Franchising Storyworlds

*Industrial Practices and their Impact on the Creative Content of Transmedia Storytelling Artefacts*

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Industrial Practices and their Consequences on the Creative Content of Transmedia
Storytelling Artefacts

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Foreword

This thesis was written as completion to the master program Arts, Culture, and the Media as offered by the University of Groningen. Although I have been enrolled in a film specialization during the master program, the research for this thesis touches a much broader spectrum of media studies. It centers on practices of transmedia storytelling, and focuses on creative as well as commercial practices. The shaping of my scope of research has been a strenuous undertaking, and I would like to thank dr. Van den Oever for guiding me with her expertise and giving me insightful advice throughout this process. Furthermore, I would like to thank my first supervisor dr. Kiss for reassuring me and expressing his faith in me upon our first ever meeting. I would also like to thank him for quickly and constructively responding to my emails, which was our most feasible form of communication due to our geographical distance. I am also indebted to my parents for their support, financial as well as mental, their confidence in me and – above all – their utmost patience throughout the process of writing this thesis.
Introduction

As our lives become increasingly dominated by the use of media platforms for the gathering of information as well as for our entertainment, developments in the creative, technological, and industrial realms continually look for ways to benefit from this digital evolution. The term transmedia storytelling has been devised to follow more general cross-media practices at the end of the 1990s, when media scholar Henry Jenkins used the label to first describe “a new aesthetic that [had] emerged in response to media convergence (Jenkins, 2006a: 20-21).” It is actually an umbrella term pointing at several phenomena that emerged in broader creative production spheres, yet can be grouped together under the same label. A very plain definition would say it indicates the unfolding of a single narrative across multiple media platforms and products. This highly oversimplified description gives an impression of its meaning, but does not even begin to cover the intricate complexion of the notion. Due to varying interpretations of both the terms ‘transmedia’ and ‘storytelling,’ and the (at times conflicting) implications the notion has for several fields of production (e.g. the creative and economic sections of the entertainment industries), a universal and all-inclusive explanation has not yet been formulated, and may never be devised. Yet when given a simple (albeit incomplete) definition, the majority of people will have an adequate understanding of the term as it infiltrates their consumption and entertainment habits on a daily basis. The term is especially relevant for media-literate audiences that choose to diversify their entertainment consumption across various platforms, yet still want to keep up with one, or several related storylines.

In general, the creative possibilities for the production of entertainment products are influenced by technological and industrial demands. Transmedia storytelling artefacts are especially susceptible to such demands, as they cover many different creative and industrial production sites. This presupposes an extremely broad and intricate network of social as well as professional relations between stakeholders, including the audience. Transmedia storytelling is first and foremost a creative practice, albeit inextricably linked to production and distribution practices that are not creatively motivated. Although media-literate audiences are very well aware of the commercial interests coupled with the production and dispersion of creative entertainment
products, the actual strategies and direct influences thereof on the content of their products often remain obscure.

The entertainment industries employ various tactics to produce and distribute entertainment products. I find the tactics grouped under the term media franchising is best applicable to the production and dissemination of transmedia storytelling artefacts. Media scholar Derek Johnson first coined this term in his *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (2013). It is pertinent, yet not exclusive to, the production of transmedia storytelling artefacts because of its productive as well as creative abilities. It simultaneously reinforces the creation of new transmedia narratives, as well as enables the rejuvenation of already existing intellectual properties. I found several remarkable resemblances between transmedia storytelling as a (chiefly) creative practice and media franchising as a (primarily) commercial practice. Johnson’s (2013) book also demonstrates economically motivated practices are indeed able to influence creative practices, and can provide adapted and enhanced forms of artistic expression. The consequences of industrial tactics on the creative content of transmedia storytelling artefacts caught my attention and form the basis of my research.

This thesis’ field of study thus incorporates the creative practices of transmedia storytelling and the industrial practices of media franchising, and emphasizes their mutual influences. The network of relations that emerges from the intimate collaboration between the two realms is further affected by technological developments, which can originate from either creative or economic interests. They are thus a determining factor for the alterations to transmedia storytelling artefacts, and deserve attention as well. I wanted to investigate the adaptations industrially motivated practices of production, distribution, marketing, and use impose on the aesthetic and narrative qualities of media content because these practices often go unnoticed by audiences. Yet they can influence their experience of said entertainment products significantly. An additional focus is on the feature film as exemplary product of transmedia storytelling practices. This is also shown by several studies, such as those of Jenkins (2003), arguing that films have the most diverse audiences and that its audiovisual nature is lends itself especially well for the practice of worldbuilding. One of the objectives of this master thesis is to find a workable definition of the term *transmedia storytelling* to use for future research. The definition should incorporate
creative as well as industrial factors, as studies indicate. In order to analyze the ways in which transmedia storytelling as a creative practice can be used strategically (e.g. economically or commercially) by the entertainment industries, this thesis also aims to identify the fusion of the creative and industrial fields of entertainment production; I will determine their mutual influences. Studies by Jenkins, among others, indicate that the content of transmedia storytelling artefacts is affected by factors both economically and creatively motivated. In an attempt to trace the implications on the aesthetic and narrative content, a differentiation between these factors is crucial. Both the creative and commercial facets of transmedia storytelling tactics will thus be examined thoroughly. The analysis of the abovementioned elements should further the thesis’ general aim to devise an overview of how industrial strategies to produce transmedia storytelling artefacts influence the aesthetic and narrative content thereof.

The explication of the term *transmedia storytelling* will rely on former research outcomes (e.g. studies by Jenkins and Johnson) and incorporates several scholars’ efforts for a complete definition. To understand the fusion of creative and industrial practices in contemporary entertainment production, an historical overview of the entertainment industry will be provided. It will explore and describe the adaptations made to creative and industrial tactics, and it will assess the respective implications for the artefacts’ aesthetic and narrative content. Narratively, technologically, and industrially motivated developments will be analyzed as consequences of such alterations by way of classification. This analysis will be based on several studies concerning narrative (e.g. Mittell) and industrial (e.g. Johnson, Elberse) developments that are applicable to the practices of transmedia storytelling. I will abridge the findings of these studies and elaborate on the elements that are especially applicable to my own research. Moreover, using these findings in terms of transmedia storytelling practices increases their significance in the broader spectrum of media studies. I also trace more general developments in the fields of marketing and technology and connect them to the practices of transmedia storytelling. These findings are the result of my own observations in the field of (new) media, as I felt many of these could be linked to the practices of transmedia storytelling in significant ways. I support my own findings with studies concerning these developments (e.g. Morie, Vagionis and Loumioti) in order to place them in the larger discourse of (new) media studies and explicate them in terms of transmedia storytelling practices. The amalgamation of my own findings and those of
former studies leads to new conclusions in terms of the links between the different fields at discussion in this thesis.

Based on the investigation of the studies mentioned above (among others) and my own observations, I suppose the creative and industrial effects on transmedia storytelling artefacts are inextricably linked to each other and are mutually influential. Moreover, I assume the latter effects are more likely to negatively influence the aesthetic and narrative elements of transmedia storytelling artefacts, as they are chiefly economically motivated. They may impede creative processes and thus cause tensions throughout the entire production process. However, these are only premature assumptions based on readings and self-made observations. Throughout this thesis I will adjust these assumptions during the explication of the studies I used and their connection to each other, starting in the next chapter. This means also I do not have an outspoken hypothesis from which I start my research, nor are my research questions based on formerly developed assumptions.

This research aims to result in a structured overview of the adaptations that creative and industrial tactics have brought to the aesthetic and narrative elements of entertainment products developed by transmedia storytelling techniques. The analysis of these intertwined fields, their intricate network of relations, and consequential effects on aesthetic and narrative elements can serve as an inventory to explain the adapted formats of current entertainment products. This inventory then is based on the analysis of abovementioned studies that describe practices relating to transmedia storytelling and its artefacts. Such an explication is relevant to show how several disciplines with different motivations can jointly realize new and innovative creative products in mutually beneficial ways. Moreover, the objective is to clarify the phenomena that are grouped together under the label *transmedia storytelling*, or comparable labels, with this inventory. Such a clarification is relevant because there are a large variety of studies from very different disciplinary fields (e.g. film and media studies, marketing studies) dealing with factors that can be connected to transmedia storytelling practices. The findings resulting from analyses of such studies and a connection thereof enable the construction of a valuable framework of the factors working in the practices of transmedia storytelling and their associated fields. The studies that form the basis for this inventory are those of Henry Jenkins (mainly his findings as presented in his *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006a) and on his blog
Confessions of an AcaFan), Derek Johnson (2013), and Anita Elberse (2014). These studies have been devised in the field of media studies, and partly within the field of marketing studies. The studies of Henry Jenkins are especially relevant for the phenomena grouped under the label transmedia storytelling from a creative perspective and are therefore very valuable for this thesis’ research. They are also meaningful for their many allusions to other studies in the media field dealing with similar practices. Johnson’s Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries (2013) is much more focused on the industrial tactics of the entertainment industry and offers an extremely thorough understanding of the operations of entertainment industries dealing with transmedia storytelling practices. Elberse’s account of blockbuster strategies, in Blockbusters: Hit-Making, Risk-Taking, and the Business of Entertainment (2014), provides valuable insights of marketing tactics as used in the entertainment branch. Especially her thorough explication of marketing feature films is helpful for the scope of this thesis, though she gives very intelligible accounts of other entertainment spheres as well. Jason Mittell’s Narrative Complexity in Contemporary Television (2006) partly instigated me to write about the subject of transmedia storytelling in the first place. It very lucidly explains narratological developments, which I feel have influenced most of our contemporary media narratives. The abovementioned studies form the basis of my research and the combining of several of their findings, which can be placed within the disciplines of film, media, and marketing, will be helpful in the elucidation of transmedia storytelling practices and artefacts.

The first chapter of this thesis serves to give an extensive explanation of the term transmedia storytelling to provide the readers with a detailed understanding thereof. Then in the second chapter, I will give a thorough understanding of the strategies of the industry with respect to transmedia storytelling. It starts with an historical overview in order to trace the adaptations over time, and eventually forms the basis for my own connections between the industry and the content of transmedia storytelling artefacts. The third and last, yet expansive, chapter connects my findings from the industrial realm of transmedia storytelling to my findings that relate to the content of the artefacts resulting from such practices. As mentioned before I will give special attention to filmic expressions of transmedia storytelling, but will not discard other artefacts and products in spite of this focus.
Chapter 1 – Transmedia Storytelling: An Intertextual Definition

The term *transmedia storytelling* has been widely used in various discourses since its conception in the early 2000s. Scholars and academics often use it in relation to the audiovisual and (new) media or digital culture realms of the contemporary media environment, yet the term itself does not seem to be commonly known or used among actual users of such media (most peers with whom I discussed the subject adopted a rather clueless expression at my mention of the term). However, a brief explanation of its uses and some exemplary cases usually elicited enthusiastic nods and exclamations of recognition, which shows the set of phenomena is deeply integrated into the everyday uses of our contemporary media landscape. The discrepancy between the obvious presence of transmedia storytelling and its less apparent defining framework can be perceived as a result of the incongruous theoretical background it comprises. Ever since Henry Jenkins coined the term *transmedia storytelling* for the underlying phenomena, its infinite reiteration by scholars and academics in various discourses has led to serious cerebral confusion. As each interpretation seems to deviate from the others, a universally accepted definition seems to be unattainable. Starting with an overview of the genesis of transmedia storytelling as a set of phenomena (which took place prior to Jenkins’ formulation of the term itself), this chapter will provide the notion’s most commonly used definitions, applications, and their critiques, so as to elucidate the preeminent position this sometimes highly contested notion holds in the contemporary media landscape.

In his *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006a), Henry Jenkins uses the term *transmedia storytelling* in relation to the Wachowski brothers’ film *The Matrix* (1999). According to Jenkins this was the first phenomenon that can be furnished with this term, as it was the first film franchise that demanded of its consumers to do their proper homework in order to “truly appreciate what [they] are watching (Jenkins, 2006a: 94).” The idea of having to put in a certain amount of effort as consumer to fully appreciate the entertainment experience might just be the crux of transmedia storytelling, and in that case *The Matrix* is exemplary. As Jenkins explicates, prerelease advertising prompted future consumers to use the Internet to familiarize themselves with the advent of the franchise. After the film’s release, several clues indicate the existence of backstories that can only be accessed via games, DVDs, or
downloadable animations – i.e. alternative platforms. Basically, what seems to characterize the set of phenomena transmedia storytelling is the factor of having to ‘work’ in order to ‘get’ the story that is being told – across various platforms indeed. One has to divide his or her time, attention, and often money over a variety of platforms to grasp the told story, which is ingeniously cut into pieces and permeated by crafty gaps encouraging the hunt for more, in its entirety. This additional ‘labor’ that, according to Jenkins, positively correlates to the entertainment experience of transmedia storytelling expressions, is crucial for the set of phenomena, especially in its social relations and its connection to the industries.

1.1 Premature Interpretations

Before turning to the term’s intricate network of connections with other fields such as the entertainment industries and the social realm, I deem it necessary to explicate the term an sich. I realize the difficulty of such an attempt for a term as substantial and widely discussed as transmedia storytelling, but will venture to do so regardless. Although Henry Jenkins seems to have been the first to coin the term transmedia storytelling in his 2003 MIT Technology Review publication Transmedia Storytelling, it rather obviously incorporates two separate terms, namely ‘transmedia’ and ‘storytelling,’ that I would like to further explain before uniting them under the same label. Film scholar Marsha Kinder introduced the term transmedia in her book Playing With Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games (1991), where she inaugurates the term when discussing cinema’s contemporary (then ‘postmodern’) condition. Like a convergent media scholar avant la lettre, Kinder (1991: 1) considered the cinema a medium that had become part of, though was not (yet) superseded by, “an ever-expanding supersystem of entertainment, one marked by transmedia intertextuality.” Some of the elements in her description of this supersystem have an almost uncanny likeness with characteristics of our current media landscape, such as a high level of interactivity with and myriad interrelated connections among media. Kinder (1991: 2) takes intertextuality as the principal feature of her supersystem, and argues “any individual text [that is] part of a larger cultural discourse [...] must be read in relationship to other texts and their diverse textual strategies and ideological assumptions.” Hence, in a transmedia context, intertextuality does not merely refer to currently omnipresent references to other expressions of popular culture within
cultural texts, but to “the open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated (Kinder, 1991: 2).” Intertextuality does not only point to the overdetermined relationships between different media utterances, but rather refers to the manner in which cultural texts allow for different interpretations by its users. As they can freely roam the media landscape, they continually adjust their consumption to their personal tastes and likings. Although the myriad cultural texts all relate to each other and can be connected in various ways, it is the consumer who decides in which way(s) this occurs and what meanings are assigned to these relationships. In the meantime, consumer behavior vis-à-vis entertainment products has not changed much since Kinder’s analysis, as personalized consumption is paramount for contemporary consumer practices.

Kinder (1991) explains such intertextuality was employed as a strategy by media companies to encourage more and varied consumption already in the 1930s and 1940s, and similar means remain applicable to current industry practices related to transmedia storytelling. Intertextuality then functions as a system of constant reminders for customers. Their consumption practices are persistently influenced by the multitude of products and expressions offered, which relate to previous purchases or advertisements and other media expressions. Kinder mainly discusses intertextual relations among television, films, and toys, and exemplifies this phenomenon with “Saturday morning American network television” when TV shows, commercials and (off-screen) toys are simultaneously consumed while referring to one another constantly (Kinder, 1991: 40). This is what she calls transmedia intertextuality. As such, Kinder is the first to use the term transmedia, now a widely used - and sometimes misused - term within media discourses. In her book Kinder (1991) uses the term to indicate the appropriation of popular narratives to expressions across multiple platforms that, she argues, stems from a remarkable upsurge in consumerism during the booming economy of the 1980s. Formerly single-platform narratives, usually originating from comic novels, films, or television shows, were now being expanded and expressed across multiple platforms; mainly in an attempt to maximize industry profits through widespread commodification of those narratives. Transmedia practices are highly determined by consumerism according to Kinder, who sees the proliferation of popular narratives across different media as expressed in the aforementioned transmedia suprersystems. These systems
“position consumers as powerful players while disavowing commercial manipulation,” and thus endow consumers with an active, participatory role (Kinder, 1991: 119-120). Although these supersystems allegedly do not manipulate consumers by merely offering them a wide selection of products to choose from, I argue such manipulation is inherent to their intertextual nature. By creating such widespread visibility, consumers are kindly forced to notice the availability of an ever-expanding product array. Prior investments are then easily followed by additional consumption to remain familiar with the intellectual property in question. As the title of her work suggests, Kinder considers the transmedia trend to be a struggle over power led by entertainment industries that employ consumers worldwide to amplify an already all-pervasive mass reproduction of cultural products.

I contend Kinder’s definition of the term transmedia functions inaccurately within the current media landscape and for the term transmedia storytelling in particular. Instead I suggest the appropriate term for her description is cross-media rather than transmedia. These terms are often thought to be interchangeable and though they are to a large extent similar, they differ in a way crucial to the term transmedia storytelling. Both terms involve multiple platforms across which similar content is spread, and they both presuppose forms of interaction with the audience. Yet transmedia implies a different type of coherence between the different expressions. Cross-media experiences occur across various platforms but deliver practically the same content with every expression. For example, a film or series may be watched on television, on a DVD, or be streamed online, but the plot, characters, and film style remain the same. Moreover, the image of a character as used in the original expression (e.g. a graphic novel) can be copied across products such as action figures or unrelated commodity goods. Cross-media dispersion thus involves homogeneous content copied across differentiating platforms, whereas transmedia dispersion involves changing, albeit correlated, content. The platforms are thus undeniably connected to each other through their content, which is visually and/or narratively related.

Apart from her early interpretation of the term ‘transmedia,’ Kinder (1991) also offers a premature understanding of the term ‘storytelling’ in her reference to intertextuality across narrative media, though primarily within the realm of television and consumers’ (in this case children’s) interactive use of media. Kinder (1991: 2) defines narrative as a means to structure “events within a pattern of space, time, and
causality” and argues it results in a context that can be individually interpreted. More specifically, she addresses the notion ‘storytelling’ by alluding to children's ability to function as an actor within such narratives, as spectators as well as performers. Expanding this notion for a broader audience including adult consumers, Kinder can be said to have laid the foundation for a definition of the term 'storytelling' that positions consumers within a narrative that delineates a storyworld. As Kinder (1991: 7) positions children in a “dual player/spectator position,” I suggest adult consumers, too, are actively involved with the narratives they consume. They actively (though often unconsciously) deal with the narrative elements presented to them through cognitive processes. Hence, people adjust their perception of the entire narrative with each new narrative element they consume. These adjustments are very subjective and can be seen as personal ‘story-making.’ As Kinder failed to designate abovementioned process as ‘storytelling’ and maintains a different definition of the term ‘transmedia,’ the two terms as explicated in her work cannot be joined together in a workable definition for the scope of this thesis.

