A Theory of the Transmedia Franchise Character

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Clare Elizabeth Parody

September 2011

Abstract

In contemporary media landscapes characterised by technological, industrial, and cultural convergence, transmedia fictional practice, that is, the generation of multiple texts, products and experiences across multiple media outlets cohered by a common narrative reality, cast of characters, or entertainment brand, is in the ascendancy. This thesis begins from the observation that although transmedia practice is coterminously beginning to receive more and more critical attention, there remains much work to be done theorising the "total entertainment" experiences (Grainge, 2008: 11) it produces in fictional terms. It identifies a particular need for further critical investigation of how transmedia fictional practice interacts with the design, development, and representation of character.

It takes as its fundamental starting principle the assumption that transmediality can be defined and operationalised as a particular modality of fiction, producing particular orientations and operations of meaning and representation, and that the trans-textual, trans-medial extension of a fiction can be identified and delineated as a fictional practice. In dialogue with existing critical work organised by the concept of transmedia storytelling, and industrial discourses and practices of cross-platform production, I conceptualise and define the object of study of this thesis as the practice of transmedia franchising, of which transmedia storytelling is positioned as a sub-genre.

The thesis comprises an original theory of the transmedia franchise character as a fictional object, situated in a poetics of transmedia franchising as a fictional practice. It proposes conceptual tools, theoretical frameworks, and critical positions for understanding and analysing the processes of meaning and representation that build up a picture of a character as it is franchised across texts and media, and how they are shaped and influenced by key contextual factors. The six chapters map six core features of the transmedia franchise character as a fictional object, each then providing a granular elaboration of some of the formal, operational, functional, and critical implications of these features. Chapter One engages the problem of the instability of "the text" as critical concept and material artefact relative to transmedia franchise fiction; Chapter Two theorises the franchise character as extensible, designed to anticipate, sustain and generate serial development and representation across multiple texts; Chapter Three presents transmedia franchising as an art of multiplicity, and explores how it builds up a picture of character through setting in play dialogues between rewrites, reimaginings, and alternate versions; Chapter Four focuses on the multimediality of the franchise character specifically; Chapter Five discusses how paratextual material interpolates into and contributes to the actualisation of the franchise character; and Chapter Six explores the franchise character as site and technology of participation, interactivity, and immersion in the franchise world.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to all those people who have supported and encouraged me in my doctoral study, but especially:

First and foremost, to my supervisors: to Andy, both for the many hours of support, inspiration, and feedback over the course of my PhD, and for his teaching on the Science Fiction Studies MA, which first opened my eyes to new ways of thinking about what it means to study fiction; to Claire, for consistently going above and beyond the call of duty for a secondary supervisor; and to both of them, for making it possible for me to undertake these studies at the University of Liverpool in the first place.

To the University of Liverpool's School of English, for seeing in my work sufficient value to merit AHRC funding, for offering me invaluable teaching and presenting opportunities, and for providing a supportive and stimulating research environment.

To Kat, who has throughout understood, commiserated, and cheered me up.

To Ruth, who remains my best friend and a constant source of encouragement, intellectual challenge, and entertainment, even three hours' train journey away.

To my sister, who believes in me, makes me laugh, and manages not to rub her gainful employment in my face too much.

To Hazel, who has somehow put up with me through these three years, and given me more support, encouragement and happiness than I can say.

Finally, to my parents, who have given me unwavering support, financial, practical, and emotional, over twenty-one years of education, without which I would not be where I am or who I am today.

Contents

Introduction

Welcome to Convergence Culture

> Every once in a while a book escapes...it first severs the umbilical cord by which it was hitherto attached to an author, and then wisely (or foolishly) accepts any number of surrogate guardians – illustrators, dramatists, filmmakers, actors, composers, singers, choreographers and dancers – willing to devote their individual and combined talents to ensure its continued existence and ever-widening fame. (Sibley, 2006: xvi)

A snapshot: at the time of writing (1st September 2011), the ten highest-grossing films in the UK (UK Film Council, 2011) include *The Inbetweeners Movie* (Palmer, 2011), a feature film outing for the characters of a cult television comedy; *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (Wyatt, 2011), the latest in an array of prequels, sequels and remakes in film, television and comic books derived from Schaffner's 1968 *Planet of the Apes*, itself inspired by a novel; *The Smurfs* (Gosnell, 2011), a 3D film based on the 1980s comic books and animated television series of the same name, and released in tandem with videogames on the Nintendo Wii and DS and an extensive range of merchandise; *Conan the Barbarian* (Nispel, 2011), whose titular character, initially created by Robert E. Howard, has sustained not only nearly eight decades of short stories and novels by various authors, but also two other feature films, three television series, comic book lines by Marvel and Dark Horse, seven videogames, and a handful of trading card games, board games, and role-playing games; and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part Two* (Yates, 2011), the final instalment of a series of adaptations of J. K. Rowling's Potter novels, which have themselves spawned games both digital and table-top, merchandise ranging from Lego sets to elaborate replica wands, and even a theme park, Universal Studios' *Wizarding World of Harry Potter*.

Another: as each episode of the current series of *Doctor Who* (the sixth of the twenty-first-century revival) draws to a close, viewers' Who experience opens up. *Doctor Who Confidential*, a making-of documentary about the evening's episode, follows on its heels just a channel-hop away on BBC Three; a little further afield, at the BBC's website (http://www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/dw), lie deleted scenes, scriptwriting competitions,

trailers for the next episode, screenshots downloadable as wallpapers, storyboards, and browser games allowing users to "have an adventure in the time machine!" (BBC, 2011a)

And another: the worldwide bestselling videogame of 2011 so far (VGChartz, 2011) is *Pokémon Black/White Version* (Game Freak, 2011), the latest generation of an entertainment juggernaut currently spanning upwards of thirty video games, fourteen seasons of a still-ongoing animated television series, thirteen feature films, and countless forms of associated merchandise and branded products.

Sibley's remarks above introduce a collection of essays on the various media incarnations and translations of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* novels. He goes on to suggest that texts "escaping" to the degree that Tolkien's trilogy has is "rare enough" to be considered a "phenomenon"; it speaks, he suggests, to something special in the work at the heart of it all, "some lightning-strike of originality or spark of vision", that has caused it to "la[y] siege to the public imagination" (Sibley, 2006: xvi). In fact, this "phenomenon" of media production is becoming a pervasive and increasingly unremarkable fictional practice. More and more, not only books, but films, television programmes, comics, videogames, less "escape" than are released, even pushed out across platforms and into the hands of "surrogate guardians". Their narratives are extended into sequels, trilogies, series, branched and paralleled in spin-offs, across multiple media platforms; their characters turn up in adverts, stamped on Happy Meal boxes, shrunken into articulated plastic. They may expect adaptation, not once, but into a range of media, from the film of the book, to the game of the film, to the novelisation of the game. They are reformatted and streamed across a range of delivery technologies, repackaged into new editions, fragmented and dispersed into trailers, previews, and clip shows; they are surrounded and supplemented by websites, commentary tracks, and character blogs. This proliferation and overspill is orchestrated and organised: texts and products are marked and connected as members of a family; at the end of each fictional encounter is an invitation to another, one more text, one more experience, one more purchase.

 This fictional method is most notable where it has been most successful (and it has been successful – producing some of the most high-profile and high-grossing media fictions of the past century: *Star Wars*; Bond; Potter; *The Lord of the Rings*; *Toy Story*; *Star Trek*; *Pirates of the Caribbean*; Batman, Spider-Man, and many more superheroes beside, to name just a few), and undeniably, the extent of any given text's proliferation and mobility

is to a degree contingent on its initial profit generation and cultural impact. Yet it is increasingly present throughout landscapes of cultural production. Scripts of fictional production, consumption and engagement are being rewritten: the act of reading a book, watching a film, playing a game, is increasingly often a diffuse, prolonged, expansive experience, stretched across products and outlets; more and more fictional projects are conceived and developed from the start as materially inter-textual and inter-medial, multipronged and multifaceted.

This "textual overflow" (Brooker, 2001a) is not unique to recent decades. Kristin Thompson outlines a genealogy of what she terms franchising, the generation of related texts and products around a successful media fiction, stretching from the merchandising of *Felix the Cat* cartoons in the 1920s, through *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and decades of Disney production to the present day (2007: 4-7); she notes, too, that although they have recently "become more common and gained a higher profile", "sequels have actually been around since nearly the beginning of cinema" (3). Angela Ndalianis sees sympathies between much contemporary entertainment and seventeenth-century baroque aesthetics, noting their shared "lack of respect for the limits of the frame" (2005a: 25); Henry Jenkins looks back still further, at Greek myth and the Bible, noting that "unless you were literate, Jesus was not rooted in a book but was something you encountered at multiple levels in your culture" – and, indeed, in multiple forms and media: "a stained-glass window, a tapestry, a psalm, a sermon, a live performance" (2006a: 119). The practice of extending and expanding texts, the impulse to revisit a fictional world and explore more of its corners, to follow a narrative or character across texts and media, is undoubtedly a long-standing one.

Contemporary media landscapes, however, are characterised by a degree of industrial and technological convergence that enables and encourage it. Since the 1960s, many media corporations have been moving away from specialisation and towards conglomeration and production across media outlets, such that it has become "more desirable for [them] to distribute content across those various channels rather than within a single media platform" (Jenkins, 2006a: 11), to develop texts, creations and properties that can be used to generate multiple media products, and hence multiple revenue streams. Additionally, as Derek Johnson notes, in the 1980s and 90s particularly, these concentrations of power also led smaller studios to "push towards sequelisation and

serialised, ongoing production models", in an attempt to "grab market share" from these monopolies (2011: 11). Delivery technology, meanwhile, has been developing in the direction of the "Black Box" (Jenkins, 2006a: 14) ideal, the "one central device" (15) on which consumers can store their entire media libraries, and through which they can surf the internet, watch a film, listen to music, game, read a book, at the same time should they wish. Coterminous with this has been a general move towards digitisation of both delivery and production technology in a range of media industries. Together, these shifts are blurring and collapsing lines between media channels, reconfiguring their characteristic protocols of production, representation and delivery, and making content "a very liquid asset" (Wolf, 2000: 92), easily repackaged, remediated, and redistributed. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, from these patterns of technological and industrial convergence has come what Henry Jenkins calls convergence culture – media and cultural landscapes characterised by "flow of content across multiple media platforms [and] co-operation between multiple media industries" (Jenkins, 2006a: 2), flooded with remixes, remakes and reboots, extended editions and director's cuts, bonus interactive content, co-ordinated cross-platform marketing campaigns, adaptations, sequels and prequels. "In the world of media convergence," Jenkins writes, "every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms" (2006a: 3). Though what follows will focus on Anglo-American fictions and media landscapes, convergence culture is a global phenomenon; Japan, in particular, has long been experiencing similar trends and shifts towards what is usually termed a "media mix" culture (Ito, 2001).

It is in convergence culture, furthermore, that forms and patterns of cross-platform production are really developing identity and becoming institutionalised as fictional practices. Convergence culture is a moment in which not only are multifaceted fictional production and experiences prevalent, they are the subject of much press and industry discourse. As it becomes more and more of an imperative, industry figures and media creators are spending more and more time debating and reflecting on how to develop successful cross-platform entertainment, in conferences both public and private, interviews and press releases; this has been, for example, a primary topic at the 2011 NAB Show in Las Vegas, and has formed a key strand of discussions at the Producers Guild of America's 2011 Produced By Conference in June. As these cultural trends have taken root, meanwhile, they have generated press attention and editorial comment, from

features in *Wired* (Cheshire and Burton, 2010) to columns in *The Guardian* (Ewing, 2011). From this is emerging a vocabulary of cross-platform fictional production – synergy (Jenkins, 2006a: 19); multiplatform entertainment (Bilson, quoted in Jenkins, 2006a: 105); 360o storytelling (Gray, 2010: 210); screen bleed (Hanson, 2003: 47); and, rapidly gaining currency as the preferred term, transmedia (Jenkins, 2003) – and, more importantly, paradigms for transmedia practice. "When I was hired on *Heroes*," remarks Mark Warshaw, former associate producer of NBC's transmedia venture,

> the transmedia storytelling concept was pretty foreign to the studio, network, and some parts of the show...Now there are templates. (interviewed by and quoted in Gray, 2010: 218)

Producers and creators are gradually developing "transmedia production manuals" (Warshaw, as above), negotiating aesthetics, protocol and best practice, learning and refining particular configurations and co-ordinations of cross-platform production. Though the twenty-first-century may not have invented transmedia fiction, therefore, it has seen conventions start to crystallise, criteria for evaluation begin to become established, paths and grooves for the transmedia spreading of a text marked and worn.

In this thesis, however, my interest lies not only in the ways in which media convergence and transmedia practice affect what it means to produce and consume fiction, but also in the ways in which they affect how fiction means. That is, in what follows, I centrally look to explore and illuminate the anatomy and operations of transmedially conceived and developed fictions, to consider how transmedia practice modifies, transforms and inflects the nature of, for example, narrative, genre, or characterisation as fictional elements and operations, to theorise the particular strategies for the production of meaning and effect that transmedia fictional practice produces and makes possible. My aim is to make "textual overflow" fictionally intelligible in critical and analytical terms to a degree that it currently is not. Transmedia practice is increasingly well understood as a cultural phenomenon, yet remains underexplored and under-theorised as a method and modality of fictional representation.

Critical Landscapes of Media Convergence

Since I began this research project, the study of media convergence and transmedia practice has developed into an established, thriving field. MIT's Comparative Media Studies programme, led until recently by leading scholar of transmedia Henry Jenkins,

this year held its seventh *Media in Transition* conference; its Convergence Culture Consortium (C3), a knowledge exchange partnership of academics studying convergence and companies interested in profiting from it, is currently in its sixth year of research activity, and will be holding its fifth *Futures of Entertainment* conference in November 2011. In April this year, the second *Transmedia, Hollywood* symposium for transmedia creators and researchers took place at UCLA. Since Jenkins's pioneering and influential *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* in 2006, a number of monographs on the subject have been published (including, for example, Ross, 2008; Tryon, 2009; Evans, 2011), and media studies generally is becoming increasingly transmedia-aware. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, is now nearly sixteen years old, and in February 2011 published a special edition on "Adaptations, Cross-Media Practices, and Branded Entertainment."

Rather appropriately, the field of media convergence studies stands as a melting pot of epistemologies, fed by film studies, production studies, ethnography, cultural theory, economics, communication studies, audience studies, media history, and more. In this disciplinary convergence, however, sociological, historical, media and cultural studies perspectives notably dominate, with aestheticist readings, or fictional theory and analysis, currently underrepresented. Of course, transformations in fictional production and reception are not the only significant implications of recent paradigm shifts. Convergence culture is altering the way news is broadcast, the way politics operates, the way education needs to operate, the ways in which the creative industries are organised and creative labour is conceptualised; it is redefining advertising, remapping how we socialise, interact and communicate with each other, changing the role that media and media products play in daily life. It is changing, even, how we define and understand media themselves. Fiction, moreover, is not the only category of entertainment being affected by media convergence; as Jenkins (2006a: 9) observes, for example, the music industry is experiencing a period of great change and instability, and reality television shows have consistently been early and enthusiastic adopters of transmedia distribution and engagement strategies. From the first papers generated by the MIT Communications Forum, across which democracy, intellectual property, and reportage are recurring themes, it is these subjects and issues that have – understandably and valuably – defined the contours of much of the critical landscape of this field, and occupied much critical thinking and research activity on transmedia. Its major research consortia include Project

New Media Literacies, which takes as its focus the challenges and new possibilities faced by educators in the current media climate, and the Center for Future Civic Media, which explores the social and political potential of media change, and how convergence culture is transforming democracy. C3 is broader in its remit, but the work it produces clusters around the topics of journalism, globalisation, politics and policy. Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* devotes two of its six chapters to studies of reality television, two more to interactions between grassroots creativity and media institutions, another to political campaigning and activism in convergence culture, and only one explicitly to transmedia fictional practice; many others of the monographs and collections currently surveying the landscape of media convergence centrally engage the question of how to define cinema (Tryon, 2009), or television (Spiegel and Olsson, 2004), in the twenty-first-century. The editorial introduction to *Convergence*'s 2008 special edition on convergence culture presents its concerns as "renegotiations of power", "social networks", "democratization", the question of "what is a media company?" (Jenkins and Deuze, 2008).

Reflecting this orientation of the field, however, where transmedia fictional practice and its products are the objects of critical attention, their aesthetics and operations are often not the primary concern. Kristin Thompson's (2007) account of the transmedia activity surrounding Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, for example, is that of the film historian, interested in what it "reveals[...]about the changes going on in Hollywood in this transitional era of globalization and new media" (10); Ernest Mathijs inflects his collection on the various *Lord of the Rings* texts similarly, framing the study of the fiction's "multiple dimensions" as necessary "to fully comprehend the impact of cinema in the twenty-first century" (2006: 18). Likewise, Neil Perryman's exploration of the BBC's transmedia strategies in the twenty-first-century revival of *Doctor Who* sets out to "illustrate how *Doctor Who* has become an unlikely template for the BBC's drama output and commissioning policies[...and...]a flagship franchise for mainstream transmedia practices" (2008: 22). Jonathan Hardy's "mapping" of the range of transmedia proliferations generated both to market and to expand HBO's *True Blood* is first and foremost an analysis of "how corporate activity seeks to order (inter)textual space" (2011: 14); he examines how the orchestration of *True Blood*'s transmedia movements works "to establish both cult status and popular appeal" (12), rather than how, for example, the "faux evening weather reports on radio stations for vampires" he describes, create and draw on fictional meaning. Marianne Martens's (2011) reading of transmedia cultural

products aimed at teenage girls is principally concerned with how they are commodified and exploited as consumers and uninstitutionalised labourers. Ivan Askwith's (2007) anatomy of transmedia tie-ins is directed towards elaborating a theory and definition of audience engagement with media properties in convergence culture, and he is far from alone in this focus on the audiences, rather than the workings, of transmedia fiction: Ross's 2008 monograph on television "beyond the box" is principally a study of participatory engagement; Elizabeth Evans's work on transmedia television (2009; 2011) is centrally concerned with understanding how audiences use, respond to and engage with transmedia fictional practice, and the field of fan studies is a significant presence in the landscape of scholarship on media convergence (with self-titled "acafan" Henry Jenkins, of course, being a leading figure in both).

In some cases, furthermore, these angles of approach not only background the fictional dimensions and operations of transmedia movements and products, they work to obscure and even deny them. Wasko and Shanadi's (2006) descriptive inventory of *Lord of the Rings* merchandise, for example, writes these products as a catalogue of consumables, and reads off cultural significance from its scope and volume, collapsing any fictional meanings and operations at play in and around specific items into a conceptualisation of the body of them as evidence of "the extent to which literature/films have become commercialised", and "the ability of integrated entertainment conglomerates[...]to promote their products across their various businesses in synergistic fashion." (23) In many cases, where transmedia fictional practice and products are read in economic terms, the conceptual and critical vocabulary of commerce works not only to bring out their commercial motivations, operations and implications, but also to overwrite their fictionality. Martens' comments on *The Twilight Saga* and *Harry Potter* imply "licensing" and "merchandise" as antonyms of "culture" (2011: 57), and in doing so deny the transmedia movements of and around these fictions not only artistic value, but also the capacity to produce fictional meaning and effect. In organising discussions of trading card games, role-playing games, museums and exhibitions, conventions, and DVD repackagings all under the chapter heading "Licences to Print Money", Thompson (2007) erases the differences between these types of products' forms of representation, communication, and dialogues with other *Lord of the Rings* texts, and recategorises them together as revenue-generators; Mathijs's edited collection on the *Lord of the Rings*, meanwhile, groups studies of trailers, games, the *Lord of the Rings Location Guidebook*,

a *Lord of the Rings* musical, DVD extras, and pornographic parodies of the *Lord of the Rings* together under the section title "Ancillary Contexts", thereby not only positioning them as marginal and of secondary importance, but also constructing and conceptualising them as illuminating background information rather than objects of analysis in themselves. Though he emphasises that they "deserve to be scrutinised", Matt Hills's note in introducing his study of the New *Who* revival that "readers hoping for analyses of new *Who*'s tie-in novels, of *Doctor Who Magazine* comic strips, or fan fiction, will be disappointed" (2010: 4), nevertheless works to downplay and deny their functions as part of a fictional project by suggesting that engaging them is optional to a critical analysis of New Who.

There is a growing body of work that explores how the various components of transmedially developed fictions work in themselves and in relation to each other to create fictional meaning, and that is beginning to build up a picture of transmedia production as a fictional practice. This picture is, however, still only partial. Many studies give only an account of a specific vector of transmedia movement, a specific configuration of media or genres, such as Martin Barker's (2006) work on the BBC radio adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, or Tom Brown's (2007) theory of the DVD as entertainment object; digital texts and media, meanwhile, are overrepresented in these studies, reflecting a general tendency Derek Johnson observes in the field to understand convergence and transmedia in terms of digitisation and new media (2009: 35). Moreover, these studies often noticeably lack a formalised, generalised understanding of the protocols of transmedia fictional practice, as is felt, for example, in Thompson's (2007) brief discussion of the fictional interrelation of the *Lord of the Rings* films and videogames. Others, conversely, give a general reading of the transmedia proliferation of a fiction at the expense of its particularities, finding meaning in the fact of a text's "escape" rather than the specifics of its extension; Jones, for example, discusses an effect of "perceptual transparency", of "overlaying material reality with the signs of the fictional world", produced by "transmediality" broadly, analysing its "accumulative effects" (2002: 84).

As it is in industry, a sense of transmedia aesthetics is emerging increasingly strongly from critical work in the field, not least from the work of Henry Jenkins. Jenkins's discussions of transmedia fictional practice illuminate it, for example, as an art

of worldbuilding (2009a, c), as "a hyperbolic version of the serial" (2009c) that offers pleasures of "openness, [...and of] suddenly understanding how a bit of information consumed in one medium fits into the puzzle being laid out for us in a totally different platform." (2009a) They elaborate convincingly its aims and impulses, to offer "new levels of insight and experience" (2006a: 98) with respect to a narrative, character, or fictional world, for example, and identify a range of core design principles, such as spreadability, drillability, extractability and immersion (2009b, c). However, again reflecting undercurrents in the field, much of this work and the scholarship it has influenced is geared more towards helping creators understand and implement good transmedia practice than helping critics unravel and elucidate transmedia products. Geoffrey Long's identification of an aesthetic of "negative capability" in transmedia practice, for example, explicitly sets out to establish what "a storyteller looking to craft a potential transmedia narrative should" be doing (2007: 60, emphasis mine), while an idiom of ideals and potentials runs through Jenkins's writing, a construction of transmedia practice as enriching and enhancing. Still largely missing from the field, furthermore, are more granular explorations and theories of how these aesthetics and impulses translate into fictional operations, inter- and intra-textual structures, representational strategies and orchestrations of effect, of how exactly transmedia fiction works. Indeed, Jenkins' opening remarks at 2011's *Transmedia, Hollywood* conference identified this very problem, and addressing it as the brief of the conference (2011a); however, speakers tended to interpret this brief as a call for more discussion of specific case studies, rather than finer nuances of theory, and Jenkins' most recent (1 August 2011) writing on transmedia fiction is still in broad brushstrokes (2011b).

Angela Ndalianis's *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (2005a) is a notable exception in this. Ndalianis's central thesis, as noted above, is that currently, "mainstream cinema and other entertainment media are imbued with a neo-baroque poetics" (5). She finds in what she conceptualises as a widespread, multifaceted drive towards the "traversal of boundaries" (1) an aesthetic of the spectacular and the sensory, a tendency towards the "infinite" expansion of narrative scenarios and "polycentric", labyrinthine mapping of narrative paths (26); she observes in contemporary entertainment the dominance of intertextual (26) and spatial logics (27). As she elaborates this thesis, she puts in place a rich conceptual vocabulary for figuring the nature of fictional meaning and representation in transmedia works, their narrative

patternings, intertextual dialogues and acts of transformation; she theorises not only aesthetics, but also techniques and operations of transmedia practice. Her discussion ranges widely across media, and readily recognises the fictional and artistic dimensions of categories of media product and experience often de-aestheticised, such as the theme park and the videogame. Still, Ndalianis leaves room for further interventions of this sort in the field. Her work is intended, for example, to make broad comment on contemporary media production and products, not simply that modality of practice now called transmedia. Paradoxically, therefore, it is limited as an account of transmedia practice by its scope and diffuse, roaming focus; fully understanding transmedia fictional practice, I would argue, requires recognising that and how it is developing protocols and specific identity. As is unavoidable in an era of such rapid technological, industrial, and cultural change, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics* has dated, particularly in its comments on video games and the web. While Ndalianis's analogy of baroque art is undeniably an effective and illuminating critical framing, meanwhile, it remains only one lens through which to read transmedia aesthetics, representation, and strategies of meaning.

One part of the anatomy of transmedia fictions, furthermore, is notable in its absence: character. Ndalianis is not alone in this. The intersection of transmedia practice with the development and representation of character is perhaps the most under-theorised corner of this under-theorised area; scholarship is overwhelmingly oriented towards understanding narrative and worldbuilding, towards describing how pieces and strands of narrative information and action are organised across texts and media (Long, 2007; Jenkins, 2006a), how individual texts point in narrative and worldbuilding details towards other instalments (Long, 2007). Elizabeth Evans's 2009 investigation of audience engagement with transmedia television drama is something of an exception, oriented as it is around identification with characters, but still her interest does not lie in processes and strategies of characterisation as such. Pearson's (2009) work on *Lost* is another, in its elaboration of a theory of the nature of character and characterisation in a transmedia narrative that is "hermeneutically driven" (142), but its outlook is very specific. The topic is beginning to receive more critical attention – Jenkins's (2010a) annotated syllabus for a university module on "Transmedia Entertainment and Storytelling" includes a week on "migratory characters", and character was the subject of one panel at 2011's *Transmedia, Hollywood* conference – but nowhere near proportionate to the importance of character in transmedia fictional practice.

Cultural Icons

As Evans observes, speaking specifically of television serials, "characters are a central, if not the central, point of engagement" (2009: 203) for audiences of long-form fiction (as transmedially developed fictions characteristically are); "whereas," she argues, "in terms of prolonged engagement with a drama, narratives can begin to merge and become indistinguishable from each other, characters are easier to identify and recall." (203) In his essay on what he calls "the contemporary ubiquity of media" (2009: 114) in Japan, Marc Steinberg likewise insists on the central role of character in successfully developing a fictional property across platforms. He identifies character as a key "form of relational or connective technology" (116), as a "technolog[y] of media ubiquity" (130); because to a degree "character – as a named, visual figure that possesses recognizable attributes – is independent from any particular medium" (128), because "the most basic form of the character[...is...]fundamentally transposable" (128), it is a key means of generating, connecting and cohering multiple texts and products. Insofar as they may be objects of desire, emulation, and intense attachment and affection, characters may be exploited to motivate sustained investment both emotional and financial in a transmedia fiction; they provide a source for multiple kinds of ancillary product: action figures; character merchandising; replica props and costumes. They are loci of identification and introjection; they structure continuity between transmedia movements, and give identity to the whole.

Characters developed and articulated through transmedia practice are among the most culturally omnipresent and significant of the last century. Characters like Batman, James Bond, Harry Potter, the Doctor, Captains Kirk and Sparrow, are transnationally and transtemporally recognisable and meaningful, even though their identities are elastic and evolving; their appeal is multigenerational, and has endured even through multiple cultural and aesthetic shifts. They have been made to bear a weight of socio-political and ideological functions and meanings, often differently at different points in their cultural lifespan; "they condense and connect, serve as shorthand expressions for, a number of deeply implanted cultural and ideological concerns." (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987: 14) They often, as Jenkins and Spiegel observe, play a part in how people understand and construct "their own personal identity[...]and their particular relationship to the social world." (1991: 136) They are, as editor Dennis O'Neil muses of Batman and Robin specifically, "part of our folklore", "deep[...]in our collective psyches" (Pearson and

Uricchio, 1991b: 23); they are named idols, icons, myths. Through their years of popularity and visibility, moreover, they have almost transcended their unreality. "Without exception," Bennett and Woollacott write, remembering an ITV anniversary programme about James Bond, "all of those interviewed spoke of Bond as a real person" (1987: 13), while Andy Medhurst (1991: 152) observes how many commentators on Batman do much the same; in popular and critical discourse, in the collective imagination, these characters have been "granted a quasi-real status" (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987: 13), known and treated as celebrities, public figures, folk figures as much as characters. "Batman," note Jenkins and Spiegel, "[...]has become part of our culture's popular memory" (1991: 119); James Bond "is arguably the most popular – in the sense of widely known – figure of the post-war period, if not of this century" (Bennett and Woollacott, 1988: 11); "a generation[...]grew up dressing as Darth Vader for Halloween" (Jenkins, 2006a: 131); "even those who have never played *Tomb Raider* are likely to at least have at least heard of Lara Croft" (Newman, 2004: 127).

If the field of transmedia scholarship does not adequately recognise this, then cultural studies more broadly does; Bond and Batman, at least, have had more than one full length study devoted to them as cultural icons. Conversely, however, whether as a function of their chosen framework and focus, or because they predate formalised critical understandings of convergence and transmedia, this work often does not sufficiently engage their idiosyncrasy as fictional phenomena, and particularly, the transmedia dimension of their development, representation, and distribution. Bennett and Woollacott's seminal 1987 study of James Bond as "popular hero", for example, *Bond and Beyond*, recognises that he is a trans-media and trans-textual figure, though it lacks this vocabulary; they begin their study by noting that the figure of Bond is articulated by a wide range of texts, "which are constituted into an interacting set precisely by the functioning of the figure of Bond as the signifier which floats between and connects them." (19) Indeed, their landmark critical position is that fully understanding Bond as cultural icon requires tracing his representation through all "texts of Bond", as they put it. However, in undertaking these tracings, their principal aim is to illuminate him as a "moving sign of the times" (19), that is, to trace the various and shifting political, cultural, and ideological meanings and functions that have been assigned to him over the course of his cultural lifespan. This colours what comment there is on the ways in which this "interacting set" of representations is organised; the textual and extra-textual forces

that relate and position different "texts of Bond" are primarily framed in terms of "cultural activation", the "cueing" of particular readings and construction of implied audiences (55). In practice, meanwhile, the relationship between particular texts or representations is usually articulated in comparative terms. This focus also means, understandably, that there is little further reflection in the fictional analysis that underpins their decodings and constructions of cultural significance on the critical and conceptual problems posed by Bond as a fictional object.

Tony Bennett provides the foreword for Pearson and Uricchio's 1991 collection of essays on "a superhero and his media", Batman, and the influence of *Bond and Beyond* is evident throughout the anthology. Batman as a character is likewise recognised as likewise built up from "a plethora of corporately orchestrated expressions" (Pearson and Uricchio, 1991a: 1), but similarly approached first and foremost as a "complex cultural phenomenon" (2). The general relevance of Batman as a specific case of multi-platform fiction is framed not in terms of what he may illuminate about the nature of large-scale, trans-textual and trans-media storytelling, but in terms of what he illuminates about "the production, circulation and reception of the media products that make up contemporary popular culture." (2) Of the ten essays, four are explicitly or implicitly audience studies, investigations of demographics, ways of reading, and affective response, two are interviews with contributing creators, one is a comic book historian's account of the Batman's textual lifespan, and another situates the late eighties "deluge of [Batman] material" as an economic strategy in response to a contemporary phase of industrial conglomeration and convergence (Meehan, 1991: 47). The remaining two, however, do usefully approach the transmediality of Batman more from the perspective of fictional analysis, albeit a touch obliquely. Jim Collins (1991) engages the question of how different Bat-texts rework and speak to their antecedents, though he frames Batman's inter-textuality in terms of a trend in popular narrative towards "hyperconsciousness", rather than towards transmedia practice; Pearson and Uricchio (1991c), meanwhile, illustrate a core critical problem in studying transmedia characters, without explicitly reflecting on it as such, through their thorough exploration of what exactly, given such a "plethora of expressions", may be said to be "the core character of the Batman" (186).

Will Brooker's 2001 monograph on Batman as "cultural icon" positions itself in the line of both *Bond and Beyond* and Pearson and Uricchio's collection. As Brooker puts it, his book is

> an investigation, a detection, a "forensic examination" of the disparate texts which have borne the signifier "Batman" over sixty years, in an attempt to reconstruct their context and hence recover the meanings carried by this cultural icon at key moments in his history. (3)

Again, Batman's transtextuality and transmediality is acknowledged as territory to be explored, but not directly confronted or engaged as a modality of his nature as a fictional object. Brooker also, however, aligns his study with Ken Gelder's *Reading the Vampire* (1994), and Batman, implicitly at first then more explicitly (2001: 333), with the vampire as cultural and fictional figure. This, I would suggest, is a misalignment; while it may usefully articulate something of Batman's power, functions and operations as a cultural object, it misrepresents him as a fictional object. Gelder's monograph is a study of an archetype, of "the vampire" (1994: ix) rather than any particular vampire; in fictional terms, however, Batman remains, notionally at least, across and behind all his incarnations a specific fictional character, his inter-textuality, as Pearson and Uricchio note, "corporately orchestrated" into a single, continuous (in its meaning as antonym of discrete) fiction, however expansive and diffuse. Like all of these studies, Brooker's work contains framings and concepts useful for understanding transmedia fictionality, and suggestive analyses of particular inter-textual interrelations, but it lacks both a rigorous understanding of transmedia practice and explicit engagement with the fictional particularity and complexity of the character; Brooker applies terms like "franchise" or "fictional brand" without defining them either in fictional or economic terms. As I note above, all three of these works predate significant critical work on media convergence and transmedia practice, and the fact that none of them bring out and position the characters they study explicitly as products of a particular kind of fictional practice by no means invalidates their analyses. It does mean, however, that the picture they give of these characters, and the frameworks they propose for understanding them, are partial, and the contribution they make to a broader understanding of transmediated characters in fictional terms is limited.

Theorising the Transmedia Character

This thesis sets out to respond to the need thus identified from this survey of the field of convergence culture and transmedia studies, that is, a need for further dedicated, rigorous, holistic theorising of transmedia fictional practice, and in particular, of how a transmedia method interacts with the development and representation of character. The chapters that follow aim to set out a conceptualisation of the nature of the transmedia character as a fictional object, rooted in a poetics of transmedia fictional practice – that is, a set of conceptual tools and theoretical frameworks for understanding the "formal repercussions" (Ndalianis, 2005a: 2) of media convergence and transmedia practice, for expressing the fictional operations and processes involved in and produced by the transmedia elaboration of a "narrative scenario" or imagined world broadly, and character specifically within it, at the level of both overarching logics of meaning, effect, and representation and specific strategies. This poetics will acknowledge and account for how contemporary media landscapes are encouraging and institutionalising transmedia fictional production, while still providing critical theory that can describe and illuminate earlier examples of the form.

My intention is not to stage an interrogation of or challenge to fundamental theories and ontologies of character as an element of fiction. Concurring with his own opinion of its "comprehensiveness" and wide applicability (1990: 845), I accept Uri Margolin's general conceptualisation of the fictional character as a "non-actual individual", that is, an imagined person with an imagined life course, "freely devised or constructed by an actual human mind in acts of hypothesizing, supposing, or imagining[...,]called into existence and intersubjectively manifested by means of entity-invoking expressions" (Margolin, 1990: 847).

> It can be uniquely identified, located in a space/time region, and endowed with a variety of physical and mental attributes and relations, including social, locutionary, epistemic, cognitive, emotive, volitional, and perceptual. [It] may possess inner states, knowledge and belief sets, traits, intentions, wishes, dispositions, memories, and attitudes, that is, an interiority or personhood. (844)

Margolin's definition is primarily an ontological/philosophical one, but becomes a definition of "a character" as a fictional object with a slightly different inflection: a fictional character is a structure of meaning, of acts of signification, from which is inferred an imaginary individual. It should be noted that this process of inference should

be foregrounded, examined and interrogated in critical engagement with transmedially-presented characters specifically. The issue of how exactly the many diverse and dispersed representations of a transmedia character are understood as all referring to the same "non-actual individual" is a complex and important one; it is particularly useful to think about transmedia characters in terms of defining traits, immediately recognisable signatures, cohering principles.

Working from this basic definition, my aim is to theorise the particularities of the transmedia character as a fictional object in more functional and operational terms. I look to build up a picture of factors and frameworks shaping the conception and design of transmedia characters, of the ways in which their life courses are imagined and articulated, of key sites and strategies of their representation, and cruces of meaning therein, of how character is implicated in the aims and impulses of transmedia fictional practice.

I build this picture from six different materials. I draw on existing critical literature on transmedia fictional practice and its products, either to elaborate the implications of general theories of transmedia aesthetics for understanding character and characterisation specifically, or explore how they translate into representational strategies, or to extrapolate general principles from specific case studies. I consider how far secondary literature on genres or modes of fiction that share salient qualities with transmedia practice, or may even be reasonably considered antecedents or tributaries of it, may be usefully applied or modified to illuminate it. I examine those industrial and press texts and discourses that are contributing to the establishment and institutionalisation of an identity and protocols for transmedia practice, and theorise their "formal repercussions"; I likewise engage the contours of the Anglo-American landscapes of media convergence that are currently encouraging transmedia practice, and suggest how technological, industrial and cultural features of this landscape produce and shape fictional dynamics and strategies. I occasionally draw also on work on Japan's "media mix" culture, recognising sympathies between Japanese and Anglo-American media landscapes in this respect, and also that Anglo-American media convergence and transmedia practice has in many respects been fed by Japanese cultural products and trends, including anime, manga, console and mobile gaming. I theorise transmediality as

a fictional modality both in the abstract, and from noting trends and patterns across specific case studies.

With respect to this latter, I have taken two approaches. Recognising that any theory of a fictional mode or genre should be rooted in as broad a survey of relevant texts as possible, I have immersed myself over the three years of this research project in convergence culture as a critical consumer, monitoring and following the emergence and development of Anglo-American transmedia projects closely. I have also, however, engaged in depth and at length with five franchises in particular: *Harry Potter, The Matrix,* the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*, the twenty-first-century revival of *Doctor Who*, and *Star Wars*. My selection of this corpus of case studies was first and foremost informed by Jenkins's observations writing on the challenges of teaching transmedia fiction. Jenkins reflects that "the sheer scale" of the works he taught meant that he "need[ed] to rely on students' existing familiarity with the franchises" (2010a: 947); he notes, also, that while student analyses and contributions were very successful where the students were working with "franchises they already knew well", if they did not have this prior familiarity, "discussions faltered, staying at a fairly superficial level" (2010a: 947). Jenkins's teaching experiences speak to the fact that acquiring the level and kind of mastery over the multi-text of a franchise required for advanced, closely engaged critical practice requires the critic to have followed the trans-media spread of the franchise as an active, interested consumer over the period of its release. This is only partly because of franchises' "sheer scale"; part of the difficulty faced by Jenkins and his students in this respect, after all, is a function of the limited time available in a single undergraduate module. More important is the fact that as the following chapters will discuss in more detail, fully understanding the design and operations of a transmedia franchise demands significant critical reflection on the circumstances and orchestration of the release and circulation of its texts, products, characters and iconography, on the (many) cultural moment(s) of the franchise. Furthermore, and relatedly, the critic having had that kind of prolonged exposure to and involvement with a franchise as it has unfolded in the media landscape is important because the stance of the critic of franchise fiction should not necessarily be, as Marie-Laure Ryan puts it,

> the stance that has traditionally dominated the criticism of print literature: the perspective of an omniscient Superreader who, having committed every word to memory, and enjoying a panoramic vision of the entire text, authoritatively

dissects ideas, themes, style, narrative techniques, and plot (or the lack thereof)[.] (Ryan, 2001: 225)

Ryan calls for a move away from this stance in critical readings of hypertext fiction, suggesting that the nature of the hypertext novel – multicursal, interactive, non-trivially different on each reading – requires criticism that does not try to dissemble its contingency and partiality, and that is closely aware of and engaged with the experience and "dynamics of the reading process" (2001: 225). I would suggest that transmedia fiction shares some salient qualities with hypertext fiction such that a similar shift in critical stance is productive: transmedia "texts" are composed of multiple parts dispersed over time across media outlets, between which the consumer must navigate; the consumer's path through this network of parts may be variously configured and variously comprehensive; it is a network of events and experiences, many of which are themselves interactive to a greater or lesser degree, as much as a network of texts and objects. In the case of the transmedia franchise, however, the typical "reading process" (if indeed one can be generalised) unfolds over a significant period of time, across many different cultural spaces and reception communities, interpolated and inflected by flows of cultural discourse. For the critic to truly take up the stance proposed by Ryan relative to a transmedia fiction, they should thus themselves have experienced this kind of unfolding, exploratory, dynamic encounter with the transmedia work.

In this research project, therefore, I have chosen to work most extensively with transmedia fictions that I have consumed extensively over the period as they have been developed and released. *The Matrix, Harry Potter, Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* and New *Who* franchises I have experienced as a typical consumer, following them as they have spread across platforms and products, noting their advertising campaigns and promotional events, reading around and about them, as well as revisiting their many texts and investigating their more obscure corners from a critical perspective over the course of this research project, and indeed consuming their most recent instalments as they have been released as at once a fan and a researcher. I have also, however, taken advantage of the time available to me as a doctoral researcher rather than an undergraduate student to critically explore the vast *Star Wars* multitext, a transmedia fiction with which I was largely unfamiliar prior to this research project, yet which represents transmedia fictional practice taken to perhaps its fullest extent. The theories set out in this thesis have thus been shaped both by critical reflection on immersion as a consumer in landscapes of

media convergence and transmedia fictions, and critical analysis of transmedia products at more of a remove.

I have also chosen these particular five case studies as representative of the range of particular forms, processes and practices that fall under the umbrella of transmedia production and distribution. They illustrate different types of orchestrated cross-platform intertextuality, from adaptation, to narrative extension, to merchandising, from the careful co-ordination of tie-ins across platforms in a relatively small window of time, to the exploitation of a property in fits and starts across many years. Though all have achieved global visibility and popularity, two are primarily the products of the UK entertainment industry (*Harry Potter* and *New Who*), two the USA media industry (*The Matrix* and *Star Wars*), and one the Japanese media landscape (the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*). They also, meanwhile, comprise a set of franchises which have their starting points in, and remain dominated by, different media; the *Harry Potter* franchise has its roots in a series of novels, the *Matrix* franchise in a trilogy of films, the *Star Wars* franchise in two film trilogies, New *Who* in a television series, and the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* in a videogame.

It is worth noting, however, that they are all similar in their genres; all five are works of speculative fiction, of science fiction and fantasy and often a mixture of the two. To an extent, this in itself makes them usefully representative of the current and historical landscape of transmedia fiction, which has been and continues to be dominated by speculative genres. Tom Abba discusses this as a function of the fact that some forms or strategies of transmedia extension of a property resonate particularly well with the tropes of these genres. His focus is primarily on Alternate Reality Games or ARGs, intricate, large-scale, primarily web-based puzzles with a narrative frame that players work both collaboratively and individually, both online and off, over a period of months or even years, to solve, and which are increasingly commonly used to transmedially promote and extend media fictions. Abba notes that the core mechanics of the ARG position players as hacker detectives trying to get to the bottom of murky mysteries, asking them to draw on their individual and collective computer and cultural literacy to crack codes, sniff out leads to new parts of the puzzle, piece together information; as such, he observes, they suit very well a cyberpunk narrative frame (2009: 63). I would also add that science fiction narratives more broadly, particularly near-future ones featuring high-tech

organisations (whether shady or benevolent), lend themselves well to the generation of tie-in websites, which as New Who has shown with its real-world web presences for the fictional Torchwood Institute (http://www.bbc.co.uk/torchwood/sites/arg/pages/messages.shtml) and U. N. I. T. (http://www.unit.org.uk/), may be used in Alternate Reality Games, advertising campaigns, or simply to provide new worldbuilding or narrative content on a new platform. Beyond this, however, speculative fiction genres are also highly merchandisable genres, sources of extravagant costumes, uniforms and armours, high-tech and magical weapons, vehicles, and artefacts, alien and fantastic creatures, objects that represent adventures, quests, and great powers, that are ripe to be turned into tools for imaginative play. Moreover, as Scott Bukatman has addressed at length in *Matters of Gravity* (2003), there is particularly much potential in speculative genres for "technological spectacle" (2), that is, for showing off the latest advances in representational technologies, and the pleasures of both feed off each other. Seeing a vast alien cityscape rendered in minute detail by a top-of-the-range videogame console, and being able to manoeuvre an avatar around it, or seeing a fire-breathing dragon loom in 3D from a digital cinema screen, redoubles the sense of wonder that the fantastic invention in itself induces. As Chapter One and Chapter Four will discuss further, technological spectacle is important to the transmedia aesthetic. Fascination with the representational capacities of new media technologies motivates moves across media platforms for consumers and producers; remastering is a key transmedia logic, a strategy for refreshing and extending (and eking more profit from) a creative property that can be relied upon to stimulate renewed interest and new purchases from consumers, and can be used to stake a claim for a franchise on a new delivery channel. However, the transmedia treatment may in theory be applied to fictions of any genre, and as such, in drawing so heavily on examples of speculative transmedia fictions, it has been necessary to remain sensitive in my theoretical extrapolations to how the conventions and mechanics of speculative genres with respect to characterisation are interacting with the particularities of transmediality as a modality of fiction in these case studies.

I have set out in this thesis to produce a work of critical theory, rather than an exercise in critical analysis, with the hope that what follows will provide a solid foundation for further rigorous studies of specific cases, in addition to making transmedia fictional practice generally more intelligible. My intention is that the conceptual and

theoretical elaborations that follow may serve as a vocabulary and guide for the critical analysis of character in transmedia fiction, a toolkit for thinking about and illuminating their design, representation and functions, and a map of productive directions and sites for critical investigation. I do, however, repeatedly relate and apply my theoretical work to particular transmedia products, to ensure that abstraction does not become misrepresentation.

I begin in this from the assumption that transmediality can be defined and operationalised as a particular modality of fiction, producing particular orientations and operations of meaning and representation, and that the trans-textual, trans-medial extension of a fiction can be identified and delineated as a fictional practice, that is, a method or strategy for conceiving, developing, producing and releasing fictional content, which I in this thesis will call transmedia franchising. Before I begin my discussion proper, however, both this assumption and my choice of terminology require further comment.

Transmedia Franchising

Critical work on transmedia fiction and media convergence is often preoccupied with questions of definition and differentiation – the question of, for example, how far transmediality and transtextuality is sufficient to confer uniqueness and particularity on the fictions at hand, given that, as Gérard Genette rightly comments, "textual transcendence" (1997a: 1) is "obviously to some degree a universal feature of literarity" (9); some fictions are "more visibly, massively, and explicitly" (9) transtextual than others, but is a difference in degree necessarily a difference in kind? There is also the issue of distinguishing between the various kinds of cross-platform media practice, product, entertainment and communication that are currently flourishing in a climate of media convergence, and pinning down the terms often used interchangeably and imprecisely to refer to them.

In Henry Jenkins's earliest (2003) work on the concept of transmedia, for example, "transmedia storytelling" begins to emerge for the first time as a delineated category of multi-platform fictional practice. Reflecting the fact that Jenkins intended to elaborate it for potential transmedia producers and creators as "a new model" (1) for multi-platform content creation, the concept of "transmedia storytelling" is here defined and distinguished primarily in qualitative terms; transmedia storytelling is differentiated

from "sequels", "franchises", and "the current licensing system" (2) because it produces "a depth of experience", "a more complex, more sophisticated, more rewarding mode of narrative" (3), rather than "works that are redundant (allowing no new character background or plot development), watered down (asking the new media to slavishly duplicate experiences better achieved through the old), or riddled with sloppy contradictions" (2). It is an integrated, co-ordinated production effort, preferably overseen and even controlled by "a single creator or creative unit" (2); in its "ideal form", "each medium does what it does best" (3). Star Wars is positioned as paradigmatic because it fulfils these aesthetic criteria, and has been economically and culturally successful.

These early principles of differentiation can be seen to have percolated through into Jenkins's later attempts to define "transmedia storytelling" more rigorously and completely as a form of fictional practice and content production, and other types of synergy and cross-platform production relative to it. In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins offers a formal definition of transmedia storytelling that echoes the language and thinking of this previous work:

> A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable [p. 96] contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction[...]Reading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption. (2006a: 95-6)

It is *The Matrix*, here, that is positioned as paradigm, although more comment is made acknowledging an extensive history of transmedia fictional practice, and identifying such products of the Japanese media mix culture as *Pokémon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh* as further defining examples. Again, the practice is repeatedly defined as a way of enriching fictional projects and experiences; it produces a "whole[...]worth more than the sum of its parts" (102), an effect of "additive comprehension" (123), of consistently bringing out new facets and depths of a narrative or narrative world. It is constructed as "a whole new vision of synergy" (104), more explicitly differentiated from a practice only negatively defined as franchising or licensing in terms of the degree to which the products generated are "peripheral to what drew us to the original story in the first place", not conceived as part of an overarching transmedia project from the outset, and "governed too much by economic logic and not enough by artistic vision" (105); again,

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issues of quality are implicated in this negotiation of distinction, with Jenkins contrasting "hack collaborators[...]crank[ing] out the games, comics and cartoons" (108) and "big and dumb and noisy" franchises (130). "Transmedia storytelling" emerges from *Convergence Culture*, however, seeming more a notional or ideal than an actual category of fictional production; much of Jenkins's discussion of the topic focuses on the extent to which creators and audiences are still negotiating how to work and consume in transmedia, and he notes early on that "relatively few, if any, franchises achieve the full aesthetic potential of transmedia storytelling." (97)

Jenkins's vocabulary and criteria of differentiation resonate throughout other work in the field. Geoffrey Long uses "transmedia storytelling" to refer to the type of "business, aesthetics, and production" he studies in the Jim Henson company, and assumes Jenkins's definition thereof, picking out his criterion that each transmedia proliferation should make a "distinctive and valuable" contribution to the overarching fiction as particularly the key to defining this specific cross-platform practice (2007: 16). He engages more directly than Jenkins the question of what makes a contribution "distinctive and valuable" in this context, but comes to a similar conclusion: that it is a question of cohesion (34) and of whether or not the content is optional to an understanding and appreciation of the fiction as a whole (40). Long also more rigorously defines what he calls "transmedia branding" in opposition to transmedia storytelling, that is, the generation of products such as "a box of *Star Wars* cereal" (32), the application of names, characters, iconography from a fiction to non-fictional products. His definitional work spends time additionally distinguishing transmedia storytelling from adaptation, thereby positioning the transmedia movements generated around Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* novels as a different, undefined kind of practice. He diverges from Jenkins's schema at only one significant point; where Jenkins positions "co-creation" – "conceiving [a] property in transmedia terms from the outset" (2007) – as a defining principle of transmedia storytelling, Long suggests that what he calls *a priori* and *a posteriori* transmedia practice may be conceptualised as sub-categories of transmedia storytelling, that transmedia storytelling may be envisaged from the start of a fictional project or embarked upon following the success of an initial hit property (Long, 2007: 20).

Neil Perryman, meanwhile, in an article on "*Doctor Who* and the convergence of media", uses Jenkins's terminology to differentiate two phases of cross-platform practice

in the production of the show. The 2005 revival of *Who*, Perryman suggests, is "what we would now refer to as transmedia storytelling" (2008: 23), whereas earlier examples of "multimedia storytelling" (22) accompanying the television programme were not. Perryman makes this distinction firstly on the grounds that in the case of the earlier phase of multi-platform production,

> little or no collaboration existed between the BBC and the books' publishers, and more often than not the spin-offs were riddled with contradictions and surreal interpretations of the show's protagonist. (23)

The remainder of the article relates the transmedia movements around the revival series to Jenkins's definition of transmedia storytelling as offering consumers "new levels of insight and [an] experience [that] refreshes the franchise and sustains consumer loyalty" (2006a: 96), almost testing them against this criterion.

Jenkins's more recent writing on the subject indicates several significant evolutions in his thinking on the subject. Responding to film critic David Bordwell's rather critical interrogation of claims to transmedia storytelling's novelty and particularity, for example, a 2009 piece (2009a) displays greater awareness of and interest in the precursors of the modern transmedia fiction, and positions itself more as involved in constructing continuities and lines of descent for this fictional category than the delineation and differentiation of something new. It recognises, too, some of the slipperiness of any distinction between "transmedia promotion" and "transmedia extension", acknowledging that in an age of complex, extensive advertising campaigns that often blur the line between advertisement and entertainment, "one man's promotion is another man's exposition". Perhaps most importantly, this work begins more formally to define transmedia storytelling as a category of fictional practice in aesthetic terms, introducing such defining characteristics as its emphasis on worldbuilding and practices of managing and presenting diegetic information.

In what is perhaps the fullest statement of Jenkins's conceptualisation of transmedia storytelling as a category of fiction, his two 2009 blog posts setting out "Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling" (2009b and c), these shifts are reflected, but many of his earlier mechanisms of definition and differentiation are also retained. "Seven Principles" repeats Jenkins's "Transmedia Storytelling 101" definition of the practice verbatim, though adds the qualifications and nuances that, firstly, narrative is

only one logic organising this practice (others including branding and spectacle), and secondly, some transmedia storytelling operates according to a logic of multiplicity rather than continuity. That is, rather than always carefully and systematically developing one continuous narrative map across a range of media texts, some transmedia storytellers occasionally produce in addition "alternative versions of the characters or parallel universe versions of the stories" (2009b). These pieces also repeat the movement differentiating transmedia storytelling from adaptation, and from transmedia branding, although they acknowledge that some transmedia proliferations – action figures, for example – seem to fall somewhere in between the two.

