse cannot be said of nodes which are purely franchise-based, such as toys, theme-park rides and collectible paraphernalia. Diagrammatically, the relationship between nodes can be expressed as follows:
For example, the *Batman* network is constituted as a franchise; its various textual nodes are linked by recurring motifs such as the bat cave, the bat symbol and secondary characters in the text. This can include movies, theme park rides, soundtracks and collectible paraphernalia. The network also accommodates a transmedial spread constituted by narratively linked story modes. Examples of these include *Why so Serious?* (2007-2008) and the sequence of *Batman* films directed by Christopher Nolan: *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). Obviously, the Batman franchise is much more extensive, chronicling over seventy years of content; however, for illustrative purposes, selected examples are sufficient. They demonstrate how transmedia storytelling is distinguishable from, yet constituted within a franchising network. This is important in a commercial context because franchises attract and retain a mass audience. Transmedia texts thus have multi-faceted appeal. The two networks interact in a way which prolongs engagement with the text by using multiple delivery strategies to target different markets across several generations. This discussion is elaborated in the next chapter, which looks at audiences for transmedia texts.
Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that there is a distinct creative structure unique to transmediation which can be conceptualised as distributed relational networked aesthetics. This aesthetic structure is comparable to Wagner’s (2004) concept of the 'total work of art'; a composition of discrete, yet related, storytelling nodes. Tensions which exist between this perspective and the commercial application of transmedia storytelling can be overcome; the two – aesthetic constitution and economic logic – are not mutually exclusive. Whilst recent literature suggests that commercial transmedia storytelling is governed by intertextual strategies which order engagement across a series of media and utilise the Internet as a space for exploiting participatory practices, this does not necessarily negate the aesthetic integrity of the text. Furthermore, there is little practical research to account for the perspective of audiences in this discussion. Chiefly, the work of Jenkins (2006a) is instrumental in addressing this issue. He suggests that synergistic storytelling can be used as a design method for managing economic logic with industrial and aesthetic concerns. The view that aesthetic and economic concerns can be reconciled in this field is led by scholars (Dena 2006; Jenkins 2006a; Perryman 2008) who campaign for creative integrity in the commercial industries; however, whilst hopeful, they forewarn that commercial imperatives can negate creative intent.

Whilst the economic incentive to create a transmedia text is similar to that of franchising (i.e. to reach demographic markets across multiple dispersed media), this chapter demonstrates that the narratively based constitution of transmedia can be used to differentiate the two. As a unique content model, one of the most important consistent elements of transmedia storytelling is the concept of the storyworld. The storyworld is used as a context for the development of a consistent narrative across story modes. Its properties are most lucidly expressed through digital gaming and ARGs; however, it features in nearly all transmedia forms. Perspectives on constitution are commonly framed through either a gaming or narrative framework. This thesis aligns itself with the narrative perspective of transmedia storytelling and proposes a networked conceptualisation of transmedia based on an adaptation of ANT which positions storytelling as one of multiple applications of a principle of transmediation. This framework is used to delineate the properties of transmedia storytelling from
franchising by postulating that story modes in the network are linked via transitional thresholds which are narratively constituted. Furthermore, this framework accounts for actors in the network; however, to date little is known about how audiences consume transmedia and thus the role of actors in the network can only be speculated on.

The next chapter aims to build upon this issue by addressing the distinct lack of audience research in transmedia scholarship. Whilst perspectives on transmedia audiences are represented to a certain extent in the literature, they are mostly speculative. The next chapter explores the relationship between mode preference and levels of engagement in the first step towards identifying and characterising a transmedial user.
Chapter 2: Consuming Transmedia Texts

This chapter aims to theorise consumption of transmedia texts in order to identify and characterise transmedial consumption; that is, the dedicated consumption of a narrative across multiple story modes. In particular, this chapter aims to reveal how commercially structured traversals accommodate multiple forms of media use and how transmedial consumption, as the purest form, can be characterised. This discussion can be situated within audience studies research which implicates convergence, cross-media design and digital technologies in recent shifts in consumer trends (Hardy 2011; Holmes 2004; Jenkins 2006a; Jenkins & Deuze 2008; Marshall 2004; Martens 2011). Taken together, these factors signal the emergence of a new media environment wherein the capacity for media practitioners to meet the needs of their audiences is greater than ever before due to the timely convergence of technologies and industries. Perspectives on this subject have been well represented in both media studies (Deery 2003; Huang & Chitty 2009; Jenkins 2006a; Murray & Weedon 2011) and marketing research respectively (Enoch & Johnson 2010; Mulhern 2009; Schwaiger, Cannon & Numberger 2010); however, the presentation of practical analysis in this field is limited. This chapter will begin with a literature review of what is known descriptively in the field about transmedia consumption before addressing the gaps in research that this field presents.

The literature on transmedia consumption implicates migration and digital literacy in the emergence of commercial transmedia storytelling as a response to the profit-capacity of cross-media branding (Fogel, n.d.; Marshall 2004; Martens 2011; Stein 2009). Many scholars working in this field champion web-integrated projects such as Gossip Girl in Second Life (Stein 2009), The Amanda Project (Martens 2011) and Dawson’s Creek (Brooker 2001) as the harbingers of newly integrated entertainment models. It has been demonstrated that these models engender a new audience online who participate more actively with content and with many other people from communities dispersed throughout the globe (Deery 2003, p162). Furthermore, the intermedial connections between traditional media and the internet provide a space for fans’ self-definition and community practices (Booth 2008; Nikunen 2007). Coupled
with the migratory patterns of new media users, the digital realm has been championed as an ideal space for narrative expansion.

Despite the enthusiasm which marks the emergence of new forms, the internet also offers new opportunities for exploitation. In fact, many scholars (see Fogel n.d; Marshall 2004 and Martens 2001) point to the use of digital media in transmedia storytelling by corporate entities to exploit audiences. This perspective shares many of the same tenets as traditional structuralist thought. Proponents from this field argue that transmedia storytelling, particularly the expansion of commercial content to a proprietary website, is used as a means of structuring consumption whilst creating the illusion of freedom. This idea has been explored in the previous chapter as it pertains to the economic logic of transmedia storytelling; however, this perspective also implicates consumption of these texts. Whilst this is, indeed, pertinent to the study of consumption in digital spaces, it is not unique to transmedia consumption. Whilst scholars working in this field take transmedia storytelling as their subject, their findings are only as relevant to transmedia storytelling as a study of online platforms in isolation. Rather, they reflect the conditions of consumption when digital environments are co-opted by commercial bodies. As Mark Deuze (2008, p6) points out,

> The same communication technologies and practices that enable interactivity and participation have been deployed throughout the 1980s and 1990s to foster the entrenchment and growth of a vast corporate-commercial global media system that can be said to be anything but transparent, interactive or participatory.

Whilst perspectives on the use of digital media have been influential in transmedia scholarship – particularly as they pertain to the insinuation of a commercial imperative – they do not reflect modes of use which are unique to transmedia storytelling, except to say that television networks and film corporations rely on the participation of a willing audience to move online based on the popularity of the broadcast content. Furthermore, they do not reflect on why audiences migrate across media. In other words, these perspectives reflect processes of commercialisation which are indicative of a broader shift in the digital realm not exclusive to transmedia storytelling. Furthermore, many of these studies are purely speculative. Whilst they theorise the exploitation of audiences online, they seem to assume naivety as a prerequisite for this process based on the willing participation of audiences in these restricted environments; however, their very
consent suggests a more agentic disposition. Amid the myriad of fan run sites online audiences are not forced to exercise their engagement with the text via official channels. Moreover, whilst fandom ostensibly serves commercial interests the experience of consumption cannot be divorced from lived culture. According to Stein, we should not dismiss the complexity of the fan experience lived through a consumerist model. In her analysis of *Gossip Girl* in *Second Life*, she argues,

...dismissal of Gossip Girl’s orchestrated fandom as insidious consumerism bypasses the dynamic, lived media cultures that, while steeped in consumerism, are far more than the sum of their parts (Stein 2009, p121).

Stein’s contention demonstrates the speculative nature of commercial analyses of digital spaces. They advocate a reductionist view of consumption as either consumerist or cultural, which in most cases, positions the audience as victims of commercial design. Furthermore, such analyses do not pertain to issues of transmediation exclusively. For the most part, the literature comprising this field is speculative and its subject reframes issues which have already been discussed at length in commercial analyses of the internet by political economists (see Coombe & Herman 2002; Deuze 2008; Mulhern, 2009; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli 2007). Furthermore, research in this field makes no attempt to characterise the audience. Such analyses are thus definitively political and do not contribute to the discourse on audiences.

Others scholars, such as Dena (2008), Jenkins (2006a) and Klastrup and Tosca (2004) represent a growing body of literature which interrogates transmedia design for its ability to accommodate new modes of use which encourage agency, whether in digital or fixed locales, by allowing audiences to participate with the text. Critically, traversals in a commercial environment can accommodate both passive and agentic forms of consumption. The current thesis rests on the assumption that commercial transmedia storytelling accommodates *multiple* modes of consuming (described as modes of use), *one* of which is characterisable as *transmedial* use. It does not aim to solve debates surrounding passivity and agency; rather it aims to theorise migration. That being said, the limited research on transmedia consumption does emphasise participation as a component of how media users engage with commercial transmedia texts.
As the previous chapter discussed, storytelling which invites audience participation in its construction has been described by Aarseth (1997) as ‘ergodic’. According to Aarseth (1997, p1), ergodic literature requires nontrivial effort to ‘allow the reader to traverse the text’. Although he uses the term primarily in relation to games, Aarseth refers to *cybertext* as the primary class of literature to which the term can be applied. He explains that cybertext centres attention on the user of the text as an integrated figure in the construction of meaning across media. This places the user in a constructive role that the various concepts of ‘reading’ do not account for (Aarseth 1997, p1). This concept can be applied to transmedia storytelling due to the constructive nature of consumption which it invites. After all, transmedia storytelling depends on the active participation of media users to develop a narrative aggregate and this includes both the physical movement between modes and participation with the text in various forms.

Audiences can participate with transmedia texts in a number of ways. Some forms of participation are encouraged and can even be engineered using ergodic design, whilst others emerge organically as a response to the text. One way that audiences participate with transmedia stories is through the practice of narrative expansion. From a narratological perspective, this process can be seen as a response to the conceived expansion of content across story modes inherent in transmedia design. According to Abigail Derecho, texts which invite expansion are *archontic*. The term ‘archontic’ is derived from the word *archive*, and is used to invoke the idea that literary texts, like archives, remain open to new entries, new artefacts and new content (Derecho 2006, p64). She claims that archontic texts are ‘always open and have the potential for infinite expansion’ (Derecho 2006, p65). She uses the idea of an archive as an analogy for the way in which texts are expanded across multiple platforms by multiple people. This process can be facilitated in numerous ways by a number of *transmedia players* (an adaptation of Dinehart’s (2010, p1) concept of the transmedial consumer as VUP (viewer/user/player)), including viewers and users. Furthermore, Derecho (2006) claims that central to this process is the idea that narratives should be understood collectively rather than definitively. That is, a collection of texts generically bound create an archive of meaning. This is comparable to the networked view of transmedia introduced in Chapter One of this thesis. From this perspective, expansive fan practices such as fan fiction can be constituted in the transmedia archive. As Derecho explains (2006, p64),
A literature that is archontic is a literature composed of texts that are archival in nature and that are impelled by the same archontic principle: that tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess.

A similar view is taken by Klastrup and Tosca (2004). In their conceptualisation of the ‘transmedial world’ they claim that the world’s actualisations can include not only sanctioned texts and products such as films, board games and amusement park rides, but also fan-produced works, such as fan fiction (Klastrup & Tosca 2004, p1)(referred to as ‘any prose retelling of stories and characters drawn from mass media content’ (Jenkins 2006a, p285)). This idea is built on the assumption that transmedial worlds should be approached as ‘worlds’, and not ‘texts’ (Klastrup & Tosca 2004, p4). Treating them as texts connotes systems of authority and sanctioned production. Treating them as worlds means that their construction can be shared across many levels of production. They further claim that traditional conceptions of transmedia storytelling, which focus on story rather than world, propose that the model works by producing gaps, comparable to transitional threshold, which cannot be filled by the reader/viewer, because ‘the necessary information lies outside the text, in another text’ (Jenkins refers to this as additive comprehension; 2006a) (Klastrup & Tosca 2004, p3). This assumption is oddly misplaced in their analysis, given their emphasis on the role of the fan in extending the storyworld; one could argue that it is precisely this phenomenon which invites participation with transmedia texts. Klastrup and Tosca assume that consumers will seek the ‘answers’ in another text, rather than create their own answer.

Chiefly, these perspectives posit that popular artefacts are constituted archivally via a networked spread of content. This means that transmedia storytelling is an organic process which invites the expansion of form by multiple parties; however, this does not take into account the demarcation of licensed properties from fan-produced works in a commercial context. Inherent in this discourse is the relationship of canon to fanon: ‘the events created by the fan community in a particular fandom and repeated pervasively throughout the fantext’ (Busse & Hellekson 2006, p9). Fanon emerges from the efforts of fan writers to pull elements of their own fiction into the ‘official story’. Whilst Derecho (2006) advocates a model of inclusion which posits that transmedia texts are constituted archivally, this approach is rarely adopted by proprietors of commercial properties; from a commercial perspective, fan writers are disempowered by legalistic notions of authorship, and corporate control over public meaning and cultural
connotations means consumers are ill-positioned to poach media content, while producers are benefited by copyright protection (Coombe 1998; McCardle 2003). As Rosemary Coombe (1998, p26) notes, ‘Increasingly, holders of intellectual property rights are socially and juridically endowed with monopolies over public meaning and the ability to control the cultural connotations of their corporate insignias’. From a networked perspective, this demonstrates how some nodes in the network have more power to influence the story structure than others. As Jenkins (2006a, p137) notes, current intellectual property rights laws are built to protect the media's investment in branded entertainment and so the owners of a production are in a position to quash artistic expression which is not aligned with the agenda of industry.

According to Derecho (2006, p64), these arguments are misrepresentative and the adjective archontic describes the intertextual relationship between fan fiction and texts from mass culture better than appropriative or derivative, since these terms announce property, ownership, and hierarchy; indeed, given the irregular nature of canon, many scholars have demonstrated difficulties inherent in designating complete interpretive control to copyright holders (Brooker 1999; Chaney & Liebler 2007; McKee 2004). Derecho claims that appropriation and derivation connote thieving and corruption, whereas archontic texts are not demarcated by definitive borders that can be transgressed. Texts which build upon existing texts are no less significant than their source material, and they do not violate the creativity, originality or legality of that genre. Rather, ‘they only add to that text’s archive, becoming a part of the archive and expanding it’ (Derecho 2006, p65). Whilst this perspective is innovative as a model for content co-creation, there are few practical examples of texts whose borders are ‘not demarcated’. Typically, commercial properties are built on licensed content which privileges the proprietors with rights to buy and sell content for a profit. Whilst the structured consumption perspective discussed in this chapter demonstrates some of the ways that proprietors attempt to exploit free labour from fans online, typically interpretive communities are negatively viewed in the entertainment industry because they threaten brand consistency by appropriating and recirculating content which contradicts the creative vision of the works license holder (see Carruthers 2004; Shefrin 2004).
Recently, transmedia practitioners have learnt to work with their audiences in an effort to harness engagement through collaborative participation. This practice can be theorised as *value co-creation*, described by Scott Walker, President at Brain Candy, as the process of inviting fans to contribute canonically to a transmedia experience (Walker cited in Johnson 2011). Walker uses the shared storyworld as a formative concept for describing commercial works which invite contributions from audiences. Whilst the concept of organic transmediation theorises a *process*, reflecting intuitive synergies between design and co-creation, Walker’s work is instrumental in demonstrating its practical applications. This approach positions fans as collaborative co-creators. For example, *World of Depleted* (2010-2011) – an online sandbox fiction – invites fans to contribute short films to the *World of Depleted* canon by responding to an official prologue posted to the site last year. The site claims that the best entries will be awarded canon status, while the rest will be archived on the site in a section where fans can use the ideas of *World of Depleted* (2010-2011) to create ‘alternate histories and creative adjustments to the framework of the world’ (*World Of Depleted*, 2010-2011).

In some cases, works which can be conceived of as fan-produced receive copyright protection. The incorporation of fan-produced works in the licensed text means that fans are rewarded for their investment in the story and production companies acquire a glut of free content for expanding the storyworld. Sometimes grassroots cultural practices are transformed and incorporated into the professional realm. For example, *Doctor Who* is written in part by fan writers turned pro (McKee 2004); however, in other instances, fans are invited to contribute to the text from within the cultural context of fandom. For example, *Pottermore* (2011-2012) invites fans of the *Harry Potter* franchise to help build new content for the series online in collaboration with the series’ author, but without professional credit.

According to Janet Murray (1997, (pp83-84)) this process becomes increasingly easier in digital environments because of the encyclopaedic capacity of electronic media. The digital age has brought with it renewed opportunities for participatory expression through online spaces, allowing fans to re-envision story arcs from popular culture in new and interesting ways. Online, fans are empowered to become grassroots producers. According to Murray (1997, p84), ‘the encyclopaedic capacity of the computer and the encyclopaedic expectation it arouses’ make it a ‘compelling medium for narrative art’.
As she explains, not only does it allow authors to tell stories from multiple vantage points and map story arcs across the Internet, but fans too can contribute to ongoing plotlines, creating an interwoven archive of stories and characters (Murray 1997, p85).

Some texts are more open to audience expansion in this respect than others. For example, open source gaming software allows gamers to integrate their fiction into the commercial product in a way that other media channels do not. Writers of fan fiction, on the other hand, cannot integrate their fiction seamlessly into the master narrative. Traditional media channels such as film and literature could thus be viewed as ‘closed source’; however, open source software which invites fan production such as ‘modding’ – a contraction of the term ‘game modification’, used to describe the development of game content by amateurs/fans enabled by open source software (Bainbridge & Tynan 2008, p352) – contradicts Derecho’s view because these kinds of fan production do not contribute to a transmedia story archivally, but rather expand content within a story mode. Whilst they can be considered expansive in so far as story is concerned, they cannot be considered transmedial due to their representation within an existing artefact rather expansion through a new one. Thus, not all forms of participation are necessarily archontic.

Dena (2004b) theorises these practices as a ‘participatory continuum/coordinate’ within a transmedia framework. She claims that the participatory continuum, otherwise referred to simply as the ‘Z’ continuum, accounts for the ‘various involvement humans have with a work’ (Dena 2004b, p7). In her analysis of ARGs, she explains that entry point into the game varies considerably depending on the user’s level of engagement. Channels and modes outside of the creator’s world, such as forums, fan sites, unauthorised websites and so on, offer the user alternative entry points which can enhance their experience of the game (Dena 2004b, p7). Dena (2008) describes these as ‘player created tiers’. According to Dena (2004b, p8), we can divide game tiers into those that are sanctioned – triggered by the designer/producer – and those that are unsanctioned, such as fan fiction produced by amateur fans, or as this thesis describes them, structured or organic. As Dena (2008) explains, unlike most other transmedia narratives, ARGs invite users to create new entry points into the game based on their competencies and levels of interaction. Also, much like traditional games, the players are required to complete tasks and solve puzzles in order to reveal the next step in the
trail. If all of the players of an ARG decided not to play, then the narrative would cease to exist or at least stop midway; ‘the narrative utterly relies on the participation of its players to develop’ (Losowsky 2005, p6). According to Dena (2008, p44), content created by players becomes tiers for a massive audience to experience the work. Furthermore, ARGs allow player creativity to be built into the structure of the plot. Critically, this means that the distinction between sanctioned and unsanctioned tiers is sometimes blurred. Writers and producers of ARGs including Sean Stewart (*The Beast*, 2001) and Brooke Thompson (*Lockjaw*, 2002; *Metacortechs*, 2003) have redeveloped plot lines in response to player activity (Losowsky 2005), whilst Vivendi Universal Games observes their user’s comments on the company’s online forum and adjusts future game development in accordance. In fact, most producers of ARGs (known by players as ‘puppetmasters’) create storyworld structures which allow some flexibility of plot development. According to Dena (2004b, p8), as a result of this process ‘unsanctioned comments[s] become sanctioned and the player is elevated to pre-publication play-tester and co-creator’.

Jenkins (2006a, p21) claims that ARGs also encourage players to create new media tools and literacies which they can use to process information in the game. He explains that transmedia storytelling emerges as a new aesthetic in response to media convergence which depends on the ‘active participation of knowledge communities’ to construct meaning. According to Jenkins (2006a, p21), in order to fully experience any fictional world it is imperative that consumers collaborate to create a richer entertainment experience. Creation, according to Jenkins, is just as important as consumption in the acquisition of media literacy. He claims,

> Just as we would not traditionally assume that someone is literate if they can read but not write, we should not assume that someone possesses media literacy if they can consume but not express themselves (Jenkins 2006a, p176).

However, Apperley (2004) proposes that new kinds of literacies based on accessing media across multiple channels have the potential to be exclusionary. When constructed in light of the fact that the internet is becoming increasingly important in this context (through its functionality to create story modes for world-building or hosting ARGs), it becomes apparent that groups from underdeveloped nations cannot participate in these new media circuits as easily as others. Therefore, with
new paradigms of cross-media entertainment come new forms of global inequalities (Apperley 2004, p2). Both Apperley and Will Brooker (2001) point to the unevenness of transmedial consumption based on relative access to money, resources and technology. Both suggest that audiences who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds are limited by their budgets and restricted access to technology such as the internet, and are thus unable to participate in the transmedial extension of commercial properties. Jenkins (2006a, p116) acknowledges that the experience of convergence is uneven, claiming that,

... the political economy of media convergence does not map symmetrically around the world: audiences outside “developed” economies often have access only to the films....

Furthermore, transmedia storytelling requires the activity of the reader to traverse multiple story modes. Unlike transfiction (described in Chapter One of this thesis) (Dena 2004b, p3) transmedia requires navigation between channels. Navigation between media is a vital aspect of transmedia storytelling which requires the user to ‘move physically and conceptually to another system of interaction’ (Dena 2004a, p4). In other words, one of the ways in which transmedia storytelling can be distinguished from other forms of storytelling is that it actively invites participation from the audience in order to navigate the storyworld.

Critically, whilst the perspectives discussed in this chapter contribute to a theorisation of transmedia consumption, none offer practical or qualitative insights. Both the structured consumption and participatory play approaches are instrumental to the field and offer uniquely different perspectives on consumption; however, both assume that the audience is known and thus that theory may be prescriptive. Furthermore, such analyses do not distinguish the multiple modes of use enabled by transmedia formats. This demonstrates two critical gaps in research in this field: firstly, a lack of practical research on multiple modes of use enabled by transmedia storytelling; and secondly, a lack of known distinguishable characteristics associated with a single form of use characterised by transmedial consumption. This chapter marks the first step in addressing these issues by theorising modes of use associated with transmedia storytelling towards the aim of characterising transmedial consumption based on what is known descriptively in the field.
Entry Point, Mode Preference and Levels of Engagement

In addressing the ways in which media users engage with transmedia texts, one of the most significant areas of discussion is entry point, and its relationship to levels of engagement and mode preference (Abba 2009; Dena 2008; Jenkins 2006a; Örnebring 2007). Discussing this addresses how the audience encounters the text, their mode preference and the coupling of immersion (used in this thesis to describe the extent of story mode consumption, i.e. immersion in the transmedia network) and the engagement spectrum, thus addressing the multiple modes of use enabled by transmedia formats. This section discusses the importance of these issues as well as demonstrates the relationship between them.

Given that transmedia stories offer narrative components across a variety of story modes, media users are faced with multiple narrative ‘entry points’, or story modes, through which to engage with the franchise. The process of building a story over time and across multiple story modes thus creates multiple engagement points. As Jenkins (2006a, p97) notes regarding The Matrix franchise,

> The Wachowski brothers played the transmedia game very well, putting out the original film first to stimulate interest, offering up a few Web comics to sustain the hard-core fan’s hunger for more information, launching the anime in anticipation of the second film, releasing the computer game alongside it to surf the publicity, bringing the whole cycle to a conclusion with The Matrix Revolutions, and then turning the whole mythology over to the players of the massively multiplayer online game. Each step along the way built on what has come before, while offering new points of entry.

Essentially, the production of a transmedia project involves building the narrative over time and creating the opportunity for existing media users to experience new narrative elements across different story modes, and for new media users to enter the narrative via alternative points in the story arc, and through the story mode of their choosing. The consequences of this are numerous, particularly as they relate to the influence of narrative design. For example, if an audience member chose to enter the Matrix franchise via the gaming title, Enter The Matrix, they would lack the relevant story information to contextualise their mission in the game, which is intimately tied to the first film; however, Jenkins suggests that good transmedia should be comprised of multiple linked story modes which exist as part of an overarching story, but yet which
can also be consumed in isolation. From this view, audience members are empowered by their choices because it allows them to consume the story via an entry-point of their choosing. Furthermore, this suggests that consumers are enabled to ignore the transmedia structure if they prefer only to engage with the story mode in isolation, i.e. they may choose not to pursue the story beyond their initial contact with a certain story mode. Audiences needs only pursue the story as deeply as they desire. Furthermore, they are enabled to construct their view of the story world based on the media they prefer or feel more comfortable engaging with.

The transmedia model thus provides points of entry which are accessible to different media users. This means that over time, as the franchise expands, media users who might not have engaged with the franchise in the past can approach the franchise through a narrative point offered through an alternative story mode. For example, as the previous chapter discussed, media users who might not enjoy video games but are fans of The Lord of the Rings movies might experiment with the title on a gaming platform (Watrall & Shaw n.d, p1). Comparably, a media user who did not enjoy The Lord of the Rings films but enjoys engaging with media on a gaming platform might experiment with the franchise through that story mode.

Chiefly, what this suggests is that, whilst consumers are enabled to view story modes as isolated, mode of use is also changeable. Whilst transmedia storytelling can appeal to multiple markets it also has the potential to transform markets by encouraging transmedial consumption. This is distinct from traditional franchising models which aim only to cater for multiple markets based on the popularity of a series or brand. Transmedia storytelling is an attempt to create an integrated experience which encourages audiences to consume across media, in a networked fashion; however, contrary to this assumption, the use of multiple story modes can be problematic. In a recent analysis of the BBC franchise Spooks Elizabeth Jane Evans (2008, p198) revealed that because the series offers content through both television and games, the audience’s level of activity or passivity varies throughout the different elements of the transmedia narrative depending on the level of interactivity offered. Thus the audience is required to shift modes whilst moving through the series. While game play offers users the opportunity to explore the storyworld of the franchise, not all users are necessarily comfortable with such freedoms. Evans (Evans 2008, p198) proposed that
consumers of transmedia drama transfer values *between* media; therefore audience members expect the same experience from gaming as they get from television. In other words, the transitional spaces between modes can be difficult to traverse in light of the user’s prior experience. What emerged from her research was that fans who played the game enjoyed engaging with the series’ characters, but they did not themselves want to become a part of the series’ diagesis (Evans 2008, p208). As Evans (2008, p209) explains,

> These participants do not want to step inside the fictional world of Spooks ... They want the fictional characters from the series to remain and therefore they reject the kind of viewing position offered by the games ... they want to experience it [the series] through the actions of a third party.

According to Evans (2008), instead of wanting to insert their own identity into the series’ diagesis, fans of *Spooks* wanted to maintain a detached viewing position and enjoy the interactive text as a separate, fictional world; much the same way as they enjoyed the series on television. Control over fictional characters is welcomed, but only if those fictional characters are not replaced by themselves (Evans 2008, p210). What this reveals is that consumers may not be as comfortable about shifting their consumption patterns across media as traditional theories of transmedia storytelling would suggest. This contradicts the belief that the strength of transmedia storytelling lies in the ability of each medium to ‘do what it does best’. The ability of each medium to ‘do what it does best’ is negated, in this case, by the user’s familiarity with a particular story mode. For example, viewers of the television series *Spooks* might be avid fans of that particular mode, having never experienced the levels of interactivity offered through game play. This demonstrates that there is a desire among some audiences for values to be transferred between media depending on their familiarity with certain story modes.

Again, this points to the importance of entry point and mode preference in the study of transmedia consumption. A recent study by Bong-Won Park and Jae-Hyeon Ahn (2010) supports this, indicating that flows from television to movie formats are more likely to inspire trans-purchases (the purchasing of content on another platform/story mode) than flows in the opposite direction. Like Evans’ study, their study articulates the importance of entry point and mode preference due to its emphasis on migration. Their findings
suggest that television is better suited for cultivating engagement than film, thus the use of television as an entry point to a storyworld is more likely to inspire migratory consumption than other formats. From a networked perspective, television series could thus be seen as particularly strong nodes for transmedia networks. Findings from both studies demonstrate the need for research which interrogates engagement with transmedia narratives and the study of transmedial consumption; that is, dedicated consumption of a single story across multiple story modes which implies the movement of an audience. This thesis addresses this need directly.

Örnebring (2007) proposes a model of entry point which champions textual design over volitional engagement. In Chapter One of this thesis, this model was discussed as it relates to the economic logic of transmedia storytelling. The relevance of this perspective is renewed in the present chapter as it pertains to mode preference. Örnebring (2007, p448) claims that transmedia storytelling is built around the concept of an ur-text – a central text, or story mode around which other texts are built; from a networked perspective: the central node. This idea presupposes that transmedia storytelling ‘leads’ the media user through the narrative according to a hierarchy of meaning. To that end, this suggests that inherent in the design of the text is the imagined performance of the user. This is similar to Umberto Eco’s (1979) concept of the implicit reader – based on the idea that every text is constructed around a reader implied.

What emerges from this discussion are divergent models of the consumption of transmedia texts. While one points to mode preference as the key indicator of how transmedia narratives are consumed, the other champions textual design. Implicit in this discussion is an active/passive audience debate. Given the multi-modal nature of transmedia storytelling, there are multiple routes of consumption which media users can pursue. While there is evidence to suggest that new trends in media usage are increasingly defined by fragmentation, interactivity and customisation (Cover 2006; Jenkins 1992, 2006a; Tewksbury 2005; Webster, 2005 ), there are also compelling arguments for the propagation of popular culture across texts to a mass audience to harness profit (Bolin 2007; Kinder 1991; Wasko 1994). This thesis does not seek to resolve these debates, rather it argues for the bifurcation of media users. Essentially, what this means is that both arguments are true. Tiziana Terranova (2004) describes this as resulting from the emergence of networked cultures and the internet. She claims,
The Internet ... seems to capture (and reinforce) a feature of network culture as a whole – the way it combines masses, segments and microsegments within a common informational dimension ... this peculiar combination of masses and segments does not produce a peaceful coexistence of two different modes ... A networked mass displays a kind of active power of differentiation. It is still a mass, but it cannot be made to form a stable majority around some kind of average quality or consensus (Terranova 2004, pp153-154).

This thesis seeks to extend this argument beyond the context of the internet and the affordance of digital technology and recontextualise it within a broader discussion of transmedia. One of the aims of this chapter is to identify how multiple markets respond to transmedia storytelling differently, based on a networked conceptualisation which implicates the spread of content across multiple story modes. For this reason, one of the key indicators which this thesis uses in differentiating media use is mode preference, defined in this context as the degree to which the consumer demonstrates preference for particular story modes (e.g. a preference only to play games). This allows for a typology of use which covers a range of preferences.

However, this criterion alone does not suffice to describe the complex behaviours associated with contemporary media use; particularly in the context of transmediation. Despite the implications of transmediation on entry point and mode preference as defined through story mode preference, there are other defining elements which must be considered in order to postulate a model of transmedia use. In addition to looking at entry point in the consumption of transmedia narratives – so marked because it relates to the distinction between single story mode engagement and transmedial consumption – one of the most commonly discussed issues pertaining to consumer behaviour is level of engagement. The idea of engagement has been written about extensively by a number of scholars working within the field of audience research (Askwith 2007; Jenkins 2006a; Livingstone 2008; Livingstone & Das 2009, Russell & Puto 1999), and currently there are several different models which attempt to describe it. The interest in engagement as an area of academic study emerged initially from a need to find a more effective business model for advertisers to reach audiences. In the past, the effectiveness of broadcast advertising was evaluated in terms of mere exposure. However, as Ivan Askwith (2007, p23) points out,
This traditional emphasis on reaching as many viewers as possible has become more problematic as new technologies and distribution channels emerge, fragmenting the mass audience and intensifying the competition for viewer attention. In response, the television industry has started to embrace the notion that “engaged” audiences may prove more valuable than large audiences.

The same principle can be applied to transmedia storytelling. According to a report published by the Magazine Publishers of America titled Engagement: Understanding Consumers’ Relationships with Media (2006, p5), due to changes in consumer expectations based on new technologies that allow them to consume media when and where they want, audiences are using various means, to ‘keep out advertising that does not connect with them’. Whilst transmedia storytelling works to appeal to multiple markets it is not always successful in attracting a single audience – in this case, to consume transmedially. Furthermore, for this reason engagement is particularly important in the context of transmedia storytelling because of the unique demands placed on audiences to consume these texts. It is for these reasons along with those pointed out by Askwith (2007) that advertisers have needed to aim at increasing engagement levels rather than viewer metrics. This in turn has led to greater interest from scholars in how audiences develop relationships with media.

Askwith (2007, p49) suggests that engagement can be defined as an overall measure describing both ‘the depth and the nature of an individual’s specific investments in the object [a given media, content or advertising brand]’. He claims that engagement can take a range of different forms and reflects a number of different needs and desires. He negotiates these multiple needs by defining engagement through multiple indicators, which include consumption, participation, identification and motivations (Askwith 2007, p49). Cristel Antonia Russell and Christopher P. Puto (1999) suggest a different model which distinguishes engagement from other forms of consumer-text relationships by describing it as a measure of connectedness. They claim that connectedness is defined as ‘an intense relationship between audience and television program that extends beyond the television watching experience’ (original emphasis, Russell & Puto 1999, p397). They explain that connectedness as a form of engagement can be differentiated from other forms of involvement with the text, based on the degree to which it becomes intimately connected to the individuals’ personal and social experiences. In this sense, connectedness is defined as the contribution of the text to an
individuals’ personal and social identity, and is the primary indicator of engagement (Russell & Puto 1999, pp397-398).

Alex Chisholm et al. (2002) propose a model of engagement known as the ‘consumer expressions’ model which incorporates both the traditional advertising metric of ‘viewer impressions’ with a new system of ‘consumer expressions’. The metric layers qualitative information such as context, and the viewers’ involvement and attentiveness, on top of quantitative data such as exposure and satisfaction, to create a measure that would,

...convey the ability of a media vehicle to deliver an actual impression and have the opportunity to elicit an enhanced engagement, perception, recognition, or response (Chisholm et al. 2002, p16).

This approach is unique in that it incorporates both traditional and contemporary audience research methods in order to develop a holistic account of audience engagement. Other scholars, such as Sonia Livingstone and Ranjana Das (2009, p5) conclude that a multitude of engagement indicators are expressed through the concepts of interpretation and literacy; essentially, how meanings are produced and reproduced. Whilst each measure of engagement is slightly different, there is a consistent trend in the research to define engagement through a variety of indicators. This suggests two things; firstly, that engagement is a notoriously slippery concept to define; and secondly, that engagement is expressed by more than a single behaviour or action. Rather, it should be understood as the expression of a relationship to media content which can be characterised by multiple behaviours and attitudes.

Engagement is particularly important in the context of transmedia storytelling due to the sustained levels of interest it requires from the audience. In fact, Jenkins claims that the commercial failure of The Matrix franchise can be attributed to the fact that it placed too much responsibility on the audience to engage with the narrative across multiple story modes. Despite its artistic and aesthetic prowess, the failure of The Matrix to engage consumers in a fully transmedial experience can be attributed to the fact that it places unreasonable demands on its viewing audience. As Jenkins (2003b, p1) explains,

You are always going to feel inadequate before the Matrix because it expects more than any individual spectator can provide. That is its strength and its limitations.
Despite his enthusiasm for the project, Jenkins (2006a, p96) concedes ‘no film franchise has ever made such demands on its consumers’. Whilst the filmic components of The Matrix were a commercial success, the ancillary content failed to attract significant attention. The original feature film, The Matrix (1999), was extremely successful, taking $460,279,930 worldwide at the box office. The second, The Matrix Reloaded (2003) took a staggering $738,576,929 (the-numbers.com, 2009). In comparison, Enter the Matrix (2003) enjoyed only moderate success, selling 4.83 million units globally across four gaming platforms (vgchartz.com, 2012). What this suggests is that consumption of transmedia texts is uneven. In the case of The Matrix franchise, it is possible that the transmedia network was only substantiated by a small group of people. Furthermore, it is difficult to measure whether audiences for the game were the same audiences who accessed the films. Whilst box office figures indicate that a large audience accessed the films, engagement levels could not sustain interest across multiple story modes for most viewers.

This is particularly important for the study of transmedia storytelling for which there is very little audience research. Whilst Jenkins (2003a, p2) claims that the most successful transmedia franchises emerge when ‘a single creator or creative unit maintains control over the franchise’, the failure of The Matrix as a transmedia entity suggests that this alone cannot sustain mass interest. The comparative lack of commercial interest in ancillary content such as The Animatrix (2003) and Enter the Matrix (2003) suggests that only a small minority engaged with The Matrix in the way it was intended: as a transmedia experience. Comparably, Kim Newman (cited in Perryman 2008, p23) claims that the collapse of the BBC’s original Doctor Who franchise (which enjoyed a long tradition of cross-media storytelling) might have been a result of the series being driven into ‘niche cultdom’. In other words, the franchise became too squarely aimed at ‘hardcore fans’. Subsequently, mainstream fans may have been shut out due to the relative complexity of the overarching transmedia narrative. Jenkins suggests that The Matrix franchise suffered a similar fate, claiming that the film relied too heavily on the initiative of a collective audience to look at the work from many different perspectives and compile information pieces themselves. Creating an incentive for fans to move across multiple story modes is important; however, even the coordinated efforts behind The Matrix were not enough to inspire mass popularity. As Jenkins (2006a, p134) claims,
They [transmedia stories] demand way too much effort for “Joe Popcorn”, for the harried mom or the working stiff who has just snuggled into the couch after a hard day at the office.

For the mainstream viewer, The Matrix franchise demands more than any individual can offer (Jenkins 2003b, p1). Jenkins (2006a, p130) explains that while there is an economic incentive to move in the direction of transmedia franchises, Hollywood is limited in its ability to capitalise on this trend if audiences are not ready to shift their mode of consumption; however, it may be possible to use transmedia design to encourage a change to this effect. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

What this suggests is that level of engagement is an important criterion for describing how transmedia narratives are consumed. Academic discourse surrounding engagement tends to focus on higher level engagement consumers such as fans. These discussions centre on the activities and behaviours which distinguish fans from other consumers; that is, engagement is relative. In the context of fandom, many of the activities associated with high engagement are expressions of participatory culture (Brooker 2002; Jenkins 1992, 2006a; Lewis 2004). These include: the production of fan fiction, including community review; costume play, or cosplay (the practice of wearing elaborate costumes modelled on characters from manga, anime, or video games; Thorn 2004, p175); and ‘modding’, or game modification. Despite the presentation of these activities, Jenkins claims engagement can be an elusive concept to define. In his attempt to do so, he claims that an engaged viewer can be described as follows:

... an engaged viewer has a high degree of loyalty to a particular program, is attentive during the broadcast, may talk about the program content with others, and preserves the relationship through consuming additional transmedial materials (Jenkins 2006a, p324).

The problem with Jenkins’ definitional concept is that it champions an ur-text as the catalyst for further consumption and also assumes that the ur-text will be the same for all consumers. This contradicts the ideas of scholars such as Dena (2006) and Derecho (2006) who claim that each text should be valued equally for its unique storytelling capabilities and that texts which build upon existing texts are no less significant than their source material. It is more likely that consumers enter the network via different
entry points; indeed, this is viewed as one of the strengths of transmedia storytelling. Furthermore, his use of the word ‘broadcast’ assumes that in most cases the ur-text will be static. In doing so he effectively excludes from this discussion interactive texts such as games, and world-building components such as interactive websites and ARGs. For the purpose of this thesis, Jenkins’ definition of engagement is adapted to include attentive consumption (as opposed to attention during the broadcast), media literacy, participation and ‘extra-textual’ activities (these concepts, along with the reasoning for their inclusion, are discussed at length below). It retains degree of loyalty. Five indicators of engagement are thus used in this thesis, which include loyalty, attentive consumption, media literacy, participation and ‘extra-textual’ activities (although not presented in that order). Furthermore, the new definition does not discriminate between story modes. That is, this thesis divorces levels of engagement from the notion of an ur-text. This does not, in effect, mean that some consumers will not choose to access the story through a primary or ur-text; however, by divorcing engagement from the notion of an ur-text this thesis allows a broader discussion of engagement which accounts for multiple media preferences.

Another of the key limitations associated with Jenkins’ conception of engagement is that it is built on the binary of ‘engaged’ and ‘not engaged’. This seems overly simplistic and thus it is proposed that a spectrum of engagement would in fact be more useful. Askwith (2007, p25) elaborates on this, claiming that consumers’ relationships with texts are ‘complex and multidimensional’, and thus it is difficult to describe them using the easy binary of ‘watching and not watching’. In order to measure engagement on a spectrum, it is necessary to describe in some detail the indicators which are used to define engagement. Furthermore, this means that individual audience members will present different combinations of the engagement indicators and in varying degrees, thus qualifying the scale. In the following section this chapter provides a thorough description of the indicators for a spectrum of engagement as they are used in the context of the present research, as well as justification for their use. These include loyalty, attentive consumption, media literacy, participation and ‘extra-textual’ activities.

Loyalty
Loyalty, like engagement, is an elusive concept. In the context of Jenkins’ work, loyalty is defined through the identification of a distinct consumer groups known as ‘loyals’. According to Jenkins (2006a, p329), loyals are:

... the most dedicated viewers of a particular series, often those for whom the program is a favourite. Loyals are more likely to return each week, more likely to watch the entire episode, more likely to seek out additional information through other media, and more likely to recall brands advertised during the series.

This description is limited in a way similar to his description of engagement. It assumes that the ur-text need be static, and it does not measure loyalty across media. Rather, it places broadcast media as the primary form with which loyalty can be expressed, and views consumption of additional media as symptomatic of this loyalty. A holistic description of loyalty should consider all media as artefacts of devotion, including those not necessarily associated with the broadcast model, such as video games and websites. Furthermore, loyalty can be expressed in a number of ways, of which attention to an ‘entire episode’ is only one manifestation. This section seeks to elucidate the role loyalty plays as an engagement factor and how this influences transmedial consumption.

Scholars working in the field of transmedia storytelling, such as Mark Andrejevic (2008) and Bolin (2007, p246), claim that transmedia design encourages consumer loyalty because the consumer is forced to traverse multiple platforms in order to engage with the narrative in a meaningful way. According to Andrejevic (2008, p31), this trend is often observed in the television industry whereby producers attempt to capitalise on fan loyalty by creating interactive components to accompany the broadcast series, such as official websites, online games and behind-the-scenes footage and interviews. Implicit in this statement is an assumption that dedication to a particular medium or narrative will encourage loyalty to the story brand across multiple story modes. Evans’ (2008) analysis of Spooks fans suggests that this is not always the case; however, the very fact that fans of the series were willing to experiment with the intellectual property on another story mode – regardless of their assessment of the experience – suggests that their loyalty to the series influenced them to engage with the text in a transmedia environment.

In marketing research, the term ‘loyalty’ is used to describe a process, or series of processes, which involves selecting a particular brand as preferable to other brand
offerings. This includes the development of cognitive, conative and affective tendencies (comparable to Jenkins’ (2006a, p319) conception of ‘affective economics’, a term used to describe the emotional commitment consumers put in brands as a central motivation for consumption;) which lead to a higher likelihood of purchasing (Jacoby & Chestnut 1978; Oliver 1999). Whilst the marketing of material goods is not directly comparable to the marketing of entertainment goods, businesses understand the profit impact of having a loyal consumer base (Oliver 1999, p33). More recent research in this area describes trust as a crucial element in the development of brand loyalty (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán 2001; Singh & Sirdeshmukh 2000; Sirdeshmukh et al. 2002). According to Elena Delgado-Ballester and José Luis Munuera-Alemán (2001, p2) ‘trust is a key variable in the development of an enduring desire to maintain a relationship’. They explain ‘trust is a feeling of security held by the consumer that the brand will meet his/her consumption expectations’ (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001, p3). What this implies is that consumers who develop a relationship with the brand will be more likely to become loyal consumers.

Securing consumer loyalty is crucial in a transmedia environment because audiences are asked to commit themselves to content across multiple story modes. This requires far greater effort than consuming media in isolation. In theory, consumer loyalty should help breed migratory behaviour. This has been explored at great depth in contemporary fan studies. Within this context, scholars seek to explore why and how fans express loyalty to a particular text or storyworld. Unlike the marketing perspective, the term ‘brand’ is not often used in this context unless the author intends to draw an economic analysis specifically (see Brooker 2001, 2002; Hills 2002 and Jenkins 1992, 2006a); however, the attachment process associated with brand loyalty is comparable in some respects to loyalty in media fans. According to Jenkins (1992, p10), some of the most popular stereotypes associated with fans suggest that fans will consume almost anything associated with the object of their fandom, will devote their lives to the cultivation of ‘worthless’ knowledge, and place undue emphasis on devalued cultural artefacts. In fact, scholars such as Matt Hills (2002), David Giles, (2000) and Daniel Cavicchi (1998) claim fan cultures are comparable to religious cultures. According to Giles (2000, p135), the roots of devotion in both fans and religious devotees are ‘remarkably similar’. What this suggests is that fans display the same kind of loyalty, towards a text
or brand, commonly associated with religious fanaticism (this is discussed in more
detail in Chapter Three of this thesis).

The discourse on loyalty discussed here suggests that loyalty is a facet of high level
engagement due to the commitment necessary in order to foster loyal attachments. This
is often expressed by discriminating between brands and stories based on personal
interest. Due to the high level of engagement it implies – particularly for transmedial
consumption – loyalty is an important indicator of engagement in this discussion.

**Attentive Consumption**

The second indicator is attentive consumption. According to Jenkins (2006a, p324), an
engaged viewer is ‘attentive during the broadcast’. Jenkins’ definition of engagement
thus identifies attentive consumption as one of its key indicators; however, it is unclear
what is meant by this. As John Fiske (1987, pp73-74) rightly states,

> ... television must be capable of being watched with different modes of attention.
> Viewers may watch television as a primary activity when they are “glued to the
> screens”; they may... reluctantly give it second place in their attention while they do
> something else; or they may have it on as background while they read the paper,
> converse, or do homework; it gains their full attention only when an item makes a
> strong and successful bid for their interest.