1.2 The Genesis of Transmedia Storytelling

Jenkins does define and combine the two terms in a feasible way, and most scholars operating in the field since then have recapitulated his explanation of transmedia storytelling. In 2003, the rapid increase of the movement of content across media prompted Jenkins to reassess the conditions of our current media landscape, in which he deems collaboration between media companies pivotal. It became increasingly apparent that joining forces greatly benefits all parties’ economic concerns. Firstly, it lowers production costs “by sharing assets across media,” and eventually it yields more revenue by encouraging purchases by consumers who want to follow narratives that unfold across multiple platforms (Jenkins, 2003). Jenkins argued consumers started to crave a more sophisticated form of storytelling and desired new and more profound insights into the characters and fictional worlds, instead of mere superficial duplicates of a narrative created by mass reproduction (i.e. cross-media production). Interestingly, he almost instantly connects a primarily creative function of media (i.e. storytelling) to the logics of the entertainment industries and as such implies the two are inseparable. This may be true in our current media landscape, which is indeed dominated by industrial and profit-minded strategies. However, in several of Jenkins’ accounts on his blog
Confessions of an Aca-Fan, he singles out storytelling as a starting point for his explication of the label transmedia storytelling, and studies it from a narratological, or, if you will, artistic perspective. Jenkins avows the inspiration for his pioneering termination originated in Kinder’s conception of transmedia, or what should be called, as I suggested, cross-media. He credits her for working out the abovementioned transmedia intertextuality on which his conception of the term seems to be founded, yet clearly distinguishes between the two. Indeed, for Jenkins, intertextuality can exist within a single medium and is thus not an inherently transmedial concept. It is important here to note that for Jenkins, as a scholar, there is no limit to the amount of media platforms involved in his understanding of the term transmedia. Rather, any definition of this term that puts a restraint on the amount of possibly involved media is stifled according to him. His academic comprehension of the notion transmedia is thus fairly abstract, in the sense that the amount of networked media involved is infinite (with indefinite optional connections between them) and so allows for endless possible expressions within our media landscape.

Whereas Kinder refers to (transmedial) intertextuality as the mere referential relationships between media texts and personal interpretations thereof, Jenkins adds the concept of storytelling to his understanding of the term. As such, he expands the somewhat superficial relations between texts Kinder speaks of, for example consisting of mentioning each other’s existence (within the same or across different media) or duplications of the same text in different forms. Jenkins’ extended understanding of intertextuality incorporates the creation of new meaning, as emerging through the texts’ interrelations. Thus, instead of exact copies of already existing texts within the same or across different media, he alludes to re-appearances of texts that actually add something new to the network of interrelated texts (Jenkins, 2011). Within a single medium, the same event may be retold from different characters’ perspectives, providing the consumer with new insights (Jenkins calls this radical intertextuality). Alternatively, consumers might receive new information of a single storyline across different media, through the unfolding of a backstory or the introduction of alternative characters. This explanation of intertextuality, originated with Kinder and expanded by Jenkins, seems to culminate in the latter’s definition of transmedia storytelling. He refers to his as “the systematic unfolding of elements of a storyworld across multiple media platforms, with
each platform making a unique and original contribution to the experience as a whole (Jenkins, 2013).

Crucial to the term transmedia storytelling, then, is a level of ‘additive comprehension’ for Jenkins. This feature distinguishes transmedia storytelling from narratives that are dispersed cross-medially, and ensures consumers’ knowledge expansion through each text. It relates to Jenkins’ understanding of intertextuality in the sense that each text is connected with one or more others, as well as adds new information about the narrative as a whole. Jenkins thus emphasizes the act of continually expansive storytelling, whereas earlier scholars such as Kinder focused on the mere cross-media dispersion of the same, confined narrative when talking about transmedia practices. For the former, storytelling should be seen as a process that stimulates more active participation in its consumers than just listening to or reading a story. Consumers of the narrative are supposed to have a natural inclination of wanting to obtain every bit of knowledge there is, and as such invest in the narrative, albeit in a playful manner. Moreover, this investment incorporates a certain level of personal interpretation of new information, and application thereof to the already obtained knowledge. Storytelling may thus be described as a personal process of story-making, or, as Jenkins and other scholars put it, worldbuilding.

Storytelling, as defined by Jenkins (2007), is a process that creates a singular, unified narrative (or ‘entertainment experience’, as he maintains in his later understandings of the term), which is determined by performative actions that demand consumer investment. The transmedial nature of the term is pivotal for its narrative dispersion and story-creation, because it allows for intricate fictional worlds with multiple storylines and subplots. The narrative is dispersed across different media platforms where “each medium does what it does best—so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play (Jenkins, 2003).” Each additional entry is thus self-contained enough to be consumed independently, yet still adds to a unified, central narrative to which it makes a distinct and valuable contribution for those who follow the entire narrative. Hence, from a commercial perspective, expanded consumption of a single intellectual property is stimulated.

Whereas essentially all stories can become cross-media stories, not every story is fit to become a transmedia narrative. This is due to the required level of complexity and
potential for diverse expansions. Jenkins (2011) thus adds the notion ‘modality’ to a story's obligatory features in order to become a rightful transmedia story, and alludes to the different types of representation across the involved media. A story and its different features should not solely be dispersed across different media in the same form, but should allow for different appearances. This may refer to a different ‘look’ of the same character across different media (e.g. 2D versus 3D, differences determined by each medium’s specific qualities) or to different perspectives of the same narrative. Together with a story's intertextual nature and additive comprehension, multimodality ensures a story's chance of becoming transmedia and, moreover, lays the foundation for a possibly highly exploitable and profitable media franchise. Hence, the worlds created by transmedia storytelling often know several distinguishable styles apart from their already varying narrative features. Worldbuilding thus becomes an important notion, and the narratives involved in the process should be seen as “complex fictional worlds, which can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories” rather than narratives based on “individual characters or specific plots (Jenkins, 2007).” The notion demonstrates the participatory nature of transmedia narratives with their consumers, since the storytelling process presupposes an active role for its consumers. Their performative action emanates from their ability (and inherent desire) to construct a personal understanding of the story they are building with the narrative's given elements. They are aided in this process by the creative entertainment industries that construct fully furnished universes containing multiple storylines, which can be expanded almost infinitely.

1.3 Transmedia Storytelling Characteristics and Principles: Towards a Definition

Evidently, this substantial open-endedness is also a good way to ensure consumer interest in (and therefore consumption of) transmedia narratives. It thus serves a creative as well as a commercial purpose. This in-depth interest and subsequent consumption are stimulated by the narrative designers’ purposeful creation of “gaps or excesses in the unfolding of the story,” which are thereafter covered within additional narratives on other platforms (Jenkins, 2007). The gaps encourage consumer desires to figure out every fragment of the narrative to its fullest and connect them in every way possible. This wish to become an omniscient ‘member’ of the narrative urges
consumers to explore the storyworld in its entirety and yearn to consume every extension of the narrative, such as backstories, in-depth character developments, and spin-offs. Jenkins argues consumers of transmedia narratives should be seen as “hunters and gatherers moving back across the various narratives trying to stitch together a coherent picture from the dispersed information (Jenkins, 2007).” Since the various extended narratives can be consumed separately from each other and from the original narrative, consumers are enabled to personalize their experience of the universe and so build their own storyworld. As such, some consumers may create a more elaborate world from the original narrative than others, depending on the extent to which they are willing to invest in it (both time- and money-wise). Moreover, personal interpretations of different segments of content allow each consumer their own transmedia story or entertainment experience. Thus the performative aspect of transmedia storytelling indicates something resembling a co-operation between creators and consumers. They simultaneously construct these storyworlds, of which the creators build the foundations upon which the consumers build their personalized versions. This is where the notion of fandom (or ‘forensic fandom’ as Jason Mittell (2009) has dubbed consumers’ deep engagement with a narrative) manifests itself. Consumers increasingly share their personal experiences and findings of the narrative with the rest of its fanbase, thus contributing to what Pierre Levy called a narrative’s 'collective intelligence.' This feature supplies transmedia storytelling with a highly visible social context, which the creative entertainment industries gladly deploy in their profit-oriented creation and expansion of (already existing) transmedia narratives. Though not the focal point of this thesis, the social aspect will certainly be touched upon later, for it relates to the industrial logics of transmedia storytelling on the level of its production as well as its marketing strategies.

There is thus a certain level of seriality involved in the narratives at issue, which allows them to be dispersed across media in ways that consumers have become used to. Transmedia narratives are mostly characterized by an amalgamation of both the serial and episodic nature we recognize in many television series of the past decade, a combination of means to storytelling increasingly employed by television itself. Transmedia narratives can undoubtedly be considered complex narratives, due to their intricate interrelations and vast dimensions. Jason Mittell (2006: 32) argues, “At its most basic level, narrative complexity is a redefinition of episodic forms under the influence of serial narration – not necessarily a complete merger of episodic and serial forms but a
shifting balance." This balance then presupposes certain autonomy for each expression of the transmedia narrative, which also maintains one or more story arcs that serve as continuously evolving story elements across it. The transmedia storytelling structure can thus be seen as having a larger, general plot that functions as an umbrella for all autonomous expressions that can be consumed separately (i.e. as episodes) or in combination with each other (i.e. as chapters of a whole). This corresponds with Jenkins’ (2006: 95-96) understanding of the term, as he alludes to its episodic and serial structure when arguing that “each text [makes] a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole,” and that each text “needs to be self-contained so you don’t need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa.”

By way of summarizing Jenkins’ (2009ab) understanding of transmedia storytelling, which is still the mostly used one by media scholars, I will quickly review the seven core principles he devised as the fundamental components for this set of phenomena. ‘Spreadability versus drillability’ alludes to the narrative’s respective required ability to be dispersed across media (i.e. horizontal interaction) and its ability to be explored deeply by its consumers (i.e. vertical interaction) in order to fit the label of a transmedia narrative. Moreover, while pertaining to the aforementioned principle ‘spreadability,’ a narrative also needs to be sufficiently coherent in order to be plausible for its consumers. Jenkins (2009a) dubs this principle ‘continuity versus multiplicity’ for the narrative should still be understandable (thus continuous) across the multiple narratives via which it is dispersed. His next principle regards the narrative’s ability to captivate consumers in the fictional world, yet to be deployed in their everyday life through consumption and/or evaluative practices. This principle, dubbed ‘immersion versus extractability’ by Jenkins (2009b), can thus be said to function as a bridge between the narrative as a creative, aesthetic expression for the consumers’ entertainment, and as a cultural product used by the industries for profit maximization and is thus of great importance for the scope of this thesis. His next principle is the previously mentioned ‘worldbuilding’ that serves as the industry’s response to consumers’ encyclopedic desire to understand as much as they can of the presented narrative, through the myriad expressions across multiple platforms (Jenkins, 2009b). The combination of this principle with the notion of extractability allows for the extensive and profit-generating expansion of transmedia narratives in consumers’ real lives, as will be explicated further in this thesis. As previously explained, Jenkins’
fifth principle ‘seriality’ is crucial for the dispersion of the narrative and encouragement of consumption thereof, though transmedia narratives generally do not have a purely serial structure but are also characterized by episodic and other nonlinear structures. The sixth ‘subjectivity’ principle refers to the different perspectives consumers of transmedia narratives are presented with, thus enabling them to explore various dimensions of the fictional world in different ways (Jenkins, 2009b). This principle encourages consumers to remain aware of the ‘author’ of the specific part of the story they consume, yet I presume the myriad expressions and sometimes excessively concealed marketing practices often confuse (and sometimes even mislead) consumers. Such consequences for the narrative and visual style will be further elaborated upon later in this thesis. Jenkins’ (2009b) last principle is that of ‘performance’ and addresses the aforementioned active encouragement of consumer interaction by and with transmedia narratives. This ensures prolonged consumption of the narrative and thus stimulates the industry’s goal of profit maximization. Consumer participation can originate within consumers themselves, or be the result of transmedia narrative creators’ so-called ‘invitational strategies (Jenkins, 2009b).’ Jenkins discerns two types of such strategies’ employed by the creators of transmedia narratives, namely implicit and explicit. The former type stems from elements within a narrative that are considered ‘real’ within the fictional world the narrative embodies, such as institutions characters are involved with or brands they use, that do not exist in reality. Such features may instigate devoted consumers to perform background checks on them, and as such they form additional means for the entertainment industries to devise backstories and ancillary information or product outlets. However, increasingly explicit types of invitational strategies for consumer participation surface, as the entertainment industries are eager to incorporate consumer participation in their profit-making activities to ensure profit maximization. Such strategies may include requests to vote, scriptwriting contests or platforms launched by the industries where consumers can interact with each other and/or with the creators of the narrative themselves (Jenkins, 2008). The specific relation between consumers’ performative action and the entertainment industries will be further elaborated upon later in this thesis, as on the consequences this relation has for the aesthetic and narrative elements of transmedia storytelling artefacts. This last principle contradicts Jenkins’ original definition of transmedia storytelling as “a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed
systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience (Jenkins, 2007).” The grassroots organization of (for the industries often essential) participatory cultures surrounding transmedia storytelling practices often favor “diversity over coherence (Johnson, 2009a).” By continually expanding storyworlds and associated product lines in attempts to reach profit maximization, industries may complicate a narrative at the expense of the audience's comprehension. Supposedly this has severe consequences for both the narrative and visual style of the franchise’s products.

**Conclusions**

This chapter sought to offer a lucid and complete understanding of the notion *transmedia storytelling*, using several scholars’ efforts to define it and different applications of its characteristics. While conducting my research for this chapter, one of my main findings was the importance of intertextuality as one of the notion's founding characteristics. This intertextuality leads to a high level of open-endedness for the term *transmedia storytelling*, which has in turn caused an inability to define it in universally agreed upon and all-encompassing terms. As delineated in the introduction of this thesis, I choose to focus on an industrial approach to transmedia storytelling strategies and the implications these have for their artefacts’ aesthetic and narrative content, concentrating on films in particular. The definition of the notion that I maintain based upon my findings in this chapter emphasizes the active role of the consumer as individual storyworld builder or decoder. I found that the creative and commercial counterparts of transmedia storytelling practices are inseparable. For this reason I contend Jenkins’ principle of ‘immersion versus extractability’ is paramount, as it is both creatively stimulating and commercially exploitable. I find that by stressing the importance of this principle, the industrial implications for transmedia storytelling can be more easily and lucidly incorporated. In terms of the inventory this research aims for, these findings are crucial as they underline the importance of the commercial counterpart of transmedia storytelling, and offer an entry point to their connection (i.e. the ‘immersion versus extractability’ principle). In order to research these implications, a thorough understanding of the industrial tactics must be ensured, and this will be explicated in the next chapter.
Chapter 2 – The Entertainment Industry’s Commercial Strategies

As shown in the previous chapter, the term *transmedia storytelling* labels a new / innovative creative practice and can impossibly be discussed without referring to the entertainment industries. Moreover, some accounts of transmedia storytelling parallel the set of phenomena to an industrial tactics aimed at corporate synergy that has become predominant in our current media landscape.¹ Today, transmedia storytelling seems to be characterized by a blurred boundary between its function as a creative or artistic outlet to tell stories, and its function as an industrial strategy to attain profit maximization. This chapter provides an explication of the relation between transmedia storytelling and the entertainment industries in order to show the term’s inseparable alliance with the industrial logics in our media landscape. One of Jenkins’ core features of transmedia storytelling is the previously mentioned ‘immersion versus extractability’ principle, which refers to the requirement for a narrative to captivate its consumers in the storyworld, as well as to have the ability to be deployed in consumers’ everyday lives through consumption and/or evaluative practices (e.g. online discussions). I argue this feature best manifests the bridged relation between the functions of transmedia storytelling as both a creatively and economically driven practice, designed respectively to benefit entertainment and economic values.

Once the creators of a transmedia narrative have succeeded in designing a storyworld that absorbs its audience, their next aim is to maintain this audience’s loyalty to the storyworld. The best and most profitable way to do so is to instill the presence of said storyworld into the audience members’ personal lives. Through the employment of industrial strategies that go well with the creative tactics of transmedia storytelling, these members often become faithful consumers of the storyworld products. Their role as devoted fans-turned-consumers and subsequent willingness to invest in the storyworld financially as well, renders them crucial participants (stakeholders, if you will) in the entertainment industry’s networks. Fans’ loyalty to and immersion in such transmedia narratives result in continual investments, of which the financial type is paramount for the entertainment industries because it constructs the particular

storyworld chance to become a successful and an enduring source of revenue. In other words, proper maintenance of a transmedia narrative's fanbase helps to ensure its consumers’ ongoing capital investment in the transmedia franchise, which in turn (hopefully) leads to profit maximization. Although the combination of transmedia storytelling as an aesthetic and narrative strategy for cultural production with the economic term ‘franchising’ might seem irreconcilable, Derek Johnson’s (2013) account of this coupling provides valuable insights into the overdetermined character of their relation. Before I turn to Johnson’s demonstration of the culture industries’ adaptation of the logics of franchising, which originated in business culture discourses during the 1950s, I will briefly revisit Hollywood’s history as a profit-focused, commercial enterprise. Whereas Hollywood originally referred to film businesses, and although many still associate the term with the film industry alone, it is an industry with a highly transmedial nature and has worked its way into various entertainment industries. Such developments have surely resulted in new artistic conventions, yet were rarely instigated for such reasons because they were solely economically motivated. I therefore want to avoid any understanding of Hollywood as a chiefly artistic undertaking, a perception some people still retain, as it has employed economically oriented strategies from the onset. Thus, while recounting Hollywood’s history from an industrial perspective I will explicate some of its most important profit-oriented strategies that precede the logics of media franchising, before trying to untangle the intricate operations of this latter industrial tactics.

2.1 Hollywood’s Commercial Creative Practices: The Golden Ages

Already during the classical studio system, often referred to as Hollywood’s Golden Age, Hollywood’s commercial aspirations were paramount. From the 1920s until the 1960s, eight vertically integrated movie studios dominated Hollywood film practices. There was a division between the Big Five as major players (i.e. the Majors; MGM, Warner Brothers, 20th Century Fox, Paramount Pictures, and RKO) and the Little Three as smaller, less influential players (i.e. the Minors; Universal, Columbia, and United Artists). The former group made A-films, whereas the latter group “supplied the extra films needed [to secure profits] and catered to smaller theaters that did not belong to the Majors (Thompson and Bordwell, 2010: 200).” The Minors should however not be confused with the Independents, who formed yet another group that supplied the
market with prestige films or other (inexpensive) B-films to fill up exhibition spaces left open by the Majors and Minors. The Big Five were truly vertically integrated, which means they controlled films’ entire production processes, owned one or more theater chains, and controlled international distribution of their products. The products the Big Five created were distributed solely to the theaters (or theater chains) they jointly owned, and as such an oligopoly had emerged. Of the Little Three, Universal and Columbia were producer-distributors, and “United Artists was only a distributor for independent producers (Conant, 1981: 80).”\(^2\) The Little Three’s lack of theater chains to exhibit their produced and/or distributed films caused them to miss out on the box office revenues that constituted the bulk of films’ total profits. Nevertheless this system continued to prevail well into the 1940s, and was characterized by exclusionary practices that disadvantaged many independent companies. Those excluded from the studio system eventually started to file lawsuits against the Big Five and the Little Three. A longstanding case of the U.S. Department of Justice against the eight major companies had over time become federal and finally reached the Supreme Court in 1948. In this case, the well-known *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.*, or the *Paramount Antitrust Case*, it was decided that film studios (i.e. The Big Five) could no longer operate a vertically integrated system. They had to relieve themselves of the theater chains they owned, were prohibited to make block bookings (requiring exhibitors to buy strings of films without their consent of the actual content thereof) or employ blind bidding strategies (selling films to exhibitors without showing or even producing them beforehand). Earlier decrees had already prohibited parts of the practices that secured the eight companies’ oligopoly, such as fixed admission prices for (independent) theaters and franchising (Conant, 1981: 81). The term *franchising* was thus already linked to the film industry during the studio system, albeit in a different way than the currently perceivable media franchising. It involved licensing agreements for exhibition of the Majors’ products among each other and with some independent theater owners. As such, this franchising practice characterized the controlling attitude of the Majors that made sure the studios never actually sold their films to exhibitors, but merely granted them the right to show them. Said licenses also “fixed minimum admission prices which the exhibitors agreed to charge” at their theater (Leslie, 2011: 490). The Majors argued this practice was legal according to acts and statutes regarding copyright

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\(^2\) [http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3640&context=lcp](http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3640&context=lcp)
and patents, previously approved in different business realms. Such statutes stated that the owners (in this case the Majors) had exclusive rights to fix the prices for which the licensees (the, often independent, theater owners) could sell (exhibit) the patented product (the copyrighted films). Unfortunately the Majors’ argument was refuted and instead they were accused of conspiracy for fixing the prices for the exhibition of their films, with which they excluded others from competition. Moreover, these licensing contracts extended over long periods in which all films released by the studio had to be exhibited by the licensee. The Supreme Court deemed this fixed-pricing unfair trade (as it was disadvantageous to competitors) and, together with practices such as block-booking and blind-bidding, accused the Majors of “unlawful restraints of trade (The Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers, 2005).” The subsequent Supreme Court verdict ruling in favor of the government had severe consequences for the configuration of the Hollywood industry. Because the studios lost control over exhibition they could no longer guarantee profits, which made banks hesitant to finance their projects. This resulted in a declining supply of new projects (hence, films) as well as changed strategies in an attempt to remedy this.