These negotiations of terminology and typology are drawn together and re-employed in the opening chapters of Elizabeth Evans's *Transmedia Television* (2011), one of the most recent concerted attempts at pinning down a definition of transmedia storytelling as a fictional practice. Evans echoes and expands many of their argumentative and theoretical movements, again invoking for the purposes of differentiation earlier "primarily promotional practice[s] involving merchandising, adaptations, sequels and franchising" (20), "the motivation behind this[...]connected with the economic systems of Hollywood", and contrasting the creation of "a coherent, deliberately cross-platform television experience" (20) that "expand[s] the fictional world of a series" (10); she also sees adaptation again as a useful point of comparison, stressing that "transmedia elements do not involve the telling of the same events on different platforms, they involve the telling of new events from the same storyworld[ ]." (27) Ultimately, however, she valuably sets out to define transmedia storytelling in terms of the nature of the coherence between the multiple texts and parts produced through it. She suggests that transmedia storytelling is narratively cohered, both in the sense that a "narrative universe is shared" (29), and that "different components[...]contribute different facts to the narrative" (30); she argues that it should be coherent and co-ordinated in its authorship and creation, and finally that "transmedia narratives involve the release of elements within a specific timeframe that, although not simultaneous, remains limited and related to the core text." (37)

In doing so, Evans provides perhaps the narrowest of all these definitions of transmedia storytelling as a fictional practice. However, she concludes her discussion with a note that the practice of transmedia storytelling as she defines it may be just one

splinter of the process of transmedially "enhancing" a narrative world, that the same narrative world may often also be extended and transmediated through "related practices of adaptation, novelisation, spin-offs and merchandising." (39) This, I would suggest, is significant. Very few transmedia fictional projects stand in their entirety as examples of "pure" transmedia storytelling by any of the above definitions. The vast majority draw together into their announced multi-textual family a range of forms of cross-platform practice, not only narrative and diegetic extensions, but also adaptations, merchandise, elaborate promotional campaigns such as Alternate Reality Games. Yet the concept and practice of transmedia storytelling has come to dominate such work on transmedia aesthetics and transmedia fictional operations as has been carried out.

I thus propose that if the landscape of transmedia fiction, both current and historical, is to be further and more fully illuminated, it is useful to identify and theorise a broader category of multi-platform fictional practice, of which transmedia storytelling, as Evans implies, may be understood as a splinter or subset. Like Hardy in his conceptualisation of "commercial intertextuality" (2011), Gray in his use of the term transmedia storytelling to refer to both "rebooted and serial" logics (2010: 214), or Steinberg (2009) in his theoretical intertwining of media mix and merchandising, I would suggest that it is both viable and valuable not to draw a distinction between the generation of "spin-offs, reversionings, promos, online media, books, games and merchandise" (Hardy, 2011: 7), but to conceptualise an overarching modality of fiction that may involve the marshalling or orchestrating of various or all of these, which I choose to term "transmedia franchising." I use the term modality in contrast to the terms genre and form. The industrial practice of transmedia franchising may produce fictions in any genre (though as noted above, it may be particularly congenial to some over others). "The transmedia franchise" may be understood as a fictional form, that is, as a particular kind of container for meaning like a sonnet, but it is a particularly elastic one, more a rule of combination (an orchestrated set of multiple texts in multiple media) than a particular structure. I see it as more useful to consider transmediality as a particular inflection of the processes of fictional meaning, and use the term modality to reflect this.

I offer the following definition of transmedia franchising as a practice: the generation of multiple products, texts and experiences across multiple media outlets that are all in some way announced as together comprising a continuous (again, in its meaning

as antonym of discrete), expansive, ongoing fiction. It is this latter that perhaps above all else should be understood as particularising transmedia franchising among the practices of retelling, reimagining, citation and continuation of stories and storyworlds common in cultural landscapes throughout history, differentiating it from, for example, simply two writers separately drawing on a common source. This announcing may be paratextual or intra-textual; it may be performed by titles, branding, the recurrence of characters, the implication of a single shared narrative world, an authoring name (whether belonging to an individual or an institution), or continuity of narrative. The products, texts and experiences may stand as adaptations or continuations of each other, may be more or less significant to an understanding of the overarching fiction, may represent centrifugal or centripetal movements (Ndalianis, 2009: 186), that is, work outwards to expand and further map a world, or inwards to enrich or differently inflect a core text. All, however, are implicated by the fact of their orchestration as related in an overarching structure or process of fictional meaning and representation. This structure may be meticulously mapped from the start of the project, or evolved ad hoc, or somewhere in between. There are hierarchies at play organising these relations. Through continuous and mobile interactions between promotional and distribution strategies, industrial business models, debates in audience communities, and simply the reach of their respective media and the chronology of their release, different franchise texts are positioned and received as more or less central to the franchise, and as more or less authorised. Some representations of a character, for example, are designated as loci of origin and authority, against which other representations are judged for consistency and coherence; some texts are designed and presented as peripheral, their content optional to enjoyment and understanding of others positioned as the core of the franchise. As Chapter Two will discuss in more detail, many franchises are organised around what Jenkins calls "mother ships" (2009c), texts or series of texts in one medium that are promoted to and consumed by the largest audience base, many of whom may never bother to make the jump across platforms to its satellite proliferations.

Transmedia franchising has a history stretching back through the twentieth century, and shares DNA with any large-scale, multimedia, serial fictional practice; in the current climate of media convergence, however, it is both particularly enabled by technology and particularly profitable for conglomerated media industries, and is thus experiencing a moment of ascendancy and institutionalisation.

I choose to bring together the two terms "transmedia" and "franchising", and their attendant connotations from existing critical discourse and debates, to articulate this practice in terms of an interrelation, imbrication and tension of creative and economic impulses, and a co-existence and co-dependence of iteration, seriality, repetition, and expansion, of revisits and new insights. By the above definition, its products number not only *Star Wars* and The Matrix, but *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Twilight*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Toy Story*, *James Bond*, the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*, and multiple franchises originating in comic books.

It is thus that I frame the subject and focus of this thesis, the practice that the following chapters aim to make fictionally intelligible. In doing so, my rationale is partly that this position better engages and reflects the actual landscape of transmedia fiction, rather than ideals, potentials and hypotheticals of transmedia practice, and partly that it is both reasonable and useful to position the fictions that fall under the umbrella thus created as sharing a particular modality of meaning, operation, and representation. Fundamentally, this may be defined as an art of amalgamation and aggregation (Collins, 1991: 167), and of configuration, of organising together more information, more perspectives, more narrative, more characters, more representations. It is significantly driven by an aesthetic and pleasure of immersion, as Marie-Laure Ryan frames the concept. In *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, Ryan unpacks immersion as a particular kind of "imaginative relationship to a textual world" (2001:14), an "experience through which a fictional world acquires the presence of an autonomous, language-independent reality populated with live human beings" (14), structured by particular fictional strategies. Transmedia franchising meets many of Ryan's criteria for an immersive art form. As Chapter One will discuss further, transmedia franchises are significantly organised in their production, operations, and reception by the metaphor of the text as world, such that individual instalments of a franchise are positioned and "apprehended as...window[s] on something that exists outside language and extends in time and space well beyond the window frame" (Ryan, 2001: 91), a "physical, autonomous reality furnished with palpable objects and populated by flesh and blood individuals" (92). Much of what follows will go on to illustrate that transmedia franchising characteristically produces this effect of the reality of its textual world, and an effect of presence in it for the consumer, through its exhaustive, multisensory process of representation, its engagement of the consumer's body, its use of representational forms and techniques that "blur[...]

ontological boundaries" (153). It is driven by the impulse that Ryan identifies as the essence of emotional immersion, summed up in the quote from Proust that begins her chapter on the subject:

> I would have wanted so much for these books to continue, and if that were impossible, to have other information on all those characters, to learn now something about their lives. (quoted in Ryan, 2001: 140)

The dimension of interactivity the transmedia franchise characteristically and, indeed, to a degree necessarily possesses works largely to enhance rather than obstruct its immersive effects. As Chapter Six will discuss further, where franchises make room for consumer participation, they typically encourage make-believe and embodied engagement, forms of interactivity, Ryan notes, most easily reconcilable with effects of immersion (see Chapter Nine in *Narrative and Virtual Reality*); the active navigation between textual parts they require on the part of the consumer structures an experience of exploration and discovery of a textual world, rather than the disorientation and frustration of imaginative recentering in a narrative reality often deliberately structured by postmodern experiments in interactive fiction.

It may, however, be further anatomised as producing particular dynamics and strategies of meaning and representation, and characteristically operating according to particular aesthetic principles and conceptual underpinnings. As the following discussion should demonstrate, insofar as they share a basic structure of "corporately orchestrated", cross-platform inter-textuality, an intricate exercise in transmedia storytelling like the *Matrix* franchise, and an adaptation-based franchise like *Harry Potter* or *The Lord of the Rings*, have fundamental similarities and resemblances in their construction and operations, and the experiences and pleasures they offer consumers. Existing work on transmedia storytelling may thus be understood as a form of second-order theorising, and this thesis as illuminating convention, characteristics and protocol at the next level up in the phylogenetic tree of cross-media practices, as laying, in other words, currently missing foundations.

Centrally, however, I choose to organise this thesis around the concept of transmedia franchising in reaction to the critically problematic negotiations of cultural capital and systems of value underpinning discourses of transmedia storytelling. As Derek Johnson notes, the processes of reconceptualisation (rebranding, even), strategic

distancing, and disavowal of such concepts and cross-platform practices as merchandising, branding, and franchising in both industry and critical discourse on transmedia often reads as an attempt to "make sense of" and validate their work or chosen object of study in more "culturally advantaged ways" (2011: 23); this is critically problematic, often leading to false oppositions and equivalencies. The dismissal and denial, illustrated in the above literature review, of the fictional dimensions and functions of the more transparently economically motivated exercises in transmedia content production is perhaps the most fallacious of these. As Gary Westfahl notes, "all sequels, spinoffs, tie-ins, or merchandise based on a given novel, film, or television series must, at least in a small way, derive from and build on some real aspect of the original work (1996: 292) – in other words, even the most dislocated exercise in transmedia branding draws on and contributes to fictional meaning. Although the "*Star Wars* breakfast cereal" Jenkins invokes in his definitional negotiations may make only "a limited contribution[...]to our understanding of the narrative or world of the story" (2009b), if its box has, for example, character names or images on it, then it is engaging in and with processes of fictional representation and meaning, however trivially. Its commercial motivations do not cancel out its fictional operations. I would argue that it is thus important to recognise and assert the practice increasingly commonly understood as transmedia storytelling as a sub-genre of the longstanding, both commercially and creatively driven impulse and practice of exploiting fictional content across media platforms, and more so, to focus on recuperating these parent practices of licensing and franchising in fictional terms.

Having thus defined transmedia franchising as a fictional practice, what follows will now engage it as a modality of fiction, and theorise the nature of the transmedially franchised character as a fictional object. Chapter One engages the problem transmedia franchise characters pose at the first point of the critical encounter, namely, the problem of delimiting "the text itself", the raw textual material of analysis, in the case of transmedia franchise fiction. It observes that not only is "the franchise text" in fact an orchestrated multi-text, the boundaries and limits of what is announced as part of this multi-text are unclear and unstable, subject to dismantling whenever a new avenue of production can be capitalised upon, and differently constructed at different times and by different audiences. It moves from this to discuss the idea that content, rather than the concept and rhetoric of the text, is the primary "industrial organising principle" (Murray,

2003: 9) of franchise fictional production. It thus offers some critical perspectives on character in transmedia franchise fiction that reflect, address and accommodate this, and look beyond "the text itself" both literally and conceptually. It discusses transmedia franchising as an art of worldmaking, and considers how this inflects its processes of meaning and representation, engaging framings of these as hyperdiegetic and encyclopaedic in mode. It conceptualises and theorises the transmedia franchise character as a brand, an object both textual and supratextual, and then using Bennett and Woollacott's concept of the "popular hero", a character who becomes a term in the cultural vocabulary, familiar and meaningful even to those who have never consumed any of its primary representations. It concludes by proposing the metaphor of the archive as a tool for making transmedia textuality critically comprehensible and manageable.

Chapter Two begins from existing work noting seriality and openness as defining characteristics of transmedia franchise fiction, and from this, develops a conceptualisation of the transmedia franchise character as extensible, always a work-in-progress, fundamentally designed to be mined indefinitely for media products, the patterns of its narration and articulation shaped by the objectives of serialisation. It thus engages Geoffrey Long's (2007) argument that transmedia franchising is centrally an art of creating and managing hermeneutic gaps, that is, diegetic details and representational strategies that make room for further texts and experiences, and inflects his typology of such gaps to account for how this is negotiated on the site of character specifically. The bulk of the chapter, however, sets out to typologise some specific movements, rhythms and spatialisations of transmedia extension, and consider how they work to build up, organise, and develop a picture of a character.

Chapter Three centres on the fact that rewriting, re-visioning and remaking are often as much part of this fictional method as narrative extension, and that as such analysing "the transmedia franchise character" often in fact means analysing an array of announced variations on a theme, a set of parallel, discontinuous versions cohered as multiple refractions of a single creation. It constructs transmedia franchising as an art of multiplicity, producing character through setting in play dialogues between rewrites, reimaginings and alternate versions. It identifies, conceptualises and theorises some ways in which multiple versions of a transmedia franchise character may relate and speak to each other, discussing transmedia extensions that position themselves as excursions into

alternate universes or continuities, "official" parodies produced under the franchise brand, the construction and presentation of different versions of a character as differently authored, and the practice of rebooting or returning to square one.

Chapter Four sets out to theorise multimedia development and representation as not only a feature of the franchise character as a fictional object, but as a fictional strategy and operation. It first considers how far existing theoretical work on multimedia art is applicable to transmedia franchise fiction. Most of the chapter, however, is devoted to developing figurings of different types of multimedia relation and process involved in the transmedia franchising of a character, that may be used as frameworks for understanding and analysing the effects of meaning and representation thereby produced. It argues that there is something of the palimpsest in the multimediality of the transmedia character, its various media incarnations to an extent not only completing and extending each other, but also overwriting and erasing each other. It echoes Jenkins (2010b) in suggesting that much-maligned medium specificity approaches are useful for analysing the transmedia franchising of a fiction, and gives some thought to how medium specificity theory may be recuperated from the flaws in its initial formulations. It notes also, however, that transmedia franchising involves and produces intermedial forms and exchanges, that is, strategies and dynamics of fusion, slippage, and cross-pollination between media protocols and aesthetics. Finally, it discusses how adaptation works in the specific context of the development of a transmedia franchise, suggesting that where entertainment franchising incorporates adaptive practice, it necessarily transforms and particularises it, even if only insofar as it is brought into dialogue with the overarching logics of the franchise mode.

Chapter Five returns to the question of thresholds of interpretation in the study of transmedia franchise characters, and takes up Gérard Genette's position in *Seuils* (1987): that fictional analysis should involve closer engagement with what he calls paratexts, the "verbal or other productions" (1997b: 1) like a title, footnotes, blurbs or critical literature that present and comment on fictional texts. It follows Genette and more recently Jonathan Gray in recognising that these productions work to "create[...]sense or meaning[...]for and on behalf of" (Gray, 2010: 8) fictional texts, activating additional meanings, expectations, and interpretative frameworks around and during their consumption, inflecting, modifying and continuing the fictional encounter. It suggests

that convergence culture generally, and transmedia franchising particularly, both breed paratexts and script and integrate them into the act of fictional consumption to such an extent that it begins to seem imperative to bring them within the jurisdiction of critical practice in the analysis of transmedia franchise characters. It theorises some roles of paratextual material in encounters with and the presentation of these characters, before considering how far in fact transmedia franchising problematises not only an operational distinction between "primary" and "secondary" textuality, but even a conceptual and operational distinction between fictional and paratextual texts and discourses.

Chapter Six identifies media convergence culture as fundamentally a participatory one, in the sense that its networks, channels and technologies encourage and enable the production and distribution of amateur media content alongside institutional output, and positions this as a context for understanding the design and representation of contemporary transmedia franchise characters. It conceptualises franchise characters as producerly, John Fiske's term for texts that produce a reading subject "that is involved in the process of representation rather than a victim of it" (1987: 95), and that invite engagement that is participatory and productive. It notes, however, that institutions are increasingly realising that participatory culture can be monetised, and hence that participation is something increasingly invited and scripted by institutional communicators; it suggests that the concept of participatory culture expresses not a one-way dynamic but a feedback loop, an interaction between institutional and grass-roots media production. It thus sets out principally to theorise the contemporary franchise character as a site through which and on which audience participation is deliberately structured and invited, and as generated through and shaped by interactions between producers, consumers and texts. It identifies some types of participatory text and medium that have emerged as key tools of transmedia practice, and explores the kinds of participatory engagement with character they enable and invite. It then concludes by explicating some dynamics of feedback and exchange between participatory cultures (and the media texts they generate) and franchise creators, and how they interpolate into the development of franchise characters. In this, this chapter does not engage in ethnographic study of franchise audiences, but rather considers the concepts or constructs of fandom and participatory engagement that organise these feedback loops in addition to the actual qualitative and quantitative data that, as the chapter will discuss, convergence culture makes so readily available to institutional communicators.

Chapter One

Beyond "the Text"

Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott begin their monograph on James Bond by engaging a problem at the first point of the critical encounter: how to define and delimit the raw material of character study in this case? "The text", object of study, site of analysis, source of meaning, is here practically and conceptually problematic. Bond is "constituted within a constantly mobile set of inter-textual relations" (1987: 6), circulated through multiple and multiplying "texts and coded objects" (1), less "the text" than a multi-text, an expanding array of interlinked and interacting media products and experiences. He is also, moreover, something more than the sum of these textual parts, in the sense that, as earlier suggested, he has to a degree transcended his fictionality, frequently apprehended and discussed almost as a real person, and insofar as he has over time

> br[oken] free from the originating textual conditions of [his] existence to achieve a semi-independent existence, functioning as an established point of cultural reference that is capable of working – of producing meanings – even for those who are not directly familiar with the original texts in which [he] first made [his] appearance. (14)

As such, furthermore, Bond challenges even the bounding of the "interacting set" (19) of textual gestures that produce him as fictional and cultural object as all and only "corporately orchestrated expressions", texts announced as parts of the Bond fiction; many people have a clear understanding of Bond as a character derived entirely from second-hand encounters, from his circulation as a term in their cultural vocabulary. Bond's name here could be replaced with that of any other franchise character; the same critical issues arise. Where and how can Batman be pinned down for analysis, when he is an idea and an icon that persists behind, across and beyond his various textual incarnations? Which should be consulted to evaluate the moral compass of Han Solo – the cut of *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977) where he shoots Greedo first, or the subsequent remastering (1997) where he shoots in retaliation?

On one level, these ontological problems are not particular to the study of franchise characters. As Ira Newman observes, all fictional characters have a tendency to

"escape from their constraints" (2009: 73) somewhat when subjected to critical study, developing into referents with dimensions and coherence beyond the individual acts of signification of which they are textually comprised; because, Newman suggests, the representation and reading of character is so bound up in understandings of real-world human behaviour and psychology, the analysis of fictional characters is a discourse as much of "virtual people" (73) as of textual constructs. It is no coincidence that L. C. Knights's famous New Critical critique (1933) took aim primarily at character study. Textual criticism, meanwhile, in bringing to light the ontological and methodological issues raised by editorial practices and the (im)materiality of the fictional text,[1] has illuminated that the "the text itself" as identified and constructed in any act of critical practice is always unstable and notional, while the conceptual manoeuvres of structuralist and poststructuralist theorists of textuality have articulated "the text" as system of meaning as open, "plural" (Barthes, 1971: 168), reaching beyond itself, as ongoing "productivity" rather than finished "product" (Kristeva, 1980: 36).

Transmedia franchise practice, however, foregrounds and exacerbates both these issues. An effect of characters' reality and vitality, their life beyond their texts, is an inevitable corollary to franchising's fundamentally immersive operations, and a valuable one, amplifying consumer engagement and attachment; it is as such often deliberately structured by franchises' presentational and representational strategies. Transmedia franchise multi-texts, meanwhile, are characteristically ongoing and open-ended, continuously flowing and unfolding into new media channels and instalments; their boundaries, and hence the parameters of critical study, can only ever be temporarily marked, always subject to dismantling when a new avenue of production or distribution can be capitalised upon. They are vast and asynchronous enough to support and require multiple possible introductions to the fictional world they present, and available in enough formats that a consumer can configure and tailor her fictional experience as she sees fit; there is no single script for the consumption of a transmedia franchise, and it is thus difficult to posit a typical or even ideal encounter. Individual instalments are iterated and versioned into new fictional products that offer hitherto unseen content, or re-mastered special effects, in attempts to manufacture new selling points for the same basic product. Because their reach is so great and their visibility so high, their fictional creations have an unusual degree of mobility and ubiquity in cultural discourses more

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[1] Cf. Greetham, 1999; McGann, 1991; Grigely, 1995.

broadly; because their creative projects are so expansive, fictional meaning and information frequently spills out into creator interviews or behind-the-scenes documentaries, details, insights and explanations continually appended to the franchise multi-text. As Paul Booth notes, meanwhile, and as Chapter Six will explore in more detail, much of a transmedia fictional encounter involves not texts but "practices" (2008: 515), activities and interactivities such as Alternate Reality Games or avenues for user-generated content. Such ergodic texts[2] are ontologically problematic; videogames, for example, are emergent in nature, that is, interaction with them generates a specific, complex, and indeterminate instantiation of text from a core of simple generative elements or algorithms – should the videogame text thus be understood as comprising the structure of signs generated by an act of play, the code or engine from which it is generated, the input required from the player in order to generate it, or some combination of the three?

Moreover, transmedia franchising disrupts and challenges those formulae deep-rooted in critical theory and practice – original > adaptation; director's cut > theatrical release; textual content > authorial intention or commentary; hierarchies of medium and authorisation – that are often used implicitly or explicitly to order, resolve and bound textual multiplicity and instability into workable material for analysis. The franchising of the *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* novels, for example, has positioned the film adaptations as the primary point of entry for consumers into their fictional worlds; often, indeed, these adaptations will be consumers' only point of contact with Harry, or Frodo. To an extent, they have displaced their sources and become new origins of meaning and representation; subsequent acts of franchising speak to the films before they speak to the books (the box of the *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* videogame, for example, presents the game as a chance to "relive the action of the movie" (EA Bright Light Studio, 2009)). In terms of how it is motivated, presented, and received, meanwhile, the revision, expansion, and remastering of franchise instalments is often better conceptualised as a strategy for eking new (monetisable) pleasures from the content, or presenting new and more (monetisable) ways of experiencing it, than as a process of perfecting, uncovering or restoring a definitive version. Commentary and additional intradiegetic information supplied by franchise creators in interviews, webchats, or on

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[2] Texts in which "nontrivial effort [that is, effort beyond the turning of pages or the pressing of a "play" button] is required to allow the reader to traverse the text." (Aarseth, 1997: 1)

their own blogs and websites is becoming more and more integrated into franchise fictional encounters (see Chapter Five for further discussion of this). The negotiation by both consumers and creators of "canonicity", of what "counts" as part of "the franchise multi-text", is thus often complex, unpredictable, and highly subjective. Williams suggests, for example, that where the *Star Wars* franchise is concerned "anything with [George] Lucas's name attached is considered canonical" (2009: 29); Brooker's survey of fan opinions, however, reveals that there are cases in which fans start to waver on this otherwise agreed standard, notably the Lucas-penned *Star Wars Holiday Special* television show (1978). I would suggest it is no coincidence that this franchise instalment is viewed by fans as an "embarrassment" (Brooker, 2002: 103), and would infer from this that pulling often against the effect of authorisation is the individual consumer's fantasy of the work they love; instalments that do not live up to fans' ideals of the quality, depth, seriousness, or any other aspect of the appeal of the franchise can as easily be elided from canon when a continuity error arises as those that are unauthorised.

"The text", however, is not only a distinctively slippery and problematic concept relative to transmedia franchising, it is one that is deprivileged in contemporary industrial discourse and thinking. Generally speaking, the concept and rhetoric of the text does not have the primacy within current logics of media and fiction *production* that it does within media and fiction *studies*. As John Caldwell and Simone Murray describe, it is rather *content* that is the primary "industrial organising principle" (Murray, 2003: 9) of fictional production in convergence culture. The concept of content structures synergy and flow; it frames fictions as "quantities to be drawn and quartered" (Caldwell, 2004: 49) into elements that can sustain revisiting, re-visioning and reformatting, that can be repeatedly exploited to extend the narrative and shelf-life of a franchise. At points in this critical discourse, this figuring of content seems simply a re-conceptualisation of text, a strategy for illuminating how text is understood as "recyclable" and repackageable in convergence culture; it also, however, and more suggestively, emerges as referring to ideas, conceptions, and fictional creations that exist meaningfully outside of any particular textual realisation, and that can be used to *generate* texts or products. Johnson, for example, describes the development of a franchise as "a process of designing for emergence, of constructing a set of resources that can be elaborated upon" (2011: 14). The transmedia franchise character is a paradigmatic example of such content or resources, and the work it does for producers and industries in media convergence

culture. As a fictional object, the Doctor, for example, is more than a collection of textual gestures: he is a fictional conception that is an object of intellectual property, a non-actual individual whose representation is controlled and licensed, an idea that can be farmed out to a range of creators and manufacturers for use in the production of objects from children's lunchboxes to tie-in novels; he is an imaginary person about whom multiple stories can be told (through the extension of the transmedia text), and about whom the same story can be told multiple times (through the adaptation of the transmedia work, or part thereof). Transmedia franchising thinks and operates in terms of creations and properties, fertile settings, narrative formulae and mechanisms, inexhaustible characters, cohering and identifying motifs and aesthetics.

As a first principle for the critical study of transmedia franchise characters, therefore, I contend that theory and practice is needed that thinks beyond "the text" as critical concept, and looks beyond "the text" as material object (or collection thereof) and site of analysis. This is not to say that textual analysis has no place in transmedia character study; far from it, when transmedia franchising involves such an overwhelming volume of textual acts and artefacts. Rather, it is a call for recognition in this analysis that the textual fabric of the transmedia franchise character is distinctively malleable and re-workable, its boundaries fluid and indistinct and struggling to contain the process of meaning and representation, and the character itself, and that the relations between its parts are complex and mobile. It is a call for critical practice that thinks with the concept of content, and about the supratextual logics that cohere and underpin transmedia franchising, to understand how franchise characters are conceived of, developed, and deployed. In this first chapter, I thus set out three frameworks in this vein for understanding the transmedia franchise character. I first discuss setting or diegesis as organising concept and cohering principle in transmedia franchising, and the idea that transmedia franchising is centrally an art of worldmaking; I then theorise the transmedia franchise character as part of an entertainment brand. Finally, I engage Bennett and Woollacott's solution to the critical problem they pose, and consider their concept of the "popular hero" (1987: 13) as a critical tool for understanding transmedia franchise characters more generally. I conclude by suggesting a conceptualisation of "the transmedia franchise text" that makes it critically intelligible and manageable without rationalising away its actual complexity and instability. In this, this chapter aims to lay the groundwork for the rest of the critical theory this thesis will elaborate.

Worldmaking

"Many transmedia narratives", suggests Geoffrey Long, "aren't the story of one character at all, but the story of a world." (2007: 48) Transmedia franchising, he argues, is an art of "developing a *stage* upon which multiple storylines ([...]in different media types) can unfurl" (48, emphasis mine). His comments resonate with industrial discourse on contemporary transmedia practice; panels at 2010's *Transmedia, Hollywood* conference repeatedly identified the art director, the person responsible for designing a coherent and fully realised diegesis, as the heart of a transmedia production team, and the question driving their practice "What's the playground?" (Bilson, 2010) They resonate, too, with how audiences apprehend and respond to transmedia franchises; the proliferation of fan-produced websites such as the *Harry Potter Lexicon*[3] or the *Star Wars Wookieepedia*,[4] databases of diegetic "fact" in their respective transmedia universes, indicates that consumers engage with and make sense of setting as robust, substantial, and significant. This primacy of setting is reinforced and reflected by the fact that science fiction and fantasy, fictions of worlds other than our own, are the dominant genres of transmedia franchising, and the fact that spatial media (such as the videogame) and fictional spaces (such as the theme park) have been and continue to be so heavily involved in the franchising process (see Chapter Six for further discussion of this).

I would thus suggest that much transmedia franchising can be productively understood using James DiGiovanna's concept of worldmaking. Worldmaking, for DiGiovanna, is a fictional mode paradigmatically illustrated by the works of Tolkien and Blake, in which "the creation of fictional worlds[...]is the goal", rather than "incidental" to the creator's expressive ends or trivially "constitutive" of her chosen form (2007). Certainly, the creation and evocation of an expansive fictional universe is emerging as a "core aesthetic impulse" (Jenkins, 2009a) of transmedia franchising. As Long observes, in no small part, what is explored, traced and presented through the narrative events and cross-platform movements of a franchise is "the character of the world" it takes as its setting, "how the world develops", its history, future, and far corners (2007: 47). For many franchises, it is a sense of a shared narrative universe, a common imagined reality, that coheres and defines them (Evans, 2011: 29); it is the concept of diegesis that organises production, operation, and reception.

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[3] Available at: <http://www.hp-lexicon.org/> [Accessed 28 July 2010].
[4] Available at: <http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page> [accessed 28 July 2010].

This in itself orients and inflects the design and functions of their characters. Characters are important sites and technologies of worldmaking; their narrative movements and journeys may be directed to discover fictional space, and they are usefully synecdochic, a single character able to signify, represent or imply an invented race, land, or law of diegetic physics. The personalities, motivations, and narrative circumstances of many transmedia franchise characters may thus be productively read as in part mechanisms for mapping their home universes, the exploration of character in transmedia franchising understood as intertwined with the exploration of setting. In *The Matrix Reloaded* (Wachowski and Wachowski, 2003a) and *Revolutions* (Wachowski and Wachowski, 2003b), for example, Link, Cas and Zee's conversations about Link's dangerous work and absences from his family, and Zee's contributions to the war effort against the machines, engage themes of duty and sacrifice, but also significantly work to illuminate Zion as a community and the nature of everyday life within it, communicating something of its social organisation, the jobs its people do, the ways in which its children are raised, the pressures that shape the psyches of its citizens. Long goes so far as to suggest that character is entirely subordinate to worldmaking in transmedia franchising; "popular recurring characters can increase repeat revenue," he argues, "but better still is a rich story world that can host multiple sets of recurring characters, as in *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*." (2007: 45) To an extent, for Long, franchise characters are simply "avatars" (47) through which consumers can experience and investigate "captivating universes" (45), the primary source of engagement, investment and pleasure for them. While I feel Long overstates his case, and undervalues character as locus of consumer attachment and interest, it is nevertheless important to conceptualise transmedia franchise characters as often tools in an art of worldmaking.

Characteristically, the core of the worldmaker's craft is a large-scale act of imagination, vast in its scope and minute in its detail. Worldmakers conceive fantastic cosmologies on a grand scale, and are, according to DiGiovanna, "inherently interested in the answer to virtually any question about [them]", even though they may never give textual expression to these "facts" (2007); had Shakespeare been a worldmaker, in other words, he would indeed have known not only how many children Lady Macbeth had, but their names, dates of birth, hair, eye colour, and favourite foods. The primacy afforded this aspect of fictional creation in transmedia franchising, combined with the time and room the practice allows for its development and presentation, means that what franchise

texts and products tell us about their settings could fill volumes. However, transmedia franchising also depends on its fictional worlds being still more fully conceived than ever textually articulated. It requires the wholesale imagining of a rich and complex narrative space, furnished with continents of imaginary geography, millennia of fictional history, a plethora of peoples and cultures and diverse flora and fauna, more or less fully and carefully designed. The more completely a world is imagined, the more media outlets it may colonise, and the more textual products may be generated from it, as the ways of representing and making use of it approach inexhaustibility. As Chapter Six will discuss further, meanwhile, structuring consumer participation in or interaction with the franchise universe is a key aim of transmedia franchising; the more fully conceived the fictional world appears, the more pronounced and rewarding the experience of "stepping into" it for the consumer. The *Star Wars* universe, with its hundreds of named planets, cities, characters, alien races and species, and an intradiegetic chronology spanning five millennia, represents an extreme pinnacle of this fictional method, but even franchises on a smaller scale have a distinctive breadth and depth of imagination in their settings, enabling and resulting from their synergistic movements.

In many cases, therefore, the characters of transmedia franchises may likewise be conceptualised as vastly and minutely imagined inhabitants of these vastly and minutely imagined worlds. Behind and beyond their various textual appearances, their life courses are comprehensively plotted, the minutiae of their identities intimately known. They are situated in elaborated social and cultural ecologies, complex and extensive histories, a vast underlying chronology, that contextualise them, explicate them, and give them function and meaning.

This orientation of imagination and practice, however, affects more broadly and fundamentally processes of fictional meaning in transmedia franchising. Existing discourse on the ontology of fictional worlds theorises them through converging possible world theory and modal semantics on the fictional utterance.[5] This gives rise to a somewhat contradictory and circular conceptualisation: a hypothetical reality that acts as a modal operator for the truth-value of any given fictional utterance (in philosophical terms, the possible world w in which sentence p is truthfully referential), and therefore a concept that seemingly pre-exists the fictional text, while at the same time only coming

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[5] See, for example, philosophers of fiction Sainsbury (2010) or Goodman (1978).

into existence through the fictional act of signification.[6] Because of this, these writers argue, the worlds of fiction (and fictional characters as existents within them) are defined by a complex and problematic incompleteness. There are constraints on what is knowable about a fictional world; for Sainsbury, this makes it closer to an *im*possible world, one about which there are many statements that have indeterminable or contradictory truth-value.[7] At the same time, however, as reader-response theory has illuminated,[8] situation models of fictional worlds emerge in the act of reading not only through decoding the semiotic gestures of the fictional text, but also through situating them in the reader's broader cognitive frameworks for making sense of fiction and reality; thus we can infer and speak meaningfully of details of a fictional world never directly represented.[9] By these terms, then, our apprehension of a fiction's virtual reality is telescoped and restricted by textual cues. It suggests there is an economy to the evocation and implication of the possible worlds of fiction, that the process of signification and representation only calls into being as much of a narrative reality as is required to make sense of the story being told.

Insofar as it is an art of worldmaking, however, at the levels of production, representation and reception, transmedia franchising works on the principle that what is not mentioned about the franchise universe is still known, and that design, details, and descriptions directly given point out to a completely conceived world, rather than setting the parameters of its incompleteness. According to the logic of content discussed above, the multiple fictional texts across multiple media that take this world as its setting are conceptually subordinate to the overarching conception of the universe, understood and presented as ways of representing its different aspects rather than acts of creating them. Geoffrey Long describes transmedia fiction as operating according to a logic of "negative capability", appropriating the term from Keats to refer to an art of managing and deploying "simple references to people, places or events external to the current narrative [to] provide hints to the history of the characters and the larger world in which the story takes place." (2007: 53) In the case of transmedia franchising, he frames the necessary

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[6] For further discussion of these arguments, see Chapter Four in Sainsbury, 2010: 68-90.
[7] To use Sainsbury's example, in the world of the Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes neither has an aunt nor lacks an aunt, and therefore (il)logically, simultaneously *both* has *and* lacks an aunt (Sainsbury, 2010: 88).
[8] See, most famously, Iser, 1978.
[9] Again to use Sainsbury's example, a reader may reasonably assume that in his fictional world Holmes lives closer to Paddington Station than Waterloo, from her knowledge of the "real" location of 221b Baker Street and the fundamental protocols of realist fiction (Sainsbury, 2010: 77).

incompleteness in the creation of a world through fictional gestures not in terms of what is *unknowable*, but what is *unsaid*, "unanswered questions" (59) rather than ontological impossibilities. In this, he echoes Sara Gwenillian Jones's writing on cult television series, whose "metaverses" also often "extend far beyond what is visible on screen at any given moment or in any given episode." (2002: 85) "The visible spaces, actions and events of the televisual text", she suggests, "have invisible lateral resonance; they function metonymically, referring us to spaces, actions and events beyond themselves, elsewhere in an implied and hallucinatory realm of structured but unforecloseable possibilities." (85) To use Matt Hills's term, transmedia franchise texts may be conceptualised as *hyperdiegetic* in mode, their creation, operations, and apprehension organised by the idea of an underlying "vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered inside the text." (2002: 137) In other words, it may in philosophical terms be illogical to speculate about what their characters were doing or thinking off-page or off-screen, but this is nevertheless a mode of comprehension invited and encouraged by transmedia franchising's operational logics.

Reading their characters, therefore, often requires acknowledging this inflection of processes of meaning, and exploring how an impression or *effect* of hyperdiegesis is produced or induced on the site of character. It requires engaging and analysing what Derek Johnson calls "overdesign" (quoted in Jenkins, 2009a), the decoration of individual transmedia texts with a proliferation and even profligacy of detail that points to the richness and complexity of the overarching diegesis; it requires investigating how strategies of characterisation and representation gesture "off-camera", at the "implied and hallucinatory world" beyond the text. Johnson gives the example of the tattoos worn by *Battlestar Galactica* character Sam Adama, which are indicated as records of his military activity (2011: 15); they thus point out to the "structured but unforecloseable possibilities" of earlier events in Adama's life course, and to the cultural customs and social structures of his corner of the franchise universe.

Elizabeth Evans, however, suggests that transmedia worldmaking in fact represents an "expansion" (2011: 28) of the concept of hyperdiegesis. Transmedia practice, she notes, seeks not only to imply vast narrative universes, but to *realise* them; its driving impulse is to make "the moments that are missing from [one] text[...]manifest via an alternative platform", a further product (29). As this discussion has already

suggested, the purpose of conceiving a vast and detailed narrative reality is, after all, to mine it for texts, products and experiences. Though it usefully captures something of the design and operations of transmedia texts, Long's theorising of transmedia franchising as an art of negative capability, of possibilities, potentials, and wonderings, is in this respect misleading. In emphasising how transmedia texts spark the imaginations of consumers through what is *not* said, he underplays how the process of franchising itself seeks compulsively to answer the questions it raises, to *tell* consumers what happened next, what happened back then, what happened to that character when she disappeared off-screen, what is the name of that alien species and what their home planet is like. From another perspective, the "overdesign" of franchise texts is not stimulus for the audience but fodder for the creator, seeds and starting points for future texts, products and experiences. There is something completist and exhaustive in the franchise method, even as it presents the totality of its worlds as "always beyond our grasp" (Jenkins, 2007). This impulse seems to structure consumer engagement with franchise fictional worlds as much as, if not more than, the principle of negative capability; consider again the fan encyclopaedias mentioned above, through which audiences labour to describe and manage the details of franchise universes, or the children who ask J. K. Rowling to supply more facts about Harry's world: what is Draco Malfoy's Patronus? What education do the children of wizards have before going to Hogwarts? (Rowling, n. d.(a)) The consumers of franchise universes, it seems, are as "inherently interested in the answer to virtually any question about them" as their creators.

This, I would argue, should likewise be understood as modifying processes of representation and signification in transmedia texts, in particular, the way in which *gaps* in transmedia narratives, worldbuilding, and characterisation operate. Textual absences, elisions and emissions have long been recognised as carrying significant weight of meaning in the presentation of character, eloquent in the fact of their silence; the nature of transmedia franchising, however, means that gaps in franchise texts are always implicitly waiting to be filled. The conceptual underpinnings and presentation of franchise fiction imply to audiences not only that there are answers to any question they might have about its conceived reality, but also that those answers *may be provided*, in interviews with creators, in bonus material included with a DVD release, in future extensions of its narrative, through the representational lens of a new media semiotic. Reading those points

in the design and articulation of franchise characters that point out to the vast fictional world beyond needs to acknowledge that they are thus inflected.

Jenkins refers to this completist impulse in both the creators and consumers of transmedia worlds as "encyclopaedic" (2007), and the concept is suggestive. With its implications of "a drive for comprehensiveness" (Swigger, 1975: 353), and of "*Drang zur Universalität*, the compelling aim to be all-inclusive and all-knowing" (352), the concept certainly resonates with the scope and granularity of transmedia worldmaking; it also, however, usefully expresses *mastery* over diegetic fact as a key modality of engagement with transmedia franchises. Due to their scale and complexity, transmedia fictions demand that consumers absorb and become *au fait* with volumes of information about character, narrative and setting to make sense of both the whole and individual parts; the fan labour discussed above, however, suggests that mastery of an expansive fictional world as process and achievement is also a pleasure offered by and taken in transmedia franchises, an enjoyable form of immersive and social engagement.

An encyclopaedic impulse implies also epistemophilia, a joy in knowledge for knowledge's sake. This is, I would suggest, an important concept for understanding the design and operations of transmedia fictions, and how they produce character. As has already been discussed, the encyclopaedic thrust of transmedia franchises produces a profligacy and superfluity of detail in character design and representation, a surfeit of information. This poses an interpretative problem. Rooted in and used to dealing with "replete" (Goodman, 1978: 68) texts, in which every creative decision is or may reasonably be interpreted as a gesture towards meaning, effect, and significance, conventional character study reads details of character design as having symbolic resonance, thematic functions, narrative significance, or effect and affect as leitmotifs. While this approach undeniably still yields fruit when applied to transmedia fictions (no one could argue that the colour of Harry Potter's eyes, or the code-names characters have chosen for themselves in the *Matrix* universe, or the weapon Aeris Gainsborough uses in the world of *Final Fantasy VII*, should not be read through this conventional lens), franchise universes by their completist nature are filled with grace notes of characterisation that only ever seem trivial and incidental, marginal to overarching logics of meaning and effect, and that resist assimilation into coherent interpretative positions. The idea of epistemophilia, of information as end and pleasure in itself, can be used to

make intelligible the situation of such details in the broader structures of a transmedia work, the logics governing their deferral, revelation and exploitation, and their functions and value for both creators and consumers.

Writing on the eighteenth-century French *encyclopédistes*, meanwhile, Andrew Wernick frames encyclopaedic projects as attempts to trace and communicate the "interconnectedness" of knowledge (2006: 28). Umberto Eco theorises the encyclopaedia as mode of thinking and form of representation similarly, describing encyclopaedism as "a process of unlimited semiosis" (1984: 68), of recursively approaching an understanding of an item "by means of interpretants" (68), that is, references to other items, which themselves require explanation and representation "by means of interpretants", and so on and so forth. Information presented encyclopaedically is thus labelled and titled, filed into fields and subjects, nested into concatenations of family memberships; coterminously, it is cross-referenced and highly schematised, patterns, connections and relations brought to the fore. This likewise, I would suggest, speaks to something in the imagination and operations of transmedia franchising. As Henry Jenkins puts it, for example, "each character" in a franchise is typically "connected to every other character through complex sets of antagonisms and alliances" (2010c), embedded in dense relational networks, as a function of transmedia franchising's typical narrative complexity and expansive worldbuilding. Equally, however, franchise characters are often repeatedly positioned in their belonging to a particular fictional place, family, race, or social structure, in strata of imagined social and cultural organisation; they are compulsively categorised and taxonomised, textually and paratextually, as Jedi, Slytherin, Sontaran, SOLDIER, Cypherites. This represents an intersection of the encyclopaedic impulse of transmedia franchising with the hyperdiegetic modality discussed above; a category label gestures beyond the individual to whom it has been applied, to other members in the "implied and hallucinatory realm" beyond the text, to evolved organisations and social structures and the flows of events, forces and pressures that over time produced them. These schema, Jenkins suggests, become central to how consumers understand and make sense of the world, characters and narratives of a franchise; it "matters", Jenkins argues (2010c), what House Albus Dumbledore was in at Hogwarts, or what planet Jar Jar Binks is from and the name of his species. The archives of fans' Frequently Asked Questions about the *Potter* franchise housed on J. K. Rowling's website bear this out; questions about the Houses of minor characters, the wizarding

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world's concepts of race and class, and the organisation of magical politics and education recur throughout (see Rowling, n.d.(a)). To an extent, this inflection of response is a function of the franchises themselves placing a weight of meaning and characterisation on intradiegetic labels, affiliations, and categories of identity, perhaps because they are, as Long suggests, so much "the story of a world", and hence of factions, lands, and peoples as well as individuals. Characters' actions and identities are thus shaped and given meaning by their position in broader intradiegetic cultural structures. Classification, however, is also an important axis of the kind of mastery over diegetic fact discussed above. Perhaps most importantly, though, a complex and expansive design of intradiegetic organisations and structures is an important mechanism for the kind of immersion and introjection in a fictional world that is so valuable to franchise producers. Fictional creations such as Rowling's House system give consumers terms in which they can interpolate themselves into the franchise's narrative reality, in which they can construct and imagine themselves, for example, as Hogwarts students.

Ultimately, however, I would argue that transmedia franchising can be usefully conceptualised as encyclopaedic in its method and imagination insofar as *information*, as well as and as a form of content, may be understood as a key organising concept of its production, operations, and reception. As John Caldwell notes, at the heart of many large-scale, cross-platform production efforts in modern media landscapes is a "bible" (2004: 60), effectively an encyclopaedia of narrative arcs, character biographies, and worldbuilding details that sets out rules and truths of the work's diegetic reality, and hence helps ensure continuity across the work of what can be hundreds of contributing creators; Walter Williams, for example, remembers being required to consult a "166-page bible...includ[ing] background information on the *Star Wars* universe, information about major characters, the Jedi Knights, the government, and the military, a list of major worlds" (2009: 30) to write a tie-in novel under the *Star Wars* license. J. K. Rowling has shown, meanwhile, that she built Harry's world from detailed family trees[10] and charts of Hogwarts' students' names, ages, blood status, and House.[11] Diegetic fact is a privileged plane of meaning, engagement, and pleasure; synergistic movements are often centrally negotiating the discovering of worldbuilding detail.

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[10] See: <http://www.hplex.info/wizards/blackfamilytree.html> [Accessed 31 July 2010].
[11] See: <http://www.hplex.info/about/sources/source_hpm.html> [Accessed 31 July 2010].

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that so many transmedia franchises should themselves make use of encyclopaedic texts, forms and discourse to manage and present their worldmaking, from dedicated guides and intradiegetic reference books like the *Official Star Wars Fact File* magazines (2002-5), or J. K. Rowling's *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2009a), to glossaries, maps, dictionaries and digests tucked into DVD bonus materials, the appendices of novels, or official web presences. To conclude this discussion of transmedia franchising as an art of worldmaking, I wish to offer some thoughts on how this encyclopaedic discourse works to produce fictional meaning in the context of transmedia franchising, and particularly, how it operates as a strategy of characterisation.

Transmedia franchises are far from the first fictions to borrow the encyclopaedia as formal and structural principle; as Maria Maciel notes, "a long list of contemporary artists and writers[...]have dedicated themselves to the creative use of taxonomies, employing such procedures to compose encyclopaedic works that suit the demands of plurality and heterogeneity of the contemporary world" (2006: 50), a list including Borges, Perec, and Quereau. In many of these writers' works, however, "encyclopaedism is satirized, demonstrating that the organization of knowledge is inevitably arbitrary and conventional" (Swigger, 1975: 357); the interest is in the *problem* of knowledge, or as Swigger writes of Borges, the "potential" of the encyclopaedic perspective "rather than the specific details or irreducible principles of a given branch of knowledge." (358) In an inversion of the distinction Eco draws between dictionaries and encyclopaedias, however, the authorised fictional encyclopaedias produced through transmedia franchising are "pragmatic devices" (1984: 85), tools for managing and communicating information rather than exercises in satire or parody. In the context of transmedia franchising, I would thus suggest that encyclopaedic discourse works to foster exactly that sense that the writers above expose as illusory, that is, to position the franchise consumer as part of an act of mapping and understanding a reality, and position that reality as concrete and knowable. This is a function of these encyclopaedias' implication in processes of worldbuilding, and their use in the management and comprehension of involved narratives and large casts of characters, but also often seems an effect deliberately structured by their register and presentation; the blurb's framing of *Quidditch Through the Ages*, for example, as "a copy of the volume in Hogwarts School Library" (Rowling, 2009b), works to construct its reader as researching facts about a world in the same way

its inhabitants would, structuring suspension of disbelief to the point of credulity, rather than ironic distance. In fictional terms, the use of encyclopaedic texts and forms as sites and strategies of characterisation in transmedia franchising may thus be usefully understood as *aimed* at producing an effect of the character's substance and even reality, however problematic this may be from an epistemological standpoint.

Like fan encyclopaedias, meanwhile (see Booth, 2009), franchise encyclopaedias frequently represent at least in part a rewriting of other instalments, fragmenting and translating their narrative events, character developments, and worldmaking processes into pieces of information. This information is then recombined into new organisations, new systems and logics of connection, and thus newly and differently given meaning. As Matt Hills explains, for example, series guides allow consumers to "actively *collapse, navigate and teleologise*" (2005: 195) the complex seriality of franchise storytelling; they "convert temporally 'unfolding texts' into spatially organised [...] forms of information" (195), suggest and bring out alternative patterns of continuity and connection within a franchise multitext, retroactively superimpose design and intention on its structures. They allow transmedia *sjuzhets* to be collapsed or re-ordered into their *fabulas*, transforming the effects of anachronies in their original presentation structure. Character design, action and behaviour are rewritten as biography, data, and metrics; form is collapsed into content, and then given new form, schematic, taxonomical, and hypertextual.

Of course, not all the work these encyclopaedias do is fictional. In their lists and inventories, encyclopaedic texts and supplements activate and manage the collector impulse in consumers. Accretive, completist consumption is highly desirable to transmedia producers. For their long-term, cross-platform practice to be profitable, franchise producers require consumers who find pleasure and value in obtaining multiple editions and re-packagings of a media product, and the full range of a franchise's ancillary proliferations and merchandise, for whom investment in a fiction manifests as a desire to exhaust its secrets and display this mastery in trophies. Organising a franchise universe into an encyclopaedic form rewrites its reality as a catalogue or checklist of collectables both literal and figurative; as repositories of worldbuilding detail and diegetic fact, guide books and fact files are also implicitly directories of action figures and model starships, extended editions and director's cuts, Easter Eggs and textual secrets. They are

resources for collectorship, and tools that may be used in the negotiations of cultural and subcultural capital at play therein.

On this note, this chapter now looks to return to the economic dimension of transmedia franchising, and to consider a logic that is perhaps more consistently central to its organisation and operations than the worldmaking impulse: the logic of branding.

Brand Management

It is one of the defining features of the landscape that for media producers in convergence culture, storytelling and advertising are imbricated in the concept of transmedia. Multiplatform extension and synergy is a modality of fictional *marketing* as much as of fictional production, with advertising texts "regularly mov[ing] between the multiple screens of cinema, television and mobile phone" (Johnston, 2008: 145) both to maximise their reach and to insinuate themselves into the cross-channel rhythms of media consumption. Conversely, other industries are engaging in transmedia storytelling as part of their brand management and development; there is a current fashion for *branded entertainment*, the creation of multimedia "scripted content that visually depicts the personality and core values of the brand through lifestyle triggers emblematic of the audience it serves." (Snowfield, 2009) As the introduction to this thesis has indicated, critical discourse repeatedly constructs transmedia fiction and transmedia advertising as confused and indistinguishable, both implicitly in the idiom of franchising and sharecropping used to refer to transmedia fictional production (Parkin, 2009: 13), and more explicitly; Ross Harley describes media convergence culture as "a 'landscape of consumption' in which market, place, image and product intermingle" (Harley, 1996: 104), while various commentators have suggested that in a landscape where DVD releases, merchandise, and other ancillary, franchised products are the real profit powerhouses for media industries, primary texts at their initial points of release function as trailers or advertisements for a broader consumer experience (cf. Gray, 2010: 90; Jenkins, 2010c). Critical understandings of the transmedia work shift fluidly between ambiguously delineated frames: act of storytelling or representation; cultural artefact; material object; consumable product and commodity.

Furthermore, as Paul Grainge sets out, the production of a transmedia franchise may be understood as coterminously the development and management of a fictional

brand (Grainge, 2008: 11). It involves the creation of icons, names, concepts, even a signature aesthetic or production design, that are both textual and supratextual, concrete logos, images or trademarks that are also cohering principles, markers of authorisation, modalities of economic power, operational logics and nebulae of affect and attachment. It is centrally a practice of developing objects of intellectual property that can acquire distinctive cultural capital, that can be loaded with resonance and meaning beyond their fictional operations, and that can be knitted into the consciousness and lifestyle of a consumer, all in order that she continues to invest her time and money in the products and experiences this intellectual property is used to generate; it is structured by the desire to create a "total entertainment" experience that is also an "extended commercial environment", an inhabitable *brandscape* of fictional encounters, purchases, and the negotiation of lifestyle and identity (Grainge, 2008: 11). Just like the words "Coca-Cola", or the yellow "M" of McDonalds, the words "Doctor Who", for example, do not only title a television programme, they associate with it a sense of production values and principles, and a particular cultural cachet; they authorise products, and attract and motivate the consumption thereof; they make certain promises to said consumers, and construct and represent for them particular experiences, memories, affects, and sociocultural positionings.

Character plays a crucial role in this. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, characters have been recognised and exploited as major "stimulator[s] of consumer desire" (Steinberg, 2009: 117). They are loci both of attachment to and identification with fictional brands, motivating consumption through structuring investment and interest in their further appearances and development, and through modelling or offering particular constructions of identity that can be enacted or demonstrated through a consumer's economic gestures of affiliation. They can give a fictional brand both stability and longevity, lending themselves easily to multiple narrative and semiotic incarnations, while remaining conceptual constants and iconographic anchors across the resulting multiplatform swathe of products. From the fictional character, meanwhile, comes the action figure, a type of merchandise particularly significant within entertainment franchising (so much so, in fact, that it will be further discussed in Chapter Six). For young fans/fledgling consumers, action figures are "avatars,[...]extension[s] of the child into a virtual or imagined world" (Jenkins, 2010c); they are tools of imaginative play, and technologies for the integration of a

franchise into the rhythms and activities of everyday life; they can become affectively and socially charged possessions, and are highly collectible.

Characters in transmedia franchises may thus be conceptualised as implicated in brand logic, and as brands or parts of brands in themselves. Reading them as such requires a conjunction of fictional analysis and theories and understandings of entertainment branding. There are no existing models for this critical synthesis; although a growing concern of more sociologically- and economically-minded media analysis, the implications of transmedia franchising's conjunction of branding and storytelling for their analysis *as fictions* have so far gone almost entirely unexplored. I thus wish to propose and elaborate in this section that a productive approach can be located in considerations of *function*. Positioning the transmedia franchise character as a brand engages the *work* it does as an item of content and intellectual property relative to the economic goals of and protocols of transmedia franchising, and thereby guides and contextualises analysis of how characters are designed and deployed to enable this. To make this aspect of the transmedia franchise character critically intelligible, therefore, I would argue it needs to be read with frameworks for understanding the work that brands perform more generally for companies and industries in convergence culture. In the rest of this section, I now look to suggest some threads of contemporary brand theory that I see as particularly applicable to transmedia fictional brands, and consider how they might be used specifically to illuminate the operations of character on this plane.