While this assessment discusses the habits of television viewers specifically, one can
extrapolate, based on Fiske’s analysis, to the behaviours associated with other forms of
media. For example, the reader of a comic or novel could skim the content if they were
not highly engaged, or movie viewers could as easily give a film second place in their
attention whilst they attend to something else, either in the home or in the cinema itself.
Therefore, attention cannot be measured through ratings metrics, since these methods
only reveal data pertaining to the media itself; they do not measure the relationship the
consumer shares with the media. As Askwith (2007, p41) explains, ‘the practice ... can
encompass passive monitoring, rapt immersion, and everything in between’. For
example, while the passive consumer might switch on their television every night, they
might nevertheless ‘reluctantly give it second place in their attention while they do
something else’ (Fiske, 1987, p73). Conversely, the fan of a television series might only
engage with the program once a week during the scheduled airing; however the level at which they engage with the program could be seen to be higher, or, as Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998) suggest, more specialised. For example, they might engage with the text in other ways which extend beyond the mere viewing experience, such as attending fan conventions. Clearly, measures of engagement reveal more about the complex nature of consumption than frequency measures alone. What Fiske rightly identifies is that neither proximity nor exposure to a given text (or indeed frequency of proximity or exposure) necessarily lead to ‘attentive consumption’.

According to Askwith (2007, p30), one of the ways in which we can measure attentiveness is through the media users’ ability to recall content-related details after viewing/consuming. This implies a correlation between attentiveness and absorption. Therefore, one can assume that attentive consumption involves committing content to memory. It follows then that attentive consumption can be defined as consumption which leads to the internalisation of textual content which can be recalled, and it is thus indicative of high engagement. This practice facilitates profound emotional investment in the text and an encyclopaedic knowledge of related material (Akpinar & Wennström 2006, p48). Transmedial consumption allows fans to enhance their knowledge of the text by engaging with in-world material across multiple story modes. This allows them to invest in and accumulate cultural assets which are perceived as valuable in the fan community: knowledge of the text. Therefore attentive consumption is an expression of engagement which both facilitates and reflects the accumulation of cultural capital. Whilst it is not the aim of this thesis to measure attentive consumption, it is an important facet of engagement and thus instrumental to theorising modes of use which are associated with high levels of engagement.

**Media Literacy**

The third indicator is media literacy. This indicator offers an important dimension to the present analysis because of its relevance in the field. Recent work by media scholars, including Jenkins (1992, 2006a), Jim Gee (2003) and notably Livingstone (2008) and Livingstone and Das (2009), support this idea, suggesting that media literacy is
becoming increasingly important as a part of the engagement discourse. According to Livingstone and Das (2009), when considering consumer engagement we need to widen our perspective from the analysis of interpretation at the interface of text and reader, and focus instead on literacy. They claim,

Literacy makes us ask, what does the reader or user bring to bear on the process of interpretation; here we point to the social literacies or new literacies theorists to situate audiences in time and space, and to recognise that literacy is culturally and historically conditioned, not simply a matter of individual cognition. Literacy also implies a text to be read, raising questions of legibility – what interpretations are afforded, what knowledge is expected, what possibilities are enabled or impended (Livingstone & Das 2009, p6).

This suggests that meaning-formation occurs at the point of contact between reader and text, based on what both contribute to the process. Livingstone (2008, p1) argues that most work addressing people’s engagement with media is not framed in terms of audiences, but rather in terms of literacies. According to Livingstone (2008, p3), the notion of ‘literacy’ is better suited than ‘audiences’ to describe the way people engage with today’s media because it accounts for increases in diversification, convergence and complexity. Jenkins offers a similar perspective, placing literacy at the centre of a paradigm shift which sees the media sphere redefining itself in the face of new technologies and Web 2.0 sensibilities. He claims ‘contradictions, confusions, and multiple perspectives’ should be anticipated at this juncture (Jenkins 2006a, p176). This shift, comprising new technologies and participatory cultures online, is creating new opportunities based on media literacy skills (Aufderheide 1997; Buckingham 2003; Christ & Potter 1998; Jenkins 2006a). Jenkins claims that in this context, literacy is not only about what we can do with printed matter, but also about how we use other media. Chiefly, this pertains to the user’s ability not only to read, but to express themself; in other words, the audience’s ability to produce as well as consume media.

Critically, there are barriers to literacy depending on access to relevant media resources. This means that whilst literacy is becoming increasingly important to the field of audience researcher, it also points to the unevenness of media access. For some audience members, engaging with media may require them to gain literacy over time, thus limiting their involvement with the text and possibly their entry into the community that surrounds it. For others, the required literacy may be impossible to acquire, thus
disabling their ability to consume altogether. Media literacy is thus less easily expressed than any other indicator in the spectrum, which points to the significant variation between audience members in terms of how they express their engagement. This should also serve as a reminder that engagement is formed via a relationship between the user and the text, where both influence this interaction by enabling or disabling certain modes of using and consuming. In considering this, it is important to be mindful that because literacy implicates both reader and text, it cannot be reduced to an analysis of the competencies or skills of the reader alone. Livingstone (2008, p6) claims that to do so would obscure the question of whether the texts themselves enable or impede creative or critical use. Thus, not only does the literacy indicator deal with the importance of context in the process of engagement, but it also implicates both reader and text in this process. As Livingstone (2009, p79) explains: ‘engaging with symbolic texts rests on a range of analytical competencies, social practices and material circumstances’. In particular, transmedia storytelling requires audiences to utilise multiple media competencies in order to engage with the story across multiple modes. The fact that both text and reader help to shape literacy suggests that control lies not entirely in the hands of the reader, but is shared across structures of production and consumption, and therefore implicates both producer and consumer. Contrary to the structured consumption approach, this suggests that power structures are shared across the network. The present research draws on the idea that the notion of literacy means to ask: what does the reader or user bring to bear on the processes of interpretation? and; what interpretations are afforded, what knowledge is expected, and what possibilities are enabled or impeded? (Livingstone & Das 2009, p6).

**Participation**

The fourth indicator is participation. This idea stems from the active audience tradition which posits that consumers are not ‘passive dupes’, and that modes of use extend beyond mere consumption of the text (Fiske 1987). According to Jenkins (2006a, p331), participation can be defined as ‘forms of audience engagement that are shaped by cultural and social protocols rather than by the technology itself’. Participation is usually linked to the idea of participatory culture; a facet of a broader sub-culture defined by Jenkins (2006a) as ‘convergence culture’. He explains that participatory
culture is built on the idea that fans and consumers are invited to ‘actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content’, and he describes five distinct dimensions of this culture as follows:

... its relationship to a particular mode of reception; its role in encouraging viewer activism; its function as an interpretive community; its particular traditions of cultural production; and its status as an alternative social community (Jenkins 1992, p2).

As a means of exploring participatory practice, the concept should first be delineated from interactivity. While the two may seem related terms, there are important differences between the two which work to explain why one is included as an indicator of engagement and the other is not. The term ‘interactivity’ has long been associated with the activity of computers which accept user input while a program is running (Aarseth 1997, p48). From a narratological perspective, it is described as ‘a response to a deliberate user action’, and so again implies the use of technology (Ryan 2004b, p338). The two phrases are often used interchangeably; however interactivity and participation can be positioned as forms of user engagement defined by technology and culture/community respectively. Scholars such as Jenkins (2006a) and Tim Berners-Lee (1999) are critical of claims that interactivity is synonymous with participation, and suggest that it is important to draw distinctions between the two. As Jenkins (2006a, p137) explains,

Initially, the computer offered expanded opportunities for interacting with media content ... it was relatively easy for media companies to commodify and control what took place. Increasingly, though, the Web has become a site of consumer participation that includes many unauthorised and unanticipated ways of relating to media content.

Participation, then, can be conceptualised as a form of engagement which is both consumer-driven and culturally-oriented, while interactivity can be conceptualised as a form of structured consumption which is author-driven and technologically-oriented. Transmedia storytelling invites both; however, interactivity is not an accurate indicator of engagement. In fact, Aarseth (1997, pp50-51) claims that the term ‘interactivity’ is so overused in social research that it has become meaningless in the context of textual analysis. What this implies is that while participation is voluntary, interactivity is built into the structure of the text. It is inevitable as a part of the users’ experience of the text,
and therefore does not imply greater levels of engagement. It is for this reason that this thesis considers participation, not interactivity, as an indicator of engagement.

Participation is characterised through various social and cultural phenomena, including machinima (derived from the term ‘machine cinema’, this practice involves the creation of animated movies in real-time using computer gaming software) (Lowood 2006), cosplay and fan fiction. In many ways, these activities require certain literacy skills and so the same limitations presented in Media Literacy may apply. Nonetheless, these activities are constituted as facets of engagement by various academics (Hills 2002; Jenkins 1992, 2006a; Shefrin 2004; Thomas 2006), and the discourse surrounding them implies that participatory consumption is generally exercised by high level engagement consumers exclusively. The recent attention given to participatory culture stems from the evolution of digital technology coupled with networked communications, allowing consumers access to a potentially global platform from which they can enact their participation with the text. Participation can also be appropriative or performative. For example, the annual cosplay competition at Australia’s Supanova, a popular culture expo for fans of science fiction, pulp movies and gaming, demonstrates the performative aspects of participatory culture in a playful and competitive environment. Whilst some participatory practices, such as writing fan fiction, have existed as a way of participating with mass media texts since at least the 1930s (Thomas 2006, p226), digital technology such as the internet has provided a space where audiences can more easily participate with media content, and researchers can study these phenomena.

According to Hills (2002, p74), fan-produced works represent a form of participatory engagement that involves transforming the primary text into a ‘transitional object’ which allows fans to balance the external reality of the text with the internal reality of their fandom. This view positions participation as a unique facet of engagement which involves creating content that combines elements of the original text with the fan psyche; a ‘third space’ shaped by ‘cultural and social protocols’ (Jenkins 2006a, p331). Participation in its many forms is becoming an increasingly important component of how audiences engage with media, and as such it is instrumental to a spectrum of engagement. As Jenkins notes (2006a), many media companies would not survive without the willing participation of a loyal audience.
‘Extra-textual’ Activities

The final indicator is ‘extra-textual’ activities. Extra-textual activities are activities which are based on the consumer’s relationship with the text, but which do not necessarily involve direct exposure to the text. This indicator shares a varying relationship to participation because of the extra-textual nature of many participatory practices, such as cosplay, thus demonstrating the considerable interplay between facets. According to Russell and Puto’s (1999, p397) model of engagement, extra-textual activities can be measured through degree of ‘connectedness’, described as ‘an intense relationship between audience and television programs that extends beyond the television watching experience into individuals’ personal and social lives’. For the purpose of the present research, this includes attending conferences, exhibitions and conventions, embarking on symbolic pilgrimages (to sites and landmarks of signification) and any other activity which is associated with the text but does not make use of the artefact itself. Extra-textual activities are typically user-driven rather than content-driven. Whilst the text can be seen as inspiring these activities, it is not necessary for their execution.

In Fiske’s (1978, p75) analysis of television audiences he proposes three distinct ‘levels’ of television textuality which delineate levels of engagement. These include primary texts, referring to ‘the shows themselves’, secondary texts, referring to texts that proliferate around the primary text such as reviews, fan magazines and promotional material, and tertiary texts, referring to viewer-generated discussion and interpretation. This model can be adapted in the context of the present research to account for variation in user activities. This allows for a conceptualisation of extra-textual activities in the context of other indicators of engagement. To that end, the first level can be reconceptualised as primary text activities, which refers to the activity of engaging with the artefact. The second level could be adapted to reflect participation, and the third to reflect extra-textual activities. Critically, the difference between the final two levels can be defined by their associated relationship with exposure to the text. Whilst participation refers to user-led activities which may or may not involve direct exposure to the text, extra-textual activities refer to user-led activities which, by definition, do not involve direct exposure to the artefact. This means that extra-textual activities are always necessarily participatory; however, participatory play is not always necessarily
extra-textual. According to this re-conceptualisation, the first level describes activities associated with direct engagement with the text, such as playing a video game or watching a movie, the second refers to activities associated with the text but which extend beyond mere viewing, such as writing fan fiction or discussing the text’s features with a group of friends whilst engaging with the form, and the third level describes activities which are based on the consumer’s relationship with the text, but which do not involve any direct exposure to the text, such as attending a convention or cosplaying.

The most important revision however, is to adapt the relational ties between each level so that they do not reflect a hierarchy of signification, but rather a flow of engagement-related activities. The use of ‘flow’ as a metaphor for the movement of consumers across a text or across intertextual signifiers was first conceived of by Raymond Williams (1974). According to Williams (1974, p86), who looked primarily at television serials as the subject of his analysis, ‘in all developed broadcasting systems, the characteristic organisation, and therefore the characteristic experience, is one of sequence or flow’. Williams used flow to describe how broadcast networks retained audience interest by directing consumers to their programming through self-promotion and intertextual branding. In recent times, the concept of flow has been adapted to account for the movement of audiences across interlinked narratives via multiple story modes, including television, film, games and the internet (Bolin 2007; Brooker 2001 Watrall & Shaw 2008). What this implies for the present research is that there is a characteristic organisation of sequence or flow which suggests that one level leads to another. For example, whilst not impossible, it is unlikely that an individual would attend a fan convention without first having engaged in primary text activities such as watching a film or playing a video game. In this sense, extra-textual activities are included as an indicator of engagement due to the involvement in other textual activities that they imply. That is, they indicate a depth of engagement which is preceded by consumption of the artefact.

**Media Use Typology**

In addressing media use in the context of commercial transmedia storytelling, a Media Use Typology (Figure 2) has been developed directly out of the preceding discussion
which identifies four classes of media use based on two intersecting axes; mode preference (defined in this context as the degree to which the user seeks preference for one story mode over another) and levels of engagement (defined through the use of five indicators, described above).

Similar attempts to map media use on a typology or spectrum include Abercrombie and Longhurst’s (1998) spectrum of engagement with the object world and Richard Giulianotti’s (2002) taxonomy of football spectators. Abercrombie and Longhurst offer a useful illustration of engagement with the object world which builds logically from minimal, or undifferentiated, engagement with objects from mass media, to high levels of engagement with objects from mass media; however, rather than focus solely on objects drawn from mass media the continuum deviates to the enthusiast: a category of individual who does not engage with objects from mass media at all, but rather engages with activities in pursuit of skill development. When compared to the fan and cultist, also listed on the spectrum, it becomes clear that what the model measures is level of engagement where the variable factor is the object. Whilst this work is useful, particularly for understanding the relationship of specialised media use to engagement, it does not address media use directly, nor does it account for transmedia consumption.

Comparably, Giulianotti’s (2002, pp30-31) taxonomy of football fans is pertinent in so far as it discusses hot and cool modes of consumption, which is comparable to high and low levels of engagement; however, this model concerns the consumption of football primarily, with a particular emphasis on cultural geography. Furthermore, Guilianotti classifies spectatorship on the basis of a traditional/consumer binary. Such a rendering ignores the possibility for a multifarious consumer subjectivity constituted by both supporter (community based) and consumer identities. This issue is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Critically, at present there have been no attempts to map media use as it pertains to commercial transmedia consumption.

The classes of use in the typology have been broadly identified as: story/content-driven, mode-driven, experimental and graze-guided. While the typology only identifies four classes of use, there can be considerable overlap between each group. In other words, the classes are not prescriptive. Each class of use can be adopted or discarded by a user at any given time based on the reception context for that user and their mode preference. Critically, this means users can change their mode of use to accommodate a fully
transmedial experience. Whilst this thesis does not propose to account for all forms of media use, the typology provides a useful way of differentiating media use on the basis of mode preference and levels of engagement, which have been identified as the most useful criteria for organising a typology of use for expressing forms of transmedia consumption. The typology demonstrates how, based on these factors, media users might engage with transmedia texts in a multitude of different ways. The Media Use Typology is illustrated below in Figure 2.

![Media Use Typology](image)

*Figure 2. Media Use Typology*

The first class of media use this chapter discusses is named *Experimental*. Experimental media use is associated with low levels of engagement and highly differentiated mode preference.
preference, so named because this combination implies experimentation with a particular mode. This means that experimental use is not expressed in the behaviours associated with high levels of engagement, yet it can be associated with preference for a particular story mode. Experimental use is best exemplified in the ‘casual gamer’. Some of the most commonly used notions to describe casual gamers include: an ability to play games without great effort; an ability to pick up and drop games easily; and simply, someone who plays games casually (Kuittinen et al. 2006; Millis & Robbins 2005). Descriptions of casual games similarly dictate that: casual games have a low barrier to entry; they are easy to learn; and they require less dedicated input than hardcore games (Waugh 2006).

David Rohrl (cited in Tinney 2005), Producer and Designer at Pogo.com claims ‘“casual” gaming suggests the users are not as engaged in the activity’. He associates the term with the ‘mass market’ and ‘family games’ (Rohrl cited in Tinney 2005), lending further emphasis to the contention that casual gamers demonstrate low levels of engagement and making this an ideal example of this form of media use. One of the key factors consistent in academic discourse surrounding engagement is the idea that engagement is relative. Indeed, the term ‘casual gamer’ has been adopted by marketers, academics and gamers alike as a way of distinguishing low level engagement ‘casual gamers’ from high level engagement ‘hardcore gamers’ (Bosser & Nakatsu 2006; Poupart 2006; Tinney 2005). According to Jussi Kuittinen et al. (2007, p106),

Usually casual gamers are contrasted against hardcore gamers so as to make clear a distinction between the two groups. A casual gamer is someone who is not a hardcore gamer and casual games are non-hardcore games. IGDA also defines a third group, core gamers, who are between the casual and hardcore gamers.

These discussions demonstrate the importance of the use of a spectrum which allows users to move between levels of engagement. This indicates not only that casual gamers are identifiable in relation to hardcore gamers, but also that the two exist on a spectrum of engagement, with the ‘core gamer’ existing somewhere in the middle. This dynamic can be expressed as follows:
The next class of media use is referred to as *Mode-driven*. Mode-driven use is associated with high levels of engagement and highly differentiated mode preference. Unlike experimental use, mode-driven use is associated with highly selective mode preference and the activities/behaviours associated with high levels of engagement. In the spirit of relativity, an example of mode-driven use is again sourced from the gaming industry. As a broad research area, gaming has been studied extensively by academics such as Aarseth (1997), Craig Anderson (2000, 2001, 2004), Jenkins (2006a, 2009b) and T.L Taylor (2006). This is testament to the fact that the ‘gamer’ is increasingly seen as a point of interest in terms of audience research. Popular conceptions of the ‘gamer’ are so closely linked to the idea of high level engagement that the stereotype of the game player as ‘addict’ is still widely circulated (Cover 2006). Unlike the casual gamer, the hardcore gamer represents a demographic that not only prefers games to other story modes, but that demonstrates high levels of engagement. In fact, Hanna Wirman (2007) posits that hardcore gaming (sometimes referred to as power gaming) can be conceptualised as a facet of fandom, due to the high levels of engagement exhibited by hardcore gamers being similar to that observed in fan cultures. For hardcore gamers, their relationship with the story mode is defined through intensity, efficient game-play and goal fulfilment. As T.L. Taylor explains (2006, pp75-76),

... what distinguishes the power gamer is their constant engagement in dynamic goal setting and the focused attention to achieving those goals, which can range from gaining levels to securing particular weapons and armor, killing certain monsters, ... and exploring difficult zones ... What is striking to me with power gamers is their willingness to go through very hard work to achieve their goals.
The hardcore gamer is a highly engaged media user. Some of the unique behaviours and activities which are associated with the hardcore gamer, include: the formation of social communities based around the text (this is often observed in the context of MMORPGs, or, massively multiplayer online role-playing games) (Jakobsson & Taylor 2003; Steinkuehler & Williams 2006); the production of machinima; and of course, interactive play (Vorderer, Hartmann & Klimmt 2003). Furthermore, the intensity with which the hardcore gamer engages with the mode, as described by Taylor, implies that their interaction with the text is driven by a strong preference for games over other media. Of a comparable nature are cinema buffs or bibliophiles. This is indicative of mode-driven media use.

The third class of media use is named Graze-guided. This class of use is associated with both low levels of engagement and undifferentiated mode preference. Graze-guided use is representative of notions of the passive consumer associated with traditional audience reception studies. Examples of this can be found both in the structuralist reception studies of the 1970s, which posit that audience responses are constructed by the text (Wilson 2009, p11), and early effects studies research, particularly in the field of psychology (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur 1976; Dysinger & Ruckmick 1933; Goldberg 1956). The passive consumer thesis is based on the notion that audiences passively succumb to dominant ideology and that the act of consumption nullifies the ability for critical and creative thought; however, this in itself does not imply that the audience is not engaged. After all, there is no requirement that engagement with a text need be oppositional. Whilst passivity implies low levels of engagement, there are no reasons to suggest that media users cannot engage with media texts in a ‘preferred’ manner. For this reason, this thesis seeks to make a departure from the dominant/oppositional readings debate, and instead focus solely on levels of engagement and mode preference. Not only are these debates already over-represented in the literature on audience studies, but they are also irrelevant in the context in which engagement is being discussed in this thesis. In this regard, graze-guided use can be conceptualised as a class of use associated with low levels of engagement with the text and a lack of preference for a particular mode.

Examples of this class of use can be found in a variety of settings. In Fiske’s (1987) analysis of television audiences, this class of media use is easily identifiable. As he
explains, levels of engagement can vary greatly and in ways which might not have been anticipated by producers. For instance, graze-guided users may, as Fiske (1987, pp73-74) suggests use media as a distraction or compliment to another task. It may not gain their full attention. While the discourse surrounding this view is largely out-dated, not all audiences typify the character traits associated with the popular active audience tradition. The recent work of scholars in this field – particularly those interested in studying fans – (see Brooker, 1999, 2001, 2002; Derecho, 2006; Jenkins, 2006a; Murray, 2004), do not account for all forms of media use. In the same way that the ‘linguistic turn’ of the 1970s challenged notions of the mass audience and passive consumption associated with the Frankfurt Institute (Alasuutari 1999, pp2-4), it is important now to acknowledge new models for media use which challenge a romanticised view of the audience. This does not, in effect, invalidate the contributions of the active audience tradition to audience scholarship. On the contrary, this thesis seeks to acknowledge all forms of media use, whether passive or agentic, to identify modes of use associated with transmedia storytelling.

The fourth and final class of media use is defined as Story/Content-Driven. According to the Media Use Typology, story/content-driven use is associated with high levels of engagement, but also highly undifferentiated mode preference. In other words, users who adopt this class of use engage with media on a high level, with a number of different story modes, making them exemplary transmedial consumers because this class of use accommodates transmedial consumption: the dedicated consumption of a narrative across multiple story modes. Story/content-driven use is commonly associated with fandom. This area has been studied extensively by scholars such as Brooker (2002), Hills (2002), Jenkins (1992, 2006a) and Lisa Lewis (1992). These consumers are typically associated with fannish behaviours which are seen to be extreme, including: hysteria (this is often associated with the ‘Beatlemania’ of the 1960s) (Hermes 1999; Lewis 1992); religious-like devotion (Giles 2000; Hills 2002; McCormick 2006); and a lack of involvement in social or cultural activities outside of fandom (Jenkins 1992; Steinkuehler & Williams 2006). While some of these behaviours have been observed and discussed in academic research, many of them emerge from popular stereotypes surrounding fans and fan cultures which are not necessarily verifiable (Jenkins 1992, p10).
Critically, the literature on fandom emphasises higher level engagement activities coupled with an undifferentiated preference for story mode, this makes the fan an excellent exemplar of story/content-driven use, which is instrumental to a typology of transmedia use because fannish tendencies typify transmedial consumption. The following chapter is dedicated to exploring this mode through the interpretive discourse of fan studies as a means of contextualising story/content-driven consumption.

**Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates that consumption of transmedia texts is currently understood through a framework of either structured or organic participation. Whilst the view of commercial co-optation of digital spaces has been instrumental in shaping the field of transmedia research, its subject (chiefly, consumption in the digital environment) reframes issues which have already been demonstrated in analyses of the internet by political economists. Whilst these issues are also relevant to transmedia storytelling, they are not unique to this field. Primarily, key theoretical perspectives on transmedia consumption emphasise how audience participation can be incorporated into the structure of the text. Chiefly, a review of this material reveals a lack of practical or qualitative research in this area, including a lack of understanding about transmedial consumption. This chapter is the first step in this thesis towards addressing these issues.

The most pertinent issues to transmedia consumption include: entry point, level of engagement and mode preference. These factors are of greatest relevance to the ways in which commercial transmedia stories are consumed and produced. Whilst nebulous, the concept of engagement is significant to transmedia consumption due to the demands transmedia texts place on consumers. Entry point and mode preference (which are intimately linked) are relevant because they relate to issues of both how and why the audience enters the transmedia network. This can greatly impact their engagement with the text as well as their proclivity to traverse story modes. The relationship between engagement, entry point and mode preference is articulated in the Media Use Typology which is used to identify and characterise transmedial consumption: the dedicated consumption of a narrative across multiple story modes. The typology illustrates that transmedial consumption can be characterised as story/content-driven use.
The following chapter builds on the current chapter to construct a profile of the media user most likely to adopt this class of use. The arguments proposed in this chapter are crystallised in the next in a discussion on fans and fan culture and how fans typify story/content-driven use, thus characterising transmedial consumption. Furthermore, the next chapter discusses how insights into story/content-driven use can be used to encourage transmedial consumption; in other words, how mode of use is changeable.
Chapter 3: Fans as Transmedial Consumers

This chapter aims to situate story/content-driven use in a transmedial user profile. It is argued in this chapter that contemporary media fandom – a sub-cultural manifestation of highly engaged media users – embodies all of the characteristics of story/content-driven use, thus making the contemporary media fan the exemplary transmedial consumer. Fans typify, through interpretative and cultural capacities, a level of engagement which is required by most commercial transmedia texts. Furthermore, they demonstrate migratory consumption: consumption across multiple story modes, or, an undifferentiated mode preference. Transmedia storytelling thus accommodates fan-use (story/content-driven use typical of fans). In fact, many traits associated with fandom exemplify transmedial consumption, most of which were discussed in the previous chapter in the context of engagement studies. These include participation, loyalty, attentive consumption and media literacy. To avoid repetition this chapter does not retrace the same discussions, but points to them when necessary and relevant in the context of new discussions. The present chapter focuses chiefly on migration given that, as a behavioural tendency, it is central to transmedial consumption. This chapter also demonstrates how recent trends in audience behaviour suggest that transmedia storytelling can encourage an existing audience to adopt a new mode of use comparable to fan-use. In other words, fans demonstrate desirable consumer habits characterised by a mode of use which is ideal for engaging with transmedia texts as comprehensive artefacts (story/content-driven) and this mode of use can be adopted by other non-fans.

The chapter will begin by providing an historical overview of the emergence of media fandom and its relationship to religious fanaticism. This advances the argument from the previous chapter by providing a context for expressions of loyalty and engagement by demonstrating the persistent nature of these qualities throughout the history of media fandom. The chapter then situates fandom within the context of recent shifts in audience research, thus demonstrating its relevance to the field. Finally, the chapter discusses the *fanification* of audiences. Through these measures, this chapter explores how fans typify
story/content-driven use in a contemporary audience studies context. This includes an emphasis on mass fragmentation, polarisation and discerning consumption.

**A Brief History of Fandom**

According to Cavicchi (1998, p38), the term ‘fan’ can be traced back to seventeenth century England where the word was used as a ‘colloquial abbreviation for “fanatic”; a term commonly associated with religious zealotry or madness. The idea of the fan as fanatic is an enduring theme in contemporary fan studies (Brown 1998; Giles 2000; Hills 2002; Kelley & Tian 2004). In fact, whilst negatively characterised, the earliest literature on fandom reflects fanatic engagement with the object world which is comparable to loyalty and high levels engagement, both characteristics of story/content-driven use; however, Jenson (1992, p9) claims that, as a result of the term’s origins, the fan is ‘constantly characterised as a potential fanatic’, and fandom as extreme, excessive or deranged behaviour. According to Jenkins (1992, p12), the term ‘fanatic’, abbreviated from the Latin fanaticus, has been derived from its literal sense and come to assume a more negative connotation. Whilst the term ‘fan’ was often employed as a playful expression, Jenkins (1992, p12) claims that it never fully escaped its earlier connotations of ‘religious zealotry, false beliefs, orgiastic excess, possession and madness’.

Some of the earliest recordings of fan activity took place in eighteenth century Europe when enthusiastic readers, driven by the advent of commercial publishing, sent letters to their favourite authors and even visit locations described in the fictional texts (Braudy 1986). Noted recurrences include the emergence of music fandom in the late nineteenth century – characterised by enthusiastic theatre mobs (Levine 1988, pp108-109) – and the emergence of sports fandom in the United States of America. In each instance, a high level of engagement with the object world is a characteristic component of the expression of fandom. In fact, contemporary literature on sports fandom still uses the term ‘fanatic’ in a research capacity. Some even argue that the term ‘fanatic’ came into popular use when sports journalists used it to describe early baseball spectators (Jenson 1992, p9). In recent years, the study of sports fandom has become an important and popular subset of fan studies (Crawford 2004; Dietz-Uhler et al. 2000; James &
Ridinger 2002; Wann et al. 2001). Interestingly, the literature on sports fandom reflects
many of the same themes addressed in the study of media fandom. For instance,
William Sutton, McDonald & Milne’s (1997, p17) conception of the sports fan – which
describes the fanatic as ‘exaggeratedly zealous’ for the belief or cause of the team they
support – is similar to Cornel Sandvoss’ (2005, pp79-82) conception of ‘projection in
fandom’ – the process by which a bond is manifest between the fan and the object
world. Furthermore, these ideas demonstrate similarities between the two fields based
on their shared origins; the religious fanatic. The only significant difference between the
two pertains to the relationship between sports fandom and violence and aggression
(Roberts & Benjamin 2000; Simons & Taylor 1992; Wann et al. 2001), with a particular
emphasis in sports fandom on hooliganism (Armstrong 1998; Dart 2008; Kerr 1994).

Despite its rich historical context, some scholars place the emergence of fandom in the
early to mid-twentieth century, attributable to trends in popular music such as barn
dancing, the tango and the jitterbug (Peterson 1997; Peterson & DiMaggio 1975;
Vermorel & Vermorel 1989). Examples from this era reflect many of the same
assumptions used to describe fanaticism in the seventeenth century. One of the most
well documented examples of this is ‘Beatlemania’; a phenomenon inspired by the
emergence of the popular band The Beatles in the 1960s and one of the most well
documented examples of fan hysteria. According to Barbara Ehrenreich, Hess and
Jacobs (1992, p84):

The news footage shows police lines straining against crowds of hundreds of young
women ... the girls’ faces are twisted with desperation or, in some cases, shining with
what seems to be an inner light ... There are shouted orders to disperse, answered by a
rising volume of chants and wild shrieks. The young women surge forth; the police line
breaks ...

This description demonstrates the enduring significance of the origins of fandom in
religious fanaticism and the high levels of engagement expressed by fans compared to
other audiences. Furthermore, according to Joli Jenson (1992, pp22-23), consumption of
media across a spectrum of platforms and outlets was indicative of ‘fanatic pathology’
during this time, thus intimating a link between high levels of engagement and
migratory consumption. Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs (1992, p85) claim Beatlemania is
significant historically because never before had such an unprecedented display of
fannish behaviour of this variety been recorded. According to Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs (1992, p86), while young women had displayed fannish tendencies in the past – for example they ‘swooned over Frank Sinatra’, and ‘screamed for Elvis Presley’, The Beatles inspired ‘an extremity of feeling usually reserved for football games or natural disasters’. For this reason, Beatlemania represents an important moment in the history of fandom; one which has been described as a ‘social movement’ which addressed shifting conceptions of masculinity and femininity (Ehrenreich, Hess & Jacobs 1992, p84; Scodari 2007, p49). In fact, most academic discourse surrounding the Beatlemania phenomenon describes it as conducive to and indicative of ‘the stirrings and eventual advent of radical feminism’ (Cura 2009, p104).

More recently, fan study has tended to focus on fans of science fiction and fantasy (see Brooker 2002, 2006; Jenkins 1988, 2006a), both of which are commonly used as vehicles for the expression of transmedia narratives. Furthermore, this reflects the recent emphasis in fan studies on transmedia storytelling (see Hills 2002; Jenkins 2006a; Nikunen 2007). Of worthy note in science fiction and fantasy fandoms are the letter-writing campaigns pursued by fans of Star Trek in the late 1960s, attributed by some as the first mass expression of media fandom (Bowrey 2011, p201). As this chapter discusses in the following section, fan activism can significantly influence transmedia design. Furthermore, research in this field implies that science fiction and fantasy fandom shares similar roots to the emergence of music fandom in fanaticism and devotion. In fact, Giles (2000, p135) compares contemporary media fans to religious devotees, claiming that ‘the roots of devotion are remarkably similar’ between the two groups. As Cavicchi (1998, p51) explains, fandom and religion are centred on similar experiences:

... while religion and fandom are arguably different realms of meaning, they are both centred around acts of devotion, which may create similarities of experience. In fact, fans are aware of the parallels between religious devotion and their own devotion. At the very least, the discourse of religious conversion may provide fans with a model for describing the experience of becoming a fan.

In the context of fandom, devotion is comparable to loyalty and thus indicative of high-level engagement. This is often observed in the study of science fiction and fantasy fandom. In a case study on the subject, Michael Jindra (1994, p32) argues that Star Trek
fandom is best understood as a religious phenomenon. In fact, she claims that religious fanaticism in popular culture emerged as a response to science fiction, which she describes as ‘a universalising faith, meant for all people anywhere’. Here, the link between religious devotion and fandom is made explicit; both invite faithful consumption of an ideology or a text. She claims that Star Trek is comparable to religious phenomena based primarily on the activities of its fans, such as the organisation of large-scale networks, community formation and mass pilgrimages to sites and landmarks of significance. In a literal example of the link between fandom and religious devotion, a national census in 2001 found that more than 70,000 Australians listed that they were followers of the Jedi Faith; the religion created by George Lucas as a part of Star Wars mythology (BBC News, 2002). The Jedi Faith is now establishing legitimacy online following the emergence of several grassroots religious communities, including Templeofthejediorder.org, thus evidencing the use of multiple platforms and outlets as a means of enacting loyalty. Today, science fiction and fantasy fandom continues to be a popular area of academic research and popular debate. What characterises continued interest in fan studies is the high levels of engagement demonstrated by this group, and the use by fans of multiple story modes as a demonstration of their loyalty (see Bainbridge 2010; Evans 2008; Jenkins 2006a).

The Fan in Audience Studies

Whilst audience research can be traced back as far as the early 1930s, fan studies did not emerge as a field of research until around the 1980s. Research in this area emerged as a response by scholars who sought to challenge the perception of audiences as passive dupes; however, in the beginning the field was characterised by many of the same stereotypes used to describe fans in popular discourse: as brainless consumers of devalued cultural material (Jenkins 1992, p10). As this thesis demonstrates in Chapter Two, fans are often characterised by behavioural traits which are not found in other media users, such as story/content-driven use. Whilst instrumental to the legitimacy of the field, this tendency has led to the popular conception of the fan as ‘other’.

According to Fiske (1992, p30), fans rework material from mass culture to create an intensely significant popular culture that is ‘both similar to, yet significantly different from, the culture of more “normal” popular audiences’. As a result, fans have come to
represent a ‘scandalous category’ in contemporary society, one which is distinguishable from other audience segments based on many of the same discernible traits used to describe the origins of fandom: fanatic behaviour; neuroticism; and groupie-mentality (Jenkins 1992, p15). According to Jenkins (1992, p15),

The fan remains a “fanatic” or false worshipper, whose interests are fundamentally alien to the realm of “normal” cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality.

Critical research in this area was perpetuated by studies conducted in the late 1980s to 1990s which identified fandom as a stream of audience behaviour concerned with cultural resistance and consumer empowerment (de Certeau 1984; Fiske 1989a, 1989b, 1992). This view of fandom still exists today. In fact, Joke Hermes (2009, p115) argues that audiences cannot be labelled ‘fans’ unless they are either politically or economically empowered. Such a view emphasises cultural resistance as a determinant of fandom. This is consistent with Jenkins’ (1992, p17) summation of the subject, which situates fan ‘othering’ as a manifestation of projected anxieties about the violation of ‘dominant cultural hierarchies’. This is linked to the discursive construction of taste. According to Bourdieu (1979), taste functions as a marker for class. Whilst taste often seems natural, it is reinforced through social and cultural exchange. Those who ‘naturally’ possess appropriate tastes are privileged over those with subordinate tastes. According to Jenkins (1992, p17), the fans’ transgression of bourgeoisie taste is viewed as ‘abnormal’ and ‘threatening’ to the possessors of legitimate culture (Bourdieu & Nice 1980, p253). For Jeffrey Brown (2001, p18) fans challenge what the bourgeoisie have institutionalised as ‘natural and universal standards of “good taste”’ () via their rejection of the latter. The consumption of popular texts is erroneously denigrated thus creating the cultural conditions for classifying fandom as an obscure practice. This view of fandom is characteristically negative. It provokes a simplistic rendering of the fan as ‘other’ and as gatekeeper of ‘disposable’ mass texts.

Findings from this era found that fans discriminate fiercely between popular texts, thus empowering them to resist industry forces which sought to channel their attention. Today, research suggests that discrimination facilitates loyalty, thus motivating fans to find content consistent with their media preferences via multiple outlets (see Jenkins
Comparably, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) place fandom at the heavy end of a spectrum denoting specialisation as its opposite. Whilst heavy media use is implicated in transmedial consumption, specialisation is of comparable significance due to the relationship between specialisation, discrimination, and loyalty. Chiefly, it facilitates migratory consumption based on the desire to seek content which is ideologically or narratively consistent with existing preferences. Furthermore, specialisation connotes high levels of engagement with and expertise in a particular area; traits which can be developed through engaging with the text across multiple story modes. The specialisation spectrum proposed by the authors is thus problematic because it omits this feature from the fan experience, thus reproducing a simplistic rendering of the fan as mindless consumer, definable only by their ‘heavy’ media use.

According to Hills (2002), as a part of the ‘resistant’ label associated with fandom, the fan is often compared to the cultist. In his work, Hills uses ‘cultist’ discourse as a way of differentiating fandom from religiosity whilst simultaneously pointing to the similarities between them. Critically, he advocates a neo-religious understanding of fandom which champions the proliferation of ‘discourses of cult’ within media fandom which cannot be read as a return to religion (Hills 2002, p86). Such a view intimates that cultism can be viewed as variation of fandom. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998, pp140-141) suggest that cultists are distinguishable in fandom based on their relationship to the object world on a spectrum of engagement which accounts for categories of fan, cultist, consumer, enthusiast and petty producer. The continuum is designed on the basis of three factors: the object of fandom; media use; and organisation. According to the authors, the object of the fan is usually a program or star from mass media; however, they concede that, in their work, the cultist more closely resembles what recent literature describes as the fan; they demonstrate explicit attachments to a particular program or types of programs. This implies discrimination; a facet of consumption which this chapter links to story/content-driven use because of the loyalty it facilitates to a particular class of media. This is consistent with the work of Hills (2002), who claims that cult-fandom exists as a metaphor used by fans themselves. Whilst fan and cultist are delineated by Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) according to their relationship to the object world, Hills (2002, pp117-118) points to the relationship between the two as subjectivities of the fan experience. In other words, cultism is a
subjective experience which can be constituted within the realm of fandom based on the ways fans characterise their relationship with media.

As cultists, fans are uniquely positioned not only to consume transmedia but to influence transmedia design. Consistent with the discourse on cultism, Greg Taylor (1999) claims that cultists wield discriminatory power as a means of resisting massification. He claims:

… fans are not true cultists unless they pose their fandom as a resistant activity, one that keeps them one step ahead of those forces which would try to market their resistant taste back to them (Taylor 1999, p161).

An example of this is ‘fan activism’, first noted in the late 1960s when fans of *Star Trek* organised mass letter-writing campaigns in an effort to prevent the cancellation of the series (Bowrey 2011, p200; Tulloch & Jenkins 1995, p10). Protests to ensure the longevity of the *Star Trek* canon would continue for the next forty years with significant effect on the growth of the franchise across multiple story modes (Bowrey 2011, p200). This is not uncommon; the dedication of television fans often endures long after the series has expired or been cancelled. Hills (2002, p28) claims the tension between the fans enduring devotion and the rapid turnover of television programming is an example of how the fan can be seen to resist the expectations of commercial industry. Furthermore, in many ways the enduring commitment of fans can be seen to inspire or provoke transmedia design. An example of this is the fan community for Whedon’s *Firefly* (2002-2003) and *Serenity* (2005) (the feature film which followed it); the continued campaigning by fans of *Firefly* (2002-2003) following its cancellation directly influenced Universal Studios to produce a feature film expanding the narrative through another mode: *Serenity* (2005) (Russell 2005). The franchise now also includes a miniseries of comic books meant to bridge the gap between the television series and the movie. Furthermore, since 2006 fans of both *Firefly* (2002-2003) and *Serenity* (2005) have organised an annual charity event called *Can’t Stop the Serenity* which mobilises fans of the text to raise funds and awareness to support Equality Now. Despite the fact that the series ended nine years ago, fans of the text still actively engage with the content and influence its expansion.

Hills (2002, p28) claims that fans’ attention to detail and programming continuity is often greater than that of the original producers. This situates them as ideal candidates
for participatory design or content co-creation. Indeed, for fans, devotion to the text extends beyond mere consumption (Taylor 2009, p13). Some fans seek not only to consume the narrative, but also to extend and correct the narrative. For instance, romantic ‘shippers’ (short for ‘relationshippers’) challenge perceived narrative derailings associated with character relationships by writing the desired outcome into fan fiction (Scodari & Felder 2000). This has been described as the fulfilling of narrative desires, a concept closely linked to cultural resistance (Jenkins 2006a, Scodari & Felder 2000). This trend is symptomatic of fans’ profound emotional investment in and encyclopaedic knowledge of the text (Akpinar & Wennström 2006, p48); a trait which exists within processes of consumer loyalty since it implies a high level of commitment to, and engagement with, the narrative. It is also symptomatic of participatory culture, a process which allows fans to assume the role of textual poachers, a term coined by Jenkins (1992) derived from de Certeau’s essay (1984) on the nomadic reader. The poacher in Jenkins’ work is an active participant in popular culture who appropriates material from mass texts to create and circulate their own grassroots products. Furthermore, the proclivity of fans to view the text as pliable (Jenkins, 1992) reinforces the rationalisation for participatory design in transmedia storytelling. The benefit is two-fold; for fans, their engagement with popular culture is rewarded, whilst producers are benefited by the loyalty which accompanies this. This also suggests that fans view the story as expandable, thus supporting the view that fans approach stories from a multi-modal paradigm.

Given their attention to programming detail, fans often enact their resistance by assuming a gatekeeping role enacted to uphold a dialogical ‘contract’ shared between user and text. Martin Barker (1989, p261) writes,

> A ‘contract’ involves an agreement that a text will talk to us in ways we recognise. It will enter into a dialogue with us. And that dialogue, with its dependable elements and form, will relate to some aspect of our lives in our society.

When the contract is violated, fans often resist the dominant narrative in one of many ways. This can include appropriative or subversive re-workings of the text, which point to a multi-modal framework for engagement, or dedicated campaigning, which, as this chapter has already discussed, can influence transmedia design due to the unique demands made on the work’s creator to prolong the narrative after its ending in a single
form. As a result, producers are unwillingly engaged in a generic contract with fans made tense due to the unique demands they place on the outcome of the author’s work.

These conflicts – between compliance and resistance – point to the curious tension between the communal identity and commodity practices of fans. In fact, according to Livingstone and Das (2009, p2), one of the key insights offered by traditional audience reception studies is the idea that a contested balance exists between creative and commodified conceptions of the audience. Whilst specific aspects of fandom support the ‘resistive’ label, positioning fans as somehow ‘anti-consumerist’, there is an alternative argument which explores the idea of the fan as commodity-completest. This view challenges the essentialist view of fandom as grassroots cultural practice and points to the role of the fan as consumer; an often neglected aspect of fandom in cultural research and significant in the context of transmedia scholarship. Furthermore, the very nature of transmedia storytelling demands a substantial investment of time and money for fans to engage with the storyworld. According to Hills (2002, p28), the one-sided view of fandom as anti-commercial ignores the extent to which fandom is deeply embedded in wider shifts within consumer culture, such as the increase in consumption-based social and communal identities. The cultural view of fandom ironically reduces the significance of consumption in a sub-culture which is definable by the consumption of mass produced media. Whilst Bourdieu (1974) acknowledges the relationship of economic and cultural capital in the mapping of cultural taste, his model serves as a fundamental critique of class. According to Hills (2002, p29), it is pointless to try and resolve the contradiction between the cultural and financial economies of fandom. Instead, he appeals for a new theoretical framework which tolerates the contradictions inherent in the fan experience.

The financial economies of fandom are primarily based on merchandising. As Kathy Bowrey (2011, p198) notes, forms of consumption made possible by merchandising often create the most commercially valuable franchises. This view was explored to some extent in Chapter One of this thesis through the work of Meehan (1991) and Kinder (1991), who examined the economies of consumption of Batman and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Both concluded that the fan experience of the text was largely dependent on the consumption of ancillary paraphernalia, a phenomenon known as ‘Bat-mania’ and ‘Turtle-mania’ respectively. This was characteristic of the franchising
of popular children’s texts in the 1980s. To a lesser extent, Dena (2004b) – who defines toys as the commodity channel’ of transmedial storytelling – and Bainbridge (2010) – who points to the action figure as an integrated component of transmedia narrative – also implicate consumption as a significant component of the fan experience. In fact, the role of consumption in story/content-driven use cannot be underestimated in this context, since it implies consumption of (and therefore acquisition of) content across multiple story modes. In other words, transmedia stories can require substantial financial outlay from consumers. One aspect of this, the collector’s scene, demonstrates the role of fandom in consumer culture and of fans as willing participants in the circulation of capital (see Fiske 1992; Kiste 1990; Smith 2011). Furthermore, collecting is intimately tied to cultural capital, as Fiske (1992, p44) notes,

... fans with high economic capital will often use it, in a non-aesthetic parallel of the official cultural capitalist, to accumulate unique and authentic objects.