2.2 Post-Paramount Decree: Changing Attitudes in the Hollywood Industry

The major studios had to be much more selective in the films they produced, as they could no longer secure profits by selling strings of films to exhibitors. Also, with the constant interference of the Majors out of the way, independent film studios increasingly released films and/or opened theaters to show both domestic and foreign independent, even art-house films. Competition thus grew considerably, forcing Hollywood to find new ways to ensure profit maximization. Hollywood film studios increasingly started to spend bigger budgets on fewer films, and produced these on a project-by-project basis. This new production strategy involved temporarily assembled crews of directors and stars working on one project at a time; the short-term contracts were dissolved immediately after film production was fulfilled (Cybercollege, 2013). Possibly the biggest change was the fact that the Big Five decided to leave film production (and accompanying financial risks) almost entirely to smaller, dissociated companies. They only produced a few films themselves, though still distributed all features that resulted from their various projects as this proved to be “the most powerful and lucrative wing of
the industry (Thompson and Bordwell, 2010: 300). Focus thus shifted from production practices to distribution practices, leading to fewer releases actually produced by the studio owning their rights. This new focus still ensured the control of the market for the Majors and Minors, in terms of revenue streams.

During the post-war decades the entire American film industry suffered, mainly because cinemas encountered declining attendances and studios thus fell short of this critical revenue chain. Thompson and Bordwell (2010) recount this diminishment and argue it was not only related to changes in the entertainment industry itself. Apart from fewer releases of films and a decreased availability of films in certain theaters or theater chains, it had wider socio-economic grounds. An important reason for the declining cinema attendance was the expanding suburbanization of American society, as families moved away from the cities where most cinemas were based. Moreover, this suburbanization fueled the popularity of new forms of entertainment that would bring even greater changes to the film industry and its products’ form and style: television and the Video Home System (VHS). Threatened by television’s emergence at first, Hollywood soon developed ways to capitalize on its supposed rival and started creating content for television networks. This diversification was Hollywood’s first step towards a transmedial nature, of which its symbiosis with television would remain paramount. Especially the introduction of cable and satellite television intensified bonds between the two entertainment formats, as studios and networks made mutually beneficial business agreements for both film production and television broadcast, and reciprocated content. Thus, the videocassette and VHS soon proved to be beneficial instead of detrimental to Hollywood’s revenue streams.

Because these developments occurred simultaneously with changes in audience taste, the entertainment industry adjusted its industrial configuration to answer new demands. The multiplication of choice in entertainment products for the audience was characterized by an enormous growth in differentiated products and genres. As a consequent the audience fragmented into many niche groups, each with their own tastes, preferences, and (later on) classics. The entertainment industry’s adjustments in order to maximize profits from the emergent new technologies and to answer the audiences’ needs meant an increased focus on diversification. The changed focus led to the innovation of production ideas already experimented with in the 1980s by Walt Disney’s cross-medially dispersed commercial storyworlds for children, as shown by
Kinder (1991). The development towards producing ‘convergent’ media, resulting in “families of products with related content that are distributed in various versions and formats across platforms and channels,” eventually led to immense changes in the industrial make-up of the entertainment industry (Davis, 2013: 176).

The diversification the Majors employed since the late 1960s and that changed their business ethics thus led to the Major studios’ consolidation into global media companies such as Disney and Time Warner. Studios that formerly concentrated on film production thus became a mere bundle of assets within large media conglomerates that aimed for corporate synergy. This term originated in business theory and refers to the merging of “several compatible business lines” or companies in order to bundle and thus maximize profits (Thomspson and Bordwell, 2010: 664). In the entertainment industries, Walt Disney was the first to experiment with this strategy, when he licensed myriad companies the right to use ‘his’ Mickey Mouse in order to increase the company’s visibility. These licensing agreements guaranteed increased visibility of Disney’s media, as references to its characters were displayed in various advertisements and products. As seen in Marsha Kinder’s (1991) work that discusses ‘intertextuality,’ Disney’s strategy turned out to be very profitable and formed an example for future media companies’ distribution and marketing strategies. For this reason, companies and multinationals that had little or nothing to do with the entertainment industry. Tim Dirks (Filmsite, n.d.) mentions Gulf+Western Industries, Inc., or aviation company Avco, had begun to acquire film studios during the 1960s in an attempt to maximize profits. This stream of take-overs continued well into the 1980s, when companies such as the Coca-Cola Company and media companies such as Time Inc. alike initiated mergers that resulted in multinational or global conglomerates. These were characterized by consolidated, top-down power. As Bordwell and Thompson (2010) note as well, from the early 1990s onwards, these mergers and acquisitions concerned mostly global, media-oriented conglomerates and increased focus on entertainment. Hollywood’s intellectual properties could now be exploited on various platforms so revenues could be yielded from each of these platforms with the prospect of leading to profit maximization. The new make-up of the film business as part of global media conglomerates caused the entertainment industries to devise new strategies to attain profit maximization.
2.3 Ways Towards Profit-Maximization: the Blockbuster Strategy

Starting in the 1970s, film studios increasingly developed what Thompson and Bordwell (2010: 487) call the ‘megapicture strategy’ and focused on a few high-budget films marketed to mass audiences. This new way of thinking, which will henceforth be referred to as the blockbuster strategy in light of its underlying work of reference, constituted a step further in the development towards the current industrial structure of our media landscape. Moreover, the aforementioned consolidation into media conglomerations that many film studios experienced offered them the lucrative opportunity to collect profit returns from various ancillary markets and through a variety of different (media) products based on the same property. However, not every film they produced suited this newfound business model, as only the big hits would gather enough popularity to be truly profitable in all markets. Hollywood’s first blockbusters, *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975) and *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977), had shown a film’s ancillary markets could be very profitable if it turned out to be a huge hit (Thompson and Bordwell, 483). These successes gave other film studios confidence in making outrageously high-risk bets in the early 1980s, in an attempt to produce a must-see event film that appealed to mass audiences and was able to maximize profits. In her book *Blockbusters: Hit-Making, Risk-Taking, and the Big Business of Entertainment* (2013) Anita Elberse describes this strategy and mentions film studio executives’ decisions to make “huge investments to acquire, develop, and market concepts with strong hit potential, and [...] bank on the sales of those to make up for the middling performance of their other content (Elberse, 2013: 3).” The bulk of studios’ budgets would thus be spent on a few big launches each year, leaving a small portion of the budget for what Elberse (2013) calls the ‘also rans,’ or minor projects with low expectations. Although they make profits that are not worth mentioning in comparison to the disproportionately big returns studios yield from their big bets, the small bets still need to be released for several reasons. Apart from an economically favorable function, allowing studios to spread fixed production costs, smaller bets also serve as important test cases. They are worth producing for they may supply producers with the next big hit or A-list actor that can be exploited further in different projects. Moreover, managing peripheral projects often boosts an entertainment company’s likability within the media landscape, because the loyalty given to such less-commercial projects is often understood as an indicator of unpretentiousness; a rare virtue in the entertainment
industry. This (supposedly) humble attitude may additionally instigate A-list talents to collaborate with these companies in future projects, whereby both reputations are mutually augmented. Furthermore, possible investors usually favor broad portfolios to see what type of projects they engage in. Small bets can thus indirectly raise the funds necessary for prospective big bets. Also, continuing loyalty to smaller-scale projects does not only engender respect from peers and lead to fruitful collaborations, but also allows media companies to maintain recurrent relations with gatekeepers\(^3\) in the entertainment industry. These may prove profitable in future negotiations with partners in ancillary business lines, and enhance the company’s position for critical agents that are involved in all kinds of commercial or promotional undertakings.

The bets are placed either before the actual production process has commenced, or at a very early stage within this process, and is thus very risky. What further complicates this betting strategy is the configuration of the mass audience at which the films are aimed, consisting of shifting demographics and characterized by fluctuating tastes. According to Elberse (2013) and Alan Horn, former president of the Warner Bros. studio and the first media executive to implement this high-stakes blockbuster strategy, most moviegoers see an average of five films each year in the cinema. This renders it a painstakingly difficult task to decide on which of the films released by the major studios (according to Elberse approximately 120 each year) to bet. Moreover, audiences have an immense power to make or break the success of the released films through grassroots marketing practices, such as real-life or online discussions. The way a film or other entertainment product is released is thus crucial for its subsequent success, and its launch and marketing campaign compose a significant part of the total production budget. Elberse discusses a variety of entertainment products in her book, but gives special attention to the film industry since this is where the blockbuster strategy originated, albeit applicable to other types of products as well.

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\(^3\) In art worlds, gatekeepers are those people that basically determine a product’s success. As critics, managers, or curators they are in control of products’ access to big markets and mass audiences. They get to assess creative output before its official (wide) release, which gives them the opportunity to valorize it and spread their judgment. Since gatekeepers are usually the most successful companies or individuals in the field, their opinion is highly anticipated and regarded by creative workers, as it can make or break their product. During Hollywood’s early years they consisted of the studio moguls that controlled production, distribution, and exhibition, but due to the emergence of global media conglomerates, product diversification, and new types of distribution (e.g. digital), the role of gatekeeper is increasingly democratized. Apart from professionals in the field, peers’ (online) opinions and amateur criticism constitute an important part of products’ success, and consumers are thus often seen as gatekeepers as well.
Whereas films produced by studios dissociated from major media companies are often released through 'limited' or 'grassroots' strategies, blockbusters produced by media companies are released through 'wide' or 'mainstream' strategies, with the goal to "immediately capture the attention of as large an audience as possible (Elberse, 2013: 64)." A limited release is the best option for a product launch when a company's budget does not allow for extravagant distribution and marketing campaigns. In the film industry these two go hand in hand, for a lot of theater chains refuse to exhibit films that are not marketed properly, or to their standards. The idea behind a limited release is to aim for the right audience for the product, as opposed to the masses. After a small-scale release (e.g. exhibition of a film in some major cities only), the estimation of the public's opinion determines the allocation of the rest of the budget. In case of a fairly popular response, the marketing and/or distribution budgets are expanded for a wider release. A limited release is thus contingent on many social factors. Only if the product, or film in this case, receives positive feedback from its initially targeted audience, it has a chance of becoming a hit with mass audiences, too. The success of such films grows only moderately because it takes time for social networks to spread the buzz, and for producers involved to adjust their distribution and marketing campaigns accordingly. A limited release can be favorable if money is an issue, as initial success or failure can be incorporated into the given commercial strategy in order to avoid unnecessary expenses. When money is not an issue (as is often the case with major media companies) and bets can be made early in the production process without fear of going bankrupt, a wide-release is much more profitable.

The type of films this thesis discusses especially benefit from this strategy, in which "a successful opening is seen as critical (Elberse, 2013: 64)." The bulk of a media company’s marketing budget is spent prior to a film’s release or opening weekend. The buzz created with such broad advertising campaigns paves the way for a wide distribution because exhibitors do not have to worry about disappointing box office sales. Again, the film audience's social influence is crucial, yet in ways different than for limited releases. Elberse (2013) argues “initial success breeds further success,” meaning that the audience attracted by the early buzz will automatically instigate higher popularity and subsequent audiences. Pervasive marketing strategies still prove to conjure mass audiences, because people in general prefer consumption of popular products. Widespread visibility guarantees mouth-to-mouth publicity that intensifies
the buzz created by the entertainment industry itself. Since large groups of consumers are susceptible to both these extensive marketing campaigns and the film's (alleged) popularity among peers, audiences are formed already in anticipation of a film's initial yet widespread release. Hence, the "first week of release is often also their biggest week in terms of revenues," as most people want to satisfy their curiosity as soon as possible (Elberse, 2013: 65). Wide-releases are thus more prone to attract mass-audiences during their opening weekend or period than limited releases, largely because of more general social conditions such as trend followings. Another important one that springs to mind is the FOMO or 'fear of missing out,' arguably a type of social anxiety from which the bulk of generation Y (those born between the early 1980s and early 2000s) suffer. This contemporary ailment is fed by the abundance of social media its sufferers devour, which in turn is beleaguered by the entertainment industry’s official marketing campaigns. People share their judgment, based on such campaigns before personally experiencing the products, with friends either verbally or through social media and as such often unconsciously bolster the entertainment industry's promotional cycle. Incited by social pressure these marketing campaigns flourish because of people's general crave to experience *le dernier cri* as one of the firsts. An entertainment product's initial success is thus crucial for its long-term success, since audiences susceptible to social pressure (i.e. typically those that consume entertainment goods aplenty) are easily won over after an inceptive buzz that will be remember for a long time.

The blockbuster strategy, characterized by high-risk bets and preferably wide-releases, thus proves to be remarkably apt for media companies' general objective of profit maximization. Although here illustrated mainly by commercial, often Hollywood, ‘event films’ (for they are its most intelligible example) Elberse (2013) argues the blockbuster strategy is relevant for most sectors of the entertainment industry (e.g. the music industry and even national sports leagues).

### 2.4 From Commodity to Content Production

The aforementioned consolidation into conglomerates that began in the early 1990s meant increased horizontal integration for the entertainment industries. Conglomerates consisted of a wide variety of companies, including film studios, media companies, and companies dissociated from the entertainment industry. This consolidation emerged from a desire to meet the demands of the fragmenting audiences,
and to guide consumers from one media experience to the next while maintaining their loyalty to the content of the same intellectual property. The recognition of consumers’ fragmentation into niche groups ultimately led to a new production strategy that dispersed the same content across several platforms to reach (and satisfy) as many consumers as possible. Derek Johnson (2013: 73) refers to this strategy as the multiplied production of content. Thus, “living at the center of mass culture, Hollywood was providing ‘content’ for media empires” instead of delivering finished products (Thompson and Bordwell, 2010: 662). Multiplied content production entails the recurrent reproduction of a studio’s intellectual property elements: they are copied across various products without altering its form and style. It is thus a safe and simple way of producing new yet profitable goods, as their chances of success are quite solid due to previously achieved successes with the same content. The multiplied production of content was still largely characterized by vertical integration, as partnerships were merely initiated because of collective commercial interests. This practice continued into the early 1990s, though media discourse increasingly referred to the practice as ‘franchising’ and as “the production of content across a range of genres and industrial contexts (Johnson, 2013: 55).” This development coincides with the increase in corporate mergers and acquisitions as discussed above. Evidently, the production of ‘content’ was crucial for profit maximization, and partnerships with other companies were able to provide diverse options for the content’s output. The contemporaneous move towards consolidation in order to achieve synergy thus involved large media companies that monopolized rights to intellectual property (Thompson and Bordwell, 2010: 664). Focus thus shifted from production processes to the control of intellectual property rights, which were distributed across different lines of business.

It is not surprising that the production of unified content became paramount for the various partners with diverging interests and skills. ‘Content’ does not refer to media platforms or outlets in this respect; neither does it refer to the end products delivered by the entertainment industries. It rather denotes the abstract material or subject matter that serves as the intellectual foundation thereof. In Simone Murray’s (2005: 417) words, it involves “the abstraction of content from the constraints of any specific analog media format [that] has come to be conceptualized in a disembodied, almost Platonic, form.” Unlike strategies that were built around piece-by-piece production of entertainment products that focused on the form of a single product at a time, new
media conglomerates jointly developed extensive intellectual properties, or fictional worlds if you will. Most companies

in the entertainment industry thus changed the focus of their production processes: from the creation of holistic end products to the designing of building grounds that could be used as starting points for myriad outlets by diverse companies with different interests and skills. These building grounds could be extended well into the future and across various media formats, due to the myriad possible extensions of the property and the plurality of companies involved. The networked nature of content dispersion also engenders a highly beneficial marketing apparatus known as cross-promotion. This phenomenon occurs without top-down interference, yet mostly manifests itself across media formats owned by an individual conglomerate. The transference of uniform content across different formats yields a network of interrelated products that in combination raise consumer awareness of the intellectual property. This happens by mutually referring to each other through image, form, and/or style and points back to the previously mentioned notion of intertextuality as a precursor of transmedia processes. The control of content grew more important for conglomerates than control of diverse technological outlets, since their properties could be dispersed across various formats much easier through digital technologies and the new business structures. It is thus relevant to refer to the involved parties as ‘content producers’ rather than manufacturers, as their primary output consists of intellectual (hence intangible) property. Apart from solely designing, producing and distributing autonomous and tangible (entertainment) products, media conglomerates are now occupied with the more abstract worldbuilding much as transmedia storytellers are. In the industrial counterpart of this creative process, each collaborator carries out the purpose it serves best to simultaneously reach collective artistic, creative, and commercial goals. The new focus and increased number of collaborators with diverging industrial practices merged into conglomerates with uniform goals stimulated the development of innovative business strategies.

An innovated form of franchising strategies proved to serve the collective goals of stakeholders and the overall nature of their entertainment products best. Though franchising, as a business strategy, may seem irreconcilable with the creation of entertainment products as it stems from the retail industry, the conglomerated nature of the entertainment industry lends itself perfectly for implementation of such logics.
Instead of the top-down, consolidated power of the 1990s, conglomerated media institutions focused increasingly on collaboration between partnerships. The classical Hollywood studio system had already shown that licensing according to the traditional franchise model could be highly profitable for the dispersion of entertainment products by licensing theaters the right to exhibit a studio’s films. A shift to the production of ‘mere’ content and the subsequent move towards a business strategy that involved licensing was thus an understandable move in light of profit maximization. Movement of content across different media channels surely appeared to be the key to success, especially because of the increased fragmentation of audiences and markets, due to diverging interests and new (niche) markets created by emerging technologies. This fragmentation allowed “intellectual property resources [to] be multiplied and leveraged as franchises” much as traditional franchises shared business plans and other corporate content (Johnson, 2013: 5). This ‘streaming’ of content has from the start been commercially motivated, because “content parlayed into multiple, cross-promoting formats owned by a single conglomerate creates multiple revenue streams from essentially fixed production costs” and thus precipitates corporate synergy (Murray, 2005: 417). By producing intellectual properties instead of finished end products, conglomerated media companies can reduce financial risks and receive the lion’s share of multiple (albeit shared) revenue streams. A precursor to the creation of intellectual property worlds, the aforementioned production of multiplied content was also subject to streaming and subsequent cross-promotion: the same images are parlayed across different formats that mutually reinforce each other’s existence. To regulate these streaming practices and expand the possibilities of shared intellectual properties, media conglomerates have altered traditional franchise practices to fit the type of products in the entertainment industry.