First and foremost, understanding the transmedia character as a brand is coterminous with understanding it as a site and technology of advertising. There are two main dimensions to its advertising function. The first is what is known as "character merchandising", defined by the World Intellectual Property Organisation as:

> the adaptation or secondary exploitation, by the creator of a fictional character or by a real person or by one or several authorized third parties, of the essential personality features (such as the name, image or appearance) of a character in relation to various goods and/or services with a view to creating in prospective customers a desire to acquire those goods and/or to use those services because of the customers' affinity with that character. (quoted in Steinberg, 2009: 115)

The term refers, in other words, to the pencil case with a Dalek slapped on, or the toothbrush bearing Hannah Montana's smiling face and Disney's logo scrawled beneath it, or the *Star Wars*-themed duvet and pillowcase set, that seem to structure so much

discourse on the contemporary commodification of fiction and entertainment. This discourse, however, is usually anxious, derisive and dismissive, invoking these products as reason and means to delegitimise franchise fictions as cultural and aesthetic objects (cf. Kearney, 2004; Martens, 2011), whereas I would argue that character merchandising can and needs to be recuperated as one of their significant sites or aspects of characterisation. As Gary Westfahl (1996) observes, each such deployment of a character is a further act of its representation, a further point of a consumer's encounter with it, and can as such reasonably be subjected to analysis as part of the study of that character.

Two angles of approach to this suggest themselves. The first is to recognise that character merchandising puts the image of the character, with all its attendant meanings and resonances, in dialogue with the form, functions, and connotations of the object to which it has been promotionally attached, and to explore how the two inform and transform each other. Pretending at a character's endorsement of a particular product, for example, not only charges the product with associations from the character, but also charges the character with associations from the product. Jonathan Gray, for example, describes an officially licensed "Gotham City pizza" released by Domino's Pizza alongside the 2008 *Batman* film *The Dark Knight*. Gray characterises this merchandising as "unincorporated", "contribut[ing] nothing meaningful to the text or its narrative, storyworld, characters, or style" (2010: 210), yet "meaningful" is a slippery term; the association with Domino's may certainly be understood as positioning the franchise instalment and its audience and scripting its consumption in a particular way, as the kind of blockbuster that you would sit in front of with junk food, popcorn and Coke, as something that should be enjoyed with friends, the catalyst perhaps for a movie night watching all the other Batman films.

The second approach is to situate acts of franchise character merchandising in the context of a further key protocol of contemporary branding, usually termed *lifestyle marketing*. The development of modern brand logic has been bound up in advertising's general move away from simply extolling the virtues of a product, towards manufacturing need and desire through establishing it as emblematic of and a constituent part of a particular model or standard of living, insinuating it into the collective and individual consumer consciousness, and generally holistically constructing and negotiating its place in a consumer's everyday life and sense of identity (Grainge, 2008: 26-30). As Diane

Sekeres notes in her study of the franchising of children's literature, character merchandising is a major part of this, a way of ensuring that "integration between entertainment and advertising and the daily tasks of living—such as brushing teeth—is seamless" (2009: 400), a way of enmeshing brand identity and consumer identity, everyday activity and consumption. Ubiquity, visibility, deep-rooted and continuous engagement and investment are core aims of transmedia franchising, and lifestyle marketing as such a key dimension of the transmedia franchise character's brand function and identity. Recognising this clarifies pressures and dynamics at play in how character merchandising is used by producers and consumers, such as, for example, the fact that character merchandise is a tool with which consumers negotiate and articulate their identity as fans of the franchise, and through their fan-dom of the franchise. It is also thus a site on which a child's ability to demonstrate to his classmates the extent of both his love of a franchise and, if the franchise is a particular *zeitgeist*, his cultural capital, by acquiring a complete set of action figures or trading cards is managed and exploited by transmedia advertisers. Often, however, consumers engage with transmedia franchises over such a long period of time that a life *course* perspective may be usefully brought to bear on processes of lifestyle marketing, an awareness, for example, of how character merchandising may trade on nostalgia in an aging consumer base, or be implicated in an ongoing, *unfolding* process of identity and taste formation (see Harrington and Bielby, 2010, for further discussion of life course approaches to fandom).

Transmedia characters are not only used to sell ancillary goods, however, but also to motivate consumption of and participation in the fictional texts and experiences offered under the umbrella of their parent franchise. For consumers who are already to some degree invested in a franchise, characters are "lovemarks", major loci of emotional engagement and attachment (Evans, 2008: 203). The reappearance of a character, therefore, or greater narrative prominence or further development for it, can be a primary selling point for a new franchise instalment, and the role of character in branding, authorising, and advertising these instalments thus significant. This intersects also, I would argue, with the process of persuading consumers and fans to commit to a franchise on a new media platform, insofar as character is a particularly useful accent and focus for some of the pleasures provided by media technologies themselves. Bolter and Grusin have set out, for example, that hypermediacy plays an important part in modern blockbusters and franchises, that is, awareness of and fascination with the workings and

capacities of cutting-edge media technology, particularly with respect to special effects (1999: 157); it motivates participation in such texts, both insofar as it is an aspect of enjoying them and insofar as it is a prominent feature of discourses of hype, distinction, and differentiation. As computer-generated animation has become more sophisticated and culturally significant as a media form, however, rendering bodies and faces has become as much a site for displays of special effects virtuosity as large-scale explosions or fantastic monsters; consumers may follow a franchise to a new top-end videogame console, therefore, to marvel at the finely-detailed character models it offers. Conversely, extension from animated texts into live-action media effectively doubles the brand power and appeal of a character, as it becomes combined with that of the celebrity or star selected for the role.

Fictional brands are charged not only with the task of sustaining a consumer base for a franchise, however, but also with building one to start with. Understanding the transmedia character as part of an entertainment brand thus additionally requires understanding how it is used to generate interest in a forthcoming franchise, expectations and excitement for it, and a high volume of cultural discourse about it to the point that it becomes a property both instantly recognisable and highly desirable.

In media landscapes characterised by textual flow and connectivity, and by networked, media literate consumers with an array of far-reaching outlets for their thoughts and responses at their disposal, producers and industries have realised that one of the most effective ways of managing brands in this respect is by attempting to start up, tap into and direct these channels of intra-audience communication (Holland, 2003: 5). For a long time, the dominant industrial and critical metaphor for this process has been *virality* (Jenkins et al., 2009). The idea of viral marketing models successful brand management in convergence culture as lying in the contagion of ideas, information, and textual content, the rapid, pandemic, consumer-led dissemination of a brand or content or properties associated with it, to the point that the brand is ubiquitous, and knowledge of or exposure to the brand is a measure of cultural and social capital. This framework conceptualises the franchise character brand for analysis as quotable, memorable, fragmentable into easily dispersible segments of text or information, that can both generate intrigue and at the same time communicate brand identity and product specifics.

In a white paper for the Convergence Culture Consortium, however, Jenkins et al. have critiqued the dominance of virality as a metaphor for contemporary brand logics. They argue that the term masks the unpredictability of any given campaign's take-up and media industries' proven inability to consistently mastermind successful brand dissemination, that it fallaciously attributes inherent self-replicating power to a brand or brand campaign and underplays the activity of consumers in propagating it, and most importantly, that it falsely implies that the "virus" of content released by media producers retains its integrity as it circulates (Jenkins et al., 2009). Rather, they argue, drawing on the work of Knobel and Lankshear, the success of this sort of brand campaign depends on the adaptability of the content involved; content spreads, they suggest, where it can be remixed by consumers, conjoined with other content, bastardised into a more memorable form, modified into a joke or parody and pared down into a generative base or formula for more. Their white paper offers instead the concept of *spreadability*, a figure that they suggest preserves the basic and undeniably accurate descriptive qualities of the metaphor of the viral while moving away from its more misleading connotations, and foregrounding the activity of consumers in the dissemination of brands, and the modifications and transformations they inevitably undergo as a result. Reading the marketing work done by transmedia character brands through this lens raises the same fundamental question as using viral marketing as a conceptual tool – how do character brands spread and travel through media landscapes? – but suggests an approach to answering it more rooted in concepts of memetic adaptability and textual appropriation, poaching, and repurposing.

Implicitly, however, discussions of these concepts are also discourses of a further function of fictional brands, namely, that they are "corporate metonyms", always reflecting back on and contributing to the public image of their parent studio or conglomerate (Grainge, 2008: 115). In the above dialogue between metaphors, furthermore, this function is revealed as stressed; a tension is apparent between the desire to exert control over brand circulation, and thereby over corporate presentation, and awareness of both the inevitability and the profitability of consumers having the freedom to spread a brand on their own terms and for their own purposes, potentially producing images or content that attach meanings undesirable to studios to it in the process. This tension is exacerbated for entertainment brands, because issues of trademark, copyright, and intellectual property become murkier; ongoing legal debates over what does and does

not constitute fair use of a fictional idea, creation or text (cf. Coppa, 2010a), contested and often dubiously effective technologies of media product protection, and uncertainty and inconsistency where studios actually move to protect their brands,[12] all point to the uneasy fit between fictional content and the metaphor of property.

Understanding the transmedia character as a brand, therefore, means also understanding it as bound up in the anxieties of entertainment brand management and the negotiation of corporate image. This intersects with how it is used in character merchandising, guiding the decision of where and to whom a licence should and should not be released; it shapes interfaces and dialogues with fans, influencing how a franchise encourages or discourages fan activity and transformative response (more on this in Chapter Six). It interacts with casting decisions, with star actors contributing another image to the character brand that requires management and control, and with processes of cross-platform extension, with each new semiotic rendering of a character complicating and completing the form of the studio's intellectual property. As Paul Grainge notes, meanwhile, these anxieties are increasingly manifesting themselves reflexively in the fictions of franchises themselves. In order to manage the precariousness of their position relative to copyright law, and audiences increasingly savvy about the big business of entertainment and mistrustful of brand monopolies, he argues, franchise fictions can be seen to engage in "representational manoeuvres" that try to legitimise their producers' ideals of brand control; Grainge cites the example of 1996's *Space Jam*, noting how its self-conscious engagement with themes of merchandising and franchise production stages a narrative that differentiates between

> 'good' and 'bad' capitalism[...]posit[ing] a moral difference between the 'wacky' capitalism of the Looney Tunes, delivering beloved American brands to cheering global audiences, and the 'wacko' capitalism of alien or unhinged corporate bullies, threatening the free market through shady business practices and designs upon world domination. (Grainge, 2008: 128)

Similar trends are visible in twenty-first-century transmedia franchises; it is telling, for example, that the most recent instalment of the *Toy Story* franchise (*Toy Story 3*, Unkrich, 2010), surrounded pre-release by cynicism about the motivations behind reviving a seemingly abandoned narrative, mounts a critique of shallow, faddy toy consumption while venerating "good" consumption, that is, intense emotional attachment to beloved

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[12] Cf. Jenkins, 2006a: 185-8 for a case study of Warner Bros' interactions with *Harry Potter* fan sites.

toys (all of which are conveniently available as character merchandise for viewers to purchase in real life).

This work of advertising and corporate image-building performed by the transmedia character brand has one further salient dimension, namely, that it is on a global scale. Brand-based marketing, oriented as it is around establishing names, images and content that can approach universal recognition and can be used to cohere and give identity to vast swathes of disparate products, is a key strategy by which industries navigate and have navigated the globalisation of markets over the last decades (Arvidsson, 2006: 3). Entertainment brands are no exception to this; contemporary franchise fictions are developed and managed as "global cultural commodities", circulating in "a newly heterogenous and transnational public sphere" (Grainge, 2008: 152, 151). This aim of global mobility produces particular dynamics and factors operating on character brands, and therefore interpolating into their design and deployment. In an attempt to achieve global appeal, character brand design may be shaped by archetypes believed to be accessible and resonant across cultural boundaries; conversely, it may be subject to modification and tailoring at different points of international distribution. Character brands may work differently in different countries because of the connotations of their parent culture (Japanese character merchandise, for example, may be charged with sub-cultural capital in US or UK markets, where in Japan it would be unambiguously mainstream); at the same time, they may become sites or mechanisms for enacting the dominance of their parent culture over others, their global ubiquity leading to cultural homogeneity rather than melting-pot diversity.

Reading the transmedia character with the conceptual tools of brand theory can thus be seen to be necessary to make a key plane of its existence and operations intelligible; however, its critical importance goes beyond that. It represents a gesture towards a broader epistemological and theoretical shift necessary if the fictional products of convergence culture are to be made fully critically comprehensible, specifically, a repairing and strengthening of the still largely uneasy relationship in disciplines for the study of fiction between textual (and non-textual) interpretation and exploration of a work's commercial contexts and motivations. The fictional operations of transmedia storytelling are inextricable and often indistinguishable from strategies of advertising, marketing, merchandising, and the general commodification of entertainment; the

transmedia character is undeniably a product, and this is neither separate from nor incidental to its nature as a fictional object. Critical practice in analysing franchise fictions needs to be similarly hybrid and synthesised, not only able to draw on facts and theories of the twenty-first-century media economy to illuminate and contextualise transmedia fictional operations, but also concerned with formalising conceptualisations of and strategies for reading the fictional forms and elements developing with one foot in advertising and one foot in storytelling. This is an important foundation of the whole of the critical theory this thesis looks to offer, not only this subsection of its framework.

Popular Heroes

For Bennett and Woollacott, key to conceptualising James Bond as an object of study is recognising the extent to which an idea of the character circulates in cultural discourse and the collective imagination beyond his corporately orchestrated expressions. Images of Bond, whether overt or disguised, are "used widely in advertising and commodity design" (1987: 15); he is an "established point of cultural reference" (14), his name invoked by journalists as shorthand for a particular attitude or sensibility, or deployed on the cover of other spy novels to create horizons of expectation. This produces and reflects the fact that even people who have never consumed an authorised Bond text or product have sufficient understanding of the character that the transferences of meaning involved in these invocations of Bond are intelligible to them. Lines of dialogue from the books and films (and impressions or imitations of the Bond actors who delivered them), their basic narrative premises, a sketch of the core elements of the Bond franchise, are "lodged in the memory bank of our culture" (14), contributing to the language, terms, and patterns of its thinking.

Bennett and Woollacott thus figure Bond as a *popular hero*, "a term", they note, "which is often used quite loosely [but which in fact] refers to a cultural phenomenon of a quite specific type with quite specific – and complex – conditions of existence." (13) They define a popular hero first as a fictional character that is "granted a quasi-real status" (13), that transcends its own fictionality, and then as a character that as such transcends its originating *textuality* to circulate within the collective cultural consciousness and multiple discursive spheres.

It is not a condition of Bennett and Woollacott's definition that the character originates in or is the catalyst for a multi-textual, multi-media fictional project; however, synergistic movements around a character are undeniably important indicators and agents of its cultural mobility. Franchising a character across media is often motivated by industry perceptions that the character has captured the public imagination, but also in its turn increases the character's cultural presence, bringing it repeatedly and through multiple channels into public awareness, and with the release of each franchise product generating new publicity and discourse about it. The brand logic of transmedia franchising described above likewise relies on and produces extra-textual visibility of and buzz about characters, circulating images and ideas of them. As a franchise thus takes root in the collective consciousness, new instalments become anticipated and constructed as cultural events, and developments in them reported as news; their characters as such become talking points, their actions and narratives the subjects of volumes of social conversation. Transmedia franchising escalates the cultural circulation of characters, to the point of turning them into markers and touchstones of cultural literacy, such that even consumers who otherwise have no interest in a franchise feel that "I have to know about it to a certain degree...otherwise I will be excluded from the conversation of my friends" (quote from a participant in a survey by Jonathan Gray of "anti-fans" and "non-fans" of major media products, 2003: 71).

Contemporary media landscapes, meanwhile, enable and support the mobility of fictional characters more generally as terms in cultural discourse. It is an axiom of new media studies, for example, that twenty-first-century mediascapes are congested and saturated with information, communications and commentary, and outlets and spaces for its rapid dissemination; as Chapter Five will discuss in more detail, most fictional texts are thus heavily mediated and remediated from the moment they are released, referenced, quoted, reviewed, summarised, described, interpreted by countless publications and consumers across a vast spectrum of communicative contexts. As Paul Grainge notes, furthermore, in the twenty-first century "entertainment has become a ubiquitous force", encroaching on realms of the public sphere "from news reporting, political campaigning and museum display, to the managed occasions of sport, shopping and dining." (2008: 176)

Many franchise characters, therefore, and particularly those born of or developed in convergence culture, achieve to some degree the "semi-independent existence" Bennett and Woollacott describe, their faces widely recognised, their catchphrases readily quoted, their narrative trajectories easily summarised even by consumers who have never had contact with their primary texts; they are *talked about* at extreme length, in extreme volume, and in a range of discursive spheres; they are reference points, part of general cultural and fictional literacies. Bennett and Woollacott's concept of the popular hero, I would argue, and the framework they set out in *Bond and Beyond* for analysing popular heroes, are thus useful critical tools for reading franchised characters more generally. However, the extra-textual mobility of characters franchised across media particularly has its own "specific and complex" conditions, that require some comment here.

First and foremost, for example, the cultural circulation of franchise characters is circumscribed by the fact that unlike the out-of-copyright Robinson Crusoe, another of Bennett and Woollacott's examples of a popular hero, they are protected possessions of a media corporation. A character's travels beyond the boundaries of sanctioned, authorised franchise products are theoretically limited by the terms of fair use under copyright law, restricted to parody, commentary, quotation. Insofar as they are licensed and copyrighted, franchise characters cannot move freely and intelligibly between fictional universes as may a figure like King Arthur, who is encountered within the realities of *Stargate SG-1*, *Babylon 5*, *Doctor Who*, to name only a few franchise fictions. However, systems of copyright and brand ownership do permit franchise characters to cross over fully into each other's diegesis where they have a common parent corporation or brand. They thus create interesting additional imaginative spaces, delineated by common corporate parenthood, in which diegetically-distinct ensembles of characters may be intuited to co-exist and potentially meaningfully interact. It is a sense of these spaces that makes intelligible texts such as Square Enix's *Dissidia* (2008), a game in which protagonists and antagonists from across the range of the company's various *Final Fantasy* franchises meet and do battle. Of course, exerting full control over fictional creations once they escape into the collective imagination is impossible, and there are many cultural spaces in which images and constructions of franchise characters are circulated through unofficial, grassroots creative uses. From Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* onwards, for example, fan communities have been recognised as engaging in forms of folk production and consumption, creating out of others' creations, building and organising social relations

through acts of storytelling and creative performance, "challeng[ing] the media industry's claims to hold copyrights on popular narratives." (Jenkins, 1992: 279) These practices are charged as appropriation and poaching, however, not as contributions to a communal literature or creative spring. Nor should the "challenge" they offer be too idealised; fan productions are subject to pressures of their own – the anxiety of complicity in structures of economic and cultural power that comes with participation in major entertainment brands, that qualifies subversive or transgressive textual appropriations; a persistent concern with "canonical" interpretation that perhaps speaks to a degree of self-consciousness about the marginal, subordinate status of fan creations.

Suggesting that franchise characters are markers and touchstones of contemporary cultural literacy, meanwhile, requires further qualification, as the position of transmedia storytelling relative to systems of cultural capital and discourses of taste is complex and contradictory. Mark Jancovich's work provides a starting point for understanding this position, in his insightful critique both of contemporary taste communities and politics and trends in scholarship thereon. Jancovich explicitly confronts the category of mainstream, commercial fictional production as an awkward, skirted term in discourses of cultural distinction; the mainstream, he notes, emerges only in "inconsistent and contradictory" form in the gaps between canonical and subcultural taste politics, with both traditional and supposed "counter-aesthetics", as well as the critics who write on them, quick to buy into and define themselves against "the image of mass culture as the inauthentic Other, and of the consumer of mass culture as the simple conformist dupe" (Jancovich, 2008: 154). In doing so, he revitalises legitimacy and cultural capital as concepts relevant, operable and intelligible relative to big-budget blockbuster franchises produced by big-name industry conglomerates with mainstream appeal on a global scale, though does little more to explore the nuances and particularities of how they are negotiated. For that, Matt Hills's work is more instructive, specifically, his figuring of franchise fictions as "mainstream cult media" (cf. Hills, 2006 and 2009). "Mainstream cult" is a loaded, tension-filled concept, and in that is a powerful tool for thinking about the cultural capital of transmedia storytelling. It articulates, for example, the fact that many of the hegemonically illegitimate, devalued modes of engagement associated with cult consumption are becoming more and more normalised by the protocols of transmedia storytelling. Transformation of fictional experiences into cultural events; poaching and appropriation of fictional content for independent cultural and subcultural purposes;

active participation and communal reception; sustained, even cross-generational involvement with a work; intimate familiarity with a diegesis and the circumstances of its production; the incorporation of a fiction into one's life and identity – all characteristic features of cult consumption (cf. Mathjis and Mendik, 2008), and as this chapter's discussion has repeatedly demonstrated, all normal and even defining elements of the reception of transmedia works. Yet at the same time, the idea of "mainstream cult media" also encapsulates how many pressures still act to define and constrain legitimate response to franchise fiction. It recognises that this response is located on a fine line, always on the verge of veering into obsession and juvenilia, balancing at a point of uncomplicated, perhaps faintly ironic enjoyment in between the academic who anxiously and defensively takes pop culture too seriously, and the fan whose devotion is irrational and consuming. The term brings out, furthermore, anxieties in the negotiation of subcultural capital within communities of franchises' fans, namely, that two of the primary strategies for amassing and developing capital in such communities – demonstrating exhaustive and obscure knowledge of the beloved text, and taking up a subversive, transgressive reading position (cf. Mathjis and Mendik, 2008) – are qualified and transformed, by the uncompromising accessibility of transmedia works, and by the anxious complicity identified in the previous paragraph.

With this in mind, then, Bennett and Woollacott's positions and strategies for analysing popular heroes may be brought within the critical framework this chapter proposes. Bennett and Woollacott's primary interest is in exploring how "as focal points of cultural reference", popular heroes come to bear a weight of psychosocial and ideological significance, how "they condense and connect, serve as shorthand expressions for, a number of deeply implanted cultural and ideological concerns." (14) *Bond and Beyond* is at heart a study of the political meanings that have been found in and inscribed upon the figure of Bond over his cultural lifespan, an investigation of the sexual, national, and political values that have been culturally negotiated on the site of the character. Given in addition transmedia franchising's tributary genres of fantasy, with myth, fairy tale, and metanarratives in its own DNA, and the superhero comic, in which "identity is the obsessional center" (Bukatman, 2003: 54), I would suggest that this is an important line of approach to its characters more broadly, likewise given its situation within cultural and economic hegemonies, and its desire, as discussed above, for consumers to incorporate its products and characters into their sense of identity.

Bennett and Woollacott also call attention, meanwhile, to how the discursive sprawl surrounding and circulating popular heroes insistently works to pull the "off-screen" on-screen, producing "chains of signification" (Marshall, 2006: 179) that cross, confuse and conflate various fictional and non-fictional spheres and dimensions, such that a consumer's understanding of a character comes to form part of their opinion of an actor, or vice versa. Bennett and Woollacott discuss, for example, "the close association between the figure of Bond and the constructed screen and off-screen identities of Connery and Moore[,] and in certain regions of textual distribution, the person of Fleming" (45). Transmedia franchising and media convergence culture generally repeatedly generate these discursive movements. The length of time and number of products over which an actor typically plays a franchise character strengthens the association and conflation of them, likewise the processes of remediation necessarily involved in the transmedia franchising of a character; as Daniel Radcliffe's face, for example, is used as the model for computer-generated images of Harry Potter in a console videogame, or for an action figure or theme park animatronic, his body seems to become the character's, not simply a performance or translation of it. Meanwhile, as a function, perhaps, of a general tendency towards reflexivity and hypermediacy, media convergence culture characteristically makes its production processes (or a particular presentation of them, at least) visible behind and alongside its products. Transmedia creators use narratives of production, actorial and authorial commentary as fodder for franchise extension, into supplementary DVD content, for example, or "behind-the-scenes" programmes such as BBC3's *Doctor Who Confidential*, and explicitly or implicitly draw connections between this content and the fictional texts they accompany; Jonathan Gray observes, for example, that the behind-the-scenes footage offered on the *Lord of the Rings* Extended Edition DVDs continuously "replicates" the franchise's "epic tale of an unlikely group of heroes who, through comradeship, resilience, and compassion, manage to overcome the odds and triumph in the face of immense adversity[...], superimposing it onto the cast, crew, director, Tolkien, and New Zealand" (Gray, 2010: 92).

The core critical position of Bennett and Woollacott's study, however, necessary and implicit throughout the above discussion, is that in order to understand "popular heroes" fully as fictional and cultural objects, analysis must look beyond the "originating textual conditions of their existence" and explore advertisements, newspaper articles, reviews, television retrospectives, as "contribut[ing] to the expanded reproduction" (6) of

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the characters. Recognising their cultural circulation as a meaningful plane of franchise characters' existence means recognising that they are constituted, concretised, and imbued with meaning by this secondary discourse; it thus likewise means drawing the boundaries of character study in transmedia franchises to include the identification of key modalities of audience response to franchise characters, and of activities and practices in transmedia consumption, to contextualise and explicate how they percolate through the cultural consciousness, and to include a mapping of the extratextual and paratextual landscape around the transmedia experience, of the discourses and communication networks that produce the cultural image(s) of franchise characters.

Archontic Fiction

Again, then, the question of how to bound and conceptualise "the transmedia franchise text" as object of study arises. To conclude this chapter, I wish to propose that for the purposes of critical practice in the study of transmedia franchises, the concept of "the text" may usefully be replaced by the concept of "the archive". I use this term as Abigail Derecho (2006) does, drawing on Derrida, to theorise the nature of fan-produced fiction based on existing media products. Figuring the multi-texts of transmedia franchises as archives expresses their open-endedness and impulse towards expansion, ascribing to them "that drive within an archive that seeks to always produce more archive, to enlarge itself" (Derecho, 2006: 64), and their shifting, indeterminate borders; it also constructs franchise consumption as selective browsing, thus conveying something of how partial, individuated, and variously configurable the encounter with a franchise fiction can be. The concept, like archives themselves, gathers together into a critical construct of a transmedia franchise not only its fictional texts and products, but "all texts related to [them]" (65), metatexts, paratexts, and hypertexts that take them as source and subjects.[13] It also, moreover, usefully figures franchise fictions as repositories of "usable artifacts" (65), fictional objects that creators can use to make new textual deposits in the fiction's archive; this conceptualisation thus resonates with and articulates the fact that content is a fundamental organising principle of transmedia franchising. Derecho's theorising of the idea of the archontic as a fictional modality, meanwhile, is likewise sympathetic to core principles of transmedia franchises' fictional operations. Archontic fiction, for Derecho,

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[13] I use Gérard Genette's terminology in *Palimpsestes*, here, understanding metatexts as "commentary" or "critical" discourse on a text (1997a: 4), paratexts as those "verbal or other productions" (1997b: 1) that surround and present fictional texts, such as blurbs or cover art, and hypertexts as fictional texts "in the second degree[...]derived from another pre-existent text" (1997a: 5), such as adaptations or parodies.

is an art of repetition and variation, of structuring and deriving meaning from echoes between texts, of "actualising" in new archive deposits the "virtualities" (74) or possibilities suggested but unwritten in others, of managing and exploring relations, interplays and dialogues between parts and wholes; so too transmedia franchising, as this chapter has already discussed and others will further.

Some qualifications to Derecho's elaboration of this conceptual framework are necessary, however, to make it a better fit for transmedia franchise fictions specifically. Throughout her essay, for example, Derecho asserts archontic writing and the concept of the archive as a challenge to hierarchical ways of thinking about textuality, predicated on ideas of ownership and authority; she also links it to political resistance, narrating a history of archontic literature that is ultimately a history of critique and subversion. In using the concept of the archive and the archontic to theorise transmedia franchising, I invoke instead the resonances the term had originally for Derrida, that is, of the institutional and the conservative (Derrida and Prenowitz, 1995: 12). Necessarily, insofar as franchising is fundamentally a practice of licensing, managing, and exploiting intellectual property, logics of authorisation, legitimisation and ownership are at play organising the archive of any transmedia franchising; though these logics do not entirely control and limit archive deposits, as suggested above, they do interact with how new texts and artefacts enter a franchise's archive, sometimes barring access, and how precisely they are filed or shelved within it. Bennett and Woollacott's observation, meanwhile, that each new entry into what they conceptualise as an "interacting set" of "texts of Bond" (1987: 19) "reorganise[s] kaleidoscopically the relationships, transactions and exchanges between them" is also, I would suggest, a useful note.

With these qualifications in place, I thus propose that "the transmedia franchise text" may be usefully conceptualised as an expanding archive of texts, products, media encounters and experiences both fictional and not, drawn together into a meaningful and interrelated collection by a shared narrative reality, by brand iconography, markers of authorship and authorisation, by common fictional elements, objects, or items of content. Transmedia franchise characters, in this framework, are both "useable artefacts", content that may be exploited to further enlarge the archive, and principles of classification, as subject, allusion or reference grounds for a text's admittance into the franchise archive. Much of the critical theory that follows is founded on this conceptualisation; Chapters

Five and Six will discuss further how, respectively, the analysis of secondary texts and audience activity may be brought within a critical framework for the study of franchise characters, while Chapters Three and Four explore types of relational dynamics and operations between franchises' archive deposits. First, however, Chapter Two looks now to engage further the open-ended seriality of transmedia franchising, and the idea of franchise characters as "useable artefacts" for generating and sustaining it.

Chapter Two

Extensible Characters

Though it should express franchise characters' openness to new creative interventions, there is something concrete, something *finished* about the figure of the "useable artefact", a sense of a fictional object fully formed that may be borrowed, deployed, turned over in the hands of a new media creator to be viewed from a different angle. To begin this chapter, I thus propose instead that franchise characters may be usefully conceptualised as *extensible*.

This figure, with its implications of development, unfurling and potential, I would suggest articulates better the fact that insofar as franchise production is characteristically open-ended, franchised characters as fictional objects are works-in-progress. Synchronically conceived and released transmedia franchises are extremely rare; the textual picture of a franchise character is instead typically *serialised*, parcelled out and built up over time. Jenkins identifies seriality as one of the core principles of transmedia franchising; the franchise, he suggests, is "a hyperbolic version of the serial, where[...]chunks of meaningful and engaging story information have been dispersed not simply across multiple segments within the same medium, but rather across multiple media systems." (2009c) Seriality is undeniably valuable to franchise producers; serial production and distribution prolongs the fictional experience (thereby maximising brand presence and opportunities for consumption), and weaves and unfolds content into and around the lives of consumers. Serialisation is also implicated in the hyperdiegetic operations and effects of transmedia franchising. As Matt Hills notes, serials index and articulate "a much wider narrative world" insofar as their form is "always implying further [narrative] events and developments" (2005: 190), and vice versa. Recognising this is important to understanding the patterns and rhythms of franchise characters' narration and representation. They are shaped by the objectives of serialisation, by efforts to manage the investment of an established audience and attract the interest of new consumers through balancing cliffhangers with resolutions, repetition and redundancy

with novelty and progression, the episodic with the arc.[14] The *design* of a franchise character, meanwhile, may likewise be an ongoing process. It should not be assumed that because transmedia franchising is an art of worldmaking, its worlds and their inhabitants are fully conceived in all their vast and minute detail prior to textual production; comments from creators bear out[15] that as a function of the duration of transmedia production and distribution, even the most schematised and methodical building of a transmedia world is inevitably a continual process to some degree, the colouring and mapping of its terrain initiated, guided and inflected by how the fictional experience unfolds in the cultural landscape.

The concept of extensibility, furthermore, is flexible and polyvalent enough to express both that some characters are franchised *a posteriori* (Long, 2007: 20), their stories and backgrounds only extended across texts and media following the success of an initial standalone appearance, and that characters intended from their conception to be franchised may be designed and represented *as* extensible, that is, with a spread of media products potential in them. The crafting of this extensibility may be bound up in the strategies of overdesign and hyperdiegetic meaning discussed in the previous chapter, in the implication of things unsaid about the character, or it may involve designing generative mechanisms, narrative scenarios that can be drawn out or formulae that can be iterated, quirks of personality or physiology that can keep long-form storytelling possible, plausible, and continually fresh and varied: the Doctor's ability to regenerate, for example.

This conceptualisation suggests three important foci for critical practice in the study of franchise characters. The first is how the character has *adapted* to cultural, technological and industrial shifts that inevitably occur over the lifespan of its parent franchise, how the directions of its development have been set and altered by *interpolating* factors and forces. These factors may include the desires of fans and other strata of consumers; serialisation makes room for the incorporation of audience feedback

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[14] Of course, it should be remembered that this seriality is to some extent reconfigurable. Technologies of home viewing, like the DVD, allow consumers to revisit selectively franchise instalments, view them rearranged according to thematic logic or diegetic chronology, or consume a franchise in its entirety, re-contextualised and outside the rhythms and flows of initial distribution; the previous chapter has already noted, meanwhile, that the encyclopaedic, catalogue and database forms so frequently used to present franchise worlds work to "convert temporally 'unfolding texts' into spatially organised [...] forms of information" (Hills, 2005: 195).
[15] Cf. Carlton Cuse, interviewed in Jenkins, 2010d; also Rowling, n.d.(a).

from previous instalments, whether on matters of style, tone or structure, on the subjects of favoured characters or plotlines, or particularly pressing questions about narrative developments or worldbuilding details. They may include shifts in market conditions, such as the emergence of new competitors, or the ageing and drifting of a consumer base; they may include changes and changing zeitgeists within the technological landscape, and new industry targets, such as the desire to reach a hitherto untapped audience demographic, or promote a franchise in a new country. Frameworks provided in Chapters Three, Four and Six of this thesis, theorising reworkings of transmedia characters, medium-specificity in transmedia works, and precisely how transmedia franchises are shaped by their audiences, may be used to engage and reflect on this question in more detail.

The second is the creation of space in the design and representation of franchise characters for further extension. The previous chapter engaged hyperdiegesis and encyclopaedism in transmedia franchising primarily as modalities or inflections of fictional meaning, but it is equally important in franchise character study and theory to explore the actual "syntagmatic" (Örnebring, 2007: 451) or "hermeneutic" (Long, 2007: 61) gaps that produce and are produced by them, the textual silences, allusions and implications left in one franchise instalment to make room for another. It is necessary to examine how they structure relations between parts of a franchise archive, how they establish purpose and conditions of engagement for a new synergistic movement, how and on what terms they *invite* consumers across texts and media. These issues are the primary focus of Geoffrey Long's 2007 work on transmedia fiction, and as such I do not set out to engage them extensively in this thesis; however, the account Long gives in his framework of the crafting of extensibility relative to character is limited, and I thus wish to offer some notes of qualification and expansion to this framework here.

Long sets out a typology of hermeneutic gaps or codes that is organised by the *topic* of the questions raised by textual hints or absences, and subsequently answered by acts of franchise extension; in this typology, questions about "characters or aspects of characters that do not appear on screen", or about the "histories, fates, or motivations of characters" (64), represent one of six such categories, the others being questions about the organisation and practices of the cultures that make up the franchise's imagined world, questions about "events that happened in the past, or in the future" (64), questions about

"important places that either don't appear in the main story or appear only briefly" (64), questions about the "flora, fauna, or other scientific components of the [franchise] world" (65), and questions about "the very existential nature of the story [the audience is] consuming" (65). I would note, first of all, that character is often implicated in the asking and answering of these other five types of question, and vice versa; the questions an instalment raises about characters, for example, may concern what they did or what happened to them beyond the limits of that instalment's narrative chronology, or conversely it may be the physiology of a character, for example, that raises questions about the "scientific components" of the franchise's world. Though "characters that never appear on screen", "histories, fates, [and] motivations of characters" are significant types of character-related hermeneutic gap, meanwhile, this list is still partial. Individual franchise instalments may also raise questions about relationships between characters, for example, or encounters between them, about whether and how two characters are connected, or how a meeting might play out between characters who have not yet appeared "on-screen" together. They may leave unsaid how a particular character *reacts* to their narrative events, or leave the *consequences* of a character's behaviour unexplored. The silences a franchise creates and fills may also be related to identity politics and issues of representation, both intradiegetic and extradiegetic; instalments may ask and answer questions about what it is like to be a woman or ethnic minority at Hogwarts, for example, or look to redress racially or gender-biased casting.

Finally, reading extensible characters involves understanding the patterns, rhythms, and movements of their extension, the shapes and contours of the maps and trajectories into which their narrative paths are unfolded, and how this organises and articulates their development, growth, and imagined life course. This aspect of franchise character study and theory is the central concern of this chapter. The discussion that follows sets out to describe and theorise some common rhythms and trajectories of a franchise character's extension across texts and media, by engaging the particularities of franchise seriality and narrative complexity, while also acknowledging Jenkins's argument that "there is a great deal we can learn [about transmedia seriality] by studying classic serial forms of fiction" (2009c), and drawing on television and comic book studies specifically in its theoretical work (the modern television series, serial and soap opera, and the ongoing comic book narrative, being most sympathetic in scope, audience, modes and contexts of engagement to the transmedia franchise). It looks, specifically, to develop

spatialisations of franchise character extension that move beyond the dominant critical and industry metaphor of the *character arc*.

"Arc is to character", explains Michael Newman, "as plot is to story. Put slightly differently, arc is plot stated in terms of character. An arc is a character's journey from A through B, C, and D to E." (2006: 23) Newman identifies it as a useful term (2006: 23), while Greg Smith suggests it to be an intuitive one (2006: 82); it is used idiomatically by television scholar Jason Mittell in essays on long-term television narrative (cf. 2009a, 2010a), more formally theorised by Newman as "the device that best ensures" (2006: 23) audience commitment to and investment in serial television, and by Smith as part of the distinctive artistry of the television series (2006). It is clearly a concept that franchise creators think with; Karl Stewart, for example, a contributor to the *Tomb Raider* franchise, sees it as the organising principle of his practice (quoted in Nunneley, 2011). However, I would question its fit and value as a critical model of character extension and development in transmedia franchising, primarily because the design and organisation of transmedia franchise narratives rarely resonate with the concept of the arc. As model and metaphor, the character arc spatialises character development and the narrative structures that contain and articulate it as a smooth and regular trajectory, sustained and cohering, of motivated change and growth, of traceable and describable progression towards epiphany, resolution, fulfilment. The precise nature of transmedia extension, however, makes the shapes of franchise narratives characteristically irregular and unwieldy. Transmedia franchising may, for example, combine and blend a range of different *types* of narrative extension, including series form (different instalments "having the same characters and/or settings but with different stories" (Mazdon, 2005: 9)), serial form ("a[...]narrative presented in a number of separate instalments which may or may not reach a conclusion" (Mazdon, 2005: 9), adaptation, remediation and repackaging, or the re-narrating of earlier instalments from a new character perspective. In some cases, the development of a franchise narrative is carefully managed and meticulously organised; as often, however, it is haphazard, plot strands taken up and dropped as economic and creative priorities shift, continuity wilfully or unwittingly forgotten, postscripts of content mounting upon postscripts. As the spines of extended, multi-textual, cross-platform, participatory entertainment brand experiences, transmedia narratives cross, connect, imbricate and interweave in dense and complex patterns; they are subject to revisions and interventions, sudden changes of direction and occasional returns to square one.

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Conceptualisations are thus needed that draw critical attention to these irregularities and their effects, rather than smoothing them over. Centrally, as such, the critical tools this chapter looks to provide are alternative spatialisations of franchise character extension, that better reflect and acknowledge the distinctive narrative complexity of franchise entertainment. These spatialisations are intended not as alternative figurings of a single deep structure essential to all transmedia works, but rather as some possible variants of character and narrative trajectory in transmedia franchising, one or more of which may underpin any particular transmedia work. Though I do wish to suggest ways of thinking outside it, my primary intention is not to reject the metaphor of the character arc as entirely lacking value – the extent to which it is used in industry discourse, if nothing else, demands that it be kept in mind – but rather to modify and nuance it in the light of transmedia narrative theory, and thereby turn its intuitive usefulness into something more rigorously tailored and closely compatible.

Long-form Entertainment

I begin with a general note, that franchise extension tends to be *long-form*. That is, like a soap opera (Newman, 2006: 16), it often works on an intra- and extra-diegetic timescale of years, even decades. Consumer encounters with transmedia characters thus typically span large stretches of time, on three levels: the time that passes in the fictional world over the course of the narrative events of the franchise; the time spent consuming franchise products, sitting in a cinema, completing a videogame, or playing with an action figure; and the period of time over which franchise instalments are released. Transmedia franchise practice shows us considerable portions of characters' lifespans, over the course of a considerable portion of our own.

This has two main specific implications for the study of these characters. Firstly, where franchises begin with properties aimed at children or teenagers, as many do, it is likely that, as Tanya Krzywinska notes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, many consumers "of comparable ages to the characters 'grow up'" (2009: 392) with the franchise. Such franchises may as such attempt to echo and "mesh with" (Krzywinska, 2009: 392) the ageing and life events of these consumers in the rhythms of their character development and extension, to amplify their identification, engagement and attachment, and ensure continued interest in the franchise as they move out of its initial target demographic. The *Harry Potter* franchise is a case in point in this respect, the narrative chronology of the

books roughly keeping pace with the timescale of their release, allowing a generation of children to grow up alongside Harry, and the release schedule of the films repeating this pattern for a further generation of consumers. Reading the extension of some franchise characters may therefore require exploring the life course of a notional consumer as a structuring principle of their fictional lives, and how this shapes meaning, engagement and effect relative to their narrative events. Again, here life course theory may prove a productive critical tool in franchise character analysis.

The previous chapter, meanwhile, drawing on Bennett and Woollacott, stressed that franchise characters often function as "shorthand expressions for [...] cultural and ideological concerns" (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987: 14). They are, as Bennett and Woollacott write of James Bond, "sign[s] of the times" (19), reflecting, embodying, and serving as sites for the negotiation of social, cultural, and political concerns contemporary to them. The duration of many franchises, however, is such that they unfold through multiple social, cultural and political movements and epochs. The characters of these franchises are thus not just signs of the times, they are signs of *many* times; multiple and different cultural and ideological meanings are inscribed on them as they are extended over time. As Bennett and Woollacott again note of Bond, the "cultural and ideological business that [is] conducted around, by means of, and through them" needs to be understood and analysed as "mobile and shifting" as they are "activated for consumption" in different "horizons of meaning" (19).

I begin by theorising transmedia franchise extension as long-form, however, primarily because it is potentially a quality common to all the patterns of extension elaborated in the discussion that follows. This should be understood as assumed throughout the rest of this chapter's framework.

Transmedia Labyrinths

In *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, Angela Ndalianis identifies the polycentric, multicursal labyrinth as key model and metaphor for understanding the narrative complexity produced by contemporary entertainment's "lack of respect for the limits of the frame" (2005a: 25), its trans-media and trans-textual movements. It is a useful conceptual tool for understanding the narrative structures and extensions produced through transmedia franchising specifically. With its connotations of navigating and

mapping, it resonates with the spatial logics identified in the previous chapter as fundamental to the franchise aesthetic and experience, of movement both through a fictional world and through a media landscape, between media interfaces and spaces of reception. Exploring and solving a maze is a suggestive figure for engagement with transmedia franchises, articulating it as an experience of following intra-, inter- and extratextual threads for the reward of a new corner of the fictional universe, a new piece of diegetic history, a new narrative development, a sense of mastery over textual complexity. More importantly, however, the concept does express the shape and structure of much franchise extension. The visualisation of neo-baroque narrative form Ndalianis sketches in further work on serial television diagrammatises both the configuration of the typical transmedia archive and its multicursal narrative structure (2005b: 95):
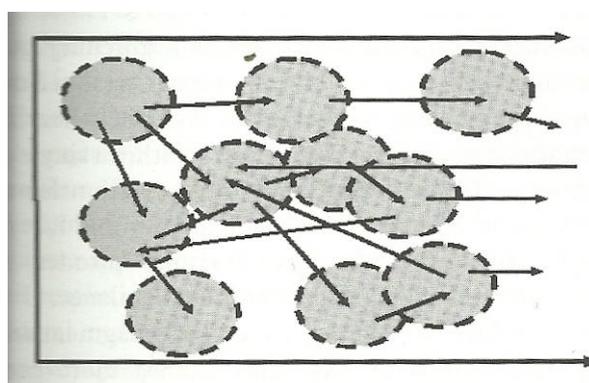
As franchises spread across texts and media, their narratives often fork into parallel and divergent branches, that may later rejoin, intersect, or touch each other glancingly at tangents; multiple loci of narrative action and attention are created and orchestrated. As Chapter One has touched on already, notions of origins and originals, starting points and points of entry, paths and scripts of consumption are complex and slippery in transmedia franchising; as Jim Collins puts it, narrative comprehension in transmedia franchises involves the "negotiation of an array" (Collins, 1991: 164) rather than a rigidly ordered linear structure, with different consumers potentially selecting, prioritising and beginning from different elements of the franchise archive.

Because characters are, as has already been discussed, such primary objects of consumer investment in and engagement with franchises, it is often character that structures how a franchise narrative branches, and defines its multiple centres of action and attention. Transmedia narratives frequently fork into new texts and platforms to follow a particular character when its path diverges from the rest of the cast; their threads

are knotted back together when these paths again meet or cross. It is often "hermeneutic gaps" in and about characters, elided or summarised stretches of their narrative courses or holes in their backstories, that principally organise and direct franchise extension and orient the purposes and pleasures of new instalments. This can produce a particular rhythm in the trajectory of a franchise character, namely, an oscillation between exaggerated periods of foregrounding and backgrounding. A character may make only a cameo or supporting appearance in many franchise instalments, while being the protagonist or at least a primary narrative agent in others. One strand of the *Matrix* narrative, for example, follows Niobe "off-screen" when her minor role in *The Matrix Reloaded* ends, into the videogame *Enter the Matrix* (Shiny Entertainment, 2003), in which her activities parallel to the plot of *Reloaded* and *Revolution* are the primary plot; another expands (in "Kid's Story", one of the *Animatrix* short films (Watanabe, 2003)) the character Kid's fleeting appearance in *Reloaded* into the full narrative behind his reaching Zion and his few lines of stuttering gratitude and hero-worship towards Neo.

Such a narrative trajectory, I would argue, may be usefully modelled in terms of a changing rhythm or pattern of *focus*, characters moving between the periphery and the centre of the interested gaze of the narrative. The concept of focus I find critically suggestive in multiple senses. On a basic level, for example, it articulates that the movement of character from narrative foreground to narrative background is coterminous with an oscillation between broad-brush and fine-grained painting, detail, depth and subtlety of characterisation becoming visible with narrative prominence. It also, meanwhile, makes room for critical examination of the *nature of the lens*, that is, the motivation or sensibility that turns narrative focus towards a particular character. For this lens is not neutral or disinterested; it may be coloured by thematic or aesthetic concerns, or by some or all of the interpolating factors discussed above: perceived audience attachments and affinities; the capacities and protocols of new media outlets to be colonised; cultural and market trends. Primarily, however, I suggest this conceptualisation because it implies reciprocity, that is, that necessarily as one character comes into focus, others blur out of focus. This is important for understanding franchise characters as parts of an *ensemble*. It is the shifts in focus effected by franchise extension, and the way in which they destabilise the notion of franchises having protagonists, that invite the application of the term *ensemble* in the first place; Mathijs defines ensemble pieces as "at odds with the structure of protagonism that otherwise characterises

Hollywood cinema." (2011: 89) However, the fact that these rhythms of focus typically make protagonism *mobile*, reassigning it from text to text and platform to platform, rather than doing away with it completely, make the transmedia franchise a particular kind of ensemble piece. Little critical work has been done on reading character in ensemble narratives, but implicit in Mathijs's essay is a figuring of the ensemble cast as a design of various and complementary roles and types, that defines the development, actions and interactions of its members. As the example of the *Matrix* franchise again demonstrates, however, switches of focus in transmedia narratives shuffle and remap this design; "Kid's Story", for example, mentioned above, positions Kid as gifted and chosen and Neo as mentor, where the central trilogy of films focuses on Neo as saviour and Morpheus as mentor and guide. As a transmedia character moves in and out of narrative focus, therefore, they may also coterminously cycle through roles in an ensemble structure, both movements organising and articulating their growth and developments.

The figure of the polycentric, multicursal labyrinth, however, does require some further qualification and particularisation to be an accurate model for transmedia franchise narrative complexity. It should be recognised, for example, that insofar as the franchise labyrinth is not only multicursal, but multimedia, it is constructed from many different types of building block. The base units of narrative form and rhythm are different in different media; underlying and structuring the typical map of a franchise narrative labyrinth is a complex configuration of these different units, the two-hour feature film, the 30-level videogame, the open-ended series of half-hour television episodes.

One further way of approaching the extension and development of a franchise character, therefore, is to examine and conceptualise how it is patterned by particular interrelations of medium and narrative. This may be demonstrated by examining a segment of the *Star Wars* franchise, namely, the animated television series *The Clone Wars* (2008–). *The Clone Wars* marks an intervention into and expansion of the narrative gap between the end of the feature film *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (Lucas, 2002) and the beginning of the feature film *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005a), filling this slice of narrative space with involved political conflicts, the story of young Padawan Ahsoka Tano, and hyperdiegetic colour. Though bounded, however, by a closed frame, *The Clone Wars'* narrative is serial and currently open and

ongoing. The *Star Wars* multitext is thus distended by this series, its core structure of six feature films disrupted by (at the time of writing) fifty-seven television episodes, and likewise its narrative; the tripartite temporal relation that defines narrative, between the chronology of the *fabula*, the temporality of the *sjuzhet*, and the duration of the act of consumption, distorts between two points, the feature films' elliptical architecture of scope suddenly given room to breathe and thicken in the drawn-out rhythms of the television serial.

This coterminously then produces a peculiar effect of *dilation* in characters' narrative trajectories. Across the *Star Wars* films, for example, the development of Anakin Skywalker is precisely managed, the prequel trilogy carefully joining the dots between Anakin the young Chosen One and Darth Vader as he is introduced in the very first film. *The Clone Wars*, however, stretches a section of this diagrammed progression out almost to the point of suspension or stasis, keeping Anakin hovering between two already marked phases of character development. His narrative role and agency becomes circumscribed; there is a limit to the kind of experiences he can be put through, the kind of relationships he can be shown to enter into, the kind of plots in which he can take part, and have *The Clone Wars* still plausibly bridge the characterisation set out in *Episode II* and that set out in *Episode III*. On the other hand, his presentation becomes ripe with potential for foreshadowing and dramatic irony, and for nods both forwards and backwards through the franchise narrative chronology towards continuity, and the deft weaving and knotting together of worldmaking threads.

It should be noted, however, that the narrative rhythms of the particular media forms involved do not always inexorably define the co-ordinates of a franchise character's narrative trajectory. The discussion so far has implicitly figured the relationship between the narrative reality of the franchise, narrative form or structure, and medium of representation in franchise fiction in terms of organising and containing, with medium and narrative offering particular representational structures into which the franchise universe may be marshalled, turning worldbuilding into story, game or experience, and in so doing mapping points of change, climax and resolution onto it. Yet I would argue that sometimes, the "vast narrative space" that is the transmedia franchise world, the dense underlying *fabula* of the fictional franchise, seems to pull against the patterns and constraints of the media and narrative forms through which it is articulated,

that the markers, boundaries and cadences of, for example, the two-hour feature film sometimes seem simply to cut into the sprawling network of events that comprise a franchise's hyperdiegesis, rather than giving it shape. Again, the *Star Wars* franchise provides an illustrative example. A showdown with antagonist Count Dooku is positioned as a climax in *Episode II*, yet his death falls outside the typical rhythms of a blockbuster action film, taking place between the beginning and the middle of *Episode III*. Such slight narrative discordances, I would suggest, may be productively understood both as effects of hyperdiegetic storytelling, and attempts to produce an effect of hyperdiegetic storytelling, to give an impression that the world of the text is not bounded by the arc of one feature film narrative.

Transmedia narrative labyrinths, meanwhile, do not always unfurl forwards and outwards. The textual trajectory of the franchise character is often full of anachronic and lateral movements in diegetic chronology relative to release chronology, tangents and doubling backs, as new instalments not only continue the narratives of earlier texts and products, but also join their dots, open out in their spaces and silences, tell the stories leading up to them. The characteristic open-endedness of franchise entertainment already makes climax and resolution distinctively slippery concepts. What may seem like narrative end points in individual franchise instalments are frequently designed and received as in fact anticipating or introducing further narrative extensions, or are later repurposed and reinscribed as such. Often, the more franchise narratives progress, the more they open up in scope, rather than narrowing; this can be seen in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, the worldbuilding, narrative and mythology of which gets richer and more expansive, and raises more hermeneutic questions, as the core trilogy of films progresses towards conclusion for many of its characters. The anachronies of franchise extension, however, further destabilise these concepts. Rather than drawing a line under a character's narrative trajectory, many individual narrative resolutions instead draw lines *to* another part of the franchise archive, knitting the instalment back into other narrative threads; they tie loose ends together, rather than tying them off. The development of a transmedia character may therefore be punctuated with moments that are polyvalent in their operations, their functions, significance and pleasures lying in both closure and connection, in their latent potential for extension and their completion of a missing narrative link, in their promise and marking of a gateway into a new fictional experience.

Finally, Chapter One noted that the encounter with a franchise archive is variously configurable, and may be highly individuated. It should also be stressed, however, that it is more often than not *partial*. Holistic, completist consumption of every part and proliferation of a franchise is the exception, rather than the norm, partly due to their sheer scale, and partly because much transmedia proliferation remains an adjunct or an afterthought. As such, as Jenkins implies when he writes of "mother ships" (2009c) within franchises, transmedia works are rarely non-hierarchical structures. In many, a core text or set of texts emerges, settling into dominance and canonicity through a conjunction of promotional strategies, paratextual manoeuvres, and distribution circumstances; other instalments then fall into hierarchies of importance, structured in terms of medium, authorship, and the level of investment required both to be aware of and find them, and to care about the details of narrative and worldbuilding contained within them. The majority of a franchise's audience will only consume the "mother ship" texts, a smaller fraction its more readily available or heavily promoted proliferations, a smaller fraction still the complete multitext of its fiction, and just a handful all its Easter eggs, supplementary websites, DVD extras, creator blogs and interviews. In many cases, therefore, if the franchise narrative is a labyrinth, it is *multileveled* as well as multicursal, with only some explorers walking all the way to the narrow, obscure paths of its lower levels and the subtle, often trivial illuminations and resolutions at the end of them.