Critically, this demonstrates a bridge between the commodity aspects of fandom and the cultural manifestation of fan communities. As Fiske notes, the acquisition of commercial goods is intimately tied to the notion of cultural capital. For the fan, this often manifests as textual knowledge; particularly as it pertains to the acquisition of narrative channels. Transmedia texts are uniquely designed to allow fans to build cultural capital in the community. This is because fan knowledge is based on the accumulation of knowledge associated with the franchise/storyworld. This knowledge, and its importance to the fan community, can be increased by engaging with the text across multiple story modes. This is indicative of story/content-driven use because it implies a dedication to the storyworld and its fictional components.

According to Hills (2002), the uses of fan knowledge in this context can be best understood by comparing them to academic knowledge, due to the subjective similarities in knowledge construction across both communities. He claims that fan knowledge can be characterised as enthusiastic and celebratory. Comparably, academic knowledge is rationalising and objective. Whilst the scholar must conform to a rational subjectivity, the fan is characterised by affective knowledge: the process of projecting emotional realism (Jenkins 1992, p107). Jenkins claims that this ‘emotional realism’ is best understood as a process of knowledge construction and interpretation. That is, fans ascribe emotional realism to texts. This
is incompatible with academic knowledge which is based on systematic rationality and objectivity. Whilst fan knowledge performs the same role as academic knowledge as a source of cultural capital, the difference between the two, according to Hills (2002), lies in the culturally-specific contextualisation of knowledge; or in the imagined subjectivities from which the knowledge is produced within a specific sub-culture. According to Fiske (1993), the difference in knowledge construction across fandom and academia can be accounted for by processes of imperialisation and localisation respectively. He claims that popular knowledges, such as those created within fan communities, ‘do not reach beyond their immediate conditions, but are used to build and control locales’ (Fiske 1993, p206). Imperialising knowledges, on the other hand, create ‘cultures of representation, ones that reproduce both a sense of the world and the power to control that sense’ (Fiske 1993, p19). According to Thomas McLaughlin (1996, p53) one of the best examples of popular or localised knowledge can be found via criticism in fanzines (known colloquially as ‘zines’). He claims that zines provide a space for fans in which ‘fundamental theoretical questioning of cultural systems’ occur contrary to the desires of the culture industry itself (Fiske 1993, p206). This allows fans to articulate criticisms of popular culture without pretence of anthropological or interpretive distance.

In a functional capacity localising knowledge acts as a motivator for transmedia consumption for fans due to its function as social and cultural capital. It is thus intimately tied to consumption and acquisition. Fiske (1992, p33) refers to this as ‘popular culture capital’. According to Fiske (1992, p33), popular cultural capital can be acquired within fandom via fan knowledge and appreciation, via means which reproduce the equivalents of the formal institution of ‘serious’ culture. For fans, knowledge and appreciation is assisted by the acquisition of commercial goods which are constituted by the storyworld. Furthermore, this view demonstrates the importance of acquiring information commodities because it is intimately tied to cultural control in a limited field. Engaging with texts transmedially can thus be seen as a means of acquiring greater cultural capital which assists fan knowledge.

Conceptualisations of fandom which neglect to consider the consumer-based characteristics of the fan experience generally emerge from cultural studies. Typically, audiences who respond to merchandising are viewed as passive and become
embarrassing to those who study them for not demonstrating the creative expression of fandom anticipated by academics (Bowrey 2011, p199). Such a view offers a simplistic rendering of fandom based on the distinction of ‘bad’ (commodity) fandom and ‘good’ (community) fandom. Even in Jenkins’ work the financial economies of fandom are often neglected. He claims that one of the effects of cultural and technological convergence is that the industry increasingly targets consumers who have demonstrated:

... a prolonged relationship and active engagement with media content and who show a willingness to track down that content across the cable spectrum and across a range of other media platforms (Jenkins 2004a, p38).

The problem inherent in this idea relates to that which has been denied in Jenkins’ central assumption. Such a view characterises migration as solely experiential without considering the economies of transmedia consumption. Whilst the willingness of fans to traverse multiple platforms reflects strongly on their engagement with media content, Jenkins fails to explicate the relationship between this, and the role of the fan as commodity-consumer. Whilst consumption can be viewed as symptomatic of, and perhaps reconstituted within, the realm of engagement studies, it is nevertheless central to the fan experience. Jenkins (2004b, p283) defines fans primarily as the champions of participatory culture, a phenomenon which enables the average consumer to participate in the ‘archiving, annotation, appropriation, transformation, and recirculation of media content’. Whilst the validity of this claim is sound, it reflects the wider tradition in contemporary media studies to ‘romanticise active audiences’ (Hills 2002, p28).

Whilst fan study does focus on the financial economies of consumption, most analyses tend to focus on the commercial imperatives of the industry which seeks to harness the attention of committed fans, rather than the experience of consumption from a fan’s perspective. In other words, the experience of consumption as it pertains to the constitution of the fan identity is ignored. In much the same way that Hills (2002, p29) criticises contemporary fan studies for reproducing a moral dualism which places ‘good’ fandom in opposition to the ‘bad’ consumer, the literature on fandom places the ‘commercial’ industry in opposition to the ‘cultural’ fan. This dualism should be reconceptualised so that it more appropriately reflects a symbiotic relationship between industry and fan, which acknowledges both cultural output and consumptive practices within the fan experience.
The Fanification of Audiences and Fan-use

So far, this chapter has reviewed the history of fandom and fan studies which situates fans as highly engaged, migratory media users. This is indicative of story/content-driven use and is most commonly associated with the unique characteristics and contexts of fandom. The present research contributes to the existing discourse on fandom by addressing and extending the subject in the context of the current cross-media climate. The view of fans as transmedial consumers was foreshadowed as early as 1984, almost twenty years before the term ‘transmedia’ was coined, by de Certeau (1984), who described fan readers as nomadic. He claimed that readers can be compared to travellers in two ways: firstly, through the constitution of a place which defines the experience of reading for the individual, i.e. ‘to read is to be elsewhere, where they are not’ (de Certeau 1984, p173); and secondly, via the movement of the reader across texts. He claims, ‘readers are travellers... like nomads poaching their way across lands belonging to someone else’ (de Certeau 1984, p174). This is comparable to the recent conceptualisation of transmedial consumption. Much like travellers, consumers of transmedia texts traverse multiple story modes in order to fully engage with narrative.

Recent interest in fan scholarship points to several significant trends in this field including the migratory behaviour of media fans and the use by fans of multiple media to engage with and create popular culture. More than twenty years following de Certeau’s seminal text on nomadic consumption, Jenkins (2006a, p2) described the consumptive patterns of fan-users as migratory, claiming that ‘audiences will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want’. Kaarina Nikunen (2007, p114) elaborates on this, claiming that fan culture provides the most appropriate case study in intermediality since the use of multiple media platforms are ‘an essential part of fan cultures’. She claims that there are various different kinds of fandom which are now organised around multiple media and practices. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) express a similar view, describing media use by fans as heavy (and specialised, as this chapter has argued). According to the authors, the fan can be differentiated from other media users based on the relative intensity and frequency of media use; however, this does not necessarily imply that fans are susceptible to ancillary franchising schemes. As Jenkins (Jenkins 2004b, p284) claims, the ‘books,
hooks, and looks’ method, which involved constructing ancillary markets for successful film and television programs, is not as effective as transmedial expansion, which encourages the product/narrative to ‘flow across media until it becomes pervasive in the culture at large’. He claims that fans who consume this way are more likely to be highly invested and highly engaged (Jenkins 2004b, p3). In fact, as this chapter has already discussed, both cultural and commercially-driven modes of media use are integral to the fan experience and the reception and consumption of transmedia texts. Taken together, these traits are indicative of story/content-driven use because they imply that fans are both highly engaged and committed to following narratives across multiple story modes. This is a trend which has been identified not only here, but in research from fan studies which discusses both engagement and migration as facets of fandom (de Certeau 1984; Dena 2008; Evans 2008; Hills 2002; Jenkins 2003a, 2006a; Lewis 2004; Nikunen 2007). In fact, Hills (2002) claims that research which seeks to valorise or validate specific media texts is incongruent with contemporary fan practices which are increasingly transmedial in nature. He claims that theories such as those emerging from film studies in the 1970s immediately cut themselves off from the cross-media consumption habits of media fans, due to their singular research focus (Hills, 2002).

Today, fandom is a significant feature of popular culture. Research in this area is becoming increasingly popular and critical to the field of audience studies due to the influence of mass fragmentation and polarisation. Contemporaries from this field argue that the idea of the mass audience is being replaced by the emergence of discrete audience segments which advance from the mass to form smaller sub-groups. Livingstone and Das (2009, p3) recently suggested that contemporary audience studies is,

... shifting away from the possibility of distinguishing audiences from other social activities to the prospect of audiences so dispersed and embedded that it is impossible to say when or where people are not part of an audience.

What this means for audience study is that the scope for research is becoming simultaneously wider, and more complex. Recent shifts in this field towards the study of fandom have been attributed in part to mass fragmentation (Morrison 2009; Tewksbury 2005; Webster 2005; Yuan 2008). According to James Webster (2005, p367), audience fragmentation has emerged as a direct result of developing processes of production and
distribution in the television industry. He claims that fragmentation can be attributed to a number of factors, including: the increase in available channels to all domestic households; the diversity of programming; channel specialisation (otherwise known as narrowcasting); and the diversity in availability of programming packages (that is, different delivery systems offer different bundles depending on social, economic and geographic status). The result of this is that the mass audience becomes more widely distributed, and each broadcast network has a smaller market.

More importantly, Webster talks about the relationship between audience fragmentation and polarisation (also noted by Hollander 2008). The relationship between these two terms can be described using Philip Napoli’s (1999) categorisation of diversity of exposure. He claims that there are two kinds of audience exposure. The first is horizontal exposure, which refers to ‘the distribution of audiences across all available content options’ (Napoli 1999, p26). This is similar to Webster and Phalen’s (1997, p39) concept of audience fragmentation, which focuses on breaking the mass audience into smaller segments. The second is vertical exposure, which refers to ‘diversity of content consumption within individual audience members’ (Napoli 1999, p26). This is more commonly referred to as polarisation, a concept which focuses on ‘the tendency of individuals to move to the extremes of either consuming or avoiding some class of media content’ (Webster & Phalen 1997, p110). This can be seen as an aspect of story/content-driven use because it implies dedicated consumption of a particular class of media. In the context of the present research the concept of polarisation becomes significant because it demonstrates the processes by which users can become fans. In other words, polarisation leads not only to avoidance of certain media, but to the dedicated consumption of certain media as an expression of this. In pursuit of media which is consistent with their interests, consumers are more likely to engage with multiple story modes. According to Webster (2005, p369), as a result of an abundance of media content coupled with narrowcast programming models, now more than ever,

... people will use the abundance of choice to avoid material they find distasteful and seek out material that conforms to their predispositions.

The danger behind these trends, according to some scholars, is that filtering out alternative voices in favour of like-minded speech can lead to what has been described as ‘group polarisation’ (Hollander 2008; Sunstein 2001). This is similar to Jonathan
Gray’s (2003) concept of the ‘anti-fan’. According to Gray, this is not necessarily indicative of anti-fandom per se, but rather, is indicative of those who ‘strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel’ (Gray 2003, p70). Gray claims that in contemporary audience studies the anti-fan is either ignored or assumed. Studies of fandom take precedence and the texts and textualities of the anti-fan are either under-researched or insubstantially theorised or understood (Gray 2003). However, according to prevailing conceptions of audience polarisation, anti-fandom is a component of discriminatory consumption which involves both positive and negative expressions. In other words, polarisation involves both the tendency to avoid media which does not conform to the users’ aesthetic or ideological preferences and to seek out media which does. This trend could thus facilitate loyalty to brands or storyworlds that allow the user to reinforce their views across multiple story modes. This means that the anti-fan is actually an expression of fandom owing to the presentation of discrimination as a key characteristic of the fan experience (Fiske 1992; Jenkins 1992; Sandvoss 2005). As Fiske (1992, pp34-35) explains,

Fans discriminate fiercely: the boundaries between what falls within their fandom and what does not are sharply drawn ... this discrimination in the cultural sphere is mapped into distinctions in the social – the boundaries between the community of fans and the rest of the world are just as strongly marked and patrolled... Textual and social discrimination are part and parcel of the same cultural activity.

This comment is indicative not only of consumer loyalty, but discrimination and criticism, thus pointing to the significance of cohesive transmedia design. According to Jenkins (1992, p86) fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an exercise in theory and criticism. Social and textual discrimination (an effect, according to Webster (2005), of audience polarisation) can be seen as a component of this. While it may seem simplistic to propose that fans are created purely via market forces which influence mass polarisation, it is not so to suggest that these processes might help produce new fans out of existing audiences. Essentially, polarisation leads to more loyal media users, and loyalty, of course, is a key indicator of higher level engagement. This implies that processes of polarisation are likely to produce more users who can be identified as fans, or at least, more users who adopt fannish modes of media use. Furthermore, taking the literature on polarisation into consideration, this suggests that fans are also more likely to follow narratives across multiple story modes as a result of discerning tendencies.
This is an expression of both consumer loyalty and fandom, which are of course linked (Jenkins 2004b, 2006a; Nikunen 2007; Oliver 1999; Scolari, 2009).

The industry, according to Livingstone (2004), is enthusiastic about the recent turn in audience trends. Media companies looking to foster consumer loyalty in a bid to harness greater profit are happy to accommodate new modes of media use (Webster 2005, p369). Having discarded the traditional single-channel broadcast model, the media industry is now experimenting with new formats which cater to an increasingly diverse audience. The new media audience is fragmented, migratory and embedded in fandom; the mass is becoming spectral. Critically, practices of use are increasingly ‘intertextual, transtextual, [and] unexpected’ (Livingstone 2004, p78). Livingstone (2004, p78) argues that media practitioners have accepted these new challenges with vigour:

... the media industry, having boldly taken over many of the ideas and methods of the academy ... is, unlike some in media studies, agog with the fate of the audience.

Furthermore, according to Ruggill (2009, p106) trends in cross-platform production encourage media users to consume in new ways, lured by the promise of alternative means of ‘seeing, studying, and interacting’. Jenkins (2006a) shares a similar perspective, claiming that new trends in media-mix culture – an approach to storytelling which spreads information across various textual sites including broadcast media, mobile devices and location-based entertainment – might lead to the evolution of a new kind of culture and society where transmedial consumption becomes intuitive for all media users. This in turn might lead to the popularisation of transmedia production. He claims that, in the same way that children played with bows and arrows in hunting culture, the inheritors of the information society will play with information (Jenkins 2006a, p134). However, he acknowledges that one of the problems inherent in transmedia storytelling is that many older media users are left confused or uninvolved with such entertainment models, unable or unwilling to shift their mode of use. Whilst not all media users may be willing or able to participate in the new popular mediascape, these trends do point to an increase in fannish modes of media use. Critically, discerning consumption inspires new modes of use which are commonly associated with fans. Furthermore, this means that while media users may be more fastidious in their consumption habits, they are also likely to consume across multiple story modes, thus offering the industry new opportunities to exploit consumer loyalty. For transmedia
practitioners this means that transmedia storytelling can be used both to exploit existing
loyalties and to encourage non-fans to consume transmediaally, thus facilitating new
loyalties.

As a result of these processes the subject of fan studies is widening. Kaarina Nikunen
(2007) refers to this as the ‘fanification’ of audiences, a trend influenced by studies
which champion fans as the pioneers of future audiences (Bailey, 2002; Booth, 2008;
Jenkins2004a, 2004b). As Carrie Reinhard (2009, p9) notes, the term is used as a way of
describing the recent focus in audience studies on fans as a way of understanding and
conceptualising future audiences. Critically, this implies that mode of use is changeable.
Due to processes of mass fragmentation and polarisation audiences are more discerning.
Their adopted mode of use more closely reflects story/content-driven use than other
forms. This is comparable to fan use and suggests that fans are the most likely
consumers to engage with texts transmediaally and that fan use is beginning to define
consumption of commercial popular culture. Nikunen (2007, p111) concedes that in
many ways this cannot be helped since fan culture seems to be at the very heart of
media change, embodying technological convergence and paralleling an increase in
internet usage. Livingstone (2009, p3) elaborates on this, claiming that the key issues
facing audience reception studies today include: ‘meaning, agency, resistance,
participation, conversation’, and ‘interaction’. Each of these traits is associated with
fandom. Furthermore, fanification refers to industrial processes which seek to address
audiences as fans, ‘thus ordinary audiences are expected to adopt fan practises’
(Nikunen 2007, p114). As Jenkins (2004b, p1) notes,

Contemporary popular culture has absorbed many aspects of “fan culture” which
would have seemed marginal a decade ago. Media producers are consciously building
into their texts opportunities for fan elaboration and collaboration.

Critically, this demonstrates that conceptions of fandom are becoming somewhat
nebulous, so much so that the concept of the fan is increasingly being used to describe a
much broader audience segment than its traditional use encompasses. This suggests that
media users now have the opportunity to perform their consumption more easily via
means usually enacted by fans, such as migratory consumption. As a result, transmedia
storytelling may be adapted more often for commercial design; however, this does not,
in effect, mean that processes of fragmentation and polarisation have led to
massification via the standardising of fan practices. Rather it can be seen as leading to an increase in discerning consumption – which implies polarisation – and as channelling user behaviour into a story/content-driven framework. Discerning consumption begets migration because it can be used as an effort to track down favoured content and to avoid material which has been deemed unfavourable. The popular media fan is thus highly engaged with media across multiple story modes. This can be seen as symptomatic of highly specialised media use and discerning consumption, i.e. fans are highly discriminatory and loyal to particular brands and narratives. Due to the behaviours associated with this mode of use (story/content-driven), the narrative is valued more highly than delivery mode, thus fans are likely to engage with narrative transmedially.

The behaviours by which fandom is characterised continue to evolve in response to the cultural environment. According to Jenkins (2006a, p323) recent trends towards transmedial consumption can be situated within the context of convergence culture, described as ‘a shift in the logic by which culture operates, emphasizing the flow of content across media channels’. This phenomenon is characterised by both top-down and bottom-up processes. Whilst consumer loyalty serves the interest of media producers, so too does transmedia content serve the interests of fragmented and migratory audiences. Ultimately, these trends are indicative of an increase in fannish modes of media use, enabled by market forces and the confluence of convergent media and grassroots practices. These trends indicate an increased interest in the fan as a subject of audience studies, as well as implicating fan practices in transmedial consumption.

**Conclusion**

This chapter uses fan studies as a framework for discussing story/content-driven use of transmedia texts. This chapter finds that fans typify story/content-driven media use thus making fans exemplary transmedial consumers, and fandom the ideal context for adopting this mode of use. Many of the characteristics used to position fans as exemplary transmedial consumers were discussed in the previous chapter in the context of engagement studies. This chapter focused primarily on the migratory consumption
patterns of fans, revealing how fandom creates an environment suitable for transmedial consumption.

The history of fandom reveals patterns of use which can be characterised by high levels of engagement with and devotion to a variety of texts from mass media. Whilst the fan can be read in the context of fanaticism and zealousy, many of the behaviours associated with media fandom are comparable to loyalty; a significant indicator of engagement. Contemporary audience studies have pointed to a shift towards the fanification of audiences. Critically, this suggests that mode of use is changeable. Given that transmedia texts accommodate a range of uses, audiences who approach the text according to a different mode of use can be encouraged to adopt a fannish mode of use via their engagement with transmedia design. Due to recent cultural and technological changes it is likely that this trend – towards the fanification of audiences – will continue.

The next chapter discusses the qualitative research component of the research. The qualitative research builds on the findings and theories from the first half of the thesis by interviewing fans of the case study texts about their engagement experience with transmedia storytelling, and extracting themes from the data to formalise categories of description based on the data. The following chapter introduces the second half of the thesis by exploring in detail the methods and methodology utilised in the qualitative research.
Chapter Four: The Qualitative Research

In this chapter, the findings from the previous chapters are used as a theoretical basis for the qualitative study which utilises in-depth interviews as a mixed method for exploring the nature of engagement with transmedia texts by fans, including accounts of how, and why. The methodology is based on a phenomenographical approach, described by Ference Marton (1988, p144) as ‘a method adapted for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them’. So far, this thesis has relied on discourse analysis as a method for discussing the subject. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the qualitative research for this thesis. The first half of the chapter details the epistemological and methodological approach, and methods utilised; that is, it provides accounts of phenomenography and qualitative methodology, as well as detailed discussion on the practice of in-depth interviewing exploited in this study. This includes discussion of recruitment strategies, informed consent procedures and interview techniques. Following this is a discussion of the limitations of the study as well as methods used to circumvent methodological problems and an overview of data analysis. The second half of the chapter discusses the case study texts used as a basis for participant recruitment. This includes an overview of each text and justification for its use in the study.

The Methodological Approach

Sharan Merriam (2009, p5) describes qualitative research as an exercise in understanding experiences. Rather than determining cause and effect she claims qualitative researchers are more interested in uncovering ‘the meaning of a phenomenon for those involved’. There are several key features of the qualitative research process. These include: a focus on the everyday life of people in natural settings; the interpretation and perception of meaning; consideration of the relationship between the researcher and the researched; and the use of ‘thick description’ (Holloway 1997, p5), characterised as an interpretative analysis which builds up a ‘clear picture of the
individuals and groups in the context of their culture’ (Holloway 1997, p154). Janice Morse and Lyn Richards (2002, pp25-26) describe two defining criteria for adopting qualitative methodology in research; that the research question requires it, and that the data demands it. The present research seeks to understand how media users engage with transmedia texts. The basic epistemological assumption underlying this aim is that subjective accounts are powerful means through which to understand the social and cultural world. Furthermore, qualitative data sources, such as interview transcripts and e-mail correspondence, are thought to be immeasurable using quantitative methods, such as the counting of measurable units (Bertrand & Hughes 2005, p85), thus demonstrating the logic of Morse and Richards’ (2002) qualitative research criteria; that is, that both research question and data often dictate the appropriate methodology.

Qualitative research is commonly informed by interpretive epistemology (Merriam 2009; Priest 2010; Schwandt 2003). That is, it is based on the assumption that ‘reality is socially constructed’ (Merriam 2009, p8). From an interpretive perspective, what distinguishes human action from the movement of physical objects is that the former is inherently meaningful (Schwandt 2003, p296). Furthermore, this kind of research emphasises variation of perspective; that is, it seeks to uncover multiple interpretations, rather than a single observable reality (Schwandt 2003, p8). Because human action can only be understood in the context of a system of meanings, to find meaning in action requires one to interpret the system (Schwandt 2003, p296). The assignment of meaning by actors to social contexts is what Merriam (2009, p8) refers to as the social construction of reality, a concept originally formalised by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in 1967. The basic method underlying this assumption is the interpretive process. This process informs most qualitative approaches to social research, including phenomenography, the approach adopted in the present study. Exclusive to qualitative design, the interpretive approach allows researchers to understand human action within a system of meaningful contexts.

Ina Bertrand and Peter Hughes (2005, p260) describe the qualitative approach as research primarily based on description rather than measurement. Today, qualitative research is still defined in contrast to quantitative research; its description by means of comparison is commonly practiced. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2003, p13) describe the differences between qualitative and quantitative methodologies as follows:
The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency.

This account reflects commonly used distinctions in the field. It demonstrates that qualitative methodologies differ primarily from quantitative methodologies in terms of the research approach and the research environment. The approach in qualitative research, as Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p13) explain, emphasises ‘qualities of entities and … processes and meanings’. The most obvious distinction is between the production of a quantity of data and the production of quality, or depth of data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006, p11). In fact, Thomas Schwandt (2003, p293) describes the qualitative approach as a movement encompassing epistemological and methodological criticisms of research which is ‘experimental, quasi-experimental, correlational’, and of ‘survey research strategies’. Comparatively, these differences are described by Brannen (2004, p312) as ‘two fundamentally different paradigms through which to study the social world’.

Whilst many researchers still emphasise a distinction between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, there is a growing body of literature which suggests that a mixed-method approach can be suitable in certain research scenarios (Greene 2007; Maxwell 2010; Sandelowski, Voils & Knafl 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori 2006). This is typically reflected in the analysis of data. ‘Quantitizing’, or ‘quasi-statistics’ are terms both used to describe the numerical translation or transformation of qualitative data in verbal form (Becker 1970, pp81-82; Maxwell 2010, p476; Sandelowski, Voils & Knafl 2009, p208). This often involves the use of terms such as many, often, typically and sometimes (Maxwell 2010, p476). Whilst the present research utilises similar discourse for analysis of data, this alone does not make the study mixed-method research. As Joseph Maxwell (2010, p478) contends,

… the use of numbers per se, in conjunction with qualitative methods of data, does not make a study mixed-method research. Specifically, numbers in the sense of simple counts of things … are a legitimate and important sort of data for qualitative researchers.

Whilst counting methods are used in the present research in order to codify the data, data collection is based on a qualitative paradigm. Furthermore, qualitative research is
often distinguishable in terms of research environment. For example, Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p16) claim that while quantitative studies rely on remote, inferential and empirical methods, qualitative researchers often use the social world as a context for research. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (2006, p5) support this view, suggesting that qualitative methods differ markedly from research models based on the creation of knowledge in a controlled environment. This difference is reflected in the use of observational methods emerging from the school of sociology, such as anthropology and ethnography. Qualitative methods strive to ‘make the world visible’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p5). Research materials used in this effort vary: case study; personal experience; interview; artefact; and life narrative are all measures of meaning and often used interconnectedly in interpretive practice (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p5).

Given the number of qualitative methods and practices now available, selection of research material can involve a combination of methodological ontologies based on the use of those most suitable for exploring the research at hand (Frost et al. 2010, p442). The present study uses phenomenography as a research orientation. Its principles and associated methods, as well as justification for its use in this research, is discussed below.

Phenomenography

The term ‘phenomenography’ is a derivation of the Greek pahinomenon (appearance) and graphein (description). Its meaning is thus, ‘a description of appearances’ (Hasselgren & Beach 1997, p192). Phenomenographic research emerged in the 1970s as a response to ‘common sense considerations about learning and teaching’ (Marton 1988, p152). The term was coined and its methods first used as research practice in 1979 (Marton 1988, p141). Its methods were based on an inductive approach which sought to assess individual experiences (Richardson 1999, p57) – to map the ‘qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them’ (Marton 1988, p144). According to Lennart Svensson (1997, p167), phenomenography shares the following research principles with qualitative methodology: an assumption about the importance of description and interpretation; and an understanding of knowledge as a matter of ‘meaning and similarities and differences in meaning’. More specifically,
descriptions of conceptions are made the aim, and the term ‘phenomenography’ is used to refer to the research practice underlying this aim (Svensson 1997, p160).

The phenomenographical approach is referred to by Marton (1981) as the ‘second-order perspective’ and is distinguishable based on its orientation towards people and their experiences of the world, or as Biörn Hasselgren and Dennis Beach (1997, p192) describe it, ‘a description of appearances’. Conversely, the first-order approach orients itself towards the world and infers on its nature (Marton 1981, p178). This is comparable to phenomenology, an approach which is often confused with phenomenography (Alsop & Tompsett 2006; Barnard, McCosker & Gerber 1999; Hasselgren & Beach 1997). Phenomenology aims to describe ‘phenomena and their essences’ (Dahlberg 2006, p11). In phenomenological research, an ‘essence’ is understood as a structure of essential meanings which define the phenomenon (Dahlberg 2006, p11). While the notion of essence is used to refer to a ‘common, intersubjective meaning’, phenomenographic research has repeatedly found that aspects of reality are experienced in a ‘number of qualitatively different ways’ (Marton 1981, pp180-181). The two can thus be distinguished based on the description of data.

Compared to phenomenology, phenomenographic research arrives at a fundamentally different level of description (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber 1999, p213). According to Marton, the key difference is that phenomenology is exclusively methodological whilst phenomenography is largely research-oriented. He explains:

“The phenomenology of political power” would, for instance, refer to something that we arrive at concerning political power by means of a phenomenological investigation. “The phenomenography of political power,” on the other hand, would refer to anything that can be said about how people perceive, experience and conceptualize political power (Marton 1981, p181).

The phenomenological approach is thus an example of the first-order perspective. Marton’s discussion of the differences between the two perspectives is now used as a guide to distinguishing these approaches in the field (see Alsop & Tompsett 2006; Barnard , McCosker & Gerber 1999; Hasselgren & Beach 1997; Richardson 1999). He advocates the second-order approach because it allows researchers to reveal truths which cannot be derived from either what we know about the general properties of the human mind, or from what we know about structures of society; phenomenography
seeks to understand levels of modes of experience, thus instituting a research method which reveals forms of knowledge in-between the common and the structural (Marton 1981, p181). Furthermore, this implies that phenomenography is not concerned only with phenomena, or with participants who experience phenomena, but with the relationship between the two (Dall’Alba et al. 1989, p57). This approach is suitable as a method for the present research which investigates transmedial consumption as an engagement experience enacted as a response to the text. Thus, the present research advocates the phenomenography of transmedial consumption.

According to Marton (1981, p196), the primary methods associated with phenomenographic research involve the categorisation of descriptions denoting ‘forms of thought, which we bring together in order to characterize the perceived world’. He refers to this as the denotation of a ‘collective intellect’ (Marton 1981, p198). Findings drawn from this method can be described as relational and experiential because they reflect relations between subject and phenomena drawn from categories of description based on the most distinctive features that differentiate one experience from another (Dall’Alba et al. 1989, p58). The purpose of this method of data, according to Marton (1981, p197), is to thematise descriptively:

... the complex of possible ways of viewing various aspects of the world, the aggregate of basic conceptions underlying not only different, but even alternative and contradictory forms of propositional knowledge, irrespective of whether these forms are deemed right or wrong.

Fundamentally, phenomenography aims to reveal the qualitatively different ways people experience the phenomena, known categorically as the ‘collective intellect’ (Marton 1981, p198). Its methods are concerned with describing aspects of reality as they are understood; it takes as its research object experiential concepts (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber 1999, pp213-214) and produces research outcomes based on the ways people conceive of and experience phenomena. This approach uses subject experience as its primary data source and thus ‘meaning may not be predefined’ (Svensson 1997, p169). Instead, meaning has to be found. It can be argued that the role of theory in this context is not to frame assumptions regarding the research outcome, but rather theory is used to frame emergent themes and categories of description (Richardson 1999, p71). This method is particularly useful for cases such as the present,
where little is known about conceptions of the research object. Furthermore, the phenomenographical approach is not uncommon to qualitative methods, especially those using small sample groups, such as the present. In fact, John Walton (1992, p192) has observed that ‘case studies are likely to produce the best theory’. He explains that the logic of the case study is to demonstrate a causal argument about how ‘social forces take shape and produce results in specific settings’ (Walton 1992, p122). In other words, small samples act as demonstration of theory, through ‘force of example’ (Walton 1992, p122). That being said, Svensson (1997, p162) indicates that phenomenography is usually motivated by a set of research assumptions. The present research is based on a theoretical conceptualisation of the research object as phenomenon (the transmedia text), coupled with research assumptions regarding the nature of a particular mode of transmedial use. The theoretical conceptualisation of transmedia storytelling is used to characterise the research, whilst the research assumptions regarding transmedial use are used as a basis for participant recruitment. Consistent with the epistemological approach, theory regarding the experience of transmedial consumption is introduced following the research analysis based on categories of description which emerge from the data. This is the most suitable approach for the present study because so little is known about transmedial consumption. Without a meaningful body of literature to guide understanding, a theoretical framework cannot be predetermined; however, assumptions can be suggested based on the available information.

While many sources suggest that phenomenography is still most commonly used in the study of learning (Bowden 2000; Francis 1993; Marton 1981; Marton & Säljö 1976; Prosser 2000; Richardson 1999), John Bowden (2000, p1) asserts that its methods may be applied to a variety of research settings, both within and outside the field of education. In contemporary applications, phenomenographic research can be conducted in one of two ways; the methods are described as ‘discursive’ or ‘pure’ phenomenography and developmental phenomenography (Bowden 2000, p3). Pure phenomenography refers to the research process which emerged out of the work of Marton in the 1970s. Whilst his research focused on the study of learning, the prefix ‘pure’ denotes the generic nature of the methods utilised, emphasising their applicability across a number of fields and distinguishing these methods from other studies which share the same educational focus (Alsop & Tompsett 2006, p243; Bowden 2000, p3;
Svensson 1997, p164). This form of research investigates the ‘qualitatively different ways in which people perceive and understand their reality’ (Marton 1981, p177). As Marton (1981, p180) suggests, it is research which is directed towards ‘experiential description’.

In comparison, developmental phenomenography seeks to discover ‘how people experience some aspect of their world’, and then ‘enable them or others to change the way their world operates’ (Bowden 2000, p3). The difference between the two approaches can be attributed to the purpose of research outcomes. Whilst developmental phenomenography seeks to encourage and enable agentic action, pure phenomenography aims to reveal categories of description denoting the different ways people perceive and experience their environment. The present study is informed by pure phenomenography, used as a method for revealing categories of description about how users engage with transmedia texts. Consistent with this research orientation, the study aims to describe conceptions in relation to more complex phenomena. The following section discusses the method of data collection.

**The In-depth Interview**

The present study uses in-depth interviews as its primary method of data collection. This is the most appropriate method for the present research because it aims to reveal the qualitatively different ways fans conceive of their engagement with transmedia texts. The interview schedule (see Appendix One) consists of 12 pre-established questions which were organised around the aims of the study. Two were probe questions, which sought to introduce the interviewee to the subject, such as question one: How long have you been a fan of the text? The remaining ten were organised thematically based on the aims of the study. Transmedia story modes are referred to as ‘platforms’ in the interview schedule because the term ‘platform’ is more recognisable in everyday parlance.

The use of in-depth interviews in qualitative research serves several purposes. According to Tim Rapley (2004, p16), the two major traditions on which the analysis of interview data has centred are: *interview-data-as-resource* (the data are seen to reflect the subject’s reality outside the interview); and *interview-data-as-topic* (the data are
seen to reflect a reality ‘jointly constructed by the interviewee and the interviewer’). A review of the literature reveals that both conditions are true. The demarcation of this method’s utility as resource and conversation is unnecessary. While the data-as-resource approach has suffered considerable critique based on the belief that interviews are inherently interactional events (Rapley 2004, p16), other authors suggest that qualitative data can be generalised (Flyvbjerg 2006; Gobo 2004; Mayring 2007), lending credence to the notion that the data reflects the subject’s reality outside the interview, thus negating the researcher’s influence on the interaction. Because this study uses interpretive phenomenography as research practice, which considers both ‘the object of interpretation and the interpreter as part of the same hermeneutic circle’ (Hasselgren & Beach 1997, p198), it follows that the principles of the data-as-topic tradition are the most relevant in this context. This approach is described as hermeneutic phenomenography and operates from ‘the inter-relatedness of being and objectivity (subject-object-subject) relations’ (Hasselgren & Beach 1997, p198). Hermeneutic phenomenography emphasises interpretation at the stage of analysis and can thus be considered complementary to an interpretive approach. According to this perspective, meaning formation must be arrived at through interpretation which considers both the object of interpretation and the interpreter as part of the same hermeneutic circle (Hasselgren & Beach 1997, p198). According to Hasselgren and Beach (1997, p198) hermeneutic analysis aims to:

… fuse the horizons of these two meaning formations by bridging the gap between their initial states, as far as is humanly possible in a way true to an original meaning or intentionality: however difficult this might be in practice.

Hasselgren and Beach (1997, p198) maintain that the basic tenet underlying this approach is to understand things in their own context and on their own terms. They claim that this basic tenet is reflected in most phenomenographic research and thus hermeneutic is an acceptable prefix to phenomenography as it applies to the interpretation of interview data.

Kristin Esterberg (2002, p85) describes three types of interviews associated with qualitative research: the structured interview, the semi-structured (or in-depth) interview, and the unstructured interview. According to Esterberg (2002, p87), the goal of the semi-structured/in-depth interview is to ‘explore a topic more openly’, and ‘allow
interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words’. The semi-structured/in-depth interview can be located between the extremes of the structured interview, and the unstructured interview. This typically means that the interview schedule involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and topics, but the interviewer is free to digress and probe beyond the answers to the prepared questions (Berg 2009, p107; Merriam 2009, p89). This kind of interview method is appropriate when the researcher is working from a predetermined research paradigm, or is familiar with the area they wish to study. As Morse and Richards (2002, p94) indicate,

Sometimes the researcher knows enough about the phenomenon or the domain of enquiry to develop questions about the topic in advance of interviewing, but not enough to be able to anticipate the answers.

The present research is framed by a predetermined research paradigm informed by the literature on transmedia storytelling. The use of a semi-structured interview schedule is thus the most appropriate approach. The semi-structured interview technique has been described as a ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Berg 2009, p101; Esterberg 2002, p88; Holloway 1997, p94;) in which the interviewer aims to obtain the perspectives, feelings, and perceptions from the participant (Holloway 1997, p94). In fact, Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin (2005, p108) refer to the responsive interview as an ‘extended conversation’. This is consistent with the present research which is informed by a design seeking to reveal subject experience as it pertains to aspects of reality which have been characterised by the researcher. The perspective of interview as social interaction is reflected in the work of many qualitative researchers (Bertrand & Hughes 2005; Holloway 1997; Rapley 2004; Warren & Karner 2005). According to Carol Warren and Tracy Karner, the view of the interview as social interaction and speech event has influenced qualitative methods since at least the 1920s, especially in the Chicago School. As Vivien Palmer noted in 1928 (p171),

Any interview constitutes a social situation between two individuals; it is a process of continuous, spiral interaction in which one person’s response to the stimulation of another in turn becomes the stimulation for another response.

Whilst the benefits of this approach have been well documented (Bertrand & Hughes 2005; Esterberg 2002; Holloway 1997; Morse & Richards 2002), the social context of
the interview method requires the researcher to compromise their objectivity. According to John Johnson (2002, p109), compared to other qualitative methods, in-depth interviewing involves a ‘greater involvement of the interviewer’s self’. Distinct from most research methods, the in-depth interview institutes ‘the self’ as research instrument. Proponents of the Chicago School in the 1920s advised researchers to maintain an ‘objective detachment’ from their participants (Warren & Karner 2005, p138). Today, qualitative researchers recommend methods similar to the hermeneutic approach which emphasises the role of the interviewer as participant in the social context (Johnson 2002; Warner & Karner 2005;). The difference reflects Rapley’s (2004) impressions of data-as-resource and data-as-topic. Rather than seek to describe the benefits of this approach, it is more useful to refer the philosophical underpinnings of dialogic meaning formation. As Schwandt (2003, p302) explains, understanding is something that is produced in dialogue, not something reproduced by an interpreter. Proponents of the ‘interview as social context approach’ are in fact advocating a philosophical perspective on meaning formation which necessitates its use as method. The approach taken in the present study – data-as-topic – is consistent with this approach.

The incorporation of the interviewer as participant in the research design necessitates the use of certain methods to manage the social dynamic. These include: rapport, as a method for establishing truthfulness between interview participants (Warner & Karner 2005); reciprocity, to encourage cooperative self-disclosure (Rapley 2004, p23); and the detection of markers – ‘important pieces of information that the respondent may offer as they are talking about something else’ (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006, p128). According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p128), the interview scenario is an opportunity for the co-creation of social scientific knowledge. It is a collaborative process which requires the cooperation of both researcher and respondent in the process of meaning formation. Such an approach reduces the hierarchical separation of interviewer and interviewee. This is not unlike the hermeneutic approach, according to which ‘meaning is negotiated mutually in the act of interpretation’ (Schwandt 2003, p302). The interview method thus lends itself to hermeneutic methods of social inquiry. Understanding from this perspective is participative, conversational and dialogical (Schwandt 2003, p302).
The requirement for rich data is particularly significant in the context of research which uses a small sample size. This assumes that individuals have ‘unique and important knowledge about the social world’ (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006, p119). What this implies is that interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviours or feelings, or we need to ask the individual directly how they interpret the world around them. This allows the researcher to obtain information that could not be obtained through other means. As Patton (2002, pp340-341) explains,

We interview people to find out from them those things which we cannot directly observe... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions... We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective.

The present research uses in-depth interviews as a method to reveal categories of description regarding the experiences of respondents who engage with texts transmedially. Techniques associated with this method, including the use of rapport, reciprocity and the detection of markers, are used as part of a hermeneutic approach which seeks to reveal meaning collaboratively via the process of interpretation. This involves entering into the participant’s perspective and using the interviewer’s characterisation of the object jointly to interpret meaning. A description of the methods is discussed in detail in the following section.

**Methods**

This section provides detail regarding the methods used in the present research including an account of recruitment strategies, informed consent procedures and interview techniques, all of which have been approved by the University’s ethics board. Limitations and data analysis is discussed separately. The present discussion begins by examining two key issues of method: sample size and the generalising principle.

According to Bertrand and Hughes (2005, p64), when working from a constructivist or interpretative approach, the aim is not to make generalisations. Rather, the selection of cases is based on developing an understanding of defined groups or instances of a process. This is described as the case as instance of state” method (Crouch &
Despite the commonality of this approach, there is a widely held assumption in the social sciences that research should be variable-oriented rather than case-oriented (Campbell & Stanley 1966; dellaPorta 2008; Héritier 2008; King, Keohane & Verba 1994; Schmitter 2008). Bent Flyvbjerg (2006) describes this as an unfortunate result of ‘conventional wisdom’ pertaining to small sample research. Perhaps the most oft cited limitation associated with small sample studies is the view that one cannot generalise on the basis of a single case. Proponents of this view typically make the following argument:

... the traditional small-scale community research of fieldwork anthropology – are not in themselves generalizing studies. But they can easily become so if carried out in some numbers, so that judgements of their typicality can justifiably be made (Giddens 1984, p328).

Such a view unfairly assumes that generalisability is only made possible through the examination of a large group. As Alan Kazdin (1982, p282) articulates, ‘results may not be generalizable to persons other than those included in the design’. Ann Majchrzak et al. (2000) expand on this view, claiming that generalisability cannot be assessed from a single case study, except to confirm findings which have already been published in the literature. This is a view shared by other researchers, such as Betty Vandenbosch & Michael Ginzberg (1996), and Michael Newman & Rajiv Sabherwal (1996). In large scale design this problem is statistically corrected.

Questions arising from the generalisability of small sample studies have led some social researchers to defend the validity of such a method. One of the basic approaches to establishing generality from this approach is based on particularity. As Warren Thorngate (1986, pp75-76) explains,

To find out what people do in general, we must first discover what each person does in particular, then determine what, if anything, these particulars have in common ...

Nomothetic laws lie at the intersection of idiographic laws; the former can be discovered only after we find the latter.

Such a view emphasises the importance of the ‘instance’ in social research (MacDonald and Walker 1975). What this assumes is that not only is it advisable that some observation of the instance, or the particular, should be pursued for the furtherance of knowledge, but that it is required in order to determine the relationships between the
particular and the general. As Flyvbjerg (2006, p222) elucidated, contextual inquiry is
central to human learning. He uses various seminal studies as examples of this, which
employed small case methods and whose findings were successfully generalised to the
broader context such as Galileo’s theory of gravity, Newton’s laws of physics,
Einstein’s theory of relativity and Darwin’s theory of evolution (Flyvbjerg 2006, pp225-
226).

Most research in the social sciences (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg 1991) relies on small
cases. That is, ‘it aims at rich descriptions of a few instances of a certain phenomenon’
dellaPorta 2008, p198). In fact, it is not uncommon in qualitative research to rely on
the use of small samples or case studies as a method (Esterberg 2002; Gray 2004;
Merriam 2009). Qualitative recruitment techniques tend to be based on a desire to
understand a particular case in great detail. Thus breadth is usually sacrificed for depth,
and researchers typically choose participants based on the possible insights they can
offer on the research topic (Esterberg 2002, p93). This approach values the uniqueness
of individual subjects or cases over the generalising principle. For example, as Denzin
and Lincoln (2000, p370) explain, ‘any given classroom is like all classrooms, but no
two classrooms are the same’. While results may be transferable to some degree, even
this is unnecessary and irrelevant to most non-positivist research (Bertrand & Hughes
2005, p65).

Nonetheless, in some cases results from a qualitative study may be generalisable to
similar contexts (Mayring 2007, p5). Whilst there are methods specific to qualitative
research which allow interview data to be generalised to specific contexts the aim is not,
ordinarily, to use the data as a measure of relationships in a broader population
(Mayring 2007, p489). In fact, for instance-based research it is not necessary to define a
population (Bertrand & Hughes 2005, p65). From this perspective it can be argued that
results from the data of the present research could be generalised to other fan users who
engage with transmedia texts. The context is specific enough that results from in-depth
interviews can be generalised to a similar context; that is, to transmedia texts of a
similar genre or based on a similar narrative structure. According to Malcolm Williams
(2002, p125), generalisations in qualitative research are legitimated only if they are
made explicitly as ‘moderatum generalizations’ (...). The principle underlying this
approach is that aspects of specific data sets can be seen as ‘instances of a broader
recognisable set of features’ (Williams 2002, p131). In this case, individual data sets can be generalised to the themes or categories of the data at large. For example, a single quotation drawn from interview data could be regarded as representative of a broader set of themes or categories underlying the data set. Not only is this a useful methodological tool for qualitative research, but its method is characteristic of qualitative data analysis. Whilst it is not the aim of the present research to generalise to a broader population, replication of the study might confirm the findings in contextually similar cases; therefore, findings from the present study can be generalised to contextually specific cases.

**Recruitment**

When recruiting for non-positivist research there are no rules on sample size if your aim is not to generalise the results (Bertrand & Hughes 2005, p65). Whilst opinions in the broader community insist that small samples cannot ensure validity, ‘interview-based studies involving a small number of respondents are becoming more common in social science’ (Crouch & McKenzie 2006, p484). In fact, according to Mira Crouch and Heather McKenzie (2006, p483), a small number of cases (less than twenty) will enhance the validity of in-depth inquiry using the interview method in qualitative research.

Recruitment for the present study is based on the key principles of qualitative research: the extraction of rich, qualitative data; the examination of an instance using a small sample set; and generalisability to similar contexts but not to a broader population. The recruitment method used in the present study is most similar to non-probability quota sampling (whilst ‘sampling’ is traditionally a positivist term, it can be used to describe ‘any process of selecting subjects for study, including cases and instances’ (Bertrand & Hughes 2005, p67)). This method is characterised by the selection of a sample based on what is already known about the population, but without the same rigour as probability sampling which is used to find samples which are statistically representative of a larger population (Bertrand & Hughes 2005, pp66-68). Quota sampling can be classed a facet of a broader class of sampling method known as purposive sampling. According to Esterberg (2002, p93) this occurs when you intentionally select participants for the
specific and different perspectives they might offer. The purpose then, is to extract rich qualitative data about a topic which is at least partially understood, from the perspective of the interviewee. Thus, it is necessary in the context of the present research to conduct in-depth interviews as a method of extracting rich, qualitative data which are reflective of the participants’ experiences of engaging with transmedia texts. However, purposive sampling also dictates that the researcher should choose participants who can provide the greatest possible insight into the topic. This suggests that great effort should be taken in sourcing participants from environments which are most likely to produce the kinds of individuals who can offer the kinds of perspectives which is desirable to the study. Such a method sacrifices breadth for depth and perspective; a key requirement of qualitative recruitment methods (Esterberg 2002, p93).