2.5 Franchising Creative Industries: A Social Affair

Although Johnson states the term ‘franchising’ does not need explanation in relation to the entertainment industries for it is widely understood as "the expansion of cultural production across different media and industry sectors," I would like to provide an understanding of its general functioning within this particular domain (Johnson, 2013: 27). I will do so according to several distinctions and similarities between traditional forms of franchising (often retail franchising) and media franchising. A most
important similarity is that both types of franchising logics are characterized by cooperation between different stakeholders who, despite of their diverging interests, must always maintain compliant attitudes. Naturally, such antagonistic relationships occur within the entertainment industry as well and stretch even further than with traditional franchises. Such antagonisms occur at multiple levels and consequently further complicate the networked structure of franchised entertainment production, a problem Johnson thoroughly addresses in his book. A difference with traditional logics of franchising is the permission for licensees within a media franchise to customize their products to a greater extent. Besides having to pertain to certain obligatory structures characteristic to the traditional franchising method, those involved in media franchising have more wiggle room when it comes to manufacturing the final product. The franchised commodity, intellectual property, is of an intangible nature and thus allows the licensees a certain degree of autonomy when it comes to deciding how to create a final product that can be profitable due to its distinctness. As mentioned before, differentiation is the key to (economic) success with respect to entertainment products, and “the point of franchising is to connect intellectual property resources with producers who can generate new kinds of products,” which will urge consumer awareness through cross-promotion (Johnson, 2013: 42). Moreover, the licensor performs a less policing role. Another difference, then, is the current industrial make-up of the entertainment industry, which makes for a different attitude towards licensing agreements. Traditional (retail) franchises rely on licensing agreements with external parties, but most of the media conglomerates that dominate the entertainment industry are much less compelled to arrange these. They are horizontally integrated to such an extent they do not need to license intellectual property rights to film producers, (comic) book publishers, and television networks: these companies are all incorporated. The importance of contractual agreements thus occurs largely within the conglomerations themselves, and does not necessarily happen in licensed forms. Johnson (2013) however mentions they still use such traditional licensing practices for contractual agreements

4 Johnson explicates the myriad relations between stakeholders involved in franchised media production and takes into account cultural as well as social interests. He sees the shared industrial networks that result from shared intellectual property production as platforms where creative identities share and negotiate their diverging interests. The multilayeredness of this site reveals itself through the enormous amount of stakeholders involved, since consumers are included as well. The types of antagonistic relationships that occur within sites of franchised media production thus range from ‘fantagonisms’ between consumers and producers, to conflicts of interest between producers and advertisers.
with those industrial domains they do not possess. Furthermore, it may be economically fruitful to outsource some productive labor and share costs and subsequent risks through such agreements. Another difference with retail franchising is that those creative laborers involved in the production processes can never “claim ownership over their contributions” as these are direct products of the intellectual property of which the rights are owned by the licensor (Johnson, 2013: 45). Struggles over creative authority within media franchises, which will be mentioned again later, can thus be seen as rather futile attempts to gain control over individual creations that can never be claimed, and may in fact precipitate alterations to the intellectual property under discussion.

Ultimately the shared characteristics between retail and media franchising seem to be located in the realm of their social relations, for maintaining control of shared resources remains equally paramount to both forms of franchising. In fact, the maintenance of collaborative relations appears to be of greater significance for media franchising. The commodity at stake, intellectual property, is shared not only by a single corporation, but also across several industrial contexts. This means multiple decision-makers with diverging interests compete for corporate as well as personal stakes to get higher-up. And, as previously mentioned, apart from maintaining social relations within conglomerate structures, maintaining social relations with customers has enormous significance in media franchising networks as well, because they constitute important stakeholders. Increased collaboration between the licensor (the conglomerate or company that owns the rights of the intellectual property), the myriad licensees (the companies allowed to use its content), and many other stakeholders (often in the form of consumers) thus characterizes the media franchising and distinguishes it from traditional franchising methods. As illustrated above, franchising strategies as applied to the entertainment sector should be able to fulfill the common goal of corporate synergy and their implementation constitutes a chiefly sales-oriented venture. The lenient approach to licensing characterized by media franchising focuses on “a shared claim of intellectual property” with external parties, which broadens the networks evermore (Johnson, 2013: 93). The configuration of multinational, horizontally integrated conglomerates is still crucial for the entertainment industries’ aims for synergy. They do, however, recognize the value of partnerships with external parties such as game designers. These partnerships thus constitute fruitful extensions of a property’s
visibility that increase its creative as well as economic value.

2.6 Managing Shared Worlds

As with traditional (retail) franchises, media franchising is presided over by the intellectual property rights holder: the company that allocates the licensing agreements to its myriad production partners. The network that is created by this practice needs to be managed somehow, financially as well as creatively. The number of licenses granted to external production partners cannot be too high, for this may be detrimental to the property's capital. Simultaneously, a loss of control over creative features within the property may occur as a result of inordinate licensing, which can thus be detrimental to the property in itself as well. Due to the degree of autonomy granted to external partners, certain features of their final products may not correspond with the unified style as envisioned for the franchise by the property rights owner. Hence, if production partners deviate too much from the original property with their final products, other production partners or the rights owners will not comply and take action to restore this sidetrack. It is in this respect the collaborative characteristics of media franchising relations are crucial, as the high levels of autonomy also make for an environment in which stakeholders can critique and negotiate with each other. By doing so, continual power struggles between stakeholders nonetheless contribute to the realization of shared objectives. Moreover, different production partners may interfere with each other’s processes and mutually inspire and/or control each other.

Johnson (2013) further complicates the intricacy of media franchising networks by including consumer or fan activity as a possible productive component. Because the entertainment industries are culturally and socially embedded in our personal lives, consumers may (unconsciously) get involved in the production and/or distribution of its content without benefiting from this due to a lack of actual ownership. Although the scope of this thesis does not allow for an extensive analysis of such consumer relations with the products of transmedia storytelling, I do touch on the influences of some fan-based practices in the next chapter, as they increasingly come to affect entertainment products’ aesthetic, and sometimes even narrative, form and style. Such influences have become increasingly visible since the emergence of active fan engagements with transmedia narratives and simultaneous technological developments.
I argue the industrial practices of media franchising significantly resemble the process of worldbuilding as employed in the creative sense by transmedia storytelling. This is why the strategy is so applicable to the production of the transmedia storytelling artefacts and forms pivotal component of this research into the industrial repercussions on the products’ creative elements. However, media franchising and worldbuilding (as creative strategy employed by transmedia storytelling) are not exclusively related, as the practices of media franchising often function equally well with products that do not originate from worldbuilding practices in the creative sense. What distinguishes the transmedia type of narrative produced and dispersed through media franchising practices is its "seemingly inexhaustible capacity to be shared among a multiplicity of production communities (Johnson, 2013: 108)." Johnson instead proposes the term *worldsharing* to refer to the collaboration between multiple stakeholders across different production sites in shared creative contexts. I contend this term is especially apt for the case of transmedia storytelling, which as a creative practice deals with myriad stakeholders. Moreover, the term worldbuilding suggests the process of construction of industrial organizations and creative universes, yet transmedia storytelling goes further than this. It requires a prolonged collaboration after the building part of both the narrative and industrial structure is completed for creative as well as commercial interests. The continual creation of new narrative (and aesthetic) elements requires such prolonged collaboration, as do the myriad recurrent distribution and marketing practices. The general aim of profit maximization finally renders worldsharing particularly relevant for transmedia storytelling practices that are commercially oriented. Crucial for achieving this goal is creative differentiation, implemented by creative laborers working on transmedia narratives as well as by business-minded professionals working towards corporate synergy through media franchising. Needless to say, creativity is paramount in the process of transmedia storytelling as a narrative strategy. The domain of creative production is thus central to the marriage of media franchising and transmedia storytelling, as this is a site where creative laborers and business workers mainly negotiate their interrelations.

The complex networks of media franchising offer “a shared creative context in which many different individuals and communities can draw resources and contribute in kind (Johnson, 2013: 109).” Part of those many different individuals is a group of creative laborers responsible for the creation of transmedia stories, thus the
constructors of the narrative worlds that form the basis for media franchises. These creative communities form nodes of tension between those individuals within the franchising network that prioritize corporate synergy and themselves, who prioritize the narrative’s creative composition. Tensions often rise between creative- and profit-focused orientations, as each party negotiates their own position while realizing the utmost importance of collaboration to reach their respective goals. For inter-industrial franchises the extent to which different stakeholders collaborate is often greater than for intra-industrial franchises, as the latter share franchise worlds yet are involved in separate businesses (Johnson, 2013). For inter-industrial franchises, those conglomerations that divide the entire production of the franchise world’s products among its own businesses, it is convenient to share office spaces and personnel across different production lines. This is easier for them as all production lines share the same corporate umbrella and therefore share similar, if not equal, business cultures and strategies. Moreover, inter-industrial creative laborers pursue creative differentiation to a lesser extent than intra-industrial franchises, because they all need to pertain to the single conglomeration’s creative standards. Intra-industrial franchises evidently need to stick to the intellectual property rights they are licensed to use, yet are inherently more dissimilar as they derive from different, often unrelated businesses lines. Especially for intra-industrial franchises require “immense energy […] to manage decentralized franchise creativity and bring it in line with a singular, centralized vision” for its transmedia dimensions (Johnson, 2013: 150). In both types of industrial configurations, the differences that arise within the creative realm are dictated by top-down management of the business as well as by the social and professional relations between creative laborers across the different industries. Here, too, tensions may arise that affect the eventual aesthetic and narrative style of their products.

Conclusions
The aims of this second chapter were to historically trace several developments in the entertainment industries, and to untangle the concept media franchising. The historical overview showed the 1948 Paramount Decrees can be taken as a general turning point for changing industrial attitudes in the course of reaching profit maximization. Furthermore, the move towards content or intellectual property production is paramount for this advancement, because if offers new opportunities for widespread
distribution. With respect to the logics of media franchising, I found it should be seen as a creative site where multiple interests are at stake. This ascribes it an extraordinarily social character as industrial logics. The process of media franchising involves continual negotiations between stakeholders with different concerns and professional backgrounds, which affect the production process. Following from this finding are several consequences of such mediations between stakeholders for the entertainment products they develop (which will be discussed in the next chapter). Decisions made in such negotiations may be detrimental to either the economic or creative interests of a transmedia narrative and/or the aesthetic form and style of its ancillary artefacts, yet they can also be mutually beneficial. This establishes an important finding, and its consequences will shape the artefacts discussed in this thesis significantly. Also important for the inventory that should elucidate transmedia storytelling practices is the industrial move towards intellectual property production, which is especially crucial for the production of transmedia storytelling artefacts. Since the narratives at discussion in this thesis are dispersed transmedially, building a resourceful creative world to expand and adjust is a forceful strategy. Apart from productive, creative sites, media franchising networks are complex social structures where creative identities are established and mediated. For the scope of this thesis, I chose to discuss only those segments that are explicitly applicable to the practices of transmedia storytelling. Johnson (2013) however offers a far more extensive and generic account of media franchising and should be consulted for further understanding of the relational nature of franchising networks concerning all types of entertainment production. Yet the elements as discussed above should form a sufficient basis for the discussions of their consequences for transmedia artefacts as explicated in the next chapter.
Chapter 3 – Contextual Repercussions for Entertainment Content

In order to assess the consequences transmedia storytelling as a creative as well as an industrial practice has on the aesthetic and narrative features of its products, it is necessary to understand which products of the wide array available to include in this analysis. As previously mentioned, my research centers around audiovisual expressions of transmedia storytelling (and the feature film in particular), yet also pays attention to other types of products because they cannot be disregarded as integral parts of the intricate network of transmedia storytelling expressions. The relations between the different products created by transmedia franchises in order to convey a narrative can be called ‘overdetermined’ as they are connected in myriad ways. For one, they mutually reinforce each other's existence by way of their intertextual nature. The unified design of the franchise's intellectual property ensures its different products are recognizable as part of the same property or brand. Cross-promotion, then, is a rather favorable consequence of said intertextuality as it is a largely self-sustainable form of publicity. Moreover, the franchise’s standardized style makes it easier for consumers to remain loyal to the franchise once they have started to invest in it, because it offers them a sense of familiarity and hopefully triggers them to further explore the intellectual property on a narrative level. Usually, the transmedia narrative originates in a single medium and is then expanded across different media over time. Often the most visible narrative expressions of a franchise are films or (graphic) novels, yet narrative contributions are made by a wide variety of products. The expressions of a transmedia narrative can be found in media expressions such as (online) games, mobile apps, television or web episodes (‘webisodes’), but also in products with a less interactive nature such as promotional merchandise or commodities and appliances carrying the images associated with the intellectual property.

The latter forms of expression do not necessarily make a narrative contribution to the franchise’s storyworld, but rather serve as enhancements or reinforcements of other, more interactive, expressions that serve as actual building blocks of said storyworld. Non-narratively motivated products thus share basic visual features such as images of the property’s creatures or generic stylistic details like fonts or color schemes. The (for the most part) visually determined relations these commodities have with the franchise’s intellectual property, together with their lack of substantial narrative
contribution, makes it difficult to ascribe to them a narratively contributive value. Their production is merely commercially motivated because their main purpose is to increase widespread visibility of the intellectual property and maintain consumers’ loyalty to the entire franchise. The consequences of the industrial make-up that belongs to transmedia storytelling tactics are especially influential for the creative processes behind its products. These manifest themselves to a lesser extent in a franchise’s promotional products. Although they are undoubtedly an essential part of any media franchise and carry its imagery and other stylistic elements, their production process finds itself in a different, less creative realm than that of the franchise’s products that make narratively valuable contributions. For this reason, the following analysis of the consequences of industrial strategies connected to transmedia storytelling on the aesthetic and narrative qualities of their products will focus on those products that originate from creative narratively motivated production processes. The principles of transmedia storytelling in combination with media franchising as an industrial tactics are decisive for its products’ aesthetic and narrative qualities. Aesthetic and narrative conventions for entertainment production can be traced historically in order to note the alterations that have occurred since the advent of transmedia storytelling as a creative practice together with accompanying industrial practices.

3.1 Narratological Developments: Sustaining Classical Storytelling Techniques

With respect to narrative qualities, conventional storytelling practices that emerged in the early 1900s have been adjusted over time to fit the changing desires of entertainment industries and consumers or fans alike (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008). Such narratological changes influence and affect the visual aesthetics of entertainment products as well. The most logical starting point for an examination of product modifications as resulting from transmedia storytelling is thus the system of narrative conventions as used in classical Hollywood cinema. Since transmedia storytelling is first and foremost a narrative strategy, and film is the main product at discussion in this thesis, these conventions can be traced historically in order to note alterations emanating from changing (industrial and creative) tactics and help to classify further implications. Terminological accuracy is important in this respect, as this thesis maintains a slight yet crucial difference between a ‘narrative’ and a ‘story.’ As mentioned
before, ‘narrative’ in this case refers to a “chain of events in cause-effect relationship [that occurs] in time and space” and is constructed by creative laborers in the entertainment production industry (Thompson and Bordwell, 2008: 75) It is thus the ‘world’ built by creative minds, plot-wise as well as aesthetically. ‘Story’ then signifies the part(s) of this narrative a person consumes and assimilates individually. Stories differ from person to person as they are formed by individual consumption choices and assimilation processes that are influenced by subjective experiences in course of the organization of a narrative in one’s personal cognitive categories. Storytelling conventions emerged in the early 1900s as a way of making the increasingly long films more comprehensible to audiences (Thompson and Bordwell, 2010: 31). In order for viewers to follow narrative developments, filmmakers “worked out a system of formal principles [to] guide the spectator’s attention, making every aspect of the [narrative] on the screen as clear as possible (Thompson and Bordwell, 2010: 32).” Filmmakers increasingly adhered to continuity principles including camera movements, acting conventions, and post-production editing techniques that invisibly yet effectively led spectators through film sequences. By imitating natural mobility principles with camera movements and other techniques, spectators were able to concentrate on a film’s narrative and be fully immersed in its events; almost without realizing they were watching a film. For a great deal this immersive viewing mode was, and still is, realized by a focus on character psychology as the main catalyst for narrative developments. Moreover, narrative construction is a process that abides by certain rules concerning causality, space, and time.

According to Thompson and Bordwell (2010), causality is mainly determined by characters and their actions as these, together with external occurrences, connect the narrative events. The narrative events obviously take place in time, yet the order in which they are displayed is not always chronological. Thus although every film has an obvious beginning and ending, these may not always follow each other in a temporal logic (e.g. the film’s ending might actually portray the narrative’s chronological starting point). Such temporal disorder has always been experimented with even by conventional narrative techniques (e.g. flashbacks), yet has gained momentum with the advent of what Jason Mittell (2006) has deemed ‘narrative complexity,’ on which concept will be elaborated later. Films or franchises that employ conventional storytelling techniques thus have clear-cut beginnings and endings, whether they be
intelligible or ambiguous. Applied to transmedia franchising and its artefacts, the beginnings and endings of so-called ‘episodes’ (i.e. different products) do not necessarily abide to the rules of causality and time or space. Because each product is relatively autonomous and stands on itself (a key feature for transmedia storytelling artefacts according to Jenkins), this also means they cannot have completely fixed endings and beginnings: they need to have the ability to be consumed separately and in any order without losing complete track of the narrative events. What constitutes a beginning, or a first entrance into a franchise’s storyworld for one person can be the ending (open or closed) or just a halfway point for another. It distinguishes the narrative elements of transmedia franchising artefacts from those of other entertainment products because they are likely to have an incoherent or incomplete appearance to those unfamiliar with the term. This is especially pertinent for transmedia franchising (audio)visual artefacts such as films and comics, but the same type of ambiguity is also applicable to less narratively motivated expressions such as advertising products of which the reference to a storyworld seems unclear or irrelevant to uninitiated consumers. As mentioned before, the level of ambiguity is contingent on consumption patterns, and dependent on the amount and order of consumption of a franchise.

With respect to spatial dimensions, classical narratives usually develop in the visualized locales displayed to its viewers (onscreen spaces), and can partly take place in unseen locales (offscreen, yet still part of the diegetic world). Viewers are then stimulated to imaginatively create these in their minds, inspired by diegetic cues such as characters’ descriptions or visual aids (Thompson and Bordwell, 2010). The use of such offscreen spaces is a rather conventional and widely used storytelling technique, and in a broader sense one that is especially important for transmedia storytelling narrative techniques. Similar types of cues for offscreen events may refer to places yet to be explored in additional franchise products, thus encouraging further immersion into the storyworld. Classical Hollywood cinema has incorporated all these generic narrative qualities with the continuity editing system in a certain mode of filmmaking that has been reproduced by other narrative, non-Hollywood films, and even by television shows and games. The causal advancement of classical Hollywood narratives thus relies heavily on characters’ psychological motivations, which are relayed to the audience in largely objective ways. Objective narration exposes the audience to the characters’ external behavior and shows actions in different places or times, which can give them a sense of
being omniscient spectators since they usually know more than the film’s characters do. However, it can also “be an effective way of withholding information” from viewers on purpose (Thompson and Bordwell, 2010: 91). The creation of knowledge gaps for the audience allows for a minor detail to become “a major causal and thematic motif” later on in a film or, in the case of transmedia storytelling, on different platforms (Thompson and Bordwell, 2010: 91). With extra information from other sources, transmedia consumers can thus “infer causes and effects” and so create their own story, depending on their consumption choices (Thompson and Bordwell, 2010: 91). The concealment of certain events or motivations can create suspension and make for surprising effects in upcoming sequences, which renders it a popular storytelling technique to keep spectators involved with the narrative and satisfy their desire to be entertained.