Character development through this kind of franchise extension may thus be modelled as *tiered* or *stratified*, supporting a spectrum of degrees of consumption and investment, structured through vertical digging through textual or narrative layers rather than, or as well as, forward narrative progression; the range of narrative actions, intradiegetic facts, traits, intentions and motivations that make up the transmedia character may be distributed across hierarchies in its parent multitext, and therefore themselves hierarchised, differently designated as essential or incidental to an understanding of both character and narrative. A range of critical approaches suggest themselves for analysing such types of character development, the first being to examine the logics by which both text and its representations of character are stratified, and hence the different forces and contexts working on and around each level of action or information. Medium may be an organising and intersecting factor, for example, with "mother ship" texts often distributed through culturally established media with a wide reach, and satellite proliferations designed for newer media, often highly personalised,

and often still negotiating their capacities as vehicles for fiction. Obviously, different tiers will be designed with different audience demographics and reception cultures in mind, and their content tailored to suit. The construction of each level may also, meanwhile, assume different *contexts* of consumption, taking into account that blockbuster "mother ship" instalments, for example, will be built up into cultural and transcultural events, whereas a detail of characterisation hidden in the extras on a special edition DVD box set may be unearthed through the collaborative efforts and intelligence of a small, dedicated online community of fans. A second productive approach may be to explore the precise nature of the relationships between a franchise's various narrative strata – whether less accessible instalments tend towards redundancy or triviality, for example, primarily providing new inflections of or perspectives on the core narrative rather than significant additional details of plot or meaning, or whether they offer subtleties and diegetic minutiae that complicate and enrich the core narrative, without being necessary to understand it; whether they expand compressions or ellipses in the core narrative, or remain in its margins and interstices; how any one tier creates gateways and passageways into others. For example, the character development performed by the in-character MySpace blog for Martha Jones maintained by the BBC alongside the third series of New *Who*[16] (discussed further in Chapter Six) is bound up in the satellite nature of this transmedia proliferation, and the fact that as such "Martha's" blog entries offer only re-presentations of television episode plots, and evocative pictures of narrative "down-time", evenings with the Doctor "hunched up on this tiny sofa, his gangly legs sticking out while he ate his beans and watched Coronation Street." (BBC, 2007) The necessary focus in this text on grace notes of shade and colour produces Martha as astute, sensitive and insightful, and deepens and reinforces the presentation of her in the television series as in love with the Doctor.

Matrices and Databases

This latter, however, is only one strategy by which franchise practice navigates the issue of supporting multiple points of entry into and degrees of investment in the franchise fiction. Matt Hills describes another in a case study of the new *Doctor Who*, identifying three primary strategies that new *Who* employs to satisfy the fan who consumes as many franchise products as possible, and seeks finely detailed worldbuilding and complex

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[16] Available at: <http://www.myspace.com/marthajonesuk> [Accessed 11 August 2011].

continuity, while not "alienat[ing] new viewers unfamiliar with massive backlogs of story and character information" (Hills, 2009: 333), and who may only dip in and out of the franchise's "mother ship" products. The first he describes as the creation of the "absent epic", that is, a significant and far-reaching piece of diegetic history or present that is never "fully represented on screen" (Hills, 2009: 334), but is rather articulated purely through "hints and references" (Lyon, 2005: 220). The example in New *Who* is the Time War between the Daleks and the Time Lords, "one of the new series' major additions to *Doctor Who*'s established lore" (Hills, 2009: 334); it is a momentous narrative event, that Hills describes as a "structuring absence" throughout the revival, never directly narrated, yet used to "underpin the [revival's] altered characterization of the Doctor as supposedly the Last of the Time Lords." (Hills, 2009: 334) The second technique Hills observes is the creation of "implied story arcs", that is,

> Instead of layering plot development on plot development, and so assuming cumulative audience knowledge, [creator Russell T.] Davies instead tends to repeat a specific signifier, seeding it relatively unobtrusively into the background details or dialogue of episodes for fans to spot. (Hills, 2009: 336)

Invested, close-reading fans may find pleasure in spotting that words such as "Bad Wolf", "Torchwood" and "Saxon" recur throughout the franchise, and of speculating on their narrative significance, yet more casual viewers can enjoy and understand the series finales, which make explicit and resolve these implicit arcs, without having registered or prioritised these mentions as clues. Finally, Hills notes that new *Who* makes significant use of parallels, echoes, and variations on a theme, both narrative and cinematographic, describing how "an FX shot swooping down to Rose's home" (339) becomes a "reiterated motif" (339) of Rose's character trajectory, and the structure of Rose's first meeting with the Ninth Doctor is mirrored in her later adventures with the Tenth. "These narrative parallels", as Hills explains, "reward loyal fan audiences who can play spot-the-difference across episodes without detrimentally affecting the enjoyment of less committed or narratively knowledgeable audiences." (339) Here, franchise extension adds depth and texture to pictures of characters not only through *vectors* of narrative movement, but also through *matrices* of echoes, motifs and references, rewarding repeat and careful consumption without requiring it for enjoyment of the franchise and understanding of the character.

Throughout, the above discussion implicitly thinks in terms of vectors and trajectories; however, these figures do not always usefully or accurately spatialise

franchise character extension. They have organised this chapter's theorising so far because up to this point, this discussion has intertwined and even conflated the study of franchise extension with the study of narrative form, development, and progression. However, franchise extension often involves cross-platform movements into non-narrative forms and media. Franchises frequently expand, for example, into simulational texts, products and experiences like videogames or theme park rides. As Chapter Six will discuss in more detail, in simulational fictions and fictional experiences, characters are rendered in procedural terms, as rule-based intelligences forever acting in predetermined patterns; the figure that best describes these phases of extension is the algorithm, loop or system, rather than the unfurling path. As Chapter One noted, meanwhile, much about the transmedia character is presented, or re-presented, not as narrative or even description, but as information, in encyclopaedic texts and paratexts, catalogues, museum exhibits, character information sheets in role-playing games, the boxes of toys or action figures. Adding such entries to a franchise archive produces *catenulate* patterns of character development and extension; they build up a picture of a character by aggregating intradiegetic facts, chaining together biographical, psychological and physiological details. For audiences engaging with character through this material, a sense of character development is bound up in acquiring *knowledge* of increasing depth and breadth about the character.

Just as brand management, meanwhile, and the iteration of "key iconographic motifs" (Ndalianis, 2005a: 51), are additional cohering principles of franchise archives, so too are they additional logics of franchise extension. The next and final section of this framework looks to theorise and conceptualise more fully how these logics organise and pattern the extension and development of franchise characters.

Repetition and Variation

Ndalianis observes something of the palimpsest in many long-form television series, that is, a pattern whereby each new instalment "lays itself over prior episodes in an attempt to perfect on its predecessors" (2005b: 95). The model of character development implicit in this conceptualisation of narrative form, that is, of *layering* representations of a character into an ever-thickening textured fabric of textual gestures, newer incarnations replacing, obscuring, combining with or juxtaposing earlier ones, likewise articulates something fundamental about the fictional operations of transmedia franchising, defined as they are

by repeated acts of writing anew, again, over, around and beyond fictional objects (I will return again to this metaphor, in fact, in Chapter Four's discussion of relations between the different media incarnations of franchise characters). So too is the impulse it defines, that is, the impulse to perfect a winning formula through iteration, variation and repetition, basic to franchise practice. The pleasure that franchise entertainment offers is in no small part a balance of familiarity and novelty; insofar as transmedia franchising is an art of refining and managing brand identity and iconography, meanwhile, a primary thrust of franchise extension is the desire to stabilise through repetition the brand and license.

Though the adjective "formulaic", furthermore, tends to appear a value judgement, it expresses something significant about the operations of transmedia franchise fictions. Lance Parkin, writing on *Doctor Who*, suggests that

> Telling the latest in the line of continuing stories of a character like, for example, Sherlock Holmes, Superman, James Bond, or Doctor Who [sic] requires a writer to take into account a set of rules...the story has to meet conditions that "make it" a *Doctor Who* story. (Parkin, 2009: 13)

In this, his argument draws on Will Brooker's comments about what defines Batman as character and multitext, which propose that

> a Batman story, regardless of medium or time, has a core set of concepts. Not all of them are used, not all of the core concepts were there at the beginning of the series, and some stories actively subvert expectations, but readers and viewers understand them as "rules", and are critical, or at least initially suspicious, when these rules are broken. (Parkin, 2009: 18)

For Parkin, it is constitutive of the distinctive "art" (13) of long-form, serial, transmedia storytelling that at the levels of production, representation, presentation and reception it is organised by and around "conditions" or "core concepts", elements ranging from plot devices or narrative patterns, to stylistic tics, to a distinctive tone or moral compass, the appearance of which legitimises and authenticates a new franchise instalment for consumers as much as any other markers of license or authority. Certainly, this may be understood as bound up in many key protocols of the practice. The gradual emergence and stabilising of a set of "rules" that give identity to a franchise may be read as speaking to anxieties on the part of both fans and creators already touched upon, that is, about determining origins within and the canon of a vast transmedia multitext, the boundaries of the fiction, and what incarnations of a character or textual proliferations are authorised

and have authority; such "rules" may also be read as tools used in and produced through the negotiations of these concepts that structure so much textual marketing and presentation, and so much fan activity and discourse. This conceptualisation of franchise practice is, of course, sympathetic to and contiguous with an understanding of franchise entertainment as organised by a logic of branding and licensing; moreover, it is echoed in some common practices of transmedia creation, with Virgin Publishing, for example, producing "author guidelines" for potential contributors to the *Doctor Who* multitext, including such comments as "there's a lot of humor in *Doctor Who*", and "perhaps the best resolutions could be described as bittersweet." (quoted in Cornell and Orman, 2009: 39)

The focus of Parkin's discussion of the "rules" of *Doctor Who* is primarily on how difficult they are to pin down. He illustrates a confusion and even, perhaps, a surfeit of authority in a fiction like *Doctor Who*, noting first its collaborative creation, and second that its almost diasporic production methods ensure that there are a range of organisations that may reasonably be able to claim "ownership" of its fictional objects, including the BBC and Virgin Publishing (more on problems of authorship in Chapter Three); he entertains the possibility that the authority to define *Doctor Who* may lie with its audience, but faces the problem in doing so of how diverse, complex, contradictory and unpredictable consumer and fan opinions on what "makes" a *Doctor Who* story can be. What Parkin sees as a critical problem, however, I would suggest may be identified as a driving principle of franchise extension. That is, acts of franchise extension may be understood as implicated in overarching processes of reasserting, negotiating and defining the "rules" or "core concepts" of the franchise.[17]

The extension and development of a transmedia character may thus be modelled as palimpsestuous and iterative, but may also be spatialised as movement around or within a set of parameters, as progression fuelled, legitimised, and circumscribed by the persistence or reiteration of certain concepts. Taken to an extreme, the structuring of

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[17] It should be noted, however, that a significant proportion of this negotiation and definition is extra-textual or paratextual; the "core concepts" of a character emerge as much from the character being quoted, referenced, parodied, reviewed and critically debated as from primary text representations. This thesis has already introduced, and will expand later (see Chapter Five), the argument that character study in transmedia necessarily extends beyond the text, that when it comes to franchise entertainment, reception studies and paratextual studies are part of, not merely contiguous with or tangential to, fictional analysis; understanding the role of paratextual material in franchises' processes of fictional meaning is particularly important for understanding transmedia franchising as organised by "core concepts", and vice versa.

franchise extension and seriality around "core concepts", conditions and formulae can produce narrative movements and character development that seem to be organised around a "reset button". *The Simpsons* demonstrates this almost paradigmatically. In every episode, its characters work through narratives that always somehow leave them in the same place in which they began; the potential lasting impact on character development of any changes, catastrophes, or epiphanies they undergo over the course of an episode is effectively neutralised or nullified by its close, and this cycle is repeated *ad nauseam*. Martyn Pedler, meanwhile, laments the fate of the superhero trapped in a run of monthly serials: Batman and Superman find themselves fighting the same antagonists, the same battles, over and over again; the Joker keeps escaping; "no matter what it's put through – transportation, teleportation, dismemberment and death – the superbody survives" (Pedler, 2007: 3); both the status quo and states of crisis rhythmically recur. Character in such serials may thus be figured in terms of some kind of default state, from which they periodically develop through narrative movement, yet to which they always nevertheless return, such that this narrative movement might as well never have happened.

A variety of approaches to analysing this form of extension of characters suggest themselves. The concept of a default state, that is at once both stable and generative, bears examination and interrogation for what kind of understanding of character as a fictional object it produces and requires, how it frames personality traits, for example, as narrative mechanisms, how it defines motivation, intention and the roots of behaviour, how it can fix the age of a character as a necessary condition of a fictional reality. Both the limits and the freedoms of variation in this form of narrative may be productively explored, and the conditions necessary for the suspension of disbelief and acceptance of the often surreal perpetuity presented; how far, for example, is this cyclical storytelling contingent upon genre, upon the establishing of a certain type of fictional reality, upon the protocols of its medium and the expectations of its audience? There are often, moreover, overarching patterns of change that may sustain analysis, both in themselves and in their frequently tense and peculiar relation to those fictional elements that remain stable. *The Simpsons* again demonstrates, for example, that even in a series that self-consciously and extravagantly makes use of a reset button, not all character development gets reset at the end of an episode; as Ndalianis notes, though "baby Maggie has not aged a day in the show's fourteen-year lifespan" (Ndalianis, 2005b: 93), the death of Ned

Flanders's wife resonates serially through his character development, with his search for a new partner spanning multiple episodes, and the romance between Principal Skinner and Edna Krabappel similarly shows serial progression. Reading character in this or a similarly structured text could thus involve examining how and why some characters and some events cut across an otherwise episodic narrative, and how this affects the way they are presented and understood relative to those characters stuck in stasis. It may also be productive, meanwhile, to explore whether resetting a character's development at the end of an instalment really can ever wipe the slate clean, or whether cycles of variation and repetition ultimately have a cumulative effect on both a consumer's understanding of a character and future representations of it. Finally, reflexivity and self-awareness become important considerations, often emerging in this kind of narrative as a strategy for renewing and refiguring the appeal and creativity of what can, over time, come to seem a stale and forced storytelling method. This approach to character analysis runs through Pedler's paper; he explores, for example, how a degree of self-consciousness about the iterative structure of superhero narratives manifests as traces of trauma and cynicism in the presentation of their protagonists, noting Batman's weary comment on the Joker, "That's the punchline – I never stop him" (quoted in Pedler, 2007: 5), and Superman facing the fact that the "tide of darkness and chaos" he just stopped "always returns, always worse" (quoted in Pedler, 2007: 2). *The Simpsons*, meanwhile, demonstrates time and again how this kind of fourth-wall breaking can conversely be a source of comedy.

Implicit in the above discussion is the idea that the franchise character has elastic limits, within which all its narrative and transmedia movements take place. But just as a rubber band, when stretched too far or too often, may lose its elasticity and permanently distend, so too, I would argue, can repeated extension of a transmedia narrative in the above fashion ultimately warp the "core concepts" or "default state" of a character. The process of stabilising and concretising the essential qualities of a franchise character through iteration or reassertion can instead produce exaggerations or distortions of key aspects of its design, even, indeed, to the point of pushing character towards caricature. The development of Cloud Strife across the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* provides a useful illustration of this. Cloud in the first instalment of the franchise, PlayStation game *Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 1997), was presented as a prickly, standoffish young man, aloof and faintly hostile in his interactions with other characters, and struggling throughout the game to understand the truth about his identity and his past. Subsequent

instalments, notably PlayStation Portable game *Crisis Core* (Square Enix, 2007) and CGI-animated film *Advent Children* (Nomura, 2005), chose to isolate, highlight, and reiterate the grief and trauma caused by this struggle, de-emphasising and softening the character's sharper edges; by his most recent appearances in PlayStation Portable game *Dissidia* and the overlapping *Kingdom Hearts* franchise, Cloud's standoffishness has transmuted into introspection and reserve, his struggle into angst. Yet this change does not correspond with fictional and narrative logic in such a way as to read as a representation of psychological growth and change over time; *Crisis Core*'s narrative spans a period not only before the events of *Final Fantasy VII*, but also before the events ultimately identified as the root of Cloud's identity crisis in that game, while *Dissidia* and the *Kingdom Hearts* games are narratively disconnected from the rest of the *Compilation*, Cloud's appearance in them an exercise in licence, rather than narrative, extension.

A further possible model of the extension and serialisation of the franchise character may thus be proposed, as mapping not development, but a *shift* in the "rules" that define its narrative and brand identity, a mutation of traits into stereotype and almost self-parody produced through their progressive crystallisation and distillation. Such shifts may be usefully unpacked and analysed simply as a function of time, of over-using and over-polishing a formula, or related to the process of translating a character between media, or effected by and bound up in character merchandising, that is, through association of the character with particular products, its transformation into an explicitly commercial object, and the different forms, functions and consumers it has as a result. Perhaps more important, however, is to examine how shifts in a character's conceptual or brand identity are in dialogue with market pressures and audience desires, whether expressed, imagined or constructed. What turns a process of defining a fictional property into a caricaturing of a licensed character may be too great a focus by franchise creators on refining, exploiting and repeating a winning formula; mutations in a character's "core concepts" may be read as a consequence of producers too adeptly, readily and enthusiastically responding to market research and similar expressions of the crux of a character's appeal for consumers, and perhaps erroneously assuming that fans of a franchise or character always want more of what they see as a good thing (see Chapter Six for further discussion of feedback loops between franchise consumers and franchise creators as distorting and disrupted).

Kaleidoscopic Storytelling

What Ndalianis's work with the concept of the palimpsest never quite directly confronts, however, is the fact that in long-term, brand-oriented, franchised serial fictions, texts and licences are occasionally "rebooted" and overwritten in a more wholesale, dedicated way. As may be seen in some of the twenty-first-century transmedia reworkings of superhero franchises, particularly the recent *Batman* films and transmedia products, studios may choose to breathe life back into a stale, long-running licence by returning to square one of its narrative, and superimposing a new, updated in some way unfolding of the franchise brand, mythos and diegesis over the previously evolved canon. This raises an important critical issue. The preceding discussion has implicitly assumed that narrative movement in franchise entertainment, and coterminously character development, is, if not inexorably forwards, at least to some degree continuous. In some cases, however, or at some points, the serialisation of a franchise character may instead reach a point of rupture, divergence or restarting, a shift, perhaps, into an alternate narrative reality, or into a text that adapts, rather than extends, previous instalments. The character thus becomes not developed, but rather kaleidoscopically refracted, serialised into multiple versions rather than one persistent or evolving figure. This poses problems for critical study – of how the different versions of a character relate to each other; of the *kind* of textual multiplicity each one represents; of the forces and logics that cohere them and make them intelligible as in some sense all the same character – that require significant further discussion. The following chapter, therefore, looks to explore and theorise multiplicity in more breadth and depth as a defining feature not only of the transmedia character, but of franchise entertainment more broadly, to complement and counterpoint this chapter's focus on seriality and continuity.

Chapter Three

An Art of Multiplicity

Much transmedia fictional practice involves the orchestration of a variety of forms of inter- or transtextuality in the development and representation of a fictional brand and world, not only sequels, prequels, and spin-offs, but also adaptations, remakes, translations, reissues, and repackagings. Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, for example, comprises (to date) a series of four feature films, two series of children's books set before the events in the films, and a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game set in between the first and second feature film, but also videogame adaptations of each of the four films. Even the *Star Wars* and *Matrix* franchises, frequently held up as paradigmatic examples of transmedia practice where each new instalment "makes its own unique contribution" to an overarching narrative (Jenkins, 2007), include adaptations in their archives; the film *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (Lucas, 2002) has been novelised (Salvatore, 2003), for example, and the videogame *The Matrix: Path of Neo* (Shiny Entertainment, 2005) adapts scenes from the first *Matrix* film into playable levels. As Jenkins puts it, such transmedia fictions run on logics of *multiplicity* as well as logics of continuity, generating "alternative retellings", "alternative versions of[...]characters", or "parallel universe versions of[...]stories" as well as narrative extensions, requiring consumers "to sort out not only how the pieces [of the transmedia work] fit together but also which version of the story any given work fits within." (Jenkins, 2009b) They may even be treated as comprised of multiple "canons", fans of the *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings* franchises, for example, readily speaking of "book-verse" and "movie-verse", understanding and navigating the series of books and the series of film adaptations in each franchise as distinct (though obviously and necessarily related) narrative realities and fictional systems.

  This is the crux of this thesis' foundational conceptualisation of transmedia franchising as parent practice to transmedia storytelling: that transmedia storytelling is one specific logic of inter-textuality and cross-platform movement, namely narrative or diegetic extension, where transmedia franchising may involve many. Here, however, I

wish to go further and theorise transmedia franchising as an *art* of multiplicity. That is, I wish to bring out that multiplicity is not only an important concept for understanding the make-up and configuration of the textual archives the practice produces, it is also a key principle of the fictional operations and imaginations at play in them.

Multiplicity as a logic of transmedia extension is rarely thus framed. The comments of Jeff Gomez, CEO of Starlight Runner (a production company specialising in cross-platform entertainment), are typical of much critical and industrial discourse that denies the creativity and even fictionality of adaptation- or remediation-based franchising; narrative extension is "artful", franchising through adaptation is "mercantile" (quoted in Phillips, 2010: 10). Insofar as franchising brings together and announces adaptations, remakes, or reissues as new takes on or representations of a character or narrative world, however, it should be recognised as a practice of creating meaning, of building and developing fictional objects, through setting in play dialogues between rewrites, reimaginings, and alternate versions, of thinking about, presenting and revealing fictional creations through reworkings, revisits, and what-if?s. Franchise consumers understand their plots and characters through, and take pleasure in, returning to and gaining a new perspective on stretches of narrative, mastering and shifting between multiple strands of continuity. The way in which transmedia franchising is organised around content, brand logic, and "core concepts", as the previous chapters have discussed, makes multiplicity intelligible as a co-ordinated process or strategy of fictional representation; the extent to which convergence culture more broadly is breeding adaptations and remakes normalises it as a modality of engagement with media texts and properties. Finding meaning in and creating meaning from multiplicity is, moreover, in the DNA of transmedia franchising. As Ford and Jenkins note, for example, insofar as comic books, particularly those in the superhero genre, are important "precursors for" (2009: 304) and ancestors of transmedia franchising, the practice has its roots in an art form that frequently exploits the creative possibilities of developing "multiple versions of the same characters" (307). Across comic book series' complex tangle of continuities, "multiple versions of a superhero cumulatively work to create the version that eventually becomes the legend." (Ndalianis, 2009: 281) This thesis has already noted, meanwhile, that contemporary Anglo-American transmedia practices can be productively understood as developing in relation to Japanese "media mix" culture, in which multiplicity is likewise deployed and comprehended as a creative strategy for presenting and developing

a fictional property. As Mark Steinberg's (2009) analysis of the popular character Tetsuwan Atomu (or Astro Boy, as his name was translated for Anglo-American audiences) demonstrates, fans of a character in this media landscape readily and adeptly navigate multiple media representations of it and multiple retellings of its narrative adventures, understanding them simply as different, differently valuable and differently useful ways of consuming and experiencing a beloved fictional object.

This is not to say that all "alternate versions" of a character or plot generated through the franchising process are created and treated as equal. Negotiations of hierarchy, authenticity, canonicity and fidelity often play out in the presentation and reception of franchised adaptations, remakes, and alternate continuities, interacting with how they work together in producing fictional meanings. As Derek Johnson notes, meanwhile, there are usually "power differentials" between the various "nodes" of a franchise production network, such that franchise creativity involves similar negotiations; "what results", Johnson suggests, "is a tension between what might be termed difference and deference, where those creators with more social and institutional capital in the franchise have the ability to diverge from previous uses [of its content], and those [with] less power use the franchise in more conservative ways so as not to challenge the creative acts above them in the creative hierarchy." (2011: 16) Moreover, not all discontinuities in a franchise's archive are the product of an aesthetic of multiplicity. Franchises in which every use of the transmedia licence is carefully co-ordinated and integrated with a centralised creative brief tend to be the exception rather than the rule; more commonly, production is diasporic, the transmedia licence farmed out to different production teams for each medium or textual part, and collaboration or consultation between them can be minimal. Inevitably, this produces elements of worldbuilding, narrative, or characterisation that unintentionally contradict other parts of the work. In acknowledging that multiplicity can be read as a fictional operation and even aesthetic strategy in transmedia franchises, critical theory and practice should not lose sight of the fact that some discontinuities and divergences in franchise narratives, worldbuilding, or characterisation are best understood as fault or error, and that subsequent franchise instalments may need to be understood and analysed as attempting to overwrite, brush aside or rationalise them.

Analysing the transmedia franchise character, then, in fact means analysing an array of announced variations on a theme, a set of *versions* presented and set in dialogue as multiple refractions of or perspectives on a single creation by some persisting markers of brand identity or "core concepts": name, appearance, authorisation or ownership. It means reading how the character is rewritten and reimagined over the course of its transmedia life, and how a picture of it emerges *through* this multiplicity, from the ways in which its various versions speak to and engage each other. This chapter sets out a framework for so doing. In it, I look to identify some common forms of franchise extension through multiplicity rather than continuity, conceptualising and theorising each in terms of the relation in which the textual version thereby produced stands to other franchise instalments. I also consider how each type of multiplicity may be understood as a strategy or tool in an overarching fictional method or project, discussing each in terms of the work it can do relative to broader protocols of transmedia franchising.

From Hyperdiegesis to Multiverse

I begin by returning to comic book serials as analogue and influence. DC Comics in the latter half of the twentieth century has attempted to manage, organise and rationalise many of the splinters, resets and disruptions of continuity in its various series using the concept of the *multiverse*. (Jenkins, 2009d; Ndalianis, 2009) The idea of the multiverse is a framework that makes sense of multiple and contradictory narrative continuities in terms of parallel universes, alternate dimensions, diverging and converging time streams. It figures multiplicity in comic book serials in diegetic terms, distinguishing strands of continuity and versions of characters by the conditions, rules and facts of the fictional reality in each case, what did and did not happen, what is and is not "true" in the narrative world presented and implied by each branch or instalment.

Here, I wish to appropriate the concept of multiversality from discourse on comics as a critical figure for a particular type of multiplicity in franchise extension more generally, that is, the production of multiple versions of a franchise character through a mechanism of positing and exploring alternate narrative realities. This may be framed as an excursion down a road not taken at a narrative fork or crux in another franchise instalment, or a game of cause and effect, of unravelling the implications of rewriting a diegetic fact or two, as an exercise, in other words, in "what if?" The *Star Wars Infinities* line of comics (2002-4), for example, plays out the consequences of Luke Skywalker

failing to destroy the Death Star. It may involve altering fictional logics other than narrative and causality that shape and constrain characters and the narrative realities in which they live, such as genre; DC Comics's *Elseworlds* multiverse, for example, offers titles that, for example, "examine what a German expressionist superhero story might have looked like" (Ford and Jenkins, 2009: 308). As mentioned briefly in Chapter One, meanwhile, where a parent corporation holds the rights to multiple franchise licences, characters may be transplanted into another franchise universe entirely, or into one of the peculiar realities described in Chapter One, brand-defined fictional spaces in which characters of common corporate parenthood co-exist and mingle. Often, these appearances are simply side-steps in a character's narrative trajectory out of its usual time and space, rationalised by the notion of all a studio's franchises ultimately taking place in one fictional reality, but not always. A recurring character, for example, with the name, physical appearance, and basic personality traits of Cloud Strife from Square Enix's *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* franchise turns up in Square Enix's *Kingdom Hearts* franchise, yet the *fabula* of his fictional life is entirely distinct, both his narrative arc and the diegesis he inhabits entirely unconnected to those of Cloud Strife in the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* titles.

Given that genres of speculative fiction dominate transmedia franchising, multiversal storytelling in franchises may have an intradiegetic frame of time travel or Hypertime (a science fictional concept "akin to the many-worlds interpretation of quantum theory" (Ndalianis, 2009: 281), but which admits the possibility of rupture, slippage, and intersection between timelines and dimensions), or may be presented as detours into such speculative fictional spaces as dream worlds, future visions, or immaterial realities; alternatively, it may be framed and made intelligible by nothing more than transmedia franchising's logic and aesthetic of multiplicity. In either case, franchise properties are treated and exploited as "reservoirs of potentialities" (Ryan, 1999: 117), of possible worlds.

For franchise producers, multiversal storytelling is a useful method of exploring and presenting characters. It is a way, for example, of dealing with the problem of managing narrative climaxes and pacing in vast ongoing narratives, the need to avoid narrative stagnation while at the same time avoiding events that would too greatly disrupt flow. Extending a franchise multiversally allows creators both to reverse otherwise

narrative-killing events, and also to indulge in them. As Roz Kaveney notes, for example, multiversality in the *X-Men* franchise allows contributor Grant Morrison to push the work's theme of extinction to the point of "total nightmare", and set out a vision of apocalypse centuries into the future of his continuity that, were it not for the leeway of the multiverse, would provide something of a block for further narrative development (2008: 174). Existing work on comic book multiverses also suggests, meanwhile, that a major function of alternate universes is to provide space for the exploration of directions for a character "not suitable" for other instalments, actions or futures for them "unthinkable [in] the main continuity" (Ford and Jenkins, 2009: 308). Their frame of digression, speculation and experiment make alternate universe texts to a degree "safe spaces" for the loosening of continuity control and brand control. Transmedia franchises may thus make use of them to attract a larger and more varied consumer base through escaping the confines of a character's official branded form, and taking it in different tonal, thematic, or generic directions, without thereby destabilising or diluting to too great an extent their brand identity and core concepts. *Star Wars Infinities: A New Hope* (Warner, 2002), for example, explores the dark side of Princess Leia; a character defined in the rest of the franchise and in cultural memory by heroism, strong will, and unwavering principle, in *Star Wars Infinites: A New Hope* Leia is swayed by Vader and Palpatine to renounce her rebellion against the Empire, and to feed her Force with anger and ambition. Crossing an already extremely popular franchise character over into another franchise universe, meanwhile, as in the case of Cloud Strife's appearance in the *Kingdom Hearts* games, may provide a valuable "hook" to draw consumers into a new sub-franchise or related brand. Recognising this latter as a motivation behind multiversal storytelling can provide a useful framework for analysing the ways in which the "hook" character is constructed in its multiverse incarnations. It highlights that the character in its new reality may be presented with the features that initially made it so appealing emphasised, for example, or as a reflection more of fan discourses about the character than its creator's initial vision,[18] and that its narrative appearances are likely to be unexpected cameos, and perhaps structured as rewards for close engagement with or investment in the new sub-franchise text. In the first game in the *Kingdom Hearts*

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[18] With this in mind, then, having said that the multiversal extension of a character enables experimentation without a concurrent weakening of brand identity, I would qualify that this particular type of multiversality may sometimes be implicated in the *shifts* in core concepts discussed in the previous chapter. The multiversal extension of Cloud Strife into the *Kingdom Hearts* franchise, for example, may be productively understood by these terms as a contributing factor in the gradual distortion of his core concepts noted in Chapter Two.

franchise (Square Enix, 2002), for example, popular *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* villain Sephiroth is a secret optional boss, a fight with him hidden behind the menu option "?????" and only available after the completion of five other battle tournaments.

This gives some sense of the value and practical function of this type of multiplicity for franchise producers, but the question of how a picture of a character emerges from multiversal storytelling remains. Much existing critical discourse on meaning and effect in "forking path" fiction is derived from postmodern experiments in labyrinthine narrative and non-linear, non-teleological fictional temporalities; as such, it tends to frame the multiversal representation of character in terms of the articulation of disjointed and abnormal subjectivity, and the contingency and potentiality both of experience and of fictional representations, and of alternative temporalities and spatialities (see, for example, Buckland ed. 2009 generally, and in particular Elsaesser and Wedel). While there may be formal and structural similarities between such texts and the multiversality of the franchise character, however, it is not a product of the same aesthetic and cultural conditions and motivations, and therefore cannot be made similarly intelligible. Rather than coming from a climate in which the deconstruction of naturalised understandings of the nature of time, subjectivity and reality was an explicit thematic concern that stylistic experiment spoke to and negotiated, it comes from a place of re-presenting intellectual property, experimenting with large-scale fictional worldbuilding, and exploring the reach of a fictional creation. In the immediate contexts of its production and reception, therefore, the transmedia character's multiplication across fictional universes is rarely if ever abstracted or thematised, and the significance of stylistic or diegetic multiplicity is read in terms of the specifics of the fictional conditions altered, rather than the act or fact of the multiplicity itself.

A more productive point of comparison, I would argue, is as such the science fiction sub-genre of the counterfactual or alternate history, in which the core sf method of the thought experiment is directed back at history rather than forward at the future. Counterfactuals such as Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), which begins from the premise of an Axis Powers victory in World War II, ask readers to reflect on and gain a deeper understanding of a present actuality through the lens of what might instead have happened, what did not happen, and why. Elena Gomel invokes the term multiverse in a discussion of counterfactual fiction (2009: 348); I propose here the

converse: that if the concept of the counterfactual is slightly expanded to accommodate alterations in style, genre, and similar fictional conditions as well as diegetic fact, franchise multiversality may be usefully understood as a form of counterfactual thinking and writing, and as similar in how it produces fictional meaning to this sub-genre of sf. Some further comment on the fictional operations of counterfactuals and alternate histories is thus here necessary. Fundamentally, counterfactual thinking is a way of understanding and illuminating causality, chains of actions and reactions, implications and consequences; the multiversal representation of a character may as such be understood as working to highlight and explicate cause and effect, the factors influencing decisions and the ramifications of them, the complex ecology of behaviour, motivation and response. Although, meanwhile, it may be expected that counterfactual thinking, in bringing to light some of the "absolute contingency of history" (Gomel, 2009: 348), "might make the world seem capricious and random" (Galinsky et al., 2005: 112), psychologists have found that it instead tends to lead people to perceive greater meaning in actual events, to induce a sense that things must have happened as they did for a reason (Galinsky et al, 2005). Multiversality may therefore likewise be read as conferring significance, thematic, moral, cosmic or theological, on those actions and decisions of characters that it positions as cruces. Furthermore, I would suggest that counterfactual engagement with characters in many respects actually works to clarify and concretise consumers' understanding of what is fundamental, essential, definitive about them. To a great extent, the thought experiment "how would Character X behave/what would Character X be like given completely different narrative circumstance Y?" requires a reasonably robust set of expectations about the character, a stable picture of key aspects of its personality and identity, to be intelligible; it relies upon and produces the assumption that there are some features of the character that define it and its behaviour. A strong effect of a character's "core concepts", meanwhile, may be produced from retaining some aspects of a character across multiverse incarnations, keeping certain character notes stable through a litany of other changes, whether as a function of the need to maintain a degree of brand continuity between versions of a character, or more organically in accordance with logics of characterisation and character development. In *Star Wars Infinites: A New Hope*, for example, Han Solo's wisecracking stands out all the more as a defining feature of his character because it persists while the rest of the *Star Wars* narrative reality is reorganised around him.

I wish to conclude this section by engaging David Bordwell's comments on what he calls "multiple-draft narratives" in film as illuminating further precisely how franchise multiversality understands and presents causality. As part of his extensive work on narrative in film, Bordwell has questioned film theory's readiness to see Borges's "Garden of Forking Paths" in films with multiple timelines or realities. Instead, he proposes that the multiversality of "multiple-draft" narratives is in fact highly circumscribed, a far cry from the dizzying infinity of Borges's notional labyrinthine novel. He notes that individual narrative forks tend to be linear and structured according to "traditional cohesion devices", and that shifts into alternate realities are usually heavily signposted and clearly contained; furthermore, he observes that the logics of causality underpinning the design of a forking narrative are for the most part extremely conservative, assuming that individual causal cruces can be straightforwardly isolated and their possible outcomes clearly identified, and keeping many diegetic facts stable across realities (Bordwell, 2002). Although developed in response to a particular trend in modern film production and theory, this focus on how multiversal texts are circumscribed proves a productive perspective to take on franchise examples. The protocols of transmedia production operate as much to limit multiversal storytelling as the intuitive causalities of folk psychology that Bordwell identifies as underpinning the genre he examines, particularly the requirement noted above that clear brand and franchise identity be maintained through all alternate narrative and diegetic realities, and more generally, the importance Chapters One and Two have indicated within transmedia franchising of iconic moments, axioms of characterisation, and "core concepts". The foundations of the counterfactual narrative architecture of the aforementioned *Star Wars Infinities: A New Hope* are to a great extent "how else might the key moments of the film trilogy occur given a different starting principle?", rather than "what new key moments may occur had a different narrative path been taken?"; halfway through the comic , for example, there is still a dramatic revelation that Darth Vader is Luke Skywalker's father, and Leia Luke's sister, but it comes from Yoda, not Vader himself (2002: 60).

Licensed Parody

The *Star Wars* franchise makes further room for multiplicity in a sub-brand, the *Lego Star Wars* videogames (Traveller's Tales, 2005; 2006; 2007; 2011). Stamped with the *Star Wars* brand and bearing the mark of LucasArts's authorisation, the games retell and

remediate the narratives of the films in a visual semiotic based on the range of toys and merchandise that Lego produces for the franchise. They are in a basic sense adaptations, yet this classification does not quite capture all the dimensions of the type of multiplicity these texts demonstrate. Their visualisations of character are closer to caricature than remediation, highlighting and exaggerating key features; they are also highly iconic, renderings in a shorthand of such features as would immediately index the character even for consumers only tenuously familiar with the franchise: Leia's whorls of hair; Obi-Wan's brown cowl. Much of the formal structure of the games, meanwhile, imitates rather than translates the films; they use the same music, the same logo and typography, and they begin with the words "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away" and scrolling prologue text. At the same time, however, there is a sense of deliberate comic dissonance and bathos in their use of these iconic elements, that comes not least purely from their juxtaposition with the Lego brand and its bright cartoonish blocks. Where stretches of narrative are translated, meanwhile, they are re-rendered as highly condensed digests often without dialogue, mute pantomimes that have more than a hint of farce about them.

The relation in which the *Lego Star Wars* games stand to the main continuity of the franchise would seem, therefore, to be best described as parody. Parody, suggests Linda Hutcheon, "is an ironic subset of adaptation, whether a change in medium is involved or not." (2006: 170) Like adaptation, parody is a fundamentally intertextual mode, that makes another text present within itself (Rose, 1993: 39); in addition, however, it cites and embeds a general cultural understanding of its target text, a digest of its most characteristic, iconic, and recognisable elements, that defines, clarifies, and amplifies its act of commentary. Its treatment of its target text is imitative and quotational (Genette, 1997a: 19), reproducing features of style, genre, content and purpose, but in such a way as to bring out what is comic, absurd, ridiculous or problematic about it; it characteristically achieves this through "the structural use of comic incongruity" (Rose, 1993: 37), such as exaggeration and grotesquery, applying the parodied style to unexpected and incompatible subject matter, or changes in tone and attitude.

However, the concept of parody also seems in some respects an awkward fit with this form of transtextuality. The *Lego Star Wars* games are unambiguously authorised, fully licensed parts of the *Star Wars* franchise; they are primary, corporately orchestrated

expressions, not merely hypertexts[19] only drawn into the diffuse outer limits of the franchise archive by critical positioning. Most theories of parody assume the parodic text to have a measure of distance from its target, not least because its aims and operations are held to be fundamentally critical. Although it may also be fond of and sympathetic to them to a degree, at its heart, it is argued, the parody mocks, undermines, and challenges tired, reactionary, or otherwise problematic texts, genres and discourses (Rose, 1993: 26). This does not preclude works from being self-parodying, but it implies such texts would tend to be subversive, avant-garde fictions, with an explicit thematic or philosophical interest in undermining the stability of literary discourse and the authorial or narrative voice. The idea that parodic texts might be brought happily within the fold of one of the biggest media corporation's biggest name, biggest money fictional brands is unintelligible from this critical standpoint. Yet George Lucas has smiled on *Lego Star Wars*, and this is not an isolated case; Lego have developed similar sub-brands in a range of other transmedia franchises (*Batman*, *Indiana Jones*, and most recently *Harry Potter*).

Frederic Jameson suggests that parody without critical thrust is not parody at all, but rather pastiche. Jameson defines pastiche as "blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs", likewise "the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask", but a "neutral practice, [...]amputated of the satiric impulse" (1991: 17). Linda Hutcheon, however, argues that this distinction is predicated on a failure to recognise that even the most savagely satirical parody is unavoidably ambivalent and compromised. Necessarily, because parody structures its critiques through imitation and caricature, it both "questions" and "enshrines" (Hutcheon, 1988: 126); it is conservative as it is subversive, "deferential" (35) as it is critical. As Michele Hannoosh observes, furthermore, parody is necessarily reflexive and self-sabotaging; by its nature the act of parodying a text, genre or stylistic trend also works to replicate and perpetuate it, with parody therefore inevitably "implicat[ing] itself in its treatment of the parodied work." (Hannoosh, 1989: 114)

This understanding of parody, I would argue, seems a more useful framework for understanding the work that texts like *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga* (Traveller's Tales, 2007) do as part of a franchise project than Jameson's concept of pastiche. Fundamentally, for example, licensed parodies are attempts to *co-opt* rather than entirely

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[19] Again, I use the term as Genette does; see Chapter One.

neutralise the satiric impulse. They may be understood as acts of managing and monetising uses of intellectual property that franchise creators would otherwise have no control over and make no money from, given that parody counts as fair use by the terms of most copyright law, and in so doing managing and monetising ridicule, mockery and critique. *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga*, for example, is after all undeniably a comic text, that pokes gentle fun at the *Star Wars* films, but as a licensed franchise extension it is an exercise in the franchise laughing *at itself*, and thus pre-empting, defusing and directing the laughter of consumers. As it laughs at itself, meanwhile, it is also engaging in a process of brand promotion, management, and circulation. Jennifer Sclafani's (2009) sociolinguistic study of parody finds that even as it looks to expose and ridicule its targets, it simultaneously works to fix and iconise their shape, cultural position, and significance in consumers' minds; whatever else parody does, it works to increase the cultural circulation of the parodied text, codifying its key features into the cultural consciousness. For a mode of fictional production whose success depends on establishing its characters as household names, its style as iconic, and its narratives as modern folktales, encouraging and authorising parodies begins to seem a productive, rather than contradictory, strategy. I would also argue, furthermore, that Hutcheon's note that there can be something elitist about parody, in that it sets up a divide between those with sufficient mastery over the codes at play to comprehend its intertextuality and those without (Hutcheon, 1988: 34), is suggestive for thinking about the position and function of texts like *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga* in a franchise archive. *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga* trades on and rewards intimate familiarity with the *Star Wars* films; it can thus work to confirm and flatter consumers as fans, to position them as belonging to a privileged group sufficiently literate in *Star Wars* lore to understand its references and quotations, to allow them to exercise and take pleasure from their mastery over the *Star Wars* archive and at the same time to motivate them to seek out or revisit (or to put it another way, purchase or re-consume) franchise products that can fill any gaps in this knowledge.

The multiplicity of character representations produced by texts such as the *Lego Star Wars* games can therefore be conceptualised as a form of parody, the force of its ridicule and comic incongruity circumscribed and partially neutralised through authorisation, and directed towards establishing knowledge of the parent brand as part of consumers' literacy in media products and cultural references. Parody's structural core of

comedy derived through identification and reappraisal of the target text becomes recuperated as the in-joke, consumers laughing more at the act of recognition and understanding than at the element of ridicule, occupying thus a complicit, self-conscious subject position. This conceptualisation, I would argue, facilitates analysis of the functions and operations of such texts' representations of character, as may be illustrated by looking afresh at the example of the *Lego Star Wars* games through this lens. It offers a suggestive perspective, for example, on why transmedia parodies are so often intertwined with the process of merchandising.[20] Both the principles of character design that go into the production of an action figure, for example, and the kinds of imaginative play and storytelling that consumers enact with it, resonate strongly with the parodic mode: iconic, quotational, imitative, and always at once appropriating and extending the fictional brand, and cleaving to it (see Chapter Six for further discussion of this). It highlights, meanwhile, the fact that parodic versions of a transmedia character are constantly acknowledging, negotiating, and producing what is most popular, memorable, and potentially memetic about them; this provides a useful inroad for analysing such creative decisions in the *Lego Star Wars* games as the use of the Imperial March, cult villain Darth Vader's immediately recognisable and endlessly hummable theme music, as the opening music of the game, instead of John Williams' main *Star Wars* theme.

Multiple Authorship

Authorship is a problematic concept relative to transmedia franchising. The notion of authorship has emerged coterminously with the privileging of originality and creation in fiction, yet in this respect franchise storytelling harks back to earlier modes of fictional production rooted in shared pools of myths, narratives and archetypes; because of the nature of the franchise mode, the vast majority of authors in transmedia write (or draw, or model) characters that someone else has invented. Authorship is thus dislocated from creation, where it would usually imply it. It is debatable, meanwhile, whether any given instalment of a transmedia work can meaningfully be said to have a clearly defined author. Many of the media used are fundamentally collaborative art forms, requiring the input of multiple authoring figures as part of a creative team, while the logic of franchising and cross-platform development multiplies the number of these creative

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[20] In addition to Lego's videogames accompanying toy ranges, for example, many of the authorised shorts produced each year as part of the Official *Star Wars* Fan Movie Challenge are parodies that make use of action figures, replica lightsabers, and mass-produced costumes.

teams involved in the ultimate production of the transmedia work. Transmedia franchising is, furthermore, thoroughly bound up in the participatory culture that characterises contemporary media landscapes (as will be discussed further in Chapter Six). In this culture, the creative agency of the consumer is privileged to an unusual degree; more and more transmedia works incorporate a level of interactivity, or of user-generated content, that confuses the idea of who it is that ultimately produces the transmedia text. Within the *Matrix* universe, for example, there is *The Matrix Online* (Monolith, 2005-2009), an MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game) that continues the narrative of the film *The Matrix Revolutions*. Within this game, there are certain fixed points of narrative progression, but the player is given the opportunity first to create the outline of her own character from a set of basic elements (whether she is a coder, a hacker, or an operative, for example), then make a series of decisions (such as which organisations this character will align and ally themselves with) that further flesh out that character, and then effectively "script" that character's progression through the narrative (hence the defining term "role-playing" in the name of the medium).

Nevertheless, auteur figures in transmedia franchises do emerge, invoked and constructed by both creators and audiences as part of negotiating the boundaries of the transmedia archive, assigned through cultural conventions and conceptualisations of authorship in different media and genres, and marked paratextually in the presentation of franchise texts. As Chapter One has briefly touched on, for example, George Lucas emerges as author, authority, and authorising figure from debates over canonicity and continuity in the *Star Wars* archive. More importantly for the purposes of this chapter, however, they are also frequently invoked by both critics and creators to define and make sense of different versions of franchise characters. Jenkins, for example, frames the version of Spider-Man in the *Ultimate Spider-Man* series of comics as a function of writer Brian Michael Bendis's "distinctive voice" (Ford and Jenkins, 2009: 310); Frank Miller, meanwhile, figures *The Dark Knight Returns'* (1986) version of Batman as the result of him bringing his authorial "view" and "sensibility" to the character (quoted in Sharrett, 1991: 35).

This framing reflects and responds to the realities of transmedia production. The distribution of a transmedia licence is often organised with the explicit aim of bringing in the "view" and "sensibility" of a range of specific authors; Jenkins observes this at work

in many contemporary comic franchises, with DC and Marvel "carv[ing] out distinctive corners of their superhero universe for specific creators" (Ford and Jenkins, 2009: 309), and the BBC are doing likewise with *Doctor Who*, recruiting Richard Curtis and Neil Gaiman to contribute episode scripts. Here, however, I wish to bring out more clearly that this organisation and presentation of acts of franchise extension in terms of authorship also orders intertextual relations and dialogues between renderings of characters in a particular way.

Foucault's theory of the "author-function" may here be usefully invoked. Foucault's work on authorship (2008) conceptualises the "author" of a text as a constructed term in the discourses of and surrounding the text, a concept that serves a discursive and interpretative purpose in providing consumers with a framework for making the text intelligible. As Matt Hills notes, this author-construct need not be an individual; he suggests that the 2005 revival of *Doctor Who* has been "'authored'[21] by the corporate identity of BBC Wales as much as by Russell T. Davies" (Hills, 2010: 26). The protocols of transmedia franchising, and media convergence culture more broadly, define these "terms" repeatedly and comprehensively; convergence culture's surfeit of information and communication outlets, and the dense mediation of franchise products and creations (touched on already in Chapter One; see Chapter Five for further discussion), produce numerous and pervasive constructions of authorship. Transmedia producers increasingly often have blogs and websites, offering readily available biographies, autobiographies, and more indirect constructions of their personalities and outlooks; online encyclopaedias and databases, such as Wikipedia or the Internet Movie Database, put an organised picture of an author's complete output and the consumer's fingertips. Where an author's name is attached, through industry practice and paratextual manoeuvres, to a particular representation of a franchise character, an "author-function" may be understood as mobilised around it; that is, these constructions are interpolated into the franchise experience, to frame and position the version of the character in the franchise's processes and strategies of fictional representation and meaning.

"Authoring" versions of a franchise character orders dynamics of characterisation through multiplicity in two main ways. Firstly, it distinguishes and defines each version in terms of an authorial intertext, making it intelligible in terms of the "author"'s other

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[21] ["Authored" in quotation marks here expressing the mobilising of the Foucauldian author-function, rather than an actual act of creation, a convention the rest of this discussion also adopts.]

works, and the recurring stylistic quirks, narrative formulae, character archetypes, thematic preoccupations and agendas, whether political or creative, that may be extrapolated from them as characteristic of his, her or its production. As Matt Hills illustrates, for example, where Russell T. Davies is invoked as an author-figure behind representations of character in New *Who*, they are inflected by the repeated construction of Davies as an author with a desire to naturalise and normalise representations of queer sexualities in media fictions (2010: 34-8). These negotiations and dynamics are often not only differential, but comparative, as may be seen again from the example of New *Who*, which is primarily "authored" by both Russell T. Davies and Steven Moffat. Fan and critical responses to the fifth series of New *Who* in the light of Steven Moffat's increased creative input draw on and interact with constructions of his previous input that emphasise how far his scripts are both an antidote to the worst flaws of Davies's, and yet in some ways compare unfavourably. The perceived strengths of science fictional imagination, tone and narrative complexity in Moffat-authored scripts are constantly asserted relative to constructions of Davies's work in terms of bombast and excessive sentiment, yet discourses on Davies's "gay agenda" are repeatedly invoked to present Moffat's work as characteristically under-representing queer sexualities.

Secondly, "authoring" a version of a character can configure its relation to other versions as *interpretative.* To read a text as authored is to read it as intentional, a deliberate expression of a particular world-view and coterminous creative vision relative to its subject matter, and to read its style and formal quirks as individuated and characteristic. However, as stated above, in the case of franchise production, this intentionality is constructed as directed towards an already established fictional idea or object. I would suggest that "authoring" versions of a franchise character thus positions them for analysis as readings or interpretations, filtered through the intention, outlook and aesthetic of the authorial figure, of what Dennis O'Neill calls "the folklore/mythological roots of the character" (quoted in Pearson and Uricchio, 1991b: 18), or in the terms of this thesis, the character's "core concepts" or brand identity. To return to the example of *The Dark Knight Returns*, its Frank Miller-"authored" Batman invites reading as a re-interpretation of Batman's typical superhero behaviour and moral compass as "psychotic sublimative/psychoerotic" (Miller, quoted in Kaveney, 2008: 148), as an exercise in taking the core concepts of Batman and articulating a new perspective on them that brings them out or recasts them as profoundly dysfunctional, rather than heroic. Hills argues that

it is important in discussing the "author" as function and construct not to lose sight of "what authors actually do and say" (2010: 33), and it should be noted here that explicit expressions of and reflections on license extension as interpretation are often circulated and arranged by authors around franchise texts, in DVD commentary tracks, making-of documentaries, or creator interviews and blogs. Chapter Five, however, will engage more thoroughly how such paratextual and metatextual expressions may be theorised and analysed as part of the franchise fictional encounter.

Rebooting

The term "reboot" is gaining currency in the cultural and critical idiom on transmedia franchising, attached to such franchise movements as the films *Batman Begins* (Nolan, 2005), *Casino Royale* (Campbell, 2006) and *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009). It is increasingly recognised as a key marketing buzzword, and "rebooting" discussed both as a trend gathering momentum and a profitable and desirable direction for the extension of existing franchises (see, for example, Gray, 2011; Brew, 2008; Davies et al, 2010; Boxer, 2011). Though it is clearly becoming institutionalised as a form of franchise practice, formal definitions of rebooting are hard to come by; primarily, however, it emerges from this discourse and its acts of classification and categorisation as a return to narrative square one, often in the first instalment for a long time of seemingly "dead and dormant franchises" (Brew, 2008), "reviv[ing] bygone properties[...]in an updated context" (Gray, 2011), sometimes in an attempt to refresh and rethink a still-current franchise that is nevertheless in "ill-health" (Brew, 2008), waning in popularity and profitability.

This defines the motivation of the franchise reboot, and something of its mechanism, but sheds little light on how rebooting a character might negotiate and contribute to the overarching picture of it. Neither has there been significant critical work done towards theorising the inter-textual dynamics of fictional meaning and representation produced in rebooting a franchise. William Proctor's work on formally defining rebooting, however, provides a useful starting point in this regard, that this final section looks to develop further. Proctor defines rebooting relative to remaking, suggesting that where a remake is a reimagining of one film, a reboot is a reimagining of a whole franchise (2011). On one level, this definition simply articulates that the slate reboots are looking to wipe clean is expansive, multi-textual and multi-media; however, I find Proctor's phrasing further suggestive. "The whole franchise" may be further glossed

as its brand identity, its "core concepts", the understanding of a world or character in cultural circulation, its ideal or implied audience, its marketing. It should be understood, I would argue, that narrative continuity is not the only thing reset in a franchise reboot; these other aspects and logics of franchise practice may also be re-engaged and overwritten. *Batman Begins*, for example, reboots plot, but in doing so also stages a tonal shift away from the campy 1990s cinematic instalments, and a re-positioning of Batman as an unstable, ambivalent hero figure. As it returns to the beginning of Bond's career, *Casino Royale* also attempts to reboot some of the political meanings that have been attached to Bond over the duration of the franchise, by sexualising Daniel Craig's Bond, for example, through a female gaze; the film restages *Dr No*'s iconic scene of Ursula Andress emerging from the sea in skimpy swimwear with Craig in Andress' place, coterminously renegotiating the Bond brand's iconography and sexual politics.