The criteria for recruitment based on information ‘known’ for the present study was the identification of the fans as the most likely audience to consume transmedially. Sourcing methods for this group are based on an analysis of ‘typical’ fan behaviours. According to the literature, one of the defining features of the fan is a tendency to traverse multiple story modes (Bolin 2007; Brooker 2001; Jenkins 2006a; Watrall & Shaw 2008). This can be seen as a result of either planned flow (see Örnebring 2007; Williams 1974), which typically positions the media user as vulnerable to wider economic imperatives, or more agentic forms of consumption, understood as representing a cultural shift as consumers seek out new information and ‘make connections among dispersed media content’ (Jenkins 2006a, p3). These two ideas represent the dominant theorised perspectives on audience behaviour and the agentic conditions of migratory consumption; however, regardless of the differences between the two, each shares a common theme which dictates the sourcing method for the fan user: that they traverse multiple story modes. This means that, in theory, fans should be found engaging with media through all manner of story modes including books, graphic novels, film and interactive games.

Traditionally, sourcing participants who engage with multiple media, such as books and films, is based primarily on locating participants in social spaces; this can include both fixed locales, and online spaces which are socially constructed by ‘the interaction of multiple humans over time’ (Wise 1997, pxiii). This idea has been validated by research which explores the social customs and behaviours associated with emergent internet
communities (Miller & Slater 2000; Brobeck 2004; Rheingold 1994; Turkle 1997). It acts as both a conduit for production, and a platform for social arrangements. This makes it an ideal avenue through which to source fans because not only do fans engage with media across story modes, but the extra-textual activities associated with high level engagement consumers suggests that fans will be found participating in online fan communities.

The latter also applies to fixed social locales. As Jenkins (2004a, p38) points out, fans demonstrate an ‘active engagement with media content’ and a ‘willingness to track down that content’. These behaviours manifest both online and in fixed locales such as fan conventions, community gatherings and distribution points for popular media artefacts, such as special interest retail stores (Aden 1999; Jindra 1994; Reijinders 2010).

Participants for the present study were recruited using one of two approaches. It was anticipated that this would increase the likelihood of accessing fans, based on spatially distinct, but contextually similar environments. Both relied on a call to participants, but using different methods: firstly (non-sequentially), through internet-based research postings; and secondly, through research flyers distributed to selected special interest stores. The first approach was used with success and reliability as a method in a previous study by the author. Participants sourced for the study using this approach were recruited online at viewaskew.com and buffyforums.net from fan forums based on the case study texts (the details of which are discussed later in this chapter). Initially, a third case study (The Matrix) and associated website (thelastfreecity.com) were included in the research; however, only one respondent made contact regarding the case and despite lengthy correspondence which confirmed their consent to the study, the individual did not participate in an interview.

**Online Recruitment**

In order to communicate the research details to potential participants, the researcher had to become a member of the websites’ fan forums. Research proceedings were delayed on buffyforums.net because this action required new members to post or reply to five threads on the forum before being granted access to private messaging (PM) features.
Privileges which allowed members to contact other members directly could be earned by generating social capital on the threads; i.e. interacting with one another based on the social norms of reciprocity and trust (see Malaby 2006; Putnam 1995). This was not the case on viewaskew.com, which allowed new members to post upon receipt of a $2.00 donation. While registration to the site was free, posting privileges were granted at a small cost to the member.

Each website had a central board which broadcast news, announcements and forum updates, and could be used by members for general discussion. Other boards on the forums were used for topical discussion only (for example, buffyforums.net featured a board titled Angel, a character and one of Buffy’s love interests in the series). The ‘home’ board on each forum acted as a digital agora and was used for posting for the research because of its neutrality. A call for interest (see Appendix Two) designed for posting on the home board (and thus reflecting a colloquial discourse) was adapted to each forum. One referred to the View Askew-niverse as case text and the other referred to Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Additionally, to avoid replication and to engender trust amongst research participants the researcher’s username varied from one website to the next and this was reflected in the customisation of the postings. For example, on the View Askew forums, the researcher used ‘SilentEm’ as an online handle, chosen because of its pointed reference to a well-known character (Silent Bob) from the View Askewniverse.

The date of posting on viewaskew.com is inaccessible due to the sudden closure of the site’s forum halfway through the recruitment process (the details of this will be discussed in the limitations section). The date of posting on buffyforums.net was 15 July 2010. In both cases the posting explained the details of the study, gave a description of the research topic and prompted participants to contact the researcher via PM if they were interested in participating.

On viewaskew.com four members responded and expressed an interest in participating in the study. While it was originally hoped that all participants could be interviewed face-to-face, for some participants this method was difficult because they were located overseas. Furthermore, in a study which investigated why fans write fan fiction online, participants recruited online preferred not to meet face-to-face owing to the veil of anonymity offered in online forums (Beddows 2007). For this reason, members who
expressed an interest in the study were offered a variety of methods in order to secure their participation. The first method offered was a face-to-face interview, because it was preferred by the researcher as a context for discussion. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p124) the face-to-face interview is preferable to other methods such as telephone interviews and e-mail interviews because it allows the researcher to interpret gestures such as eye contact and other forms of non-verbal communication, as well as build rapport. When pragmatic factors or issues of ethical conduct make a face-to-face interview impossible it is appropriate to use an alternative method. The second method offered to participants was a Skype interview. Of all the respondents who chose this method each elected to disable video functionality during the call. The Skype interviews are thus comparable to the phone interview method and are therefore referred to as Skype (P) interviews from here on. Following this, participants were offered an interview via PM, a service available on forums which functions in a similar fashion in most respects to e-mail. Out of four respondents, three elected to participate in an interview via Skype (P) and one elected to participate in an interview via PM. The primary reason for these choices was that each participant was located overseas in the United States of America. Out of those four, only two participated in their scheduled interviews. As was discussed earlier, the forum boards on viewaskew.com closed suddenly during the recruitment process. Two out of the four members who agreed to participate in the study had yet to confirm an interview date or respond to questions via PM. When the site closed, all records of correspondence with these members were unfortunately lost. The two remaining respondents were both interviewed via Skype (P).

The same methods were used on buffyforums.net. This time, a total of five participants expressed an interest in participating in the study. Out of those five, two elected to participate in an interview via Skype (P) and two elected to participate via PM. One member expressed an interest in participating in the study; however, after several attempts to organise a method of interview with this member, no response was received.

**Offline Recruitment**

At the same time that a call for interest was posted on viewaskew.com and buffyforums.net, a call for interest flyer (see Appendix Three) was distributed to selected special interest retail stores. These included: Minotaur in Melbourne, Seventh Art in
Hawthorn, and *Global Gear* in Knox City. Permission was secured from staff members at each store before the flyers were distributed. The flyers were similar in nature to the call for participants post except for a few small details: the flyers targeted fans of all three original case study texts (*the View Askew-niverse*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *The Matrix*), because the distribution points were not case specific; and they included the researcher’s e-mail address for respondents who were interested in participating in the study.

There were a total of five responses to the flyers distributed in and around Melbourne. Four responded as fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and one responded as a fan of the *View Askew-niverse*. The respondents did not reveal which stores they found the research flyers in. Of the four respondents, three elected to be interviewed face-to-face and one elected to be interviewed via PM, when it proved difficult to arrange a mutually convenient time to meet in person or on Skype (P). One member expressed an interest in participating in the study; however, three months after arranging to conduct the interview via PM no response was received.

The interview methods used for the research differ primarily in terms of their synchronicity (Opdenakker 2006, p2): the face-to-face interview method creates a synchronous context of both time and place; the telephone method (comparable to the Skype interview in the present study) creates a synchronous context of time and an asynchronous context of place; and finally, the e-mail or PM interview method creates an *asynchronous* context of both time and place. Each of these methods presents unique advantages and disadvantages for data analysis. Chiefly, asynchronous communications of both time and place (such as e-mail or PM), generate data sets which are easier to record; however synchronous communications of either time or place (such as face-to-face or Skype (P)) are seen to generate a richer data set due to the added verbal and non-verbal cues. These methods are illustrated in Table 1 (adapted from Opdenakker 2006, p2).
Table 1. Interview Methods for the study arranged according to dimensions of synchronicity/asynchronicity of time/place

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synchronicity</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skype (P)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asynchronicity</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E-mail/PM</td>
<td>Skype (P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E-mail/PM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst most qualitative studies use only a single method, chosen based on a research aim (Opdenakker 2006, p10) the methods for the present study were influenced primarily by ethical considerations. The implications of this are further discussed in the limitations section.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study. Those who were interviewed face-to-face were given a plain language statement to read and keep (see Appendix Four), which explained details of the study and confirmed its approval by the University’s ethics board, and were asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix Five) which declared their consent to participate in the study, and to be recorded. Respondents who were interviewed via Skype (P), PM, or e-mail were sent the plain language statement electronically. Skype (P) participants consented verbally to participate in the study and to be recorded and consent was implied via participation for those interviewing via PM or e-mail. Participants’ identities were protected via the use of pseudonyms. Participant details are illustrated in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Recruitment Method</th>
<th>Interview Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

137
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Text Response</th>
<th>Availability</th>
<th>Communication Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>View Askewniverse</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anabelle1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>View Askewniverse</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Skype (P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>View Askewniverse</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Skype (P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>e-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Skype (P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Skype (P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabelle9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>PM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Limitations

The study was affected to a certain extent by unavoidable limitations, some of which have already been mentioned in this chapter. Chiefly, the study was limited by unforeseeable issues occurring during the recruitment process. As this chapter has already discussed, the forum boards on viewaskew.com closed suddenly halfway through the recruitment process. Correspondence shared with board members prior to its closure suggested that the boards closed because some members violated the conditions of posting. An official post by Kevin Smith (the creative head of View Askew Productions and moderator of the forum) confirmed this shortly before the boards closed (details of this post are included in Chapter Five). Following the closure of the boards all correspondence with board members was lost. This included records of correspondence with two board members who had agreed to participate in the study. In order to protect the confidentiality of participants no records were kept of the respondents’ online usernames. It was therefore impossible to contact the missing respondents on the board directly. In an effort to secure more participants the original call for participants was reposted on the boards once the forum reopened; however, there were no responses. This limits the study because the data set could have been made richer with more interview responses; however, those who were interviewed provided a rich data set.

The second limitation to the study relates to the use of different interview methods. The face-to-face interview method allows researchers to extrapolate from a richer set of interpretive cues than online methods of communication. Non-verbal cues such as subtle nuances of tone, gesture and body language contribute significantly to the

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<th>Slayer</th>
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<th>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</th>
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richness and depth of communication. Online, there are non-verbal cues which cannot be interpreted. This idea is referred to as the ‘Cues-Filtered-Out’ theory, which maintains that online communication is limited in its ‘socioemotional and relational possibilities’ (Lawson 2004, p82). According to this theory, the present study is limited by its use of asynchronous online communications media, which include PM and email. Hence the analysis of unique data sets might affect the practice of interpretation. For example, when using data drawn from a face-to-face interview, non-verbal gestures such as body language and eye contact can influence the interpretation of meaning; however, the results from a mixed-methods study such as the present one might be affected by inconsistencies in the data. For example, data from online interviews offer different kinds of meaningful nuance from face-to-face communication.

That being said, there are also advantages to using online communication in social research. Firstly, whilst face-to-face interviews typically generate a spontaneous response, asynchronous settings such as the e-mail interview generate a more considered response given that the interviewee can answer the questions at their own convenience (Opdenakker 2006, p9). Furthermore, the use of multiple methods in qualitative research can be viewed as advantageous because multiple datasets allow data triangulation which strengthens the trustworthiness of the findings (Curasi 2001). In fact, according to Roberta Brampton and Christopher Cowton (2002) the face-to-face interview method shares many of the same advantages and disadvantages as the ‘e-interview’. Furthermore, Chris Mann and Fiona Stewart (2000) argue that technology has developed new ways of conveying meaning which can be beneficial to qualitative research. They describe computer-mediated communication as a ‘new kind of discourse’ which combines characteristics of both oral and written language and exists as an important development in the long-standing debate regarding the use of oral communication versus written communication (Mann & Stewart 2000, p182).

Many scholars have written on the research issues associated with different interview methods (Duffy 2002; Elgesem 2002; Lawson 2004; Mann & Stewart 2000). The use of multiple methods in the present research was necessitated by an ethical obligation to conduct the interviews in a manner which participants felt comfortable consenting to. Also, seven out of the ten respondents were located either overseas or in other states of Australia. This made it difficult to arrange a convenient meeting place to conduct the
interview face-to-face. Nonetheless, use of computer-mediated communication can be advantageous in social research (Mann & Stewart 2000; Miller & Slater 2000). By allowing respondents to choose their interview method, the researcher was able to secure more participants for the study. Rather than limiting, this can be seen as advantageous because it led to a richer data set.

This issue is further accounted for in the present research by the method of analysis. The aim of phenomenography is to reveal categories of description denoting the different ways people perceive and experience their environment. The categories are configured based on concepts of experience. Both online and face-to-face communications are effective methods for exchanging ideas about abstract concepts, so the interpretation of data drawn from these methods should not be problematic (Schwandt 2003, p8). Furthermore, Youngme Moon (2000) found that participants completing a computer-mediated interview reveal a great deal of intimate and personal detail if the general principle of reciprocity is followed. This process is enhanced when the participants are asked to discuss subjects which they enjoy. This is particularly relevant to the present study where participants self-identify as fans of the case study texts. Furthermore, the use of multiple data sets strengthens the validity of the findings, thus adding nuance to the collated data set by drawing on multiple reference points to locate meaning (Curasi 2001, p372).

Finally, there is a third consideration worth noting which pertains to the researcher’s subjectivity. Given that the participants for the study self-identify as fans it is important to acknowledge that the primary researcher is also a fan. This subject-orientation can be described as aca-fandom, a derivative of ‘academic-fan’. The term is used by scholars (including Hills 2001; Jenkins 1992, 2009a; Brooker cited in Jenkins 2009a and Suzanne Scott cited in Jenkins 2009a) who identify themselves as fans, and/or who are invested in the study of fans. This is otherwise known as scholar-fandom. The split subjectivity inherent in this orientation presents concerns for methodological practice. According to Alexander Doty (2000, p12), the difficult task of the scholar-fan is to convincingly merge fan and academic identities without ‘coming off as embarrassingly egotistical or gee-whiz celebratory’. According to Hills (2002, pxii),

The scholar-fan must still conform to the regulative ideal of the rational academic subject, being careful not to present too much of their enthusiasm…
For Hills, enthusiasm is dichotomously opposed to rationalism. Whilst the scholar-fan must conform to a rational subjectivity, the fan is characterised by affective knowledge. Methodologically speaking, this implies that the scholar-fan risks compromising their research due to the tempering effects of affective knowledge. Put another way, the scholar risks romanticising either the subject or their research results.

Despite obvious issues associated with a subjective fan orientation, Hills (2002, piii) claims that there are common elements shared by both fans and academics, which he describes as imagined subjectivity. The subjectivity that is imagined, according to Hills, is a certain type of subjectivity. For example, imagined subjectivity attributes ‘valued traits ... only to those within the given community’, while simultaneously ‘denigrating or devaluing the “improper” subjectivity of those who are outside the community’ (Hills 2002, piii). Hills claims that hybridisations such as the scholar-fan emerge as an effort to reconcile the contradictions which exist between the imagined subjectivities of the fan and the scholar, respectively; however, it is not made clear in his discussion how scholars can approach this reconciliation methodologically. It may be that scholar-fandom serves to destabilise dominant modes of practice in the academic field by critically evaluating the epistemological rationality of academic culture. Randall Collins (1998, p36), for example, draws attention to the emotional energy of cultism which pervades academic culture, commenting,

> When a group has a high degree of agreement on the ideas put forward by some intellectual leader, that person becomes a sacred object for the group. Thus arise the cult figures of intellectual life....

What this does is de-rationalise the imagined subjectivity of academia and bestows it with qualities of cultism and emotionality which are usually associated with fandom. Other scholars have pursued the argument so fervently that they have redefined themselves as scholar-fans. According to Hills (2002, pvii), Jenkins’ attempts to redefine himself in such a way are marked by his efforts to ‘extend the imagined subjectivity of the academy into the cultural spaces of fandom’. This is done primarily through discussions of fan knowledge and expertise which require a critique of academic modes of thinking and writing, and requires social researchers to recognise their own limitations (Green, Jenkins & Jenkins 1998, p13).
The present research is informed by a phenomenographical methodology which advocates an objective approach to data collection and analysis in which meaning may not be predefined (Svensson 1997, p169); however, as this chapter has already discussed, phenomenographical research is often motivated by a set of research assumptions. That is, the research can be framed by a set of theoretical or conceptual assumptions. The method of recruitment and data retrieval for the present study, i.e. the in-depth interview, is deemed appropriate when the researcher has prior knowledge of the subject area. Furthermore, qualitative research values an empathetic dialogue with participants which allows the researcher to view phenomena from the participants’ perspective (Morgan & Drury 2003, pp4-5). This is known as ‘conscious partiality’ (Miles & Vandana 1997, p34) and is comparable to the assumed subjectivity of the aca-
fan.

It is the view of this researcher that whilst complete objectivity in social research is difficult to achieve – indeed, qualitative methodology recognises that the subjectivity of the researcher influences every stage of the research process (Ratner 2002, p1) – the researcher’s own interests and prejudices can be accounted for by careful use and deployment of reliable methods. Whilst the subjective orientation of the researcher for the present study should be acknowledged, it can be accounted for using an objective approach to data analysis. An account of these methods, including their deployment in the present study will be discussed in more detail below.

**Data Analysis**

The present research uses methods of data analysis consistent with the epistemological approach. John Schostak (2006, p72) warns there are potential problems associated with qualitative analysis. He cautions the researcher to be aware of the complexity of interpreting the rich, subtle and symbolic nuances of the human language; a common variety of qualitative data. The interpretation of interview transcripts is often influenced by a temptation to ‘fill in the gaps’, or misinterpret the limit of data provided. Because language is such a common form of communication, people may be likely to assume the meaning behind a subtle gesture or turn of phrase (Schostak 2006, p72). In some
instances, qualitative researchers may be tempted to manipulate data in order to report preferred or pre-determined assumptions (Schostak 2006, pp72-75).

Phenomenography can be used as a method of analysis to overcome these research issues. Its methods are based on a non-assumptive approach to research which allows findings to emerge organically from the data set. Its results focus on ‘the descriptive level of participant understanding’ (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber 1999, p214). The principal mode of analysis is based on the retrieval of categories of description. This is similar to the code-and-retrieve method, which is based on categorisation, or ‘coding’ of themes (Bertrand & Hughes 2005, p92). In order to develop themes, the researcher must scour the data transcripts seeking to identify patterns and then categorise those themes which persistently recur. The present study uses a two-tiered code-and-retrieve method to identify categories of description from interview transcripts, compiled from Skype (P) and face-to-face interviews, and digital interview records kept from e-mail and PM interviews. The first tier involves analysing the data by hand and coding themes which reoccur across the interviews, while the second tier involves formalising the findings using qualitative research software. In other words, the qualitative research software is used to organise themes and categories found by hand into digital records; it is not used to codify the data. The analysis of categories of description is consistent with the aims of phenomenography, which defines the unit of description as a ‘conception’ (Marton & Pong 2005, p336). According to Marton, the relationship between categories of description and conceptions can be understood as hierarchical. Experiences of reality from this perspective can be understood in a ‘limited number of qualitatively different ways’ (Marton 1981, pp180-181). The same conceptions, represented by categories of description, should appear across different situations. The set of categories are thus stable and generalisable between contextually similar situations, ‘even if the individuals “move” from one category to another on different occasions’ (Marton 1981, p195).

Whilst traditionally, categories of description are used to measure concepts of the object directly, the present study seeks to reveal concepts of engagement. It was determined that for the purposes of this research an analysis of how participants engage with transmedia texts would reveal the most about how they experience the phenomenon. This approach shares some features with symbolic interactionism, which maintains that
the character or meaning of an object is ‘conferred on it by the individual’ (Farganis 2004, p353).

The reliability of research findings based on these methods relates to the interpretation of information-rich data. According to Marton (1986), one of the ways results from a phenomenographic study can be deemed reliable is when the researcher’s interpretations can be corroborated by another. This issue concerns whether other researchers can recognise categories of description identified in the study (Marton 1986, p35). Jörgen Sandberg (1997) refers to this as interjudge reliability. Whilst this method ensures consistency in the classification of descriptions, Sandberg (1997, pp206-207) argues that it is limiting as a measure of reliability in phenomenographic research because it overlooks the researcher’s methods and creates methodological inconsistencies. As Sandberg (1997, p206) argues, ‘interjudge reliability does not take into account the researcher’s procedures for achieving faithful descriptions of the individuals’ conceptions of reality’. This means that use of this method does not demonstrate the extent to which subject conceptions have been faithfully recorded – only that the researcher’s interpretations have been corroborated. Further to this issue, Sandberg (1997, p208) also contends that interjudge reliability is inconsistent with the theoretical and methodological framework which informs phenomenographic research. Essentially, phenomenography is legitimated methodologically as a qualitative and interpretive approach which maintains that human knowledge is intentionally constructed through the use of concepts. According to this approach, categories of description are internally related to individuals’ experiences of reality. Their configuration emerges from the intentional interpretation of the researcher. In comparison, interjudge reliability is derived from an ‘objectivist epistemology within the positivist research tradition’ (Sandberg 1997, p207), methods which seek to discover facts about an objective reality. The approach is thus inconsistent with the epistemological foundations of phenomenography. As Sandberg (1997, p208) explains,

... categories of description are intentionally constituted through the researcher’s interpretations. Hence, as phenomenographic results express knowledge as intentionally constituted, it is a fundamental mistake to judge the reliability of phenomenographic results by using interjudge reliability as a criterion. Interjudge reliability cannot demonstrate the extent to which results that express knowledge as
intentionally constituted are reliable. Instead, it demonstrates the extent to which research results correspond accurately to the objective reality under investigation.

The reliability of the present research is measurable using an alternative approach advocated for its consistency with the epistemological foundations of phenomenography: interpretive awareness. To maintain interpretive awareness requires the researcher to ‘acknowledge and explicitly deal with’ (Sandberg 1997, p209) their subjectivity throughout the research process. As expressed by Amedeo Giorgi (1997, p1), ‘one ... brackets past knowledge about the phenomenon encountered’. This implies the suspension of theoretical predictions in favour of an open relationship with the research data. This method has been implemented in the present research as a way of circumventing analytical predetermination. For example, Expanding the Archive from Chapter Six discusses how fans engage with the text by contributing to its structure through fan-produced works such as fan fiction. Fan studies often risk romanticising this aspect of fandom because it is consistent with popular theories about active audiences; however, both Chapters Five and Six of this thesis consider views expressed by fans from the study that denounce fan fiction as part of the engagement experience, thus demonstrating the researcher’s ability to avoid analytical predetermination. Furthermore, the present chapter accounts for and addresses the researchers own subjectivities, thus explicitly bracketing past knowledge and experiences.

Use of this method, according to Sandberg (1997, p210), involves five steps: orientation of the researcher to the phenomenon as and how it appears; orientation toward describing what constitutes the experience under investigation; horizontalisation; a search for structural features; and using intentionality as a correlational rule. The first step requires simply that the researcher clarifies the object of research. This means that the research question should accurately characterise the phenomenon of research as well as explicate the phenomenographical aim. The present study characterises its research aims using the following research questions: what modes of use do commercial transmedia texts accommodate? and how do media users engage with commercial transmedia texts? The questions expose the object of research (transmedia texts and transmedia audiences) and characterise the context for phenomenographical analysis (the experience of transmedial users).
The second step, *description* requires that the researcher describe subject experience rather than explain it. As Marton (1981, p195) confirms, the research aim of phenomenography is to describe and analyse. The purpose is to avoid descriptions which ‘surpass the individuals’ experience under investigation’ (Sandberg 1997, p210). The most effective way to maintain a neutral approach when analysing the interview data is to avoid theoretical predetermination. As this chapter has already explained, the present study is based on a set of research assumptions (principally used as tools for characterising the object of research), but abstains from theoretical predetermination regarding subject experience.

Step three of Sandberg’s (1997) interpretive guidelines, *horizontalisation*, maintains that all aspects of the lived experience under study should be treated as equally important. That is, no conception is more important than another. This is important when analysing data obtained because ‘judging some of the individuals’ statements about their reality as more significant than others may lead to invalid interpretations’ (Sandberg 1997, p210). The use of this method as an analytical tool is reflected in the present research through the presentation of diverse categories of description. Whilst each category of description is organised around a central theme, e.g. *Expanding the Archive* or *Assembling the Story*, each category addresses a variety of expressions within that theme. For example, in *Assembling the Story* from Chapter Six one participant argued that the Buffy X-Box game is ‘not like playing out another episode … or another season of Buffy’ (Edward5), whilst another claimed that the game is ‘like a lost episode of the television show’ (Henry8); this points to a diversity of experiences, whilst still providing meaningful insights. This mode of analysis thus facilitates the recognition of persistent themes without seeking unification in the data.

Step four, *search for structural features*, applies practical methods to the identification of concepts as semantic variants as identified by Marton and Pong (2005). Sandberg (1997, p210) claims that when interpreting conceptions, the researcher should adopt different interpretations until the ‘basic meaning structure of the individuals’ conceptions’ has been stabilised. In other words, the researcher should check for variation in the participants’ conceptions until consistent themes emerge. As this chapter has already discussed, the present research seeks to identify themes across the entire data set – that is, the interviews combined – however, the themes are also cross-
checked within data sets to ensure that individual passages are used in a way that is consistent with that participant’s conceptions. In other words, even though each theme discusses quotes from multiple interviews, individual passages are checked for consistency so they are not used out of context.

Step five, using intentionality as a correlational, refers to the dual nature of conceptions: the meaning (the referential aspect), and; the structure (the structural aspect). Analysis is thus influenced by semantic variation. The relationship between the two aspects (meaning and structure) is usually demonstrable, although they are most easily discerned when interviewees discuss concrete cases (Marton & Pong 2005, p345). That being said, ‘the intertwined nature’ (Marton & Pong 2005, p345) of the two suggests that they need not be demarcated. It is more important to understand how the relationship between the two leads to the emergence of conceptions during the process of interpretation. This step of analysis involves identifying what participants conceive of as reality (the meaning of the conception), and how (the structure of the conception). The constitution of the conception is arrived at by relating these two aspects. In other words, the basic structure of a conception can be understood as reflected in the semantic structure of its expression.

Case Study Texts

The present research uses two case study texts as objects for the basis of the study. Due to the absence of a reliable catalogue of transmedia texts, the case studies for the research were chosen, and justified, based on their relevance to what is known descriptively about transmedia storytelling as a method of narrative expansion and their compatibility with the framework offered in this thesis. Furthermore, due to the problematic nature of archiving variable media (Maitland & Hall 2006) no appendices have been included to this effect. The following section discusses the case study texts in the context of descriptive conceptions of transmedia storytelling.
The View Askew-niverse

The first case study text is the View Askew-niverse, a transmedia narrative developed by Smith for View Askew Productions. The narrative began in 1994, following the production of Clerks, a low budget film which debuted at the Sundance Film Festival before later being picked up by Miramax Films (Pierson 1995); the film is now described as a ‘cult classic’ (Gutierrez 2008; Pierson 1995) and earned Smith the title of ‘post-modern totem of indie filmmaking’ (Pierson 1995, p2). The Clerks (1994) storyline follows a day in the lives of two convenience store clerks as they ‘annoy customers, discuss movies, and play hockey on the store roof’ (Clerks, 2012a). Shot in black and white, the film is well known for its modest budget and ‘hilarious’ rapid-fire dialogue (Sebastian 2010). Since the release of Clerks (1994), the View Askew-niverse expanded to include five feature films, two comic book series, and an animated short known as the ‘Lost Scene’ animation (Clerks, 2012b). Furthermore, in 2000 an animated series based on Clerks (1994) was developed, which aired on ABC but ran for only two episodes. In a recent performance at The Sydney Opera House, Smith suggested that he had little involvement in the production of Clerks: The Animated Series (2000), and discouraged opinion that the television spin-off was a component of the Askew-niverse narrative (K Smith, 2010, show, 8 August). This demonstrates the problematic nature of archiving a transmedia property. Whilst the original author is typically credited with veto power to define the parameters of their work, the very fact that Smith created and developed the series legitimises its cultural status. It is therefore difficult to say how the View Askew text is constituted.

The most recent instalment of the View Askew-niverse franchise is the SModcast Network: a series of free podcasts produced by Smith and a number of collaborators including Jason Mewes (the actor credited as Jay in the View Askew-niverse movies) and Scott Moiser (Smith’s producing partner). Of notable worth is Jay & Silent Bob Get Old (2010–present), a podcast featuring Smith and Mewes which focuses on Mewes’ long-standing struggle with substance abuse. The nature of the text is complicated by its reference to the fictional characters played by the actors in the films. Whilst neither host performs ‘in character’, the podcast explores the personal narratives of Smith and Mewes in a manner which performatively explicates the relationship between the fictional characters and the actors who portray them. For example, Mewes portrays a
drug addict in his role as Jay whilst Silent Bob is characteristically modest and mild mannered; traits both associated with Smith.

Oddly, the View Askewniverse is not written from within either the science fiction or fantasy genre. Designated as comedy, the View Askewniverse contradicts traditional methods of story expansion, which commonly rely on the ‘perpetuating histories’ of science fiction narratives as an aid (Bick 1996, p44). Despite this fact, the View Askewniverse successfully links narrative components across multiple dispersed storytelling modes. According to Jenkins (2006a, p115), each instalment of a transmedia narrative should be recognisable as part of the whole based on reoccurring motifs. The View Askewniverse uses a similar method by establishing characters and settings which are easily transferable across each story mode. Furthermore, the View Askewniverse uses transitional thresholds to link storyworld components. That is, story components are linked referentially, thus creating thresholds which signal a gap in the narrative filled elsewhere through another story mode. This mechanism is used to tie the storyworld together.

Fans of the View Askewniverse are intensely loyal and dedicated to supporting Smith’s work. The cult status of Smith’s debut film Clerks (1994) arguably contributes to the enduring devotion of its fans due to the cultural longevity that its classification implies. Fans of the View Askewniverse actively contribute to the View Askewniverse discussion boards, where they can talk primarily to each other and occasionally Smith, and also Twitter, where fans can contact Smith directly.

Little has been written about the View Askewniverse or View Askew Productions from an academic perspective (with the exception of a book written by John Pierson about independent filmmaking), which makes it simultaneously difficult and advantageous to study; difficult because there are no reliable sources to draw from which confirm its status as transmedia, yet advantageous because the lack of scholarly inquiry suggests that the text represents a field of analysis which has not yet been explored. This makes the present study unique in its use of the View Askewniverse as a case study text, and its conceptualisation of the View Askewniverse as a transmedia property.
Buffy the Vampire Slayer

The second case study text, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, has been met with considerably more attention than the *View Askew-niverse*; particularly in academic scholarship and by transmedia practitioners. According to Jeff Gomez, CEO at Starlight Runner Entertainment,

With its comics, novels and videogames, each of which add something new to the canon, the TV series Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a true transmedia property (cited in Thompson, 2009).

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is well known as a television series written and produced by Whedon for Mutant Enemy Productions, which aired from 1997-2003 on the WB Television Network. The story’s main character, Buffy Summers, emerged five years earlier in the 1992 film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, also created by Whedon; however, in an interview about the series, Whedon claimed of Buffy’s filmic debut (portrayed by Kristy Swanson), ‘that’s not quite her. It’s a start, but it’s not quite the girl’ (Whedon cited in Ervin-Gore, 2001). It is still unclear whether filmic and television components coexist in the same storyworld or whether the television series should be viewed strictly as adaptation. Whedon’s public view on the issue suggests the latter; nonetheless, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer’s* narrative constitution is problematic.

Characteristic of Jenkins’ perspective on the role of the author in transmedia storytelling, consistency in the *Buffyverse* is preserved by the presence of a single author who maintains creative control over the franchise. The storyworld created by Whedon for the television series is set in the fictional town of Sunnydale and follows the adventures of Buffy Summers, and a host of other characters, as she balances ‘slaying, family, friendships, and relationships’ (*tv.com, 2012*). The use of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a vehicle for story expansion is consistent with the literature on transmedia storytelling which suggests that narrative expansion is often explored through either speculative science fiction or fantasy (*Watrall & Shaw 2008, p1*). Whilst the transmedial spread of the *Askew-niverse* is considerably larger, the narrative spread of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is more obvious because Whedon promotes the series’
expansion so heavily (see Brady 2007; Faraci 2005; Rudolph 2006). In an interview about the Buffy season eight comics (2007-2011)⁴, Whedon stated,

I basically said, “We could do something and for once we could make it canon. We could make it officially what happened after the end of the show.” (Rudolph, 2006)

The Buffyverse consists of numerous narrative components including novels, comics and videogames (one of which, incidentally, allows you to play as Whedon; see, Buffy the Vampire Slayer Role Playing Game, 2006); however, not all of these have been classed as ‘official’.

For the most part, Whedon advocates the use of canon as a way of demarcating the ‘creation’ from ‘ancillary creations’, emphasising authorship as a key determinant of this difference. He claims,

Canon is key, as is continuity. If you are [a] massive nerd. Which I am. I believe there’s a demarcation between the creation and ancillary creations by different people (Whedon in Ryall 2007).

This view typically focuses on the television series and the comic-only eighth season as well as the recently released Angel & Faith (2012) comics as canonical material in the transmedia text (due to Whedon’s involvement in their creation); however, as this discussion has already demonstrated, the Buffyverse extends beyond Whedon’s totalising notion of canon.

Like fans of the View Askew-niverse, fans of the Buffyverse have been loyal to the property. According to Gomez, Buffy’s fans are also integral to its longevity, citing The Bronze – a fan-generated website devoted to all things Buffy – as one of the first examples of expanded content in the Buffyverse (2009). Despite his enthusiasm for canon, even Whedon supports ancillary creations by fans, such as fan fiction (Whedon in Ryall, 2007). Whilst not as many forums exist now as did during the airing of Buffy on television, fans of the series are still vocally committed (see whedonesque.com). Recently, fans have been given the opportunity to participate, with the Buffyverse using Tooncast Studio, a property of NetToons for Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment which focuses on creating ‘super-fan connections between fans and brands’ and ‘empowering users to share branded content across the social grid’

⁴ The Buffy season eight comic book series is referenced in full in the reference list. For ease of reading the comics are referred to collectively in the body of the thesis except where a specific volume is being discussed or quoted.
The Tooncast Studio allows fans to create, share and purchase animated comics based on licensed Buffy content. At the present time it is still unclear how popular or successful the application has been.

From an academic perspective, Buffy the Vampire Slayer has enjoyed considerable success (see Albright 2005; Edwards, Rambo & South 2008; Pateman 2006; Wilcox 2005). According to Neda Ulaby (2003, p1), Buffy has a ‘special following’ among academics, ‘some of whom have staked a claim in what they call Buffy Studies’. Its influence in academia includes: a peer reviewed journal titled Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association; Watch Junior, the undergraduate journal of Buffy studies; and Slayage conferences held once every two years which continue today. The topic can be studied as part of a Masters Degree at Brunel University in West London, and the text has been added to the syllabus of a Gothic Literature course at the University of Adelaide, Australia. College courses across the globe are devoted to the topic, and secondary schools in Australia and New Zealand provide Buffy classes (ctvnews, 2004). The use of Buffy the Vampire Slayer as case study text in the present research brings a unique perspective to the field of ‘Buffy studies’ which reveals how transmedial users describe their engagement with Buffy as a transmedia property.

**Conclusion**

The qualitative research can be characterised as a phenomenographical methodology using a mixed-method semi-structured interview approach. The aim of the qualitative research is: to reveal, using qualitative semi-structured interview method, categories of description pertaining to how transmedia users conceive of their engagement with transmedia texts.

Phenomenography is the most suitable methodology for the present research chiefly because it investigates the relationship between actors and phenomena in their environment, and it can be used when little is known about the experiential aspect of that relationship. Furthermore, the phenomenographical approach encourages a degree of theoretical speculation on the subject followed by an objective approach to data analysis. This is consistent with the approach used in the present research.
Each of the case study texts is suitable as a case based on what is known descriptively about the field and the phenomenon in question. Furthermore, both texts are commercially oriented and both are culturally relevant, having been recently expanded. For example, Smith continues to run his podcast series and the *Buffy* Tooncast studio was only recently added to the *Buffy* story structure. In addition to that, each text is structurally open to further expansion: at a recent live event Smith discussed the release of an animated *View Askew* movie whilst the *Buffy* season nine comic continues to be produced. Finally, each text sustains an active fan audience.

The following chapters discuss the findings of the study based on recurrent categories of description revealed in the interview data. The first findings chapter, *Author as Text*, discusses the influence of the author/creator on transmedial consumption, the second findings chapter, *Constructive Consumption*, discusses the roles fans play in defining the stories they consume, and the third, *Conditions and Contingencies*, discusses conditions and contingencies which must be met in order for audiences to consume transmedially. New theories are drawn from these chapters which enhance and significantly contribute to the fields of transmedia storytelling and audience scholarship.
The Findings: Introduction

The findings chapters discuss three themes drawn from the interview data, each of which account for a group of distinct but related categories of description. The interview schedule was based on what is known descriptively about transmedia consumption, which to date is very little. Based on the methodological framework for this thesis, data was analysed objectively without theoretical predetermination; that is, whilst the interview schedule was predetermined based on what is known about the subject, data analysis was based on a code-and-retrieve method which allows themes to emerge organically, thus compensating for subjectivity in this process (for more detail on data analysis see Chapter Four of this thesis). That being the case, all three themes were, to an extent, unexpected. The findings chapters each discuss selected responses from the interview data and offer interpretations and inferences drawn based on qualitative analysis. The discussions do not aim to generalise their conclusions to all cases of commercial transmedia storytelling; rather, they reflect on implications at a case study level and offer insight which may have practical implications for similar cases. Whilst there is some cross-over of interview data, both within and between categories, in each chapter (for example, some responses are indicative of two or more categories and, sometimes, two or more themes across chapters) each category is well represented in the interview data and constitutes a distinct perspective on the subject.
Chapter 5: Author as Text

This chapter discusses the first key theme drawn from the interview data: Author as Text. The chapter is split thematically into three categories of description: Pedigree and the Auteur; Author as Text; and Canon/Official Story. The categories of description for this chapter concern several issues, including: canon; creation and the creative process; and notions of the auteur (although participants did not suggest this term, it was suggested by the researcher as part of the interpretive process). These issues reflect the influence of the author/creator on how fans in the study choose to engage with commercial transmedia narratives. Whether the influence is deliberate or consequential, responses drawn from the interview data indicate that the author/creator plays a significant role in influencing the consumption habits of fans. The theme in this chapter is couched in discourse concerning the creative process of commercial production. Some of the most interesting responses were drawn from a series of questions which sought to explore the nature of producer-consumer synergies as they related to transmedia storytelling; essentially, the relationship between the author node and audience nodes in the network. For example, David4 tempered his response to one of these questions by stating:

Part of being a fan is caring enough and taking a text seriously enough to really care about the decisions and choices of the producers

The questions addressed producer-consumer synergies by asking fans to reflect on production processes underlying the text. Analysis of the data revealed that these questions exposed a trend which might otherwise have been hidden from the researcher; fans of the case study texts are highly cognisant of how popular narratives are produced and distributed to audiences, and of the socio-economic context in which the text is conceived. In other words, certain concepts of experience from the data were reflecting on the creative process as a part of engagement with the text. This is not entirely surprising given the vast literature on fans as cultural critics (Bielby, Harrington & Bielby 1999; Jenkins 1992; McKee 2004; Sen 2010; Shefrin 2004; Thomas, 2006). Across various forms and genres fans express, lament and ruminate on their concerns, online in forums and chat rooms, and often expressly through the creation of fan fiction.
This is suggestive of forms of engagement which extend beyond mere reading of the narrative. According to Nikunen (2007), fans use media in multiple ways to express their engagement with popular narratives. Critically, her research reveals that audiences engage with popular texts across multiple spaces which share a varying relationship to the original artefact. For example, fans of *Xena: Warrior Princess* perform their fandom in online forums, whilst *Ally McBeal* revealed the socialising aspect of popular culture, encouraged by strong intertextual links between the series and tabloid newspapers. Contemporary audiences engage with popular texts not only as artefacts, but through an associated network of socio-political arrangements – expressed in various outlets and networks – which surround their production. For example, one participant revealed that being a fan means actively seeking out texts outside the original medium and its conceived format. He commented:

… being a fan watching the relevant texts and looking for as many ways as I can to engage in those sorts of texts outside the original medium I suppose as well, often following new sites for little tidbits of information about what’s going on with the show, what’s going on with the actors ... ‘cause I guess they’re just as important as the characters they portray in these texts (Henry8)

When expressly asked about their interest in the production process underlying the text, participants like Henry8 demonstrated an engagement with *context*: the social and political arrangements surrounding its production. This is indicative of extra-textual activity; an important indicator of engagement. Whilst the questions on context were thematically-based they were also open-ended, allowing participants to either express or deny their interest in the creative process underlying the text. For example, question 11 asked: ‘Do you ever think about the production process underlying the text? (that is, when you think about the text, do you think about why it was shot a certain way/why it was written a certain way/why a character acts a certain way?)’. Structuring the question this way allowed participants to express a lack of interest had they not reflected on these issues. Many participants indicated this was something they thought about often. For example, in response to question 11, Bill2 commented:

… very much so ... with the View Askew stuff – especially having *Clerks* and *Chasing Amy* – with them being made on such small budgets, it sort of makes it really interesting to sit down and watch, like, *Clerks* is really almost like a play. It’s just sort of... straight shot, walk in, do the dialogue, walk out ... *Chasing Amy* more so with only
having 250 grand to make that film, is sort of ... it’s sort of amazing to see what they were able to pull off with such a minimal budget and minimal crew and all of that…

This view reflects not only an engagement with the narrative text, but with the practical and logistical implications of narrative production. This was also reflected in other responses to various questions regarding engagement with the text. For example, George7 reflected on the creative process underlying Whedon’s decision to expand *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* into television format after the release of the film in 1992:

… there was the film originally which was a bad experience and things like that, um, I think he was making up the rules as he went initially and I think you can, in probably the first season you can see that … and I think it was a big experimental platform for him, but … he was creatively frustrated by the film experience and he was looking for a longer format to tell a story and really expand on the character… (George7)

Such considered readings of the text contradict popular stereotypes of the fan as cultural dupe, reassigning them status as cultural critic. Whilst a considerable amount of research has been dedicated to studying the fan as devotee (Giles 2000; Jenson 1992; Jindra 1994; Kelley & Tian 2004), contemporary literature on the subject positions fans as sophisticated media users who use new technologies to manipulate and critique popular texts and artefacts (see Booth 2008; Cohee Manifold 2009). Many participants used the interview to voice their assessment of the series; in fact, one repurposed their fandom as a weapon for cultural critique. He stated:

... I’ve been one of the more outspoken critics of Joss. I really do think that his co-creator for the earlier part of the year, David Greenwalt, is owed a lot of credit for helping make *Buffy* ... giving us three seasons that started that show and enabled the spin-off and all these ... other things to come out. Joss I don’t think really gets what Greenwalt did. I don’t think he’s been able to replace him (Edward5)

This kind of critique is facilitated by the growth of a new media ecosystem (see Naughton 2006) that makes possible ways of engaging with and accessing content which contradicts traditional media structures. This emerging ecology gives users increasing control over the flow of information (Deuze 2007, p246). According to David Gauntlett (2009), the wealth of freely shared information online empowers individuals to create, participate, and affect self-determination. George7 and Edward5 demonstrated a considered assessment of the text based on insights which extend
beyond mere consumption of the narrative and reflect forms of consumption which are 
more agentic than traditional media would allow. These practices, facilitated by 
networked structures of communication associated with digital media, allow 
communities of fans to easily locate information via multiple sources, thus assisting 
agnostic forms of consumption demonstrated by fans in the study.

Selected responses revealed three categories of description relating to this theme 
denoting the perceptions and experiences of fans engaging with commercial transmedia 
texts. These were identified earlier as: Pedigree and the Auteur; Author as Text; and 
Canon/Official Story.

**Pedigree and the Auteur**

The first category of description, *Pedigree and the Auteur*, concerns the influence of 
branding and the classification of textual content based on recognisable insignia 
denoting an identifiable author or primary creator. George7 explicated this denotation 
well, explaining,

> A sign of being a fanboy is you look for indicators ... that will tell you something’s 
good, so whether it’s a particular artist who’s working on a comic or a particular 
writer, it’s a kind of pedigree of ... the product, and that’s really what made me read the 
comics (George7)

Whilst it is unclear what the indicators described by George7 are, one at least relates to 
the author. This admission is comparable to the tenets of auteur theory, which is 
traditionally presented in the following way:

> ... the defining characteristics of an author’s work are not necessarily those which are 
most readily apparent. The purpose of criticism thus becomes to uncover behind the 
superficial contrasts of subject and treatment a hard core of basic and often recondite 
motifs (Nowell-Smith in Wollen 1969, p80).

Here, Nowell-Smith (1969) reflects an emphasis in the field on content, expressed as 
personal vision brought to the text by its director. Indeed, auteur theory emerged from 
the French film industry in the 1920s and invokes artistic direction in cinematography 
(Lacey 2005, p155)). As Andrew Sarris (1976, p246) explains, ‘the strong director
imposes his own personality on a film, the weak director allows the personalities of others to run rampant’. Whilst film has proved ‘too malleable’ to be reduced to a series of linguistic or semiotic rules, themes can be coded which persistently re-emerge within a director’s work regardless of which genre they are working in (Lacey 2005, p157). This view is typical of traditional auteurist critique. More recent views on the subject emphasise processes of negotiation (see, Herman & Vervaeck, 2011; Todd, 2009; Kindt & Müller, 2006). Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck (2011, p20) contend that the traditional auteurist view is limited by ‘the pitfalls of deification’. They argue that the author image is constructed by the reader via a process of negotiation which involves balancing ‘the text, the context, his own dispositions, and the author’s self-presentation’ (2011, p19). Tony Todd (2009, p80) agrees with this view and also points to evidence that collaboration or compromise at a production level is detrimental to the auteurist legend; this is indicative of a shift in recent years which marks a departure from the ‘monotheistic’ (Herman & Vervaeck, 2011, p11) origins of the theory. For example, whilst much of the outstanding work in the comics industry has been produced by a ‘single and personal’ artistic vision, authors Randy Duncan and Matthew Smith (2009, p117-118) compare production in this industry to five identifiable qualities of auteurist critique, including, competence, the recurrence of certain themes, stylistic traits, borrowing of ideas and collaboration. Furthermore, Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus (2005) argue that auteurism in the digital age will take the form of corporate branding due to the necessary partnering of major corporations, thus emphasising both collaboration and negotiation in this process.