On the whole, the events of a classical Hollywood narrative are structured according to a certain order. All (minor) events are positioned amidst certain major turning points, a term Kristin Thompson (2008) uses to describe “a crucial event, or change” of which the protagonist is usually, yet not always, aware. A turning point is not necessarily a moment of high drama, but often “a small but decisive action that determines the shape that the next large-scale portion [or act] must take (Bordwell, 2006: 33).” Turning points may involve accomplishments, failures, new premises, revelations (for characters as well as for spectators) or major external events. While there seems to be academic consent with respect to the fact that classical Hollywood narratives maintain such an order and are divided in acts by said turning points, the amount of turning points within a film narrative is contested (Thompson, 2008). The use of a narrative order stems from the filmmaker’s desire to prevent the audience from becoming bored and to aid their comprehension of the action, which “can be learned instinctively by watching a great many movies (Bordwell, 2006: 22).” Mastering such narrative comprehensive conventions is a basic asset for every frequent media user today, and is further stimulated by more complex narrational techniques on which will be elaborated later.

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5 The three-act model that originated in the 1970s has been the most common model for structuring narrative events, and proposes the introduction of a problem in the first act, a conflict between characters in the second, and problem-solving action in the third (Thompson, Storytelling in the New Hollywood, p. 22). Thompson, as well as some other scholars, proposes a four-act model and thus incorporates a third, ‘midway’ turning point. Such central turning points divide the film in halves and can be described as “crucial, temporally centered events” and offers “decisive new premises (Thompson, Storytelling in the New Hollywood, pp. 32-33).
3.2 Creative Expansion of Diegetic Storyworlds

Despite the multiplicity of changes that have taken place in Hollywood filmmaking, still “nearly all of them depend on storytelling principles established in the studio era (Bordwell, 2006: 21).” These principles also served as guidelines for the large-scale production process of Hollywood films during the first half of the 20th century, referred to as the “golden age of studio filmmaking (Bordwell, 2006: 1).” It has been widely argued some changes to the classical Hollywood film style emerged as a result of the move away from vertically integrated studios that controlled the entire production and distribution processes. During the studio system, singular studios controlled the entire decision-making process that encompassed their films production. The decisions made by the Paramount decision in 1948 no longer allowed the same extent of control for individual studios, though most “big Hollywood studios were still in charge at the end of [the 1970s] and that the same stable oligopoly that had existed since the 1920s was still in force (Bordwell, 2006: 4).” However, due to product differentiation the need to collaborate with other companies who joined the production processes as stakeholders called for diverging interests that necessitated compromising attitudes and collaborative relations. The myriad changes in films’ production processes affected visual and narrative aesthetics too, as we will see later on in this chapter. An important first general change to classical Hollywood narrative was constituted by changes in subject matter, which are also explicated by Thompson and Bordwell (2010). During the decline of the studio system experimental creativity challenged several stylistic and narrative conventions, such as the Production Code. The rules stated in this Code delineated subject matters to be avoided by Hollywood studios, mostly in order to prevent federal interference and censorship over films. Naturally, such restrictive regulations concerning nudity and sex, profanity, racial issues, and other illicit affairs were likely to be challenged in Hollywood’s creative environment where innovation is key. Hence, in the late 1960s filmmakers started to counter these conventions and sought refuge in contested subjects. Especially films that were part of exploitation genres were affected by such experimental behavior concerning subject matter, and not often without success in certain niche audience groups. On a more widespread scale the aforementioned emergence of the videocassette and VHS affected new filmmakers’ inspiration and creativity. These technologies allowed them to study their predecessors’ canonical achievements meticulously and remodel these according to their own ingenuity. By
adopting a historic intertextuality as a way of honoring and reviving classics and adjusting them to new methods, these filmmakers paved the way to what many critics have called the ‘postclassical’ Hollywood era. It refers to a period between the late 1960s and early 1980s in which new directors carried out myriad changes to the classical Hollywood system, stretching from industrial to aesthetic and narrative modifications.

These changes, however innovative and groundbreaking, were mostly implemented within the bounds created by classical storytelling principles that still proved to be most profitable. Bordwell (2006) contends audacious filmmakers that chose to surpass these guidelines and made atypical films deviating from said guidelines often found themselves in the margins of Hollywood, producing films that were unable to generate adequate amounts of revenue. In fact, those filmmakers who showed an ability to stay within the premises of classical Hollywood filmmaking by extending its basic ideas and intensifying aesthetic and narrative techniques, made the most popular films in the post-classical era (e.g. Spielberg’s *Jaws* (1975), and *Jurassic Park* (1993)). The character-driven plots that dominated Hollywood films thus continued to prevail in the post-classical Hollywood era, yet an important adjustment rose to prominence. During the studio era, film characters mostly had reliable, somewhat heroic personalities that remained consistent throughout the film for reasons of plausibility. However, new filmmakers drastically changed this convention by allowing their characters to be relatively flawed. Characters became more vulnerable, unveiling personal fears and facing unresolved problems from the past. This added character complexity provided filmmakers with new narrative possibilities, because “given a flaw, the character must conquer it (Bordwell, 2006: 30).” It challenged filmmakers to resolve both internal and external goals (i.e. characters’ needs and wishes) in the end. In other words, characters are supposed to achieve personal growth and deal with their inner conflicts. This helps to strengthen the audience’s connection to the characters onscreen and intensifies their immersion into the narrative. The display of personal hardships and a sympathetic vulnerability further increases the characters’ plausibility and allows audience members to relate to them on a personal level more than before.

With respect to transmedia storytelling such character flaws and inner struggles provide more room for (transmedia) extensions. The characters’ unresolved fears, for instance, may require the exploration of his/her personal backstory in a different medium, or could lead to ancillary relationships that cannot be explicated in a single
expression. Such backstories and other excavations then are created in order to further inform the audience of characters’ personal developments, which in turn reinforces their connection to them. These expressions can for example be realized online in the form of additional webisodes accessible via a franchise’s website, or through a spin-off (TV) series revolving around (a) certain character(s) in different contexts. Another adaptation to narratological conventions that influenced the strategies of transmedia storytelling emerged during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Certain schematic narrative models that originated in the literary world inspired filmmakers throughout Hollywood. They were based on an ordinary man’s mythic journey through a special world, during which he encounters various problems. Upon returning to the ‘real’ world after this quest, the now ‘hero’ had resolved all inner conflicts. Among others, Lucas’ *Star Wars* is based on this model and the “universal resonance to ordinary adventure plotlines” that followed instigated a growing demand of the fantasy and science fiction genre. The mystic journey model as adapted to conventional screenwriting (e.g. according to the three-act model) could easily sustain films in this genre (Bordwell, 2006: 34).

### 3.3 Transmedia Complexity

Several other narrative developments that augmented the intricacy of film narratives can be grouped under the principles of ‘narrative complexity’ as coined by Jason Mittell as “a model of television storytelling (Mittell, 2006: 29).” He maintains American television narratives have adopted increasingly complex narrative structures that surpass “the conventional episodic and serial forms that have typified most American television since its inception (Mittell, 2006: 29).” I contend this model, which will be explicated below, is employed by transmedia storytelling practices as well as exploited by the industrial tactics of media franchising. Although Mittell argues narrative complexity as a storytelling mode “is unique to the television medium despite the clear influences from other forms of such as novels, films, videogames, and comic books,” I’d like to argue for a more widespread relationship of narrative complexity with all of these media, as narrative complexity also shapes the creative and industrial practices of transmedia storytelling and media franchising. Mittell contends the emergence of narrative complexity took place in the 1990s and was influenced by transformations in the entertainment industries, media technologies, and audience behavior (Mittell, 2006: 30). Firstly, the entertainment industry instigated a change in television’s general
perception as a quality entertainment medium by offering more sophisticated programming aside from the reality television shows that were increasing in popularity. This new programming contained shows aimed at niche audiences of “more upscale educated viewers” that would become devoted and loyal viewers (Mittell, 2006: 31). Secondly, technological advancements reinforced this development as the rise of the DVD allowed viewer control to proliferate. Television episodes could be viewed according to the programming, yet could also be recorded on VCR or bought on DVD, re-watched, and paused, which makes possible a type of personal narrative construction unthinkable before. Thirdly, such viewer engagement was strengthened by other emerging modes of viewer or fan activity, such as the accumulation of what Pierre Levy coined ‘collective intelligence’ in online fan communities. Viewers’ desires to share insights, opinions, and experiences found their outlet in the Internet, where fan communities in turn encouraged narrative complexity in an industrial context according to Mittell, presumably because of the financial prospects such online communities heralded.

The origins of narrative complexity can certainly, and specifically, be found in television, however its characteristics are being proliferated through media franchising as industrial tactics, and thus employed by a wide variety of media. Particularly important for the television medium is narrative complexity’s shifting balance between episodic and serial narration (Mittell, 2006: 32). Although the repercussions of this interplay are best illustrated by television, they are definitely also visibly present in and crucial for media expressions constituting transmedia franchises. For the sake of argument, I propose a comparison between the emission of a television show’s single episode and a media franchise’s single narrative expression by a single medium. This comparison makes it easier to explicate certain characteristics of narrative complexity, such as seriality and episodic narrative, backstories and spin-offs, or intertextuality in relation to transmedia storytelling. It helps to analyze the similarities between the products of transmedia storytelling and those in which narrative complexity as a storytelling tactics originated. Moreover, it indicates how media franchising industries possibly employ similar tactics. The chief parallel between the two types of products is their extent of autonomy within a larger entity: they each comprise individual and absolute expressions, yet are undeniably part of a bigger whole. As Jenkins’ (2007) frequently-quoted explanation of said autonomy puts it; “Ideally, each individual
episode must be accessible on its own terms even as it makes a unique contribution to the narrative system as a whole.” Within the larger, unified whole each expression can take on different meanings depending on the particular context they are surrounded by. These contexts consist of ancillary products of the same franchise in the case of transmedia storytelling. Television episodes can take on different meanings depending on the actual context they are consumed in (e.g. viewed alone or with others, on a big or mobile screen) but also depending on the serial context they are consumed in. The aforementioned increase in viewer control has significantly altered viewers’ consumption processes, resulting in personalized serial orders that may endow episodes with unintended meanings. Viewers’ decisions in their consumption process include or exclude certain expressions of a media franchise, much as the high extent of viewer control allows television audiences to decide which episodes to watch and when (and where) to watch them. Although these alterations do not change the intrinsic meaning of the episode or product’s narrative contribution, they can certainly influence the consumer’s interpretation thereof in relation to other episodes and/or products they decide to consume.

A crucial feature of narrative complexity in television series is the aforementioned interplay between serial and episodic structures. Consequently, regardless of the presence of episodically resolved story arcs, there will always remain a lack of closure at the end of each episode. The series’ main narrative thus continues and expands across several episodes, even seasons, which allows for multiple secondary plotlines to be explored simultaneously. Such ongoing story arcs ensure viewer loyalty, but are also able “to offer backstory for in-jokes and self-aware references” for those viewers that participate actively (Mittell, 2006: 34). Yet secondary plots often dominate and are wrapped up at the end of an episode, mostly to make these enjoyable and comprehensible for viewers less inclined to invest in the entire series. The option to participate more actively with the narrative and be able to understand executively created in-jokes accords to those viewers a sense of privilege and association with the series that eventually renders them even more loyal viewers. Such self-awareness is thus expressed by a high level of intertextuality within the television series itself, but also by intertextuality with other (popular) media expressions. The former type of intertextuality concerns the series’ interweaving and coinciding plotlines that sometimes make for surprising narrative connections or jokes referring to past story
events. The second type of intertextuality extends the scope of its references to include expressions of popular culture that are not directly related to the television series, yet are often recognized by their audience. Such references connect a series to the broader field of popular culture and enable individually varying experiences of episodes, influenced by viewers’ personal backgrounds in the field of popular media.

3.4 The Consumer as World-Decoder

Mittell (2006: 35) deems the so-called ‘operational aesthetic’ the most distinctive feature of narrative complexity, and I contend it is a key feature for the enjoyment of transmedia stories as well. This operational aesthetic involves the audience’s recognition and appreciation of the constructed nature of television narratives or other storyworlds, and heightens their awareness of the non-diegetic world. In other words, it invites viewers “to engage at the level of formal analyst, dissecting the techniques used to convey spectacular displays of storytelling craft (Mittell, 2006: 36).” Historically, there have been several techniques to instigate a television viewer’s shift in focus from the diegetic to the non-diegetic world, such as spectacular special effects or experimentation with conventions such as breaking the fourth wall (e.g. Sarah Jessica Parker’s Sex and the City character Carrie who speaks into the camera during the series’ first two seasons). These visual methods can be gathered under the notion of cinematic special effects, which have found their way into television’s medium through conventions originally limited to the cinema. Furthermore, narrative special effects awaken a similar, heightened sense of awareness of narrative construction, yet without explicitly displaying the diegetic world’s artificial nature through visual tactics. Instead, purely narrative tactics are used to draw attention “to the constructed nature of the narration and [ask viewers] to marvel at how the writers pulled it off (Mittell, 2006: 35).”

To recognize such narrative special effects requires a certain level of engagement on the part of the audience. There are some obvious examples of narrative special effects that are easily recognizable even for unattached or one-time or sporadic viewers, such as changing vantage points within a singular episode or perhaps throughout a season. Yet only attentive and narratively involved viewers will note truly spectacular narrative effects instantly, whereas more disinterested viewers will not grasp the intricacy of the narrative construct upon such occurrences. An example is a sudden and unexpected
collision of multiple storylines, which may be introduced discreetly yet evidently for the trained viewer. This latter group of viewers has the adequate type and amount of knowledge of the series’ backstories to connect the proverbial dots and recognize the narrative ingenuity, apart from enjoying the diegetic action. Connecting events from the past with actions in a series’ present storytelling time thus forms an important method to engender narrative spectacle. Another generator of narrative spectacle is the explication of previously mentioned and seemingly insignificant hints or indications of diegetic occurrences. When such clues are reiterated in new contexts, previously unthinkable information may be revealed to attentive viewers. Often, such information is hinted at implicitly by the disclosure of clues, and it is left up to the viewer to connect these to past occurrences or other facts. This narrative technique instigates viewers’ cognitive processes to solve riddle-like problems and encourages what Mittell (2006: 36) has dubbed formally aware viewing. Moreover, Mittell (2006: 39) argues for viewers’ “procedural mastery,” meaning trained viewers recognize, comprehend, and are able to follow a media expression’s underlying procedures. These procedures are crucial for complex narrativity, and can be compared to storytelling techniques such as the three-act model. They structure narratives according to certain events and relations, and over time attentive viewers will be able to recognize them more easily. The recurrent procedures, some more difficult to identify than others, eventually help trained viewers in decoding complex narrative structures. The act of decoding narrative constructs also leads to increased audience activity in other media, mainly the Internet. Mittell (2006: 32) notes a “rise in amateur television criticism” online and argues this, together with extensive (online) discussions, makes for a mutually reciprocal relationship between such audience practices and a television show’s success. As such, contemporary media consumers train their cognitive processes while plunging in storyworlds and extracting their (usually short-lived) entertainment experience into their personal lives to prolong it.

Narrative complexity is thus characterized by its “heightened degree of self-consciousness in storytelling mechanics” expressed through intra- and intertextuality with other media, and the encouragement of increased viewer activity and attention for the narrative construct, resulting in the presence of an operational aesthetic (Mittell, 2006: 39). In short, narrative complexity comprises all traditional storytelling elements and adds the component of the operational aesthetic, which evokes added pleasure
derived from the diegetic as well as the non-diegetic worlds. The ways in which narrative complexity employs traditional storytelling techniques and applies the operational aesthetic is very similar to the storytelling tactics as used by transmedia storytelling. A crucial feature for both phenomena is their continual withdrawal of information to create narrative gaps that can be filled later on, or in the case of transmedia storytelling, across different media. The equilibrium between episodic and serial forms of narrative characteristic of narrative complexity results in relatively open endings for each episode. This relative open-endedness is similar to that of each narratively motivated transmedia franchising artefact in the sense that they reach their full potential only in relation to each other. It also alludes to the aforementioned relative autonomy that characterizes transmedia storytelling artefacts. These two features indicate transmedia storytelling artefacts’ dependency on their fellow products in order to comprehend the entirety of the franchise’s storyworld. The constructed gaps of information encourage the television audience’s viewer loyalty to a series in much the same way they encourage franchise consumers to remain loyal to and reinvest in a storyworld: they trigger curiosity and invite further exploration of a diegetic world, concerning its aesthetic and narrative aspects.

Another crucial feature of products of narrative complexity and transmedia storytelling thus is their potential to be explored, scrutinized even, beyond their initially offered form and scope. This is to say television viewers and franchise consumers alike are offered the possibility, are often encouraged to invest further in products and surpass the standard amount of activity required for their consumption. They can opt for more actively engaged relations with the products through extension of their consumptive experience: by extracting (parts of) it for implementation in their private lives, the television series or franchise obtains a place in people’ private lives and exceeds its existence as an imaginary, medium-restricted world.

3.5 Excavate and Incorporate: Full Immersion

Possibly Jenkins’ (2009b) principle of ‘immersion versus extractability’ springs to mind here, as it refers to “the perceived relationship between the transmedia fiction and our everyday experiences.” The idea behind this principle has been briefly discussed in this thesis’ first chapter, yet a reiteration of its key idea is relevant here. Jenkins (2009b) counters a franchise’s world’s ability to render and maintain consumers engaged with
the storyworld (immersion), with the ability for them to take “aspects of the story away with them as resources they deploy in the spaces of their everyday life (extractability). He focuses on tangible aspects of a storyworld and discusses the extraction of a storyworld through retail industries and the consumption of all kinds of merchandise including figurines, theme parks, and even products in the food industries (e.g. the 2012 “Dark Vador” black hamburger created by French fast-food chain Quick for the 3D-release of Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace). Such monetary investments enable consumers to include a storyworld in their everyday lives and ensure frequent reminiscence thereof, often encouraging further consumption. Arguing for a more extensive definition of Jenkins’ (2009b) principle, I want to suggest the extraction of intangible elements of a franchise’s storyworld through non-financial, but cognitive investment to be included in the definition as well. The immersion into a franchise presupposes such cognitive investments because the entertainment experience does not end when the actual consumption of a product ceases. When a film or episode ends, audiences take parts thereof to reflect on, talk about with peers or strangers even, or relate to their personal lives, and as such extend the entertainment experience without further monetary or conscious investment. Cognitive extraction is thus inherent to the consumption of media franchises, and is especially encouraged by narrative complexity as a storytelling strategy. The information gaps that are deliberately created, the (possible) connections between several (secondary) storylines, the complicated relationships between characters, and (relatively) open endings stimulate further contemplation of the storyworld. The curiosity such storytelling techniques prompt in consumers guide cognitive extraction that can be expressed through tangible as well as intangible forms. The ‘immersion versus extractability’ principle is thus compatible with narrative complexity as a storytelling technique because it exemplifies a series’ or film’s operational reflexivity.

Apart from enjoying the aesthetic and narrative features of a storyworld, the extraction thereof into one’s personal life demonstrates a predilection for its narrative construction on a non-diegetic level as well (Mittell, 2006: 35). Applied to transmedia storyworlds, narrative complexity invites “temporary disorientation and confusion, allowing viewers to build up their comprehension skills through long-term viewing and active engagement (Mittell, 2006: 37).” Thus the paradoxical marriage between the diegetic and non-diegetic storyworld is realized through storytelling techniques that
trigger audiences' desire for all-comprising knowledge of the storyworld at issue, and is most effectively employed by media franchises for creative as well as commercial reasons. Consequently, the operational aesthetic has become a crucial element of transmedia storytelling as consumers of a media franchise cannot help but be reminded of the construction thereof. As explained above, there are storytelling techniques such as the creation of narrative spectacle that indicate a storyworld narrative's construct. Furthermore, a franchise's omnipresence, a result from its expansive proliferation of storyworld elements across different media, also reminds the consumers of the franchise's construction from an industrial perspective. Hence, aside from Mittell's (2006) argument for the operational aesthetic as a pivotal feature of complex television, I argue for the fundamentality of its presence within transmedia franchises, where it is expressed through aesthetic and narrative elements as well as through technological and commercial elements.