Fundamentally, then, rebooting is a process of restaging, rewriting and overwriting origin stories for a character, but on both intra- and extra-diegetic planes. Reboots return to and retell the actions and events by which a character arrives at the main movement of the franchise plot; they establish anew the scenario that defines the character's motivation and propels them through the narrative; they re-trace awakenings of power, the starts of journeys, moments of (self-)discovery, entries into new worlds. Yet they also rebirth characters as brands, imbuing them with new connotations and associations, making them do new work to new (and old) consumers as symbols, metonyms, and horizons of expectation. They regenerate them as popular heroes, relaunching and redefining them as icons for a new cultural moment. They stage for a new generation of consumers the process of "becoming a fan", but also re-stage this process for long-standing fans of the franchise, thus twice re-originating characters as objects of affect and attachment.

Though rebooting positions itself as an act of beginning afresh, however, it is necessarily at the same time an act of mobilising and reorganising a franchise's archive in a particular way. It is impossible for a reboot to divorce itself completely from the rest of a franchise, to erase cultural and individual memories of what has gone before it, and nor do studios ultimately want to; the decision to revisit an established property rather than start a new franchise from scratch in itself indicates a desire to bring into play and trade on existing brand awareness. Rebooting is perhaps more accurately thought of as a kind

of selective intertextuality; reboots retain some franchise elements, whether as little as a character name or as much as a narrative world, and discard and replace others, each decision setting up a dialogue with other instalments. In doing so, it thus works to position other entries in the franchise archive, legitimising some, constructing others as flawed, outdated, irrelevant. The final negotiation of origins rebooting stages, I would argue, is thus a location of the textual "roots" of a character, a construction of some expressions or representations within the franchise archive as most authentic, "truest" to the character, approaching most closely its essence or fundaments. Titling the sequel to *Batman Begins*'s reboot *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008), for example, may be read as thus positioning Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*.

The operations of franchise reboots, and the relations in which they stand to other franchise instalments, need therefore to be understood as inflected by complex negotiations, exploitations and denials of nostalgia, memory, continuity and rupture. Even as they try to set out on a new narrative path, they often have traces of the rhythms and plays of meaning of a prequel, of dots connected, movement towards pre-determined points, dramatic irony: where *Star Trek*, for example, pauses just a moment when the newly introduced character Leonard McCoy laments his ex-wife leaving him with nothing but his bones; where *Batman Begins* closes with a mention of a criminal who leaves Joker cards at the scene of his crimes, a point of mystery for the characters, intrigue for new fans, and promise for old ones. *Star Trek* is a particularly interesting example of a reboot insofar as it dramatises these negotiations. At the heart of its plot is a slippage of space-time that brings an older version of Spock, played, as he was in the 1960s television series that *Star Trek* sets out to reboot, by Leonard Nimoy, into contact with a rebooted Kirk. Reboot and origin collide and interact, in a plot device that indulges long-standing fans in nostalgia and in-joke, while providing an alternative way of making this intelligible and satisfying for a new generation of consumers who may not recognise the citation.

As a final comment on the reboot as form and strategy of characterisation through multiplicity, it should be noted that the processes and dynamics of "authoring" discussed in the previous section resonate with and are often implicated in rebooting. Rebooting a character is in many ways an interpretative process, in the sense that it involves analysing a franchise archive and constructing a favoured reading, and in the sense that any re-

imagining of a character requires to start with a reading of its nature and functions as currently represented. Author names and functions, however, are also frequently attached to franchise reboots, as part of the assertion and construction of differentiation, rupture, and new directions.

An Art of Multimediality

Perhaps the most common and important form of multiplicity in the representation of franchise characters, of course, is the fact that by definition, the transmedia franchise character is articulated in multiple media. This aspect of the transmedia character's multiplicity is so fundamental to its construction, however, and yet so rarely explicitly acknowledged and theorised, that it requires extended discussion, which the following chapter will now undertake.

Chapter Four

Transliteracy and Beyond

Transmedia franchise practice requires and produces transliterate consumers, that is, consumers able "to read, write and interact on a range of platforms" (Fearn, 2008), and to combine these literacies to understand stories and story worlds spread across media. Likewise, necessarily, transmedia character study requires transliterate critics. Transmedia franchise characters are by definition developed and represented in the semiotic systems and expressive structures and conventions of multiple media; to understand fully and analyse comprehensively their construction and operations, critics must be literate in the different sites and strategies of characterisation offered by different codes and media forms, familiar with multiple media disciplines, and able to deploy in synergy the theories and methods each has developed for analysing character in its medium's texts.

This methodological principle, however, positions and engages multimediality as a feature of franchise fiction, rather than a strategy or operation. Reading and operationalising fully the multimediality of the franchise character in fictional and aesthetic terms, I would argue, additionally requires an understanding of the various and complex ways in which the different media incarnations of a character interrelate and interact to produce fictional meaning and effect. For this, transliteracy is necessary but not sufficient as a critical framework. The cross-media extension of a character is not a straightforwardly additive or combinatory practice, and so theories of the relational, inter-textual and inter-medial dynamics it structures are needed beyond and on top of an aggregatory interdisciplinarity.

Existing theoretical work on *multi*media art is somewhat oblique to *trans*media franchise practice. It has been largely formulated in response to texts that comprise "the synchronous occurrence of different media forms within the frame of one integral medium" (Spielmann, 2001: 56), such as a web page or CD-ROM, where transmedia practice involves the asynchronous accumulation of and movement between different discrete media products (which may individually, however, contain the former type of

multimediality). Theories of multimedia art thus often define and explore it in perceptual and sensory terms, framing multimedia texts as effecting a "fluxing across the sensory" (Higgins, 2002), as a conjunction and combination of the aural, the visual and the haptic rather than (for example) film, hypertext and the computer game. Higgins theorises the "overlapping aesthetics" produced through multimedia practice in terms of "their relations to the senses" (63), while McPhee figures the multimedia text as a configuration that engages multiple "perceptual systems" (1997: 72); Melanie Swalwell invokes Wagner's desire "to overwhelm the audience through stimulating all of their senses" (2002: 48) in her explication of multimediality, and clarifies that her theorising of multimedia aesthetics is grounded in the word's roots "*aisthesis,* meaning the sensory experience of perception and *aisthetikos*, that which is perceptive by feeling." (47) Yet transmedia franchise fictions do not only "flux across the sensory", they flux across ways of storytelling, technologies, and contexts of consumption. The impulse and pleasure of transmedia practice is not synaesthesia so much as it is engagement on multiple platforms, using multiple delivery technologies, in multiple social and cultural situations: a multiplicity of experiences, rather than (or, indeed, as well as) a multisensory encounter. Transmedia practice is not primarily aimed towards the creation of "ambience", as suggested of multimedia art by McPhee (1997: 75), but rather towards *surrounding*, *integration* and *saturation*, that is, enabling consumers to engage with franchise product through as many as possible of the multiple media channels, technologies and encounters that fill and structure their everyday lives.

McPhee also theorises multimedia art as operating according to associative or conductive logic (85), structuring lateral, tangential, and metonymic leaps and plays of meaning. Again, I would argue, this framing is rooted in a conceptualisation of the multimedia work as single collage text; however, it is nevertheless in some ways suggestive relative to franchise practice. Franchise logic may to an extent be characterised by principles of array and assemblage, supplementation and digression, rhizome and hypertext. It produces textual archives, relative to which engagement is often best conceptualised as browsing; its brand logic produces chains of signification, meanings linked together by substitutions, elisions, and associations. Structures and concatenations of portals, links, frames and networks, the impulse and ability to "click through" and open up a new window onto the fictional world, can frequently be seen in both the composition and the organisation of transmedia franchises. That said, any

conductive plays of meaning in franchise practice are constrained and directed by the causal logic of narrative, and the cohering principle of diegesis. I would also argue that the concept of conductive logic resonates more with the inter-textuality of franchise fictions generally than the fictional operations of their trans-mediality specifically; while there is an element of collage in the way franchise practice presents characters through multiple media, the relation between the assembled representations seems better thought of as a building up of a picture or an orchestration of aspects of a fictional object (more on this shortly), rather than a chain that with each new link further loses sight of where it started.

In this chapter, then, while remaining sensitive to existing theories of multimedia art and where they may still usefully illuminate transmedia franchising, I look to propose alternative figurings of the types of relation, process and movement that characterise the fictional, aesthetic and inter-textual operations of multimedia practice in the specific context of entertainment franchising. What follows will, I hope, thus explicate further multimediality as an aspect of characterisation in franchise fictions, and how exactly the franchise character emerges from the interplay between its multiple media incarnations. I begin with some further elaboration of the notes in the above paragraph on franchise multimediality as collage, to provide an initial foundational conceptualisation of how the different media representations of the franchise character relate to and produce it as a fictional object.

Windows and Layers

Swalwell suggests that the organisation and operations of some forms of multimedia practice may be usefully thought of in terms of "triangulation" (2002: 49), that is, as working to construct a subject or produce an effect or idea at the centre of an orchestration of semiotic or sensory expressions of it. She describes this kind of multimediality as *exhaustive* (49), as using the different languages and phenomenologies of different media to capture, touch on or gesture at as many aspects of the subject's meaning and nature as possible. Similarly metaphorising transmedia practice in the representation of franchise characters conceptualises it as a process of looking at a non-actual individual through multiple media windows, or conversely, refracting this individual kaleidoscopically through multiple representational lenses. The various media incarnations of the character are figured as together comprising a complete, holistic,

exhaustive mapping of the inner and outer contours of a fictional person, the relation between them as complementary. Extending the character from a novel into a film text adds visual and aural dimensions to the picture the novel has built up of it; the converse may add an interior monologue, a passage of description that inflects this visual dimension with meaning. To use a metaphor from science fiction, each new medium of extension provides new data from which a full-body scan of the character as fictional object is generated.

This conceptualisation is certainly sympathetic in many ways to the protocols of franchise fiction. It reflects and accommodates the conceptual and operational distinction between text and content established in Chapter One as underpinning franchise practice; it clarifies some of the pleasure and satisfaction of multi-platform engagement with a beloved fictional world or character as lying in literally *seeing more* of them with each transmedia movement, putting a visual to textual descriptions, being able to interact with as well as imagine Hogwarts. It connects transmedia practice to franchising's hyperdiegetic and encyclopaedic modality, and its impulse towards "overdesign"; it also usefully expresses the interrelation between cross-platform extension and brand management. Gradually accruing semiotic incarnations of a character through multimedia practice not only fleshes it out as a fictional object, it builds it up, fills it in, and concretises it as an object of intellectual property, establishing an ever-increasing range of uses and representations for protection and management.

This framing does not, however, always fully capture the dynamics at play in the process of cross-platform extension, as may be seen from a specific case study. The figures below are illustrations, necessarily limited to still images, of the various media incarnations of Zack Fair, one of the main characters in the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* franchise:

Third-party copyrighted material redacted: videogame screenshot showing Zack Fair in the Sony PlayStation game *Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 1997)

Third-party copyrighted material redacted: in-game portrait art of Zack Fair in the mobile phone game *Before Crisis* (Square Enix, 2004)
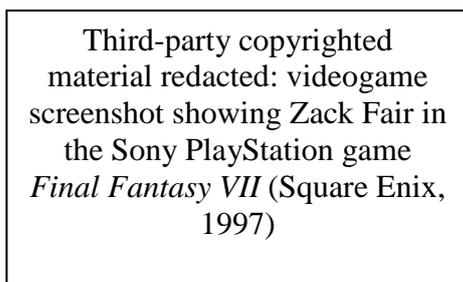
**Figure 1: in-game footage, *Final Fantasy VII*, Sony PlayStation (Square Enix, 1997)**
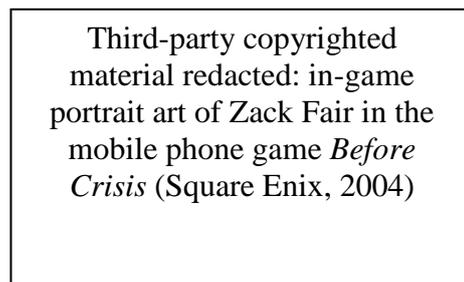
Figure 2: in-game art, *Before Crisis*, mobile phone game (Square Enix, 2004)

Third-party copyrighted
material redacted: screenshot of
Aeris Gainsborough and Zack
Fair in the film *Advent Children*
(Nomura, 2005)

Figure 3: *Advent Children*,
CGI film (Nomura, 2005)

Third-party copyrighted
material redacted: screenshot of
Zack Fair in the anime OVA
Last Order (Asaka, 2005)

Figure 4: *Last Order*,
anime OVA (Asaka, 2006)

Third-party copyrighted
material redacted: screenshot of
gameplay footage of Zack Fair
in the PlayStation Portable
game *Crisis Core* (Square Enix,
2007)

Figure 5: in-game footage, *Crisis*
***Core*, Sony PlayStation Portable**
(Square Enix, 2007)

Figure 6: FMV footage, *Crisis*
***Core*, Sony PlayStation Portable**
(Square Enix, 2007)

Third-party copyrighted
material redacted: screenshot of
FMV footage of Zack Fair in
the PlayStation Portable game
Crisis Core (Square Enix, 2007)

These different media renderings can be positioned as completing each other; although
obviously not illustrated by the above images, for example, *Crisis Core*, *Last Order* and
Advent Children all give Zack a voice, where in *Final Fantasy VII* his dialogue was
entirely textual. However, the extension of Zack Fair across platforms also maps and is

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mapped by improvements in the representational capacities of videogame and digital film technology; every remediation of the character is more technologically advanced. Multimedia practice here thus seems better conceptualised as a process of *perfecting*, rather than completing and complementing. Each representation supersedes prior visualisations of the character, the stunted, blocky polygons of his PlayStation incarnation improved upon by the character portraits of *Before Crisis*, improved upon in its turn by the remarkable CGI of *Advent Children*, itself then perfected by a High-Definition Blu-Ray reworking (2009).

The impulse of transmedia franchise practice, I would argue, is to supplant and surpass as much as it is exhaustive. This thesis has already touched on the idea that hypermediacy, reflexive fascination with the workings and capacities of cutting-edge representational technologies, is a key pleasure and structuring principle of transmedia franchising; the organising concept behind the cross-platform extension of a character is as often improvement as triangulation. To accommodate and express both these impulses and dynamics, I would suggest that a better basic model for the multimediality of the franchise character is the palimpsest. Its various media incarnations in some respects complete and extend each other, but also overwrite and erase each other, ultimately accruing as a texture of overlays that sometimes build up as a jigsaw or patchwork, and sometimes make invisible all those underneath them.

Medium Specificity

Running through and structuring the above theorising of multimediality, and all the critical work on multimedia art it references, is something of the thinking of medium specificity theory. Fundamentally, medium specificity theory is an approach to media that explores and emphasises what defines them and differentiates them from other media. It enjoyed great prominence during the Modernist period, and crystallised into a particular conceptual, theoretical, and epistemological framework through the writing at the time of critics such as Clement Greenberg, around a central tenet that "the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincide[s] with all that [is] unique in the nature of its medium[...]. In [a work of art's] 'purity' [we] find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence." (Greenberg, 1960) As Carroll puts it, therefore,

> the specificity thesis [has] two components. One component is the idea that there is something each medium does best. The other is that each of the arts should do

what differentiates it from the other arts[…]The two can be combined in the imperative that each art form should explore only those avenues of development in which it exclusively excels above all other arts. (1988: 81)

Medium specificity is thus at once a theory of the nature of media, a guide to creative practice and an ideal of creative practice, a perspective from which to analyse the forms and operations of a work of art and a criterion for assessing its merits.

Medium-specific thinking is heavily implicated in all the framings of multimedia practice discussed so far. Formulations of the characteristics and capacities of media implicitly and explicitly structure the above accounts of how they complement and transform each other when they are configured together; a sense that different media make different contributions to a fictional or aesthetic experience underpins all the theoretical work in this chapter to this point. However, specificity approaches to texts and media have been much criticised, and not without grounds. McAuley highlights, for example, that medium specificity theory in its traditional, established form is less descriptive and analytical than it is prescriptive (1987); this is true not only in the literal sense, however, that it explicitly identifies aesthetic ideals, but also in the sense that processes of and principles for assessment and judgement are too much implicated in its strategies for analysis. When textual analysis is bound up in a framework that valorises some aesthetic practices over others, it becomes not an account of what a particular work is and does, but rather an account of what it is not and should have been, and therefore fallacious. Another flaw of the theory as it has been established and practiced is the outdated, simplistic, and inaccurate conceptualisation of what a medium *is* upon which it rests. There has been a lack, for example, of sufficient self-awareness among specificity theorists with regards to the fact that media only gain identity and come to be defined through complex social and cultural processes of legitimisation, discursive construction, and institutionalisation,[22] and that the essentialist theories of media they have developed are, far from being privileged insights into the fundamental nature of media, instead simply another element of these processes (and one that, as Robert Stam observes, is often governed by "constellation[s] of substratal prejudices" (2005: 19) that groundlessly hierarchise media). Carroll criticises the field, meanwhile, for its blindness to the reality of how complex, impure, unstable, evolving and continually aggregating new and borrowed characteristics, media as institutions unavoidably are (2003: 6-8).

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[22] For a more detailed account of these processes, see Gaudreault, A., and Marion, P., 2005.

Nevertheless, not only scholars of multimedia art, but transmedia practice and practitioners themselves seem to think in medium-specific terms. The basic drive and structuring principle of transmedia franchise practice is, after all, movement across media in search of something new that a different platform can offer, even if that is only a new consumer base, source of profit, or share of a market. The frequently expressed (see Introduction, pp. 18-21) idea that the transmedia extension of a property adds to, rounds out and enhances storytelling, worldbuilding, or characterisation is fundamentally medium-specific thinking, whether named as such or not. An unarticulated understanding of medium specificity is evident in Jeff Gomez's definition of transmedia practice as making "artful and well-planned use of multiple media platforms" (quoted in Phillips, 2010: 10), in other words, of making the most of what different media can offer; it comes through in game designer for the *Matrix* franchise David Perry's assessment of the key factor behind the success and quality of the *Matrix* videogames:

> The Wachowskis [directors of the core film trilogy, and creative directors of the franchise as a whole] get games. They were standing on the set making sure we got what we needed to make this a quality game. They know what gamers are looking for. (quoted in Jenkins, 2006a: 107)

Lord of the Rings game designer Neil Young's framing of his own approach to transmedia practice could be an alternative definition of medium specificity theory:

> I've got my world, I've got my arcs, some of those arcs can be expressed in the video game space, some of them can be expressed in the film space, the television space, the literary space, and you are getting to the true transmedia storytelling. (quoted in Jenkins, 2006a: 124)

Medium specificity thus seems to define good practice and artistic merit for transmedia practitioners. Recognising and exploiting the distinctive strengths and potentials of different media, whether in terms of their consumer base, their reach, or their aesthetic languages, emerges from the above quotes as method and ideal for transmedia franchising. In dialogue with this, medium specificity may frequently be seen as a prescriptive and evaluative framework in critical writing on transmedia fiction; Jenkins, for example, partly defines poor cross-platform practice as "asking the new medi[um] to slavishly duplicate experiences better achieved through the old" (2006a). Here, however, I wish to suggest that medium specificity may also be a useful, and indeed necessary, framework for *analysing* a franchise's transmedia movements, and critically illuminating how they structure and interact with fictional meaning. To return to

the specific rubric of this thesis, fundamentally, understanding the development of a character across media involves recognising and analysing the cross-platform movements of the franchise as implicated in and performing overarching aims and logics of entertainment franchising, whether fictional or extratextual: narrative extension; worldbuilding; maximising profits; increasing brand visibility; and, as discussed above, completing or perfecting a picture of the character. Reading how specific synergistic leaps fit into and carry out these logics requires an understanding of the specific possibilities and opportunities, again, both fictional and otherwise, that each new platform offers. Analysis of how a franchise activates and manages a collector impulse in consumers, for example, identified in Chapter One as a significant aim and operation of transmedia franchises, may usefully engage how the franchise spreads across different media that make content differently material; part of understanding how a franchise weaves content and product into the lives and identities of consumers is reading the different positions and roles of the different media outlets it colonises in the rhythms and spheres of a consumer's everyday life.

This position is implicit in Jenkins's recent (2010b) suggestion that there is a place for medium specificity as a critical framework in contemporary media studies. The syllabus he drafts for teaching a new medium specificity theory constructs it as a means of making intelligible, among other things, "migratory characters" and "transmedia logics". If medium specificity is to be usefully brought within a framework for analysing transmedia franchise characters, however, then further work needs to be done to recuperate it as a theory such that flaws in earlier formulations are redressed. In establishing the above framing and purpose for medium specificity analyses, a gesture has here already been made towards reclaiming medium-specific thinking from prescriptivism, value judgements and qualitative assessment; however, still needed is a decisive move away from the reductive, overly simplistic understanding of the nature of media that characterises early specificity approaches. For this, I wish to bring into play here Maras and Sutton's 2000 revisiting of medium specificity theory, which centrally looks to found a new specificity theory on a more nuanced figuring of what a medium is.

In their essay, Maras and Sutton borrow Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the machinic phylum and the assemblage to model the nature and genealogy of media. As Deleuze and Guattari use the terms, machinic phyla are "technological lineages" (1988:

406), natural or artificial flows, movements and evolutions of matter and materiality, and assemblages "constellation[s] of singularities and traits deducted from the flow of matter-movement" (406), that is, specific tools or practices. Maras and Sutton appropriate this framework such that the machinic phyla become more specifically representational, creative, expressive, aesthetic (and at once technological) lineages, and the assemblages specific configurations thereof. A medium, by these terms, becomes an apparatus that operates on these phyla to extract assemblages, an apparatus that represents an "unstable interface between ideology, technology, and desire." (Maras and Sutton, 2000: 101) This framing, they suggest, "opens up the possibility of understanding medium specificity not in terms of purity or as a norm, but precisely as a product of interaction between different elements in an assemblage of material processes" (101); that is, it allows the "preserv[ation] of a central insight of medium specificity claims – that there are identifiable differences between one medium and another – while refusing any notion of medium purity." (102)

Maras and Sutton's work thus replaces the reductive figurings of early specificity theories with a model of a medium as an apparatus and institution, that performs a variety of social, cultural, economic and political functions, and is constructed and influenced by a variety of social, cultural, economic and political factors; as an assemblage or composite of a multiplicity of technologies, machines, instruments and semiotic systems; and as an unstable and loosely defined aesthetic tradition that overlaps with and stands in persistent relation to those of other media. By these terms, media therefore have identities insofar as they stand as more or less stabilised and culturally recognised collections of protocols (Gitelman, quoted in Jenkins, 2006a: 14) or parameters (Gaudreault and Marion, 2005: 6), the boundaries of which are for the most part ill-defined and subject to reorganisation.

Maras and Sutton's approach to recuperating medium specificity theory is particularly useful for turning it into a tool for analysing franchise characters, I would suggest, because it resonates with how transmedia franchising thinks about media. Their conceptual framework structures a catholic and flexibly granular understanding of what actually counts as a medium; in its terms, "the DVD" may be recognised as as much apparatus and assemblage, with its own fuzzy set of protocols, as "film", "the social networking platform" as much as "the World Wide Web", "the Wii game" as much as

"the videogame". Insofar as it thinks in revenue streams and engagement opportunities, transmedia franchise practice, I would argue, similarly understands transmediality as much in terms of platforms, formats, and delivery technologies as in terms of broader institutions or art forms. Given its aims of maximising profit from and reach of fictional properties, establishing brand presence across media channels, and tapping into technological zeitgeists, the transmedia franchising method and impulse is in many respects more usefully and accurately framed as extending or recycling content across *outlets*, than as a synthesis of higher-order branches of media art. Medium specificity readings of franchises' cross-platform movements thus need to think in similar terms if they are to illuminate them fully. In addition to movements into digital film, short animation, and novelisations, for example, the franchising of *Final Fantasy VII* has been centrally structured by movements across gaming consoles and platforms, from the Sony PlayStation, to the PlayStation2, to the PlayStation Portable, to the mobile phone. These movements may be analysed as representing the exploitation of new economic and creative opportunities as much as the franchise's movements between media arts. The PlayStation2, for example, offers improved graphical capabilities over the PlayStation, allowing the franchise to engage and provide pleasures of hypermediacy; the PlayStation Portable enables and encourages gaming to be slotted into a consumer's daily routine, as a way of passing the time on a commute, or on a lunch break, and thus provides an opportunity for further integrating franchise product into a consumer's life. Mapping the extension of the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* as movement from games into film into prose fiction would thus misrepresent the transmediality of the franchise, and obscure how exactly it performs and plays into the *Compilation*'s creative and economic logics.

To build further on Maras and Sutton's work, I see value in here giving a more granular picture of the types of protocol that comprise a medium, and thereby of key axes or foci for medium specificity analysis. A medium as assemblage and apparatus may be understood as composed of technologies of production, tools for creating content in the first instance, and particular structures and organisations of the labour of production; it may be defined in terms of technologies of delivery, and protocols associated with them, particular scripts or rituals of consumption, methods of storing content, and interfaces with content. Different media make content differently material, giving particular physical form to the media text as object, and packaging it in a particular way; this

content represents and means using particular semiotic systems, and as such engages particular perceptual and cognitive apparatuses. A medium is an aesthetic language, a lexicon of representational structures and strategies from basic units of expression (the sentence, the jump-cut) to higher order forms (the novel, the television episode, the gameplay engine) and conventions, albeit one characterised by overlap and cross-pollination with others, and one always subject to reorganisation, expansion and evolution of its vocabulary and syntaxes. A medium's apparatus includes discourses and constructions of cultural capital, consumer base, mode of engagement with its products (academic analysis, uncritical immersion, or anything on the spectrum between the two), standards and ideals of practice, concepts of authorship and creativity, that shape and constitute it as assemblage.

Missing from Maras and Sutton's work is also a model for the relationship between any given text and the protocols or parameters of its medium that moves away from frameworks of prescriptivism and determinism. I would suggest that the characteristic protocols of a medium may be usefully conceptualised as a repertoire, or a lexicon, of sites and strategies and systems that it has to offer through which to structure creative practice, and the nature of the relation in which texts stand to it one of engagement, dialogue, and interaction. A particular text's dialogue with this repertoire, the precise protocols it chooses to engage with and the forms this engagement takes, may be complex, distinctive, and various, structured by the particular aesthetic ends it is trying to achieve.

Through this theoretical work, then, I have aimed to construct a critical position from which the cross-platform development of a franchise character may be usefully read through the lens of medium specificity theory. I now wish to offer some illustrations of the value of medium specificity as an analytical framework in the study of franchise characters, beginning with a consideration of a specific synergistic leap in the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*, the 2007 release of *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix) on the PlayStation Portable. In *Crisis Core*, the character Zack Fair is the protagonist and player-avatar, having made only brief supporting appearances in other *Compilation* titles. In narrative terms, *Crisis Core* stands as a prequel to the first game in the franchise, *Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 1997); it picks up, expands on and plays out a stretch of narrative shown in flashback in *Final Fantasy VII*, specifically, the events

leading up to Zack's death and *Final Fantasy VII*'s protagonist Cloud's adoption of his identity. Understanding the full effect of this switch in protagonist, first of all, requires an understanding of the complex dynamics of identification produced by the interactivity of videogames generally. As Chapter Six will discuss in more detail (see also Murray, 2000: 53), videogame players often report shifting and contradictory feelings of control over their avatars, introjection with them, and both a heightening and deadening of affective response to them, produced by the interplay in the game experience of interactivity, narrative frames and operations, procedural and ludic logics. Asking consumers to play as Zack during the moments before and the moment of his death thus structures a powerful and complex emotional experience, of both guilt and grief, a reluctance to (inter)act produced by the narrative frame of the gameplay confused by the compulsion to "finish the level". *Crisis Core* also, however, exploits the particular protocols of the PlayStation Portable as delivery technology to amplify and complicate this further. The basic menu interface of the game is designed to imply that the protagonist himself is accessing screens and information on a handheld device just as the player is; the player receives information, for example, through emails addressed to Zack. This fosters a sense both of introjection and of intimacy with the character, intensifying and inflecting affective response in the closing scenes of the game still further.

The effect and function of the *Matrix* franchise's engagement with hypertext fiction in *The Matrix Comics* (1999-2004), meanwhile, may also be fruitfully read through the lens of medium specificity theory. Although the radical nature of hypertext as a realisation of poststructuralist semiotics is often overstated by theorists, nevertheless, hypertext does structure a particular experience of reading: rhizomatic, exploratory, ergodic (Landow, 2006: 4); it is therefore a useful medium for narratives of discovery, or of the reconstruction of events, experiences, memories, identities, in that it can very effectively replicate in the active reader the affective and cognitive trajectory of a questing protagonist. The short piece "Bits and Pieces" (Wachowski and Wachowski, 1999) in *The Matrix Comics* makes use of this fact to complex and reflexive effect. It is designed as a miniature embedded website interface, through which the user is able to navigate through a structure of files of various kinds, each containing fragments of information (presented intradiegetically, as produced by various organisations within the game world) about the creation of the Matrix. Through this, the user is therefore positioned both in the shoes of Neo, the series' overarching protagonist, and as one of the

many escapees from the Matrix whose stories are told through *The Matrix Comics* and *The Animatrix*: searching through a vast network of information for as much truth as possible about the nature of their experiences. Through its choice of medium here, therefore, the *Matrix* universe extends one of the primary themes it enacts through the arcs of its characters – coming into greater consciousness of reality through seeking the truth of experience – into the affective and cognitive experience of the reader, and adds too a neatly reflexive dimension in doing so, in the metafictional, fourth-wall-breaking aspect of having consumers of the text interface with and look for "truth" in a fictional text within a vast, pervasive, informational network that mediates increasingly much of individuals' experiences.

The cross-platform movement represented by the *Animatrix* collection of short films (Wachowski et al, 2003), meanwhile, may similarly be illuminated by medium specificity analysis. Some of Maras and Sutton's nuance in theorising and defining media here is useful. The medium of extension in this case may be named as the broad cultural category of anime or Japanese animation; however, Maras and Sutton's conceptual framework makes room for observing that dynamics of appropriation and translation are at play in how exactly "anime" operates as apparatus and assemblage for Western creators and audiences. What I mean by anime here is perhaps best understood as a Western apparatus or interface of ideology, technology and desire, acting on trends and flows in Japanese animation at a cultural distance, and constructing and inflecting it in a particular way as cultural category and media assemblage. The *Animatrix* shorts may be read as finding and engaging in this assemblage a particular language of tropes and topoi relating to the representation of the body, particularly the cyborg body, and of the metamorphosis of the self through technology and similar speculative transformations (Napier, 2000: 40), to enhance and extend the franchise's overarching explorations of the nature of physical reality and the limits of the body in virtual and non-virtual space. The extension of the *Matrix* franchise into anime may also be read through a medium specificity lens as contributing to the development of the franchise's central theme of "following the white rabbit", digging through layers of reality to find truths of experience. Generally speaking, the *Matrix*'s transmedia practice is closely intertwined with the articulation of this theme. The distribution of the overarching *Matrix* narrative across multiple media outlets, some of which are more obviously accessible than others, is crucial to the work's enactment of the central knowledge quest narrative in the

phenomenology of the individual audience member's experience of the multipart, transmedia text; this reading can be developed further by acknowledging that the social and cultural dimensions of the different media used enhance and augment that process. Napier, for example, in her account of the social and cultural processes through which Japanese animation circulates in Western societies and media landscapes, observes through ethnographic study of anime viewing audiences that the act of watching anime has strong connotations for viewers of membership in not only a subculture, but also a counterculture, of seeking out paths less travelled in the consumption of media, of needing to make conscious efforts to obtain desired media products and construct a viewing experience and culture around them (Napier, 2000: Appendix); the decision by the creators of the *Matrix* universe to release key sections of their narrative in the medium of anime can therefore be read as an attempt to tap into this cultural dimension of the medium, and in doing so enhance and extend the work's positioning of its viewers within its narratives of coming into privileged consciousness.

As Jenkins suggests in his proposal for a new specificity theory, however, what is perhaps most important in recuperating medium specificity theory is that cases and processes of interface, intersection, "hybridity and border crossing" (2010b) between media are accepted, explored and illuminated, not denied or positioned as problematic by the terms of a medium specificity framework. The next section of this chapter looks to think about franchise multimedia practice in these terms, and specifically, through the lens of *intermedia* theory.

Intermediality

Intermedia theory is a growing field of media studies, the general focus of which is on developing figures and theoretical frameworks for thinking about types of contact between media, and "how media relate to each other" (Heinrichs and Spielmann, 2002: 7). The concept of "intermediality" specifically has been designed to figure dynamics between media distinct from the aggregation and combination understood by the terms multimedia or mixed media practice; intermedia dynamics are dynamics of fusion and hybridisation, of overlap, synergy, integration, the crossing or eroding of boundaries between media institutions and texts produced within them (Heinrichs and Spielmann, 2002: 6; Swalwell, 2002: 47-8). They may involve a literal synthesis of two or more media forms (the use of the representational technology of videogames, for example, to

produce digital films), or simply an attempted replication by a text in one medium of the representational mechanisms of others (the imitation of visual perspective in a text-based medium, for example). Intermedial art plays with "structural homologies" (Higgins, 2002: 61) between media, bringing out the aural and visual dimensions of a line of text, for example. As Gaudreault and Marion's work on the genealogy of media sets out, new media and art forms are born from and into intermediality; they emerge from synthesis and recombination of prior techniques and technologies, and representation and creative practice in them remain for a period in thrall to aesthetic trends in the media that pre-exist and co-exist with them, used to perpetuate without transforming existing practices (Gaudreault and Marion, 2002: 15).[23] Intermedia theory formalises those common but unrigorous critical and cultural discourses that construct some print texts as "cinematic", or some films as in thrall to the videogame. It argues that it is characteristic of the nature of media that there is constantly contact between them, whether on an institutional scale, or simply within the microcosm of the consciousness of the individual creator, exposed to such a wide range of different media texts and practices throughout their life. As a function of this contact, it suggests and theorises, media come to make themselves present in the texts of others; texts borrow the protocols of other media on the level of register (the adoption, for example, by a novel writer of generic discourses evolved and most commonly associated with the cinema), and on the level of representational strategy.

Generally speaking, intermedia theory and thinking is increasingly necessary for the analysis of texts in contemporary media landscapes. Patterns of convergence in industry structures, processes of production and distribution, and strategies and habits of consumption, together with digitisation, are producing coterminous merging, overlap, and elision of media outlets and institutions, blurring the line between film, television, videogames, Web-based media. I would also argue that it is a particularly important framework for reading the cross-platform movements, relations and dynamics produced through transmedia franchising specifically. *Trans*media franchise practice opens up corollary channels of *inter*medial exchange between texts, products and experiences. The development of multiplatform content as part of a single fictional project exaggerates and makes more direct the kinds of relationships between industries, media institutions, media

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[23] This can be seen, for example, in the still comparatively young medium of the videogame, which stands currently at a point of exponential development in its technologies of representation, and which is showing a trend of using its increasing capacity for the generation of photorealistic images to bookend gameplay with "cinematics", short non-interactive stretches of digital film.

products, and creators that produce cross-pollination through contact; ways of thinking and creating in different media come into contact whenever the various teams responsible for each branch of franchise production collaborate in development of the whole, which may leave intermedial traces in particular franchise texts or movements. Being as it is fundamentally driven by corporate desires to colonise and capitalise upon media outlets, meanwhile, and, as already discussed, taps into the appeal of hypermediacy, transmedia franchising characteristically makes extensive use of infant media technologies, still in the intermedial stage of their institutionalisation. The BBC's twenty-first-century franchising of *Doctor Who*, for example, has involved mobile phones, the BBC's Red Button interactive television service, websites, and flash games.

It is also, I would argue, a necessary framework for understanding the nature of franchise characters as fictional objects. Through transmedia franchise practice, characters are made not only multimedia, but intermedial, partly simply to the extent that, as the previous paragraph suggests, the production logics of franchising are conducive to intermedial thinking and imagining, but also in two further senses. Chapter Two figured the franchise character as extensible, able to sustain development and representation across multiple products, and designed in anticipation of this extension. This extensibility may additionally be understood in terms of the character being translatable, adaptable, and expressible across multiple media, as well as across multiple texts. That is, the franchise character may therefore be conceptualised as a creation that has been conceived on the understanding that it will be articulated within a range of different media, and so with a range of different media protocols anticipated and synthesised within its shape and design.

A further figure may thus be proposed for the nature of the multimediality of the franchise character, that is, the Venn diagram. The preceding section has relied upon a model of a medium as a loose collection of parameters, relating to technological specifications, aesthetic practices, and cultural contexts, that shape the production of texts within them to a more or less deterministic degree; what distinguishes a medium as an autonomous institution, however, is not the fact that all its parameters are its unique property, but rather that the specific configuration of its parameters is distinctive to it. Some parameters may be common to, or at least very similar in, multiple media. The design of the transmedia character can be understood as being at least partially negotiated

in that space of overlap, commonality or equivalency between media protocols, as being deliberately composed of such elements as may be reproducible, transferable, or at least adaptable between multiple media. The recuperated medium-specificity theory set out above may therefore be applied in the service of identifying not only where media differ in their characteristic protocols, but also where they are similar, and thus the design of particular transmedia characters created for extension across particular configurations of media understood and interpreted. Cloud Strife, for example, can be seen through this lens as constructed from aesthetic protocols that work with the technological, semiotic, and phenomenological parameters of multiple media. He is fashioned as an archetypal loner, introspective and uncommunicative, and as a self-imposed outsider who gradually comes to greater involvement, both active and emotional, in his immediate and wider community; through this, he can be rendered as a narrative agent in a medium such as film, but equally, his design can accommodate the dual, interactive perspective necessary for his rendering as principal player-avatar in an ergodic story. It provides a naturalistic frame for the necessary communication of rules and instructions to the player, with the delivery of gameplay objectives or relating of key information contextualised by establishing Cloud as alienated and needing an intradiegetic introduction to many of the *Compilation*'s characters, organisations, and operations.

Of course, Chapter Two also noted that the design of franchise characters is often an ongoing process, that they may be partly fleshed out as virtual people over the course of the extension of a franchise, as well as in anticipation of it. Insofar as cross-platform movements interpolate into and set the direction of this ongoing process, franchise characters may also thus be *produced* as intermedial over time. Karin Littau's work on the transmedia movements of the figure of the Alien (from Ridley Scott's 1979 film of the same name) may be usefully invoked here. Littau finds in evolutionary biology a useful critical and conceptual language for describing the travels of a character across media. For her, the process by which the Alien emerges and develops through multiple media incarnations is best understood as evolution or mutation, a process of "cross-fertilization" (Littau, 2011: 22), metamorphosis, "diversification and hybridization." (22) With each cross-platform movement, the Alien's shape and identity as fictional creation and object evolves, responding to a new environment or media ecology. The Alien thus becomes intermedial, as meanings, creative decisions, strategies of representation and characterisation from different media are gradually absorbed into and appended to its

design, such that it is ultimately a hybrid creation. This is generally suggestive, I would argue, as an alternative or additional model to the paradigm of the franchise character being conceived intermedially from the outset, to acknowledge that franchise characters are developed through transmedia practice as well as being designed for it.

Either way, intermediality is fundamental to the nature of transmedia franchise characters as fictional objects. The way that the franchise character emerges and is conceived as a more or less coherent virtual referent is from production processes that get film directors working on game design, and vice versa, from a multimedia palimpsest of representations synthesised into an imaginary person. Necessarily, furthermore, intermediality is also thus a key feature of each of these representations individually. Insofar as the franchise character is intermedial in its design and imagination, it is an intensified site or locus for intermedial cross-pollination in its textual articulation, media bleeding into each other through it. To return to the example of the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* franchise, the tropes, conventions and requirements of characterisation in the videogame are made present in the digital film *Advent Children* as Cloud Strife makes the transmedia move into it. Combat scenes are central to the film's emotional trajectory and character arcs; the vast majority of the film's emotional peaks and climaxes, such as the resolution and overcoming of Cloud's fixation with former mentor, now enemy Sephiroth, and the conclusive expression of Cloud's willingness to move away from his self-imposed solitude and towards a realisation that with his friends, he is stronger and happier, are structured through extended and extravagant combat scenes. In videogames, likewise, and in particular JRPGs, protagonists are framed as expressing their identity, actions, decisions and motivations through their bodies and the activities of their bodies, particularly through combat; this is a necessary function of the ludic structure that underpins the JRPG, fundamentally a system of simulated physical battles. A slippage between media has occurred where Cloud, a character initially conceived a videogame protagonist, has been represented in film.

Franchise Adaptation

One of the most common and significant types of franchise multimedia practice, however, is adaptation, that is, the translation rather than the extension of a franchise product or instalment into a new medium. Adaptation is fundamentally sympathetic to the aims and protocols of franchise storytelling. It is an efficient way of getting maximum

use out of a fictional creation, and where the source text is successful and established enough, a useful strategy for ensuring a consumer base will follow a franchise as it moves across platforms; its pleasures of re-visioning, re-versioning, and revisiting, meanwhile, resonate strongly with the balance of familiarity and novelty so crucial to the appeal of franchise fiction. As such, adaptation has played and continues to play a significant part in much franchise practice. It has proven an effective means of kick-starting a transmedia franchise around a popular fictional property, as in the case of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, and multiple superhero comics; videogame adaptation, meanwhile, is becoming an almost reflexive synergistic leap for studios looking to turn new films into new entertainment brands. The cross-platform development of franchise characters thus frequently involves adaptive movements, exchanges, and intertextualities.

Where adaptation and franchising have been discussed together, it often seems to be assumed that the practice at hand is adaptation in a familiar, much-theorised form; both Arnett's (2009) discussion of James Bond, for example, and Kristin Thompson's (2003) work on *The Lord of the Rings* invoke the term without interrogating or qualifying it. Yet where entertainment franchising incorporates adaptive practice, it necessarily transforms and particularises it, even if only insofar as it is brought into dialogue with the overarching logics (fictional and industrial) of the franchise mode. Adaptation and adaptations that are situated in a transmedia project are the products of a particular market strategy; they are contributing to and drawing on a particular kind of fictional experience, and negotiating particular types of intertextual relation. Understanding franchised adaptation and adaptations, I would argue, thus requires confronting how far contact with the protocols of franchise production dislocates and modifies adaptive practice from its paradigmatic forms. Leitch's case study of Sherlock Holmes (2007: 207-235) takes a step towards this, setting out some notes on the specific dynamics at work when a text adapts a franchise rather than a single source; however, his theorising is limited by the loose, somewhat ahistorical definition of franchise storytelling he works with (without, in fact, ever really examining). My aim in this section is thus to offer some further thoughts on the particularities of adaptation in the context of the modern fictional franchise, rooted in a more rigorous engagement with the protocols of entertainment franchising, and thus clarify what adaptation does with and to franchise characters.

Hutcheon's fundamental definition of adaptation, as "announced, extensive, specific transcoding" (2006: 16), models adaptive intertextuality as one "extended" dialogue with a single other text, privileged over "all the other intertextual parallels to the work the audience might make that are due to similar artistic and social conventions, rather than specific works." (Hutcheon 21) Within this model, she makes room for adaptations that implicitly or explicitly engage more than one specific text, noting that adaptations of *Dracula* often seem in dialogue with each other as much as with Stoker's novel; in the case of franchise adaptation, however, this is the rule, rather than the exception. Even where an adaptation announces one specific franchise instalment as its source, its operations are unavoidably structured in relation to the entire franchise archive, because any instalment chosen is constantly speaking to the others, extending them, completing them, reframing them, and drawing on them for meaning and effect. Where adaptation is the primary means by which a franchise spreads from platform to platform, meanwhile, chains of remediation can result, in which each new link adapts its most immediate predecessor, while necessarily also bringing into intertextual play the first term in the sequence, and engaging this term as filtered through multiple acts of re-visioning. Multiple versions of a character are at play in an act of franchise adaptation, not merely two. The videogame adaptation of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, for example (EA Bright Light Studio, 2009), centrally engages the art direction and narrative skeleton of the film adaptation of Rowling's novel, but the structure of its gameplay, built around mini-games and small missions based on Harry's classes and school activities, speaks to the novel's school story rhythms.

The intertextuality of franchise adaptation is further complicated by the fact that, as Chapter One has made clear, the franchise "text" is characteristically diffuse and unstable, its boundaries open and indeterminate, its continuity problematic, its points of entry and scripts of consumption multiple. Adapting any single version of a character thus means dealing with how it has shaped and positioned itself relative to those that have gone before it; adaptations of any part of a still-ongoing franchise are subtly inflected by extensions imminent and hypothetical of their content; adaptations of instalments that have already been updated and recontextualised by later parts of the franchise, or by paratextual commentary and explication, have to decide how to manage the interpolation of these texts. As Leitch (2007: 213) notes, meanwhile, the flexibly cohered nature of franchise storytelling is such that adaptations may still be intelligible if they roam freely

through a franchise's textual array, and draw elements from multiple instalments into their re-presentations. It is difficult, furthermore, to make generalisations about how audience members comprehend and activate the intertextuality of franchise adaptations. A simple distinction between audiences familiar and unfamiliar with the source text is not sufficient; major media franchises support multiple points of entry into and routes through the labyrinthine vastness of their textual networks and the imagined world they map, such that consumer knowledge of a franchise source is better conceptualised in terms of a spectrum than a binary. In many cases, meanwhile, as Chapter Three has briefly suggested, adaptations or series of adaptations of franchise texts are produced, presented and apprehended as strands or threads of franchise continuity in their own right.[24]

Insofar as franchise texts and the characters in them are, as explained above, characteristically intermedial, meanwhile, franchise adaptation similarly involves complex interactions between media. The act of transcoding involved in franchise adaptations needs to be modelled and explored not simply as a process of translation between two media languages, but as the re-coding of texts and objects that may have absorbed the syntax and vocabulary of other media within their primary semiotics. Moreover, franchise adaptation involves interactions between multiple media and genres insofar as, as established in the previous paragraphs, it necessarily engages multiple franchise texts and products at once.

The question at the heart of this is Hutcheon's, narrowed in scope – what, precisely, are franchise adaptations adapting; "what exactly constitutes [the] transferred and transmuted 'content'" (Hutcheon, 2006: 10) when adaptation takes place in a franchise context? The above answers in terms of text and media, but the issue of "content" requires further comment. As this thesis has set out to demonstrate, franchise characters are particular kinds of fictional objects, and produce particular kinds of adaptive dynamics and dialogues when they are "transposed" (Hutcheon, 2006: 10) as content. Adapting a franchise character, for example, means engaging both the encyclopaedic detail of their design, and the hyperdiegetic gaps and implications in its source representation; at play as well is the cultural presence and significance of the

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[24] Thus introducing another significant complication into the intertextual dialogues structured where a series of franchise texts becomes a series of franchise adaptations: the interpolating aim of designing the adaptive series as coherent in itself.

character, the forms in which it circulates in cultural discourses and the collective consciousness, the meanings and functions it picks up as it does, and the ways in which it is absorbed and appropriated by consumers. The adaptation of a franchise character may be usefully read as guided or constrained by the "rules" or "core concepts" of the character, and also as involved in the ongoing process of negotiating, asserting, and defining them. Likewise, it needs to be understood both in terms of adapting or intertextually and intermedially engaging an entertainment brand, an object metonymic, iconographic, loaded with implication and promise, and as in itself an act of brand management. This chapter has already noted that cross-platform production generally plays a crucial part in entertainment branding in convergence culture; adaptation, however, is a particularly useful strategy for prolonging consumers' encounter with an entertainment brand, and refreshing their awareness of it, insofar as it invites consumers to *remember* other branded products and experiences. Engaging with a franchise adaptation can rekindle interest in other franchise instalments, prompt a revisit or even new purchase of other licensed products, remind consumers of the part that the entertainment brand has played in their cultural and social life, and reaffirm or reignite their attachment and affective response to it. The fact that adaptation induces and trades on memory and nostalgia thus becomes a particularly significant critical issue in the study of franchised adaptation, and the strategies by which particular adaptations do so a particularly crucial site for analysis.

The broader context of franchise entertainment, however, does not only affect the structure and operations of adaptive dynamics; it may also affect how adaptations are received and *charged*, both culturally and for individual consumers. Robert Stam has persuasively set out that adaptation as a creative practice touches a range of cultural nerves, theorising how the frequently negative, emotional responses to adaptations in both academic and popular discourse speak to deeply entrenched cultural hierarchies of media, "logophilia" and "iconophobia" (Stam, 2005: 5-7), and fetishisation of originality and anteriority; this is undeniably crucial to understanding how adaptation has been defined and has defined itself as an art form, and the anxieties that inflect much adaptive practice. However, entertainment franchising specifically, and to an extent media convergence culture more generally, work to defuse some of the aspects of adaptation that Stam identifies as charged, not least insofar as, as Chapter Three has discussed, they normalise an aesthetic of multiplicity. Because franchise entertainment relies on cohering

principles other than narrative continuity, such as brand identity, adaptations, remakes and similar re-versionings and re-visionings can be intelligible to franchise consumers as simply facets of an overarching entertainment experience, part of rather than in opposition to engaging with a beloved property. As Chapter Three has suggested, shifting between "canons" and narrative realities, and figuring out "which interpretative frame should be applied to any given title" (Ford and Jenkins, 2009: 307) is often a rewarding form of mastery over a franchise text, not a source of tension; as the sprawling multiverses of superhero franchises illustrate, meanwhile, re-interpretations, of a character, origin narrative, or world, are positioned as revitalising and giving depth to a creation, not diluting or betraying it, especially when the intervening interpreter is a big-name *auteur*. And of course, engaging with content across multiple platforms is default, not marked, a lack of this opportunity likely to be felt more keenly than the infidelities of transcoding; indeed, convergence culture may even be conditioning consumers to actively want to see, for example, Harry Potter visualised, or Hogwarts spatialised, rather than automatically approaching remediation sceptically.

This is not to say that the context of franchise entertainment unequivocally valorises and legitimises adaptation, but rather that it may to a degree neutralise, displace, or differently prioritise the anxieties that other types of adaptation often provoke. Adaptation's recycling of content may seem a disappointment to a consumer increasingly accustomed to complex transmedia extensions of narrative. Issues of anteriority, authenticity, and fidelity, whether to specific textual and worldbuilding details, or to the "core concepts" or "essence" of the franchise brand, may still be debated by fans of the franchise, but these debates may have a broader context and purpose. As Chapter One has mentioned, for fans of major, mainstream media franchises, negotiating subcultural identity and capital is complicated by the uncompromising accessibility of franchise entertainment (which adaptation only increases); reading franchise adaptations through the lens of fidelity provides a useful opportunity to display fannish expertise and assert precedence.

As the reception of franchised videogame adaptations demonstrates, meanwhile, franchise adaptation can be exaggeratedly haunted by the spectre of the commercial, and hegemonic anxieties about the commoditisation of art and entertainment. Conscious artistic endeavour is made invisible within both popular and academic discourse on

franchised videogame adaptations, negated or overwritten by the transparent economic motivations undeniably also at play; even for critics otherwise sympathetic to the medium, franchised videogame adaptations are "spin-offs", "tie-ins" (Moore, 2010: 184), ancillary products. Acting against those protocols of convergence culture that normalise adaptation are the overt commercial side of entertainment franchising, and the cultural and discursive transference of meaning effected purely by its idiom; as model and metaphor from the world of business, "franchising" inscribes adaptive media as territories to be colonised in the name of profit and brand presence, not languages for newly reading a fiction, and adaptive texts as derivative and even imitative, not interpretative or transformative. Franchise adaptations, particularly in media that continue to struggle for legitimacy as vehicles for art, are thus often constructed and treated by critics as forms of advertising or merchandising, as products or even paratexts more than texts. Rather than trying to recuperate these adaptations from this figuring, however, I would suggest it is perhaps more useful to recuperate the figuring as a way of opening up, rather than closing down, readings of franchise adaptation as a creative practice. Undeniably, adaptation can serve a promotional function as part of the development of a franchise, and the materiality of how adaptive texts are sold and purchased is non-trivial; these are starting points for exploration of the practice, not grounds for dismissing it.

Finally, as Chapter Three has argued, adaptation in a franchise context needs to be positioned not only as charged or inflected in a particular way by franchising's logics of multiplicity, but also as part of an art of multiplicity. That is, like the forms of franchise extension discussed in Chapter Three, its representations of character need to be read as orchestrated and announced into an overarching process of building up a picture of a character from rewrites and re-visions. Theories of the nature of the relationship between adaptation and source(s) thus need to be connected to and brought within Chapter Three's critical framework. Hutcheon, for example, defines this relation as fundamentally interpretative (2006: 18), constructing adaptations as readings of texts, expressed as new creative works in a new medium, and inflected by these dimensions of creativity and transcoding. Franchise adaptation may thus be framed and analysed as producing an understanding or articulation of character through and from an interpretative intertextuality. More specifically, insofar as the adaptive process of interpretation and re-creation is typically a "surgical" (Hutcheon, 2006: 19) one, an act of excision, elision and trimming, this intertextual dialogue and operation communicates a reading of narrative,

thematic, and stylistic cruxes; it interprets and expresses what is central and what is peripheral to its source. I would also suggest that this particular form of announced, co-ordinated intertextuality works to articulate underlying meanings and logics in specific moments and movements of narrative and character development. An examination of two scenes in the recent film adaptation *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (Part Two)* (Yates, 2011) is here instructive. The first is the scene in which Ron and Hermione kiss for the first time. In Rowling's novel, Hermione is finally moved to show Ron how she feels when he expresses serious concern about the fate of the house-elves, magical creatures that work at Hogwarts as domestic servants; Hermione has throughout the novels campaigned for their rights and welfare, and until this point has been mocked by Ron for it. In the film adaptation, their first kiss happens when they find a Horcrux thanks to a flash of brilliant thinking from Ron, who then puts his faith in Hermione to destroy it. The second scene is the confrontation between Harry and Draco Malfoy in the Room of Requirement, in which Draco has gone looking to take back the wand that Harry won from him earlier in the narrative. In the novel, Draco goes looking for Harry backed up with his friends Crabbe and Goyle; in the film, however, he is accompanied by Goyle and another Slytherin friend, Blaise Zabini. There are relatively prosaic reasons for both these changes. Earlier film adaptations had already cut most of the novels' house-elf-related plotlines, such that for the films to be coherent in themselves as a series, the final instalment had to do likewise; the actor playing Crabbe, meanwhile, was found guilty in 2009 of cannabis possession, and presumably as such fired from the cast. Nevertheless, these transformations articulate fictional meaning. In each pair of scenes, the different specifics do the same fictional work: in both versions of Ron and Hermione's kiss, their relationship finally moves to the next level when both recognise and respect parts of each other that they previously misunderstood or belittled; in both of Draco's confrontations with Harry, he is enough of a coward that he will not go alone. The twofold process of interpretation and re-creation involved in adaptation has thus discovered some of the significance of these points in the narrative.