These qualities and, indeed, the shift from a traditional auteurist view reflect many of the production methods underlying transmedia storytelling. For example, the emphasis in traditional auteur theory on a multiplicity of factors headed by a ‘director’ (Wollen 1976, p540) is comparable to ‘synergistic storytelling’ (Jenkins, 2006a), which champions the collaboration of artists across multiple industries to create a coherent storyworld. Furthermore, transmedia storytelling emphasises the transference of recurring themes and motifs between story modes (Jenkins 2006a, pp116-117), which is comparable to the stylistic qualities associated with auteurism. As this chapter later demonstrates, the role of the reader in constructing the author image is also represented in the way fans consume transmedia. The rhetoric of auteur theory can thus be
effectively utilised to discuss notions of authorship as they pertain to transmedial consumption.

The transmedia auteur is a common figure in New Hollywood given the oversight necessary to coordinate multiple story modes and bridge industry divides. In recent times, critics, scholars and industry observers have reconceptualised media work as taking place within the ‘creative industries’, a discursive tool used to describe the convergence of commercial and creative sectors (Deuze 2007, p249). Jenkins (2006a) identifies this as an important precondition of successful transmedia design. Charles3 admitted,

... if the creators themselves have complete control over each platform then I find it very interesting. I find it unique and I find I love the storytelling; however, if they just give licence to somebody else to do it ... like I said I just don’t bother with it...

(Charles3)

This perspective (a reflection in this case on the creative licensing of Smith’s View Askew-niverse), lends credence to the assumption that transmedia narratives are better managed by a single creative director. This positions the ‘author-node’ as the formalising unit in the transmedia network. Whilst collaborative design is inevitable given the coordination and skill necessary to manage multiple formats, the presence of a single author/creator can help mitigate ‘sloppy contradictions’ (Jenkins 2006a, p105). Evidently, creative direction is important to consumers; furthermore, findings from this research suggested that they are less concerned about contradictions in the text and more concerned about the pedigree of the auteur. This sentiment was echoed by another participant, who when asked whether the mark of Whedon (as insignia denoting authorship) would change their perception of a text they hadn’t enjoyed, commented,

Having the original creator involved in some capacity is important, like Joss Whedon is a guiding hand for the, like, the comics – the season eight comics ... that’s important.
Having him as a writer is a bonus because I enjoy him as a writer, especially the comics of his that I have read... (Henry8)

Typically, auteurism is characterised by the mark of a well-known director or creator, a practice popularised during ‘The directors Hollywood’ of the 1960s and ’70s; however, critics argue that auteurism emerged in New Hollywood as a marketing tool (Cook 1999; Corrigan 1999; Nystrom 2004). Geoff King (2002, pp88-91) claims that methods
utilised during the Hollywood Renaissance were based on the economic logic of producing and distributing auteurist packages. This is comparable to semiotic analyses of transmedia storytelling. According to Scolari (2009, p600), transmedia storytelling is a strategy used to situate and perpetuate a brand inside a fictional narrative across multiple platforms. He describes this as *brand fiction*, a set of values expressed in certain texts proposing an aesthetic style which creates difference with respect to other brands. Lemke (2009, p292) argues that transmedia storytelling emerged from innovations in marketing which seek to use co-branded content in an effort to commodify user-led semiotic traversals. What these perspectives share in common is that they conceive of transmedia storytelling as branded design. Brands are easily recognisable by designated insignia or a set of recurring aesthetic motifs; however, neither study presented here considers the pedigree of authorship or the auteur. Many fans from the present study typically pursued transmedia narratives based on the mark of the author:

By the time BTVS (Buffy The Vampire Slayer) was about three or four years old, I was well and truly a Joss Whedon fan and would have watched anything he had a hand in creating *(Isabelle9)*

In her response, Isabelle9 offered detailed accounts of her engagement with not only *Buffy*, but other Whedon productions, such as *Angel* (1999-2004), *Dollhouse* (2009-2010), and *Firefly* (2002-2003). Despite the fact that participants were asked in a call to participants to respond as fans of either *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* or the *View Askewniverse*, Isabelle9 (who was interviewed via e-mail) addressed the interview schedule with the proviso that she would respond to the questions in relation to *Whedonverse* items (as opposed to the designated *Buffyverse*) because these were the things that interested her most. Her interview response thus fully demonstrates a willing commitment to the author of the text. Her stubborn preoccupation with the *Whedonverse* suggests her perception of transmedia design is based on a principle of authoring across different modes rather than storytelling, thus re-emphasising the view that the network is formalised by the author-node.

The participant thus speaks to consumption of an author, the conduit via which is the text. This researcher suggests the term *‘auteur branding’* to describe a process whereby media users fetishise the auteur, thus conflating aesthetic motifs with the name as brand.
This idea can be situated within the context of contemporary entertainment models which seek to attract audiences based on a principle of repetition. This does not, in effect, mitigate the artistic integrity of the text; rather it situates reception of these texts in a commercial framework. According to King (2002, p50), one crucial feature of Hollywood ventures is that they are ‘pre-sold’ to audiences based on familiar or recognisable properties. The transmedia network is thus formalised by recognisable commercial elements – the author insignia – and substantiated by fans. The unification of a theory of the auteur, according to Andrew Sarris (1976, p250), is contingent upon the influence of form and culture. The New Hollywood auteur is thus influenced by the dominant economic paradigm of commercial branding and consumer culture. This is driven as much by consumers as it is by industries. The participant’s preoccupation with Whedon reflects a process of auteur branding similar to the fetishisation of commodity goods. At one point, the participant suggested that her loyalty to Whedon was not contingent on her impression of content, claiming,

I wasn’t immediately taken with Firefly. It wasn’t until maybe the third or fourth episode in that I had become hooked with the show... (Isabelle9)

Taken at face value this comment might seem indicative of nothing more than a forgiving television viewer whose commitment to mediocre programming could be explained by any of a number of factors. Taken in the context of previous comments, it seems more likely that this is indicative of obstinate loyalty, not to programming, but to the mark of the author. This suggests that loyalty, as indicator of engagement, can be applied not only to the text, but also to the author. In this case, the author mitigates the influence of gratification which means that engagement with the text need not be experienced as positive.

Later in the interview Isabelle9 commented that she wasn’t interested in reading fan fiction based on any of the series, a choice she described as ‘odd’ adding, ‘I will go out of my way to read the “official” books based on the shows’. This suggests that whilst forms of consumption driven by loyalty to a common author are intentional, fans are not always cognisant of why they make such choices. The participant’s lack of interest in unauthorised texts was not, after all, odd given her expressions of engagement throughout the interview.
Another participant, Charles3, demonstrated equally discriminative criteria for consumption, yet advocated a discerning approach to media use based on the influence of the author in the franchise and the mark of their name on each artefact. Unlike the previous participant, this fan was mindful of the factors influencing his media use and committed to honouring a discerning approach. Charles3, a fan of the View Askew-niverse offered this perspective, oddly, on the work of Whedon, author of Buffy the Vampire Slayer:

... I tend to follow his work. I mean, for example there’s the comics he’s done with say, Buffy the Vampire Slayer and/or Angel ... if it has his name or any of his writing stuff attached to it, I tend to read those books ... however, um, Angel, for example, didn’t really have Joss’s name attached to it. It was done by somebody else in the Dark Horse series. I kind of avoided that (Charles3)

For this fan, the author name functions ostensibly as a tag both for delimiting and archiving the transmedia narrative: it formalises the transmedia network. For Charles3, anything which was not tagged accordingly is necessarily external to the central narrative. For example, when asked if Smith’s work had been ‘done right’, Charles3 reflected on the relationship between story modes as it pertains to the author rather than a cohesive fiction. He commented,

I think what he’s done is something unique as opposed to say ... something like The Matrix, which was a specific ... movie story that crossed platforms and crossed video games. It told one story specifically. Kevin doesn’t tell one story specifically in one particular genre. He goes and he does Batman comics and then he does SModcast and he does his movies which are no longer a part of the View Askew-niverse. So his interaction between each medium is personal so it’s a different take completely opposed to say, again, something like The Matrix created by the Wachowski brothers [who] really don’t have anything to do with it at all, it’s just The Matrix itself, the story, the characters themselves (Charles3).

Here the participant draws an explicit distinction between the transmediation of story and the transmediation of the author/celebrity. As this chapter discusses, this is not a surprising admission from fans of the View Askew-niverse from the present study, who typically characterise the author as a text to consume. Interestingly, whilst the participant chose to focus on the author as the transmediating structure rather than the story, his description of transmedia practice closely echoes perspectives from the field.
Essentially, the participant describes *transmediation* – the coordinated distribution of a single narrative across multiple story modes set within a single storyworld – as a process wherein multiple story modes are linked by a networked structure formalised by the author. In almost all cases this structure is conceived of as the storyworld; however, for this fan, the author/celebrity is the primary bridging mechanism between modes. Critically, this means that transmedia storytelling can be conceived of differently according to the ‘transmediating structure’ identified by the audience. This chapter demonstrates that for certain participants from the study, this structure is the author. Despite Smith’s efforts to create a cohesive intellectual property across multiple story modes, Charles3 expressed a more intimate relationship with the author than the fiction. This is clearly demonstrated in the above comment, with the participant describing Smith’s personal interaction between each medium as the transmediating structure. Whilst Charles3 recognised the transmedia logic underlying Smith’s work – in fact he championed its use as a mediating principle – its structure is differently conceived from the way in which it is in this thesis and in the field of transmedia research.

Whilst this category has focused predominantly, so far, on the conflation of story with author – characteristic of auteur branding – some participants (as fans of the *View Askew-niverse*) characterised the author in ways which more closely resemble celebrity culture. Their views were expressed as personal sentiment for ‘the man himself’ (Charles3) and were couched in the discourse of celebrity fandom. Participant-fans of the *View Askew-niverse* expressly referred to Smith when discussing their engagement with the text. Irrespective of provocation, *View Askew-niverse* fans self-identified as Kevin Smith fans. The interview schedule, like the call to participants, invited response to fictional texts as the object of study. This was illustrated in question four: ‘Do you consume material related to the text across more than one media platform?’ However, some fans of the *View Askew-niverse* focused their responses on Smith, rather than the text. For example, one remarked ‘I’ve spent about $25,000 on being a Kevin Smith fan’ (Anabelle1). Another, less overtly, yet nonetheless notably, referred to the text as a product of the subject, rather than as subject itself, characterising the text as a conduit through which he acclaims the author. His reference to the fiction glorifies Smith, each component referred to either as ‘his films’, ‘his books’ or ‘his things’ (Bill2). This is similar to fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* who demonstrated conflation of the text with author. This form of engagement resembles auteur branding because the participant
fetishises the author via consumption of the fictive text. Moreover, for some of the participants, the celebrity status of Smith seemed to be a motivating factor for engagement with the text. For example, Anabelle1 claimed to have ‘read all the books’, ‘read the Twitter’, ‘seen the movies’, ‘[gone] to the Q&As’ and ‘[listened] to the podcasts’ (Anabelle1), yet claimed,

The movies aren’t really my style of humour ... I don’t really find my interest in him as a person and admiration for him as a person really enhances my experience with the movies (Anabelle1)

This is comparable to comments from Isabelle9, who suggested that her loyalty to Whedon was motivation enough for her to consume material that didn’t immediately appeal to her. Again, this suggests that the act of loyalty – in so far as it is an indicator of engagement – is not necessarily a positive experience. The above comment reflects a similar sentiment: the influence of the author mitigates preference. Despite her lack of interest in the fictional narratives produced by Smith, Anabelle1 loyally consumes ‘any of the stories he tells’, from the movies to the comics and ‘any other platform he’s working on’ (Anabelle1).

Throughout the course of one interview, the participant’s comments prompted follow-up questions, one of which asked explicitly which had greater influence on their decision to follow the story across platforms, the story or the author. The participant, a fan of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, replied frankly, ‘it was probably him more than anything else, and I think that’s ... a sign of being a fanboy’ (George7). Oddly, he later revised his response, commenting, ‘it’s probably 50/50 actually...’, although this might be indicative of a tendency to conflate story with author. Whilst George7 acclaimed the narrative openly, his interview responses were tempered by the influence of Whedon as a directive creative figure. When asked what prompts him to follow the Buffy narrative across multiple platforms, he responded:

With the comics it’s because Joss Whedon has already written like for... for X-Men ... and I think he might have done maybe some DC stuff as well which I’ve read so I knew he was a great comic writer and I wanted to kind of extend the experience (George7).

This comment reflects the fan’s appreciation for a recognisable pattern of motifs, constituted both aesthetically and thematically, associated with a particular author.
This is a characteristic feature of auteur theory (Abramson 1976, p563) and demonstrates how auteur branding is enacted in a transmedia context. George7 didn’t seek to engage with the author directly; however, for him, and demonstrably others, Whedon denotes pedigree and thus the author’s mark influences his media choices. This demonstrates a commitment to the author based on recognisable aesthetic motifs and fetishisation of the author name as brand: both aspects of auteur branding.

**Author as Text**

The second and related category of description is *Author as Text*. Whilst the first category reveals that certain participants from the study are motivated, in part, to consume across story modes based on recognisable branding and official insignia associated with the author name (conceptualised as *auteur branding*; a process whereby media users fetishise the auteur, thus conflating aesthetic motifs with the name as brand), the present category of description reveals that certain participants from the study consume celebrity across story modes in a process which delineates author from text and positions both as consumable cultural goods. This finding marks a departure from and evolution of the previous category of description, positioning the author as a text to be consumed. This process is described as affective-author attachment. The present category thus explores concepts of experience concerning consumption of the author as celebrity, emphasising the author persona as an inciting factor of consumption and exploring the fan-celebrity encounter via consumption of the author as text. The following comment by Anabelle1 is characteristic of responses from this category of description which reflect an author-as-celebrity approach to consumption of the text. She stated,

> Generally speaking, I have a lot of admiration for Kevin Smith as a person ... as opposed to necessarily having a great passion for the movies, so I actually find the person more interesting than his particular craft (Anabelle1).

This comment reflects consumption of a public figure as opposed to a story or text. Unlike participants from the previous category of description, Anabelle1 discriminated between text and celebrity when describing her engagement with the narrative across
story modes. According to Pramod Mayar (2009, p148), this is indicative of celebrity culture: a set of media-driven representations of people who are seen as worthy of ‘notice, emulation and admiration’. Celebrities are also commercial goods to be consumed. He claims that celebrities are parallel texts to films, promotions, appearances and other outlets generated by the media. The transitional spaces between the fiction and the author become important to fans because they facilitate a relationship with the author. The relationship between fans and celebrities thus becomes a commercial transaction (Mayar 2009, pp148-149).

Expanding on this point, Kerry Ferris (2001, p27) claims that fans’ interests in media texts lie in both real and fictional incarnations. The characters populating the fiction become recognisable identities, as do the actors portraying them or, in this case, the work’s primary creator, thus emphasising celebrity status. She claims fans differ from ordinary consumers of fame because they form, ... especially strong affective attachments to the objects of their interest, and they can use those attachments as the stepping-stone both to relationships with other fans, and to relationships with the famous themselves (Ferris 2001, p27).

Affective author-attachments are central to engagement across multiple story modes for some fans. Unlike the rhetoric on transmedia design, which emphasises experience, certain fans from the present study are driven by affective attachments, which can be described as emotional engagement (Schanke, Sundet & Ytreberg 2009, p386). Their engagement with material across story modes acts as a bridge to the ‘real’. The fiction is ancillary to the man, thus, transitional spaces between story modes and the author node become particularly important as bridging mechanisms between fan and author. Bill2 described his engagement with the fiction as follows:

... I dunno, it started off with the films and things and then I obviously branched to the comic books just ‘cause I sort of wanted to see more tales...

Soon after he described how this led him to Smith, marking the zenith of his consumer journey,

... it was probably with the evening with Kevin Smith DVDs, where it’s actually him on the stage, not in character or anything ... that I started to enjoy Kevin Smith the person more than just the films (Bill2)
He later elaborated that this led him to enjoy works, such as SModcast, Smith’s podcast show, which emphasises Smith’s persona more than the fiction (although many story modes do extend the fictional View Askew-niverse). A similar sentiment was demonstrated by other fans of the View Askew-niverse, who, in this study, consume media artefacts as a way of accessing the celebrity. For example, Bill2 claimed that once he became a fan of Smith (more so, according to him, than ‘just his films’ (Bill2)), he preferred to engage with story modes through which Smith was performing his own identity rather than that of a fictional character. He stated, ‘... that [being a fan of Kevin Smith] ... led me to become a really big fan of SModcast, the podcast show’ (Bill2). In this story mode, Smith performs as himself with co-producer Scott Moiser.

In a candid moment of contemplation, Bill2 reflected on how the View Askew-niverse fandom more broadly follows Smith across story modes regardless of the relationship between new projects and the originating fictional texts. He commented,

it was ... sort of interesting, like, how he sort of has started with the films and branched off into other stuff, but ... he’s recently sort of said that he’s starting to consider the podcast shows to be ... his great life’s work. So he’s sort of started off in one thing and sort of branched over and is really in love with doing a completely different thing, which sort of, is interesting how the fans have followed him yet [he] himself has sort of embraced this new aspect a lot sort of more than anything else (Bill2)

According to this participant, it is somewhat surprising – despite describing a nearly identical pattern for his own consumption (noted earlier) – that fans should follow Smith despite his implied abandonment of the originating fictional texts. This reflects forms of engagement characterised by following a public figure rather than a text. Moreover, the performance of celebrity is more appealing to certain fans from this study than the fictional text. Deference to the author figure among fans of View Askew was also reflected in the responses of other participants, such as Anabelle1 who described the View Askew-niverse as a ‘community of people who share a liking for Kevin Smith’. This was further articulated by Charles3, who argued,

You start to see him [Smith] less and less as a director and writer and just a guy who makes these movies and these podcasts and what not [and] more as a normal person who likes the same things you do, and to me, the way he is with his family and those around him, overall he comes out as a swell guy and to me that’s why I’ve become
more of a fan of him than his movies. I do enjoy his movies, but, [I’m] more a fan of him now.

Critically, this comment reflects a process which seems to be central to forms of engagement for fans of the View Askew-niverse from the present study; the transference of fandom from object to persona, or, greater level of engagement with the author node. Whilst all participants in the study cited entering the fandom via a relationship to the text, participant-fans of the View Askew-niverse commonly described this as a catalyst for a more engaging relationship with the celebrity text. Each identified media – such as the podcast show, autobiographical material and Q&A DVDs – on which Smith performs his identity as preferable to the created fiction. This does not, in effect, imply that these fans are not also fans of the fiction. When asked, for example, if she ever re-watches, reads or plays with the text, Anabelle1 quickly responded,

I’m an absolute fanatic fan of particular, Jersey Girl. I watch that, no kidding, once every two months (laughs), just because I find the movie and the way it communicates family really, really endearing.

As subsequent chapters detail, fans of the View Askew-niverse from the present study demonstrated typically passionate relationships with the fictional text. Nonetheless, Anabelle1 emphatically stated at the beginning of her interview that she finds the person more interesting than his craft, thus situating consumption of the fictional material as secondary to consumption of the celebrity text.

This category suggests that one of the factors influencing greater levels of engagement with ‘real’ incarnations of character is the presence of Smith as a member of the wider View Askew community. It is not uncommon, given the ease with which filmmakers and writers can reach audiences via digital media, for fans to be courted by production houses exploiting fields of cultural capital online (Jenkins 2003b; Murray 2004; Shefrin 2004). According to Elana Shefrin (2004, pp262-263), internet fandom supplies strong communicative links between fields of practice – artistic, power and class relations (see Bourdieu 1993) – which effectively dismantle barriers separating content producers and consumers. In response to a question about which was more engaging, the content or Smith, Charles3 commented,
Kevin is very different in as far as being one of his fans. He interacts so much with his audience and his fans in general ... I do enjoy his movies, but, [I’m] more of a fan of him now (Charles3)

Whilst it is unclear whether fans are being courted or sub-contracted as ‘consumer affiliates’ (Shefrin 2004), responses from the interview data suggest that Smith initiates direct contact with fans on the View Askew-niverse boards. Threads on the site posted by Smith are flagged in red, and whilst users might not always receive a direct response from a posting (threads in which Smith posts are typically popular) Smith engages in conversation on the board, as both member and administrator, with fans of his work. By interacting with fans on the board, Smith configures para-social relationships; seeming face-to-face relationships made possible by the intimacy of electronic media (Ferris 2001; Horton & Wohl 1956), thus encouraging affective author-attachments. When asked to characterise the text, Charles3 identified the View Askew-niverse as a multi-faceted space co-created by both Smith and his fans. In this space, symbolic interaction between group members is just as important as the content for which the community gathers. As this chapter has already discussed, the relationship between author and audience in the network is particularly important to fans. As Charles3 commented,

I would have to say that there’s two levels of the View Askew-niverse: there is the fiction that Kevin has created, um, that he continues to create and then there’s the interaction with Kevin Smith, um, himself… that personal attention that he gives to his audience … the Q&As that he sets up, the message board that he frequents and on Twitter as well, that particular interaction with himself… the View Askew to me, yeah, it’s definitely a two part entity: the fiction and then there’s the man himself.

This and other comments suggest that part of being a fan and a community member for participants in the present study is supporting Smith and his work. Oddly, this is manifest in ways which belie the collegial nature of online interaction. Rather than embrace free channels of dialogue online for the purpose of objective critique and response, the interview data suggests that many participants in the present study view direct contact with the author as a privilege, despite the egalitarian nature of most online communities. Evidently, the relationship between author and audience in the network is beneficial not only to fans, but to the author. For example, Anabelle1 commented,
My view is that I’m there, as a fan, to support Kevin ... As a fan I support what he brings to me, I listen to it, I take his advice on movies, and I don’t give him bullshit on the boards or Twitter.

Throughout the interview, Anabelle1 passionately defended her post as Smith’s loyal disciple. She lamented the more outspoken fans, stating,

I don’t give him bullshit on the boards or Twitter or be like “dude, why isn’t your podcast out yet?”, which is my pet peeve about the typical Kevin Smith fan ... you see on the boards a lot ... that people have this huge sense of entitlement because ...

Kevin’s such an approachable guy ... so as a fan, I don’t ask him when the next podcast is going to be out (laughs) (Anabelle1).

This comment reflects loyalty to the author as a facet of engagement. David4, a fan of Buffy shared a similar perspective, stating,

Part of being a fan is caring enough and taking a text seriously enough to really care about the decisions and choices of the producers ... I always try to remember that the show isn’t mine, no matter how much I enjoy it.

Whilst loyal admiration (for the author) allows some fans to traverse multiple story modes uncritically, fans of the View Askew-niverse may have been socialised by Smith to defend him and the various media he works with. Around the time that participants were being recruited for the present study the View Askew-niverse forum boards were closed following this post from Smith:

Can I tell you how stuff around here comes into existence? It's because I take a massive interest. And obviously, I've taken a massive interest in SModcast and its spin-offs. The good news is that you get HOURS UPON HOURS of free entertainment. The bad news is that some of you are getting too comfortable in your expectations, and are quickly allowing said expectation to become gross entitlement.

Y’know how this all goes away - this fucking golden age? When people feel the need to try to pit my friends and I against one another. When people slap the host in the face. When people - even after being expressly told the host would rather you not brought shit like that into his party - insist on introducing into this organization that sort of unrest or divisiveness.

Comments like yours are what’s gonna kill my enthusiasm for SModcast. And when
my enthusiasm for it all goes? Guess what happens?

Speaking of which, five times now I've returned to the board in the last month, and all five times, I was reminded why I enjoy Twitter so much more: absolutely ZERO sense of entitlement over there. Some cats here, on my own message board, assume they're owed... well, anything. You guys are playing the old game – when I was younger and far more tolerant; when it seemed like there was all the time in the world. Newsflash for all you devils’ advocates and “But I’m a TRUE fan”-ers: I'm not interested in your reindeer games. To be fair, I never was; but at least I was more polite then. Now? Approaching 40? Shuttering this board is no longer the unthinkable notion it once was. There's no more Askewniverse; the website can just as easily follow.

We're in the second Act, folks. You like it, stick around. If not, don't bitch; just leave. A lack of gratitude is an enthusiasm-killer. Why would you wanna ruin it for everyone else?

So go ahead: keep expressing your very important thoughts about which free, funny podcast you're being given weekly is better. Then, when it all goes away, you can express your very important thoughts about that, too. And when you're done being very important? Know that it was folks like you who sent it packing.

I mean, we're 15 years in at this point; you still don't get where this all comes from?

Jesus... (Smith in Babb, 2010)

The nature of the threat inherent in the post was heatedly debated amongst fans on the site. According to correspondence had with members on the board during the recruitment process (all of which is, now, unfortunately lost; the Smith post was easier to find due to its highly publicised nature), the post was submitted after a group of members on the board attacked and/or critiqued Smith’s work – or so said sympathetic parties. Whilst it is difficult to determine the true nature of the incident given that most of the threads from the time were not archived, Smith’s response to the alleged transgression speaks volumes to the dynamic he aims to cultivate on the boards. Whilst the very nature of the incident suggests that not all fans on the View Askewniverse boards are as dedicated to celebrating Smith’s work as some of the participants from the present study, Smith clearly discourages critical assessment of himself or his work.
Critically, the post speaks to backlash. Smith’s reference to ‘the second Act’, lamented by ‘devils advocates’ and ‘true fans’ suggests that the move from one mode to another, accompanied by a shift in production content (from fiction to non-fiction) was not well received by all fans. This is without question not uncommon. As this thesis has demonstrated, fans are often characterised as cultural critics. Smith’s response demonstrates a willingness to sacrifice an open forum for respect on the boards. Given the high regard in which certain participants in the present study hold Smith and his work, it is not unreasonable to assume that Smith’s attitude on the board influences, to some degree, the way these fans express their fandom, essentially altering the constitution of the author-audience space in the network. Furthermore, many participant-fans of the View Askew-niverse in the present study speak explicitly about the boards and the online community when discussing their engagement with Smith and his work. This suggests that the boards reflect established social mores within the fandom broadly which are articulated and reinterpreted until a negotiated interpretation is accepted by the group.

This is comparable to the tenets of symbolic interactionism. One of the most important features of symbolic interactionism is the creation of shared meanings. As a process, this involves the establishment of patterns of group life which are sustained by recurrent affirmation of shared meanings and modes of conduct (Blumer 1969, p67). This is conceivably the case for fans of the View Askew-niverse; that acceptable patterns of behaviour are tested and negotiated on the boards.

Whilst the onus of responsibility is usually shared by the group, Smith plays the role of both group member and gatekeeper of shared meanings. His status as group leader thus contradicts the tenets of the theory since he is positioned to override patterns of group life established by the majority. Patterns of conduct can be transformed when interpretations are undermined or disrupted by other group members; however, this process relies on group affirmation. Whilst certain participants in the present study sympathise with Smith, it is unknown how many other members on the boards feel the same. Smith’s response to the perceived affirmation of objectionable group behaviours is more characteristic of coercion than negotiation. According to Herbert Blumer (2004, p96), individuals in a group are confronted with the need to fit their actions to the actions of others, a process described by Mead as ‘the social act’. Smith’s actions
directly contradicted the actions of others. His parental control over the boards thus negates his status as group member and positions him as firmly external to the fandom that surrounds him. His bitter refusal to participate in negotiated patterns of behaviour on the boards position him, for better or worse, as external to the group. Whilst this belies the affective author-attachment expressed by his fans in this study, their very willingness to defend Smith’s position lends credence to the theory that he is consumed as a celebrity text, across story modes, as an expression of loyalty by his fans.

**Canon/Official Story**

The third and final category of description in this chapter is *Canon/Official Story*. This category reflects concepts of experience related to consumption of the text within a stipulated fictional framework constituted by the auteur brand. Given that this category builds on previous concepts of experience it is somewhat less extensive than those discussed already. Critically, it reflects how conceived notions of canon within fandom influence fans’ engagement with the story across modes. Inconsistencies in these reflections implicate the relationship of canon to fanon, revealing the somewhat variable nature of transmedia narratives. This concept is discussed in more detail later.

From a literary perspective, canon refers simply to ‘the original work’ (McCardle 2003, p2). Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (2006, p9) define canon as ‘the events presented in the media source that provide the universe, setting, and characters’. A clear understanding of what constitutes canon is rarely agreed upon given the range of subjective interpretation. Furthermore, what comprises canon may be called into question (Busse & Hellekson 2006, p9). For example, *The Lord of the Rings* canon may include any combination of J.R.R. Tolkien’s original books (1937-1949), the ancillary user guides, Peter Jackson’s film adaptations (2001-2003) or Ralph Bakshi’s animated film (1978). The recent popularisation of film adaptations (see Reynolds, 2009) means that canonising the artefact has become more complex and relativistic. According to Heather Urbanski (2011, p30), in a reboot, or a ‘reimagining’ of a franchise, ‘the narrative is in conversation with itself’ (Urbanski 2011, pp31-32). This means that the text is burdened with the weight of history and established notions of canon in the fandom. Urbanski (2011, p33) argues that what most distinguishes reboots, therefore, is
narrative burden. The expectations from canon are a source of potential danger if the reboot is either ‘too faithful (a mere “retread”),’ or ‘too unconventional (not adhering to the spirit of the original)’.

The same can be said for transmedia narratives, which are built on adherence to a set of recognisable motifs (see Jenkins 2006a) – to ensure consistency across the storyworld – and which must also offer a variety of expression across media. The importance of distinguishing ‘official’ story components from ancillary texts was clearly demonstrated in certain responses from the interview data. This was discussed by different participants in different ways. For example, Jeremy10 used the idea of a ‘storyverse’ to describe the fictional properties of transmedia canon, explaining, ‘I tend to perceive stories as various contingent embodiments of some greater “storyverse”’ (Jeremy10). This comment suggests that the networked spread of a transmedia narrative builds a canon across media which negates conflation with ancillary texts due to its status as part of the ‘storyverse’ (comparable to the demarcation of transmedia storytelling and franchising); however, not all participants shared this totalising view of transmedia storytelling. For example, David4 commented,

... if Buffy had continued through a series of, I don’t know, canonical video games I probably would not have availed myself of them simply because I’m not much of a gamer.

Unlike other responses drawn from this category, David4 described his engagement with the text as a process compromising the ‘desire to hear more of the stories’ with previously conceived media preferences. This suggests that not all consumers can be easily encouraged to adopt a fannish mode of use. The lure of canon for this participant is only enticing in so far as it aligns with his preferred media use. He even went as far as admitting, ‘I think I’d prefer the comic book continuation over an announcement of a new show’ (David4). Critically, this suggests that some fans are motivated more by media preference than narrative. For example, some viewers might have been dissuaded by the continuation of the series in comic book form because they were not familiar with the story mode or its associated sub-culture. As the typology demonstrates, this is indicative of mode-driven consumption (see Chapter Two of this thesis); however, in the context of transmediation it implicates generic compatibility between story modes. Mode of use is thus partially dependent on compatible transmedia design.
In the case of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the text converges on multiple axes, including genre, story mode and market. According to Karlheinz Steinmüller (2003, p175) fantastical genres such as science fiction and fantasy can be understood as a kind of ‘thought experiment’. She claims ‘the general principle of imaginative speculation in SF has often been characterised by the phrase “what if...”’ (Steinmüller 2003, p175). In the ‘what if...’ scenario, use of the imagination is central to the fictional thought experiment. Fantastical narratives such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are commonly explored through transmedia formats as they allow writers to explore the ‘what if...’ scenario across multiple story modes. The archival spread of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is thus not uncharacteristic within the genre. These qualities are indicative not only of processes followed and deployed within a genre or mode, but of the central logic underlying transmedia production. It is not uncommon to find scholars looking to other formats or theoretical logics to explain transmedia design. Elsewhere, transmedia formats have been implicated in discussions of storytelling logic in media, such as comics. For example, as Chapter One of this thesis discussed, Sam Ford and Jenkins (Ford & Jenkins, 2009, p304; Jenkins, 2009b) note how the immersive storyworlds of comic books – characterised by seriality, long-term continuity, character back-log and ties to a deep history – have a meaningful impact on the logic of transmedia storytelling broadly. Comparably, Elana Levine (2011, p209) discusses how transmedia formats might be used in contemporary efforts to reinvigorate the soap opera, by expanding fans’ involvement with the show and driving them to view broadcast episodes. A multitude of converging factors may have influenced the compatibility of media in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; the convergence of certain story modes and genres, and chiefly their compatibility with a transmediating principle, could be used to help explain the movement of fans across seemingly disparate audience segments. Furthermore, where story mode and genre are concerned, this implies a shared market between them.

For some fans, canonicity is far more persuasive, despite other influencing factors. For example, when asked if he ever looks for new story components on other platforms, Edward5, a fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, commented,

... not really ... I know there’s a lot of Spike material ... but I’m not really prepared to shell out a whole lot of money for Spike merchandise. Nor am I inclined to go out and look and see ... unless it’s officially story of like what he’s doing right now I’m not really inclined to go out and find other, you know, tales of Spike.
Here, the participant draws a clear distinction between ancillary material (i.e. ‘tales of Spike’; being one of the central characters from the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* canon) and ‘official story’ which he claims he would willingly engage with despite his reluctance to look for more Spike-related material. It is unclear how the two have been demarcated; however, the participant demonstrates a clear preference for one form over the other, even when this means engaging with the text in ways he would rather not. His tone implies an obligatory position; he is compelled to consume by his loyalty to the text. He also claimed that reading the story across multiple platforms allows him to keep a track of ‘where the characters are officially’ (Edward5). His tone throughout the interview suggested a reluctance to exert more energy than is necessary to keep abreast of official story. As he put it, ‘I just like to know where they are just ... to have my own knowledge filed away’ (Edward5). Furthermore, he suggested that even narrative consistency is negligible in the face of canonicity, stating,

> When I’m reading the official text or, as such, watching any of those I’m less inclined to give it [narrative consistency or continuity] a whole lot of thought. Simply put, for a lot of those premises you have to be willing to check your disbelief at the door (Edward5).

For this fan, officiousness mitigates the influence of other factors such as personal media preference and narrative consistency or continuity. Comparably, another fan lamented the absence or ease of access to an official story guide, specifically a reference to components following the television series. Unlike Jeremy10, Fred6 suggested that due to the serial nature of the text, fans need to be guided through the structure in order to filter irrelevant ancillary content. Speaking about the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* season eight comics, he commented,

> ... I don’t necessarily need to read all of them to continue the story, but ah, I had to find out which ones people thought were the most important for understanding once I start season eight. There’s like, no official guide out there. There are various different guides on the internet but there’s no real good easy official way, um, like on the internet to find what order to consume things in (Fred6).

Fred6 offered a truly unique perspective on this issue because at the time of interviewing he had only recently begun consuming *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* content across multiple modes. His comments demonstrate an adherence to canon and
continuity which suggests that transmedia narratives are preferred by some consumers to be structured and guided. Furthermore, it suggests that fans look to official sources to map their engagement experience. This shares obvious links with canonicity, but also with directed consumption. As Fred6 stated, without an ‘official’ user guide there is no real way of knowing what order to consume things in. For this fan, the author/creator designates the narrative structure.

A related finding in this category of description concerns the relationship of canon to fanon. As Chapter Two of this thesis discussed, fanon emerges from the efforts of fan writers to pull elements of their own fiction into the ‘official story’, thus making them a part of the story network. Fanon is organised according to folksonomies: user classification systems which allow fan communities to collectively organise and create meaning through labelling and categorising (Chaney & Liebler 2007; Vandel Wal 2006). The relationship of fanon to canon is not easily defined. Given the irregular nature of canon, many scholars have demonstrated difficulties inherent in designating complete interpretive control to copyright holders (Brooker 1999; Chaney & Liebler 2007; McKee 2004). For example, Alan McKee (2004) suggests that the construction of canon is less formulaic and more collaborative than previous research suggests. He suggests that,

... canon is not simply what is produced by the industry. It is a status granted to texts...

In this view, canonicity is simply about choosing from an already existing text, those elements which are to be validated. In short, fans make their own canon... (McKee 2004, pp177-178).

This view positions canon as a fluid notion which may include both sanctioned texts and fan-produced works such as fan fiction. For example, the Doctor Who canon is written in part by fan writers turned pro (McKee 2004). In the present study, participants were asked to reflect on the relationship of fan-produced work to the inspiring artefact, based on findings from the literature which suggests a theoretical link between the two. Certain response reflected on the therapeutic function of fan fiction and the role it plays in allowing fans to engage with the text in ways that canonical material does not allow; in other words, fans creating their own networked spaces via the formalisation of new story modes. This is consistent with the literature on fan fiction, which positions the practice as a process of reclaiming material from mass
culture and transforming it into something more personally meaningful (Booth 2008; Brobeck 2004; Jenkins 1992; Katyal 2006). For example, one participant noted ‘they’re just fantasies/wish fulfils’ (Jeremy10), another, ‘it ... allows fans to simply enjoy and explore their favourite materials in a much more personal and satisfying way’ (David4), and a third ‘... it’s products of a labour of love, if you will; a labour of desire’ (Edward5). One participant reflected on the terms upon which canon and fanon are usually distinguished. David4 commented,

The relationship between fan fiction and the text is mostly one-way: all good fan fiction should respect the text (or at the very least, the characterizations should be adequate, even if you’re going to go back and change 95% of the official history), and all fan fiction is influenced by new canon.

Whilst it is not entirely clear how ‘good fan fiction’ is judged, the comment implies that adherence to canon is one important factor in the formation of fanon, presumably because it helps ensure consistency in the network. An understanding of the source material is formative to the construction of derivative works as variations are carefully monitored within the fan community. As Busse and Hellekson (2006, p10) note,

An understanding of canon is particularly important for the creators of new fan texts because they are judged on how well they stick to or depart from canon.

This was reinforced by Edward5. Earlier in the chapter the participant was quoted as stating that consistency and continuity are negligible in the official text. He later remarked that unofficial texts such as fan fiction should be consistent with the official narrative because if it’s going to be ‘really ... juvenile’, then he doesn’t need to ‘waste [his] time watching ... or reading [it]’ (Edward5). This suggests that fan-produced works are scrutinised more closely than the official text and, ironically, based on their relevance to canon, even when the canon itself is inconsistent; however, it is important to note the notions of canon differ among fans. For this reason, fan writing communities are often run like publishing houses. In most cases, there exists a hierarchy of editors including a beta reader (otherwise known as the editor) who manages content, as well as proof readers and a board of reviewers who determine whether or not a piece is submitted to archive (Young 2007, p1). Isabelle9 echoed this sentiment, warning that,

... fan fiction or fan art ... needs to be very attuned with the original text. If not, the other fans can smell it out and ridicule it to an inch of its life.
Whilst cautionary, this response frames fan fiction as an acceptable part of the practice of fandom. It positions fan fiction, and fanon associatively, in a dichotomous relationship with the inspiring artefact. Such a view classifies fan fiction relationally; that is, as a response, and separate practice, to the canonical expansion of the text. It exists as an unofficial component of the archival spread of content across story modes. In fact, some participants emphatically campaigned against fan fiction. When asked what the function of fan-produced works such as fan fiction is, Anabelle1 simply commented ‘I have very little respect for fan fiction’. She later described it as ‘plain creepy’, ‘really obsessive’ and ‘kind of scary’. Critically, the participant later justified her response, stating, ‘they [fan writers] just have to try and force it to continue beyond the natural life of the show’ (Anabelle1). This demonstrates a greater respect for canonical material and a preconceived understanding of the text based on the limits of its commercial properties, signalled by the reference to its ‘natural life’.

Interestingly, the data revealed that participant-fans of the View Askew-niverse commonly regard fan fiction with either ambivalence or animosity. Whilst some commented that they simply did not know or understand enough about the genre (Bill2), others such as Anabelle1 and Charles3 openly condemned the practice. Charles3 described the practice as ‘very self-masturbatory’. He laughed at what he described as ‘complete idolisation’, characterising fan writers as obsessive and ‘a little scary’ (Charles3), which is somewhat contradictory given his adoration of the author expressed earlier in this chapter. Rather than reflect on the relevance of fanon to an already archival spread of content, these participants focused on the pathology of the fan writer, effectively consigning them the status of ‘other’. This may be due in part to the genre of the text. Earlier it was suggested that fantastical genres such as science fiction and fantasy are often explored through transmedia formats based on an expanding principle and the ‘what if’ scenario. Indeed, participant-fans of Buffy the Vampire Slayer were more likely than fans of the View Askew-niverse to acknowledge the role of fan fiction and the relationship it shares to the inspiring text. The View Askew-niverse is a contemporary cult comedy. Not only does this genre embody different thematic and aesthetic motifs, but it attracts a different audience. This may explain why participant-fans of the View Askew-niverse were less receptive to the idea of fan fiction as a constitutive component of a transmedia network. Furthermore, this lends credence to the
theory that thematic motifs in science fiction and fantasy are better suited to transmedia expansion than other genres.

Despite the response of fans of the View Askew-niverse, many participants openly embraced the idea of archival expansion through unofficial channels, suggesting that fan fiction might extend the text, in an archival fashion similar to the principles upon which transmedia formats are built. These responses echo the ideas espoused by McKee (2004), who argues that canon is an inherently unstable concept. Critically, they suggest that the terms upon which canon and fanon are distinguished are flexible. These responses are discussed in detail in the following chapter, Constructive Consumption.

**Conclusion**

This chapter looks at concepts of experience related to the role of the author and official insignia and/or connotations in characterising the transmedia text. The data from this chapter finds that many participants in the present study are not only cognisant of the production process underlying the text but are, at times, influenced by preconceived notions of the authoring process which deems some forms of expression as less significant than others. Expressions on this theme were generally consistent across both case study texts, with the exception of the third category of description, where there was more variation between them.

The first category of description, Pedigree and the Auteur, discusses responses from the data that indicate that fans are motivated, in part, to consume across story modes based on recognisable branding and official insignia associated with the author name; from this view, the author node is the formalising structure for the transmedia network. The term ‘auteur branding’ is used in this thesis as a way of conceptualising a process whereby media users fetishise the auteur, thus conflating aesthetic motifs with the name as brand. The second category of description, Author as Text, suggests that certain participants in the study consume celebrity across story modes in a process which distinguishes the author from the fiction and positions the author as a text to be consumed. This process is described as affective-author attachment: emotional engagement with the author. This concept emphasises the author-audience space in the network. The final category of description,
*Canon/Official Story* reveals that some participants in the study base their consumption of the text on what they perceive as canon, which is held in higher regard than other forms of expression, yet others acknowledge the relationship between canon and fanon across commercial and non-commercial story modes.

The following chapter elaborates on the third category of description from the present chapter in a discussion about the constructive consumption of transmedia texts. Chiefly, it considers the roles fans play in defining and constructing the stories they consume.
Chapter 6: Constructive Consumption

This chapter discusses the second key theme drawn from the interview data: *Constructive Consumption*. The chapter is split thematically into three categories of description: *Hunter Gatherers; Expanding the Archive;* and *Assembling the Story*. The categories of description for this chapter concern several issues. These include: experience design; articulating the artefact; fanon; and discriminative consumption. These issues reflect the role fans play in defining – both conceivably and constructively – the stories they consume. Unlike the previous chapter, which focused on the author/creator as an integral figure in meaning formation, this chapter focuses on the relationship between the audience and the *text*: the audience-story mode space. Responses drawn from this theme suggest that it is in this space that new story components emerge. This perspective is not uncommon to audience studies and is particularly characteristic of post-structuralist critique which positions the reader as an active participant in the construction of meaning (see Barthes 1977; de Certeau 1984; Toffler 1980). Furthermore, the consumption of transmedia formats provokes interpretive variation beyond mere consumption of the text. In the case of transmedia storytelling, not only is there opportunity for multiple interpretations, but *consumption itself* is variable. This is because transmedia formats require the user to assemble the components into a narrative aggregate. Even when the structure is designed by the author/creator during production of the text, the text can be reinterpreted and, in effect, redesigned upon reception or entry point, depending on the level of immersion.

These phenomena have been articulated in the interview data by fans through the presentation of three categories of description denoting their experiences in relation to commercial transmedia texts. These are discussed below.

**Hunter Gatherers**

The first category of description, *Hunter Gatherers*, concerns nomadic consumption. The term ‘hunter gatherer’ is based, in this thesis, on how audiences gather information
from multiple sources to create a story synthesis, thus implicating constructive consumption in this process. It was originally used in this context by Jenkins (2006b).

In Chapter Two of this thesis it was suggested that fans are the most likely audience to consume transmedially due to their higher levels of engagement. In other words, fans are more likely than other users to consume material across multiple story modes because they are more invested in the stories they consume. Jenkins (2006a, p2) refers to fans in this context as ‘migratory’. The proposed nature of the fan illustrated in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis is supported by the interview data, with many participants citing cross-media consumption as normative to their media habits. Moreover, the implications of this suggest that fans conceive of media as associative components of a storyverse. In theory, this compels them to seek out story components via multiple story modes. This suggests that transmedia consumption involves drawing connections between disparate media in order to extend the engagement experience; effectively, traversing transitional spaces in the network. Many participants from the present study suggested that this was characteristic of their consumption habits. For example, when asked how the use of multiple platforms influences him as a fan, Jeremy10 simply claimed,

... I don’t think it does, really, because I’ve always consumed stories like that ... multiplatform retellings really resonate with me, because I tend to perceive stories as various contingent embodiments of some greater “storyverse”.

As the typology suggests, as a fan, transmedia traversals are characteristic of the way he consumes media. This suggests that transmedia can be seen to cater to fans, or at least to fannish modes of engagement. His comment that the use of multiple platforms has no effect on him as a fan because he’s ‘always consumed stories like that’ (Jeremy10) reflects commercial critiques of transmedia storytelling which posit that cross-media entertainment is structured to exploit highly engaged consumers by channelling engagement across a variety of media (Bolin 2007; Lemke 2009; Scolari 2009). Whilst this may be true, Jeremy 10 suggested that the introduction of transmedia formats has neither influenced nor changed his media habits. His indifference on the subject negates the exploitative potential of transmedia formats, suggesting that transmedia storytelling merely caters to self-directed media habits. The effect in this instance is more accommodating than exploitative. This lends credence to the central thesis of this
research: that fans are naturally inclined to consume across multiple story modes. Jeremy10 elaborated on this in his interview, claiming,

A text that’s on a single platform is just a text waiting to be put onto multiple platforms! So, perhaps engaging across multiple platforms seems more of an authentic way of engaging? I mean, true to the spirit of stories and fictional universes.