The increasingly active viewing mode encouraged by narrative complexity and other storytelling techniques used by transmedia storytelling may function as a reward system for consumers: the more they invest in it (financially or cognitively), the more fulfilling their overall entertainment experience will be. Semiconsciously, dedicated consumers of a franchise's storyworld train themselves in media literacy, striving to master its procedures. This works in largely the same ways as with television series' procedures that recur in order to aid the viewers in decoding the narrative. Similarly, all media franchises are organized in identical structures, albeit with dissimilar intellectual properties as the base for their individual products. Mittell's (2006: 35) procedural mastery element is thus also applicable to transmedia storytelling, as consumers of a franchise benefit from such mastery in exploring the storyworld to its fullest. Once they get the gist of the franchise's procedures, they can utilize this knowledge when consuming other franchises. They will be quicker to comprehend its procedures and have less trouble decoding the complex narrative due to their improving proficiency. The training and additional pleasures gained from cognitive investments may in turn trigger auxiliary monetary investments, and using narratively complex structures may thus prove very profitable to the entertainment industries. Some consumers will invest a minimum amount of additional effort or money, for example through sporadic purchases in a franchise's merchandise collection or participation in (online) discussions with peers. Others may invest exorbitant amounts of time in a media
franchise, and dedicate most of their pastime (and sometimes income) to it to achieve an omniscient status regarding the storyworld. Extravagant cognitive investments often result in highly active participation in discussions and even fan productions additional to the existing products (both of which occur mostly within the virtual sphere). Mittell (2013) has deemed such excessive forms of investment ‘forensic fandom.’ This notion incorporates Jenkins’ principle ‘drillability,’ which indicates the ability for a franchise’s storyworld to be thoroughly investigated across myriad outlets.

3.6 Inter-fan-tion

Forensic fandom grants the audience an active role as it incorporates, presupposes even, their additional role as co-producers. Within the realm of transmedia storytelling such exorbitant fan participation affects the products of a franchise when fan-produced elements are incorporated in its assembly. The increased audience participation and consequential fan-production has generated a great deal of controversy, mainly as to whether it should be lauded or condemned from both artistic and industrial viewpoints. Without reiterating an ongoing and yet inconclusive discussion that is far too complex for the scope of this thesis, a brief allusion to the tensions that arose with the advent of the contributing type of consumer that can be called a ‘prosumer’ serves still the main argument, as their consequences affect transmedia franchise’s products significantly. The portmanteau of ‘producer’ and ‘consumer’ describes a kind of consumer that participates with the storyworld (in the case of transmedia storytelling) to such an extent that he/she creates “new texts and [adds] them to further expand the boundaries of the original narrative world (Fiorelli, 2013).” These fan activities are outlets for (overly) passionate fans of an intellectual property through which they can get immersed in a storyworld and simultaneously connect with equally fanatical peers outside that world. The area relates to Jenkins’ (2009b) principle of ‘performance’ and fuses the diegetic and non-diegetic parts of a storyworld through fan interaction. Therefore, it can also be associated with the ‘immersion versus extractability’ principle, as the zealous engagement with particular storyworlds causes ardent fans to incorporate diegetic elements thereof in their private (non-diegetic) lives.

Naturally, most of these fans are non-professionals within the realm of entertainment production and the additional content they create often testifies this through an amateurish appearance. The supplementary content created by fans includes, but is not
limited to, storyworld-inspired costumes and props for purposes like cosplay, drawings of or amateur graphic novels, and, most importantly in this case, online audiovisual material. Creators of such audiovisual material often use already existing (hence copyrighted) material of the franchise’s intellectual property to compose alternative teasers or themed compilations with the purpose of being shared with fellow fans. The resulting material thus has the exact same look as the franchise’s originally produced products, yet may offer deviating narrative elements. In the former case, fans may use existing material to create video clips incorporating favorite fragments or photo material. Such compilations should however not be classified as ‘new’ material, but rather as ‘newly created’ material: the pieces they are composed of belong to the intellectual property rights holder and are thus original material, albeit in a new assemblage. When such original, copyrighted material is used to compose storylines different from existing ones, with actions and events unintended by the franchise’s original creators, truly new material is created and added to the storyworld. Videos, for example, can be composed of existing video and photo material, but are edited in ways that suggest certain narrative events. Moreover, fans often bring themselves into play as voice-over or use headlines and subtitles in order to transmit the desired storyline to their viewers. Such expressions of ‘fan fiction’ may disrupt the original storyworld diegetic narrative as intended by its creators through a conscious or unconscious reshaping of said narrative with new narrative content instead of merely reproducing already existing (audio)visual content. A notable example of this phenomenon is the myriad fan creations that have emerged from the Star Wars fanbase. Included in the fan films made with the Star Wars property (though applicable to fan production of other franchises as well) are fan fiction films, documentaries, parodies, and mockumentaries. Fan fiction films are usually not acknowledged by the actual property rights holders as contributions to the franchise, although the input of Star Wars fans has been so overwhelming that George Lucas’ film company Lucasfilm Ltd. has been hosting the Official Star Wars Fan Film Awards annually since 2002 and includes this genre as well (Star Wars Fanpedia, n.d.). Fan fictions are thus mostly published within the realms of fan-related outlets, and so exist simultaneously within and outside of the franchise’s

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6 Cosplay (a portmanteau of ‘costume’ and ‘play’) is a popular and widespread fan practice in which fans dress up as characters of various narratives originating in different sources (e.g. manga, comic books, films). After dressing up, fans may engage in role-playing, self-made performances, or costume contests. As it is often part of fan conventions, they also involve many commercial activities and merchandise. They are thus a good example of a mutually profitable relationship between fans and producers.
storyworld. This example again illustrates how Jenkins’ ‘immersion versus extractability’ principle connects a franchise’s diegetic world with the non-diegetic, which is rarely financially rewarding for either of its participants (i.e. fans or professionals). The incorporation of fan-produced products into the array of franchise products thus reshapes the content as it was intended by its original creators and may lead to tensions between both groups. As explicated before, the ‘immersion versus extractability’ principle is key for franchise industries in order to maintain consumer relations and gain financial profits. Yet it can also have unwelcome repercussions in the financial as well as creative realm because fans and fan productions rise to prominence in the margins of the original franchise storyworld. Intellectual property holders and original producers alike can hardly exert control over such fan practices and therefore many of them have chosen to embrace their expressions rather than to oppose them.

Films and other products resulting from transmedia storytelling techniques in general thus still abide by traditional narrative techniques. But they use and experiment with increasingly complex storytelling techniques, which serves as an argument against claims that contemporary Hollywood blockbusters are mere spectacles and that “little effort is being made to deliver sophisticated storytelling (Brook, 2013).” Such arguments counter the longstanding popularity of entertainment products still abiding by traditional creative structures. It is possible the products and films resulting from transmedia storytelling practices especially circumvent such general accusations of deteriorating narratives or lack of interesting characters. They are by nature more narratively complex than entertainment products or films produced in more independent contexts (i.e. outside of a franchise or transmedia storyworld) because of their inherent intertextuality. Aside from that, their ability to complement other products’ narratives while simultaneously being narratively autonomous serves as a basis for a narrative that is by default captivating enough to bypass aforementioned accusations. Without getting into the longstanding debate about the status of narrative in Hollywood too much, it suffices here to allude to film scholar Patrick Keating (2006), who argues for a marriage between spectacle and narrative within the same film (or, in this case, other entertainment franchise). The culmination of a spectator’s hope that is the result of narrative events (e.g. hope that the main character resolves its problems) is often part of a monumental visual spectacle that is enjoyable even without capturing the narrative events. Because “narrative and spectacle pursue a common goal, namely to
create a concentrated emotional experience,” transmedia storytelling artefacts are so successful in attracting and maintaining broad audiences (Lavik, 2009: 152). Captivating, intricate narratives and extravagant special effects typify them and manifest themselves often simultaneously in products. Although many contemporary blockbusters are indicted for emphasizing such spectacle and offering ‘easy entertainment’ for audiences yearning for accessible amusement through imagery, the success of complex storytelling and magnitude of transmedia storytelling fanbases proves otherwise. Partly because transmedia storytelling artefacts are created in an environment where both aesthetic and narrative creativity are pertinent for the development and maintenance of the storyworld, and because of the latter’s long-standing existence and multiple story arcs, their audience still values the “emotional and cognitive lure of narrative engagement (Lavik, 2009: 151).”

3.7 Technologies Take Over Transmedia

As seen above, amateur alterations to original narratives are a consequence of complex storytelling strategies that encourage fans to participate with a franchise’s content. It is questionable whether these contributions should be included in the franchise’s array of products, but the fact that they have the ability to alter the original narrative for at least a group of its consumers (i.e. the ardent fans), is indisputable. The ways in which such fan participations can be profitable for the entertainment industries are myriad, and include abovementioned fan conventions, amateur productions, or auxiliary merchandise. The increased emergence of consumer participation with a franchise’s products is also partly related to several technological developments. First and foremost, the Internet has played a crucial role in the rise of active participation with narratives, the widespread emergence of fan productions, and the establishment and continuation of sound fanbases. The developments of new platforms across which transmedia narratives can be dispersed are pertinent because they offer room for narrative expansion and aesthetic enhancement. The emergence of new platforms may instigate narrative or aesthetic developments that were not planned before, but are especially well executed across the new platform in question. The aforementioned fan productions are exemplary, as technological developments make it easier for amateurs to compose and disperse their own creations (e.g. with programs such as iMovie and through online fan networks). Moreover, the original franchise laborers are presented
with new outlets via which auxiliary products can be distributed. This stimulates their creativity and may lead to artistic as well as financial profits. The fairly recent upsurge in the use of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets is noteworthy in relation to the alterations brought to transmedia storytelling artefacts. These additional platforms offer consumers multiple options for expanded consumption of a franchise, as they can download games or stay in touch with peers through online networks. Also, such platforms’ outbound notifications help to maintain consumers’ engagement with the franchise and stimulate (continuous) active participation via mobile applications. More importantly, narrative expansion by professionals through such applications is very common. Often storytelling or applications take forms close to games and require active participation on the consumer’s side.

An exemplary transmedia storytelling creation in this respect is Haunting Melissa (Hooked Digital Media, 2013), an application exclusively available for iPhones and iPads, from the producers of The Ring (2002). Though this particular application is not part of the type of media franchise at discussion in this thesis, its mention is still relevant. The nature and execution of the app could well be incorporated in an already existing media franchise that (partly) relies on audience’s active participation. Producer Neal Edelstein mentions technology was not yet ready for the ideas he conceived in the late 1990s, but now “technology has caught up [and] the result is Haunting Melissa (Berkowitz, 2013).” The app features a nonlinear horror narrative that requires its users to “look forward to incoming content on their phones” because new story bits are dispersed through push notifications on their mobile devices (Berkowitz, 2013). The audience thus does not know when new information will be disclosed, nor how many segments are yet to be disclosed. Artistically, this removes the restraints from the storyteller’s creativity, as it is no longer bound by certain amount of episodic expressions. The aesthetic alterations this mode of storytelling generates are mainly characterized by a fragmented nature, with fast cuts and intense editing. Mobile devices underline ephemeral consumption, which is translated into fragmented narrative forms. Furthermore, the inherent mobility may cause interrupted experiences of the narrative caused by the technology itself, such as network issues. From an industrial point of view, the dispersion of a transmedia narrative through mobile devices is profitable for it involves additional advertising from third parties, hence another move to profit maximization. The advent of mobile devices as platforms for transmedia storytelling is thus also pertinent with respect to media
franchising as an industrial strategy. The conglomerated nature and explicit focus on intra- and inter-franchise relations (as explicated in the previous chapter) make the strategy very receptive to financially rewarding connections through advertising. Such relations can exist with companies already part of a conglomerated franchise, but can also emerge from relations with external companies. Applications for mobile devices are characterized by their emphasis on advertising, to which consumers have become used and which is taken for granted by them. Advertising through this platform can thus be highly profitable for both parties, because the advertisements intersect with the narrative almost directly during consumption. This advertising method is part of a larger array of marketing strategies called ‘embedded marketing,’ on which will be elaborated later.

More directly related to aesthetic and narrative qualities of transmedia storytelling artefacts are technological innovations such as 3D or computer-generated imagery (CGI). The latter innovation, which is rooted in the field of computer graphics, has been especially crucial for developments in virtual cinematography. It refers to a methodology of filmmaking “in which the images are created digitally through compositing various elements and pieces of footage together in order to create the final image (Hardy, 2014).” The emergence of CGI was first met with great suspicion by the film industry. The first encounters with CGI tools rather discouraged the industry’s dreams of 3D films, as they were relatively unknown yet already considered complicated, risky and expensive (Morie, 1998). As opposed to the film industry, another major part of the entertainment industry was keenly interested in CGI’s possibilities and found itself quite apt for its implementation. The fast-paced and short-format nature of television commercials was beneficial for CGI’s “highly technical and tedious” labor, which was complex, expensive and hard to find (Morie, 1998: p. 31). The increasingly conglomerated industrial makeup of the entertainment industry, however, had resulted in partnerships with prosperous advertising companies, who needed “something new to captivate audiences” and “had the money to spend on it (Morie, 1998: 31).” When the film industry picked up on this new trend mid-1980s, the complexity of the labor behind CGI and its expenditure had not changed. Non-artistic programmers still were required to create the codes with which to generate new images. Nonetheless, the pioneers of CGI as applied to the film industry persevered and some minor successes (e.g. *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983)) led big-shot director
James Cameron to “undertake a new film that relied heavily on digital effects (Morie, 1998: 32).” The successes of Terminator 2: Judgment Day (1991) and other films using CGI techniques paved the way for films consisting of CGI material only, offering a new range of potential innovations and possible storyworlds.

It goes without saying that these innovations have altered the overall look of entertainment products, as these are increasingly digitally produced and thus deviate from images that consist of actual human beings and locales. Although these technological innovations are not rooted in the practices of transmedia storytelling, the two have been mutually influential for aesthetic and narrative elements in its products. This is especially observable in relation to the aspect of worldbuilding that is crucial for the production of transmedia storytelling artefacts. The innovations in digital technologies have created a gamma of creative possibilities for storytellers in the entertainment industry both on aesthetic and narrative levels. Purely aesthetic changes are obviously noticeable, stretching from the digital creation of creatures or locales formerly unable to visualize to the 3D depiction of images shot using traditional methods of cinematography.7 Non-existent creatures are brought to life and instigate or enrich a viewer or consumer’s imagination. Also, the overall ‘look’ of the images on screen has changed due to computer-generated imagery, as they may appear shinier or more saturated with color. The opportunity of creating such images is pertinent for transmedia storytelling, and particularly worldbuilding practices because the genres these products usually reside in (e.g. science-fiction and fantasy) involve the depiction of many non-existent creatures and/or locales. In fact, these genres would not exist without such technologies, and in order to produce plausible versions of their imaginative worlds, creative laborers need to follow trends and innovations in this field.

Thus apart from the more obvious aesthetic changes technological innovations cause to entertainment products in general, with respect to transmedia storytelling artefacts these changes find themselves more importantly on a narrative level. The increase in visual possibilities simultaneously allows for myriad narrative possibilities because storylines can be added and/or expanded in worlds, places, or characters enhanced or created by new technologies. Usually they entail storylines, events, or characters that were impossible to depict visually before. Technological innovations allow for their

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7 With this methodology of filmmaking “the images are created in a physical environment such as a set or on location (http://nofilmschool.com/2014/01/digital-technology-changed-definition-cinematography/).”

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inclusion in the storyworld, thus altering the narrative in previously unintended events. Other crucial and widespread alterations due to emerging technologies on a narrative level, yet mainly expressed visually, are narratively unmotivated sequences. First of all, technologies such as CGI allow for the creation of unknown and non-existent creatures and locales at which audiences may want to marvel because of their visual, aesthetic qualities an sich. Images that do not further the narrative in any way may thus be created with the sole intention of admiration for the technologies and their abilities to create the depicted imagery (e.g. shots of digitally created nature or the creation of narratively insignificant characters). In a way, the technologies at display acquire a role within the franchise, albeit a non-diegetic one, for (momentarily) becoming the product’s main attraction. Furthermore, producers can be so enchanted by a new type of technology that they wish to create an entire product (line) around its introduction. Johnson (2013: 125) recounts the producers of television series Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987-1994) who, by their wish to introduce holographic technologies to a broader audience, contemplated the creation and production an entire episode of Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987-1994). This episode would originally not have been narratively motivated, but through its existence could have had repercussions for the already existing narrative nonetheless. As such, technologically motivated events or changes in a storyworld may affect the narrative in critical ways, and change the intentions its creators had beforehand. The inclusion of other, non-narratively motivated sequences may also be rooted in commercial interests and stem from the industry’s general aim for profit maximization. These, together with other industrial developments, also have repercussions for the aesthetic and narrative elements of a franchise’s products.