As a final note to this section, I want to return to Littau's work on the transmedia lifespan of the Alien. Throughout, she suggests that the concept of adaptation is more broadly and fundamentally a useful way of thinking about the multi- and inter-media dynamics produced by franchise storytelling, that is, beyond the kind of announced cases of text-to-text or text-to-multitext translations normally understood by the term. "Cross-

media storytelling [that is, for Littau, the serial extension of a narrative across platforms]", she concludes,

> is not the same thing as adaptation, but it involves adaptation at each juncture "as" or "where" a serial fragment is tied into the "whole". In crucial respects, cross-media practices are extensions of the principles of adaptation: a given story, character, or motif must be fitted into a new environment in a meaningful way. (Littau, 2011: 32).

This position is, I think, suggestive. The practices and concepts implicit in and associated with the term "adaptation" – translation, announced and multidirectional intertextuality, rewriting, remediation, adjusting to and thriving in different media ecologies – permeate franchise multimedia practice whether serial or holistically adaptive. For Littau, "cross-media practices[...]are a reminder [for adaptation studies] that adaptation has a wider orbit than merely that of source and target, and has a wider role to play than merely that of transferring a work from A to B" (Littau, 2011: 32); this is, perhaps, likewise a useful reminder for studies of transmedia franchising.

Cross-Platform Promotion

Many of the transmedia movements of and around franchise characters, however, are not fictional. Franchise creators' experiments in transmedia often comprise the generation of commentary, behind-the-scenes footage, and similar non-fictional supplements. The BBC's cross-platform approach to New *Who* is a case in point; the web presence for the franchise, for example, hosts some flash games offering limited fictional content, but is mostly filled with recaps and plot summaries of previous episodes, interviews with actors and creators, news both about forthcoming intradiegetic developments and about matters of production. Chapter One has already noted, meanwhile, that transmedia practice is currently understood and approached as a marketing strategy as much as it is exploited as a fictional strategy, and that synergy, for many franchise creators, means generating promotional material in as many outlets as possible in addition to content. Again, therefore, the question of how to engage such "secondary", non-fictional practices and material in the critical study of franchise characters arises. Chapter Five will now at last turn to addressing it, and setting out a theoretical framework for bringing them within the jurisdiction of fictional analysis.

Chapter Five

Thresholds of Interpretation

In the small hours of the morning on 21st July, 2007, I sit down with my pre-ordered copy of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007) ("adult" version; I disliked the illustration Bloomsbury had circulated pre-release as the "children's" cover). I and a similarly Potter-mad friend have waited in line for two hours to pick up the book at a midnight launch party, passing the time by asking each other questions from *The* Harry Potter *Quiz Book* (Barnes and Macdonald, 2004). I read the 600-page book, epigraph to epilogue, in one sitting – partly because as a long-time fan of the franchise I am keen to find out what resolution this seventh and final of the books will provide, but partly also because I want to be able to get online and discuss it with other fans without fear of being "spoiled". However, I have resolutely avoided looking at the .pdf file that turned up on the internet a few days earlier, purporting (and later proven) to be a scan of an advance copy, in favour of taking part in the cultural event that is the book's release.

I find as I read that I have inadvertently "spoiled" myself somewhat regardless; in the two years since the cliff-hanger ending of the previous instalment, I have engaged in extensive speculation about the eventual contents of the final book with friends both online and offline, through conversation, blog and message board posts and essays, fanfiction, and dissection of comments by J. K. Rowling in interviews and on her website, to the point that there was very little eventually revealed in *Deathly Hallows* that I had not seen hypothesised by someone, somewhere, already. I therefore finish the book with mixed feelings, that I clarify, sort through and validate by voraciously consuming the reviews and reaction posts of others in various online fora. Still, I soon find myself looking for fanfiction, interested to see what fan writers make of the new points of plot, worldbuilding, and characterisation the book offers (and no less keen to spend more time in Rowling's fictional world). The more I read, the more new light is cast on the book for me, and the more my initial reading evolves. A fanfiction trend quickly emerges, for example, that suggests the intense friendship between Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore and the dark wizard Grindelwald when both were teens (one of *Deathly Hallows'* most significant revelations) may have been more than just friendship; I find

this a convincing interpretation, and incorporate it into my understanding of the characters. As the year progresses, meanwhile, it seems Rowling is no more willing to leave her *Harry Potter* universe than I am; every week the fan sites, blogs, and discussion boards I follow point me to new interviews or website updates in which Rowling offers more and more trivia about her fantasy world (including, perhaps most famously, an announcement in October of 2007 that she did indeed intend for Professor Dumbledore to be read as gay and his feelings for Grindelwald as romantic).

My consumption of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* demonstrates a characteristic feature of fictional production and distribution in convergence culture: that the reception of a fictional work typically involves the navigation of a vast quantity of mediating texts and discourse. As Jonathan Gray observes, "hype, synergy, promos and peripherals" have become significant categories of media text, "tak[ing] up much of our viewing and thinking time" (2010:1). The technological, industrial, cultural and fictional protocols of twenty-first-century media landscapes have saturated and congested their architecture not only with films, books, games or television shows, but also with "all manner of ads, previews, trailers, interviews with creative personnel, Internet discussion, entertainment news, reviews, merchandising, guerrilla marketing campaigns, fan creations, posters, games, DVDs, CDs, and spinoffs." (Gray, 2010: 1) The way media industries conceptualise content, as something endlessly repackageable (and re-marketable) as new formats and editions; the growth in avenues for the publication and dissemination of consumer response, from personal blogging sites to retailers' rating and review systems; the popularity of media technologies and forms (DVDs, websites) that nest and organise fictional texts in a concatenation of menus, frames, portals, synopses and information; the aggressive ubiquity of advertising, and the normalisation of creative, extensive viral marketing campaigns – these trends breed texts around texts, continually and multiply presenting and mediating both fictional and non-fictional communications. It is thus becoming increasingly difficult to posit a fictional encounter cleanly divorced from these mediations, or a reading subject able to look on a fictional text with clear eyes, unaware of or uninfluenced by the volumes of cultural discourse generated around it, and likewise to construct a critical position that draws a clear theoretical and operational line between "the text" and its "peripherals", to analyse the former without considering the latter.

Gérard Genette has suggested that drawing this distinction is generally problematic in the study of any fictional text. In the monograph *Seuils*, or *Thresholds*, in 1987, he notes that the fictional text "is rarely presented in an unadorned state", but is instead always "surround[ed]" and "extend[ed]" by "a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations." (1997b: 1) This material he calls the *paratext* of a work, and divides into two categories: the *peritext*, those elements like a dedication, cover or blurb that are closely integrated into the presentation of a text, and the *epitext*, material such as reviews, interviews with an author, or critical works, which may be involved in the reception of a text but at more of a spatial or temporal remove. Genette put forward (and demonstrated) the thesis that paratextual material interacts with a reader's reception of a text to such an extent that it cannot reasonably be excluded from analysis of how the text operates to produce meaning and effect, that the boundaries of critical interpretation should be set not at the first and last words of the "primary" text, but to include the "secondary" material that presents and frames it. (2)

Broadly speaking, this line of Genette's thinking has not had the degree of uptake that his work on narrative has enjoyed. However, critical attention in new media studies is being increasingly drawn to the margins and boundaries of fictional texts. Research has been undertaken on how DVD supplementary content (Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 2002; Brown, 2007) and promotional websites (Beck, 2004) interpolate into the reception of a fiction, the strategies by which trailers construct and promote a work (Kernan, 2004), the kinds of discussions fans engage in before a work is released and the material they use to "pre-view" it (Chin and Gray, 2001), how behind-the-scenes documentaries inscribe narratives and theories of industrial ethos and practice (Caldwell, 2008), and what "spoilers" add to or take away from the experience of a work (Jenkins, 2006a).

The most significant of these studies is Jonathan Gray's *Show Sold Separately* (2010), a monograph on the modern media paratext. Gray's work is a version of *Seuils* for the twenty-first century, a similarly comprehensive, typological account of significant categories of paratext in convergence culture, and the ways in which they interact with the reception and operations of the texts they present; however, it goes still further, taking the brakes off Genette's thesis not only by ranging across multiple media, where Genette's work is focused on print texts, but also by challenging the hierarchies still

implicit in Genette's theorising. Genette, ultimately, remains relatively conservative in his challenge to conceptualisations of primary and secondary material. As Rachel Malik notes (2008: 719), his typology of paratexts and their functions still relies on fairly uncontroversial logics of textual hierarchy (authorship and authorisation; proximity both temporal and spatial to the existence and experience of obviously primary text). The vast majority of his discussion is focused on the peritextual apparatus of a work, far more readily comprehensible as possessing "primary" textuality, with epitextual material still positioned as liminal within his framework. He consistently positions paratexts firmly as adjuncts, and consistently assumes that the textual material to which they are adjuncts can always be unproblematically defined and differentiated. The protocols of media convergence culture, however, destabilise these hierarchies and distinctions. They work, for example, to integrate and normalise active navigation and engaged consumption of what would usually fall under Genette's category of epitextual material as part of the rituals and pleasures of the fictional encounter. Websites like StarWars.com present fictional content literally surrounded by an array of paratexts, Lucasfilm's page for television series *The Clone Wars*,[25] for example, laid out with previews, images of related merchandise, a plot summary, and interviews with creators framing an embedded episode. DVD editions of films make behind-the-scenes footage, storyboards and trailers immediately present alongside the film text, and may even allow director and cast commentary to be overlaid onto it as an additional audio track. Intra- and extratextual cues script the act of watching, for example, an episode of *Doctor Who* as also involving a hop to BBC3 for *Doctor Who Confidential*, a making-of documentary about the episode, and a trip to the series' website for some interactive content. The internet more generally, meanwhile, further makes epitexts immediately and plentifully available, and not only those that are industrially produced or authorised. As Philip Napoli notes, it is characteristic of contemporary media landscapes that amateur bloggers, reporters, commentators or creators can achieve "unprecedented" reach and circulation for their content (2010: 509); while audience-created paratexts may not have quite the same kind or level of impact as industrial paratexts, they therefore nevertheless "can and often do become important additions to a text." (Gray, 2010: 143) Industrial logic, furthermore, does not position paratextual material as adjunct or afterthought; "the industry pumps millions of dollars and labor hours into carefully crafting its paratexts" (Gray, 2010: 7).

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[25] Available at: <http://www.starwars.com/theclonewars/> [Accessed 15 February 2011].

Gray thus begins from the same belief as Genette, that a fiction's paratexts make a "vital[...]contribution to meaning-making and the development of storyworlds" (22), but instead of conceptualising paratexts as an ancillary fringe around the "Big Three" of "Text, Audience, and Industry", theorises them as surrounding, saturating, and even sometimes dominating this "triumvirate", taking up more space in the media landscape, more of the audience's time and attention, and playing an important role in dictating the terms of their reception. This is not to say that concepts and constructions of authorisation, provenance, canonicity, or cultural cachet are not at play in how individual paratexts interpolate into the fictional encounter; as earlier work by Gray and Chin makes clear, audiences do construct different, complex, and often unpredictable relational and value hierarchies between different kinds of text (2001). It is simply to question the *critical* prioritising of text over paratext, to which even Genette succumbs. It is from this position that Gray calls for more emphasis on "off-screen studies" (4) in critical work on contemporary media, communication and fiction, analysis of how paratexts construct and introduce us to the media world around us, how they "guide us between its structures[...]and give us the resources with which we will both interpret and discuss [them]" (1), and even how they can be sources of pleasure and entertainment in themselves.

If critical reading across media generally increasingly needs to stretch to include "engag[ing] with and interpret[ing] paratextual" proliferations like "the filmic or televisual referent", "as something that creates sense or meaning[...]for and *on behalf of* this referent" (Gray, 2010: 8), this is still more of a critical imperative in the study of transmedia franchising. For one thing, the protocols of transmedia franchising work on top of the protocols of media convergence culture to generate particularly large volumes of paratextual material around franchise fictions; the sheer number of fictional products and events involved, their asynchronous distribution and numerous repackagings and reformattings multiply the amount of mediating material in the franchise experience, while their cultural prominence and box office dominance attract commentary, television programmes and magazine articles exploring "the *Harry Potter* phenomenon", or the legacy of *Star Wars*. This material is of particular importance, meanwhile, to a mode of fiction that needs to guide and point consumers across texts and platforms, and is driven by the desire to maximise contact with, thinking and talking about franchise product in whatever way possible. More importantly, however, as this thesis has repeatedly

discovered, key operations of and on franchise products are both effected and illuminated by paratexts, from brand management, to the development of a franchise's "core concepts", to the cultural circulation of characters as "popular heroes", to the "authoring" of franchise instalments discussed in Chapter Three.

I thus argue that reading the transmedia franchise character should significantly involve the kind of "off-screen studies", close analysis of paratextual material and its role in franchise fictional encounters, that Gray calls for. The meanings, representation, and functions of franchise characters are significantly negotiated in non-fictional, paratextual material; paratexts make up a large proportion of the franchise fictional experience, setting up expectations, guiding consumers between products, filling the gaps in between releases, structuring and modifying the fictional encounter, and should therefore be included within the critically operationalised concept of the franchise archive discussed at the close of Chapter One. In this chapter, my aim is to discuss some key roles of some key types of paratextual material in encounters with and the presentation of franchise characters specifically, and thus provide a framework for reading the franchise character in the context of and as a product of its many paratexts.

To do so, I engage extensively with Gray's arguments and frameworks in *Show Sold Separately*. Some of Gray's work may simply be usefully connected to or brought within parts of this thesis' theoretical framework already in place. For example, Gray's close *textual* analysis of how promotional paratexts for *The Simpsons Game* repeat and articulate "many of the key ingredients" of *The Simpsons* as fiction and entertainment brand – "irreverence and bodily humour[;] attractive animation[;] smart, brilliantly executed media parody" (Gray, 2010: 12) – may be drawn together with Parkin's focus on authority in discussing the "rules" of *Doctor Who* (discussed in Chapter Two), and the two together reframed in this thesis' terms as a template for reading the negotiation of a franchise's "core concepts" through paratextual material. A line may usefully be drawn, meanwhile, between Gray's exploration of how consumers use paratexts to "carv[e] out a particular route through a text" (2010: 144) and Chapter One's positioning of the franchise experience as reconfigurable. Chapter Five in *Show Sold Separately* (143-74) demonstrates both that consumers' individual negotiations of the multiple points of entry into and paths through a franchise archive can be analysed in paratexts that they produce (Gray specifically focuses on reading off modes and scripts of engagement organised by

interest in a particular character or relationship from fans' creative paratexts), and how consumers *use* paratexts in these negotiations; Gray engages the specific example of the "spoiler" paratext, which in revealing details of plot in advance may "yield [for fans] greater access to the show's other pleasures" – characterisation; production design; worldbuilding – by "allowing them to avoid being distracted by the moment-to-moment suspense." (2010: 150)[26] The main thrust of this chapter's discussion, however, is to modify and apply Gray's broad theoretical work in the particular case of the transmedia franchise character; it will also suggest and develop some additional analytical perspectives, that Gray discusses only briefly or not at all.

First, however, a qualification and a clarification. I wish to acknowledge Will Brooker's important note (2001a: 469) that while extended consumption may now be common enough to be the norm in Western media landscapes, access to and interest in large quantities of paratextual material is not universal, and may depend on a range of socioeconomic factors. I wish to offer some comment, also, on terminology and conceptual definitions. The bulk of this chapter's discussion will assume a conceptual opposition between fictional material and paratextual material, where the two are differentiated in terms of their illocutionary status; fictional material is a second-order illocutionary act, belonging to the represented world, where paratextual material is a first-order, direct real world performative, that presents, announces, refers to or comments on a fictional act of representation (Maclean, 1991: 274). For the most part, these are the terms by which I define and delimit my object of study in this chapter (therefore excluding some types of material that Gray does designate as paratextual – videogame adaptations, action figures – on the grounds that while they may have some functions in common with paratextual material, they are fundamentally second-order illocutionary acts). However, the later part of this chapter's discussion will look to interrogate this opposition, and question whether it is always useful and sustainable in relation to transmedia franchising.

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[26] This stretch of Gray's argument also does significant work in repositioning the media consumer as active in navigating and selecting paratexts for consumption, in accordance with particular priorities and interests, rather than as passively exposed to and overwhelmed by a saturation of paratextual discourse. Any readings of the role of paratextual material in a fictional encounter should bear in mind that an individual consumer may "carve out a particular route" through this material as much as through the fictional text itself.

Horizons of Expectation

As Gray observes, the beginning of fictional meaning is almost always to be found in paratextual material (2010: 26). Paratexts tend to be the site of our first encounter with the characters, style, genre, narrative, and world of a fiction, but also of our first attempt at "reading" the fiction. From paratexts such as trailers, posters, previews, set photos, casting rumours, or similar, consumers construct what Chin and Gray (2001) call a "pre-text" of as yet unconsumed fictional material, that they make sense of in much the same way as they would the fictional material itself, and similarly subject to critical and subjective analysis; coterminously, the paratextual material is scrutinised and analysed in itself.

Ultimately, the dominant function of paratextual material at this point in the franchise encounter is to manufacture interest (or confirm a lack thereof) in the fictional material to come; pre-viewing paratexts are texts of advertising, enticement, anticipation, introduction. Their primary effect, therefore, is to produce a horizon of expectation for the contents of the fictional material, so that audience members can to a degree pre-consume it and decide whether they want to invest their time and money further. The mechanics of this process in convergence culture has received probably the most attention of all areas of paratextual analysis from new media studies; notably, Gray engages in an extensive and sophisticated theoretical figuring of how the "skeletal form" of pre-viewing paratexts shares much of its DNA with the complex semiotic tricks of everyday product advertisements (2010: 27), while Lisa Kernan's monograph on trailers discusses at length their relation to "classical rhetoric, the art of persuasion" (2004: 5). Some useful work on how pre-viewing paratexts operate relative to character specifically has come out of this. Both Gray (2010: 53-4) and Kernan (2004: 10) illustrate how much expectation can be created simply by a facial expression; discussing a poster for *Home Alone* (1990), for example, Gray teases out how much work Joe Pesci's "comically overdone" "'evil face'" does to promise "a comic release of tension[...]whereby parents and children can laugh off great fears and enjoy a magic make-believe scenario in which an otherwise horrifying prospect is stripped of danger." (2010: 54) Kernan theorises the complex manoeuvres in the representation of character in film trailers to invite audiences "to identify with the character's situation or motivation in the particular film, and to want to participate or share in its narrative resolution" (2004: 57); she notes, for example, how often characters

"are introduced but despecified narratorially through the use of personal pronouns, describing their actions or roles more in terms of function than character, which enables the trailer to better place the audience enthymemically within its discourse." (56) Kernan also offers a reminder that stars are "the industry's most effective salespeople" (68), their appearance in a pre-viewing paratext making all manner of seductive promises to audiences, from a particular kind of narrative or genre experience (based on their previous work), to "the visual or aural pleasures associated with the star as spectacle", to "increased knowledge of (and thus closeness to) the star" (68).

Here, however, I wish to draw attention to a less theorised implication of the ubiquity of pre-viewing paratexts. As both Gray and Kernan observe, a major part of paratexts' construction of horizons of expectation is the establishing of genre. A primary consequence of the proliferation of paratextual material around a fiction is thus that it vastly multiplies the number of acts and sites of generic marking, and invocation of generic competencies and convention. Beyond this observation, however, the actual effect of this on the operation of genre in, on and around transmedia franchises has gone unexplored, in fact, not even identified as a question that needs to be asked. For the most part, it seems to be assumed that genre as a fictional element or operation is working much as it has always done, simply more insistently. I would suggest that this is an oversight, particularly in the light of Jason Mittell's useful 2004 work on the nature and concept of genre. In *Genre and Television*, Mittell operationalises genre as critical concept and fictional element in sociocultural terms. He conceptualises genres as "cultural categories", that is, as contingent and unstable cultural concepts not produced exclusively or necessarily by their textual members, but constantly inscribed and constituted by industrial practice, distribution logics, and extratextual or paratextual cultural discourses, and as working not only to shape, define and create fictional meaning, but to organise production, sales, consumption (2004: 10). By these terms, then, changes in these practices, logics, and processes of discursive construction – such as the saturation of the media landscape with paratextual material – are likely to produce transformations in the nature and operation of genre as a fictional element and genre categories as cultural operators.

In this section, I look to give some focused attention to such transformations, with a view to illuminating further how genre works in, on and around transmedia franchises,

and particularly transmedia franchise characters. To do so, taking Mittell's position that the best way to understand genre in any given media context is to look at the texts and practices that discuss and construct it, I want to turn to a particularly illustrative example of contemporary discourse about genre, a website called *TV Tropes*.[27] This website is a exemplary convergence culture paratext, an amateur production with a wide reach, a demonstration of the collective intelligence made possible by densely networked landscapes of communication, the result of the encyclopaedic and interpretative labour of a large self-regulating knowledge community. *TV Tropes* is a large-scale database in the Wikipedia mould, content collaboratively produced by a huge volume of volunteers, that presents itself as "a catalog of the tricks of the trade for writing fiction"; ultimately, it stands as a staggeringly comprehensive encyclopaedia of macro and micro genre conventions, that despite the website's name covers media from anime to webcomics and works from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to *Wii Sports Resort*. The site is organised on two levels, by convention or "trope" and by fictional text; the first kind of page assigns an ideally witty name to the trope and offers a brief description of it, followed by a hyperlinked list of works in which it can be found, while the second gives a précis of the fiction followed by a hyperlinked list of tropes that have been identified in it. The page for the *Harry Potter* novels, for example (TV Tropes, n. d.(a)), attaches to them some familiar labels (*deus ex machina*; Chekhov's gun), and some labels that may be less familiar, though the trope to which they refer may be more so (Phlebotinum, a "versatile substance that may be rubbed on almost anything to cause an effect needed by a plot").

TV Tropes, I would argue, incarnates some of the key features of the operation of genre in convergence culture. It points, for example, to an extreme degree of genre literacy in audiences, to the point that they are adept not only at anatomising a fiction into its conventions, but at recognising exactly how the fiction is employing them. Any page's list of examples of a trope will be marked with notes explaining whether the trope is being parodied, subverted, inverted, or "lampshaded", the website's own addition to this critical idiom.[28] This seems a reasonable consequence of the saturation with generic discourse that a proliferation of paratexts produces, although it goes against received cultural wisdom (that it is producing audiences uncritically satisfied with the reiteration

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[27] Homepage available at: <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/HomePage> [Accessed 15th July 2011].

[28] "Lampshade Hanging[:] the writers' trick of dealing with any element of the story that threatens the audience's Willing Suspension Of Disbelief — whether a very implausible plot development, or a particularly blatant use of a trope — by ***calling attention to it***... and then moving on." (TV Tropes, n. d.(c))

of the familiar). Likewise a further trend that the website demonstrates, that genre is of primary importance in how audiences make sense of, relate to, and, significantly, *perform* their competence with a work. Contributing to *TV Tropes* is, after all, a display both of intimate knowledge of a particular work, and of sufficient general cultural literacy to be able to observe patterns and repeated motifs across multiple media products.

TV Tropes illustrates on a micro level, meanwhile, something that trends of convergence in media produce on a larger scale, that is, the unleashing, making explicit, and materialising of intertextuality. The hypertext structure of the website connects together any fictional works that contributors see as having tropes in common; this effect is magnified in the general logics by which landscapes of media convergence and particularly digital media organise material, from the greater accessibility and close integration of critical work (that may explain or bring out a fiction's intertextual dialogues) into fictional encounters, to the algorithms in websites such as YouTube that suggest "related content" upon coming to the end of a text. The hypertextual organisation of the website, however, understands and constructs generic intertextuality in particular ways. Specifically, it implies and produces two models: one "top-down", taxonomical, where the generic category or convention is an abstracted, generalised umbrella under which specific examples fall, and one rhizomatic, connective, where one text is compared to another text is linked to another text is contrasted to another. This two-fold understanding of genre as intertextual principle is reflected in the discursive formulation of the "trope" categories themselves; some of the character archetypes the website identifies, for example, are given general names, like "the Anonymous Benefactor", but others are named after and defined in terms of specific pop culture characters – often, in fact, franchise characters, perhaps because they are, as Chapter One has discussed, both so culturally prominent and so much an expression or incarnation of particular cultural moments or zeitgeists.

Most significantly, however, *TV Tropes* gives a very different picture of the current landscape of culturally meaningful genre categories from that currently assumed in the academic study of fiction. While its discussions still clearly understand broad, established genre categories like science fiction or the western as meaningful terms, for the most part the website splinters and fragments such categories and approaches fictional conventions at a highly specialised micro level; in this, it reflects broader emerging trends

in industry practice, suggested by Jenkins to be a function of industries' attempts to more efficiently and precisely target audiences (2009e). *TV Tropes* also suggests that horizons of expectation and an understanding of convention operate at a much wider range of points within the fictional encounter than is usually acknowledged, including the physical format of a text, the time and place of its release, the practices involved in its consumption; only television studies, with its necessarily more pronounced awareness of the rhythms and logics of distribution, is showing any signs of incorporating this into its approaches to genre and horizons of expectation.[29] Most strikingly, however, the website is an example of audiences making sense of texts according to generic schema and taxonomies *entirely of their own devising*, and using their own critical idiom to describe and discuss them. In this, it is the natural product of a media landscape that by facilitating user-generated content to an unprecedented degree is "democratiz[ing]" media criticism (Tryon, 2009: 125), allowing the growth of interpretative practices, languages and frameworks rooted in a variety of critical contexts and communities, from individual message boards to broader fan cultures.

Reading franchise characters in terms of genre is a complex proposition regardless. The protocols of transmedia franchising produce generic multiplicity, hybridity, and reflexivity; each move across media, into a new aesthetic and formal vocabulary and syntax, each attempt at refreshing and rebooting, any act of self-parodying, complicates the way the franchise character is produced and defined in and through genre. The volume of paratextual material involved in their presentation and reception only complicates this further. However, some starting principles of a critical practice for analysing the role of genre in franchise characterisation may be proposed based on the above observations. At a basic level, there is a clear need to take a fresh look at what genre categories or terms can be said to be currently in significant cultural circulation, and where exactly horizons of expectation are forming and operating. This need is only increased by the fact that new textual forms and formats are continually emerging, as landscapes of media production and distribution continually evolve and reconfigure their logics. As indicated above, furthermore, part of reading franchise characters relative to genre is exploring how they are implicated in cultural processes of defining and discursively formulating new genre categories. The fundamental model of

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[29] Cf., for example, Brunsdon , 2004 on how and why the 8-9pm slot on British television has come to be associated with certain types of programming.

generic intertextuality and the landscape of genre categories that needs to be assumed, meanwhile, is one of splintering, granularity, patterns and conventions both micro and macro, of comparative as well as taxonomical thinking and processing. The functions of genre for audiences need also to be reappraised. *TV Tropes*, and genre discourse generally in convergence culture paratexts, demonstrate that audiences do not simply use genre as a "practical device" for making fictional texts comprehensible and guiding their viewing preferences (McQuail, 2005: 370); rather, genre literacy is deeply bound up in processes of constructing one's identity as a consumer, cultural participant, and fan, and of demonstrating cultural and interpretative competence in a media landscape where one's opinions and analysis are a major element of self-presentation. Perhaps most important, however, is to recognise the tension being played out in the multiple acts and forms of generic marking surrounding texts in media convergence culture. On the one hand, as the above case study of *TV Tropes* demonstrates, contemporary audiences are increasingly active producers and determiners of genre definitions, generic operations and intertextuality, engaging with genre in sophisticated and often critical ways; on the other hand, as Henry Jenkins notes, media industries may also be seen to be increasingly "refin[ing]" their ability to use genre "for monitoring and targeting particular clusters of consumers." (2009e)

Inflecting Meaning

Much of the paratextual material surrounding and mediating fictional encounters, however, is interpretative or critical discourse, texts such as reviews, authorial, directorial, or cast commentary, reaction posts and liveblogging (blogging commentary on a fictional encounter as it unfolds), that consumers use to validate or re-evaluate their impressions of fictional material, to understand interpretative consensus in different consumption communities, and to gain further insight from a range of perspectives into the fiction's aims, meanings, and operations. Increasingly, as the introduction to this chapter has noted, this discourse is plentifully and immediately present before, after, and even during the fictional encounter, guides to and models of narrative, character, worldbuilding and thematic comprehension closely integrated and internalised into the fictional experience. In convergence culture, media products are unavoidably read through other people's readings, and franchise products, with their multiple DVD editions, content-packed websites, and sheer cultural presence, particularly so.

The role of such material in the fictional encounter may be theorised as the insistent, proximate *inflection* of the meanings, operations and effects at play in the text or experience. That is, it may be understood as activating or putting in place particular interpretative frameworks, organising and fixing emphasis and significance, guiding and directing understanding. This is a central thesis of Gray's, which he draws and extends from earlier work by Brookey and Westerfelhaus, who offer a theoretically convincing (though their analysis of their particular case study, *Fight Club*, is less so) account of how DVD bonus materials work to "articulate a 'proper' (i.e. sanctioned) interpretation" (Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 2002: 23) of the film they surround and present.

Understanding how paratextual material works to inflect fictional meaning is a particularly important aspect of reading the paratextual negotiations surrounding franchise characters. Fundamentally, many of the processes of rebooting, authoring, branding, re-imagining and re-positioning franchise characters that define and shape their transmedia lives involve the construction, mobilising and shifting of interpretative frames and lenses, and particular organisations of meaning. In this section, I thus look to set out a four-fold approach to analysing these negotiations, in accordance with this thesis's aim to provide critical method as well as critical theory.

First, the genre, format or register of the interpretative discourse should be considered, that is, the fundaments of *how* precisely it articulates a critical reading. The building blocks of an academic essay, for example, thesis, synthesis, illustration, the careful progression of argument, are different from those of an evaluative review; it constructs its reading differently, and thus will inflect the readings of those who engage with it differently. The recaps and plot summaries that so frequently surround any franchise instalment,[30] for example, interpret through the mechanism of paraphrase, decoding and recoding an essence of plot, or character development. As such, they not only direct consumers' narrative and character comprehension, they coterminously produce additional hyperdiegetic effects. In a study that considers paraphrase through

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[30] Consider, for example, a typical episode of *Doctor Who*. The BBC's website for the franchise will provide an "overview" (one such available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b011rf7y> [Accessed 18 July 2011]); next week's episode will stitch salient clips together to form a recap. Further plot synopses may be found on Wikipedia (one such available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Good_Man_Goes_To_War> [Accessed 18 July 2011]) or on the fan-produced *TARDIS Index File* (see <http://tardis.wikia.com/wiki/A_Good_Man_Goes_to_War> [Accessed 18 July 2011]). Television guides will offer still another, and reviews of the episode will often begin with still another (see, for example: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2011/jun/04/doctor-who-a-good-man-goes-to-war> [Accessed 18 July 2011].

theories of generative grammar, Gleitman and Gleitman define paraphrasing as "providing regular surface alternatives for a single deep structure" (1970: 25-6); each time the textual appearance of a character is paraphrased, therefore, the character may be understood as reasserted as a "deep structure", as emerging more and more substantially as an inhabitant of an underlying imagined universe. DVD extras, meanwhile, make extensive use of quotation; the fundamental skeleton of the making-of documentary, for example, is a pattern of showing illustrative glimpses of fictional footage, usually overlaid with commentary that establishes the point of interest it demonstrates, showing and explaining the production techniques behind it, and concluding with further quotation of fictional material, explicitly marked and positioned as the product of the processes displayed. As Lisa Kernan observes relative to trailers, there is a non-trivially "transformative aspect" to quotation (2004: 6); quotation resituates fictional material in a new system of textual relations and material contexts that give it meaning, purpose, and inflect and highlight its significance. The fan practice of "vidding" runs on a similar interpretative mechanism, being a practice of cutting and stitching footage from a film, television show or videogame to stage a "selective seeing" of the text (Coppa, 2009: 109), accompanied by a new soundtrack that acts as a further "interpretative lens" (108). As Coppa notes, however, insofar as the form is a cousin of the music video, "vidding" as interpretative discourse is "expressive rather than descriptive, concerned with feelings and rhythm" (2010b), constructing impressionistic readings, analysis through montage. Fan fiction, meanwhile, the unauthorised, amateur production of new stories set in a pre-created fictional world, is not often positioned as interpretative discourse, but on a radical level a piece of fanfiction undeniably stands as an interpretation of and a commentary on the fictional material from which it is derived. Every creative decision made by the fan writer as to how to represent, for example, a character she is borrowing is rooted in and articulates a particular reading of how that character is presented in the source material, producing an interpretative dialogue between the two incarnations; fan discourse about fanfiction reflects and confirms that it operates in this manner, with responses to a recent *Harry Potter* fanfiction, for example, framing the work as an "illumination" and "exploration" of the characters borrowed, a "very perceptive picture" and "character study" of Hermione Granger and Minerva McGonagall.[31] Because fan fictions articulate their interpretations in the form of a new creative work, thus giving an impression of

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[31] All from comments in response to a Livejournal post by After the Rain, "The Supervisor's Tale", available at: <http://community.livejournal.com/femgenficathon/82320.html> [Accessed 16 April 2010].

continuity with the source material, its interpretative insights are often processed by fans as forming part of a "fan text" or "fanon", an expanded understanding not only of the meanings of the source material, but of its actual fictional design and content (Hellekson and Busse, 2006: 7).

Next, the authority or cultural capital that the interpretative paratext has, or makes claim to, should be examined. Brookey and Westerfelhaus suggest that this is key to determining how the readings offered interpolate into consumers' processing of the fictional product; the cornerstone of their argument is the view that the privileged position of commentators on a DVD within cultural understandings of authority influences how consumers engage with and assimilate their interpretative discourse. It may also, meanwhile, influence the focus, emphasis or slant of their interpretations. Consider, for example, the typical review in a broadsheet news outlet, which may see itself and be seen by readers as a privileged tastemaker, arbiter of value and guide to the contemporary cultural landscape. It may thus focus on analysing and constructing the cultural situation of the fiction at hand, tying it in to current trends in both the fictional landscape and discourses of merit; the *Times Online* review of *Deathly Hallows* (Fordham, 2007), for example, looks to explicate Rowling's light social satire and literary allusions, closing by unpacking the resonance of her epigraph from Aeschylus, while the *Independent*'s review highlights Rowling's "genuine coup of emotional and moral ambiguity" in "an age when popular narrative is marked by blandness and 'sympathy'" (Boyce, 2007). Of course, the cultural capital of a paratext may not always be straightforward. This thesis has already noted (see Chapters One and Three) that authority is a complex proposition relative to franchise entertainments, that the "authorisation" of a statement or even a fictional product is no guarantee that it will be accepted as "canonical" by all consumers; it is not necessarily the case that a consumer will place more weight on the interpretation of one of a franchise's author-figures than on the readings of professional or even fan critics. Features and protocols of the current media climate complicate the issue further. They have somewhat transformed, for example, the cultural positioning of the kind of review described above. Individual reviews are as often accessed through search engines or direct links from other sites as they are through a "top-down" reading of an entire newspaper or magazine, thus weakening the effect of the host publication as frame for and validation of a review's reading (though any marking on the page of a review of the name of the host publication can confer upon it cultural

cachet). Furthermore, this scattering, fragmentation and recombination of newspaper and magazine articles brought about by their remediation in hypertext alters the dynamic of their reception; the consumer becomes active in selecting and aggregating paratexts to incorporate into a personalised fictional experience, rather than the passive recipient of content in more traditional mass media distribution models.

Thirdly, the particular conceptual frameworks, theories whether formalised, assumed or vernacular of how fictional characters work and should work, critical idiom, value systems and angles of approach that make up the interpretative lens through which the paratext reads should be acknowledged, as this obviously determines the nature of the dialogue they enter into with the fictional material. The particularities of fan fiction as a mode of writing, for example, and the protocols of fannish production cultures, produce very distinctive reading perspectives, particularly with respect to character study, that should be kept in mind when analysing the role of fan texts in inflecting fictional meaning. Almost all critical work on fandom, for example, notes that relationships between characters, and in particular any signs of romantic or sexual "subtext", are a primary focus of fannish readings, and that this is often where fan texts are most overtly evangelical about their particular interpretation of their source material. It is likewise approaching an axiom of fan studies that fanfiction frequently stands in subversive relation to its source material, offering deliberately oppositional readings of the narrative significance, place within the work's moral schema, traits and motivations, and more often than not sexual orientation, of characters. I wish also, however, to draw attention to some less frequently acknowledged features of fanfiction as interpretative discourse. Added to this usual critical framing of the aspects of character fanfiction inflects can be an awareness of fanfiction's characteristic interest in what Jenkins calls textual "silences", "elements[...]systematically excluded from the [source] narrative with ideological consequences" (2008); it should be recognised that much fanfiction offers politically loaded readings of source characters, that articulate and comment upon their relation to issues of racial, gender or queer representation. Predominantly, meanwhile, fanfiction implicitly assumes a particular theory or understanding of the nature of the fictional character, as may be inferred from Jenkins's work on how fanfiction characteristically responds to and extends source characterisation. Jenkins's (2008) discussion of how fan works fill in unwritten histories of characters, explore what happens to them beyond the boundaries of the source material, unravel the psychological

background to single remarks or actions, indirectly articulates a general approach to character in fanfiction that is based on psychological realism, privileging such concepts as depth, development, coherence of behaviour, motivation, and action. Francesca Coppa also suggestively frames the production of fan texts as an act of inhabiting and directing bodies in space, getting inside the head and the skin of a character and making them behave in a particular way (Coppa, 2006). This figuring usefully expresses not only the immersive nature of fan fiction as a form of interpretative discourse, but also that it is produced, as Coppa puts it, "before a live audience" (238). Particularly in online fan communities, channels of communication between and among fan consumers and producers are almost always open and direct; fan texts are produced in environments of constant interaction and dialogue, where reviews, feedback, comments, critiques, edits, interpretations, and expressions of authorial intention circulate freely and at pace.

Fanfiction, however, is not the only kind of interpretative paratext fan cultures produce, however much it (together with related practices of fanart and fanvidding) may monopolise critical attention. Fan communities produce a significant volume of explicitly critical discourse, including close cousins of essays and reviews in traditional academic and journalistic formats, but also what is known in the idiom of fandom as "meta", "discussion of fanworks of all kinds, fan work in relationship to source text, fanfiction characters, motivation and psychology, fan behaviour, and fandom itself."[32] There is a general need for more critical study of meta as a form of fan production, if for no reason other than the current disparity between the proportion of fan texts it makes up and the amount of critical attention it receives; I wish to highlight it particularly here, however, partly because as the definition above indicates, character study is a primary focus of this interpretative discourse, and partly because as a form of critical practice it has distinctive characteristics that influence how it interacts with the meanings of the material studied. In the current landscape of online fan communities, for example, especially those that are journal- or blog-based, meta discourse is explicitly dialogic, often aiming to start a discussion as much as present an argument; when its subject is ongoing transmedia franchises, meanwhile, it is usually bound up in what Henry Jenkins calls *problem-solving reading* (2006a: 27), meaning that its focus is often on predicting or hypothesising actions that will be taken by a character in forthcoming fictional material, or rationales that will be given for their previous behaviour, by analysing the creative

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[32] Definition of "Meta" in the Organisation for Transformative Works' *Fanlore* wiki (Fanlore, 2011a).

logics perceived to be at work in the fiction so far. Reflecting, perhaps, the dominant points of overlap between fan and academic communities, while at the same time the particular nature of fan investment in a fiction, meta displays certain methodological trends: recently in particular, an emphasis on reading source material through anti-oppression discourse and sociological frameworks for understanding social injustice, and more generally, a form of intensive close reading, that in the case of character particularly, however, analyses less the mechanics of texts as semiotic constructs and more the nuances of behaviour and perceived psychology of the virtual referents they produce. Finally, where textual analysis in academic contexts has a naturalised bias towards exploring and explaining the artistry of a fictional work, as a necessary function of its implicit concern with the best, rather than the entirety, of fictional production, meta analysis in fan contexts is far more likely to focus on what texts do badly; this comes partly from the very different idea of acceptable, canonical subject matter that fandom as an interpretative community has, and partly from that curious paradox that so much defines the nature of fan attachment to a text, at once hyper-invested and hyper-critical (Baym, 1998: 124).

Examining "authorial" commentary on DVD extras, meanwhile, indicates that different "authors" read through different interpretative lenses. The feature "The Chosen One" (Lucas, 2005b) that accompanies the DVD release of *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, an extended interview with creator George Lucas and actor Hayden Christensen about the character of Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader, provides an illustrative example here. Lucas's commentary focuses almost entirely on a holistic articulation of his creative vision, a discussion of the overarching patterns and design that structure the six *Star Wars* films as a single coherent story; his comments on character are therefore preoccupied with the inscribing of character arcs and logics of character development. Christensen's comments, meanwhile, focus on distilling the character of Anakin into a handful of core traits and motivations, an actor's reading of the character's "essence".

Finally, any other purposes or functions of the interpretative paratext should be considered as interacting factors. For example, press reviews are aimed at offering the first announcement of the quality and cultural impact of a fiction; as may be seen from reviews of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* upon its release, there is as such often a

strong emphasis in this interpretative discourse on effect and effectiveness, an almost phenomenological sort of criticism that focuses on the fiction's emotional climaxes, the points at which handkerchiefs and "strong nerves will be required" (Fordham, 2007). The material characteristically oscillates, too, between interpretative standpoints, moving from the reading of the review's author, to the hypothesised opinion of fans, to a more abstract, subject-less articulation of a general cultural attitude; likewise, it moves between implied readers, by turns paraphrasing its subject for readers who are yet to consume it and discussing it for those who have. In the case of franchise entertainment, meanwhile, the acts of summary, recap and paraphrase mentioned above are primarily designed to help consumers comprehend and keep track of complex long-form narrative, and to advertise and anticipate future franchise instalments. They thus primarily work to pick out and highlight particularly significant narrative events, to draw meaningful connections between them, to emphasise points of intrigue and unanswered questions, and fundamentally, to tell consumers the pieces of narrative, character or worldbuilding information they will need to make sense of what is to come in the upcoming instalment.

An Effect of Aura

The discussion in this chapter so far has focused on how paratexts interact with fictional material to produce and inflect meaning; however, as Gray illustrates, in the case particularly of paratexts produced and "mobilised" by the creators and marketers of a fiction, they equally work to "assign *value* to a text, situating it as a product and/or as a work of art." (Gray, 2010: 81; emphasis Gray's) Specifically, in a media landscape in which the concept is compromised and in a perpetual state of crisis,[33] and yet still central to the legitimisation of cultural products, Gray argues that paratextual material works to "surround [a] text with aura, and insist on its uniqueness, value, and authenticity in an otherwise standardized media environment, thereby taking a heretofore industrial entity and rendering it a work of art." (Gray, 2010: 82) In this, it operates in constant tension with itself; industry paratexts themselves, particularly those associated with hype and promotion, exaggerate the association of their products with the concepts of commoditisation and consumerism usually set in opposition to artistic merit, and then attempt to offset this by compulsively invoking traditional discourses of quality and value in fiction. Given their precarious and ambivalent cultural capital (discussed in Chapter

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[33] For more theoretical discussion of the applicability of Walter Benjamin's notion of "aura" in new media landscapes, see Bolter, J. D. et al, 2006.

One), this is a particular source of anxiety for transmedia franchises, and thus a particularly important operation of franchise paratexts to examine.

Gray provides a useful starting point in this, through a case study of the *Lord of the Rings* DVDs. He notes, for example, how much time and energy their paratextual material devotes not only to locating an author-figure behind what is essentially a collaborative creation, in this case Peter Jackson, but also to constructing him as an auteur and visionary in opposition to the nameless industry bodies who kept asking him to cut or compromise his "bold vision" (Gray, 2010: 101); Gray draws attention also to how the inclusion on DVDs of extensive production stills or footage and concept art reactivates behind the fictional material its unique history of labour and craftsmanship, that is eroded even more in an age of digital reproduction and textual proliferation than Benjamin perceived it to be through mechanical reproduction (83). Further contributing factors Gray identifies include attempts to emphasise associations with culturally privileged texts and media, and the ways in which DVD distribution works to make the fiction as material product collectible and desirable to own, from the explicit marking (as in the case of the *Lord of the Rings* DVD releases) of DVD editions as "Collector's Editions", to the signalling of their content as exclusive (83). I would observe in addition that the emphasis in DVD paratexts on textual analysis and commentary, in other words, illuminating the meanings of the fictional material, likewise insistently calls into play ideals of artistic value; not only do individual interpretative paratexts look to demonstrate that the fiction can sustain a culturally privileged depth of meaning, they also collectively work to produce the fiction as meriting a high degree of extended discussion and examination. I would also note that as transmedia franchising becomes increasingly institutionalised as a fictional practice, franchise paratexts may not always look to validate themselves by the terms of more "traditional" aesthetic values and practices, but may instead attempt to produce an effect of aura around franchise products by positioning them relative to emerging aesthetic standards in transmedia practice.

The intersection of this process with character and characterisation has already been touched on by Gray, and by Erik Hedling, who augments Gray's discussion with an exploration of auratic effects in trailers. Both taking the *Lord of the Rings* franchise as their subjects, Gray focuses principally on how making-of documentaries inscribe the narrative of the fiction onto the participants in and processes of production, thereby

giving an organic, holistic feel to the creation of the text (92), while Hedling discusses the role of the star in projecting an impression of substance, quality and integrity onto a text, using Ian McKellen as his case study (2006: 234). In this section, however, I wish to go further in conceptualising character as a key site on which paratexts perform their production of aura (and coterminously highlight that this is a significant operation of paratexts on and around the franchise character), both in the sense that the presentation and discussion of character is significantly used to confer aura upon the entire fiction, and in the sense that paratexts significantly work to confer aura upon characters. Character, certainly, plays a bigger role in the auratic effects already discussed than has been thus far acknowledged.

A common thread running through Gray's descriptions of the DVD material he studied, that he does not pick up, is that discussions and analyses of characters' design, motivation, behaviour or personality are a primary locus for producing an author of the work; authorial intention and vision are repeatedly asserted relative to the creation and development of character. Questions of labour and craftsmanship are also significantly negotiated on the site of character, particularly with respect to stunts and special effects; in many production documentaries, there is an insistent emphasis both on the physical feats actors perform themselves with minimal mechanical and digital aid, and on both the sophistication of special effects technologies and their products and the embodied, artisanal human input behind them, which together produce a picture of craftsmanship powerful in its constant deferral of contradiction.

The documentary "The Chosen One", meanwhile, again provides a useful illustration of how franchise paratexts may invoke discourses of quality specific to the practice of transmedia franchising, relative to character specifically. In the documentary, Lucas and Christensen repeatedly make reference to and construct the mythic qualities of the character of Anakin Skywalker. Both devote a significant proportion of their interviews to discussing how Anakin fits in to metanarratives within the *Star Wars* diegesis, specifically, of course, the Jedi legends that a "Chosen One" would come who would restore balance to the Force; both also, however, emphasise the cultural presence and significance of Darth Vader as a character following the original trilogy of films, with Christensen in particular insisting on the hold he had and continues to have as a villain on the imaginations of viewers. The function of such commentary is clearly just as

much to "insist on [the] uniqueness, value, and authenticity" of Darth Vader as a character, and by extension *Star Wars* as a work, but here it does so by identifying the character with elements of what is slowly beginning to emerge as the established "gold standard" of large-scale transmedia storytelling. It draws attention, for example, to the depth and expansiveness of the worldbuilding; this thesis has already discussed, meanwhile, the importance of characters' circulation within the collective cultural consciousness within the logics of transmedia storytelling, and I would argue that here and more generally the assertion and production of this is a strategy for conferring aura on a character.

I would suggest also that the way in which paratexts make use of actors to produce an effect of aura goes beyond simply tapping into the operations of the Hollywood star system. Where industry-created paratexts use actors to comment on the characters they play, the result is not only the construction of culturally privileged qualities in the text, but also the presentation of a culturally privileged mode of acting, in other words, discussions of character become a site for the articulation of an auratic quality of craftsmanship from the actors who play them. Using actors as vehicles for explicitly interpretative discourse, for example, presents them as working from an in-depth understanding of their characters' motivations, behaviour, and key personality traits; at the same time, the rhetoric used in such paratextual material, usually full of broad assertions of the what and why of a character, structured to a great degree around the word "is", ensures that this understanding does not appear mechanically analytical and sterile, but intuitive and holistic, thereby tapping as well into privileged values of authenticity in acting. The characteristic formats of industry-created paratexts also invoke a sense of method acting, with all its cultural associations of investment, intensity, and suffering for one's art. As Gray notes, for example, production documentaries put great emphasis on the hardships of location filming (Gray, 2010: 93); they also, however, often work to elide the distinction between actor and character. Cast interviews across the DVDs of the *Harry Potter* franchise attempt on multiple levels to structure a complex identification of cast member and the character they play; an interview with Evanna Lynch, for example, who plays intelligent, creative, eccentric young Luna Lovegood, emphasises the fact that she chose to make for herself the home-made jewellery that Luna sports in the books and films ("Close-Up with the Cast of *Harry Potter*", 2009).

Certain key concepts relative to character, meanwhile, keep recurring throughout this discussion: depth, motivation, psychology. It is here, I would argue, where the most glaring omission of existing work on this issue lies. What has gone so far unacknowledged is that a significant element of that set of "traditional" artistic values that Gray and Hedling understand as invoked in the production of aura is a particular ideal of character, namely, the model of the Forsterian "round" character: psychologically coherent, realist as opposed to stereotypical or archetypal, capable of growth and change, full of the complexities, nuances, and messy contradictions that are held to define "real" minds and subjectivities. Just as much, however, as the media it uses, its transparent commercial concerns, or its attempts at mass appeal, this is potentially a point of much anxiety for transmedia creators; for one thing, much of their work is in the genre of speculative fiction, which, it has been argued, has been as culturally marginalised as it has in part because it does not always conform to realist ideals of characterisation, while the demands of the mode to create heroes, cultural icons, and fictional brands often stand in tension with the creation of "realistic" characters. As such, I would argue it needs to be recognised that a primary mechanism by which the paratexts of a contemporary media product look to confer aura upon it and its characters is by presenting its characters as conforming to the ideal of Forsterian "roundness". This may be seen at play again in the DVD paratexts of *Star Wars*; in discussions of Darth Vader specifically, recurring critical themes include the nuances of his moral compass, the extent to which he does not fit easily into a stereotypical villain's role, the range of factors that make Anakin's development into Vader plausible, from the way in which Palpatine picks out and exploits the flaws and weaknesses in his psychological makeup to the seeds of hubris and ambition present in him even as a young man full of integrity and heroism. This strategy for the production of aura, however, I would argue permeates all the paratextual operations discussed in this section so far, always at least one dimension of any negotiation of the legitimacy, authenticity and value of character.

Circulation

It is principally through paratexts, both institutional and otherwise, that franchise characters are mobilised as brands and "popular heroes", circulated in cultural discourse and the collective consciousness. Transmedia franchise practice may be able to stake out a presence for characters in multiple media channels, but it is through advertisements, fan

appropriations, editorials, reviews, news items or television documentaries about the franchise "phenomenon", that they really come to permeate the media and cultural landscape, entering our banks of allusion and reference points and what Philip Larkin called our imaginative "kitty" (quoted in Coupe, 1997: 11), that shared repertoire of narrative, scenario and archetype on which multiple creators at multiple times through history may draw for inspiration.

Bennett and Woollacott's *Bond and Beyond* (1987) stands as an exemplary exercise in tracing the range of meanings and resonances a franchise character picks up as it is described, cited, parodied, placed into webs of association in paratextual material, though they do not use Genette's terminology or critical framework; thorough and specific, after twenty years it still stands as a model for the analysis of the paratextual life of "popular heroes". However, I do wish here to note one deficiency in their approach, namely, that they do not pay sufficient attention to the *kinds* of textual transformation, reframing and rewriting characters undergo in order to gain and in gaining discursive mobility, in addition to the specific negotiations of meaning they effect. That is, how their fictional representations are fragmented and isolated, or re-edited together, whether they are quoted or paraphrased, re-contextualised or literally overwritten (a common paradigm for a text becoming memetic, for example, is the circulation of a screenshot that a consumer has humorously captioned, which may then be re-captioned and re-circulated by another consumer, and so on *ad infinitum*). Engaging this, I would argue, is key to understanding *how* franchise characters enter into the cultural consciousness, as well as the meanings and resonances they pick up when they do, and how this ties in with other aims and protocols of transmedia franchising.

To return, for example, to the kinds of plot summary, recap and paraphrase discussed earlier: the way they recount and summarise texts bears a strong resemblance to the linguistic forms and operations of consumer *gossip* about a new or past instalment of a franchise, the kind of water-cooler chat in which descriptions, discussions, and re-narrations of a text oscillate between seeming to relate the activities of real-life acquaintances and analysing and commenting on a media product; they also enable and encourage such discourse. Gossip, as Jenkins discusses (2006a: 83-5), is of huge value to franchise producers, not only because it increases brand visibility and awareness, but because of the *way* in which it mobilises characters within cultural discourse and

consumer consciousness. It stages the further integration of an entertainment brand into a consumer's social activities and interpersonal relationships, and in doing so attaches further affective resonance to it for the consumer; it is also a means by which consumers can continue to negotiate, express, and hence sustain their interest and investment in a franchise in between instalments, and by which fan communities and identities are defined and established. Consider also the increasingly common clip show or retrospective, such as those that purport to offer *The 100 Funniest Movie Moments*, or *The 50 Greatest Television Characters*. Such programmes repeatedly isolate and quote moments of franchise texts; in doing so, they fix them in consumers' memories, but also construct them *as* memorable, by surrounding their presentation with a range of talking heads remembering and repeating them. They also stage a multifaceted process of remembering in the consumer who is watching, the act of quotation inducing a moment of reliving the initial consumption experience, resituating the quoted point in the rest of the franchise encounter, reflecting on what moments were personally most memorable or most enjoyable. They thus work to stimulate or manufacture *nostalgia*, again a valuable response for franchise producers. Nostalgia can provide a mechanism for justifying and motivating continued consumption of a franchise from childhood into adulthood, as well as representing a further intertwining of entertainment brand, everyday life, and identity.