The use of the word ‘authentic’ suggests that cross-media design is a more genuine way of conveying story than the mono-text paradigm. It is possible that level or depth of engagement is used within fan communities as a measure of commitment to the text. Furthermore, this suggests that the participant, and perhaps fans like him, create meaningful connections between media irrespective of commercial design. Lemke (2009, p291) cites ‘channel surfing’ and ‘web browsing’ as examples of this. Both are user-led practices which ride the edge of cohesiveness in pursuit of a meaningful whole. According to Lemke (2009, p291), such practices are used as a way of escaping the institutional limitations of genre. The participant’s contemplations on storytelling suggest that his media habits involve creating meaningful connections between different media to form a structure of his own design. This sentiment was echoed by Henry8, who described ‘being a fan’ as involving,

... watching the relevant texts and looking for as many ways as I can to engage in those sorts of texts outside the original medium, I suppose, as well ... I guess, yeah, just the engagement appeal with the text.

Like the views of Jeremy10, this comment reflects a preconceived notion of consumption which hinges on transmedia design. For Henry8, looking for as many ways as he can to engage with the text outside of the original medium is central to his identification as a fan. According to the typology from Chapter Two of this thesis, this is characteristic of story/content-driven use, typically adopted by fans. Comparable to this view, Henry8 suggested that his identification as a fan, and thus his proclivity to consume texts across multiple story modes, is tied to the ‘engagement appeal’ of the text. This fan cites the text as the engagement catalyst, suggesting that while cross-media consumption is a normative part of his engagement experience, his inclinations are persuaded by provocative engagement appeal. This view characterises transmedia consumption as a negotiation between the proclivity of the media user and the appeal of the text. This makes it difficult to
characterise transmedia storytelling as exploitative. Instead, the phenomenon can be likened to a contract, one in which both user and producer can benefit from the interaction.

David4 reflected on cross-media consumption in the context of a hierarchy of engagement, comparable to that suggested in Chapter Two of this thesis, explaining,

Inevitably, the majority of fans will stay with or go back to the primary platform, a small minority will become fans of the secondary or tertiary platforms, and the smallest minority will be able to enjoy both or all equally.

This also reflects dedication, which is comparable to loyalty in so far as it relates to immersion in the storyworld. This was discussed in the previous chapter as it relates to affective author-attachment. This sentiment was echoed by Edward5 who, when asked what the main difference is between engaging with a text across multiple platforms and engaging with a text through one platform, responded,

I think it’s a question of intensity, because a lot of people watch Buffy ... people my age or younger would come home and it would be on and they would sit there and watch it and they would be entranced by it ... and then as the series goes on some of them stick and some of them don’t and nowadays you can see ... the more dedicated fans are the ones who still pursue it across all the platforms, be it comics, or they’re buying DVD’s that replace when they wore out from viewing, or they’re, you know, buying other things... (Edward5)

Like the previous comment, this one implicates dedication as a factor in cross-media consumption. Whilst it is still unclear how else dedication is conceived of in either fandom, these comments, like the others, suggest that the hunter gatherer technique of consuming media is part of this. Furthermore, Edward5 linked dedication to a spectrum of engagement, this time based on commitment to the series. He conceives of fandom as the remnants of a filtering process which separates the moderate from the hardcore. When prompted, he referred to the dedicated consumers as ‘what’s left of the fandom’ (Edward5), suggesting that the continuation of the series beyond its original format marks a threshold of commitment. Dedicated fans cross the threshold, following the series across new formats and into new markets. Less dedicated fans lack the hunter gatherer instinct that drives the dedicated few to seek content through other story
modes. Once again, this positions loyalty as an important facet of engagement. The participant described his own fandom as ‘mid to low’, explaining,

... I’m willing to visit places on the internet, I’m willing to pay for the product that we get now on the comics – the trade paperbacks. I’m not quite willing to go all the way out and support everything that the series represents to other people or to what the creator himself represents (Edward5).

Based on his own definition of fandom presented earlier, he identifies himself in this quote as less intense and less dedicated compared to other fans based on the fact that he is less willing to pursue the story across more than a few platforms. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the participant is not highly engaged, since he does pursue the story across multiple story modes; an act which requires him to locate discrete story components and align them with the structure of the text. In fact, he characterises his fandom by discriminating between story components which are commercially accessible and sequentially ordered and branded material and ancillary products, which is indicative of story/content-driven use because it implies a dedication to story and a willingness to traverse multiple modes. One participant, a fan of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, described what it means to be a fan as, ‘watching the shows and potentially going forward and reading more of the stories through the comics medium’ (Fred6). Like Edward5, this fan attributed transmedia consumption to a degree, or intensity of engagement. He claimed,

... I was willing to go out and find the comics, but I think a lot of people who would maybe be more casual fans – people just looking for some entertainment, you know, flipping through the channels or whatever – find the show, start following it [and] they might not be willing to ... try and find the comics (Fred6).

This echoes the views of Edward5, whose response suggested that the transition from one story mode to another marks a threshold of commitment which separates the moderate from the hardcore. This was also reflected in comments from Henry8 who, when asked if transmedia consumption is characteristic of his media use broadly (i.e. beyond consumption of the Buffy the Vampire Slayer texts) explained,

... I guess that’s kind of proportional to [the] strength of the fandom ... If I’m very much into it then that will then catapult me into looking for more out there (Henry8).
He later elaborated, claiming, ‘it’s that strength of fandom, how much I like a particular text that will propel me into [another] medium’ (Henry8). This is comparable to Fred6, who implicates the hunter gatherer instinct in his response above, describing transmedia consumption as an act of finding. This places responsibility in the hands of the media user to gather and assemble story components in order to make sense of the story network. Consumption of transmedia texts can therefore be seen to constitute acts of finding, gathering and assembling. This, according to many participants in the study, is characteristic of the media habits of fans. Even participant-fans of the View Askew-universe, who confessed greater dedication to the author than the fictional text, cited cross-media consumption as a normative part of their media use. As Anabelle1 explained,

> I’ve read all the books, I read the Twitter, I’ve seen the movies, I go to the Q&A’s ... listen to the podcasts, so yeah, pretty much every medium Kevin is on (Anabelle1).

Unlike participant-fans of Buffy the Vampire Slayer who collect story components to form a cohesive fiction, participant-fans of the View Askew-universe use transmedia traversals to construct the author. As Bill2 stated,

> ... it [my fandom] started with the movies and then from that sort of branched off, read some of the comics and stuff and then more recently some of the books he’s done as well as now the podcast show (Bill2).

The previous chapter discussed how Bill2 describes his fandom as a journey of transition, from the fictional texts to consuming the author. The above comment reflects this, and demonstrates that transmedia traversals are a characteristic part of his consumption regardless of the text or its form. Later the participant elaborated, expressing fundamental assumptions also used in this thesis to articulate the difference between consuming a text across multiple platforms and consuming a text through a single platform. When asked to describe this difference, the participant explained,

> ... if you’re a fan, it gives you access to, like, more aspects of that universe whereas, like, there are people who just like the film and sort of don’t branch any deeper into that ... [the] fact that the View Askew stuff did sort of branch away [meant] you weren’t just limited to the five or six films ... you actually had other outlets you could sort of delve into (Bill2).
This reflects the view held in this thesis that fans are more likely than other media users to engage with story across multiple modes. In a more comprehensive account, the participant explained,

... there are some people that are ... are huge fans of the films but have just never bothered with the comic books. They’re just like, ‘ah, I can’t be bothered with it’ ... I suppose it takes fans of all kinds, really ... probably ... the more sort of die-hard fans would be the ones that would branch off and look for other sort of aspects of the stories (Bill2).

This is comparable to the views of David4 and Edward5, who each implicated a hierarchy or typology of use to explain instances or depth of transmedia consumption. Like the others, Bill2 implicated engagement as a factor in this equation and also, a predisposition to consume across media. His contemplations on fandom are comparable to those of Edward5. He distinguished user groups based on engagement at the threshold of commitment. As he explained, some people simply ‘can’t be bothered’ with the comics; their dedication to the text is tested at the threshold of commitment between story modes. This is a useful theory for understanding how fans consume transmedia texts. As long as each story component is self-contained, media users may choose to disengage from the franchise at various threshold points without disrupting their experience of the narrative. The best example of this is the ‘heteromedial series’ (Dena 2007, p3). In this form of transmedia storytelling, self-contained narrative units can be chained together with other narrative units to form a larger narrative structure (Dena 2007, p3). This is partly true of Buffy the Vampire Slayer; however, only the television series is self-contained. The comic book seasons that follow are representative of a larger continuing narrative and are thus not self-contained. This does not, in effect, mean that media users cannot forgo the transmedia experience offered in continuity structures such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer – an example of the ‘heteromedial serial’, which relies on each unit in the structure to continue a larger narrative (Dena 2007, p3); however, story components consumed in isolation or out of order would necessarily make the narrative more difficult to comprehend.

Most of the responses from this category of description share in common the perception of structure or design as an impetus for transmedia consumption, tempered by habitual cross-media consumption. In the literature from the field, discussions of structure often
revolve around the assumption of an ur-text, or central node in the network: that is, the text that is marketed through other texts, such as books, comics and ARGs (Örnebring 2007). The ur-text is the inciting story mode in the overall structure, such as the television series written by Whedon for Buffy the Vampire Slayer or the movies produced by Smith for View Askew Productions. As Chapter Two of this thesis discussed, the ur-text is significantly related to entry point. This was reflected in the present study, with participants often citing a ‘primary’ or ‘original’ format when discussing their entry into the text. This contradicts the assumption made in Chapter Two of this thesis, that in most cases the ur-text is irrelevant. On the contrary, many responses were couched in a preconceived notion of the text based on a default source. For example, when asked about the production process underlying the text, Charles3, a fan of the View Askew-iverse, responded only in reference to the films. This was not uncommon; in fact, most participants used the default source as a reference point. For example, other participants, such as Bill2 and Anabelle1, did the same in their interviews. Oddly, each of these participants is a fan of the View Askew-iverse; despite their emphasis in the interview data on consuming the author (see Chapter Five of this thesis) they still cited, and referred back to, a primary story mode in the fictional text. Isabelle9 claimed that consuming material across multiple platforms is a way of ‘supporting the shows’ she loves. This comment reflects the ideas of Örnebring (2007); it implies that secondary story components are thus named because they are used primarily to support the ur-text. As Chapter Two of this thesis discussed, a study by Park and Ahn (2010) found that narratives which flow from television to movie formats were more likely to inspire trans-purchases (the purchasing of content as another story mode) than flows in the opposite direction; however, the study used different case studies to illustrate these phenomena. Whilst this demonstrates the importance of structures of flow, it is unclear whether the primary text was effectively marketed through its secondary counterparts, as flows in the opposite direction were not explored for each case study. In the case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, fans are required to engage with story modes sequentially in order to make sense of the story. In other words, the story requires them to traverse the network in a particular order. For example, Isabelle9, a fan of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, referred to the comics as ‘comics being based on [the] TV shows’. Whilst this is not entirely surprising given the serial nature of the text, it still implicates structure as an impetus for consumption. According to Örnebring
secondary texts refer consumers to characters and events from the *ur-text*. He claims that flows in the opposite direction are rare. This has been discussed in Chapter One of this thesis; however, it is also relevant here. Given the sequential nature of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, it makes sense for fans to consume the series in order. Furthermore, many participants from the study claimed that their first encounter with the *Buffy* text was in television format. Ironically, flows in the opposite direction (from the comics to the television show), which Örnebring (2007) claims serve as marketing channels, were not represented. Thus, certain interview responses from the present study suggest that ‘secondary texts’ serve only to support the primary text. They are used to enhance the engagement experience of existing fans rather than attract new fans to the series.

Örnebring’s theory might be more useful in the context of a series of self-contained units, like the structure offered in the *View Askew-niverse*, which allows each story mode to be consumed as a discrete story context. This is an example of a heteromedial series (Dena 2007, p3); however, the same conclusions can be drawn from responses from fans of the *View Askew-niverse* as from fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Whilst the *View Askew-niverse* is far less sequential than the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* text, participants from the present study each entered the text through a primary story mode; in this case, the movies. No-one from the study claimed to have used the comics, for example, as an entry point into the text. Thus, whilst Örnebring’s concept of an *ur-text* is useful for conceiving an entry point, the marketing implications are not well represented in the case studies for the present research.

Despite the overwhelming emphasis in the data on an *ur-text*, these phenomena could be conceived of as negligible given the multiplicit nature of transmedia formats. In other words, participants might use the primary format as an anchor when referring to the text because it is easier; however, the identification of a primary text speaks to the effect of structure on consumption. For example, David4 claimed ‘the majority of fans will stay with or go back to the primary platform’ (emphasis added), emphasising a principle entry point into the story. This was reflected by Fred6, who claimed ‘being a fan’ is about ‘watching the shows and potentially going forward’. In this account, the show represents the central node in the story network used literally to jump forward into other texts and contexts. This is comparable to the views of Jeremy10 and Henry8, cited earlier for their responses related to structure and consumption. The present discussion implies that the act of consuming is a negotiated process. Whilst structure can be seen to
affect consumption, transmedia storytelling can be seen as a response by industry to the proclivity of fans to consume across story modes.

Transmedia formats can also be used to appeal to multiple markets simultaneously. As Charles3 explained in his interview, ‘being able to cross ... particular mediums allows for a larger range of audience’. This was reiterated by Edward5, who claimed ‘marketing the show as a comic book – it’s a way of keeping it alive amongst a segment of the fandom’. Henry8 championed transmedia design for its ability to engage fans across different markets, claiming,

Knowing that they’re engaging fans on different levels is a good feeling ... its adding to that fan community feeling that no matter what your interests are then they’re trying to engage ... with you ... whether it’s a game, a book, comic or, like, a spin-off series.

Whilst this may be true, participants from the present study identify themselves as transmedia consumers; that is, media users who consume texts across multiple platforms. The above comment speaks more to mode-driven use. George7 articulated the market appeal of transmedia formats and its relationship to fandom, stating,

I think fans – if they’re, you know, true fans – will go across the platforms regardless of what the experience offers ... but when you break ... those fans down, then some fans are going to be attracted to a video game rather than a, you know, box set of DVDs because they’re getting something else from it.

This comment suggests mode-driven use can be transformed into story/content-driven use, which may mean that as far as changing mode of use is concerned, audiences who are mode-driven, and thus display the required high levels of engagement for transmedial consumption, will be more likely to adopt story/content-driven use than others. The participant did also suggest that ‘true fans’ consume across platforms ‘regardless of what the experience offers’, thus intimating that story/content-driven use is a marker of fandom. Whilst the potential for strategic cross-marketing seems undeniable using transmedia formats – an assumption acknowledged by certain participants from the study – forms of consumption represented in the this study can only provide speculative accounts given the participant demographic; fans from the present study identify themselves as transmedial consumers. Also, each cites a primary format through which they first encountered the text. Secondary texts offer a way for
existing fans to enhance the engagement experience; it is still unclear whether consumers not represented in this study use these channels as an entry point.

Whilst issues relating to market exposure are still unresolved in this discussion, concepts of experience from the present category suggest that fans from the study gather multiple content units across a spectrum of story modes, based on an ur-text, as a way of constructing the story. This is typical of migratory or story/content-driven use, which is demonstrably associated with fans, both here and in other studies.

**Expanding the Archive**

The second category of description is *Expanding the Archive*. In the previous chapter, participants were cited denouncing fan-produced works such as fan fiction and championing canonical structure; however, one sub-set of participants did not share these views. This category of description explores these views and concerns the relationship derivative works share with the inspiring artefact and the role of fans as co-contributors in expanding the transmedia archive. Critically, this category also suggests that participation is an important indicator of engagement. The title for this category is taken from Derecho’s theory of archontic literature (derived from the term ‘archive’), owing to its relevance to fan fiction in the context of transmedia storytelling (see Chapter Two).

In studies of fan fiction, some of the most interesting research has found that fan writing resists traditional patterns of production and consumption by seeking to correct or extend the original narrative (Jenkins 2006a; Pugh 2005; Scodari & Felder 2000; ). Jenkins (1992, p155) suggests that this phenomenon emerges from the assumption of an assumed narrative path that the fan writer believes the characters should follow. Once consumers commit themselves to fandom, producers are unwillingly engaged in a generic contract based on narrative specifications.

Taken as separate phenomena, both transmedia storytelling and fan fiction present significant opportunities for further research; however, taken together, they can be used to demonstrate how fans respond to the expanding logic of transmedia storytelling through the creation of fan-produced works and how participation is an important
indicator of engagement. In the present study, participants were asked to reflect on the relationship between transmedia texts and fan-produced works such as fan fiction. Whilst some openly denounced fan practices (see Chapter Five of this thesis) others embraced the idea of expansion, suggesting that for some fans, consumption inspires production. For instance, Jeremy10 claimed that part of being a fan includes ‘producing spin-off fiction/artwork about the story’. For this fan, producing material related to the series is constituted as a typical component of his fandom. In fact, from a list of six components, producing ‘spin-off’ material was listed as number two. Not only this, but the term ‘spin-off’ has commercial implications. As it stands, many canonical components of Buffy the Vampire Slayer are referred to as ‘spin-offs’, thus denoting their relationship to the primary text. Jeremy10 suggested that fans can create spin-offs, thus elevating the status of fan-produced works and their relationship to the inspiring text. He later drew a direct comparison between crossover fan fiction (stories which blur the boundaries between different texts; Jenkins 1992, p170) and the rich continuity structure of comics, claiming,

... I tend to perceive stories as various contingent embodiments of some greater “storyverse”. Love Alan Moore for this reason – he acts as though all stories essentially take place in the same universe. And crossover fanfic (between two fictional properties), for the same reason (Jeremy10).

Essentially, the participant suggests that both forms function according to similar logics, comparable to the views of Ford and Jenkins (2009) discussed in Chapter One of this thesis and earlier in this chapter. This is also comparable to the views of Edward5, who claimed,

... a lot of what fan writers write as far as Buffy is stuff that isn’t terribly different from what the show chose to ... be filmed and stamped as official; especially here in season eight when you’ve had some very outlandish moments ... I can’t really say that what fans create is of lesser quality than what the official writers create now.

Whilst Edward5 acknowledged the unofficial status of fan fiction, neither participant referred to fan fiction as appropriative or derivative. As Edward5 pointed out, fan-produced works aren’t ‘terribly different’ from what the series chose to brand as official. Whilst the status of fan fiction is not legitimated in the commercial realm, certain participants from the study conceive of fan fiction as legitimate in the context of
the story logic by which it operates: that which is similar to the multiplicit structures found in transmedia storytelling. This view legitimates fan fiction as a node in the transmedia network. This sentiment was echoed by George7, who claimed,

... it’s [fan fiction] like the alternate reality experience, extending the narrative ... I think it’s very similar to comic book storylines that kind of mash characters together or give you the “what if” scenario ... so it extends that experience of the narrative.

Geroge7, Edward5 and Jeremy10 each suggested that the same principle which allows the producers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to create alternative scenarios in the same storyworld across multiple modes is exercised by fan writers through the production of fan fiction, thus allowing them to express their engagement by participating with the text. According to Edward5, writing fan fiction is a way of ‘[taking] Buffy and [adding] something to it’. The logic by which commercial texts are expanded upon by multiple parties is comparable to the logic of multiplicity in transmedia storytelling. Whilst necessarily archival, transmedia narratives operate according to different spreadable functionalities. Jenkins (2009b) claims that one of the core dualities according to which transmedia narratives operate is continuity versus multiplicity. This was discussed in detail in Chapter One of this thesis. Essentially, multiplicity involves the use of ‘alternative versions of characters or a parallel universe’ (Jenkins 2009b, p3) instead of an ongoing coherence to a canon. According to responses from the interview data, extant media produced in the fan community closely resemble a logic of multiplicity by expanding the text through ‘what if’ scenarios. As George7 explained, ‘I think it’s [fan fiction] ... really, um, exploring the characters further in ways that the current platforms kind of restrict’. This was reflected by Jeremy10, who explained,

... some [fan fiction] can add new dimensions to a story and explore unexplored avenues. They’re sort of a reading of the text as well as a new creation.

Whilst both the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the *View Askew-niverse* texts are continuous structures, certain fans from the present study suggest that fan-produced works extend the text based on a logic of multiplicity. In other words, links between fan-produced nodes and existing story nodes are constituted differently than links between ‘official’ nodes; they operate according to different logics. Furthermore, accounts of multiplicity and continuity are necessarily subjective, so it is hard to say with any certainty according to which principle a text operates. Indeed, Jenkins claims
that multiplicity and continuity can occur at once; for example, comic book publishers often create deep continuities whilst also allowing characters to exist in parallel universes offered as a set of ‘mini-franchises’ (Jenkins 2009b). According to the quote above, not only does the creation of fan fiction constitute a form of narrative exploration, but the creation of new works is conceived of as a form of consumption and engagement. This suggests that the act of reading is interpretive since it inspires the creation of new works. Such a perspective is common to audience studies; however, in the context of transmedia storytelling it suggests that fans position works they produce in a similar relationship to the inspiring artefact as ancillary or secondary texts in the transmedia structure.

Some participants associated fan fiction with structural continuity, describing it as an extension of the primary text. For example, Anabelle1 claimed, ‘it can fit in [in] that it’s an extension of the story’. Oddly, she also emphatically denounced fan fiction in her interview; however, her personal views obviously have limited influence on her conceptual understanding of the practice. According to Booth (2008), the view expressed by Anabelle1 is an example of media practice. She claims that media texts are no longer discrete objects, but diverse cultural practices which mean that fan fiction can be understood as a component of textual practice, comparable to an archival or networked spread. Furthermore, this implies that ‘poaching’ is no longer an acceptable metaphor for the fan reappropriation of texts (Booth 2008, p515). Whilst the concept of poaching – that fan writing builds on interpretive practices, using the primary text as a scaffold for the creation of new works (Jenkins 1992, p156) – is still valid, Booth (2008) argues that contemporary fan studies should aim towards a critique of ‘shared cultural contexts’ made possible by digital technologies and convergent transmedia formats. Such a perspective collapses distinctions between canon and fanon, positioning both as constituents of a practice in action.

This is comparable to Derecho’s (2006, p64) perspective on fan fiction, which positions the practice as associatively archontic; that is, derived from literature which is archival and thus cannot be reduced to a single text. Derecho claims that through extending literary archives, fan fiction allows audiences to assist meaning formation through participatory engagement. Whilst this concept can be situated within the broader literature on intertextuality, Derecho (2006, p65) delineates the two, explaining,
… it is the specific relation between new versions and the originary versions of the texts, the fact that works enter the archive of other works by quoting them consciously, by pointedly locating themselves within the world of the archontic text, that makes the concept of archontic literature different from the concept of intertextuality.

This is comparable to the relationship explicated in fan fiction between derivations and the inspiring artefact. As Louisa Stein and Kristina Busse (2009, p193) note, ‘fans emphasise and foreground the intertextuality of their creative work’. In other words, fans explicate the relationship of their work to an inspiring artefact. The properties of fan fiction are thus archival in nature. This is corroborated by Sheenagh Pugh (2005) who, like Derecho, situates fan fiction within a long history of derivation and appropriation central to the creation of literary texts. She claims that the first known literature emerged via a process of creative reinterpretation, whereby later authors used elements from the original text to create their own version of the legend (citing the Arthurian canon as one example) (Pugh 2005, p10). According to Henry8, fan fiction exists as a platform for fans to ‘continue to make stories as if it were a part of it’. When prompted, he elaborated, stating,

I think they [fan writers] can definitely think it is part of the larger picture, but it’s not extending the original story. … it’s not set continuity ... it’s just expanding the larger picture ... I would prefer to have my things like part of a larger picture, feel like it were part of a larger picture, uh, rather than trying to pin down everything from the original source material.

In much the same way that Derecho (2006) describes fan fiction as archival, Henry8 emphasises that whilst fan works might not constitute ‘set continuity’ they exist as part of the ‘larger picture’. This is more reflective of archival expansion than an attempt to situate fan fiction within the canon of the original text. The comment suggests that fan fiction exists as an expansion of the original text in a different mode which sometimes operates from a different perspective from within the same universe. Whilst canon is distinguishable from fanon based on a legitimising legalistic framework and cultural notions of authorship, the two are similar when considered from a storyworld perspective. As Bill2 explained, sometimes fans enjoy the original work so much that they ‘try and create their own within that universe’. This sentiment was echoed by George7 who considered the relationship between fan fiction and the inspiring text as organic. He claimed,
I think it’s interesting that the story takes on a life of its own and really develops and grows beyond its constrictions because then it becomes something else entirely (George7).

This perspective reflects those from the literature, suggesting that the continuation of a transmedia format beyond its (commercially) intended design is not only inevitable, but contributes to the creative development of the narrative, although it is unclear whether the transformation is always viewed positively. George7 is representative of a sub-set of fans from the study who conceived of fan fiction as a component of a larger transmedia network which can be expanded both through official channels, and by fans writing from within fan communities as a way of participating with the text. Whilst each shares a different relationship to the inspiring text, both can be situated as forms of cultural practice within the same storyworld.

**Assembling the Story**

The third and final category of description in this chapter is *Assembling the Story*. This category reflects concepts of experience related to perceptions of the text. It concerns variations in conceptions of the text, its margins and its constituent components. The previous category discussed concepts of experience which characterise fan works as practice-based components of a transmedia network. It is thus relevant to the present category because it relates to conceptions of the constitution of the text; however, it is not repeated here since it has already been discussed. The present category marks both an evolution of and departure from the previous category. Concepts of experience from this category problematise conceived notions of the ‘storyworld’ by introducing marginal and/or discrete content units into the transmedia framework. Responses represented in this category reveal how each participant conceives of the text differently. Inconsistencies in these reflections imply that fan communities lack an established consensus on how transmedia texts are demarcated. Furthermore, they imply that established definitions within academia are not necessarily representative of how transmedia texts are conceived of amongst fans.

The issue of how audiences conceive of or archive transmedia texts is not well represented in the literature from the field. According to Eileen Maitland and Cordelia
Hall (2006) new media installations are increasingly difficult to record because their material constitution threatens them with extinction. They claim that the role played by ‘process’ (as opposed to ‘object’) in the constitution of creative output makes it difficult to locate new forms as meaningful wholes. Whilst their analysis focuses predominantly on installations which are ephemeral and disposable (such as those typically found in museums), their concerns are also reflected in the constitution of transmedia forms. Using the concept of ‘variable media’ as a framework – ‘creative projects incorporating elements whose viability within future incarnations of the same works can be compromised’ (Maitland & Hall 2006, p327) – Maitland and Hall problematise the coding of media built on the principles of interactivity and fragmentation. They claim, … many installations and events taking place on the contemporary art scene and resources being created within academia and elsewhere in digital formats are heavily dependent on the interaction and compatibility of a variety of distinct elements in allowing them to become fully realized or utilizable in any meaningful way (Maitland & Hall 2006, p332).

Transmedia formats are built on the principle of creating meaningful actualisations out of discrete elements. Maitland and Hall (2006) demonstrate concerns about such forms based on their variable structure. As this chapter has already demonstrated, some fans regard fan-produced works such as fan fiction as practice-based components of a transmedia text. This introduces archiving issues given the irregular and somewhat transient nature of fan fiction. Furthermore, works which are not produced under commercial licence are not as thoroughly documented as branded content. Transmedia texts are inherently volatile because they can be both expanded upon by multiple parties and often function according to a principle of multiplicity. Archiving the text is therefore problematic.

According to responses drawn from the interview data, the text is constituted differently by each fan depending on their media preferences and varying degrees of exposure and immersion. In other words, each fan both views and engages with the story network differently. For example, David4 claimed, ‘the first Buffy anything I had contact with was the movie’, which he described as the inspiring idea for the text, thus intimating that the movie initiated the series. Despite that fact that most online sources (including Wikis and fan forums) list the movie as non-canonical material (see, buffy.wikia.com,
slayalive.com), participants like David4, cited their exposure to the film as a part of their overall engagement with the Buffy the Vampire Slayer text. For example, when asked what first attracted her to the text, Isabelle9 claimed,

... I remember watching a little bit of Buffy the Vampire Slayer movie with Kristy Swanson way back when it was released ... Anyway, a few years later I read a news article about upcoming TV shows for the summer that mentioned a TV show was being made from the movie. It sounded interesting and I thought I'd give the show a go.

Clearly, for this fan the movie was the inspiring artefact for the series which followed it. She claimed that the television series, which aired five years later, was ‘made from the movie’, suggesting an intimate relationship between the two forms. This does not, in effect, imply that either participant is necessarily ignorant of the movie’s non-canonical status. Each simply confesses a relationship with the text in its original form which inspired curiosity for the television series that followed.

Not all participants held the movie in high esteem. For example, George7 acknowledged the film’s relationship to the television series only as a ‘bad experience’ – one in which Whedon ‘[made] up the rules as he went’. He claimed of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, ‘it only really started coming together as a cohesive universe in probably the second and third season’. In this quote, the participant refers to the television series. His comment suggests that whilst he is familiar with the film, he conceives of the television series as the originating continuity artefact. His acknowledgment of the film is fleeting at best, characterised as an error on the creator’s behalf. In fact, throughout the interview, the participant only mentioned the film to contest its relevance to the series. He went on to say,

... I think it [the film] was a big experimental platform for him ... he was creatively frustrated by the film experience and he was looking for a longer format to tell a story (George7).

Once more, the participant characterised the film as a failing on Whedon’s behalf, thus negating its relevance to the transmedia narrative. Other participants, such as Henry8 and Fred6, failed to mention the film at all, citing the television series as their first encounter with the text. Whilst some fans first encountered the Buffy the Vampire Slayer text in film format, most cited the television series as the originating artefact.
Given the serial nature of the television series, it might be difficult for fans to situate the film within the context of the continuity structure. In other words, the television series instigated a seasonal structure; even the comic books and graphic novels that follow conform to the continuity established in the television series. This suggests that in order to engage with transmedia texts, audiences require transmedia literacy skills; a unique set of competencies which include the ability to reconcile different storytelling formats, thus pointing to the importance of literacy as an indicator of engagement. As one fan noted of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, ‘the change in continuity between the movie and the show were sizeable’ (David4). This change is central to the continuity structure of the text. Issues related to continuity and cohesion in the text are discussed in more detail in the next chapter, Conditions and Contingencies.

For now, the indeterminate relationship between the movie and the television series can be used to frame divergent conceptions of the transmedia text within the Buffy the Vampire Slayer fandom. From a networked perspective, this means that the story structure is variable depending on media preference. Such disparity marks a lack of consensus within the fan community. This can be framed using the tenets of symbolic interactionism, used in the previous chapter to describe affective author-attachment in the View Askew-iverse fandom. Despite the stabilising structure of group life proposed by the theory, participant-fans from the present study do not demonstrate an affirmation of shared meanings in relation to their understanding of the composition of the text. The previous chapter discussed the importance of canon to the fan community; however, it is unclear whether denotations of conceived notions of canon share any relationship to conceptions of transmedia. This is not surprising given the emphasis in the second category of description from this chapter on fan fiction as a constituent of the transmedia archive. In other words, transmedia is conceived of by some fans as an articulation of the text which is not constituted by canonical material. Instead, it is constituted archivally, or as a network. It can be argued that the ‘transmedia’ text represents a totalising structure which encompasses both canonical and non-canonical material including ancillary content produced by multiple parties; however, the fact that participants from the study conceive of the transmedia text differently negates its potential as a totalising structure. The more likely explanation is that the transmedia text is constructed by each fan according to their media preference and exposure. To an extent, this contradicts the economic perspective on transmedia storytelling which
argues that transmedia formats emerged from innovations in marketing, thus intimating that the structure is designed to maximise profit across a number of discrete markets. Whilst this may be true to an extent, the interview data suggest that not all fans receive the text in the same way.

For example, when discussing the text, George7 claimed he played the Buffy X Box game. Henry8 cited a similar experience, claiming he ‘played a Buffy computer game briefly’, even describing it as ‘like a lost episode of the television show’; however, Edward5 denounced the game series in the continuity structure, claiming,

... it’s one you can spend money on and not feel ripped off, but it’s not really the next
... it’s not like playing out another episode of Buffy or another season of Buffy.

Contradictions like this are reflected elsewhere in the interview data. For example, Bill2 was the only participant-fan of the View Askew-niverse to acknowledge the View Askew-niverse animations. The animated series, titled simply Clerks, was written in 1994 and features characters from the film of the same name. Furthermore, the Clerks DVD (1994) includes a special animated featurette titled, Clerks: The Lost Scene (1994). Despite the relevance of these features in the context of the View Askew-niverse text, none other than Bill2 referred to them. Comparably, Anabelle1 cited behind-the-scenes footage from the Clerks 2 website as a part of her transmedia experience, claiming,

... there was all the behind the scenes videos you could get from the websites which really gave you just a far better, more interesting experience.

This response, and those before it, each illustrate that participants conceive of the transmedia text differently. Discrepancies of this nature might be attributable to personal media preference. For example, media users who enjoy reading comics or watching cartoons might be more likely to engage with a series of animated shorts than those who typically watch movies; however, participants from the present study all identified themselves as transmedial consumers, that is, users who engage with a text across multiple story modes. This suggests that whilst fan users are more likely than others to consume texts across multiple story modes, their consumption habits are tempered somewhat by media preference. As this chapter has already discussed, this also suggests that as far as changeable mode of use is concerned, there may be a link between mode-driven and story/content-driven use.
Media preferences demonstrate the importance of cultural and economic synergy. In order to facilitate easy consumption, each story mode should be selected and used for the varying relationship it shares with another – not based on difference. Furthermore, different media require different literacy skills so using comparable formats could help ease the transition from one story mode to another. When these relationships are effectively exploited there is a greater chance that the text will attract consumers who traverse multiple markets based on the relationship between forms. For example, Jennifer Proffitt, Tchoi and McAllister (2007) cite a relationship between science fiction and anime, suggesting that both genre and form can be exploited to maximise economic and creative output. Comparably, as this thesis has already noted, Ford and Jenkins (2009) claim that comic books utilise several of the same techniques appropriated for transmedia storytelling, suggesting that the form is integral to transmedia design. This is an important theory in the context of transmedia consumption because it implies that fans are even more discerning than the literature (see Chapters Two and Three of this thesis) suggests. Variation in conceptions of the text suggests that transmedia users consume and conceive of the text according to their own design.

Another reason for variation in perceptions of the text might be the lack of verifiable resources, such as a user guide. For example, Fred6 said of the Buffy the Vampire Slayer comics,

... there’s, like, no official guide out there. There’s various different guides out on the internet but there’s no real good easy official way ... like on the internet to find what order to consume things in.

This points to the importance of transmedia literacy, a concept discussed earlier in this chapter. Evidently, when multiple story modes are used to convey a single narrative certain skills and competencies are required in order to traverse them, such as those required to piece together narrative components. This means that not only is literacy an important indicator of engagement, but new literacies are required for the consumption of transmedia texts. As Ruppel (2009, p285) notes, transmedia narratives erode the usually accepted borders of engagement so it is not surprising in this case that fans turn to their community as a source or guide for demarcating the text. As Fred6 explained,

I had to go onto Buffy forums and start a thread asking people for some suggested readings orders for how to get from the end of, ah, Buffy season seven and Angel
season five to the start of the Buffy season eight comics because there’s a whole lot of comics.

Other participants from the study shared a similar perspective, emphasising the role of websites or fan forums in their constitution of and engagement with the text. According to Dena (2004b, p7) this is not uncommon; channels outside the creator’s world, such as forums and fan sites can be used as alternative entry points into the text. As Henry8 claimed of the Buffy the Vampire Slayer season eight comics, ‘I’ve roughly been following ... like Wikipedia and other peoples’ reviews about what’s going on, just to ... keep myself up-to-date’. According to George7, not only can fan sites be used a resource to make sense of the text, but they can also be used as a resource to help constitute it by providing a feedback loop between producer and consumer. He claimed of the Buffy the Vampire Slayer text,

... I think the great thing [about] a comic is that ... you know, there’s a lot of Buffy fans online that really give a lot of feedback and with the comic there’s faster turnaround, though I think the fans really do now kind of affect that on-going narrative ... just ‘cause it’s an easier medium to feed into (George7).

From this perspective, the fan community is instrumental in shaping the transmedia text. Whilst conceptions of structure may vary from fan to fan, those who participate in the community feed directly into the narrative properties of the text via the feedback system online. The importance of community in the construction of the text was also reflected by Anabelle1, who claims of the View Askew-niverse,

... I think its extended a lot beyond what he intended it to be in that the community has overtaken what he wanted from the View Askew-niverse (Anabelle1).

She elaborated, explaining,

... while it’s very much about, you know, the podcast and the comics and the movies, it’s also about a fan community that’s built into ... I always relate it to a very large extended family (Anabelle1).

For this fan, the community plays a central role in the construction of the View Askew-niverse, although it is unclear how. As Charles3 explained, ‘I just figured out there was a website’, and ‘learnt what he [Smith] was doing from there’. From this perspective, fan forums and websites are more than mere guides to the transmedia text; through the
pooling of knowledge in the fan community online they become constituted within the text, which may be what Anabelle1 was referring to in the previous comment. Oddly, this contradicts data from fans of the View Askew-iverse who, in the present study, discriminate between fan-produced content such as fan fiction and the commercial properties of the text; however, it is conceivable that fans of the View Askew-iverse embrace the community online because it inhabits a space created and occupied by Smith himself, thus formalising the author-audience space. For them, the author is a part of the community, thus it can be constituted as formative to the transmedia text. Whilst it is unclear the role fans see themselves playing in the construction of the text, it is undeniable that communities online are central to this process.

Other participants reflected more on the commercial properties of the text. For example, when asked whether she consumes material from the text across more than one platform, Isabelle9 explained,

I read the Buffy and Angel comics that are currently being released ... I own several BTVS X Box games – not that I have actually been able to finish them ... I also own quite a few BTVS, Angel and Firefly merchandise (all still in original packaging), but I’m not sure if you’d classify those as “consumable material”.

In the previous chapter, Isabelle9 was referenced for her preoccupation with the author name as an insignia of quality. This is reflected, to an extent, in her response above where she cites Firefly in response to interview questions relating to a case study of Buffy the Vampire Slayer specifically. In respect to the present chapter, her response is interesting in the context of constructive consumption. For this fan, various textual components including ‘BTVS [Buffy the Vampire Slayer] X Box games’ and ‘merchandise’ constitute consumable components within the Buffy the Vampire Slayer text. It is unclear what the participant refers to by ‘merchandise’; however, given her reference to ‘original packaging’ and the listed narrative material from which ‘merchandise’ is distinguished, it can be assumed that the participant refers to collectable goods such as models and figurines. Despite her uncertainty, this fan’s inclusion of collectable merchandise as a means through which to engage with the text suggests that narrative units constitute one of many classes of channels or modes through which the transmedia text can be actualised and, indeed, engaged with. This points to the uneasiness around classifying commodities as narrative channels discussed
in Chapter Two. Whilst collecting merchandise could be viewed as an extra-textual activity, based on this fans experience it could also count as a primary textual activity. The latter view is similar to Klastrup and Tosca’s (2004) concept of a *transmedia storyworld*, discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. Comparably, Dena (2004a) suggests that transmedia texts are comprised of multiple channels, including a commodity channel which may have little or no impact on story comprehension but a greater relevance to storyworld. George7 reflected a similar perspective. When asked what impact the use of multiple platforms has on him as a fan, he responded,

> Um, it gives me more reasons to spend money I guess ... the Comic-con is on in San Diego and you can just see people spending money on toys and games and, um, it gets you into that ... the universe more ... because a lot of it is about identification as well. So you identify with the characters or you identify with elements in that universe and ... you go to conventions and there’s always someone who has some limited edition bust or some limited edition comic (George7).

Like Isabelle9, this fan included commodity goods such as collectible merchandise in his conception of the transmedia text; however, he describes the commodity channel as a marketing strategy used to maximise profits from a highly lucrative audience of fans. This view describes the text as comprising multiple modes of varying constitution, where not all modes are demonstrably story-driven. For this fan, the financial investment associated with fandom and, critically, the methods used to encourage it (such as the collectors’ convention, Comic-con) are accepted aspects of his engagement with the transmedia text. Comparably, Anabelle1, a fan of the *View Askew-niverse*, was equally forthright in admitting the financial outlay associated with her fandom. When asked what being a fan means to her, she responded, ‘well, a lot of money! (laughs) I say that facetiously but I’ve spent, uh, about $25,000 on being a Kevin Smith fan’. She later conceded that some of that money was spent on ‘going to see him perform’. This suggests that for some fans, the transmedia ‘text’ is demarcated by engagement experiences which can be purchased and/or consumed. Only one participant from the study overtly denied a link between financial investment and engagement experience with the text, stating,

> One definition that I wholeheartedly disagree with ... is the belief that being a fan means spending money. The idea that if one doesn’t buy the DVDs, the shirts, the action figures, or whatever, that one isn’t truly a fan (David4).
This response demonstrates that fans conceive of the transmedia text differently according to preconceived notions about consumption. This fan expressed greater concern throughout the interview data for narrative integrity in the text across story modes. This does not, in effect, mean that fans who demarcate the text based on its narrative components do not purchase items, such as DVDs or collectables, related to the text. Rather, it is more likely that some fans discriminate between narrative units and ancillary products, constituting each as discrete components of the text with different functional purposes. Again this is comparable to the demarcation of transmedia storytelling and franchising based on a networked conceptualisation which posits transmedia nodes as narratively constituted.

For fans of the View Askew-niverse from the study, the transmedia text comprises both fictional components and non-fiction components based on the author/creator. For these fans, the transmedia text is not necessarily limited to narrative units. For example, when asked questions regarding ‘the text’, Anabelle1 listed in her responses, ‘the books’, ‘the Twitter’, ‘the movies’, ‘the Q&As’ and ‘the podcasts’, demonstrating that her understanding of the text is framed by a blending of author and story. This is not surprising given the affective author attachment expressed by fans of the View Askew-niverse in the previous chapter. Charles3 expressed a similar sentiment, referring to Smith’s View Askew-niverse as ‘these movies and these podcasts and what not’, thus linking the fictional text explicitly to the non-fiction.

Critically, this negates academic discourse surrounding transmedia storytelling, which commonly posits the storyworld or narrative as the link between modes (see Klastrup & Tosca 2004). It is more likely that audiences conceive of transmedia networks according to their own media preferences. For example, fans of the View Askew-niverse in the present study characterise the transmedia text according to the author brand. Whilst they refer both to the fictional text and Smith’s performances via various outlets as a media personality, their constitution of the text is undeniably author-based since Smith’s vision is the only common element linking each story mode. This is comparable to the process of auteur branding discussed in the previous chapter. Alternatively, it is conceivable that Smith’s fans conceive of the View Askew-niverse as a totalising structure which encompasses both the transmedia text and Smith’s non-fiction work, which often references the fictional text (for example, the SModcast series, Jay & Silent
Bob Get Old (2010-present)). Oddly, Anabelle1 and Charles3 also referred to Smith’s work for DC comics writing Batman fiction. When asked whether she ever revisits components from the transmedia text, Anabelle1 claimed, ‘I’ve read the Batman comics a couple of times, but I’m typically someone who reads books or comics three or four times’. Given the irrelevance of Smith’s Batman comics to the View Askew-niverse canon, this comment lends credence to the theory that for some fans, Smith links disparate elements, both fiction and non-fiction, under the View Askew-niverse banner. Comparably, when asked how the use of multiple platforms affects him as a fan, Charles3 claimed,

I enjoy it. I actually, um, enjoy the different mediums, say, when he does the comics ... like say the Batman series he’s doing right now ... him doing Batman and then him making a hockey movie and then him going on and talking on his podcast talking about completely different issues, but I enjoy each medium he does because it’s ... some other form of expression that I enjoy watching and listening to.

Fans of the View Askew-niverse in the present study thus seem to conceive of 'transmedia' as multiple content units produced by the same author/creator. Coupled with the findings from Chapter Five of this thesis, which suggest that fans of the View Askew-niverse engage with the author as text, their comments are enough to suggest that the author brand unites content from different story modes, genres and storyworlds under the same conceived text.

Only one participant-fan of the View Askew-niverse from the study distinguished the fictional text from the non-fiction components, stating:

... the whole cross-media thing, it was like, sort of interesting, like, how he sort of has started with the films and branched odd into other stuff, but ... how he’s recently sort of said that he’s starting to consider the podcast shows to be ... his great life’s work ... it’s interesting how the fans have followed him yet himself has sort of embraced this new aspect a lot more (Bill2).

When prompted, he claimed he views the fictional text as ‘its own separate thing’ (Bill2); however, this comment contradicts the rest of his interview data, in which he refers to both fiction content and non-fiction content in the same example (see Chapter Five of this thesis). This suggests that for this fan, like the others, the transmedia text is still constituted as a structure comprising both fiction and non-fiction content; however,
Bill2 is able to demarcate the two more explicitly, suggesting that he understands the term transmedia as referring to any body of content produced by the same author/creator or publisher. Critically, the way in which fans conceive of transmedia texts can be used to determine the necessary conditions and contingencies for consumption and this issue is discussed at length in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter looks at concepts of experience related to the role fans play in helping structure the text via constructive practices such as gathering, expanding and assembling the story. Transmedia texts require audiences to gather disparate content units and assemble them into meaningful wholes. Critically, this chapter suggests that fans construct the text themselves, meaning that each fan conceives of the text differently. Whilst the author delimits the story network according to selected ‘official’ content, audiences conceive of the story structure differently, both from the author and from each other. Therefore, unlike most texts, consumption of transmedia – not only interpretation – is variable. In other words, whilst most texts are open to multiple interpretations, transmedia texts can be experienced in different compositional states depending on level of immersion.