3.8 Branding Storyworlds

The non-narratively motivated sequences stemming from commercial interests can be grouped under the term ‘embedded marketing.’ With respect to media franchising and the effects this industrial make-up has on its products, such marketing practices are a crucial development. Because of the entertainment industry’s conglomerated nature, the profits gathered by different brands are likely to join in combining revenue streams eventually, as various companies are gathered under the same corporate umbrella. But even advertising deals with unrelated brands are made
between media companies, as these can be financially profitable in an industry so overtly profit-focused. Embedded marketing practices, or ‘product placement,’ involve the (visual or verbal) incorporation of a brand in entertainment products (Kokemuller, n.d.). With respect to transmedia storytelling and franchising this is an important tactics that can be very profitable. The overt mention or display of brands in a franchise’s storyworld may trigger audience’s auxiliary investment in other products. Traditionally, product placement has proved to be a rewarding marketing strategy because of the audience’s susceptibility to copy diegetic characters’ behavior and/or consumption patterns. Many consumers have become desensitized to conventional marketing tactics, the objectives of which are too overtly commercial. Yet “product placement allows a brand to target audiences interested in the entertainment medium while they are generally captive” and thus unconsciously influences them (Kokemuller, n.d.). The cognitive processing of brands presented in entertainment products “can be voluntary, involuntary, accidental, conscious or unconscious (Vagionis and Loumioti, 2011: 355).” The way an audience reacts to product placement depends on the type of channel used to convey the brand (i.e. visual or auditory) and its level of plot connection (Russell, 2002). Russell (2002) contends that information conveyed through auditory channels is more meaningful because it will reach a consumer even without actually looking at the product. During these days of second screens and simultaneous media consumption, with which the younger generations are especially familiar, it is likely that information conveyed through auditory channels is processed more easily. The level of plot connection, however, remains an important contingency for a positive reaction to product placement through both channels. Getting an audience to notice a brand through product placement thus is fairly easy, yet it is the memory on the audience’s part that will eventually determine its success. To increase chances consumers will remember the brand, it needs to be somehow connected to the diegetic world, or plot. Russell argues “when the brand makes a significant contribution to the story [this] will facilitate memory (Russell, 2002: 308).” Simply put, if the product placement is congruent with events in the diegetic world, consumers are more likely to unconsciously take not of and memorize the brand in question. However, research has also shown product placements incongruent with the storyline may, to a certain extent, have
positive effects. Such inconsistencies spark the audience’s attention and so facilitate memory.\(^8\)

Transmedia storytelling artefacts produced by the strategies of media franchising are thus specifically useful for this kind of embedded marketing because they require high levels of engagement from their audiences, hence encourage unconscious brand recognition. Moreover, high levels of intertextuality and audiences that are familiar with overt referencing to other products and brand make transmedia storytelling artefacts perfect contexts for product placement. Apart from the obvious forms of product placement in which brand names are mentioned or products are shown while they are being used by diegetic characters, transmedia storytelling artefacts are specifically apt to instigate ‘media-induced tourism,’ or “a phenomenon where local economies eventually enjoy an increase in visitor numbers and related benefits after the circulation of the relevant movie (Vagionis and Loumioti, 2011: 353).” This type of product placement directly relates to Henry Jenkins’ (2009b) principle of ‘immersion versus extractability,’ for the diegetic space of transmedia storytelling artefacts intersects with consumers’ real lives, which often happens unconsciously. As such “modern tourists shape ‘destination images’ through consumption of [entertainment products], without the prejudice that these are a promotional material (Vagionis and Loumioti, 2011: 355).” Immersive storytelling practices like those of transmedia franchises encourage character identification and consequential “sentimental memory” that eventually triggers a long-lasting effect and positive responses to embedded tourist-marketing practices. The act of exploring a storyworld also includes identification with the characters' environments and is thus likely to incite a desire to become part of this. The urge to investigate the entirety of the diegetic universe often sparks the desire to maintain a relation with it in the real world, corroborated by Henry Jenkins’ (2009b) principle of ‘immersion versus extractability’ and the myriad ways in which it is applicable. Hence, when the environment in question is not a fantasy world but comprises an accessible and attractive locality, audience members can be targeted quite easily as tourists. For such reasons, tourist-marketing practices incorporated in transmedia storytelling artefacts have also proliferated. Critical for the scope of this

\(^8\) Yet and adverse effect occurs when the incongruence is too unconcealed and consumers start to assess the brand an sich and its motivations for appearing on the show. For a complete overview of psychological processes triggered by product placement, see Cristel Antonia Russel’s Investigating the Effectiveness of Product Placements in Television Shows: The Role of Modality and Plot Connection Congruence on Brand Memory and Attitude (2002, Journal of Consumer Research, Inc. 29, no. 3, pp. 306-318).
thesis is that such practices often have visible effects on transmedia storytelling artefacts. Most importantly on an aesthetic level, tourist marketing relies heavily on strong visual imagery that sparks a sense of wonderment and appreciation in audiences. For products of the moving image a moment of conscious reflection on the part of the audience is important in order to evoke elaboration on the image and instill a lasting memory thereof in their minds. This desired reaction of awe can be provoked best through a gazing view during which audience members can take the images in and process them. Carefully positioned shots of the places in question are therefore incorporated in films or television series, even when their occurrence is not narratively motivated. Although not overtly showing a brand name or product, such sequences are not narratively motivated and serve as imbedded marketing practice. The duration of such imagery can exceed other non-narratively motivated sequences that are used to edit together narrative events, and therefore are more likely to capture the audience’s interest. Additional filmed material of the localities to be promoted can be dispersed through auxiliary platforms such as online fan forums as part of a ‘making of’ or backstory in a specific locality for example. As such the embedded marketing practices actually contribute to the narrative, with motivations that are mainly, if not solely, economically motivated.

Especially relevant for transmedia storytelling is the increasingly blurred distinction between an advertisement’s role as marketing tool or narrative contribution. Sometimes an advertisement, in the form of a television commercial for example, adds something to the narrative and actually forms an additional expression to the storyworld apart from merely promoting a brand. They may disclose previously hidden information or give the audience a clue to further explore on different platforms. Since they aim at an audience much broader than the one actually devoted to the franchise’s storyworld, such marketing expressions may not only persuade people to buy certain products but may even attract more people to the entire storyworld (and auxiliary franchise products). Another connection that can be made between media franchising and embedded marketing or branding practices, lies in similar strategies of distribution. The worldbuilding or worldsharing strategies employed by media franchising (which in turn resemble the creative practices of transmedia storytelling) resemble the ways in which economic subjects “aim to create a symbolic universe endowed with meaning (Scolari, 2009: 599).” Some semioticians believe advertisers can create entire worlds of
values to which consumers relate much as they relate to narrative worlds. Consumers can ‘enter’ said worlds of value by identifying with the brand and as such accept “an interpretative contract” with a company. This is the starting point for an enduring relation that maintains consumer involvement with the brand (albeit unconsciously) as they recognize and acknowledge its existence in myriad expressions. Moreover, the brand asserts certain values to which consumers relate, causing them to keep track of a brand’s various expressions and thus become loyal investors in the brand’s ‘world.’ This method is a clear similarity with the way in which transmedia storyworlds try to perpetuate the relationship with fans or consumers.

Another crucial feature for the success of the combination between transmedia storytelling and the practices of embedded marketing is the advent of abovementioned technological innovations that facilitate the proliferation of promotional material. The nature of transmedia storytelling (characterized by diffusing content across various platforms) prescribes a method of information dispersal that is specifically apt for marketing purposes. Each platform used to disclose new narrative information can simultaneously be used to promote (un)affiliated products by employment of different strategies that suit the particular medium. An episode of a franchise’s television series may for example incorporate product placements for a brand that advertises the same products via banners in a franchise’s mobile application furthering the same narrative. Similar strategies of information dispersal (i.e. through intertextuality and use of multiple platforms) can connect a franchise’s storyworld seamlessly to a brand’s world. Audiences become completely familiarized with a brand’s overall appearance and its presence within the franchise’s storyworld; they come to accept it as an almost integral part thereof. Audience members often do not realize the unconscious impact product placements may have on their perception of consumer goods or their personal consumption pattern. The audience’s unconscious acceptance of branding especially gained momentum with the advent of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. Moreover, these quickly proved their aptness for transmedia storytelling purposes because of their ability to captivate audiences and stimulate them to incorporate storyworlds into their everyday lives (i.e. the ‘immersion versus extractability’ principle), for a great part caused by their mobility. The integration of mobile devices

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9 A brand’s overall appearance should be easily recognizable through a distinct brand aesthetic. This comprises “a series of textures, colors, materials and styles that create a difference with respect to other brands” that remains unchanged across different platforms and expression (Scolari, 2009, p. 600).
into nearly all aspects of daily life caused people to become increasingly dependent on them, causing them to feel incomplete or helpless without them. Such dependency on and continual involvement with mobile devices have resulted in high levels of media literacy among the latest generation in particular. The habitual engagement with apps on mobile devices has made people accustomed to the overt use of in-app advertising.\footnote{In-app advertising is part of mobile marketing strategies that use banners or other visual and audio material inside mobile apps. Within free apps users can sometimes manually remove advertisements from the screen and continue their mobile activity. Yet to be fully freed from these inadvertent notifications, users often need to switch to paid versions of an app.} It may thus be an effective marketing strategy to target media-literate audiences that do not consider its notifications as interrupting during their mobile activities. They notice the advertisements without being antagonized by them and might unconsciously respond positively to them.

### 3.9 Consequences of Close Collaboration

As shown in the previous chapter, the entertainment industries have come to dominate the creative as well as commercial spheres of transmedia storytelling, which causes conflicts on several levels. When discussing the alterations media franchising causes to the aesthetic and narrative elements of transmedia storytelling artefacts, an examination of collaborative relations on an organizational level is pertinent. The influences of collaboration between creative and/or commercial laborers in entertainment industries on aesthetic and narrative qualities of its products are often overlooked yet plentiful. In order to grasp the intricacies of these collaborative relations and their consequential effects on products, it is crucial to look at the direct influences of the industrial make-up of media franchises, which was delineated in the previous chapter. The licensing agreements media companies have with different partners are a crucial form of (mostly profitable) collaboration with external associates. Although media franchising as an industrial tactics aiming for profit maximization relies heavily on such contracts when convenient (and financially beneficial), the structure also provides for antagonistic relations between laborers. Conflicts are likely to arise inter-industrially (i.e. between laborers from different collaborating companies) but may also occur between laborers within the same organization, both on creative and commercial levels. Moreover, relations between professionals and amateurs or fans may also have repercussions for transmedia storytelling artefacts (e.g. abovementioned fan...
productions). But as these types of relations are too complex and extensive for the scope of this thesis, it will not be further explicated here.

Johnson’s (2013) conception of media franchising as a network of social systems thus deems the production of entertainment products a highly collaborative practice, which simultaneously causes tensions in the creative realms where interests different than profit maximization are at stake. It is within, and between, the various creative departments of a franchise that challenges between laborers affect the aesthetic and narrative qualities of their products. Although they maintain a set of common elements of the intellectual property that they collaboratively share across various platforms, there is also a lot of potential for variation and difference. These dissimilarities emerge from a natural variation in laborers’ creative interest, expertise, and values. Johnson argues laborers or certain departments within collaborative franchises want to distinguish themselves and “[negotiate] meaningful production identities across [their] industrial networks (Johnson, 2013: 107).” The subjective identities resulting from such differentiating characteristics are applicable to individuals as well as to sub-departments of a franchise. It is mainly within the hugely expansive franchises such as Star Trek, spanning over decades and across a multitude of platforms, the social relations between creative workers alter the products. The magnitude of such franchises necessitates the proliferation of labor across many different departments and companies that are often physically detached from each other. This may impede the communication between distant colleagues that have to discuss creative matters via digital communication instead of face-to-face meetings, causing tensions among them.

More importantly than communication issues are the tensions and conflicts that arise because of deviating perspectives on the actual use of the shared intellectual property. Such conflicts may stem from individual claims to authority, which is a contested notion with respect to media franchising; it is decentralized within an environment that underlines high levels of unity. The decisions made by franchise members in managing functions may for example cause such troubles, as a decision to exclude or highlight certain characters for a certain product may also exclude certain creative departments (Johnson, 2013). Such decisions, which are mostly based on economic motivations, have repercussions for the end product because creative laborers have to alter the initial narrative to incorporate these demands. Unmotivated sequences might have to be incorporated, or storylines have to be added or dropped. Top-down decisions made by
non-creative intellectual property rights holders can thus cause frictions with both the franchise's workers and its fanbase. The repercussions of seemingly small decisions on a managerial level, such as discouraging certain ideas or the disproportionate financing of different departments, are thus often noticeable by the (devoted) audience. When for economic reasons a manager decides to cut back on certain special effects that characterize a franchise's overall aesthetic, this is definitely noticeable for the audience. Devoted fans are especially susceptible to alterations resulting from managerial decisions, as they are extremely familiar with a franchise's aesthetic and intricate narrative. Johnson mentions a demand from a franchise's sub-division to focus less “on references and callbacks to vast comic books continuities” because they thought it would limit market appeal for a broad audience (Johnson, 2013: 98). While this may be true, fact remains that a loyal fanbase expects these elements to be included, even in franchise expressions aimed at a broader audience. Such references and in-jokes encourage the communal sense between fans and constitute their personal connection to the franchise. Omitting them for economic reasons is likely to betray their faithfulness and might instigate them to turn their backs on the franchise, which in turn causes significant financial losses.

Tensions also arise outside of hierarchical structures, mainly between creative laborers. The degree of creativity within the production process of a transmedia storytelling product is a chief deciding factor for the degree to which this process is susceptible to changes caused by external factors. The more creative a production process, the more likely personal differences will affect aesthetic and/or narrative elements of the products. Production partners' diverging interests and backgrounds are an example of these. One laborer may have a background in gaming and thus design certain features of the franchise aesthetic differently than a colleague with a background in comics. Slight changes in the design of a franchise may not be as noticeable to every audience member, but nonetheless cause noticeable discontinuities within the franchise's array of products. Narrative discontinuities that arise from individual differences and ambiguous communication are furthermore detrimental to the experience of transmedia storytelling artefacts, because imperfections or incoherencies make a narrative less plausible for the audience. Such conflicts may arise intra-industrially, but have far greater repercussions when they arise inter-industrially because of rivalry between different companies working with the same intellectual
property. The consolidation of different inspirations and backgrounds within the same company (intra-industrial) serves as a breeding ground for innovative ideas and encourages brainstorming sessions out of which new or better plans arise. Since all laborers have the same objectives and work for the same end product, they need to compromise and work homogeneously despite their possible differences. So “whereas intra-industrial franchises manifest creativity through the injection and construction of difference, in inter-industrial modes of franchising, such distinction has frequently been perceived as creatively undesirable (Johnson, 2013: 140).”

Different companies laboring for the same franchise but developing different kinds of products can be seen as sister companies. Though in the end they all have the franchise’s best interest in mind and want to maintain its unified essence, they also want to distinguish themselves from the other companies through their creative production. Moreover, a friendly type of rivalry may provide for narrative variation and in-jokes true fans will appreciate. The rivalry between franchise workers may however also result in ‘us versus them conflicts’ that can negatively affect the aesthetic and narrative features of a franchise’s products, because they impede the prescribed unity of the shared franchise world (Johnson, 2013: 132). Some companies may not agree with new production of the intellectual property by their sister companies, and out of impotence express this discontent through their own products. Johnson (2013: 133) gives an example of inter-industrial antipathetic decisions that affect transmedia storytelling artefacts narratively by referring to the Star Trek franchise. A character from Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987-1994), a series that is part of the franchise, appeared in an episode of Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (1993-1999), a series created with the same intellectual property and as part of the same franchise, but produced by a different company. The character’s appearance in the latter series “involved not friendly cooperation [as it normally should have been], but a tense, awkward stand-off (Johnson, 2013: 133).” This added negative connotation to a character that was part of a different production department could be taken as an inter-industrial sneer about personal or professional disagreements, which is not necessarily related to the specific element used. Moreover, it may be met with suspicion or misunderstanding on the part of fans, who do not grasp these inter-industrial conflicts and cannot make sense of the narrative events. Using the intellectual property of a franchise to express inter-industrial disputes seems unprofessional on a creative level, as it may interfere with an originally designed
narrative or affect the unified aesthetic of a franchise. Yet is an important feature for the media franchising industry and eventually probably even contributes to creativity and profit-maximization. The inter-industrial rivalry results in “differences in tone, theme, and attitude between [different] productions” and so stimulates the creativity of different producers across departments in their professional reaction to other productions (Johnson, 2013: 133). Moreover, the slight differences between products of the same franchise may form part of fans’ interest in the franchise and encourage them to dig deeper into the storyworld by way of collecting everything. The variations also attract different types of audiences and can be incorporated in the product design principle of tiering. This is “the addressing of different audiences with different content in different media and environments” and permits transmedia storytellers “to tempt audiences who might not jump right away into the extended narrative (Davis, 2013: 184).” The slight variations on a franchise may cause someone that was initially not as interested in it to develop an interest for a specific product or design. As such, differentiations of the intellectual property may function as teasers for new audience types that may eventually broaden their interest and (financial) investments to auxiliary franchise products as well.

Worldsharing practices are thus not always friendly or mutually beneficial, because every individual producer wants to claim authority to the intellectual property through their creativity. This has become increasingly difficult, as the entire array of designed material has become available to everyone through digital storage methods. A consequence of this that also affects the end products’ aesthetic and narrative elements is the concept of overdesign, which is specifically applicable to franchises in the science fiction and fantasy genres. In a more general sense, overdesign refers to the ever-expanding array of imagery, characters, and events designed by a franchise’s creative laborers. Since they are spread across various companies, altogether they create an overabundance of material and share this between them. The surplus of visual imagery, props, or storyline ideas is designed during the early stages of designing a world, but is not necessarily used immediately. Designs and ideas are often kept for future use and so simplify the production process of future products, as creative laborers have a large collection of already designed material they can use straightaway. Aesthetically, this affects a franchise’s products because it creates design continuity (Johnson, 2013: 127). Firstly, design continuity refers to the unified ‘look’ of a franchise’s products, which can
be slightly altered and/or modernized over time. Design continuity however also refers to the practice of reusing designs so as to keep original intellectual property elements alive. Although this method of (re)using already existing material was originally conceived as a time- and money-saving strategy, another beneficial effect renders it an even more efficient one. Using ‘old’ material in new storyworld expressions maintains the relationship with devoted fans that experience the unfolding of the franchise narrative from the beginning. Moreover, it can be a way of reviving intellectual properties that have died out, and so instigate new revenue streams. This may for example happen when a character from a dated backstory reappears in a new product within a different context. A part of the consumers will be introduced to the character, whereas another part will be surprised by its reappearance. The reappearance of older elements can alter the aesthetic (visual) qualities of a product in two ways. Either an element with the old aesthetic is incorporated into a more recent franchise expression with new aesthetic qualities, and thus stands out from the rest, or an element originating from an older aesthetic is updated to the new aesthetic to make the two more visually compatible. Either way, visual changes will be noticeable for the franchise’s loyal fans, yet may go unnoticed by less attached consumers. A franchise’s narrative elements can also be affected by the (re)use of already existing material. Narrative design deals with a similar kind of overabundance, as storylines are devised and expanded beyond what is used for a single product. This extra material is collected and simplifies scriptwriting practices. The resources leave writers with a valuable inheritance of backstory that can be used to fill gaps of contemporary products. The resources can be both a blessing and a curse for creative laborers and writers in particular, depending on their stance towards interference with the narrative. Being able and sometimes even forced to rely on narrative resources may be a relief (because there is less work to do) but may also feel like an impediment to one’s job as creative artist (because of reduced levels of autonomy). Contemporary narratives may be affected by a reliance on previously designed narratives, as old material may turn out to be a reiteration or be slightly incompatible with narrative events that have been designed at a later time.

Overdesign also relates to production design practices resulting in visual excesses in order to “generate authenticity and coherence of cinematic space (Johnson, 2013: 114).” Johnson argues shared world’s become increasingly complex due to the generation and elaboration of further content “through ongoing use and reuse” of visual
imagery, sound, and “behaviors of narrative characters, events and setting (Johnson, 2013: 116).” According to Kirsten Thompson this tendency to design storyworlds as visually (and aurally) complete as possible leads to overdesign in the sense that the created designs exceed a single product’s capacity (Johnson, 2013: 115). Henry Jenkins (2009c) then argues this systematic practice of overdesigning actually serves as a principle for the franchising method, as it benefits the role of the creative laborers as well as the overall entertainment experience of the audience. Because although the practices of overdesign “may or may not add something key to the unfolding of the narrative, [...] they nevertheless impact [the audience’s] experience” and provide “new spaces for speculation (Jenkins, 2009c).” The consequences of overdesign for transmedia storytelling artefacts can thus be negative as well as positive, but mainly affect the entertainment experience for those consumers that are more or less devoted to the particular franchise or story arc.