Paratextual Fictionality

So far, this thesis has followed Gray and Genette in retaining a conceptual opposition between fictional and paratextual textuality, while collapsing the operational distinction between "primary" and "secondary" textuality. In arguing that the critical and analytical heuristic of the transmedia archive should include both, it has nevertheless assumed the fictional and the paratextual to be different and distinguishable categories of material, distinct in how they produce fictional meaning, and hence how their operations in the fictional encounter should be analysed: fictional material signifies, represents; paratextual material inflects, interprets, pre-constructs and reconstructs. In many respects, however, the protocols of transmedia franchise practice problematise this distinction. Chapter One has already discussed, for example, the fact that transmedia franchising delineates unstably and unclearly product from advertisement, merchandise from narrative and diegetic extension, marketing campaign from entertainment opportunity. Cross-platform logics and transmedia thinking that do not always differentiate between kinds of extended

consumption commodify paratextual material, turning paratexts such as making-of documentaries and fact files into franchise products in themselves; they position it as entertainment in its own right, and as another way of remaining immersed in the franchise world. The BBC's *Doctor Who* website, for example, discursively constructs watching interviews with writer Steven Moffat about upcoming episodes, or reading summaries of the series so far, as stepping back over the fictional threshold, framing it as finding out "what happens next?" (BBC, 2011b) and "find[ing] out all about the Doctor's latest adventures" (BBC, 2011c). As Chapter One has also touched on, meanwhile, the scale of transmedia creative projects, the scope of their worldbuilding and the complexities of their narratives, are such that extra fragments of text, worldbuilding details or bits of a character's backstory that never made it into a fictional instalment, frequently find their way into paratexts.

As such, transmedia franchising may be seen to breed not only paratexts, but texts that are ambivalent, shifting and hybrid in their register and functions, quasi-fictional, quasi-paratextual. Many franchises' transmedia strategies, for example, include the development of Alternate Reality Games. ARGs are part role-playing game, part scavenger hunt; they unfold in real-time, and involve moving across media, through cyberspace, and between real-world locations to play out a narrative scenario and usually to unravel some kind of mystery. A largely web-based ARG was organised around the *Doctor Who* spin-off *Torchwood*, for example, which involved viewers in hunting for clues and solving puzzles across a collection of websites presented as the online presence for various organisations within the franchise universe. They are immersive, interactive fictional experiences, but as Henrik Örnebring notes, by the terms of industry logic they are also fundamentally marketing tools, aimed first and foremost at "generating buzz and attention for the 'original' media texts" (2007: 450). The encyclopaedias and fact files discussed in Chapter One, meanwhile, often seem to have one foot in the fictional world and one foot out of it; they present fictional information, but the modal operators implicit behind their statements are ambiguous and dual, at once and by turns fictional ("in an imagined world, it is true that") and paratextual ("this media product tells us that in an imagined world, it is true that"). The plot summaries and paraphrases discussed above are similarly bi-vocal. In linguistic terms, a paraphrase of an utterance signifies on two planes, on the same plane as the original utterance, in this case, within a fictional context, and on an interpretative level; recaps and plot summaries function both as an alternative

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form of experiencing the initial fictional act of representation, and to read that particular stretch of text for consumers. Similar slippages between and imbrications of fictional and real world, furthermore, and of the fictional and the paratextual, are often evident in DVD bonus materials. On the DVD of *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, for example, the different fictional and paratextual material the DVD offers is accessed through exploring different rooms of a generic spaceship or space station. Each room is presented as a loop of filmed footage approximately 30 seconds long, and usually includes one or more franchise characters performing some kind of action within the room; the fictional and paratextual material is framed within screens on intradiegetic computer or control panel interfaces. These menu screen animations effect a möbius loop of shifting between textualities, impossible to resolve into the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic: they frame fictional material, announce fictional material, contain and package fictional material, diagrammatise and map fictional material; at the same time, they are fictional material, consistently representing a fictional world and signifying within a fictional context. Franchise characters present and watch their own fictions; the consumer is sutured into the fictional world to watch representations of it. The making-of documentaries accompanying the *Harry Potter* films on DVD, meanwhile, frequently interview actors and directors against a backdrop of the film sets, but without any cameras or equipment to be seen that would present them as sets rather than as representations of a fictional world; the interviews are presented, in other words, as though they are taking place at Hogwarts. This effect is only enhanced by soundtracking the documentaries with key motifs from the films' scores. The deleted scenes, storyboards, concept art that so frequently turn up on DVDs are fictional in register and modality, but at the same time, stand as descriptions or narratives of process and method.

Something of this ambiguity is reflected in the critical idiom of existing studies of paratexts. There is, indeed, a degree of conceptual slipperiness even in more general work on paratexts. Brooker's metaphor, for example, of "textual overflow" does not present paratextual and fictional material as discrete, but rather implies a continuity between them; Kernan's work on trailers, meanwhile, returns compulsively to a phrasing in which the concept of promotional discourse both pulls against and blurs into the concept of narrative representation, a framing of trailers as both "selling and telling" a story (2004: 8). Talking about television specifically, Pavel Skopal describes DVD extras and promotional websites as "'narrativised' elaboration of the text – [that allows] the

narrative arc of the show (and the narrative reception of the show) to 'continue' outside the show itself", a conceptualisation that tries to sustain a distinction between "show" and "not show", but ultimately separates paratextuality from fictionality only with scare quotes (2007: 188). Even the term "paratext" itself, as Genette notes in a paratext of his own, involves a prefix that ambivalently asserts position and relation, signifying "something simultaneously this side of a boundary line, threshold, or margin, and also beyond it" (1997b: 1). As Gray's work demonstrates, however, engagement with transmedia franchise paratexts is particularly marked by shifting and troublesome terms and definitions; as the introduction to this chapter noted, Gray categorises some types of franchise extension as paratextual that I would consider fictional, such as videogame adaptations, toys and action figures.

This instability of the concept of "paratextual" as a register of textuality, however, and hence of "paratextuality" as a form of intertextuality, relative to transmedia franchising is rarely directly confronted. I thus wish to bring to light fully here that reading characters at the boundaries and margins of the franchise archive in no small part involves exploring material that resists straightforward categorisation as either fictional or paratextual, that is defined by movement between the fictional and the paratextual in its register, presentation and functions, and that therefore interacts with the production of meaning and effect in complex and often critically unintelligible ways. The duality and liminality of this material may even be directly exploited in relation to the overarching aims and protocols of franchise practice. In this final section of this chapter, I now look to explain and demonstrate this further through an extended case study of *The J. K. Rowling Official Site*,[34] Rowling's own primary presence on the web, as a problematic paratext of the *Harry Potter* franchise.

Http://www.jkrowling.com/ is the first result when Rowling's name is Googled, listed on the search engine under the title "J. K. Rowling Official Site – Harry Potter and More", and second only to Wikipedia for the search term "Harry Potter". The front page of the site is a Flash interface designed to resemble a writer's desk, cluttered with stationery, notes, and household paraphernalia. When the mouse cursor is hovered over some of these objects, they shift slightly, emit a flurry of sparkles (some, in addition, emit an accentual blue glow), and a small text box appears alongside them, revealing them to

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[34] Homepage available at: <http://www.jkrowling.com/> [Accessed 20 July 2011].

be hyperlinks or interactives. About half of these objects are representational: two closed newspapers (one of them red-topped) that "unfold" when clicked over the desk interface to present "News" and "Rumours"; a ring-bound notebook containing "Everything you might want to know" about Rowling and the Potter franchise that may likewise be opened and its pages turned; a desk calendar that users may flip through to see "Wizards of the Month"; a gilt-lettered, leather-bound book that opens to display fragments of autobiography from Rowling and accompanying photos; an exercise book in which any Easter Eggs industrious users find are recorded. The other half are portals to new interfaces, similar in design and operation to the desk: a bulldog clip that transports users to a trophy cabinet full of links to fan sites that have caught Rowling's attention; a hairbrush that takes users to a noticeboard on which is pinned "Extra Stuff", "bits and pieces from my notes", as Rowling describes this content, "that you might find interesting"; a pair of spectacles that serves as a gateway to a bookcase on which links to agents, publishers, publicity officers, Warner Bros.' Official *Harry Potter* Site, and Rowling-endorsed charities are shelved; a pencil sharpener that takes users to a bin filled with screwed-up pieces of paper, which unfurl when clicked to show debunked rumours about Rowling and the franchise; a small identification card that opens a Wizards' Ordinary Magic and Basic Aptitude Test or W.O.M.B.A.T., a quiz allowing users to test their knowledge of Harry's world. Fitting into neither category neatly is the cluster of paperclips that, when clicked, cause a handful of envelopes and some owl feathers to fall onto the desk interface, which serve as portals to Rowling's answers to Frequently Asked Questions.

The textual content the site houses is a mixture of information *about* the franchise, Warner Bros., Rowling and her creative process, and quasi-fictional statements, many of which articulate details of plot, characterisation and worldbuilding not supplied by any other part of the franchise archive. These statements seem at once to signify in a fictional context, as acts of representation within the fictional reality of the *Harry Potter* franchise, and as an author's explanation of her creation: where she offers such "Random Facts about the Weasley Family" as

> Before her marriage, Mrs. Weasley was Molly Prewett...Arthur Weasley was one
> of three brothers. Ginny (full name Ginevra, not Virginia), is the first girl to be
> born into the Weasley clan for several generations (Rowling, n.d.(c))[,]

she speaks in a voice that is somewhere between commentator and narrator; her explanation of "what exactly happened when Voldemort used the Avada Kedavra curse on Harry in the forest [at the end of the seventh book]", including comments like "Voldemort violated deep laws of magic he did not understand", and "they have each been given weapons and safeguards, but the power of these objects and past happenings lie in how they are understood" (Rowling, n.d.(d)), is poised on a thin line between fictional exposition and paratextual interpretation. The website also contains some charts and schema, such as the following map of the marriages and children of a handful of central characters:

Third-party copyrighted material redacted: screencap showing the family trees of the youngest generation of Weasleys and some of Harry's other schoolmates, taken from http://www.jkrowling.com on 21st July 2011.
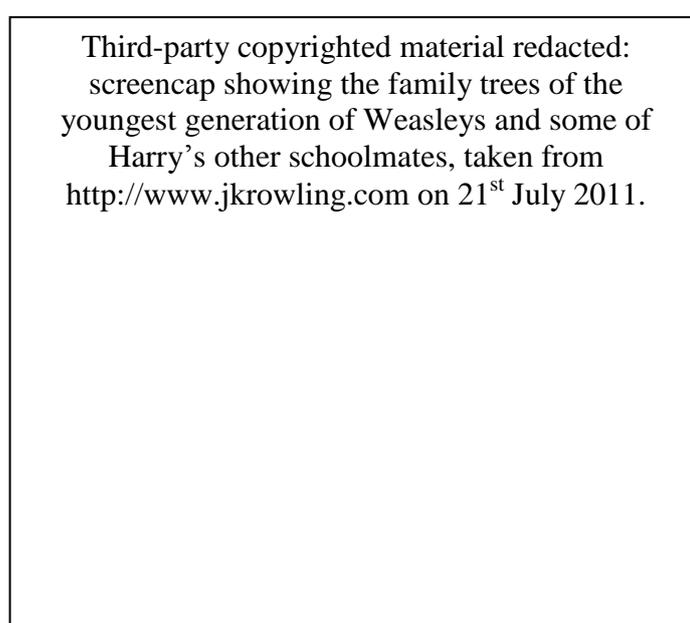
Figure 6: Screencap from http://www.jkrowling.com/, obtained 21 July 2011.

This family tree, again, delivers information about the *Potter* universe not disclosed elsewhere, but is also a species of "behind-the-scenes" footage, a glimpse of Rowling's working notes.

There are clear similarities between this content and the kind of encyclopaedic forms, discourses and products identified in Chapter One as common and significant types of franchise proliferation. Like the tie-ins *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Quidditch Through the Ages*, *The J. K. Rowling Official Site* represents the world of Potter in terms of *information*, statements of fact, vital statistics, records and

chronologies; the following, for example, is a typical entry in the "Wizard of the Month" archive:

> Mnemone Radford
>
> 1562-1649
>
> Developed Memory Modifying Charms.
> First Ministry of Magic Obliviator. (Rowling, n. d.(e))

It speaks to a completist and schematic impulse in presenting and understanding characters, providing middle names, dates of birth, the materials from which characters' wands are made, the House into which they were Sorted as Hogwarts students. Centrally, therefore, *The J. K. Rowling Official Site* may be understood as engaging the epistemophilia that Chapter One has suggested franchise entertainment produces and appeals to, and its corollary pleasures and desires of mastery over both the fictional universe and the textual archive. The marginal, para-textual positioning of its content, however, amplifies these pleasures. *The J. K. Rowling Official Site* is not scripted into the franchise experience through branding, advertising, and "migratory cues" (Long, 2007: 42) as the *Potter* films or videogames are; moreover, much of the website's content (in particular, the W.O.M.B.A.T. trivia quizzes) is only available for a short period of time. Consumers have to be sufficiently invested, motivated and transliterate enough to find and monitor Rowling's website for themselves, or in touch with a community of fans and able to draw on their collective intelligence. The website thus structures not only the pleasure of new and obscure worldbuilding knowledge in itself, but the pleasure of mastery over the franchise's subtler transmedia logics, and the chance to demonstrate and improve subcultural capital, to display the qualities of a "true fan". Its interface design, meanwhile, both redoubles these pleasures, and affords them a further dimension. Not only is the consumer required to navigate the media landscape to reach *The J. K. Rowling Official Site*, to access some of its content, she is required to solve puzzles, to figure out how to interact with the site interface to persuade it to reveal its secrets. The competencies involved in this tend to be similar to those involved in playing a videogame: working out which parts of the interface are interactive; ascertaining sequences of inputs; learning, in other words, the rules of the interface as virtual space. To take part in the September 2006 W.O.M.B.A.T exam, for example, the consumer would firstly have had to monitor the website closely and often enough to notice a

mysterious door appear in the interface design, then work out the following sequence of actions:

> 1. Click the door handle to open the door.
> 2. Click on the candle to light it.
> 3. Click on the dark red quill.
> 4. Click on the WOMBAT paper.
> 5. Click on the clover at the bottom left of the desk. It will turn into a key.
> 6. Drag this key to the desk drawer - the top of the key must touch the drawer.
> 7. The drawer will open, revealing the WOMBAT part two exam.
> 8. Click the hourglass on the desk. (MuggleNet, 2006)

Again, the website provides an opportunity to exercise and display mastery, both for personal satisfaction and to other fans, but also to draw on, demonstrate and synthesise multiple media competencies.

Like the content they house, however, the graphical spaces presented are hybrid and paradoxical, spaces in which intradiegetic objects and extradiegetic objects co-exist and interrelate. The bookcase of links interleaves spines bearing the titles *My Favourite Spells* and *Ancient Runes Made Easy* with *Wuthering Heights*, *Animal Farm* and *Robinson Crusoe*; the litter on the desk and around the rubbish bin includes empty Drooble's Best Blowing Gum wrappers, a sweet from Harry's world. Rowling's replies to letters from fans are stamped as returned by owl post; the "Rumours" newspaper contains an advert for intradiegetic newsletter *The Quibbler*. The design of the portal objects echoes the Portkeys (magical teleportation devices) of the Potterverse, in the blue glow that surrounds them, the fact that they are unremarkable, random household objects (and thus unlikely, as the novels explain, to be accidentally touched and activated), and, of course, their function. In each interface object, these two frames draw on and play off each other to reinforce and create meaning in each frame. The advert for *The Quibbler*, known in Harry's world for fanciful theories and outlandish speculation, resonates fairly straightforwardly with the "Rumours" it accompanies; the Drooble's Gum wrappers that fill the rubbish bin may be read as working a little more subtly, in the light of the fact that a plethora of convoluted fan theories (some even involving advanced cryptography) sprang up following the release of *Order of the Phoenix* about the significance of the gum wrappers pressed on character Neville Longbottom by his mother. Familiarity with the typical appearance of Portkeys in the Potterverse marks the portal objects in the desk interface, ironically drawing users' attention and mouse to them. Digitality and virtuality

both produce an effect of and are coded as magic; the interplay of nods to the imagery and structures of Potterverse magic, evocative aural and visual flourishes – bursts and dusts of light, flurries of tinkling chimes, motion blur and spatial distortions – and the way the site interface materialises and dematerialises text and images turns hyperlinks into fantastic portals, presents new screens or interface objects as conjured and apparitional. This further interacts with and inflects the site's negotiations of epistemophilia and mastery. It works, for example, to assert and construct the diegetic information the site houses as secrets of the fictional world, but also likewise positions *extra*diegetic information, presenting notes on discarded titles, links to real-world websites, news about new *Potter* projects and releases, as accessible through innocuous-looking Portkeys, tucked away on the bookshelves of Hogwarts library. It also means that consumers are effectively accessing information *about* the franchise by acting and thinking as though they are *in* the franchise universe. Like the rhetoric of the *Doctor Who* website discussed above, these operations together construct engagement with paratextual material as continued immersion in the world of the franchise, and as part of fan-dom. Mastery over extradiegetic information is connected and conflated with mastery over the intradiegetic, and reading around and about the franchise thus scripted into fannish engagement.

The site stages movement between and imbrication of Harry's world and our own on multiple levels. From the first point of encounter, the site gestures at this traversal and blurring of the boundary between fictional and non-fictional space, its Google listing text moving associatively across them:

> Jump aboard the Hogwart[*sic*] Express to come on a fantastic adventure at the official JK Rowling website. See what's on my desk. Read all about me, JK Rowling, ...[35]

The paratexts of its (quasi-)paratextual content, meanwhile, the headings, labels, and notes of preface, also work both to jumble and juxtapose and to align and confuse the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic. Frequently Asked Questions marked as "About the Books", for example, include both "Did you actually write the information that ended up on the Famous Wizard cards?" and "What is Draco Malfoy's Patronus?", while both biographical notes on the Weasley family and discussions of real people on whom

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[35] Result obtained on 21 July 2011 upon entering "J. K. Rowling" as a search term into http://www.google.co.uk/

Rowling based her creations are marked as "Extra Stuff" about "Characters". The umbrella categories that organise the site's material thus rhetorically conflate the extradiegetic and the intradiegetic, drawing both into their definitions of "book" and "character". The resulting sense that the fictional world of the franchise limns and interjects into the world of the user is, I would argue, a key operation of this material, insofar as it resonates with the heart of the *Harry Potter* fantasy. Central to Rowling's worldbuilding, and no doubt to the hold the franchise has on the imagination of so many children, is the idea that there is a world of magic in the cracks, corners and shadows of the "real" world, that a derelict department store houses wards of people being treated for dragon burns, potion poisoning and spell damage, there is a platform in between Nine and Ten at King's Cross Station if you know how to get to it, and the oddly dressed man walking down the street in front of you could be a wizard. On Rowling's website, users can participate more directly in an illusion of crossing between their own world and Harry's, turning the pages of his textbooks, examining the Hogwarts trophy cabinet, and using magical artefacts, and thereby amplify and enact one of the key pleasures of the fiction.

Another main function of *The J. K. Rowling Official Site* as part of the *Harry Potter* franchise archive may be identified as constructing or modelling ideal conceptualisations and relational configurations of creator, text, and consumer. The site, for example, singles out and marks some fan sites, and thereby by extension some types of fan activity, with authorial approval; the latest winner of Rowling's Fan Site Award is the *Harry Potter Alliance*,[36] described on its homepage as "an army of fans, activists, nerdfighters, teenagers, wizards and muggles dedicated to fighting for social justice with the greatest weapon we have – love." In its "F.A.Q" section, it also presents and legitimises a particular paradigm of fan-text-author interaction, of the fan asking the author questions about both the franchise and its world. In this paradigm, consumers are ostensibly invited to participate in the development and extension of the franchise, yet the franchise universe and multitext are simultaneously implied as always already complete, the boundaries of the franchise archive controlled. An image of the ideal fan emerges from this part of the site, as a close but uncritical reader, immersed rather than analytical, primarily interested in diegetic minutiae and narrative detail, *asking* the franchise creator about gaps and silences in the text rather than filling them from her own imagination (or

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[36]Homepage available at: <http://thehpalliance.org/> [Accessed 21st July 2011].

with her own creative interventions), recognising J. K. Rowling as a privileged authority on the facts of the Potter universe.

The hybrid textuality and registers of the site, I would argue, contribute to this work. The interleaving described of fictional and non-fictional space and objects in the interface design, for example, reinforces and adds another dimension to the process of legitimisation enacted by the "Fan Site Awards". *The Harry Potter Alliance*'s "trophy" is depicted on a shelf alongside plaques and cups bearing the names of characters such as Lily Evans, Sirius Black, and Tom Riddle, inscribed as awarded for services to Hogwarts School. The *Alliance*'s fan activity is thus presented as authorised sufficiently that it may be *brought within* the franchise universe, allowed not only past the policed borders of the franchise archive but into the imaginative world of the franchise itself. This form of validation also, however, further defines legitimate fan response, as activity and creativity *in the spirit* of the franchise, that could as easily be an authorised extension, as opposed to critical reworkings, subversive readings, fan productions vastly different in tone and maturity of content; this is echoed in Rowling's comments on the winning site, which describe it as "really[...]exemplif[ying] the values for which Dumbledore's Army fought in the books." Both the visual and verbal rhetoric of the site, meanwhile, construct an idea of Rowling as author as having one foot in Harry's world, and one in our own. This construct of Rowling receives and replies to post by owl, chews Drooble's gum as she works, reads spell books as well as Dorothy L. Sayers; she speaks and writes, in that quasi-fictional, quasi-encyclopaedic, pseudo-factual register, as an intimate of Harry, Hermione, the Weasleys, the Malfoys, as an expert in magical history and theory, like one of the writers of Harry's textbooks. She is discursively and visually constructed more as an interlocutor than an author, a spokesperson for the franchise world and our gateway into it; this works again to position her as a privileged source of information about the *Potter* universe. At the same time, the multivocality of the site's content, its shifting and slipping between narration, description, commentary and interpretation, reasserts and reinforces her power as an author; when she writes in this hybrid voice, she comes across as able to speak intradiegetic truths into being, and moreover, to have control over both creation and interpretation and collapse the line between them, to turn authorial commentary into diegetic fact and canonical text. This multivocality also, furthermore, contributes to the impression described above of the franchise universe and multitext being always already complete. In her fictional-factual statements, Rowling seems to be

offering as answers to fans' questions information about the *Potter* world already known *and already written*; each seems at once a piece of knowledge already amassed of a world already mapped, and a fragment of a text already written to describe it.

Emerging from all this analysis, finally, is a sense that one of the primary effects and operations of *The J. K. Rowling Official Site*'s confusion and synthesis of fictionality and paratextuality is to encourage consumers to engage with the franchise world and characters as if they were real. As noted above, Rowling seems to speak of them as if they were; Chapter One has already discussed, meanwhile, that encyclopaedic representation produces an effect of reality, which this site's quasi-encyclopaedic discourse enhances by juxtaposing and bringing together under the same information categories statements of intradiegetic fact and extratextual information. The W.O.M.B.A.T. trivia quizzes, however, perhaps illustrate this aim and operation best. Their framing echoes the examinations Harry takes as a Hogwarts student, similarly named (Harry's exams are O.W.L.s, Ordinary Wizarding Levels, and N.E.W.T.s, Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests) and identically graded (from O, Outstanding, to T, Troll); the consumer's knowledge of the franchise archive is thus translated and elided into a Hogwarts student's knowledge of *Potter*'s magical world, the actual consumer's reading into a fictional student's learning. At the same time, however, the site repeatedly makes visible the creative process behind the *Potter* franchise, reasserting it as work of fiction, and through a series of suggestive visual metaphors, insistently works to draw glimpses of process into the franchise archive and even turn them into products themselves. The link to the "F.A.Q" section of the site, for example, is represented as a collection of paper clips, positioning the content therein, which includes statements of influence, chapter and book titles considered and rejected, and updates on the progress of writing *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, in addition to fictional information, as attached and appended to the fictional texts; in the "Rubbish Bin" section, the user can smooth out screwed-up pieces of paper to read debunked bits and pieces of fan speculation; the design of the page of "Extra Stuff" structures an effect for users of pulling, for example, Rowling's original plans for Hermione's surname, and information about editorial cuts made to the books, from Rowling's own noticeboard and being able to consume them after all. In this, *The Official J. K. Rowling Site* stands not only as a useful illustration of the instability of the distinction between the fictional and the paratextual in transmedia franchising, but also as an example of what is perhaps a defining paradox in the nature of franchise

entertainment, produced by its close integration of paratextual material into the fictional encounter: that it is at once a highly immersive form of fiction, and a highly reflexive one, repeatedly drawing attention to the act of its creation, and implicating narratives of production, commentary and interpretation, drafts, plans, material cut and abandoned, in its processes of fictional meaning.

Beyond the Archive

Having thus explored the margins of the transmedia archive, however, this thesis now looks to make its final and furthest movement beyond "the text itself", and turns to reading the transmedia franchise character through the lens of the activities of its audiences. As Chapter Six will demonstrate, transmedia franchising is characteristically interactive entertainment, and landscapes of media convergence characterised by active, participatory consumption; franchise characters cannot be fully understood without considering what consumers do with and to them.

Chapter Six

Producerly Characters

In a 2006 white paper for the MacArthur Foundation, Jenkins et al suggest that "more than one-half of all [American] teens have created media content, and roughly one-third of teens who use the internet have shared content they produced." (2006: 3) This they position as speaking to the fact that media convergence culture is fundamentally a *participatory* one, that is, its networks, channels and technologies encourage and enable the production and distribution of amateur media content alongside institutional output. Using YouTube, WordPress, MySpace, more and more people are spending their free time doing the work of professional journalists, artists and producers, generating comment on current affairs, reviews of and reactions to recent films or television programmes, video shorts, or games console hacks. They may even reach comparable audiences; it is possible, as Philip Napoli notes,

> for homemade videos produced by individuals sitting at their computers to be watched by hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people worldwide via YouTube, or for a song produced by an unsigned band to attract a similarly large listenership via online distribution. (2010: 510)

Growing up around the gated communities of the creative industries are spaces both online and offline offering "relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and[...]informal mentorship where what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices" (Jenkins et al, 2006: 3), from writing groups to discussion boards to collaborative encyclopaedias. The boundaries of the category of the media producer are expanding and collapsing, to the point, Mark Deuze suggests, of "challeng[ing] consensual notions of what it means to work in the cultural industries." (2007: 244)

Much of the content produced in these participatory cultures builds on and with what may be referred to, following Napoli, as the products of "institutional communicators" (2010: 510). Appropriation of professional writing, film, television, games or music is a key modality of this grassroots production, remix, collage, and transformative response key genres; just as "beginning artists often undergo an

apprenticeship, during which they try on for size the styles and techniques of other, more established artists" (Jenkins et al, 2006: 32), members of participatory cultures often create out of others' creations, using action figures to film parodies of famous movies, editing film and television clips together with music to create new narratives, ironically repurposing brand imagery, writing continuations of beloved stories, or generating short films from gameplay footage ("machinima"). These cultural trends towards participation are thus not only challenging established understandings of the media producer, they are also redefining the media consumer. The tendency to conceptualise media audiences as passive has largely passed with developments in reception theory and the study of mass communication; contemporary audiences, however, are not only cognitively active, they are creative and productive. In media landscapes that support participation and amateur creativity, consuming and engaging with institutional communications can and does involve discussion and dissemination of reactions, opinions and interpretations in large, trans-national reception communities, taking texts apart and reconfiguring them, and spinning new creations off from them. Audiences, in convergence culture, are made up of "produsers" (Bruns, 2007) or "prosumers" (Toffler, 1980), individuals and groups who generate media content about and through their media consumption, who respond to institutional media products by producing texts of their own.

Characters specifically are primary loci for consumer (re)activity and creativity. Jenkins observes that much of the content fans produce in response to institutional properties revolves around "characters and their relationships" (Jenkins, 2008); this is echoed by Jones, who identifies characters as fans' "points of entry" (2002: 85) as creators into the imaginative worlds of others, and Coppa, who theorises fan fiction as centrally involving the "direct[ion] of bodies in space" (2006: 235), and defines vidding as an art of character perspective and point-of-view (interviewed by Walker, 2008). More ethnographic studies of participatory cultures bear these observations out. Bronwyn Williams (2008) illustrates that images of fictional characters play a key part in the collages of pop culture content that users of social networking sites create on their profile pages to construct their online identities; Baym's (1998) study of online discussion groups devoted to soap operas and Jenkins's (2006b) work on similar groups devoted to the work of David Lynch both illustrate that speculation about and dissection of characters' personality, behaviour and motivations make up much of the activity that goes on in them.

Moreover, the protocols of transmedia storytelling particularly facilitate and encourage "prosumption". As Matt Hills notes, the "richness and depth" of hyperdiegetic fictional worlds "stimulat[es] creative speculation" (2002: 138) as a mode of audience response, motivating, supporting, and even requiring extensive and communal after-the-fact dissection of plot, worldbuilding, character psychology and behaviour, and always implying that there are more stories to be told and representations to be made of their virtual realities. Chapter One has already discussed how franchise multitexts present themselves as archontic, as repositories or archives "forever open to new entries, new artifacts, new contents" (Derecho, 2006: 64) (though officially, of course, open only to certain contributions and contributors); they also foreground and normalise extension, revision, and remediation of characters, settings or strands of narrative. Logics of franchising and synergy provide audiences with raw materials they can stitch together into their own texts, from replica costumes and weapons to soundtrack CDs. At the heart of transmedia entertainment is an aesthetic of immersion, both in the sense that transmedia practice works to surround consumers and fill channels with media products, and in the sense that transmedia fictions "are constructed, marketed, and used by fans not as 'texts' to be 'read' but as cosmologies to be entered, experienced, and imaginatively interacted with." (Jones, 2002: 84)

Transmedia works, and by extension characters within them, may therefore be further conceptualised as typically "prosumed", as presented to characteristically active, productive audiences, who "read" them through appropriation, remix, cut-and-paste, and collective debate and dissection, but also as *producerly*. The idea of the producerly text comes from John Fiske, who developed the concept as an addition to Barthes's categories of readerly and writerly works. In *Television Cultures*, Fiske rejects the idea implicit in Barthes's work that passive, uncritical reading of closed, didactic (readerly) texts and decentred, ambivalent, plural reading of ambiguous, unstable avant-garde (writerly) works together form a neat binary opposition; he suggests that some texts instead may "rel[y] on discursive competencies that the viewer already possesses", but nevertheless produce a reading subject "that is involved in the process of representation rather than a victim of it", and invite engagement that is "participat[ory] and producti[ve]" (1987: 95). As Jason Mittell notes, the level of participation and production Fiske may have been imagining when explicating this concept may be far removed from the kinds of audience activity possible in and supported by contemporary media landscapes, but as a

"description of textual engagement", it "does not read as dated in the least" (2010b). Certainly, it usefully articulates the sort of "reading" demanded and encouraged by transmedia storytelling: navigating complex inter- and intra-textual connections; imagining and speculating about the fictional world beyond its textual representation; responding by creating new texts. Coterminously, it resonates with the picture of the franchise character as fictional object sketched in Chapter One – its conception and situation rich in detail; its textual representation filled with gaps both strategic and unavoidable – and brings out that in this, it invites and stimulates creative, participatory consumption.

Theorising the transmedia character as producerly positions the critic as well as the consumer. The implication in Barthes's work, for example, is that writerly texts invite not only writerly engagement, but also writerly criticism, that is, criticism that is plural and deconstructive in its analysis, sensitive to ambiguity, tension, and contradiction; likewise, transmedia characters may therefore be read by critics as by the producerly audience, looking for and finding meaning in what is poachable, extensible and potential about them in a similar way as would the fan fiction writer or remixer. This is not to say that critical study of franchise characters should necessarily adopt the idioms, discursive forms, and implicit epistemologies or interpretative activity among participatory audiences,[37] but rather to say that theories of fandom, fannish reading strategies and fan creativity may be usefully appropriated as theories of the source material they engage, and lenses through which to analyse it, in particular, to read the significance and operations of hermeneutic gaps in franchise texts in terms of how they encourage participatory consumption. That is, the producerly qualities of franchise characters may be seen in the mirror of what participatory cultures do with them and want from them. However, participation in contemporary media landscapes is not only something that audiences do to or with institutional products, nor are the producerly qualities of these products simply read into them. Participation, as Jenkins argues, is a "governing concept" (2006a: 169) of *relations* and exchange between industry, text and audience. In *Audience Evolution* (2011), Napoli elaborates how what he calls "audience autonomy" is providing institutional communicators with unprecedented amounts of information about consumer exposure, engagement, and behaviour relative to their products; when they publicly

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[37] Although Jenkins (2008) makes a compelling case for the value of synthesising fan practices of "creative reading" with more traditional critical methods in the teaching and study of literature at primary and secondary education level.

disseminate the content they generate in response to a text, by leaving reviews on Amazon, making blog posts or tweeting about a week's television viewing, consumers are making a wealth of market data freely available to media institutions. These institutions are increasingly realising that participatory culture can thus be monetised, that user-generated content can be mined for market trends and fed back into future products, that the desire fostered by and expressed in participatory culture to feel like "[consumers'] contributions matter" (Jenkins et al, 2006: 3) can be channelled into organised, commercialised interactivity; they are realising that

> audiences today engage in a wide range of activities that assist in the marketing of products, ranging from self-producing commercials to engaging in online word-of-mouth and endorsement (via blogs, tweets, etc.), to integrating brand messages into their own communication platforms[.] (Napoli, 2011: 82-3)

"In a sublime symmetry," Jeff Watson remarks, "the media industry itself now sees its economic salvation as being dependent on its ability to interpret and remix the productive output of fans." (2010) Participation is thus something increasingly *invited* and scripted by institutional communicators and communications (Ross, 2008: 21), often overtly. Consumers may be given the chance to affect the outcome of a programme through phone votes or online polls, as in *Big Brother* or *The X Factor*; direct channels of communication (blogs, discussion forums) may be opened up with a show's producers (*Babylon 5* creator J. Michael Straczynski, for example, regularly engaged with fans of the franchise through Usenet discussion groups, soliciting and often incorporating feedback). The concept of participatory culture expresses not a one-way dynamic but a feedback loop, an interaction between institutional and grass-roots media production.

Working in a long-form, serial mode, transmedia creators in particular can capitalise on participation. Creating spaces around franchise products for consumer discussion and activity can help sustain interest in and awareness of the franchise in between instalments; tracing and taking onboard shifts in audience reactions and opinions as a franchise unfolds can help producers negotiate with the attention and affections of an audience that is both ageing with the franchise, and always picking up newcomers. As entertainment organised by branding, meanwhile, transmedia storytelling can profit from the work done by participatory cultures to spread and circulate institutional content. Much transmedia practice, therefore, is aimed at structuring audience activity and participation. Many of the cross-platform movements a franchise makes will be into

forms and media that enable interaction, immersion, and play, from websites hosting discussion forums and polls, to games both digital and table-top, to theme park rides and museum exhibits. Its creators may directly solicit feedback and content from consumers, inviting them to contribute to the shaping of the fiction; as Chapter Five discussed, since the publication of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, for example, J. K. Rowling has been further elaborating the Potterverse in dialogue with questions from fans, while the makers of the *Lord of the Rings* film adaptations (and the franchise that was developed around them) interacted extensively with fans and focus groups during the production of the films (Thompson, 2003).

Reading the franchise character as producerly, therefore, is not only a question of reading it as a stimulus for participatory culture; it also requires understanding it as a site through which and on which audience participation is deliberately structured and invited, and as *generated* through and shaped by interactions between producers, consumers, and texts. This provides the focus for this final chapter of this thesis. In the discussion that follows, my aim is to elaborate critical theory and practice that engages the franchise character at points of convergence, dialogue, and interface between producer, text, and participatory consumer. In the first part of the chapter, I identify a range of key types of participatory engagement that transmedia franchises may attempt to structure, discussing their value relative to other aims and logics of transmedia franchising, and the cross-platform movements a franchise may make to exploit them. I theorise the role of character in these strategies, engaging the specific kinds of producerly and interactive representations of character particular participatory media offer. The second part of the chapter focuses on explicating some dynamics of feedback and exchange between participatory cultures (and the media texts they generate) and institutional communicators, and how franchise characters may be read as products of them.

Modalities of Participation

In 2001, Kurt Lancaster published a book-length study of some of sf television series *Babylon 5*'s transmedia proliferations, focusing on how said texts admit and structure performance, participation, and immersion for viewers. The monograph describes and analyses what Lancaster theorises as "the scripts, the set pieces, the scenarios" and the "blueprints" (2001: xxiv, xxviii) for participatory engagement with the *Babylon 5* universe, that is, objects and media of play, interaction, and performance like toys,

games, and interactive environments. It examines how aspects of the *Babylon 5* universe are presented in texts from trading card and role-playing games to interactive CD-ROMs, "the potential mise-en-scenes arising from [them]" (xxiv), and uses performance theory to discuss the specific forms and effects of participation they produce.

These movements of Lancaster's single case study provide a model for the more general, theoretical account of franchise characters as sites of participation I look to elaborate in the first part of this chapter. In place of the particular *Babylon 5* archive that Lancaster engages, however, I wish to begin by identifying a range of types of transmedia proliferation that may be seen to play and to have played a significant role in transmedia practice, not least because of the possibilities for immersive, active, participatory engagement with characters they offer.

1. Action figures: Jason Bainbridge, echoing Jenkins, argues that the action figure is "one of the most potent (if overlooked) symbols of media convergence" (2010: 838), emblematic of contemporary trends towards synergy, franchising, entertainment branding, and participatory culture. Since long before the current ascendancy of franchise entertainment, action figures have been both common forms of transmedia proliferation, generated almost reflexively to accompany major media properties, and catalysts for transmedia storytelling; as Bainbridge documents, multitexts comprising comics, television programmes, even films have grown up over the years around action figures like G. I. Joe, He-Man, and the Transformers, surrounding them with "rich and complex modern mythology" and "breaking them away from their role as [purely] 'toy as object'" (Bainbridge, 2010: 837). They are certainly powerful tools for franchise producers. Through them, children's imaginative play can be branded, and their homes and gardens imaginatively remapped as the terrain of the franchise universe, puddles translated into oceans, bookshelves into treacherous precipices, beanbags into far-off planets; as Chapter One has noted, they are highly collectible, and can become symbols and tokens of cultural and subcultural capital for consumers both young and old. They can take on significant affective resonance, stimulating attachment in children and nostalgia in adults; they also consistently work to make consumers remember their parent franchise and entertainment brand, not least insofar as they allow and encourage consumers to reconstruct and re-enact scenes from other franchise texts.

2. Replica Props and Costumes: As entertainment merchandising has become big business, and almost, indeed, an art form, fans' dressing up as their favourite franchise characters can go far beyond an impromptu binbag version of Darth Vader's cape. Under the menu heading "Costumes and Role-Play", the official *Star Wars* online shop offers three pages of high-quality, meticulously accurate reproduction costumes and weapons, from full Storm Trooper outfits to lightsabers that make the iconic humming swish when swung. Warner Bros's official online *Harry Potter* store offers six pages of Hogwarts school robes, wizard hats, ornately carved wands and other high-end prop replicas. This merchandise is marketed to both children and adults, and to both collectors and role-players. These products speak to transmedia franchising's pleasures and protocols of overdesign, allowing consumers to turn over in their hands and examine the fine details of the rich furnishings of franchise worlds, and structure immersive engagement. Of course, they also translate imaginative entry into franchise "cosmologies" into capitalist logics, monetising identification with characters, and further encouraging the negotiation of subcultural capital through consumption.

3. Characterised Proliferations: Caldwell defines characterised proliferations as franchise texts that are presented as "written by" or "belonging to" one of the franchise characters (2004: 51), such as a diary, letter, blog post or social networking profile. As Chapter Two has briefly noted, for example, shortly before the beginning of New *Who*'s third series, a MySpace page, http://www.myspace.com/marthajonesuk, was created for the character of Martha Jones. It includes a profile picture of actress Freema Agyeman, ostensibly in-character (though taken outside the BBC Television Centre), has the "details" section completed (informing the reader that Martha is 26, single, an Aquarius, and educated to postgraduate level) and a brief "blurb":

> Hello, new to all this! Will fill this in when I get some more time - I'm so busy at the moment I hardly have time to think. There'll be more information in my blog, so check that out as I'll be updating that whenever I get a chance.

The page also contains links to eighteen blog entries, dated between 23/03/07 and 03/07/07, and chronicling days in Martha Jones's life from an unremarkable shift at the hospital at which she works to the action-packed climax of *Doctor Who* Series Three. As Ivan Askwith notes (2007: 69), producing characterised proliferations is an increasingly common way in which creators of predominantly single-medium projects experiment with transmedia practice, but they are also common additions to full-scale franchise

projects. Though they are often positioned as "satellite" texts by the organisational and presentational logics of franchises, optional to enjoyment and understanding of the franchise, they can nevertheless do significant work relative to the protocols of franchise entertainment. When appropriated as a fictional form, for example, the social networking profile provides a useful structure for encyclopaedic character presentation, representing and defining characters in terms of fields of data (birthday, gender, relationship status, likes, dislikes). As Will Brooker notes, meanwhile, characterised proliferations like the social network profile also foster "the illusion that[...]characters have ongoing lives between [franchise instalments]" (2001b: 461); in other words, they contribute to an effect of hyperdiegesis. They represent character activity "off-narrative", the kind of mundane activity that in real life would fill the spaces between the kind of action that fictional plots are made of; they give an impression of an off-screen, interstitial, *hyperdiegetic* existence for the character. These texts also, furthermore, attempt to blur the line between real world and fictional world, and interject characters, insofar as this is meaningfully possible, into real world systems and contexts. Updating a character blog or twitter alongside the release of new instalments of a franchise even gives its narrative events a real-time temporality. As Chapter Five has already illustrated, this crossing and erosion of boundaries between real and fictional space can resonate powerfully with science fiction and fantasy franchises (consider New *Who*, or *Harry Potter*, or even *The Matrix*) that play on the trope of the fantastic limning the mundane; it is in addition a further useful strategy for integrating a franchise and an entertainment brand into the rhythms and activities of a consumer's everyday life.

4. Theme Parks: Theme parks have long played a significant role in entertainment franchising, from Disney's pioneering adventures in themed amusements, to Universal Studios Orlando's newest smash-hit attraction, an area themed as the "Wizarding World of Harry Potter", featuring Potter-themed rides and attractions set within recreations of Hogwarts and Hogsmeade; the last decade has even seen a successful, still-ongoing transmedia franchise spun off from a theme park ride, Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Scott Lukas observes that "their multi-sensory, immersive and reflexive approaches to telling a story while also delivering a product make themed rides effective marketing tools" (2008: 184); franchise-themed areas in amusement parks are, certainly, a powerful means of synergising the fictional and commercial impulses of transmedia franchising, realising to as great an extent as possible the desire to enter, explore and inhabit franchise

worlds, while saturating and organising these immersive experiences with branded consumption opportunities.

5. Videogames: The videogame industry is growing year on year (NPD Group, 2010), keeping pace with and even out-grossing the film and music industries. Console, mobile, and PC gaming has become an increasingly popular hobby across demographics, helped by concerted efforts from major game companies to develop genres and platforms that move away from the stereotypes usually associated with gaming and gamers. Writing in 2004, James Newman suggested that consumers, particularly in the UK, US, and Japan, are on average spending more money and time each year on videogame software and hardware than on renting films or going to the cinema (3), and the popularity of games has only increased since then. This profitability of the industry in itself has contributed to digital gaming becoming an increasingly important component part of transmedia storytelling, and an increasingly naturalised dimension of engaging with and enjoying major media properties. Franchise characters both modern and long-established can expect to make one or many excursions into digital game worlds over the course of their transmedia lives, whether as an extension of narrative or worldbuilding, or, more commonly, as an adaptation of other franchise instalments. The popularity of videogames among both consumers and transmedia producers may also, however, be situated in the rise of the active audience. The steady growth of the videogame industry indicates and implies how far today's consumers want and are accustomed to a measure of interactivity in their encounters with media; a major part of the significance of videogames to transmedia practitioners lies in their usefulness as tools for augmenting their entertainment experiences with participation. Like theme parks, furthermore, franchise videogames translate fictional worlds into spaces that consumers can explore, examine and manipulate. Though they may not be able to provide the kind of bodily, sensory immersion in a fictional space that Universal Studios can offer, their virtuality allows them to amplify the pleasures of franchise worldbuilding in their own way. Unbounded by the limitations of real-world space and physics, modern game consoles can generate spaces both vastly expansive and minutely detailed, and chain them together into a sprawling world map; the architecture and landscapes of game worlds can be as fantastical or science fictional as desired, likewise the physics of their environments and the physiologies of their inhabitants. Weather and light effects can be meticulously

controlled, and perhaps most importantly, the streets of videogame villages are not filled with other tourists.

6. Role-Playing Games: Like action figures, role-playing games (RPGs),[38] whether digital or pen-and-paper, are both common franchise proliferations and common stimuli for transmedia franchising in themselves. Franchises including *The Matrix, The Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars* have RPGs in their archives, while RPGs like *Dungeons and Dragons* have generated many novelisations, film adaptations, toys and merchandise. RPGs again offer pleasures of involved, long-form immersion and exploration of franchise worlds, but also augment them with a social dimension, and greater room for (nevertheless controlled, channelled and framed) creativity on the part of the consumer.

In this section, I look to find in these popular and recurring transmedia movements a picture of possible and significant strategies for structuring audience participation in franchise entertainment, and of characters as sites and technologies for this. The discussion that follows is organised around conceptualisations of kinds of participatory engagement with character that may be observed as enabled and invited in and across these types of proliferation, extrapolated from analysis of particular examples of franchise texts in these genres and media, and medium-specific theorising of these types of proliferation, and the nature and operations of their participatory, producerly representations of character, in the general case. I situate each of these modalities of participation relative both to overarching aims and operations of transmedia practice, and to contemporary cultural shifts in what it means to be a media consumer as context and pressure around them.

Illusions of Intimacy

The promotional paratexts for theme parks like Disneyland or Universal Studios emphasise as a major selling point that they offer a chance to "meet and greet" and "share a magical moment" (Disney, n.d.) with beloved franchise characters – or rather, to share a hug, handshake and photo opportunity with costumed park workers. The rhetoric and organisation of these interactions with franchise characters focuses the meaning and the magic of the encounter on the act or moment of meeting itself, on the ability to engage

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[38] Defined here as a ludic system of rules and statistics that articulates and defines a fictional world, within which and according to which players invent and perform characters and improvise interactions between them and with the fictional environment.

personally with them, to receive an expression of friendship or affection from them, to paste them into a photo album as though they were a friend or family member.

They work, in other words, to encourage *parasocial* engagement with characters. Horton and Wohl elaborated the concept of parasocial relations to describe to a form of consumer response and attachment to celebrities, defining it as "second-order intimacy" that is ultimately illusory and unidirectional, involving a high degree of investment and attachment by the consumer in and to a fantasy of knowledge about the celebrity, and nothing from the celebrity in return; "the most illustrious men [sic]", observe Horton and Wohl, "are met *as if they* were in the circle of one's peers" (1956: 215). At the time of formulating this theory, Horton and Wohl suggested it could be productively applied to ways of relating to fictional characters, and various media scholars have done so, including Russell et al. (2004) and Askwith (2007). I similarly find in it a suggestive and illuminating concept for expressing a particular modality of engagement with franchise characters, predicated on illusions of intimacy, although not without some qualifications. Existing work on the concept has tended to elaborate it in terms of naivety and delusion, suggesting that people who relate parasocially to characters are failing to appropriately understand and acknowledge the line dividing the real from the fictional, perhaps even to the point of pathology; I would instead frame parasocial engagement here as a structured and consensual fantasy, something invited by franchise texts and sought by franchise consumers, a pleasure rather than a pathology, though it may of course in some cases cross the line. I would also note that fictional characters and fictional experiences (particularly, as previous chapters have discussed, franchise ones) are implicated in consumers' processes of identity formation, interpersonal relationships, and everyday lives to such an extent that not all the emotion involved in parasocial response is "second-order"; grief over the death of a franchise character, for example, may have elements of grief for the ending of a period in one's life marked by consumption of the franchise, or for the loss of a talking point with a friend.

Parasocial response, thus defined, is a valuable commodity for transmedia creators. It implies and impels the kind of intense, invested fan-dom that helps make large-scale transmedia practice viable and profitable; it also inflects franchise characters *as* celebrities, or figures of public interest, thereby reinforcing and contributing to their cultural status and mobility. As David Giles notes, meanwhile, parasocial attachment

often turns characters into "conversational material in group settings"; it leads consumers to talk to other consumers about fictional characters "as though they were real acquaintances" (2000: 66). Again, the entertainment brand is thus made part of a consumer's relationships and social activities, and charged with affective and social significance; it is also further spread. In the specific case of the franchise theme park, it is very much the entertainment brand, rather than simply the fictional character, to which affective ties are manufactured. The versions of franchise characters that patrol theme parks are exaggeratedly much corporate metonyms, their behaviour reflecting not only upon the franchise licence but on the standard of employee working at the theme park; their interactions with park visitors are heavily circumscribed and policed accordingly, largely limited to iconic gestures and dialogue tics or catchphrases. They are also, meanwhile, part of the park's "architecture of persuasion" (Lukas, 2008: 69), their appearances and activities around the park meticulously positioned and scheduled, in order to encourage visitors to move around and take in the park's opportunities for entertainment and consumption in a certain way. Preferred rituals and scripts for navigating the park are thus elided into the parasocial experiences offered by character encounters, stitched into happy childhood and family memories as much as the character itself.

Part of the importance of the characterised proliferation to transmedia franchising may likewise be understood as lying in its ability to structure an illusion of friendship and even intimacy between character and consumer. "In-character" social networking profiles, for example, allow fans to add franchise characters to their virtual social circles, and position them as privy to these characters' personal information, thoughts and reflections; they can even simulate direct, one-on-one conversation between them. This plays off and into the hyperdiegetic and encyclopaedic functions of these texts discussed above, the vital statistics they provide, for example, structuring at once and coterminously the pleasures of knowing and knowing a character, of epistemophilia and parasocial familiarity. It also, meanwhile, interacts with their para*textual* functions. Characterised proliferations often work to advertise and bridge other franchise instalments, the narrative voice of a blog post or tweet blended with that of a television guide or a transitional, "Previously on..." paratextual paraphrase, recapping other instalments and announcing important narrative events to consumers. The illusion of intimacy and interpersonal interaction with consumers structured by these proliferations further inflects and

mobilises these paraphrases as gossip, which Chapter Five has made clear is important work.

Simulation

This interactional engagement with franchise characters, however, may also be usefully conceptualised as having *simulational* dimensions. According to Gonzalo Frasca, "to simulate is to model a (source) system through a different system which maintains to somebody some of the behaviours of the original system" (2003: 223). Frasca defines simulation in opposition to representation; this definition rests, however, on a rather precarious elision of the concept of representation into the concept of narrative. Richard Walsh suggests instead that both narrative and simulation (along with the dramatic, or the pictorial, and so on) are forms of representation; where narrative represents through relaying or recounting events, simulation represents a world, an activity, or a character "in systemic terms" (Walsh, 2011: 77), that is, as a model that may be manipulated by a user, and whose component parts will behave subject to this manipulation in accordance with rules and laws of interrelation and input/output, in such a way as to reproduce the behaviours of the object or action thus represented.

"New forms of simulation", as Jenkins et al note, "expand our cognitive capacity, allowing us to deal with larger bodies of information, to experiment with more complex configurations of data, to form hypotheses quickly and test them against different variables in real time" (2006: 25); they can also, however, be powerful fictional tools. The best and most sophisticated simulations, as Jenkins et al observe, "giv[e] us a chance to see and do things that would be impossible in the real world" (2006: 25); they can also give us the impossible chance to see and do things in fictional worlds. Systemic representations of an imaginary world allow users to engage with it through exploration and experimentation, structuring for them an experience of immersion and discovery; they may also allow users to engage in a convincing facsimile of interaction with fictional characters. Through simulations, users can manipulate objects, try out activities, move through, on and around environments in a fictional universe; simulational media can thus go a step towards realising that illusion that is potentially so valuable to transmedia creators, that their fictional worlds are "cosmologies to be entered and experienced."

Simulation is one of the eleven fundamental modalities of participatory culture identified by Jenkins, and it is likewise a key type of participatory engagement structured by transmedia franchises. Many of the core types of franchise proliferation identified in the introduction to this section have simulational qualities. Insofar as social network accounts, for example, are updated concurrently with narrative developments in other franchise texts, and real users of the social networking site can add them as friends, comment and send messages to them, and receive replies, they may be understood not only as static representations of a character's identity or articulations of their perspective, but as dynamic simulations of their online behaviour. Theme parks, meanwhile, are built out of fictional simulations. Their geography is a collection of reproductions and models of fictional buildings and landscapes, from Sleeping Beauty's Castle to the wizarding village of Hogsmeade, for visitors to explore and temporarily inhabit, usually with interactive elements and parts that move or change in loops and sequences; their rides and attractions recreate or adapt scenes or activities from other media texts as multi-sensory, bodily experiences for visitors, from Wendy, Michael and John's journey to Neverland, to a Quidditch match, and are often lined with animatronic tableaux, literally models of behaviour. The walking, talking versions of characters discussed above may be understood as components in the carefully organised system that is the theme park as an entertainment space, following pre-set patterns of behaviour that visitors must decode in order to interact successfully with them. The videogame, meanwhile, is perhaps the paradigmatic example of the simulational media product, mapping a virtual space, filled with virtual objects and populated by virtual people, that players can act upon by inputting commands on a control interface to elicit pre-defined responses.