The first category of description, Hunter Gatherers, reveals that nomadic consumption is common to the fan user, for participants in the present study. Furthermore, some expressions from this category discussed a relationship between transmedia consumption and degree of engagement. This supports the assumptions of the Media Use Typology, that fans are more likely than other consumers to adopt a mode of use characterised by cross-media consumption. Furthermore, this category reveals that most participants in the study identify a primary story mode, or ur-text which they conceive as inspiring the rest of the media in the series. The second category of description, Expanding the Archive reveals that some fans conceive of fan fiction as an expansive property in the transmedia archive. This view can be situated within the context of media practice, a term used to refer to media texts as practices in which multiple parties can participate. This view was more common among fans of Buffy the Vamprie Slayer. This finding suggests that the transmedia archive, as conceived of by fans, may be
expanded via both official and unofficial channels. The final category of description, *Assembling the Story*, reveals that each participant in the study conceives of the text and its components differently. Critically, this suggests that despite perspectives from the field, not all fans understand transmedia according to narrative specifications. This category suggests that fans might conceive of transmedia text in a number of ways, including: based on media preference, which implies a link to mode-driven use; based on genre or story mode (the combination of which can be used to exploit compatibilities); according to user guides posted by fans online; and based on engagement experiences which are consumable/purchasable by works by the same author.

The following and final chapter is *Conditions and Contingencies*. It discusses conditions and contingencies which must be met in order for audiences to consume transmedially. These relate chiefly to aesthetic integrity and cohesive design.
Chapter 7: Conditions and Contingencies

This chapter discusses the final key theme drawn from the interview data: Conditions and Contingencies. The chapter is split thematically into three categories of description: Cohesive Design, The Transference of Tone and Character Consistency. The categories of description for this chapter concern several issues. Chiefly, they explore concepts of experience which reveal something about the conditions and contingencies of transmedia consumption. Some of the issues discussed include: bridging semiotic contexts; cohesive design; and semiotic reconciliation. These issues reflect the conditions and contingencies which should be met for fans (in the present study) to engage with texts across multiple story modes. Furthermore, findings from this chapter reveal methods based on participant response, which can be used to improve transmedia design as it pertains to consumption in a commercial context.

Whilst the previous two chapters discussed the roles of the author and the audience respectively in constructing the text, the present chapter discusses how the known conditions and contingencies for transmedial consumption can influence engagement. Critically, it reveals how conditions and contingencies must be met in order for fans from the study to engage with transmedia texts. Furthermore, this emphasis in the data on the conditions of migratory consumption means that the findings lend themselves to an analysis of transmedia production. This is because they relate to conditions of consumption which are contingent upon the design of the text. Whilst fans are predisposed to consume media across multiple modes, there are conditions of consumption which can influence their engagement with the story.

Cohesive Design

The first category of description, Cohesive Design, reflects on concepts of experience which relate to issues which disrupt cohesion in the text. Through doing so, it explores methods which can be used to achieve cohesive transmedia design, chiefly using compatibility measures. For participants from the study, cohesive design involves continuity and consistency of tone, story and character. Whilst a lack of cohesion is
identifiable based on deficiencies in this respect (chiefly, continuity flaws in the text), the category reveals that deficiencies can be met, and compensated for, using compatibility measures which exploit creative synergies. This includes exploring how transmedia formats can exploit converging markets, genres and story modes in order to engage a dedicated audience willing to pursue the story across media, thus expanding upon key findings from the previous chapter. Critically, this is a significant issue as it pertains to transmedia storytelling due to the variable nature of its design; cohesiveness must be achieved across a spectrum of semiotic contexts.

Cohesive transmedia design was expressed in the interview data by some as meaning the successful execution of narrative strategies across multiple story modes. According to others, this is not always well executed. For example, Jeremy10, a fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, claimed,

> ... multiple platforms have the potential to create very exciting storytelling routes. I don’t think BtVS [Buffy the Vampire Slayer] has done this successfully on the whole, but there were definitely glimpses of it.

Later in his interview, the participant claimed that the final season in the television series and the season eight comics have a lot of flaws. In particular, he claimed that the quality of the plotting in the season eight comic was somewhat inconsistent (this will be discussed in more detail later). It is unclear where the glimpses of success are located for this fan; however, he did claim in his interview that multiplatform stories ‘resonate’ with him, which suggests that the opportunity in and of itself to consume transmedia is pleasing, regardless of the execution.

Cohesive design also concerns various levels of consistency. According to David4, not only does the text change aesthetically during the switch between platforms, but thematically. When asked what the most important components of the story are, he claimed,

> ... The central subversion, of a tiny little blonde kicking the ass of the monsters instead of screaming and running away, will always be a driving force behind the Buffy engine ... Another subversion that was present in the original movie was of the horror movie cliché, that if you have sex you die. This was one of the two reasons Joss wrote Buffy, to have a horror movie female protagonist who has and enjoys sex but still prevails, but unfortunately this got lost in translation during the switch from movie to show. In the
show, sex is almost always linked with despair or horrible things happening, which is one of the few things I genuinely dislike about the show (David4).

Interestingly, this comment does not speak to consistency as it relates to plot – an issue often raised by fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in the study (see Chapter Six of this thesis). Rather, for this fan, one of the few things he genuinely dislikes about the show includes the disruption of thematic consistency. It is unclear how this affected the participant’s engagement with the text. The change he refers to is significant, yet it is not enough to deter him as a fan of the show. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the change in consistency occurred due to different storytelling capabilities at the story mode level or whether Whedon strategically changed the narrative to reflect a new objective. Possibly Whedon changed some of the core themes from the movie in order to tell a longer story in a seasonal format; that is, created thematic motifs which could evolve over a longer period. Either way, it disrupts the cohesiveness of the text. When asked what influence the use of multiple platforms has on the story, the participant continued,

Switching mediums is always a pretty precarious move. It’ll alienate a lot of fans, and what worked in one medium might not work in another. That’s why it’s very, very rare for a story to be regarded as excellent in two different mediums. The book is always better than the movie, as they say (David4).

He went on to comment, ‘how this affects me as a fan is that usually I will stick only to the medium that I enjoy the most’ (David4). Critically, this suggests that for this fan *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* succeeded as a transmedia text because it appealed to his personal media preferences. For some fans, story modes viewed as less cohesive in the structure (e.g. the filmic component) were less well received. As David4 explained, ‘it was very serendipitous that Buffy moved from television to something I loved’ (David4). As this thesis demonstrates, certain genres and story modes are often found converging, such as fantastical genres like science fiction and fantasy and comic books. The creative synergy between fantastical genres and the comic book format may explain, in part, why Whedon choose to expand the series using that form. As a result, the relationship between the television series and the season eight comic book is seen to be cohesive. This suggests that markets might be found converging around the same elements, thus helping to explain traversals in the *Buffyverse*. For those who engage
with the text across story modes their enjoyment might be due, in part, to the creative synergies which exist between forms, thus creating new markets based on converging aesthetics, genres and story modes. This is a sentiment echoed by George7, who claimed that the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television series emulated a style associated with comic books, thus lending strength to its expansion into that form. As he explained,

... you’ve ... got, as I said that kind of storyline which is quite involved with, for example, there’s a kind of group of vampires that – something will happen, but – um, their history is quite a rich mythology ... then you go on and you discover things about them in another episode ... I think the appeal for me is like I’m a huge comics fan and I always have been and I think that style of storytelling is very much like ... comes from comics. I suppose Joss Whedon, um, comes from that as well (George7).

When prompted to elaborate, the participant continued,

I think in comics you have the ability to expand ... So you’ll have a narrative, um, let me think of a good example… When Angel was in Buffy for example, he’s a character that had a lot of really rich mythology and if that was a comic book you could introduce his character into a storyline and then flash back to another storyline quite comfortably in the medium ... and I think Buffy also did the same thing, so they would introduce a storyline with Angel and then would flash back to before he was a vampire and really work on that mythology, flash forward again ... and … at the time you didn’t really have a lot of TV shows that would take that leap, so it is a kind of a very … similar ... approach to like a monthly comic series (George7).

The positive comparison made between the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television series and storytelling techniques associated with comic books suggests that their use in combination promotes a more cohesive design because of their compatibility. This also points to the significance of mode-driven use as a precursor for story/content-driven use (see Chapters Five and Six). In fact, findings from the present research suggest that conversions to a fannish mode of use are more likely to occur when the audience are fans of a specific format first, which is not surprising, given the high level of engagement associated with mode-driven use. The idea of cohesion between media was echoed by Fred6 who noted a similar relationship between the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* text and comic books, although this time, more explicitly. He claimed,
I think that Joss Whedon and his writers, the way they approach storytelling, I think there’s a kinship between comics and TV and movies. I don’t know that this is still the case but for many years I heard that in the past a lot of movies – I don’t know if this was as true as television – but a lot of movies were… during their development there was this concept of the storyboard, and a storyboard is kind of like a comic tree, sort of tree visualisation of what they were going to film and so to me I don’t see a story told through TV in which you have themes and a story told through comics in which you have panels and pages being that much different. Obviously you don’t have human actors portraying the characters but still, I think the storytelling techniques are fairly similar (Fred6).

This may mean that both modes require similar literacy skills in order to be consumed, thus making consumption of the Buffy text easier due to their use in combination; theoretically, their similarities could ease the transition from one mode to another, and thus traversals in the transitional space. The seasonal format and story design for both forms is similar in this case, thus the participant framed the switch from television to comic books positively, as an evolution of the text into a similar form. According to this fan, when different forms use similar storytelling techniques it promotes a degree of cohesion in the text. When asked what the main difference is between engaging with a text across multiple platforms and engaging with a text through only one platform, he claimed,

Well I guess it depends on the platform, like I said, I think that the comics are quite similar to the television … movies are a little bit different simply because a movie tends to be very compressed so they narrate it a little bit different, you know, with the Buffy series they have the ability to explore things over two or three episodes or even more that would be, you know, that’s four or five hours television or whatever, of course the movie, ah, there’s a lot less time for development so, there’s just a lot [less] in there (Fred6).

This is comparable to the views of George7 discussed earlier, who claimed that Buffy the Vampire Slayer only became a cohesive narrative once Whedon shifted the text into television format. Unlike his meagre view of the movie, George7 claimed the television series shares a kinship with the comics. According to Fred6, the feature that both forms share is their ability to express longevity. Whilst a movie compresses time, a television or comic book series can convey a sense of longevity based on the serial nature of the
text. It might be for this reason that it was difficult for Whedon to express a sense of continuity from the movie to the television series. The change in continuity between the two forms was considerable, as David4 explained, ‘Buffy became two or three years younger’ and ‘Joyce became completely different’ (David4). For some fans in the study the Buffy television series – identified by most as the primary form in the text (see Chapter Six of this thesis) – shares a greater affinity with the comic books than the movie. This supports the idea that creative synergies manifest between certain story modes and/or genres and compatible pairings are better for conveying a continuous narrative because themes and motifs can more easily be carried across the forms. As this thesis has already suggested, this might also be beneficial as a technique because it implies that similar literacy skills are required for each mode. According to Fred6, unlike his experience with Buffy the Vampire Slayer, the use of different media can negate cohesion in some cases due to their ability to emphasise different narrative properties. When prompted, the participant elaborated on this, reflecting on the relationship between forms as it relates to genre and continuity. As he explained,

There’s also the issue of ... story settings out there that have had video game adaptations ... Either they’re weak in the storytelling, like a lot of times when you’ve got adaptations, particularly of comic book franchises, something like the X Men or things like that, a lot of the games tend to be very, very action oriented. The interesting thing to me about a lot of ... the hero genre is that ... even though there’s action in it mostly the story isn’t about the action. Perhaps maybe more just a little bit of entertainment here and there but ... you look at it... at something like an X Men movie or a Spiderman movie or something and the actual fight scenes and things like that might only comprise ten or twenty percent of the movie, um, but then you get this off-balanced in video games where a lot of times ... it’s not much story and the action, it tends to be very repetitive action for, you know, some number of hours and it’s just kind of... I think a lot of franchise video games kind of fall down there (Fred6).

This comment (which followed from the previous in the interview data) demonstrates the importance of creative synergies between genre and form. For this fan, video games are an illogical choice for expanding a ‘hero’ series due to the lack of emphasis in the form on storytelling, which is interesting because it contradicts one the central tenets of transmedia storytelling: to use different media in order to create multiple experiences of the narrative. Despite Jenkins’ (2006a) claim that games can be used to explore the
story’s world, this fan rejects the prospect of interactivity due to the deficiency of games as storytelling tools. This is indicative of story/content-driven use because he is driven to consume across media by his dedication to story. Media which is viewed as deficient is viewed as such because it does not clearly contribute to the narrative structure.

The relationship between video games and other media has been evident since the early 1980s, when video games were known for their adaptations of American films and television series (Picard forthcoming). During this time, and for most of the 1990s, video games were associated with other media as ancillary spin-off material or mere adaptations. The participant’s views on the subject may be influenced, in part, by the fact that Buffy the Vampire Slayer originated in television form. Flows in the opposite direction, from video game to non-interactive media, yield different results. It was not until 1993 that the film industry responded to the growing games market by release of a film adaptation in association with Nintendo of Super Mario Bros; however, the popularity of fighting games and the survival horror genre (such as Street Fighter II (1991) and the Resident Evil series (1996-2009)) proved the most successful, since these adaptations were well suited to the Hollywood action genre.

This lends credence to the theory that transmedia stories are easier to consume when they exploit creative synergies. Not only can transmedia storytelling be used to appeal to multiple markets, it epitomises convergence culture due to its ability to exploit markets which emerge around converging story modes, genres and aesthetics. In the example provided by the participant, video game formats are ill-suited to expand a hero’s journey when the narrative originates in film or television because games emphasise action. This might explain why so few participants cited the Buffy the Vampire Slayer video games as part of the continuity structure of the text; it was neither cohesive nor consistent with the rest of the text.

According to Fred6, transmedia formats can also be problematic because they force consumers to engage with the text in ways and through formats they might not be comfortable with, especially when the text evolves as a heteromedial serial which relies on each unit in the structure to continue a larger narrative (Dena 2007, p3) (see Chapter Six of this thesis). This points to the importance of literacy as an indicator of engagement because audience members who lack the relevant literacy skills will not be able to engage with the entire narrative. In addition to cultivating creative synergies
between extant media, this suggests that transmedia texts should be built on seamless transitions, using transitional thresholds, between each story mode. When asked what influence the use of multiple platforms has on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the participant explained,

... the main thing I would say is that to a certain extent it makes it a little bit harder for somebody who is a new fan entering the text to follow because... I know that there were some comics that were published alongside the TV show. They did a pretty good job of making sure you could follow the TV show without reading any of the comics, but if creators aren’t careful about that and make it that it’s hard to follow the text in one medium if you don’t go and get it in the other medium ... that makes it just a little bit more challenging to stay with it sometimes (Fred6).

Throughout the interview the participant explained that he intends to continue consuming the text in its transmedia components; however, he conceded that the shift from one format to another makes following the story more difficult; essentially, the task of traversing transitional spaces is made problematic thus negatively affecting cohesion in the story network. In this case, the participant uses the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* text as a benchmark against which to compare series of a similar nature. For this fan, the movement of the narrative from one format to another can make it difficult to track the continuity of the series.

Transitional issues can be caused by multiple factors. In the above example, the difficulty to track continuity in the series might be caused by the serial multiplicity associated with comic books; however, it might also be affected by the lack of a user guide, something the participant expressed concern over as discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis. Greater transparency of transmedia design would undoubtedly help promote cohesion in the text. This issue was also demonstrated by Isabelle9, one of a group in the study who viewed the use of multiple platforms and the transference of themes between them positively. She claimed that, for her, consuming content across multiple platforms is part of supporting the shows that she loves. Speaking about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* specifically, she explained,

... It also helps that the majority of the comics are of new material and gives new depth to the characters and depending on the writers, new background information that we,
the viewer, were not aware of. It’s a way of perpetuating the shows. TV networks can cancel a low rating TV show, but the stories can live on (Isabelle9).

For this fan the stories ‘live on’ in other forms, suggesting that transmedia formats ensure the continuation of a series after the ‘death’ of the show. This makes transmedia storytelling ideal for fans because it allows them to continue engaging with the story; however, to conceive of the shows cancellation as a death (its resurrection embodied in new forms) contradicts the continuity principle central to the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* text; after all, the cancellation of a television series should not necessarily signal the end of a narrative; however, according to Whedon, each season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in its television format was designed for cancellation (Whedon in Robinson 2001, p1). This might have negated the perpetuating structure of the series, thus demonstrating that without the audience’s knowing participation, transmedia texts can be conceived of from within a mono-text paradigm. This issue concerns cohesive design because transparency would allow the audience to conceive of the text within a transmedia framework instead of from a single-text paradigm wherein multiple story modes are additive rather than inclusive. For Isabelle 9, the unexpectedness of the shift in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was not viewed as problematic in terms of cohesive design; however, a more integrated approach might help shape the audience’s experience of the text as a transmedia entity. That is, transparent design can influence the audience to approach each story mode as a component of a larger storyverse, thus lending cohesion to the structure. Whilst cross-media consumption is normative of fans’ media habits (indicative of user-led traversals), transmedia storytelling invites participation in a structured environment where users can only follow story components within the parameters of a predefined storyworld. This differs markedly from user-led traversals, which are coordinated by the user. Commercially coordinated traversals rely on the willing participation of an audience in order for the structure to work. When this structure is hidden or obscured from the audience, their understanding of the texts they consume is necessarily mono-paradigmatic. Intentional design would help to foreground the structure and thus better prepare an integrated and cohesive experience for the audience. For Isabelle9, transmedia components are additive when a more integrated approach would have allowed her to view them as expansive.

The literature discussed in this thesis suggests that fans are intrinsically motivated to conceive of media properties as cross-media texts; however, as Isabelle9 demonstrated,
audiences cannot always anticipate transmedia design. Whilst transmedia consumption might be normative for fan audiences, it is unclear how user-led traversals differ from commercial design. For example, the structure may be hidden, obscured or used to resurrect a series and/or exploit an audience following its conclusion in another story mode, thus negatively affecting cohesion in the text.

Despite potential issues associated with transparency, Isabelle9 viewed the use of multiple story modes positively, in a way which suggests that transmedia design enhances storytelling. She suggested,

There were a LOT of things that happened in the Buffy comic that could never have happened in the TV show simply due to cost ... If you were only able to view a show in one way (let’s say TV for easy example) then you are limited by constraints by the network – not enough money to show things the way the writer or artist imagined it to be.

Rather than focus on economic prudence as tactical profiteering, this fan considers it move creatively freeing and thus beneficial to the growth of the series. Furthermore, she does not view the expansion of the series as detrimental to cohesion in the text. On the contrary, she views it as a positive continuation. She claimed,

... Having the show continue on in comic form has allowed the writers to expand and be a lot more creative in how the series evolves. There are purists out there that don’t like this, but personally I don’t mind it, as it means I can still “watch” the show I grew up with ... To not allow that evolutionary possibility, the show would grow stagnant and die ... Some things you can’t imagine unless shown (Isabelle9).

Like David4, she acknowledges that some fans did not respond to the move positively, describing them as ‘purists’; however, her use of viewer rhetoric to describe her engagement with the comic book series (‘watching’ the show she grew up with) suggests that the continuation of the series in comic book form did not negatively affect cohesion in the text, i.e. the comics were not perceived as a different story. As noted earlier, when different forms use similar storytelling techniques, it actually promotes cohesion in the text. This may help to further explain the participant’s use of viewing rhetoric in her response. Unlike David4, this participant emphasised the creative benefits of the move rather than its associated risks, claiming.
To be able to view those things in a different platform, gives you better understanding of what the writers or artists were trying to get across to the viewer (Isabelle9).

Whilst additional content units naturally enhance and expand an existing story, they can also be used to explore a variety of representational modes, each of which has a varying effect on the limitations of the narrative. For example, Charles 3 claimed,

... I think … being able to engage on multiple platforms just allows you to do things that you wouldn’t normally get to do if you were stuck in one medium ... for example ... say someone makes a movie and based on that movie they decide to do a comic book and in the comic book you could draw anything you want. In the movie you’re limited to actors and budget constraints and CG and what-not or whatever special effects you’ve got going on in the movie.

Whilst the limitations of each form fundamentally influence the narrative, each also presents strengths and unique capacities. Critically, this also speaks to compatible design. For these fans, the use of comic books is viewed as ideal, both aesthetically and financially, for expanding the story. The participant continued, claiming,

... being able to cross these particular mediums allows for a larger range of audience for one and two, different modes of storytelling; something unique can come out of one that doesn’t necessarily come out of the other one. I absolutely think it’s awesome, when they do it, when it’s done right (Charles3).

This response closely echoes sentiments expressed by Jenkins (2006a), who emphasises the capacity for transmedia storytelling to exploit the strengths of each platform in order to offer a variety of expression; however, it is unclear what the participant means by ‘done right’. Clearly, there are certain conditions which must be met in order for the text to be positively received by fans. This is a sentiment explored in more detail by Geroge7. He maintained that one of the most important aspects of transmedia storytelling is nurturing cohesive design. Otherwise, he claimed, the quality of the story can be compromised. When asked if narrative consistency is important, he commented,

I think it’s really, really important … especially now because there are so many different platforms that … stories can be told on … getting consistency across all of them is you know, virtually impossible, but it’s the main factor because as a fan you want the same kind of quality of story, or the same involvement whether you’re playing a video or if you’re reading a comic or if you’re having mobile content …
Buffy was pretty consistent across the board … aside from the ending (laughs) … but yeah it’s … the main thing (George7).

This comment demonstrates one of the most important issues from the present category: cohesive design, in this case via consistency across all story modes. Whilst the participant is pessimistic about the possibility of cohesive design, he claims that Buffy the Vampire Slayer was mostly successful in this regard. Interestingly, he claims that the ‘ending’ was the only inconsistent element; yet, as a transmedia text, Buffy has not yet reached its conclusion. This suggests that despite cohesiveness across story modes, fans frequently refer back to a ‘primary’ mode as an exemplar of the story. Findings from this category suggest that cohesiveness across story modes may be due, in large part, to compatibility between story modes, genre and aesthetics and the resultant creative synergies which help to achieve cohesiveness in the text.

The Transference of Tone

This category of description explores concepts of experience related to the aesthetic relationship between story modes, tonally. This category of description marks a departure from and evolution of the previous one. Whilst the previous category of description emphasised cohesive design broadly, the present category of description identifies a unique component of this: the transference of tone. This category is discussed separately because of the overwhelming responses from participants on aesthetic integrity and the transference of tone, which signalled its importance as a significant indicator of cohesive design. In other words, the transference of tone is a uniquely significant expression of cohesive design.

Whilst ‘tone’ is a somewhat nebulous concept, its use here is appropriate since users from the study implicate characteristics of the text which reflect the relationship between story modes. Given the trans-semiotic constitution of transmedia formats, there are few aesthetic elements which story modes share. Many responses from the study reflected this view, and thus tone has been designated as the formalising quality constituted in the transitional space. Indeed, the very nature of transmedia storytelling relies on the uniqueness of each story mode to offer a distinct variety of storytelling. According to Lemke (2009), traversals represent meanings made between semiotic
contexts by users independent of commercial design; that is, media users consume content across multiple story modes habitually and create meaningful connections between modes relevant to their own engagement experience. Lemke identifies transmedia storytelling as the commercial response to this. This has been discussed in the previous chapter; however, it is also relevant here because it concerns the relationship between story modes as they relate to consumption of the text. When traversals are user-driven; that is, when media users traverse media based on connections made as they consume rather than commercially imposed design, the relationship between media is personally meaningful. When traversals are author-driven; that is, imposed as structure or design, the relationship between story modes should be engineered to appear organic. That is, they rely on coordinated intertextualities in order to be made meaningful. The central contradiction of transmedia design is that it uses discrete semiotic contexts which are, by their nature, incompatible, aesthetically speaking, to enhance or expand an engagement experience, thus coordination is difficult. The representation of character, story and context vary from one mode to another. Chapter One of this thesis discussed how this can be problematic for practitioners trying to synthesise ideas when working from different narrative paradigms (see Dena 2004a; Dunn 2009; Jenkins 2006a); however, this issue is also problematic for fans in the transitional space. According to certain participants in the study, aesthetic variation invariably becomes an issue of tone. For instance, when asked if he consumes material related to the text across more than one platform, Jeremy 10 replied,

Yes. I like seeing how the story can be told in different media. But the books are invariably a disappointment. Perhaps a story that started off as a partly visual narrative loses something when you turn the pictures of faces into descriptions of expressions that give you more access to the characters' consciousness’s than you'd get in the original version?

This passage refers to the loss of something indefinable between story modes, for which tone may be an appropriate descriptor. For this participant, a fan of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, different media are necessarily incompatible due to the different representational techniques employed in each. Critically, it suggests that transmedia formats contradict the cognitive efforts of the audience, underestimating the role of the viewer/reader as content co-creator. For example, Pottermore (2011-2012), an online reading experience
offering fans of the *Harry Potter* franchise an expanded view of the universe which includes the audience as a ‘crucial addition’, is built on a collaborative approach to storytelling which purports that narrativity can be seen as emerging via the relationship between media, or the structural logic of the text, and the psyche of the reader; i.e. their cognitive process (Ruppel 2009, p285). In an introductory video on the site, author, J. K. Rowling explains,

… just as the experience of reading requires that the imaginations of the author and reader work together to create the story, so Pottermore will be built, in part, by you the reader… *(J.K Rowling Announces Pottermore 2011)*.

This is comparable to Ryan’s (2004a, p6) view on story creation, which posits that rather than locating narrativity in an act of telling, it can be anchored in ‘two distinct realms’,

On the one hand narrative is a textual act of representation (or presentation) ... On the other hand, narrative is a mental image built by the interpreter as a response to the text.

This view champions the role of the audience as meaning co-creators. Whilst this has been written on extensively in post-structuralist critiques of literature and consumer culture (see Barthes 1977; de Certeau 1984), nowhere is this concept more clearly evidenced than in the consumption of transmedia texts due to their variable nature. This is because transmedia formats frequently contradict the aesthetic motifs, or semiotic codes imagined by the reader associated with a particular mode. Despite claims that the strengths of transmedia storytelling lie in its ability to exploit each medium to do what it does best, there are challenges for the audience associated with this approach relating to the transference of tone. Whilst the economic logic of securing audiences in a netted franchise/storyworld is compelling, inconsistencies in tone can negate these potentials. This is particularly evident as it pertains to meaning co-creation. Literary critic, Lev Grossman (2011, p1) had this to say about *Pottermore* (2010-2011):

… when publishers mix reading with other media, the way Pottermore does, I find it confusing. Every time I see more of the Potterverse realized in other media, as video or audio or even still images, it undoes the work I did by reading about it.

This comment demonstrates issues voiced by certain fans from the present study: as characters move from one mode to another, changes in tone impact aesthetic
consistency. Whilst some fans in the study saw the use of multiple storytelling modes as innovative, many described it as problematic due to creative differences at the mode level. One of the key concerns emerging from this category of description is how story is managed in the transitional space; that is, how the story flows across multiple story modes. For George7, the point one of contention in Buffy the Vampire Slayer is situated in the transition from film to television series. He believes the film was a ‘bad experience’ for Whedon, claiming:

... he was making up the rules as he went ... in probably the first [television] season you can see that and then it only really started coming together as a cohesive universe in probably the second and third season ... I think it was a big experimental platform for him ... he was creatively frustrated by the film experience and he was looking for a longer format to tell a story and really expand (George7).

This suggests that the film was inadequate as a vehicle for telling the Buffy the Vampire Slayer story. Whilst many responses from the interview data spoke to the ill effects of transitioning the narrative, George7 conceived of the shift from film to television series as beneficial for Buffy the Vampire Slayer because it marked a new beginning for the story. Nonetheless, his views still reflect dissonance between the forms. Based on his comments, the film could not convey the narrative as effectively as the television series. It lacked the required technical and aesthetic scope, thus negatively impacting the continuity structure of the narrative. Comparably, when asked how the use of multiple platforms influences the story, Edward5 claimed,

I don’t think it really has a whole lot of influence on the story for Buffy simply because I don’t think that the creator of Buffy – Joss Whedon – has a very good grasp of those platforms.

When prompted to elaborate, he explained,

... he just doesn’t seem to... the Buffy video games are a good example of... this is taking the licence of a game – and it’s a solid game – it’s one you can spend money on and not feel ripped off, but it’s not really the next... it’s not like playing out another episode of Buffy or another season of Buffy, it’s just like, “oh, it’s a Buffy game” (Edward5).

This speaks to aesthetic continuity across forms; however, unlike his estimation of the video game, the participant did not question the continuity structure of the text in its
originating format, the television series. Furthermore, it is unclear on what basis he considers Whedon’s ‘grasp’ of interactive media poor, or, by what measure he judges the storytelling capabilities of games. When discussing continuity in the ‘official text’, Edward5 claimed,

... I’m less inclined to give it a whole lot of thought. Simply put, for a lot of those premises you have to be willing to check your disbelief at the door.

It is likely that Edward5 was willing to overlook continuity flaws in the ‘official text’ because they do not pertain to aesthetic inconsistencies (i.e. consistency in a single mode compared to consistency across modes). In comparison to the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* video game, it might also be due, in part, to its canonical status; however, it is more likely that continuity and narrative consistency are judged by measure of technical consistency. For example, the participant had this to say about season eight’s comics:

Season eight as a comic has suffered severely from plotting and pacing issues, uh, there’s been times when the comics had to go on a hiatus for them to catch up, which is understandable to a degree but you shouldn’t be having this many, and then there are the, kind of the plotting and pacing issues for various storylines within the season that other fans have pointed out... and their reaction to that hasn’t been one of, you know, fill people with a lot of hope... (Edward5).

Given the relevant success of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* text across seven seasons in television format, it seems likely that part of what contributed to the ‘plotting’ and ‘pacing’ issues in season eight was the change in mode. The issue, it seems, is not that season eight was ill-conceived as a comic per se, but that comics employ different narrative and aesthetic techniques from other forms, such as television. As the previous category of description suggested, this might be due in part to the different literacy skills required for each mode. This suggests that fans of the text use the television series as a point of plotting and pacing reference. Given the emphasis in Chapter Six of this thesis on an *ur-text*, it is reasonable to assume that for most fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the television series set the tone for the continuing narrative. Given the different aesthetic and technical specifications of each story mode it is impossible for one form to emulate with complete accuracy the tone set in another. According to David4,

... there are huge segments of the Buffy fandom who refused to read Buffy in comic book form or who tried it and dropped it because the change was too radical for them.
Comparably, Jeremy10 claimed, ‘season seven was rubbish, on balance, and the comics season eight has a lot of flaws’, thus intimating that the transition between them was problematic. Whilst the comic books continue the narrative established in the television series in the same seasonal format, participants including David4 and Jeremy10 suggest that some fans were still unpersuaded by the change, described by one as ‘too radical’ for some. This sentiment was echoed by Edward5, who claimed,

... From what I can tell the comics aren’t especially popular with people who used to be dedicated Buffy fans; they know of them, they may have even read a few of them, but very few of them... in that respect I think that the next time to the next year or season of this Joss probably will have learned greatly from his mistakes and hopefully will be able to deliver a more cohesive product of higher quality in this platform, but that’s to be seen.

Both David4 and Edward5 indicated that many members of the Buffy the Vampire Slayer fandom rejected the comics based on perceived deficiencies in the text. Whilst David4 emphasised the shift between platforms, suggesting that changes to the aesthetic shape of the narrative disrupts the engagement experience, Edward5 was more explicit in his account, emphasising deficiencies in the form itself; however, as suggested earlier, perceived deficiencies in the text might only reflect incompatibilities with the aesthetic and narrative techniques introduced in the originating mode, which might explain the ‘mistake’ referred to in the comment. These comments suggest that transmedia formats, by their nature, contradict the aesthetic structure of the storyworld established in the ur-text by introducing new forms with different aesthetic styles. Furthermore, the introduction of a new aesthetic style contradicts reception of the text in a specific format and thus the fans’ cognitive manifestations of the story. Critically, this suggests that the transference of tone, nebulous though it may be, is significant to both transmedia design and consumption.

This suggests that transmedia formats are easier to consume transmedially when they are based on creative and aesthetic synergies which exist between forms (an issue discussed in a previous chapter). Relationships forged between aesthetically incompatible media isolate audiences and neglect their role as story readers in the active construction of the text. For example, during the interview Henry8 admitted,
... I’m gonna have to leave Buffy at the end of season seven and not [go] into the work that [it] takes in comics. It doesn’t quite seem to be how I depict Buffy.

This reflects the views expressed by Grossman (2011). For this fan, material from the season eight comics directly contradicts how he imagined the story (based on the rest of his interview material it was evident that what the participant meant by ‘depict’ was imagine) in the television series. Furthermore, the reference to ‘work that [it] takes’ to read the comics might refer, again, to the importance of literacy as an indicator of engagement, thus adding to the problem. Ruppel (2009, p293) conceives of this – the use of different semiotic codes to convey a narrative – as the interrogation of form; however, for fans it can be experienced as a rupture in the story structure which is difficult to overcome. This is similar in some respects to the psychological theory of cognitive dissonance. According to Thomas Shultz and Mark Lepper (1996, p219), the theory assumes dissonance is a ‘psychological state of tension that people are motivated to reduce’. They claim any two cognitions are considered dissonant when, considered by themselves, one contradicts the other (Shultz & Lepper 1996, p219). The switch from television to print media in Buffy the Vampire Slayer creates dissonance in the narrative between story modes, or semiotic dissonance. For fans, the imposed dissonance in the text can be difficult to overcome when trying to reconcile forms. Chiefly, this is indicative of issues in the transitional space. Henry8 suggested he was motivated to ease this dissonance by rejecting one form in favour of the other. According to the theory, in the case of dissonance the individual will actively avoid information or situations which cause dissonance (Festinger 1957, p3). The actions taken by the participant are thus consistent with the theory; in order to relieve semiotic dissonance this fan avoids engaging with the comic books – for him, the cause of the dissonance. Part of overcoming the problem of semiotic dissonance will involve acknowledging the fan as meaning co-creator.

For creators of transmedia works, this invariably suggests that each unit in the structure should closely mimic the others (or the previous, if the text is built on a continuity structure); yet this is difficult and somewhat counter-intuitive to the logic of transmedia storytelling: to exploit each medium to do ‘what it does best’ (Jenkins 2003a, p3). Such an effort would require the intervention of form on style. Tonally, the fiction should be similarly conveyed across all story modes, and aesthetic motifs which frame the narrative should supplant or advance stylistic techniques associated with form. This
suggests that transmedia aesthetics, like the storyworld, should structure or intervene upon story components. That is, there should be a formative aesthetic structure which defines the storyworld irrespective of different semiotic contexts. Speaking on the season eight comics, Whedon recently confessed that fans aren’t interested in reading ‘bigger things’. He submits that, ‘having discovered that we can do more than the television show, I’ve discovered that I don’t really want to’ (Whedon in Clark, 2011, p1). According to Henry8, having Whedon involved in the production of the comics is important because he can ‘guide certain authors’ to create the comic ‘in the style of the TV series’. This lends credence to Whedon’s admission; for this fan, the comic books should reflect the style and tone set in the television series. This sentiment was echoed by Edward5, who claimed that when reading fan fiction he’s looking for something that’s ‘much like the TV show’. For these fans, works expanding the narrative established in the television series are necessarily derivative and should thus emulate the same style and tone used in that mode.

Whilst transmedia storytelling champions creative multiplicity over reproduction, the present discussion demonstrates that difficulties can occur for fans in the transitional space when consuming the text. Certain participants from the present study suggest that rather than enhancing the engagement experience, the use of styles and techniques associated with different story modes can disrupt their engagement with the text due to dissonance between forms, which disrupt established cognitive manifestations of the text.

One participant, a fan of the View Askew-niverse, employed a unique method for dealing with semiotic dissonance. Rather than avoid the conflicting media, he considered it his responsibility to carry the voice of the characters from one format to another in order to reconcile modes. He claimed,

... having seen all of the films and stuff you can sort of pick up on the way people are supposed to talk with his dialogue, so reading the comic books ... and, uh, some of the books and things, you sort of have to have the voice in your head and read it as if it’s in that same kind of style otherwise it just sort of seems very, um... I had a friend that read them and said they seemed very ... stilted ... and then I told her, like, no you’ve gotta sort of, imagine the characters and things and then it sort of worked a lot better and kind of flowed ‘cause there are, sort of, big paragraph chunks that just, I guess seem to drag on a bit unless it’s sort of done in that style of voice (Bill2).
Critically, this suggests that transmedia formats require extra work on the part of the audience, not only to traverse multiple story modes, but to reconcile creative discrepancies between them. Whilst the theory of cognitive dissonance emphasises constraints on conflicting behaviours or attitudes to achieve consistency (Shultz & Lepper 1996, p220), semiotic dissonance cannot be attributed to individual psychology. Whilst it may influence cognition (i.e. by disrupting cognitive manifestations of the text) it manifests externally to the individual, thus to ease dissonance constraints must be placed on the constitution of the text. This case can be seen as an example of this, where the participant constrained the dissonant capacity of the View-Askew comics by supplanting it with his own cognitive manifestation of the characters. Unlike Grossman (2011), who laments the intrusion of new forms on his cognitive impression of the story and its characters, Bill2 claimed, matter-of-factly, that the audience needs to ‘imagine the characters and things’ in order for the story to retain its integrity in another mode. In this example, the participant refers to the expansion of the View Askew-universe from movie format to comic book. Whilst Grossman (2011) contends that Pottermore (2010-2011) ‘undoes the work’ (emphasis added) done by reading, Bill2 suggested that the View Askew-universe comics require the audience to work harder. This difference might be due in part to directional flows between print media and audio-visual formats such as film. For example, for flows from audio-visual to print media, the story is shown to the audience. This requires effort on behalf of the reader to maintain the ‘voice’ established in the film or television series when reading the print media. Flows in the opposite direction disrupt the imagined storyworld by presenting new content in a format which cannot be reinterpreted visually. In other words, it creates dissonance in the transitional space. Both the View Askew-universe and Buffy the Vampire Slayer are examples of the former; texts whose principal format, identified by fans, use audio-visual media. Reading the comics for either text requires fans to mentally reinterpret content coded for print media to reflect audio-visual motifs. This implies that transmedia consumption requires unique transmedia literacy skills (see Chapter Six) in order to reconcile different modes. Despite this inconvenience, Bill2 seemed unperturbed by incongruencies between the two modes. In fact, he advised others to adopt a similar attitude and reconcile the differences between them as they read. Despite this, he emphasised consistency across the films, stating,
... they all have a sort of similar voice behind them ... you can tell all the films are like distinctly different but they all have the same sort of... a similar voice and style sort of underlying between them all ... just the way in which the dialogue is spoken and how the stories progress, all sort of has a similar feel to them (Bill2).

Later, he likened Smith to filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino and the Cohen Brothers, championing his skills with the cinematic form; however, this skill is not well represented across modes. Whilst the participant conceded that the View Askew-niverse comics ‘weren’t as interesting as the films’ he seemed willing to absolve Smith of his responsibility as a transmedia author.

George7, a fan of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, was equally optimistic but less absolving of the author’s responsibility in this respect. He had this to say about the transference of tone and narrative consistency,

Scott Pilgrim is a really good example of narrative consistency because they’ve managed to take that tone across the film and the game involvement … but it’s a really hard thing I think for writer to have control over as well … ‘cause the more, um… media you have across different platforms the more companies are involved and the more people’s opinions are put in place … if you can get that consistency it’s great and I think Buffy did it really well but I think there are so many factors involved these days that it’s a very difficult thing to do (George7).

For this participant, tonal consistency is an important aspect of transmedia design. This view reflects those espoused by participants quoted earlier in the chapter, who claim tonal inconsistencies negate narrative integrity and aesthetic design. The difference for this fan is that the case study text is conceived of as a successful example of this. Nonetheless, his comment demonstrates the importance of tone in transmedia design, although he doesn’t comment on how tonal consistency is achieved. This issue is often neglected in research on the subject which focuses on the uses of different representational forms for generating a variety of expression rather than on consistency between them. This was a sentiment shared by Henry8, who claimed,

I have an interest in a various number of platforms and I see that each has its own strength ... television program has a different strength to a comic book or to ... an animated show or to a game for example, and ... I think themes can easily transfer
between them incredibly well, but the portrayal is different in each version ... I’m interested in all those different kinds of medium and ... I guess how it’s depicted in each and playing upon the strengths of each medium.

Unlike other participants, Henry8 does not share the view that the use of multiple forms negates aesthetic integrity; instead, he seems to view difference positively. Also, the fact that he is interested in a number of different platforms means that transmedial consumption might be easier for him than for fans who have to familiarise themselves with new formats and story modes. When asked how important narrative consistency is, he emphasised this position, stating,

Narrative consistency within one form of medium is vital, say the television by itself, without linking it to other mediums. Narrative consistency between texts is not as important, because all the other [media] have their own way of telling things and it won’t be exactly the same as the original source material at all. You can tap into similar themes and aspects of each (Henry8).

It is unclear, based on his dismissal of consistency between media, whether this fan’s mode of engagement can be described as story/content-driven. It may be more indicative of mode-driven use, manifest across a variety of media; however, despite his dismissal of consistency between forms, he did claim that each medium can ‘tap into similar themes and aspects’, which suggests a narrative link (Henry8). This is similar to views expressed by George7, who claimed,

… in … Buffy’s case … the multiple platform thing worked really well because … the season eight comics really kind of expanded the universe. You know, in TV they could really only do so much, but in the season eight comics there were multiple slayers and they were living in Europe and Dawn became a giant … things you can’t do on TV, and the tone was a bit lewder, I guess … So in that case it really expanded the universe in a positive light.

He elaborated, claiming of the Buffy the Vampire Slayer comic book series,

… it’s just got a wider scope and they’re allowed to do things … where there are ninjas and dragons and falling out of planes and all that kind of stuff … but also tonally I think it’s … I don’t, it just feels different in tone, it feels a lot more cinematic … it feels like it’s like a hyperrealistic version of that, rather than this, you know,
constrained TV show. So, I kind of enjoy that more and it’s nice to see the narrative evolve (George7).

For this fan, the use of comic books in conjunction with the television series in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* allows the author to convey fantastic elements more convincingly, thus emphasising synergy between genre and form. He acknowledges the success of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, even characterising tonal shifts positively. Henry8 viewed the shift less positively. He was willing to absolve transitional issues in the text *despite* their effect on narrative integrity. He conceded,

I always sort of accept, yes, there are going to be differences between [the platforms]; both have their strengths and weaknesses and I try not to criticise too heavily for doing things a little wrong from the original text, in a different text, I suppose. I try to absorb it in its own, I guess, as its own thing, but still connected (Henry8).

Here the participant demonstrates a willing resignation to the fact that the use of multiple story modes can be problematic. His acceptance of this indicates the tensions transmedial consumption produces in media users; particularly as they pertain to reconciling modes in the transitional space. For this fan, the transference of tone is not viewed as problematic because he accepts the limitations of transmedia design. Such a view provokes the same concerns discussed at the beginning of this category: that what proponents of the field champion as the greatest strength of transmedia storytelling – the use of multiple story modes to tell a single narrative – may in fact be its most problematic feature.

For Anabelle1, the use of multiple platforms lends depth to an already satisfying story. In her discussion of Smith’s *View Askew-niverse* she posited that extra material serves to enhance the text by building on points of interest from the primary platform. She claimed,

I don’t think you get as much from a story if you just isolate it ... Movies and whatever aren’t really designed to just be one platform now. You’re encouraged to go to the website, you’re encouraged to view more, you know your Blu-rays and whatever come with behind-the-scenes footage and while that’s not really multiple mediums, if you do things like ... with Clerks 2 there was all the behind-the-scenes videos you could get from the website which really gave you just a far better, more interesting experience seeing how things happened behind the scenes, and all the little things that ... you
noticed during the movie. I think it gives you so much more to engage in, in the movie, and more enjoyment from the whole experience if you try and take it beyond just popping in a DVD or seeing a movie (Anabelle1).

Unlike the previous participant, Anabelle1 views the use of multiple story modes wholly positively. Furthermore, her comments demonstrate and evidence the use of transitional thresholds as a way of signalling additive content and encouraging users to seek material through other story modes. As she explained, extra content can provide the viewer with a ‘far better’ and ‘more interesting’ experience through seeing things based on ‘all the little things that ... you noticed during the movie’. Not surprisingly, the gaps observed by this viewer concern subjects which can be filled by informational content such as ‘behind-the-scenes’ footage, which distinguishes author from fiction. This might also serve to explain why Anabelle1 was unconcerned by issues of tone; not only is there greater aesthetic consistency between the Askew films and behind-the-scenes footage, but tonal and aesthetic consistency is less significant between content units coded for different purposes. Whilst the films play a pivotal role in the fiction created by Smith, behind-the-scenes footage is coded as informational; therefore, behind-the-scenes-footage is less likely to be scrutinised according to the tonal quality of the fiction.

Comparably, Charles3 emphasised in his response that the effect of using multiple platforms is ‘awesome’ when ‘done right’. Whilst it is still unclear how the ‘right’ way can be achieved, this, along with other responses from this chapter, suggests there are certain techniques and methods associated with successful transmedia design which are not always necessarily successfully executed. Critically, many of these depend on the audience and their preferred mode of media use and existing media literacy skills.

Without a standard against which to measure success audiences are limited in their capacity to define the conditions and contingencies upon which transmedia design is determined; however, along with the importance of tone, the next category of description advances this task by reflecting on one of the most important elements in transmedia design expressed by participants in the study: character.
Character Consistency

The final category of description, *Character Consistency*, reveals a specific iteration of the previous two. It concerns both the transference of tone and cohesive design, yet it speaks exclusively to the importance of character in this context. This category of description suggests that character tone is an evolving motif which moves across story modes and helps to support consistency between them. It thus eases transitional issues. Participants from this category suggest that inconsistencies in the text are negligible when character tone is transferred successfully across story modes.

One of the key issues emerging from the previous two categories of description is the contradictory nature of transmedia design. Whilst tenets from the field champion transmedia design for its ability to offer a variety of expression, certain participants in the study suggest that the use of multiple modes can negate narrative integrity due to the difference between semiotic codes. This category of description represents a perspective which suggests that character tone is the most important element in transmedia design and one which should, as a condition of consumption, transcend semiotic differences. For most participants from this category this stemmed from a love of the characters in the original forms through which they accessed the narrative. For example, David4, a fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* claimed,

> I’m fairly certain that what got me to watch the show was re-watching the movie for the first time in several years, and remembering how much I loved the character of Buffy. When I found out that Joss was going to continue Buffy in comic book form, I was ecstatic.