**Conclusions**

This last chapter served to review various contextual developments that, in their connection to transmedia storytelling practices, are able to alter the aesthetic and narrative content of entertainment products. The determining features that I explored find themselves in the narratological, technological, and commercial spheres. The factors that affect aesthetic and narrative elements of transmedia storytelling artefacts originate in the creative as well as the industrial spheres and are constantly augmented by new developments. Most important on a narrative level are the changes brought to classical modes of storytelling. The conventional rules by which storytelling techniques still abide have been altered by developments in the creative, technological, and industrial realms, but these rules nevertheless still provide the basis for contemporary narrative expressions. Some alterations stem from creative explorations of existing storytelling principles that are applied to different platforms of expression. By connecting Mittell’s theories about narrative complexity to the practices of transmedia storytelling, I found several significant and profitable relations between the two, not limited to the realm of television series. Transmedia storytelling is able to incorporate multiple modes of storytelling because of its transmedial nature, and different conventions are applicable through different media platforms. Technological developments and changing consumer preferences also influence narrative conventions,
as we have seen with the emergence and expansion of complex storytelling. Especially important for alterations brought to the aesthetic and narrative features of transmedia storytelling, these techniques underline the importance of the dispersion and expansion of narrative across different platforms. This chapter also showed that the increased importance of participatory fan cultures closely relates to the development of complex storytelling. Consumers are encouraged to explore narrative worlds to the greatest extent possible and are reminded of their existence almost incessantly. Transmedia storytelling inherently encourages this by way of narrative gaps and cross-media narrative expansion, which proves complex storytelling techniques are unmistakably part of the notion. The importance of participation with transmedia narratives is also emphasized by a variety of technological innovations that enable consumers to expand their consumption of a franchise. Moreover, they expand the creation and dispersion of transmedia narratives. As a consequence of increased participation with transmedia narratives, fan productions have found a place within the product array of many franchises. These amateur narrative expressions often comprise a contested place within a transmedia franchise, but they nonetheless contribute to and alter the overall narrative thereof (albeit in less obvious ways than officially created narrative expressions). Technological innovations are furthermore important for the dispersion of a franchise’s narrative across new and additional platforms, such as mobile apps. Other technological innovations are crucial for the creative elements of transmedia storytelling artefacts, such as the application of computer-generated imagery or use of 3D technologies. Although these affect the aesthetic elements of products first and foremost, they may also instigate narrative alterations. New creative opportunities may lead to ideas for narrative expansions or new characters, thus influencing both aesthetic and narrative qualities simultaneously. Last, but certainly not least, are the influences brought to these qualities by the personal as well as professional relations between the franchise’s stakeholders. The strategies of media franchising that I contend are inextricably linked to the creative practice of transmedia storytelling make the production process of its products an inherently social practice. The social relations that have been explicated before often include competitiveness, which may result in disagreements that are articulated through creative expressions. Yet intimate and friendly collaboration may also lead to positively motivated alterations to aesthetic and narrative qualities of a franchise’s products, such collectively created new elements or a
fine-tuned look of different, inter-industrially created products. This chapter thus adds to the inventory the origins of several alterations brought to entertainment products by developments related to transmedia storytelling practices. Such alterations are instigated by a variety of influences in the narratological, technological, and commercial realms. In order to answer the research question posed at the beginning of this thesis, the entirety of this network of intricate relations pertaining to the production of transmedia storytelling artefacts should be taken into account. The findings of the previous chapters will hereafter be combined in an attempt to provide a relevant overview of the changes brought to contemporary entertainment products by transmedia storytelling and media franchising.
Concluding Chapter

The aims of this thesis were to investigate the relations between profit-focused industrial tactics and the production of entertainment products within the creative strategies of transmedia storytelling. Henry Jenkins (2006: 20-21), in the early days of this latter term’s coinage, ascribed these products a “new aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence.” After conducting my research, the findings of which were presented in the previous chapters, I wish to argue instead for an adapted aesthetic of already existing media formats because of creative as well as industrial tactics that can be categorized as transmedial. Thus, in this concluding chapter I will synthesize these findings to show how developments predominantly related to industrial tactics have altered the aesthetic and narrative elements of transmedia storytelling expressions.

Although one of my research aims was to find a workable definition of the term transmedia storytelling, it has proved infeasible to demarcate strict boundaries. The open-endedness that is itself inherent to the notion also manifests itself in the inability to define it in absolute terms for academic as well as creative discourses. Ironically it is just this open-endedness that might best define the essence of the phenomena referred to. The term originated with the dispersion of media content across different platforms. Although Marsha Kinder (1991) prematurely referred to this practice with the term ‘transmedia,’ in hindsight she instead alluded to ‘cross-media’ practices. Already a visible practice in the late 1980s, it was characterized by an intertextual network of references to other cultural texts and ideologies. The subjective interpretation of each media expression within this network makes it inherently open-ended. Taking cross-media practices as a basis for the dispersion of narrative, Henry Jenkins (2003) devised the term transmedia storytelling first as “the systematic unfolding of elements of a storyworld across multiple media platforms, with each platform making a unique and original contribution to the media experience as a whole [Jenkins, 2003].” This complementary understanding of narrative events that emanates from each different expression is what distinguishes the term’s transmedial nature from that of Kinder’s cross-medial one. Moreover, transmedia storytelling presupposes an active role of the consumer to construct of his or her personalized media experience. It is thus a self-instigated process rather than an experience to be sustained. Because parts of a
narrative that covers an entire storyworld are separately disseminated across various outlets, consumers need to choose a certain consumption path and so customize their experience. Knowledge levels of storyworld consumers thus vary: that of a novice is automatically inferior to that of an expert who has consumed a wide array of expressions, each disclosing new narrative information.

The seven principles Henry Jenkins (2009ab) formulated to explicate his conception of transmedia storytelling all focus around the relation of its products with their consumers. Most importantly for the scope of my research is his last principle ‘immersion versus extractability.’ I found this principle perfectly combines the creative and industrial aspects of transmedia storytelling. It marks the ability of the narrative at issue to absorb its consumers in its storyworld and simultaneously to be incorporated into their real lives. As such, a narrative is creatively nourishing for its consumers and commercially exploitable by the entertainment industries at the same time. I thus wish to argue it is the focal point for the definition of transmedia storytelling as I have used it in the course of my research.

A long history of industrial domination of the creation of entertainment experiences demonstrates the nature of transmedia storytelling is for a great part commercially motivated. The profit-oriented strategies at work in the entertainment industries have always been visible and recognized by consumers, although their direct influences on products are often less evident. Film studios, then, where the main producers of entertainment products and as these are narratively motivated in the creative sense, their industrial make-up is representative for this thesis’ research. Said disintegration of the industrial configuration meant studios needed to find new ways to attain their goal of profit-maximization. Developments in the social and technological domains (e.g. changes in public taste and the introduction of new media platforms like television and VHS) influenced the process of restructuring the configuration of the entertainment industries at the end of the 1980s. These instigated the industries to diversify their content and spread it across multiple platforms in order to reach a broad yet diverse audience. Focus shifted from the production of holistic products to the production of expandable intellectual properties, a practice called multiplied production of content (Johnson 2013: 73). To meet the distributive requirements of this production strategy (i.e. widespread, cross-media dissemination), media companies increasingly merged with other (media) companies. This horizontal integration ensured the
company’s intellectual property could be dispersed across a lot of different media while still obtaining acquiring the collective revenue streams.

This industrial reconfiguration aimed still at profit-maximization while simultaneously offering new creative possibilities for the development of extensive intellectual properties. In order to maintain collaborative relations between various companies’ production departments media companies adopted elements of traditional retail franchise practices. Similar to the original structure, they issued licensing agreements to organize the dispersion of content through stakeholders and safeguard the creative content. The consequences of this licensing structure find themselves mainly in the relational spheres of professionals working with the same intellectual property. Creative laborers working to design the aesthetic and narrative worlds said intellectual properties contain, collaborate closely with laborers from departments that maintain an economic focus. Hence disagreements due to conflicts of interest may arise, both within the same company (intra-industrially) or across different companies involved with the same intellectual property (inter-industrially). Moreover, the shared intellectual property is continually adjusted and expanded by different departments and companies. Certainly every professional that augments the property wants to make a personal claim for authority, yet is unable to do so. Apart from (intra- and inter-industrial) tensions between colleagues, such issues may also instigate a type of rivalry that can be beneficial as well as detrimental to the products emanating from the intellectual property.

The shared creative environment in which these laborers work resembles the worlds that are built through the creative practices of transmedia storytelling. This is why media franchising is such a pertinent industrial tactics for these creative practices. Storylines of transmedia worlds keep expanding with new and adjusted aesthetic and narrative material, just as professional relations with stakeholders keep expanding in its industrial counterpart. The industrial practices of sharing an intellectual property, augmenting it, and distributing it across professionals thus correspond to creative practices of building, maintaining, and dispersing a transmedia storyworld. An important similarity is the relative autonomy that characterizes both their relational spheres. Industrial laborers in media franchises work individually or in collaboration with an intellectual property to reach profit-maximization. Yet they are never able to claim authority to their work in this property, as the rights remain in the hands of the
licensor. Likewise, creative laborers in the course of adjusting or augmenting the storyworld always have to deal with other creative laborers who do the same job in different departments or companies. They all use the same intellectual property, yet use their personal interpretation to adjust or augment it, which may well conflict with that of colleagues. Thus, both in the economically as well as creatively focused departments, competitiveness between laborers may arise due to unattainable claims to authority or disagreements over creative issues. Both media franchising and a transmedia storyworld have an overarching domain of which every individual laborer or every individual media expression is a part. The relations between laborers in media franchises and between media expressions within a storyworld are both relatively autonomous. Although they exist independently, they only fulfill their separate purposes jointly. For one, laborers strive for profit maximization and each contribute to this individually, yet only in close collaboration with each other this can be realized. Secondly, although each media expression that is part of a storyworld can be consumed individually and yield a satisfactory entertainment experience for its consumers, only when digging into the storyworld and incorporating will they obtain this experience to its fullest. The departments that are occupied with the creation of transmedia narratives and storyworlds form the center of negotiations between business and creative laborers within the entertainment industries. Different interests and aims need to be satisfied and realized; yet close collaboration is key. The site of creative production is thus where media franchising as an industrial strategy is coupled with transmedia storytelling as a creative practice, through the professional relations between laborers of both.

The abovementioned relations occupy a focal point within the production of transmedia storytelling through media franchises. Most importantly for the scope of this thesis was the finding that both practices are structured and function in similar ways, and for that reason are highly compatible as creative and commercial enterprises. Moreover, the network of social-professional relationships that is paramount for both has repercussions for the products they develop and disseminate. The friendly or antagonistic relations between co-workers in the creative domain may be detrimental to their end products. The level of variation is high in these creative processes small adjustments made by separate departments or companies may be noticeable in the end products. Moreover, hierarchical decisions for creative or economic reasons may influence the aesthetic or narrative elements of an expression. Certain characters may
for instance be discarded or because of a personal preference a storyline may be expanded. Personal relations between creative laborers then also form potential alterations for the aesthetic and narrative elements of a storyworld. Rivalry between departments or companies may be detrimental to a storyworld narrative and result in the re-use of characters in previously unrelated storylines by way of scorning colleagues working with different parts of the same intellectual property. Yet semi-friendly rivalry may result in diegetic in-jokes noticeable for devoted fan followers and enhance their entertainment experience.

Economically motivated decisions, too, can either improve or impair consumers’ entertainment experience by affecting aesthetic and/or narrative elements of a storyworld. These are aimed solely at profit-maximization; yet need to fit in with creative interests somehow in order to be compatible with the aesthetic and narrative elements of a storyworld. Many marketing expressions fall under embedded marketing. These can also be integrated into the diegesis of a storyworld (i.e. being used or mentioned by characters) without being narratively motivated. Using such product placement strategies, companies brand their products through media expressions in obscure ways so as to entice consumers in semi-unconscious, quasi-natural ways. Especially through transmedia storytelling expressions this can be highly beneficial. For one, these products require a high level of engagement from their consumers. Additionally, the surrounding intertextual network of related storyworld products can increase a brand’s visibility. Transmedia storytelling practices thus offer viable marketing opportunities for all various brands or purposes (i.e. instigate tourism for film locales). Although mostly media-literate people consume transmedia storytelling artefacts, the boundaries between marketing expressions and actual narrative supplements can become blurred. Aesthetic and narrative alterations to products in the form of unmotivated sequences, events, or dialogues may occur, regardless of the creators’ initial intentions.

The visibility of marketing expressions (within or surrounding transmedia storytelling narratives) has become increasingly overt due to several technological developments, and mainly to the proliferation of mobile devices. These devices are beneficial for maintaining commercial relations with consumers, because they make users more easily susceptible to them through engaging marketing strategies. Such mobile devices are also influential for consumers’ relations to the products and
storyworld of a media franchise, as their mobility allows consumers to stay up-to-date and remain involved. Such loyalty may lead to what Jason Mittell (2009) has called ‘forensic fandom’ practices. These may in turn cause fans to produce amateur material with elements of the official intellectual property, in order to realize their own ideas and share them with peers. Such fan productions alter the array of (mostly narrative) content as originally offered by the franchise, thus may alter the narrative storyworld for some consumers.

The open-endedness inherent to transmedia storytelling makes that not every consumer recognizes abovementioned alterations, for some are less deeply involved than others. Alterations that are usually visible for all consumers, regardless of their level of investment into the storyworld, are aesthetic alterations resulting from technological developments. Innovations such as CGI have altered the entire look of entertainment products and are not specifically related to transmedia storytelling. Yet transmedia storytelling is specifically apt to tell its stories and using such techniques, as they are able to depict creatures and locales that were formerly impossible to visualize. Such imagery is especially found in science fiction and fantasy genres, where most transmedia storytelling narratives find themselves. This is due partly to the fact that such worlds can be expanded inexhaustibly: a world that does not exist can infinitely be augmented with new locales, characters, and creatures. Moreover, developments in the narratological domain instigated an upsurge in the demand for storyworlds that could incorporate heroic journeys. These stories emerged from an increased emphasis on characters’ psychological developments and a more general desire to introduce narratological innovations. A great deal of such narratological innovations can be grouped under the term ‘narrative complexity,’ also coined by Jason Mittell (2006). These storytelling principles alter traditional serial and episodic structures, as do they emphasize the open-endedness of their products, which can be consumed separately or in combinations with varying configurations. Especially relevant for its application in transmedia storytelling practices is narrative complexity’s focus on narrative gaps that lead consumers to different expressions. The consumer is encouraged, expected even, to explore a narrative in order to become omniscient and consume the array of offered products as extensively as possible. These principles are perfectly applicable to the ever-expanding narratives created by transmedia storytelling techniques as they have very similar intentions. The additional proliferation of a narrative across various platforms...
then reinforces the principles of narrative complexity. Storylines can for example be spread across different media outlets to reach bigger or new audiences or reveal different characters’ points of view. Furthermore, the gaps narrative complexity and transmedia storytelling principles rely on can be filled by a multitude of media expressions, platforms, and auxiliary products. Especially in combination with media franchising tactics, the mixing together of the principles of narrative complexity and transmedia storytelling coalesces into a strategy that can be as creatively fruitful as it can be financially rewarding. Furthermore, the complex construction of a narrative, often containing multiple intersecting storylines, also forms an attractive component for attentive audience members. This operational aesthetic serves as a non-diegetic appreciation of the ways in which the media expressions, and in this case storyworld, is constructed on an aesthetic and narrative level.

The resemblances between the industrial practices of media franchising and the creative practices of transmedia storytelling I found in the course of my research are thus adequate enough to state their combination can generate valuable creative as well as economic benefits. The longstanding aim for profit-maximization maintained by the creative industry is able to thrive because of innovative tactics emanating from aforementioned creative, technological, social, and industrial practices. The consequences such developments have on the content of entertainment products are undoubtedly visible, yet to various degrees. The visibility of such changes can be either aesthetically or narratively significant and thus have various consequences for different consumers’ entertainment experiences. Moreover, this visibility relies on the crucial factor of open-endedness of transmedia storytelling practices and on the divergent consumption patterns of the audiences. Transmedia storytelling practices deliver an overarching narrative within a storyworld, and require the consumer to customize this during the formation of a personal story. The research as presented above proves the industrial strategies best applicable to transmedia storytelling are capable of altering the traditional aesthetic and narrative elements of its products. Yet the extent to which these are noticeable is contingent on consumers’ personal employment of the storyworld, and can be either reinforcing or detrimental to their overall entertainment experience. It remains unfeasible to devise a delineated categorization of the altered aesthetic transmedia storytelling encompasses because of various industrially motivated developments. Nonetheless it suffices to conclude there is an intricate,
overdetermined if you will, network of relations between the production of transmedia storytelling content and the industrial tactics of media franchising. This latter tactics is used to process and disperse the storyworld aesthetic and narrative content in order to provide a broad spectrum of consumers with an immersive yet customizable entertainment experience. The relevance of personalization is especially pertinent in a media landscape characterized by a multiplicity of media outlets, storyworlds, and technological devices.
Summary

Franchising Storyworlds: Industrial Practices and their Impact on the Creative Content of Transmedia Storytelling Artefacts
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Submitted to the University of Groningen on August 29, 2014 under the supervision of dr. M. Kiss and dr. A.M.A. van den Oever

This master thesis has been written as part of the master program Arts, Culture, and the Media with a specialization in film studies at the University of Groningen. The research it entails aimed to devise a structured overview, or inventory, of the adaptations that creative and industrial tactics have brought to the aesthetic and narrative elements of entertainment products developed by transmedia storytelling techniques. The purpose was to clarify a variety of phenomena that can be grouped together under the label transmedia storytelling and that relates to a great many disciplines. The disciplines this research (partly) covered are the commercial, technological, and creative (mainly narratological) spheres. It culminates in an analysis of these intertwined fields, their intricate network of relations, and consequential effects on aesthetic and narrative elements. This inventory can serve to explain the adapted formats of current entertainment products, caused by the increasing domination of transmedia storytelling practices. It is for a great part based on studies that describe practices and industrial tactics relating to transmedia storytelling and its artefacts. Such an explication is relevant to show how several disciplines with different motivations can jointly realize new and innovative creative products in mutually beneficial ways. The findings resulting from analyses of several studies and a connection between them enable the construction of a valuable framework of the factors working in the practices of transmedia storytelling practices and their associated fields.

The first part of this research was conducted using several scholars’ interpretations of the term transmedia storytelling in order to devise a feasible definition thereof in the context of this thesis. Its origins were found in Marsha Kinder’s (1991) early conception of cross-medially dispersed content, followed by Henry Jenkins’ exemplary studies of the notion itself. Mainly Jenkins’ studies explicate the ways in
which transmedia storytelling practices disperse and expand a narrative across different media. These analyses eventually led to the conclusion that transmedia storytelling practices are creatively as well as industrially determined an rely heavily on engaged relations with their customers or users.

The second part focused on the industrial counterpart and traced the industrial developments of the entertainment industries. Taking the 1948 Paramount Decrees as a turning point for changing attitudes, a move towards industrial conglomerates and production of content was delineated. These developments are crucial to the practices of transmedia storytelling in the ways they shape the underlying industrial strategies and enable widespread dissemination of the artefacts, under the label media franchising.

The third and last part of the research focused on several contextual developments that influenced alterations to entertainment products through their relations with transmedia storytelling practices. They occupy the technological, creative, and commercial realms and form an intricate network of overdetermined relations with transmedia storytelling practices. The findings of this chapter result in more concrete alterations to transmedia storytelling artefacts and are thus crucial in the formation of an inventory of the practices and features related to the notion transmedia storytelling.

After conducting this research it can be concluded that the longstanding aim for profit-maximization maintained by the creative industries is able to thrive in part because of transmedia storytelling practices. These relate closely to technological, creative, and commercial disciplines and are influenced by developments in these fields. The consequences such developments have on the content of entertainment products are undoubtedly visible, yet to various degrees. The developments, although they appear in different forms and shapes, are all dependent on intimate relations with consumers or users. They are encouraged, expected even, to immerse themselves into the storyworlds created and disseminated by transmedia storytelling practices. The entertainment industries then use consumers’ tendency to extract elements thereof into their personal lives to increase their prospects of profit maximization. As such, the creative and commercial counterparts of transmedia storytelling practices prove to be inseparable, and to a great extent mutually reinforcing.
Annotated Bibliography