He later contended that ‘characters are the most important parts of the *Buffyverse*’ (David4). He claimed that the subversion of traditional gender roles embodied in the story’s protagonist was one of two driving forces in the *Buffyverse*. The other is character:

> … characters are the other driving force behind the success of Buffy. Almost every character, even the most minor, is interesting, unique, and deep. This keeps the audience always wanting to know more about what happens to them, even if the writing in general has decayed or if the text has switched mediums (David4).
Critically, the participant’s willingness to pursue the series, even if the writing has decayed or the text has switched mediums (which is negatively associated with the former), opens up questions about character consistency. Whilst it is clear that characters play an integral role not only in the success of the story in one mode, but in its ability to transfer across multiple modes, it is unclear what allows characters to do this; i.e. which traits, aesthetic or otherwise imbue them with transferable power. In the second category of description from this chapter, participants claimed that tonal consistency is an important feature in transmedia design. The present category suggests that tonal qualities embodied in character are also important. This is because this view was expressed frequently by fans from the study. When character tone is consistently represented transitional issues, such as semiotic dissonance, are relieved. For example, when asked how important narrative consistency is, Charles3 claimed,

… as far as narrative consistency … as long as I don’t feel they completely betray the characters … I think ah, I’ll give it a chance, until, you know, I think it’s terrible. I’ve never had a situation where I’ve felt like he wrote these particular characters really good in here and he wrote them completely differently in this one, and so I’ve never been introduced to that particular dilemma before. I think as long as the story is done well, I’ll take anything that comes my way.

Not only does the participant confirm claims discussed so far, that character consistency is important to the continuing narrative, but his comments suggest that character is synonymous with story, thus elevating the importance of this factor as a bridging mechanism between modes. Furthermore, he suggested that the importance of narrative consistency is negligible as long as the work’s creators don’t ‘betray the characters’, thus intimating that character consistency is one of the most important elements in transmedia design; however, it is unclear what would constitute such a betrayal. This reflects the views of David4, whose comments so far suggest a similar relationship to that discussed by Charles3 between character and narrative design. When asked to reflect on the importance of narrative consistency, David4 said,

So long as the characters are mostly consistent, I can get past pretty big changes in logistics and continuity. The changes in continuity between the movie and the show were sizeable (Buffy became two or three years younger, Joyce became completely different, etc.), and the logistics completely changed between the show and the comic
... but I manage to enjoy all three of them because the important characters retained
what I always enjoyed about them.

For this fan, there is no mistaking that character consistency is the most important
element of the story as it pertains to transmedia design; however, again, despite the
positive emphasis in this comment, it lacks detail in its description. For example, it is
not clear what is meant by ‘what I always enjoyed about them’. Nonetheless, the
comment suggests that a minimum level of character consistency was achieved. From
this perspective and from many expressed in the present study, character consistency is
instrumental to transmedia design. Despite changes to logistics and continuity, fans may
be willing to forgive the failings of transmedia design if the integrity of character
profiles is upheld.

The importance of characters and character archetypes has been widely acknowledged
in film and literature studies (see Ervin-Ward 2009; Grenville 1990; Iaccino 2001;
the archetypical heroic outsider. He claims,

... while Buffy surrounds herself with good friends who support her in her fight against
evil there is a very strong motif pursued throughout the series that she is essentially and
finally alone (Alsford 2006, p26).

For Alsford (2006), part of what makes Buffy such a popular heroic character is that
fact that she embodies moral and ethical conditions which are familiar to all of us. Her
sense of ethical duty in the face of extraordinary circumstances and in conditions of
isolation make Buffy a champion of morality. The literature on Buffy is too expansive
to discuss at length here (see *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association*
for papers on the subject). Indeed, a convincing argument could be made based purely
on the use of heroic archetypes in Buffy to justify the influence of character on
consumption; however, this category of description discusses not only the importance of
character to story, but the importance of character tone as an aesthetic motif which
bridges discrete semiotic contexts. Character is instrumental, according to responses
from the interview data, in motivating consumption across multiple story modes. The
significance of this insight extends beyond mere archetypal analysis because it elevates
character to a status higher than any other story element or motif in the narrative.
Character consistency helps fans from the present study substantiate links in the
transitional space. Essentially, transmedia design provides testing conditions for story elements because it uses a variety of different contexts (see Dena, Douglass & Marino 2005). In the present study, character was commonly expressed as one of the most important components of the narrative; it is essential to continued engagement with the story across multiple story modes. Furthermore, the study finds this is true for fans both of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and the View Askew-niverse. Whilst Charles3 was generally indifferent on the subject of transmedia design, his one condition was character consistency. When prompted to elaborate, he explained,

... I would find it interesting that [Smith] would overlook [character consistency]. He’s built a world around certain characters, especially the View Askew characters and so he’s built a world around Jay and Silent Bob. I mean, first they were stoners and now they’re not really stoners but they’re still drug dealers, so... to me, to take that kind of a leap makes sense because, well, they’re getting older. They can’t be kids all the time, and so... it made sense to me. As long as it’s relevant... if he did something completely outlandish with the characters that just did not make sense with continuity... I would question it, but overall they’re his characters to do with ... as he pleases… (Charles3).

For this fan, part of what makes character so important as a bridging mechanism is believability. This suggests that believability is an indicator of consistency and, perhaps, that it can be used as a measure of tonal consistency for characters as they move across multiple story modes; indeed, believability in this context seems to relate more to individual character arcs than the story or storyworld within which they are set. As the story evolves across multiple story modes so too should the characters that inhabit it; however, it is worth noting that the participant qualified his response by stating that, overall, ‘they’re his [Smith’s] characters to do with as he pleases’ (Charles3). This is not surprising given that fans of the View Askew-niverse from the study emphasise their relationship with Smith more than the fiction; however, despite this resignation the participant expresses a vested interest in character consistency. For this fan, the maturation of character arcs helps perpetuate the storyworld across multiple modes. When neglected, inconsistencies can threaten the integrity of the narrative and, in some cases, lead fans to discredit the work’s author. This was a concern echoed by Fred6, who claimed,
I do ... sometimes stop and wonder why the author chose to do something ... if it seems odd; particularly ... if a character has been developed over a particular period of time to be one way and that character starts to act out of character ... sometimes you occasionally get like a change in behaviour which doesn’t seem like it’s been well explained ... usually a lot of times the explanation will come later so you keep watching, but it is something where you still stop and wonder to yourself, why ... that did that.

Arguably, for these fans, character arcs are more important than the meta-narrative to transmedia design. Furthermore, both suggest that inconsistencies in character development are impetus enough for them to question the motives of the author, thus disrupting the suspension of disbelief. Unfortunately, participants provided few examples of when this occurs; however, many shared a similar concern. When asked if he ever questioned choices made by the works creator, George7 said,

... [I] probably question some of the motivations of the characters ... or why he [Whedon] would try and go down a certain path ... ‘cause Buffy was, is a great balance of high-school, teen high-school movies and the kind of dialogue and things like that but these great themes, and it’s keeping that kind of balance (George7).

Furthermore, Isabelle9, a fan of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, claimed the series would lose credibility if Buffy changed between story modes. As she succinctly put it,

The basic personalities of all of the main characters must still be present in other forms (like comics) for the series to be taken seriously by the fans. If Buffy suddenly turned into the happiest person in the world, we’d wonder what new “monster of the week” we were watching (or reading about) ... If she stayed the happiest person in the world, she wouldn’t be Buffy anymore, and the show (or the comics related to the show) would lose their credibility, which in turn would turn off “viewers” in their droves, meaning less audience to purchase the new material, which would mean another cancellation of the series. And that would be bad (Isabelle9).

Character consistency is a concern for these fans, particularly as the story continues across multiple story modes. Whilst semiotic codes may vary across media, as Isabelle9 suggested, the enduring personality traits of each character must be present in each form; particularly, in this case, as they relate to emotional consistency. Along with believability, this may be an important aspect of character tone. Inconsistencies in
character tone threaten the stability of the entire story network. According to George7 character is important to fans because,

... they take ownership of the characters ... then when ... the story goes in a certain direction it’s kind of like they’ve been cheated because ... the characters have done something that they feel ... shouldn’t have happened.

Whilst this is true of single-mode stories, transmedia formats threaten established character motifs by insinuating characters into different semiotic contexts coded for unique forms of storytelling. Thus, for fans who consume transmedia, the imperative for consistency may be stronger. In effect, character profiles are threatened when resituated into formats which employ different storytelling techniques from the originating media. Furthermore, unlike Charles3, George7 placed the onus of responsibility on the work’s creators to perpetuate character profiles. He champions transmedia storytelling for its ability to increase the longevity of story arcs and allow characters to grow. He claimed.

I think from like a writers perspective it’s ... where are you taking these characters and to what purpose are you taking them, because you can end their journey, and… tie up all the loose ends and satisfy the character stories but I really would like to see someone take it to the next level ... I kind of feel they have a duty to really push the boundary ... I do think the comics are a lot better in season eight because he [Whedon] did kind of push it (George7).

This was reiterated by Isabelle9, who claimed, ‘the majority of the comics are of new material, and give new depth to the characters’. Not only is the development of character and the transference of tone an important condition for consumption but, for some fans, it is successfully executed. This also suggests that some fans crave to see the characters evolve and that transmedia storytelling is viewed as one potential method for achieving this. For Anabelle1, a fan of the View Askew-iverse, part of what makes character instrumental to the storyworld is Smith’s treatment of humanity and relationships. She claimed,

I think that the characteristic that appeals to me most, that I think appeals to most people ... is the way he portrays friendships and relationships. So he has very human characters that people can relate to, and even in things like the podcasts and the Q&A, the stories everyone really gets a kick out of are the ones where he’s talking about his
relationship with his family, being the extended groups of friends he has. So the way he communicates personal relationships and the concept of family is what I think he does best (Anabelle1).

It is interesting to note that even when discussing characters from the fictional text fans of the View Askew-iverse in the study refer to the work’s author as the subject. Nonetheless, this participant still demonstrates the importance of character in transmedia design. Her emphasis on relationships was reflected in a response from George7, who claimed the most important component of the story is ‘the dynamics between the group’. As he explained, ‘you’ve got Buffy and you’ve got Willow and ... you’ve got Giles ... you’ve got ... this ... group which you can ... get to know’. For Anabelle1, character relationships are enduring elements which both bridge and characterise the fiction and non-fiction components of Smith’s work. Oddly, she later contended,

... the only things that really did cross platforms were going through from the Jay and Silent Bob stuff to the Jay and Silent Bob comics and I never really found the Jay and Silent Bob characters particularly engaging, so I didn’t really seek to go further than that, um, because I didn’t really engage with those particular characters, and his other stuff doesn’t really extend from the fictional stuff through to other mediums (Anabelle1).

Not only does this contradict the previous comment, but it incorrectly identifies Jay and Silent Bob (characters from the View Askew-iverse) as ‘the only things that really did cross platforms’. In fact, several characters from the View Askew-iverse traverse multiple story modes including Alyssa Jones, Dante Hicks and Randal Graves; however, as the previous chapter discussed, perspective can be tempered by scope. That is, fans who engage with fewer story modes will have a limited perspective on the transmedial components of the text. Critically, the participant distances herself from character yet embraces characterisation: a process which transforms real-life people into characters (Grenville 1990, p36). This was evidenced in her previous response, and contradicted to an extent by the one above. Whilst noted, her reluctance to engage with the fictional text was explored in greater depth in a previous chapter. Here, her

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5 Alyssa Jones appears in Chasing Amy and Clerks: The Lost Scene and Dante Hicks and Randal Graves appear in various View Askew media including Clerks and Clerks: The Lost Scene.
comments complement the perspective represented in this category of description: that characters are important to transmedia design whether, evidently, fiction or non-fiction.

Whilst many participants in this category seem to view characters as dynamic, one participant presented a different view. When asked what the most important component of the story is, Edward5 confirmed, ‘it’s the characters themselves that are interesting, not so much the story’ (Edward5). When asked why, the participant continued,

Probably because they’re very… they’re never ever going to be happy ... there’s no point where any of them actually evolve to the next stage you see a character progress, they just seem kind of stuck in the same place (Edward5).

Other responses from the interview data emphasised the importance of character development. For example, Fred6 claimed the most important component of the story is ‘character development in the context of the on-going narrative’; however, Edward5 was engaged by character stagnation. His response was tempered by a unique reading of the text which emphasised that ‘Buffy characters are [always] the same’, which contradicts the readings of other fans; however, it is unclear what is meant by this, or how it relates to consistency. Despite the negative emphasis the participant cites this as his reason for finding the characters interesting; however, this may reflect more about the world the characters inhabit and the challenging scenarios they face than the characters themselves. Nonetheless, his perspective on character as it relates to transmedia design is similar in emphasis to previous participants’. Indeed, he claimed to engage with the text across multiple platforms because,

I’m much more a fan of the characters than I am the story so reading the comics allows me to keep track of where the characters are officially … it holds for Buffy and it holds for the sister series Angel as well, I just like to know where they are just ... to have my own knowledge filed away (Edward5).

Transmedia storytelling provides fans like Edward5 with an opportunity to prolong their engagement with the characters they know and love. This was also reflected in responses from other participants, which suggests that for some fans, characters are the threads which hold the story together and which bridge semiotic contexts. Character inconsistencies threaten to disable this structure, to disassociate story elements and to risk the integrity of the narrative. Bill2 claimed that characters are the primary motivator for his continued engagement with the text, explaining,
... it started off with the films and things and then I obviously branched to the comic books just cause I ... wanted to see more tales with these characters.

In fact, he claimed that the only real influence transmedia storytelling has on him as a fan, is that ‘there’s more as a fan to consume of that universe and those characters’ (Bill2). For this fan, like other participants in the category, character consistency, in whatever form it takes, is a significant condition for his continued engagement with the text across multiple story modes.

**Conclusion**

This chapter looks at concepts of experience related to the conditions of consumption for fans from the study of commercial transmedia texts. The contingencies upon which audiences engage with transmedia texts have not, until this point, been explored. Critically, this chapter suggests that transmedia texts should meet several conditions which are unique to transmedia design.

The first category of description, *Cohesive Design*, explores responses on a variety of issues related to cohesive transmedia design and how this relates to conditions of engagement. Cohesive design includes: creative synergy, which expands upon the finding from the previous category; and continuity across story modes. Participants represented in this category used the interview as an opportunity to interrogate the strengths and weaknesses of transmedia design. This category reveals that whilst the use of multiple media allows for creative expansion, a degree of cohesion, of story and form, is necessary to lend structure to the text.

The second category of description, *The Transference of Tone* reveals that while proponents of the field champion transmedia design for its ability to exploit multiple media, discrete semiotic contexts contradict one another and this can negatively affect the transference of tone. Responses from this category of description suggest that tonal consistency should be taken into consideration in transmedia design. Furthermore, this implies that consumption of transmedia texts requires a unique set of transmedia literacy skills in order to reconcile different story modes. For most participants in the category, the transference of tone is negated by semiotic dissonance in the transitional space and those few who champion the use of multiple story modes intimate that
transmedia design should be based on creative synergies between media, thus articulating this condition for consumption.

The final category of description, *Character Consistency*, is based on responses which suggest that fans distinguish character as the bridging mechanism that links semiotic contexts thus easing dissonance in the transitional space. Participants in this category of description suggest that character consistency is crucial to their continued engagement with the text across story modes; it is a condition of their consumption. Whilst it is not always clear how this consistency is achieved, characters reconcile both aesthetic and tonal contradictions in the text when they manifest consistently across forms.
Conclusion

In this thesis I have theorised transmedial consumption and explored how fans conceive of their engagement with transmedia narratives using two case studies of commercial transmedia storytelling: Joss Whedon’s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Kevin Smith’s *View Askew-niverse*. This task involved exploring the different modes of use enabled by transmedia storytelling towards the aim of theorising story/content-driven use, which this thesis argues is adopted most often by fans. Research pertaining to transmedia storytelling is steadily increasing; however, a review of the literature revealed that, to date, few studies have commented significantly on how audiences engage with transmedia formats. Whilst speculative and/or theoretical methodologies such as discourse analysis can both inform and inspire perspectives in this field, they are limited in their capacity to illuminate issues pertaining to audience engagement which emerge from the practice of consumption itself. In this thesis I have sought to compensate for the lack of research in this area by exploring, via means of in-depth interview, the qualitatively different ways fans conceive of their engagement with commercial transmedia narratives. This research, inclusive of both theoretical and qualitative components, yields numerous conclusions. These are discussed based on the designation of two themes and considerations for future research. The first two sections, based on the themes, *A Difficult Position to Be In* and *What Fans Can Teach Us about Transmedia Design* explore known conclusions from the present research. The final section, *Future Directions and Considerations for Further Research* reflects on issues emergent in this thesis that have not been fully explored and could be used as a foundation for further research.

**A Difficult Position to Be In**

One of the major findings to emerge from the qualitative component of this thesis is that transmedia design can be problematic as it relates to practices of consumption. The problem in question concerns the use of different story modes for conveying a single narrative across multiple contexts. As a finding this is significant because it contradicts
the central tenets of transmedia storytelling: to use multiple story modes for a variety of expression. As it relates to consumption the use of multiple story modes can be problematic when each is coded for different semiotic readings. For example, comic books are coded differently from film or interactive mobile content and each is received in a negotiated context of reading based on the distinct semiotic make-up of the text and the expectations of the user/reader. The problem identified in this thesis emerges when semiotic contexts are misaligned.

Usually, the relationship between media is theorised as intertextuality; however, emphasis in this field is typically placed on the reframing of linguistic and semiotic motifs across media which share a varying relationship to an inspiring context (Hiramoto & Sung-Yul Park, 2010). As Long (2007, p10) rightly suggests, this concept is made ‘explicit, complicated and formalised through intermedial deployment’. Issues occurring at a story mode level, such as semiotic dissonance, are thus easier to explain by drawing on concepts of intertextuality – whilst not the primary theoretical frame for this thesis – because they explicate the relationship between modes in a transmedia environment comparative to other forms.

Whilst ‘intertextuality’ reflects on the various connections between form and content which combine to create meaning in media, this cannot account for the complex seriality associated with transmedia formats, or the notion of a storyworld which frames the transmedia text. Such a perspective belies the complexity of transmedia storytelling whilst placing undue emphasis on the referential nature of the intertext. Whilst each story mode in a transmedia text ostensibly functions as an ‘intertext’ for all others, this is not the principle which formalises the transmedia structure. Lemke (2009, p292) suggests that transmedia texts create ‘coordinated meanings’. This perspective marks a departure from the derivative qualities associated with the intertext and distances transmedia storytelling from the negative impression of an ‘additive’ function. When combined, the notion of coordinated intertextuality (suggested in Chapter Seven of this thesis) better reflects the semiotic structure underlying transmedia design in this context. In this scenario, referencing between intertexts should be coordinated rather than derivative or additive. This also reflects the networked structure of transmedia texts.
In Chapter Seven of this thesis I discussed conditions of transmedial consumption as they relate to cohesiveness in the text, the transference of tone and character consistency. Each of these issues manifests as semiotic dissonance – the basis of which can be found in transmedia design. Semiotic dissonance is a state of design common in transmedia storytelling when semiotic contexts are inconsistent. This can be experienced as a rupture in the text, manifest cognitively in the imagination of the fan, when crucial story elements change between story modes. Fans in the study attempt to correct or avoid dissonance between modes as a way of remedying this problem. Coordinated intertextualities rely on the impression of meaningful connections between story modes in order to affect cohesive design; in other words, references should be coordinated across discrete contexts. For consumers of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and the View Askew-iverse this process hinges on consistency in the storyworld, the outcome of which demonstrates the critical nature of cohesiveness in transmedia design. To demonstrate this, I will discuss the relationship between tone, cohesiveness and character consistency and how the outcome of this relationship relates to disruptive effects on transmedial consumption.

The transference of tone in transmedia design relates to the intangible elements associated with complex semiotic codes. Each story mode conveys tone differently, and often tone manifests in story elements which are replicable, such as character. Critically, Chapter Seven of this thesis demonstrates that the use of different semiotic codes disrupts the transference of tone across media. This creates a rupture in the cognitive manifestation of the story as imagined by the fan and thus disrupts their engagement with the storyworld. This occurs because reading of the text is uniquely positioned as an interpretive act which incorporates both semiotic codes and the interpretation of the reader/user. Jenkins (2006a, p331) refers to this as a ‘third space’ constituted by components of the original text and the fan psyche.

When a character or setting is introduced in a story mode constituted using unique semiotic codes and then re-emerges in the same narrative constituted using different codes (through another story mode) the continuity structure of the text is broken. This issue is unique to transmedia design because transmedia formats are built on coordinated intertextualities. This means not only do users experience a variety of expression, but they engage with story manifest across a variety of expression. When
considered in the light of traditional theories of intertextuality, which refer to instances wherein a film or any other text builds its meaning off another (for example, HBO’s *The Sopranos* is an intertext for gangsta movie tropes) (Gray 2010, p117), intertextuality in transmedia design is built on a networked logic. Even based on the assumption of an ur-text, each mode should be an intertext for every other. This is evidenced in the case study texts used in the thesis. For example, the film *Mall Rats* (1995) is an intertext for an animated short featured on the DVD special features of *Clerks* (1994), titled, *The Lost Scene* (1994); however, each is also an intertext for the movie *Clerks* (1994). In comparison, in *The Simpsons* episode *The Treehouse of Horrors XIX* (2008) the animation is used as an intertext for the HBO series *Mad Men* (*The Simpsons,* 1989-present). It refers to and substantiates an inspiring artefact. *Mad Men,* however, is not an intertext for *The Simpsons.* Intertextuality in transmedia design should be reciprocal and coordinated. This is significant because it means that the relationship between semiotic contexts should also be coordinated. For instance, the use of animation to characterise the buildings in the opening scene referenced from *The Simpsons* does not disrupt the reading of *Mad Men* settings in live action. In a transmedia text, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* the representation of story elements using a class of semiotic codes, such as the audio-visual motifs of television, will contradict the portrayal of the same elements in another format, such as comic book. Features common to the storyworld, such as character and setting, will necessarily traverse story modes as the story evolves. When these features are substantiated in one story mode and then replicated in another the aesthetic constitution of the text is contradicted.

Critically, this insight suggests that transmedia storytelling design is somewhat flawed. In order to substantiate a storyworld most transmedia texts based on a continuity structure formalise the narrative by replicating recognisable elements across story modes. This creates dissonance in the text and in the cognitive manifestation of the story imagined by fans. Models based on a logic of game-play (such as ARGs) are constituted differently, that is, they use the player’s world as a context for the fiction, therefore removing the need to manage consistency across the network. Consistency in this case is managed by the players as they move through the game. Therefore, players or users of these fictions might not experience the same problem. This thesis explores cases of a continuity structure in transmedia design. The transference of tone across
story modes is a problem unique to this form which negates its potential to create a cohesive story that can be experienced as a narrative aggregate.

The effect of this issue on consumption of transmedia texts is evident. The interview data confirm that, for some fans, story modes should be compatible in order to create a cohesive storyworld. This issue is unique to continuity structures in transmedia storytelling, because they require some story elements to be replicated. In effect, transmediation does involve a degree of adaptation. As it relates to the transference of tone, the most significant story component in transmedia design is character. This is not entirely surprising given the importance of character to story as a vehicle for narrative advancement. This problem is exacerbated by the importance fans place on character consistency.

The significance of character to transmedia storytelling notably clarifies the problem addressed in this chapter through its articulation as an example. Tonal consistency was expressed in the interview data as one of the most important aspects of transmedia design and nowhere is this more clearly articulated than in their relationship to characters. Strong characters can carry fans through an immersive experience by anchoring the reader to the narrative. In a continuity structure, characters are vehicles for the deployment and development of a narrative over time, meaning that their constitution should be consistent in order for the narrative to retain integrity of structure. This is especially true for transmedia storytelling which relies on the use of recurring motifs in order to create meaningful connections between discrete story modes. In other words, characters from a story are represented across multiple story modes so their consistency is critical in bridging semiotic divides. In fact, according to fans in the study character consistency is one of the only elements which can reconcile the difference between discrete semiotic contexts.

Inconsistencies occur, in large part, due to the relative difficulty of locating tonal qualities. For this reason abstract qualities such as tone are often manifest in characters. This is because characters are materially constituted in the narrative, and perhaps also because characters are relatable to the audience. This is how fans from the study of transmedia texts identify tonal consistency. The characters anchor the narrative to a human condition and are thus instrumental in shaping it. They become the vehicle for carrying story across multiple contexts; their journeys are a manifestation of the less
tangible storyworld. What this means is that character consistency is instrumental in preserving the integrity of the narrative. The interview data suggest that, for fans, this consistency is perceived as character tone, although it is not always clear how character tone is conveyed. Like the story itself, characters are read in a negotiated context which involves the cognitive reinterpretation of complex semiotic codes. This context, or third space, is impossible to reproduce. Critically, so too is the interpretive act inherent in its constitution. Once characters from the series are replicated using different semiotic codes their manifestation in this space is changed. Whilst transmedia design offers new opportunities for the creative repurposing of traditional narrative structures, the present study demonstrates that consistency is still an important aspect of narrative development; perhaps more so in the case of transmedia, which relies heavily on the willingness of fans to assemble a narrative aggregate. Whilst this might seem a discouraging conclusion to draw, it can also be used to identify ways in which consumers can be fully engaged across multiple story modes by means of improving or avoiding design methods perceived as problematic by fans. This will be discussed in greater detail in the section to follow.

**What Fans Can Teach Us about Transmedia Design**

One of the main conclusions drawn in this thesis is that there are critical issues inherent in transmedia design as it pertains to the practice of consumption; however, the presentation of these issues prompts solutions and responses. In this section, I discuss insights which emerged from the study in response to the perceived problems of transmedia design and, critically, reflect on how fans can inform our understanding of how best to use transmedia storytelling to engage an audience.

In the previous section, characters were identified as one of the most important enduring story elements in transmedia design. Whilst certain fans in the study insist that inconsistencies in character tone negatively affect their engagement with the text, some also suggest that inconsistencies otherwise are negligible when character tone is consistent. This suggests that when characters are transferred successfully across story modes inconsistencies in tone inherent in transmedia design (due to the use of distinct semiotic contexts) are mostly negligible. Critically, this suggests that characters can be
used to *reconcile* differences between story modes. Ironically, rather than address the problem it *obfuscates* it; however, reconciliation suggests that incompatible elements can be made compatible through intervention of design. This demonstrates the importance of character to consistency in the storyworld. Furthermore, it elevates the importance of *loyalty* in transmedial consumption. So far, this thesis has focused on multiple facets of engagement; however, results from the research suggest that loyalty is crucial to the engagement process because it mitigates the effect of negative reception. In this case, fans of the text are motivated to follow the narrative across multiple story modes by their loyalty to the characters. Unfortunately, none identified an example of when character consistency was successfully preserved throughout an entire transmedia structure. This makes it difficult from a design perspective to conceive; however, further insights may illuminate this.

When considering recurring elements in transmedia design it becomes clearer how compatibilities can be exploited and managed in the story space. Critically, it was via discussions of consistency in the story space (occurring across all three themes) that patterns emerged regarding the relationship between compatible elements in transmedia design. These revelations can be used to inform design guides which could help in the production of transmedia projects similar to those used as case studies for the research; their application could be instrumental in shaping effective design in the future.

The matter of compatible design can be situated in the context of convergence. It became evident through the course of research that the relationship between elements in effective transmedia design was not coincidental. For example, during the interview process fans identified several factors which were consistent with prolonged engagement. These were not limited to design techniques alone, although they were still important. Critically, the research indicates that effective transmedia design – to engender prolonged engagement – can be approximated via the convergence of certain conditions. Three key dimensions can be found converging, which represent conditions that influence engaging design for commercial transmedia texts. These include specifications of the text, specifications of the context and specifications of the audience. Context in this instance refers to a context for the text and not for reception. For example, it does not account for the nationality or socio-economic status of the audience nor any other demographic information. Instead, it reflects the literary context.
of the narrative in a situated framework based on genre specifications. Whilst market research typically points to demographic information which can be used to predict future trends in audience behaviour, transmedia formats offer a complex model of consumption which involves more elaborate conditions than traditional market research considers.

Together, the three distinguishing factors found converging include: story modes, including aesthetic considerations, (text); genres (context); and markets (audience). The relationship between each of these has been separately explored before. Furthermore, each is relevant as it pertains to a storytelling logic. For example, research on transmedia storytelling has suggested a relationship between story expansion and genre (see Bick 1996; Steinmüller 2003; Watrall & Shaw 2008). In fact, most studies of transmedia storytelling intimate a complex relationship between multiple factors; however, none yet has fully explored these relationships or suggested how they influence engagement with these texts. The relationship between story modes, genres and markets suggests that consumers can be engaged by transmedia storytelling via processes which involve design and response. In this thesis relationships can be found between each of the three factors separately. Critically, this study suggests that engaging design will emerge from the triangulation of these factors. This is best understood as synergistic design and it is based on exploiting relationships which already exist between the three factors as they pertain to narrative design. For example, the relationship between transmedia design and fantastical genres such as science fiction and fantasy has been demonstrated in the past and is attributed to the perpetuating principles which underscore these forms in popular culture (Bick 1996; Steinmüller 2003). Furthermore, a similar relationship has been found between transmedia storytelling and comic books based on the use of a continuity structure to express longevity in both (Ford & Jenkins 2009). This relationship conveys the importance of cohesive design as it pertains to a storytelling logic. Whilst either may also be structured according to a logic of multiplicity (see Jenkins 2009b) this thesis explores engagement with transmedia stories which are based on a continuity structure. The expanding principle utilised in transmedia storytelling has been linked both to the perpetuating histories associated with science fiction, and to the structural logic of the comic book serial, thus demonstrating the importance both of genre and story mode to transmedia design.
The fundamental basis of this theory and that which substantiates it in a practical context is its articulation by fans as it pertains to engagement and consumption. This is not surprising in the context of the present research which advocates a relationship between transmedial consumption and a particular mode of media use. Essentially, certain patterns of use can be found converging on particular genre conventions or aesthetics and particular story modes. This has important implications for transmedia design because the presentation of these factors in the interview data, and so in transmedia storytelling, shares a direct relationship with prolonged engagement. The trigger is a perpetuating logic which underscores certain genres and aesthetics which can be articulated best through particular story modes. Audiences who are attracted to these genres and aesthetics are comparably attracted to the story modes through which they are best expressed, thus intimating a shared market. Due to the perpetuating structure upon which both are based, audiences of these media forms are also attracted to transmedia storytelling. Logically, transmedia projects built on these converging principles should successfully attract and retain engaged audiences who will follow the narrative across multiple story modes. Critically, this thesis only demonstrates this principle for a class of transmedia storytelling based on a continuity structure. For this class, the implications of this finding are important to future commercial transmedia projects.

The third significant conclusion this thesis draws, as it relates to what fans can teach us about transmedia design, concerns the significance of the author figure in the marketing and distribution of the text. According to Jenkins (2006a), the presence of a single author/creator in transmedia design is the most useful way to achieve consistency in the storyworld because the work’s creator can manage the creative output of content across multiple story modes. He refers to this as ‘synergistic storytelling’ (Jenkins 2006a, p105). Whilst this perspective is useful for determining how transmedia projects can best be managed during the creative process, findings from the present research concern the authoring process as it pertains to the practice of consumption. For many fans in the present study, the author name is synonymous with pedigree. What this means is not only does the presence of a single author/creator help establish consistency in the storyworld through control over its constituents, but it also means that the presence of a single author helps create branded consistency. By this I refer to the process wherein
fans of the transmedia text conflate author with story, thus fetishising the auteur of transmedia design, defined in this thesis as auteur branding.

One of the most interesting outcomes of this finding is the effect of auteur branding on the conceived notion of ‘the text’ by fans. In other words, fans of the text define its parameters based on the author insignia. Comparably, they also distinguish canonical from non-canonical material based on the same criteria. Whilst canon is often distinguished, in part, by involvement with the text from the work’s original author (for the same reason fan-produced works are often viewed as non-canonical), the relationship between canon and fanon is still unclear (see Busse & Hellekson 2006; Chaney & Liebler 2007), this process serves a unique purpose in transmedial consumption because it informs the reader’s understanding of the constitution of the text. This is particularly relevant to the marketing of commercial transmedia texts because so many encourage fans to participate with content in ways that make them co-creators in this process (see Derecho 2006; Walker cited in Johnson 2011). This demonstrates two important insights: firstly, that most of the research on measures used to encourage audience participation in transmedia texts does not reflect on how audience members perceive their involvement; and secondly, that this model is not applicable across all forms of transmedia storytelling. The present research demonstrates the latter point clearly. It is unclear whether this is due to the continuity structure upon which both case study texts are built or whether because each has been marketed using the author name to attract attention. Furthermore, both the View Askew-niverse and Buffy the Vampire Slayer were originally created within a mono-text paradigm. This might mean that transmedia components following the release of the originating media were viewed as additive, and designated as a part of the series based on the author name first and their relevance to the storyworld second. Transmedia stories of any class should be framed by repeating recognisable insignia across the storyworld, effectively branding the text. The present research demonstrates that this is often carried out via the author name.

Like previous conclusions drawn in this chapter, the present also relates to loyalty. In this case, loyalty is manifest as loyalty to an author figure. The present research demonstrates that many fans are willing to absolve the author of responsibility when faced with inconsistent design. This is comparable to the role of characters in cohesive
design. In this case, fans will persist with the text regardless based on the mark of the author alone. Whedon is to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* what George Lucas is to *Star Wars*. The same can be said for Smith and the *View Askew*niverse. In each case from the research, loyalty to the author brand presents as a crucial motivating factor for continued consumption with the transmedia text.

Whilst levels of engagement are crucial for determining mode of use, fans can be motivated in multiple ways to *prolong* their engagement. One way is through the fulfilment of certain conditions, including the transference of tone and character consistency, and the other is through loyalty; however, when the text is consumed in this way, motivated by loyalty, engagement can be experienced as *obligation*. Whilst loyalty is an indicator of engagement it is not always experienced positively. From a purely economic perspective this distinction is irrelevant because the motivational framework still results in a profit capacity for the distribution company; however, consumption is inspired in multiple ways so the engagement experience need not be experienced negatively. Fans from the study indicate that whilst loyalty to the text will motivate them to consume more material they are unlikely in some cases to recommend the material to others and, in other cases, only engage with transmedial components (for example, the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* season eight comic books) via secondary sources such as unofficial user guides online. Critically, when experienced in isolation or as the primary engagement factor, loyalty is also experienced as obligation. Using transmedia design to facilitate engagement in multiple ways by provoking different facets of the engagement experience – for example, participation – might offer a better opportunity for attracting a larger audience than loyalty alone, which is often associated with niche culthood (Perryman 2009, p23).

**Future Directions and Considerations for Further Research**

One of the key considerations this chapter has repeatedly articulated is that transmedia storytelling is a term used to describe the manifestation of a transmediating logic. This is clearly evidenced in the literature from the field and has been discussed in detail in Chapter One of this thesis. The focus of this thesis has thus been to identify a distinct variety of the transmediating principle and, critically, the mode of use associated with it.
Such a focus is necessary in order to offer unique and significant insights to the field. Furthermore, this thesis has argued that it is neither necessary nor logical to attempt to define the material structure of transmedia storytelling as a singular form or concept. Rather, this thesis suggests that transmedia storytelling is one manifestation of a principle which can be articulated in numerous ways to serve multiple purposes. Jenkins (2009b) conceives of these purposes – which include storytelling, marketing and advertising – as transmedia ‘logics’. Narrow conceptions of the subject limits the possibility for further research, thus stifling the field by placing unnecessary restrictions on research concepts and narrowing the field of enquiry for others. It is important that future research acknowledges this complexity and the multi-faceted nature of its subject and the modes of consumption it accommodates.

Furthermore, the subject can also be understood from within a number of different conceptual frameworks depending on the context of practice. For example, transmedia storytelling is conceived of differently in a practical context from the way in which scholars theorise the subject. This issue is covered in detail by Dena (2009) in her thesis on transmedia practice. For her, the schism between theory and practice represents a critical rupture in our understanding of transmedia storytelling and its manifestations in a practical context. In the present research, misconceptions in the field manifest as a critical discrepancy between the conceptual logic underlying the discourse on transmedia in academic research and the practice of consumption associated with it. This is articulated in the interview data through the ways in which fans characterise the transmedia artefact based on their engagement with the text via the practice of consumption. This is a unique perspective and one which is rarely addressed in any research from the field. Critically, findings gleaned from the interview data undermine many widely held assumptions about transmedia storytelling. This includes the assumption that ‘good’ transmedia should be based on exploiting the creative capacity of multiple story modes and that consumers seek to actively participate with the texts they consume.

In terms of theorising the audience, many studies underestimate the significance of brand loyalty as a framework through which to understand transmedial consumption. With the exception of Scolari’s (2009) paper on brand fiction (theorised in this thesis, with greater emphasis on the author insignia, as auteur branding) scholars should look
to the field of marketing in order to understand how fans formalise their relationship to media across multiple story modes. Whilst this thesis has contributed significantly to addressing some of these issues, further research is still needed in this field.

Furthermore, future research should explore and address the presentation of different modes of use associated with transmedia storytelling. This thesis argues that, whilst story/content-driven use is exemplary of transmedial consumption, critically, mode of use is changeable. This means that whilst fans are more likely than non-fans to adopt story/content-driven use, transmedia design can be used to facilitate fan-use in an existing audience. Findings from this research suggest that mode-driven use may be a precursor to this change – to story/content-driven use – because of the high levels of engagement associated with both. Not only does this point to the commercial potential of transmedia storytelling, but also to its ability to facilitate migratory consumption in all media users. It is impossible to observe this from either an academic or practical context at this early stage in the form’s development; however, future research and, indeed, practical applications of transmedia storytelling should explore this potential. Furthermore, as a means of pursuing this interest, future studies should explore the different modes of use enabled by transmedia storytelling associated with entry point, mode preference and level of engagement. The theoretical principle underlying this study is articulated in this thesis in the Media Use Typology in Chapter Two.

This chapter has reviewed multiple outcomes from the research which, when considered in combination, reveal critical new perspectives in the field. Whilst the subject of transmedia storytelling has been explored at great lengths, understanding of this practice in a commercial context can only be facilitated by exploring modes of use associated with it. In many ways, fans have led the vanguard of commercial transmedial consumption. They demonstrate the required combination of high levels of engagement and loyalty to a variety of media necessary in order to confront the challenges transmedia formats present for consumers. Critically, this is one of the most significant insights to emerge from this research. Ironically, the key to attracting a larger audience to commercial transmedia formats can be located within fandom; however, despite the enthusiasm of the academic community, the potential of transmedia storytelling is equally met by the reality of its limitations. These are articulated and experienced by fans in ways which could not otherwise have been observed. In the future, fans will
continue to help us understand why audiences seek to engage with media across multiple story modes and how transmedia storytelling can be used to encourage audiences to adopt a mode of use compatible with the requirements of transmedia design.
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Appendix One: The Interview Schedule

1. What first attracted you to the text?

2. How long have you been a fan of the text?

3. What are the most important components of the story in your opinion?

4. What does being a fan mean to you?

5. What does that entail?

6. Do you consume material related to the text across more than one media platform? (a platform refers to a medium through which we can access content, such as television, films, and comics) If so, why? If not, why not?

7. Do you ever re-watch/re-read/re-play the text? If so, why? What prompts you to do so?

8. Do you ever look for additional textual material through other platforms? If so, why? What prompts you to do so?

9. How important is narrative consistency in your opinion? (narrative consistency simply means that the story flows from one platform from another and makes sense)

10. What influence does the use of multiple platforms have on the story? What influence does this have on you as a fan?
11. What is the main difference in your opinion between engaging with a text across multiple platforms and engaging a text through one platform?

12. In your opinion, what is the function of fan-produced work such as fan fiction?

13. How would you describe the relationship of fan fiction to the text?

14. Do you ever think about the production process underlying the text? (that is, when you think about the text, do you think about why it was shot a certain way/why it was written a certain way/why a character acts a certain way?)

15. Do you ever question choices made by the producers of the text? If so, why? How do you express these questions? Who do you discuss them with?
Appendix Two: Call for Interest Online Post

Hi all :) My name is Emma and I am currently a PhD student at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. I am a member of this site both as a fan, and a researcher. I am a huge fan of the work of Kevin Smith, particularly the View Askew-iverse. In fact, my fascination with the View Askew-iverse and cross-media narratives is part of what inspired me to write my thesis in the first place. In terms of my research, I would like to investigate how fans of the View Askew-iverse engage with the text transmedia-ly. When I say “transmedia texts”, I mean stories which are told across multiple media (such as television, games, and comics). An example of this is The Matrix; a text where the story is spread across multiple kinds of media including films, comics, and games. A transmedia story should be consistent across different kinds of media as well. In other words, the story should flow; so what you see happen in the films should make sense in terms of the storyline in relation to what happens in the comics. Transmedia storytelling is a fairly recent development in media distribution and in this study I am interested in finding out what factors influence the way fans engage with transmedia texts and how they engage with them. If you are at all interested in being a part of this research I would love to hear from you. Simply send me a pm and I will contact you with further details. I hope to hear from some of you soon! SilentEm⁶ :D

⁶ As noted in Chapter Four, the researcher’s online handle varied according to the case study being addressed.
Appendix Three: Call for Interest Flyer

Hi,

My name is Emma Beddows and I am currently a PhD student at Swinburne University of Technology. I would like to invite you to take part in a research project that I am conducting and is supervised by Dr Mark Finn and Dr Jason Bainbridge.

The aim of this research is to investigate how fans engage with transmedia texts. When I say “transmedia texts”, I mean stories which are told across multiple media (such as television, games, and comics). An example of this is The Matrix; a text where the story is spread across multiple kinds of media including films, comics, and games. A transmedia story should be consistent across different kinds of media as well. In other words, the story should flow; so what you see happen in the films should make sense in terms of the storyline in relation to what happens in the comics. Transmedia storytelling is a fairly recent development in media distribution and in this study I am interested in finding out what factors influence the way fans engage with transmedia texts.

The research will involve me asking you about how you engage with these kinds of texts. Your participation will be of great benefit to my work and will allow you the opportunity to talk about your thoughts and perceptions regarding how you engage with popular culture.
If you are at all interested in being a part of this study or if you would simply like more information about it, please contact me at this e-mail address and I will send you more details: ebeddows@swin.edu.au

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68),
Swinburne University of Technology, P O Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122.
Tel (03) 9214 5218 or +61 3 9214 5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au
Appendix Four: Plain Language Statement

Transmedia texts and fan engagement

Dear Participant,

My name is Emma Beddows and I am currently a PhD student at Swinburne University of Technology. I would like to invite you to take part in this research that I am conducting and is supervised by Dr Mark Finn and Dr Jason Bainbridge.

The aim of this research is to investigate how fans engage with transmedia texts. When I say “transmedia texts”, I mean stories which are told across multiple media (such as television, games, and comics). An example of this is The Matrix; a text where the story is spread across multiple kinds of media including films, comics, and games. A transmedia story should be consistent across different kinds of media as well. In other words, the story should flow; so what you see happen in the films should make sense in terms of the storyline in relation to what happens in the comics. Transmedia storytelling is a fairly recent development in media distribution and in this study I am interested in finding out what factors influence the way fans engage with transmedia texts.

Should you agree to participate, you would be asked to participate in an interview of around 30-45 minutes. Participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime. With your permission, the interview would be audio recorded or stored electronically so that I can ensure that I make an accurate record of what you say.

The data collected will be analyzed for my thesis and the results will be published as a PhD thesis. The results may also be used for academic conferences, and in academic
journal articles. The results will be reported in a way to protect your confidentiality through the use of a pseudonym. Access to your responses will only be possible by me and Dr Mark Finn.

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either of below telephone numbers:

Emma Beddows: 0423263580 or Dr Mark Finn: 92145254

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68),
Swinburne University of Technology, P O Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122.
Tel (03) 9214 5218 or +61 3 9214 5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au
Appendix Five: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for fans of transmedia texts who are invited to participate in the research project titled “An exploration of how creative and economic imperatives influence levels of engagement and relations of production and consumption associated with transmedia texts”

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in this research because you have identified yourself as being a fan of a transmedia text and it is anticipated that you will be able to contribute useful insights into what factors influence the ways in which you engage with this kind of text.

Risks
It is not anticipated that there will be any risks associated with participation in this study; however, you do not have to answer any question or take part in the interview if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable.

**Benefits**

You participation is likely to benefit the wider academic community by helping us understand what factors influence the relationship between fans and transmedia texts.

**Confidentiality**

The information that will be collected from this research project will be used in my published PhD thesis. The information collected may also be used in future for academic conferences and in academic journal articles. Your confidentiality will be protected via the use of a pseudonym. Only I and Dr Mark Finn will know what your pseudonym is and that information will be kept in a password protected disk drive. Only I and Dr Mark Finn will have access to that information.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so. You may stop participating in the interview at any time that you wish. I will give you an opportunity at the end of the interview to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those, if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly.

**Who to Contact**
If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me: Emma Beddows/ebeddows@swin.edu.au, or Dr Mark Finn: mfinn@swin.edu.au

In relation to this project, please circle your response to the following:

- I agree to be interviewed by the researcher: Yes
  
  No

- I agree to allow the interview to be recorded by electronic device: Yes
  
  No

- I agree to make myself available for further information if required: Yes
  
  No

I acknowledge that:

(a) my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation;

(b) the Swinburne project is for the purpose of research and not for profit;

(c) any identifiable information about me which is gathered in the course of and as the result of my participating in this project will be (i) collected and retained for the purpose of this project and (ii) accessed and analysed by the researcher(s) for the purpose of conducting this project;

(d) my confidentiality will be preserved and I will not be identified in publications or otherwise without my express written consent.

By signing this document I agree to participate in this project.
Name of Participant:  

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Signature & Date:  

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This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68),  
Swinburne University of Technology, P O Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122.  
Tel (03) 9214 5218 or +61 3 9214 5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au
Appendix Six: Proof of Ethics Clearance, email verification

To: Dr Mark Finn, FLSS/ Ms Emma Beddows

Dear Dr Finn,

SUHREC Project 2010/121 It's what fans were begging for: investigating how creative and economic imperatives influence the relationship between hardcore fans and transmedia texts
Dr Mark Finn, FLSS/ Ms Emma Beddows
Approved Duration: 01/07/2010 To 30/09/2010

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol undertaken on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) by SUHREC Subcommittee (SHESC4) at a meeting held on 4 June 2010. Your response to the review as e-mailed on 16 June was put to a nominated SHESC4 delegate for consideration.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project has approval to proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions here outlined.

- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/ clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project.

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7 This document has been copied in its original format.
- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact me if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance. The SUHREC project number should be quoted in communication. Chief Investigators/Supervisors and Student Researchers should retain a copy of this e-mail as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for the project.

Yours sincerely

Kaye Goldenberg
Secretary, SHESC4

Kaye Goldenberg
Administrative Officer (Research Ethics)
Swinburne Research (H68)
Swinburne University of Technology
P O Box 218
HAWTHORN VIC 3122
Tel +61 3 9214 8468
Fax +61 3 9214 5267