Many franchise characters will thus be rendered simulationally at some point over the course of their transmedia lives. Reading these particular incarnations is centrally a matter of exploring and analysing *behaviour*, the logics behind it and the mechanisms and formulae of interaction that elicit and structure it. Fundamentally, simulational representations of characters translate them into, express them as, and bring out in them rules of behaviour. To return again to the example of the "in-character" social networking profile, then, the frequency of updating, the data fields the character is positioned as choosing or not choosing to fill in, the particular events, people, or introspections the character blogs or tweets about, may all be read as signifiers of personality, psychology, or narrative role; features and registers of the language of blog entries or "bios" can be

similarly elucidated, with an eye to the fact that any writing on the profile is implicitly positioned as a conscious act of fictional-self-presentation. The fact that Martha, for example, does not use "text speak" or emoticons, but heavily overpunctuates her writing, and aims to recreate the rhythms of speech and spontaneous thought using ellipses and modifiers such as "like", is vividly evocative. Even the choice of social networking site can be analysed as an expression of character; the different designs, structures and metadata of different sites, the userbase associated with them, and the cultural meanings and connotations they have picked up, can all be understood as engaged when they are used in characterised proliferation.

Play

The behaviours of characters in franchised simulations, however, are not always fictionally intelligible. Writing on the video or computer game specifically, Markku Eskelinen notes that the "entities" that inhabit digital game worlds are "definitely not acting or behaving like traditional narrators, characters, directors, and actors" (2004: 37). As Sengers (2004) and Aarseth (1997) both explore, for example, the dialogue and actions of characters depicted on screen as a videogame unfolds often resist narrative comprehension; that is, they do not easily and consistently resolve into a coherent, sensical chronology of events, and are not straightforwardly intelligible in social, psychological, or even metaphorical terms. Videogame characters die, repeatedly and extravagantly, and are reborn; they say and do the same things over and over again with no consciousness of repetition; they fight each other with scrupulous, narratively illogical and psychologically incomprehensible fairness, waiting patiently for their opponents to take their turn and hit them; they let the fate of the game world hang in the balance while they run around collecting valuable items and engaging in diverting side quests.

The problem lies in the fact that simulation is not the only modality of participation the videogame structures. Videogames are, after all, primarily spaces for and technologies of *play*, for competition, experimentation, and self-mastery directed by rules and goals. Franchise videogames not only turn fictional universes into virtual realities, they also translate objects, locations, narrative events, physical laws or magical powers from them into contexts, rules, mechanics and dynamics of play, rewriting them as obstacles, abilities, and tokens. Videogame incarnations of franchise characters, therefore, need to be conceptualised not only as agents in a simulation, but also as opponents or

teammates in a play situation, or even pieces on a game board. Play is a valuable mode of engagement for transmedia storytellers. Play can be a deeply immersive experience, insofar as it can be defined (Huizinga, 1950) as activity taking place within a "magic circle" (in the case of franchise videogames, the imaginary space of the franchise universe); play is behaviour defined by the context of an actual or notional space of consensual, sometimes communal make-believe. At the same time, play also encourages close, sophisticated interpretative engagement with the game world and its structuring rules; many videogames in particular require players "to deduce (or even impose) rules through exploration, invention and imagination – reaching out into the world to test, evaluate and execute different approaches" (Newman, 2004: 21), and thus intently involve themselves with making sense of the fictional world presented. Nevertheless, the element of play works to disrupt the fictional intelligibility of videogame representations of characters. It puts in place a competing logic dictating and motivating the representation of characters in game worlds, and conditioning how players respond to and interact with them; this logic produces and explicates what is fictionally incomprehensible about the way they ultimately appear on screen.

Newman, following Jenkins, suggests that the videogame character is fundamentally bifurcated, split between interactive and non-interactive, narrative and simulational, fictional and ludic "spheres of existence" (2004: 130), that are contiguous but not coherent. Certainly, the disjunct between the fictional and the ludic aspects of videogames has fractured critical understandings of character in videogames along narratological and ludological lines. Neither approach, however, entirely manages to pin the videogame character down as a fictional object. Narratological readings focus on the "expressive output" (Bogost, 2006: 68) of a session of gameplay at the expense of the experience and mechanics of play and simulation, and as a result struggle even to wholly make sense of this expressive output. Some ludological readings of videogames, which define their characters purely or primarily in terms of play, go so far as to collapse or abandon the narratologically loaded concept of "character" completely; the quote from Eskelinen above, for example, notably refers to the population of game worlds as "entities", while Newman reconfigures the videogame character as a "cursor" (2009: 512) through which players act in and on the game space. Yet this, too, seems to wilfully ignore a key aspect of videogame art – inherent, even, in the concept of simulation – namely, that games consistently work to present their pieces, tokens and cursors *as*

characters, mediating the rules, systems and structures of their simulations through representational frames and overlays that give them narrative and fictional meaning, that inscribe an interaction of statistics as a battle between two warriors.

Newman suggests that understanding videogame characters, for players and for critics, involves switching between interpretative perspectives rather than attempting to resolve these two "spheres" into coherence. Yet this insistence on the antagonism and incompatibility between the fictional and the ludic misses, I would argue, something fundamental to how videogames operate as forms of representation, namely, that these two dimensions of the videogame interact with, inform, and bleed into each other. Seth Giddings illustrates this usefully writing on a character, Sami, in the strategy game *Advance Wars*. Giddings describes that in both the menus, screens and interfaces that sketch troop leader Sami as a character, and the systems and structures of the game,

> her personality traits are given a quantitative value – the capabilities and strengths of her troops[...]Sami is a representational-simulational hybrid. Her personality is the metonym of her troops, both figuratively and instrumentally, and – for the player – strategically. (2007: 424-5)

This brief aside on his specific case study, I would argue, articulates a basic principle of videogame art and fictions, that a game's representational and ludic functions are not discrete, but closely interrelated. They may pull against each other, but they also feed into and inflect each other.

I would suggest, therefore, that the videogame character, and particularly videogame incarnations of franchise characters, is instead best understood in terms of how the two dimensions of its existence, the fictional and the ludic, *work on* each other. The videogame may not be dominantly narrative in mode, but its cut-scenes, graphics, interfaces, and similar framing devices work to narrativ*ise* the "abstractions of gameplay" (Giddings, 2007: 420). With respect to character specifically, by this I mean, for example, that they induce the player to *mentalise* the character's behaviour in the game space, that is, to "attribut[e] independent mental states (e.g. thoughts, beliefs, desires and intentions) to [this] behaviour" (Lim and Reeves, 2010: 65-6); they provide frames and contexts for making the activities of the character in game space-time comprehensible as a life-course; they root affective response to the character in empathy or identification with this fictional consciousness and its fictional fate. Conversely, however, the dimension of play is alternately and simultaneously working to *proceduralise* the

videogame character as fictional object, to translate personality into statistics and metadata, turn their build, knowledge, and skills into technologies and terms of interaction with and in the game space, and overlay the emotions of play – frustration, triumph and regret related to the player's performance relative to the goals of the game – onto affective response. Analysing how videogames articulate character, I would argue, should primarily involve exploring how these dimensions interact with and operate on each other, rather than delineating them – particularly so in the case of the franchise videogame, which has a vast narrative and textual archive influencing how players make sense of and respond to the "abstractions of gameplay".

Performance

Player interaction with and in videogame worlds is usually channelled through one or more protagonist characters, virtual objects that serve as avatars or surrogates for the player in the game space. The paratexts of franchise videogames thus often advertise an additional participatory pleasure, of not just playing, but "playing as" their iconic characters. The box of the *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* videogame adaptation, for example (EA UK, 2005), defines the "experience" of "the excitement of the movie" the game offers as "play[ing] as Harry, Ron and Hermione", emphasising that upon picking up the controller the player is stepping into Harry's shoes, "compet[ing] in the Triwizard Tournament, facing the deadly Hungarian Horntail dragon." A performative dimension may thus also be identified in the modality of engagement with franchise characters that franchise videogames offer. They invite and allow consumers to engage in role-playing, to *perform as* their characters when they control them and use them to interact with and in their virtual worlds. Player input and interactions generate a performance of the avatar character on screen; players act or re-enact a part through their controllers.[39] As is the case with non-player characters, this act of performance is shaped by both the ludic and the fictional context presented by the game and the surrounding franchise multitext; Justin Parsler's work on role-playing in videogames generally suggests that the decisions

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[39] Both Jenkins et al (2006) and Lancaster (2001) employ the concept of performance more expansively in theorising participatory culture and participatory media, Jenkins et al elaborating "the ability to adopt alternative identities" (2006: 4) in a social as well as a fictional sense as a core modality of participatory media cultures, and Lancaster reading all the various sites and dynamics of participation and interaction in his case study of the *Babylon 5* archive primarily through the lens of performance theory. I would echo Lancaster's position that performance theory is a broadly useful tool for understanding consumer participation in entertainment franchises, but use the concept of performance in a more restricted sense here to refer to a specific modality of participatory engagement with franchise characters, that is, the activity of playing the part of a character.

a player makes in controlling their avatar character tend neither to be predicated solely on what is "ludically more potent", nor solely on "the way they have interpreted the narrative" and the character's psyche, but on both, by turns, at once, and in dialogue (2010: 140).

Like play more generally, role-playing and performance is both an immersive and an interpretative practice, requiring from performers mastery over intradiegetic fact, narrative continuity, style, aesthetic, and character psychology. Providing consumers with sites, tools and contexts for assuming the role of pre-existing franchise characters can produce and strengthen identification with characters; the more a consumer incorporates a franchise character into his sense of self, the more purchase the entertainment brand gets in his thinking and affections, and the more work he may start to do to spread it – from wearing a t-shirt with Darth Vader's face on it to pasting a Hogwarts house crest on his Facebook profile. It also draws on and reinforces the franchise character as iconic, positioning their personality, agency, and narrative circumstances as something to be desired and emulated. Giving consumers the opportunity to play a part of their own devising in the franchise universe, meanwhile, affords them the additional pleasures of non-trivial creativity and authorship, and, potentially, self-insertion and wish-fulfilment. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that transmedia archives tend to be full of objects, props and technologies, from toys to costumes to games, that allow and encourage consumers to perform as franchise characters, to speak and behave like Harry Potter, James Bond, or Jack Sparrow in play and performance scenarios either scripted or freeform. In addition to videogames and, of course, RPGs, action figures are tools of role-playing, used by consumers both to re-stage stretches or moments of franchise narrative and to improve new adventures for the characters in the franchise world, likewise replica props and costumes.

Such proliferations may be understood as *performable representations* of franchise characters, texts that invite and enable consumers to take pleasure in adopting a fictional identity, and articulate character through the terms and structures of this invitation. They translate characters into scripts, roles and parts, encoding and drawing on the rest of the franchise archive to shape and guide role-playing. A franchise action figure, for example, presents the franchise character as a fictional body that may be *made to perform* by the consumer, moved, positioned, and ventriloquised, and as such is also a

channel or conduit for the consumer's performance of the character. It picks up fictional meanings, significance and associations from its overarching franchise context and immediate intertexts and reconfigures them as a script, as scenarios, speeches, and set-pieces to be re-enacted in play. Lancaster's work on *Babylon 5*'s sites and technologies of performance may also be usefully invoked here to illuminate the action figure as a performable representation of character. *Interacting with Babylon 5* frequently returns to Richard Schechner's concept of *strips* of behaviour or "behavioural bits" (Lancaster, 2001: 39), that is, memories of living behaviour, gestures, phrases, actions and reactions, that "performers[...]get in touch with, recover, remember, or even invent[...]and then rebehave according to" (Schechner, 1985: 36) as they play a role. Acting involves editing these strips together into coherence, just as a filmmaker edits strips of film together into story and character development. Lancaster repeatedly suggests that the performative texts of *Babylon 5* either present or index strips of fictional behaviour, meaning and context, that consumers draw on and respond to as they play and perform. I would suggest that the franchise action figure may likewise be theorised more generally as representing character in strips, as an assemblage of costume, poses, articulations and movements, fragments of dialogue, and narrative actions as encoded in accessories such as weapons or vehicles, all loaded with memories and potentials, and ready to be strung together and restored into a more or less coherent and authentic performance of the character. These strips are charged as signatures, lines, gestures, and narrative moments that are iconic and definitive, expressing and encapsulating the character both superficially and more fundamentally, taking on the weight of defining, determining and explicating the character's past and potential behaviour. Consider the Deluxe Play Arts action figure of Cloud Strife from the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*, which includes as accessories his oversized Buster Sword, a weapon bequeathed to Cloud by friend and mentor Zack Fair at a narrative crux of the *Compilation*, as he gave his life to save Cloud's, and his Fenrir motorcycle, ridden in memorable set pieces in both the film *Advent Children* (Nomura, 2005) and the game *Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 1997). However, as both Bainbridge and Jenkins (2010c) make clear, children's performance through franchised action figures is not just a matter of "re-enactments and rehearsals" (Bainbridge, 2010: 835). As Jenkins (2010c) puts it, the franchise context is a "resource for their own imaginations", such that "these toys [are] in effect an authoring system which encourage[s] young people to make up their own stories about these characters much as the folk in other time periods might make up stories about Robin Hood or Pecos

Bill." The weight of character history and development encoded in and inscribed on the franchise action figure is thus not only a script for performance, it is stimulus, context, and rationale for improvised dramas; the engagement action figures structure with franchise characters is both nostalgic and repetitive, and analytical and speculative, oriented towards reliving favourite stories and extending them in accordance with certain established premises.[40]

Videogame incarnations of franchise characters as performable representations allow far less room for free improvisation in the role-playing they structure. The act of performance here is scripted to a greater degree, by the organisations and systems of the simulation, the algorithms that govern relations between player input, character action and movement, and virtual environment, and by the underlying structure and rhythm of progression through the game; it is framed and punctuated by cut-scenes that advance the narrative and narrativising context. Franchise videogames script player performance more than most, insofar as their gameplay is bound by and situated in other franchise texts and narrative strands. Yet they cannot, of course, wholly set the player's course through the game world, without forgoing the medium's core pleasures of interactivity and control; even a game like *Enter the Matrix* (Shiny Entertainment, 2003), in which play is carefully plotted into a small gap in the franchise's narrative timeline, has to give players space for improvisation, experimentation and agency. Here, I would suggest, Mark Wolf's work on theorising the precise nature of videogame interactivity may be usefully invoked to further nuance our conceptualisation of avatar characters as roles to be played. Wolf (2006) argues that interactivity in videogames may be mapped in terms of the array or grid of choices available to the player at any given point in the game; I would likewise suggest that the parts videogame players are asked to perform may be theorised as an array of possible or potential behaviours and actions, delimited both by the design of the game and simulation, and by the way the avatar character has been narrativised and mentalised. When franchises extend or adapt their characters to be the controllable, *performable* protagonists of videogames, they translate the characters' history, personality, physiology and diegetic situation into a field or "grid of interactivity" (Wolf, 2006: 80) for the player.

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[40] This duality in the action figure as fictional text can also, I would argue, serve as a useful lens through which to analyse another undertheorised site of transmedia characterisation, the action figure's box and accompanying paratexts. The fictional meaning communicated by the notes of biography, vital statistics, and narrative context that package the franchise action figure can be usefully illuminated by reading them as implicated in structuring these two functions of re-enactment and improvisation.

It should also be noted, meanwhile, that the form of performative engagement structured by videogames does not necessarily imply wholesale imaginative transformation of player into character. As Newman notes, videogame players generally often "report first-hand experience of gameworlds" (2004: 17) regardless of whether they are presented in first-, second-, or third-person view; even if their engagement is structured through an avatar character, they talk about their experiences of gameplay as though "it's them up there on the screen" (Nintendo employee, quoted in Newman, 2004: 17). Jin and Park (2009), meanwhile, suggest that there are two axes to the way players relate to avatars: parasocial interaction, that is, perceiving the avatar as a representation of anOther consciousness, and understanding engagement with it in terms of control, dialogue, or interpersonal interaction, and self-presence, that is, experiencing the avatar as oneself; moreover, their research indicates that players have little difficulty experiencing their avatars in both these ways at once, and can readily switch between the two perceptions. This is only intuitive; the representational dimensions of games work to assert avatars as characters in their own right, but the ludic dimension is directly asking players to demonstrate and express through them their own skill and understanding, at using the console controller, at reading the behaviour of AI agents, at figuring out puzzles. The franchise videogame protagonist may thus be theorised as hybrid, as an expression of character and player at once; as role to be played or performed, it must have room for the player's own personality, knowledge, desires and dexterity. Newman suggests that in recognition of this, videogame protagonists tend to be Forsterian "flat" characters; he quotes the chief designer of the popular *Metal Gear Solid* series, Kojima Hideo, noting that "we tried not to give him [Snake, the main avatar character] too much character because we want players to be able to take on his role." (quoted in Newman, 2004: 133) In franchise videogames, however, avatar characters may have been given or may need to sustain a whole transmedia multitext's worth of development. I would suggest that franchise characters may instead need to be analysed as flat*tened* when they are made performable in a videogame, put into unfamiliar narrative situations, for example, such that the player's initial lack of ludic and narrative competence can be naturalistically addressed, or simply flattened through the nature of the medium itself; much dialogue in videogames, for example, is strikingly stripped of voice acting, accompanying facial expressions, or verbs and adverbs of speech, approaching toneless and voiceless.

Embodiment

Newman also suggests, however, that "the role that players perform during videogame play" is best thought of not as primarily a psychology, identity or complex mental state, but as "a set of characteristics, capabilities and techniques" (2009: 52) for acting in and on the virtual world, a "capacity to explore worlds, solve problems, perform actions and compete against enemies" (2004: 102). The character shoes that videogames allow players to step into are fundamentally *surrogate physicalities*, a pair of hands to touch and manipulate objects in the fictional world, a collection of possible movements through and in the game space, even a perceptual apparatus. A desire to disentangle game studies from the colonising movements of film theory has perhaps led to a general critical underemphasising of the fact that the videogame is in no small part an art of perspective, that the illusion they create of free movement through virtual worlds is as much an effect of free *looking at, around and into* their vistas and corners.[41] There is something, as Newman notes, of the cyborg in the relationship between videogame players and avatar characters; avatar characters are technologies for the player's interaction with virtual space, extensions of the player's body into digital realms, and tools through which players "become part of the circuit" (Newman, 2009: 519) of the simulation.

In other words, a further dimension of the participatory engagement they structure is a *bodily* identification or introjection of the consumer with the franchise character. The bodies of franchise characters are rich sites of meaning and engagement. They are loci of fascination and desire, not only sexual, but also for substitution, emulation, transformation, and embodied participation in the fictional world. The identities of franchise characters are often bound up in the capabilities of their bodies; superhero franchises obviously epitomise this, yet consider also how far a Jedi is defined by the physical powers given them by the Force running through their bodies, how many franchise characters have innate, embodied magical abilities, how central James Bond's strength and skill with weapons and hand-to-hand combat is to his identity, how much the *Matrix* franchise is built around the development and display of mastery over mind, body and space, through each on the others. This emphasis on bodies is clearly genre-d, implicated in how entertainment franchises draw on and position themselves in speculative fiction genres; it may also be situated in the context of the drive towards the

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[41] Another reason, perhaps, why videogames have come to be so central to transmedia franchising, with its dominant aesthetic and pleasure of worldbuilding.

hypermediate and spectacular that this thesis has earlier identified as characteristic of transmedia storytelling. Fantastic and technologised bodies are spectacular in their extravagance and unreality alone, but also where they index and foreground virtuoso special effects, technologies of representation that allow a real body to transcend the laws of real physics, to morph and transform.

Embodiment may thus be identified as a further key modality of participatory engagement with franchise characters, and a pleasure and purpose of many franchise proliferations. Replica props and costumes, for example, make the body of the consumer directly the site and technology of identification, performance, and imaginative transformation. Whether this performance is taken to the level of elaborate role-playing and collaborative dramatic storytelling, or limited to a young fan running around his garden pretending to be Batman for a couple of hours, fundamentally these tools of play invite consumers to embody characters, to replace the character's body with their own, to express and understand the character in bodily terms. In inviting this bodily identification, however, replicas also confer on clothes and costumes transformative and indexical powers. Putting on a long brown cowl, or a pair of round glasses and a red-and-gold-striped tie, is enough for a consumer to imaginatively become a Jedi, or Harry Potter, and to *mark* the consumer as the character. In this, of course, they may resonate with specific generic conventions of their parent franchise; superhero narratives, as Scott Bukatman emphasises, are narratives of "self-transformation" and "metamorphosis" (2003: 54), and costumes literalise, metaphorise, and signal these changes, defining and marking out identities. I would suggest, however, that clothing being a particularly significant site of characterisation is perhaps something more generally characteristic of franchise storytelling as a mode. Certainly, linking and conflating costume and identity does useful work relative to key protocols of franchise storytelling. It gives characters a visual signature, for example, that helps make them iconographic, and enables them to be used to brand texts and products. It makes them more transmedially mobile; an iconic costume or accessory like Harry Potter's glasses persists across digital, animated, and live-action media, not to mention action figures or Lego sets, better than the details of a face. Likewise, it can cohere other forms of multiplicity in the representation of a franchise character, such as using a series of different actors to play or interpret Batman or Superman. As the Warner Bros. and Lucasfilm stores illustrate, meanwhile, with their virtual shelves of school and military uniforms, a character's clothing is often a marker of

intradiegetic affiliations and affinities, which Chapter One has already identified as a particularly important dimension of characterisation in franchise fictions (and, moreover, an important mechanism for consumer introjection into the franchise world). Replica costumes, and the identification, transformation, and performance they invite and structure, may thus be understood as reflecting and amplifying the weight of meaning and characterisation that clothing bears in transmedia storytelling.

Theme parks, meanwhile, in reproducing the buildings and landscapes of franchise universes, disembody them, leaving character-shaped holes in their maps and architecture for visitors to fill. Theme parks are fundamentally ergonomic spaces, moulded around the human body, but their ergonomics and anthropometrics are also fictional. At heart, what franchise-themed areas of amusement parks like "The Wizarding World of Harry Potter" attempt to construct for consumers are the embodied experiences of fictional characters in their franchise universes; the multisensory experiences that theme park worlds build for and around visitors are the paths of characters through their fictional reality, their activities and interactions, their walks to work or school, their favourite seat in a pub. The metaphorical shoes of franchise characters are the underlying design principle of their rollercoasters, their layouts, their rest stops. The rollercoasters in "The Wizarding World of Harry Potter", for example, allow visitors to substitute their own body for Harry's in his first Care of Magical Creatures lesson, and the Hippogriff flight it involves, or to experience in their own skin the sensation of dragon or broomstick flight. The bodily engagement thus structured with franchise characters may, I would suggest, be multilayered, focused not only on *being* or embodying Harry Potter, but also on *doing oneself what Harry Potter does or did* and *being where he was*, whether that be playing Quidditch, fighting a dragon in the Triwizard Tournament, or drinking Butterbeer in the Three Broomsticks; there may be an element of pilgrimage, as well as identification. Both of which, of course, are aggressively monetised by most theme parks, the appeal of placing oneself in the shoes of beloved fictional characters thoroughly exploited to sell themed food, drink and toys.

Compelling Spaces

In discussing the specific pleasures of simulational and bodily engagement that franchise-themed areas of amusement parks offer, however, it is important not to lose sight of the most fundamental modality of participation they structure, that is, simply, entry into and

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exploration of a fictional space. Given the extent to which, as discussed in Chapter One, the art and the appeal of transmedia franchising is centred on worldbuilding, this may reasonably be identified as in itself a significant dimension of the participatory pleasures these proliferations offer. It may also, by similar logic, be identified as generally a common and desirable form of participatory engagement that franchises may look to structure through their transmedia movements. This may further explain the growing importance of the videogame in franchise practice; Jenkins, among others (see Newman, 2004: 106-25 for an overview of work that defines the videogame as a spatial art form) argues that game consoles should be primarily regarded as "machines for generating compelling spaces" (2004: 122), and that videogames should be understood as spatial fictions.

Franchise characters, through these movements into spatial fictions, become expressed and engaged with in spatial terms. Theoretical work on theme park worlds as fictional spaces, for example, figures them as communicating narrative through geography and architecture. Story is structured as "movement through compelling landscapes" (Jenkins, 2009); buildings, meanwhile, "take on the position of storytellers" (Lukas, 2008: 77), loaded as they are with citations and memories of the narrative events that played out against them in all the other media texts in which they feature. Universal Studios' bricks-and-mortar (and fibreglass and plywood) rendering of Hogwarts Castle, for example, "supports a story structure" (unnamed Disney employee, quoted in Lukas, 2008: 77), mapping narratives of life and activity in Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in the paths it provides for visitors to walk around and interact with it, and evoking them where it recreates objects, rooms, or vistas with narrative significance elsewhere in the franchise. Likewise, the buildings and landscapes of theme park worlds can be understood as expressing character in terms of space and architecture. Jenkins comments following a visit to a Potter-themed museum exhibition that "some of the professor figures – such as Lockhart and Umbridge – get represented through their living quarters" (2009f); such fictional spaces allow visitors to explore characters by exploring models of rooms or locales closely associated with them in the world of the fiction, touching, using or examining their furnishings. Character in the franchised videogame can similarly be read as evoked by, infused into, and articulated through rooms, buildings or landscapes, and the objects that furnish them. Furthermore, some theme parks even, rather surreally, translate characters *into* geography, the paths of Disneyworld, for

example, tracing "stylized Mickey Mouse ears" (Herwig, 2006: 91). Characters are thus used to brand and organise space and movement, such that an entertainment environment and experience is produced in which the entertainment brand is seamlessly, continuously, ubiquitously present.

As Jenkins sets out, meanwhile, many game worlds are what he calls "information spaces" or "memory palaces" (2004: 126), that is, they are filled with artefacts and characters that hold pieces of a narrative or backstory underpinning the game world and the player-character's activities in it, and a primary goal of navigation and exploration is to find these objects and piece this context together. Jenkins describes narrative as "embedded" (2004: 126) in such game spaces, and I would suggest that characterisation may be described likewise. This mode of characterisation particularly resonates with the logics of franchise storytelling. It structures engagement with and the presentation of character in terms of secrets, webs of connection, and information, all of which, as this thesis has already shown, are concepts refracted through encounters with and incarnations of franchise characters. In addition, furthermore, it should be noted that insofar as videogames structure or frame additional narrative or developmental trajectories for franchise characters, these are centrally given meaning by and designed as "machinery for the exploration of, and adventure in, cyberspace." (Newman, 2004: 106) In videogames, movement through and discovery of space often become catalysts and metaphors for character growth, self-discovery, and relationships; conversely, characters are often designed and developed as mechanisms and rationales for journeys and pilgrimages.

It is worth noting that even where theme parks set out to build replicas of fictional buildings or locations, the resulting space may nevertheless seem a distillation or even abstraction of the fictional setting into an expression of function, theme or concept. Universal Studios' "Wizarding World", for example, does not replicate the village of Hogsmeade as described in the *Potter* novels or depicted in the *Potter* films, but rather condenses and amalgamates other iconic Potterverse locales into it, namely, other wizarding shops. The specific locations of Harry's world are thus remapped into a functional or themed geography, Hogsmeade repurposed and rebuilt as a site of commerce and leisure. These spaces may as such be populated with renderings of characters – digital, animatronic, or performed by theme park workers – whose primary

function is to mark and index the spaces' function, theme or concept, and which are themselves thus characterised by a degree of economy and essentialism in their representation. The animatronics that line Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* ride, arranged into fictional scenes and fragments, the statues and sculptures that theme mazes or play spaces, or the jovial conductor that welcomes visitors to Universal Studios' Hogwarts Express, may be all be read as attempts to articulate or colour a fictional space in a single character pose, gesture, tableau, short script or sketch, and express how it is to be apprehended and used. The same may be said of the non-player characters or NPCs that can be found dotted around videogame worlds, perhaps offering a line or two of dialogue when approached; one of their primary functions can similarly be identified as expressing the function or concept of a particular space on the map, giving character to a town or field.

User-Generated Characters

Franchise role-playing games, however, allow consumers to participate in the franchise universe not only as travellers across the fourth wall, actors or interactors, but as *authors*; whether digital or pen-and-paper, they allow players to write themselves as characters into the franchise universe. Some, like *The Matrix Online*, a massively multiplayer online game, ask players to design their own avatars for participation and performance in a game world; players generate the skeleton of a fictional identity by selecting options in a range of fields, from gender, to job, to personality traits, to skills, knowledge and abilities, which determine the precise part they then use this fictional identity to play in game scenarios, and coterminously a collaborative storytelling effort. Others, like *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (Bioware, 2003), a single-player console- and PC-based role-playing game, give the player the bones of an avatar identity – in the case of *Knights of the Old Republic*, a name, some diegetic history, and a set of narrative circumstances – but allow them the freedom to flesh out this identity as they see fit, from choosing its gender or preferred weapon to crafting the moral compass that shapes behaviour in the game world. The rhetoric of these games is second-person; however, this is not to say that the avatars players create should be read wholly as self-inserts. Vasalou and Joinson observe from experiment that self-presentation through avatars is influenced and inflected by interactional context, noting that when subjects were asked to create avatars for use in a role-playing game, they "morphed their choices in accordance with the visual style and

type of the game" (2009: 512); though the resulting avatars "express[ed] stable aspects of their owners" (517), they were nevertheless also fictional or fictional*ised* creations. Lancaster notes, meanwhile, that both character design and character performance in role-playing games tend to draw on "bits of amalgamated images from popular culture" (2001: 42), tropes, archetypes and strips of behaviour from characters in other, related media products and texts. Nevertheless, where transmedia works extend into role-playing games, they can be understood as blurring the line not only between consumer and producer, but between consumer and character, further reinforcing their universes as "cosmologies to be entered and imaginatively interacted with".

These games do more than perhaps any other media form to confuse the categories of producer and consumer. They allow user-generated content to be woven directly into the institutionally authored fabric of the franchise; the avatar characters that players create thus invite analysis under the rubric of franchise character study more than most productions of participatory culture. At the same time, they resist and problematise it. On a purely practical level, they number potentially in the thousands; they are also emergent and evolving creations, difficult if not impossible to extricate from their creators' individual experiences of play and performance and pin down in a stable, readable form. Lancaster's conceptualisation of these creations as "living interfaces" with an "authored universe" (2001: 56) provides, I would argue, the best solution to this critical problem. Critical attention may be usefully drawn to how the design, ludic structure and representational content of franchise role-playing games work to stitch user-generated characters into the franchise universe. Instead of reading the avatar characters themselves, for example, the toolkit with which players are provided to build them may be analysed for fictional meaning. The matrix of possibilities out of which players are able to create their avatars, both in terms of the schematic of fields that are deemed sufficient to plot a character's basic parameters and the range of options players are given within them, expresses cruces of fictional meaning, worldbuilding, narrative, and characterisation in the parent franchise universe more generally. *The Matrix Online*, for example, asks players to select for their character an affiliation with one of three loosely defined organisations, Zion, the Machines, and the Merovingian; characters' statistically defined abilities are mapped as Perception, Focus, Reason, Belief, and Vitality, and the personality types players can choose from for them include "True Believer", "Devoted Ascetic", and "Suspicious Cynic". These defining co-ordinates of character identity distil

and articulate fundamental themes and conflicts structuring the franchise universe, narratives, and character development: of faith, perception, mental strength, truth and consensual delusion. They also, meanwhile, may be read as reflecting and mapping back onto institutionally authored franchise characters, or at least, as set in dialogue to some extent with their design and representations, offered by the franchise as further ways of defining their identities and understanding their behaviour and motivations.

Critical attention may also be usefully directed, I would argue, at how franchise universes, and the institutionally authorised characters already inhabiting them, are made to bend, expand, shift and open around user-generated content. When they make a synergistic leap into a role-playing game, franchises have to make narrative and worldbuilding room for a glut of new characters, find spaces for them to play in and things for them to do, without overly disrupting continuity established in other parts of the multitext. This can be a balancing act, which risks undermining and confusing the narrative or thematic weight and significance elsewhere placed on particular characters, actions or events, the rhythms of plot and architecture of causality in the fictional universe, and established climaxes and closures. Where institutionally authorised characters are drawn into the scenarios of role-playing games, they become particularly precarious and pressurised fictional objects, needing to respond and develop plausibly in relation to gameplay, narrative events, and characters that necessarily have an element of unpredictability and particularity, without compromising their trajectories of action and development elsewhere in the franchise.

Feedback Loops

The above discussion gives a picture of how franchises may respond to trends of active, creative "prosumption" by literally creating spaces for audience participation, generating interactive media texts and experiences. In this second section of this chapter, I wish to explore the idea that aspects of the design and representation of franchise characters emerge from feedback loops between institutional communicators and participatory cultures from a different perspective; specifically, I look to consider points of contact and dynamics of exchange between institutional producers and what participatory cultures do with and to franchise characters in their own reception communities, on their own terms, and most importantly, how these interactions are reflected and played out on the site of authorised franchise products. In *Audience Evolution* (2011), Philip Napoli does engage

the question of how institutional communicators survey, comprehend and make use of the products and activities of participatory cultures as he outlines changes in industry conceptualisations of the consumer and her behaviour, and in the metrics and methods used to gather data on, describe and analyse this behaviour; because, however, Napoli's primary interest is in industrial practices and discourses, his work theorises the contemporary participatory audience into these feedback loops in industrial terms, in terms of levels and types of attention and engagement, behaviour and labour that can be directly or indirectly monetised. What is thus missing from his work is a consideration of how the different kinds of imaginative, creative and interpretative engagement, the different modes and discourses of response and ways of reading, demonstrated in the products and activities of participatory cultures become through these feedback loops internalised in the strategies and operations of media products, the textual and design traces, in other words, of attempts to acknowledge, anticipate and court them. The discussion that follows looks to make a gesture towards redressing this by theorising one particular axis of influence and dialogue between institutional communicators and participatory cultures in these terms, as a final framework for understanding how franchise characters develop and take shape.

Specifically, this final section focuses on how the design and representation of franchise characters may reflect, engage and absorb the unscripted (that is, not explicitly structured by official franchise products) "prosumption" of fan cultures. By fan cultures, I refer to reception communities, whether online or offline, made up of self-identified fans of a franchise, who express their investment in the object of their fan-dom through active, creative consumption, whether this be writing continuations of its narrative, dressing up as its characters, engaging in discussion and dissection of its developments, or making pilgrimages to its sets or filming locations. These subcultures are built around particular interpretative consensuses and points of contention, discursive norms and interactional protocols, standards, trends and conventions in creative practice, and modes of engagement with the object of fandom. It is difficult to generalise overmuch about fan cultures and fan practices; fandoms for different source texts and different genres of source text, that make their home in different online or offline spaces, may have non-trivially different interactional protocols and creative conventions, and even within a single fan subculture, ways of interacting and engaging with the object of fandom are likely to be diverse. It is even increasingly difficult, meanwhile, to speak meaningfully

about "fan cultures" as a stable, identifiable category of subculture or reception communities; as Chapter One has touched on, a defining feature of media convergence culture and franchise storytelling as its emblematic mode of fiction is that it normalises modes of reading and levels of investment from even casual consumers that would normally have been pathologised as fannish: sustained immersion in fictional worlds; navigation of multitextual, multicursal narratives, mastery over expansive worldbuilding. Nevertheless, I would argue that fandom remains a definable modality of engagement with media properties, expressed through particular types of discourse and amateur media text.

Much critical work on participatory cultures drifts either consciously or unconsciously into fan studies, the concepts of participatory culture and fandom often aligned and conflated. Jonathan Gray (2003) interrogates this gravitation as an increasingly common trend in the field of audience studies more broadly, drawing attention to what a wave of interest in fans "has unnecessarily and unintentionally pushed under" (65); specifically, he argues for the value of more critical engagement with "anti-fannish" and "non-fannish" modes of reading media texts, with those consumers of a show or franchise who are hostile to it (but still consume it, whether unwillingly as a function of its ubiquity, or for the pleasure of disliking it), indifferent to it, or simply derive casual enjoyment from it without excessive investment. It should be acknowledged that "anti-fans" and "non-fans" are equally important subsets of a franchise's participatory audience; love for a media franchise is by no means a necessary condition for productive, participatory response, and while the protocols of transmedia franchising may in some respects breed fannish consumption across audience demographics, their cultural reach, prominence, and ambivalent capital ensures they will have many casual, occasional consumers, and many reluctant ones. This thesis has already illuminated, in its discussions of how franchise archives are ordered and presented to accommodate multiple degrees of audience investment, some ways in which these consumers interpolate into the feedback loops that shape the operations of franchise fictions. In this section, however, I still repeat the critical movement that Gray challenges, primarily because the idea that more and more media products are bearing the traces of institutional communicators' awareness of and engagement with fan cultures is oft repeated, but rarely fully unpacked.

Fanservice

Henry Jenkins suggests that contemporary media landscapes are currently experiencing "a moment when fans are central to how culture operates." (2006c: 2) As both Watson (2010) and Sivarajan (2010) note, fans, fan communities, and fan productions are gaining cultural visibility and the attention of institutional producers, who are recognising that fan attachment and the media texts it inspires can be directly and indirectly monetised. "Courting" fandom is thus increasingly seen as a priority. This "courting" may take the form of directly soliciting fan opinions, and opening up channels of communication between institutional producers and fans, whether through producers entering and participating in fan communities, fans being invited to comment on producers' blogs, or opinion polls; media texts may instead or as well frequently nod to fans, by reflexively internalising or even parodying fans and fan cultures, as Sivarajan (2010) observes in *Supernatural*, which draws representations of fans and fandom into its narrative in multiple episodes. Sustained fan investment may be courted through attempts to understand and tap into what induced consumers to become fans of a media fiction in the first place, or institutional communicators may attempt to stimulate and structure fan creativity and productivity. Fan campaigns, meanwhile (to revive a franchise, or take it in a particular direction), are gaining power, although this power should not be overstated.[42]

Through these channels and interactions, institutional media products may thus come to bear traces of the genres, conventions, concerns and stylistic quirks of fan productions, evidence that fannish modes of reading and engagement have been translated into textual forms, and that the particular desires and attachments of fans have been recognised and accommodated. Matt Hills's 2008 work on New *Who* as a dispersible text brings out a useful example of this. His central thesis is that New *Who*'s narratives are structured around the "moment", memorable, resonant, quotable textual units that can be appreciated in isolation, decontextualised and dispersed through trailers, clip shows, promotional materials, and participatory cultures. He situates this textual theorising relative to comments from key contributors to the franchise that state the

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[42] A brief case study: a substantial number of fans of the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* franchise mobilised to protest the decision to cast white actors to play East and South Asian characters in the live-action adaptation of the animated series; though the change they effected in that specific instance was limited (British-Indian actor Dev Patel was cast as the – East Asian –villain of the piece), from this campaign emerged the Racebending organisation, "an international grassroots organization of media consumers that advocates for underrepresented groups in entertainment media" (Racebending, 2011), which is gaining cultural presence and influence.

primacy of the "moment" in their thinking and writing, and both in a consideration of how central the textual "moment" is to fan engagement with texts; as Hills observes, picking out, ranking, debating and quoting favourite "bits" of the object of fandom is a common activity in fan cultures, and an important aspect of defining and asserting one's identity and status as a fan. He thus frames New *Who*'s "emphasis on reflexively producing textual 'moments'" as a strategy of "'giving fans what they want', or reflecting a fan's way of experiencing the series as made up of special moments" (2008: 28).

These slippages and dialogues between the priorities and protocols of fan cultures and institutional communicators, and the textual traces they leave, may be seen as particularly likely in transmedia franchise practice, partly given how particularly valuable the sustained, highly invested consumption of fans can be to creators of long-form, cross-platform, synergistic fictions, but also because many franchises have writers, artists or filmmakers on their creative teams who have previously been active participants and amateur media creators in the franchise's fandom (*Doctor Who* being a particularly notable example), and who may whether consciously or unconsciously bring the forms and tropes of their amateur practice into their professional contributions to the franchise. The barriers between fans and producers of franchise fiction are, furthermore, perhaps particularly permeable, given that the line between fan productions and some authorised proliferations (tie-in novels, for example) is indistinct and unstable, and indeed, the fact that in many respects transmedia franchise thinking resonates with the impulses of fannish creativity, similarly underpinned by the desire to spend more time in and show more corners of a fictional world and its characters.

Fan cultures have their own term for these textual traces: *fanservice*. The website *TV Tropes*, discussed in the previous chapter, defines fanservice as elements in a media product "designed to please longtime dedicated fans" (TV Tropes, n.d.(d)); the website *Fanlore*, meanwhile, another encyclopaedia in the wiki mould of fandom history and idiom, defines it as "decisions that TPTB [The Powers that Be, i.e. institutional communicators] make with the goal of "energizing their base," i.e., adding elements that are unnecessary to the storyline, but will make the fans happy." (Fanlore, 2011b) I wish here to propose that the concept of fanservice, as an expression of a feedback loop between institutional communicators and the desires, practices and modes of response of fan cultures *and* the ways in which this contact plays out in institutional media products,

may be usefully appropriated as a critical prism for reading franchise characters, a necessary frame for explicating, contextualising, describing and analysing some aspects of their design and representation.

Specifically, I would suggest there is value in borrowing fans' own concept to organise analysis of these channels and flows surrounding and acting upon the franchise character because it paradoxically brings with it connotations of *dis*satisfaction and misaligned expectations. In its colloquial use within fan cultures, the term "fanservice" expresses a complex and contradictory relationship between fans and institutional communicators, a sense that fanservice always somehow misses its mark; the TV Tropes page mentioned above, for example, comments that "too much fanservice can become very distracting", and there are telling scare quotes in its definition of fanservice as elements that are designed to "attract or "reward" viewers".

In this, it resonates with scholarly work on contemporary audience-industry relations. One of the few critical studies of the concept of fanservice (Russell, 2008) returns more than once to the idea that it can easily alienate, that sometimes, giving fans what they want turns out not to be what they wanted at all. Jeff Watson echoes this, suggesting that many fans, in fact, "would actually prefer to be left alone" than courted by institutional communicators, and would rather not be "reduced to a function in a virtuous feedback loop" (2010). Ideas of instability and unpredictability in these feedback loops run through the language of Watson's discussion more generally, where he describes, for example, media companies as "*divin[ing...]* the desires of their audiences, *real and imagined*" (2010, emphasis mine); Jenkins insists, meanwhile, that fans can only ever be "courted", that fandom cannot be reliably manufactured from analysis of fan demographics, behaviours, and cultural productions (2010e).

Disruptions, complications, and misfires, I would suggest, are always going to arise in institutional attempts to satisfy or service fans, necessarily because of a fundamental misalignment between the nature of fan cultures and industrial conceptualisations of audiences. As Napoli elaborates, industrial practice in market research and data analysis is structured by a desire to *rationalise* and quantify audiences. "[O]ver time", Napoli notes, "media industries' perceptions of their audience have become increasingly scientific and increasingly data-driven, with more impressionistic or instinctive approaches to audience understanding increasingly falling by the wayside"

(2011: 11); audiences and their behaviours are measured and schematised, their attachment to media products given a numerical value, their cultural productions translated into quantities of attention and engagement. As Matt Hills persuasively sets out in *Fan Cultures* (2002), however, fan attachment is characteristically and fundamentally *irrational*, contradictory, dualistic, and oppositional. When fans talk about becoming fans, for example, Hills notes they typically display heightened self-awareness and self-knowledge, and yet are at once unable to fully articulate or explain the intensity of their attachment to the object of their fandom, to the point, indeed, that this is seized upon as a defining quality of the attachment in itself (see Chapter Three particularly in Hills, 2002). This thesis has touched already, meanwhile, on the idea that questions of visibility and assimilation into mainstream culture are points of anxiety and tension within fan subcultures, with fan communities and even individual fans expressing contradictory desires that the object of their fandom become popular, and yet remain special and private to them, for fan practices and fannish engagement to become more culturally legitimate, and yet to remain subversive and under the radar. As Nancy Baym notes, furthermore, and Chapter Five has touched on briefly, fans' great love for a media text can lead them to be hyper-critical of it; indeed, Baym suggests, "fans [may] enhance their pleasure in many ways by discussing their criticisms" (1998: 124). Thus the feedback loop breaks down: attempting to address fan critiques of a franchise may deprive them of a source of pleasure; the alchemy of fan love for a character may not be reducible to a formula; shifting narrative focus based on observations of fan-favourite characters does not take into account the possibility that their appeal may be predicated on their marginality, and on the counter-cultural position that may be taken up through preferring them to the hero or protagonist. The videogame *Dirge of Cerberus* (Square Enix, 2006), an instalment of the *Compilation of the Final Fantasy VII* franchise, did just that, centring on a character peripheral to early instalments that developed an unexpectedly large fan following; it was strikingly unpopular among fans. The ideal textual trace of dynamics of fan service is, Russell suggests, as such the *glimpse*. "Desire", as Russell puts it, "is to be located in the Fanservice object, not re-determined as an achieved object of realised gratification" (2008: 108); the glimpse embodies this principle, as a moment positioned somewhere "between desire and satisfaction" (108), in which multiple and contradictory wants and possibilities of fulfilment coexist and hang in balance together.

I thus propose fanservice as an organising principle for analysis of franchise characters predicated on the idea that fans are courted by media companies because it engages the fact that there are disruptive, complicating forces at play in any channels of communication and feedback between fans and institutional communicators, that the creative and interpretative protocols of fan cultures rarely get translated into institutional products without distortion. To make sure that this critical prism in itself does not distort and misrepresent these dynamics further, however, some further nuancing is needed of how exactly "fandom" is being defined in these equations. "Fandom" as a modality of engagement with media properties may be atomised further. Four types or categories of fandom emerge from existing scholarship on and by fans. The first, and perhaps most commonly studied, is *transformative* fandom. Transformative response may be defined as "tak[ing] something extant and turn[ing] it into something with a new purpose, sensibility, or mode of expression" (Organisation for Transformative Works, n.d.). This "something extant" may be the characters, setting, or narrative continuity of an existing fiction, which may be turned into fan fiction, written extensions or re-imaginings of plot and worldbuilding, fan art, (re)visualisations of characters or scenes or diegetic extension through pictures, or filks, original songs engaging the fictional universe; the "something extant" may also be actual fragments of the source text, clips, screenshots, sound effects, lines of description or dialogue, which may be re-edited together into fan films, vids or machinima, decontextualised, re-framed and spread as memes or viral jokes, or sampled or remixed into new musical tracks. These are arts, as Jenkins et al note, not only of invention and imagination, but also of "analysis and commentary[;] sampling intelligently from the existing cultural reservoir requires a close analysis of the existing structures and uses of this material; remixing requires an appreciation of emerging structures and latent potential meanings." (2006: 33) The second, perhaps the most widespread, is *affirmational* fandom. Affirmational fans may be defined as *sanctioned* fans, as fans who express their love for a media product by buying it (and perhaps even multiple copies of it), visiting creator blogs to ask them questions about their imagined universe, posting or blogging at length about developments in the plot; affirmational fandom is going to see a band in concert, buying a football season ticket, being invested in the *creators*' vision for a franchise. Pearson notes a degree of "value judgement" at play in initial elaborations of the concept of affirmational fandom, a loaded opposition of the affirmational fan as complicit and the transformative fan as resistant or subversive (2011); like Pearson, however, I believe it is valuable to retain the distinction in fannish practices and

modalities of engagement this opposition articulates while rejecting the value judgement it implies. Blogger for the *Journal of Transformative Works and Cultures* "cryptoxin", meanwhile, has added the category of *parasocial* fandom, oriented around "virtual sociality" with the characters in the object of fandom (2010), while Jason Mittell has proposed the additional category of *forensic* fandom. Forensic fandom, as Mittell defines it, is "a mode of [...] engagement encouraging research, collaboration, analysis, and interpretation" (2009b); it is combing franchises, their paratexts and extratexts for clues about what might happen in future instalments, forming theories about upcoming plot developments through close textual analysis, and doing so collectively with like-minded fans. In practice, these modalities of response often intersect in the activities and productions of fan cultures, but they also delineate fan identities and communities.

I would suggest that the figure of fanservice, and the calculus of pressures, exchanges and influences it expresses, needs to be differently inflected and configured in each of these cases. Each of these modes of participatory engagement necessarily interpolates differently into the feedback loop between fan, franchise, and producer, because each aligns differently with institutional aims and values. Affirmational fandom, obviously, does nothing but benefit institutional communicators, and is likely to be aggressively and consistently courted; indeed, the basic impulse and method of transmedia proliferation in itself may be seen as exploiting affirmational fandom, insofar as it provides consumers with ever more opportunities to consume a beloved media product. This chapter has already discussed, meanwhile, how valuable parasocial engagement is to transmedia producers; the aim to create an illusion of direct, intimate interaction with franchise characters may be seen as more generally refracted through the synergistic logics and textual forms of much franchise storytelling. Transformative fandom, however, is a more ambivalent proposition. Insofar as it, like many other modes of participatory engagement, implies sustained immersion in and close engagement with the object of fandom, a high level of attachment to it, and significant free advertising labour, it is of value to institutional producers, and franchise texts may, as a result, attempt to both invite and reply to its texts and practices. That is, they may deliberately manufacture "syntagmatic gaps" (Örnebring, 2007: 451), points at which there is information or narrative content absent and unwritten, and yet somehow implicit in and inferred by the text, that not only make room for further transmedia extension, but also enable fans' creative and transformative interventions; alternatively, they may attempt to

answer the questions transformative works implicitly ask, about where a particular narrative thread or relationship is going, or about the significance of a splinter of worldbuilding detail.

Yet transformative fandom more than most causes disruptions in this feedback loop, the desires and modes of engagement implicit in transformative response particularly resistant to rationalisation and effective exploitation. In many respects, for example, there is something relentlessly teleological about transformative fandom; writing fan fiction, producing fan art, making fan vids, reads as repeated attempting to take a narrative, character, or relationship between characters to a particular point of climax and consummation, to answer unanswered questions. Yet from another perspective, part of the pleasure of transformative fandom is that it is kaleidoscopic; both these end points, and the journeys to them, can be rewritten and re-read interminably. Institutional communicators, even allowing for franchise storytelling's aesthetic of multiplicity, can provide only authorised, canonical resolutions, not the free play of versions that transformational fandom can offer. Desire and interest in the object of fandom, meanwhile, cannot be straightforwardly or reliably read off from the characters, relationships and plot threads that individual or bodies of transformative works focus on; as participatory cultures, transformative fandoms are developed interpretative and creative communities, structured as much by dialogues, dynamics of knowledge and labour exchange, and relationships of support and encouragement between their members as by the objects of their fandom, and likewise, their fictional productions speak as much to the produser's relationship to her subcultural community as to her relationship to her object of fandom. And of course, the pleasure of authorised, canonical response or acknowledgement cannot necessarily substitute for the pleasure of transformative practice itself. This includes the pleasure of creating, of writing one's own words on a character or actor's body, mastering video editing software, or exercising one's own worldbuilding imagination, but also the pleasure of transformative reading, of picking out unexplored potentials, or unresolved contradictions, rather than having them mapped out for you.

Moreover, the value of transformative fandom to institutional producers is heavily qualified and compromised. Although the Organisation for Transformative Works makes a strong case that transformative response is fair use of intellectual property and may be legally protected, it nevertheless treads close to copyright infringement; this may be a

particular source of anxiety for franchise producers, given that, as this section has already mentioned, the formal distinction between some authorised transmedia proliferations and transformative works is tenuous. Balancing out the work they do to increase brand awareness, meanwhile, is the issue of transformative texts attaching undesirable meanings to entertainment brands; transformative works may offer critical or subversive readings of their source texts, or employ a style or tone inimical to the entertainment brand identity, by including graphic violence or sexual content, for example. The feedback loop between institutional communicators and transformative fandom may therefore be antagonistic, with franchise producers trying to resist or *dis*courage transformative response. This resistance may be legal in form, comprising sending cease-and-desist letters to websites hosting transformative works, or filing law suits against fans; it may also be technological, for example, encrypting digital film texts or games to prevent fans delving into and fragmenting them for reassembly in their own creative productions.

It may also, however, be textual. Napoli (2011: 127-8), for example, offers an important reminder that institutional communicators are increasingly colonising and co-opting channels for the distribution of amateur content. An increasingly significant part of transmedia practice involves producing content tailored, more or less successfully, for distribution through the support systems of participatory culture, texts designed or re-designed for primary broadcast on YouTube, for example, in the hope of supplanting transformative productions. This thesis has already discussed, meanwhile, the idea that franchise storytelling on one level works compulsively to fill fictional gaps; transmedia practice generates texts, whether full-blown narrative extensions, throwaway comments from authors, or companion fact files or encyclopaedias, that sketch in blank spaces in its narrative, character design and worldbuilding. This impulse and method, I would argue, can also be read in the light of the complex relationship between institutional communicators and transformative fandom. It expresses the institutional tension between the desire to court and the desire to resist transformative response. Encyclopaedias, for example, make a franchise, to use Jenkins's famous term, *poachable*, insofar as they are filled with the kind of throwaway, underdeveloped worldbuilding details, subtleties and intrigues of continuity, that admit and encourage fans' creative interventions; they allow fan knowledge of a universe to approach that of its creators, equipping fans with the tools to give these interventions rigour, texture and depth, and thus blurring the line between authorised and unauthorised extensions of a franchise. Yet they also work to shut down

transformative invention and speculation, insistently sketching canonical fact into blank spaces and strengthening the producers' grip on their entertainment brand.

Some franchises, meanwhile, may try to find a middle ground between these two options of courtship and resistance, and seek instead to *manage* transformative fandom, to attempt to direct fan creativity down certain paths and channel the impulses behind it into activities more beneficial to institutional producers. George Lucas, for example, runs sanctioned, "official" competitions for *Star Wars* fan film-makers, giving fans permission to play in the *Star Wars* universe, a tool-kit of images, music, and sound effects, and a considerable degree of exposure for their work, on condition that no unlicensed copyright material be used in the films, the films meet certain guidelines in terms of tone and content (no nudity, swearing, sexual themes or explicit violence), and, until the release of the final franchise film in 2007, that entries be parodies, mockumentaries and documentaries rather than narrative extensions or transformative vids. The closing section of the previous chapter, meanwhile, has already set out an illustration of how live Q&A sessions or Frequently Asked Questions blogs can be used by creators to construct and interpellate fans into approved modes of engagement with text and author.

Implicit in this last is the idea that forensic fandom, oriented around problem-solving, exegesis of creator intention, and *predictive* reading, *is* something valued and courted by institutional communicators, and indeed, this is an increasingly common critical framing. Jason Mittell, in particular, has worked extensively on exploring feedback loops between authorised media products and the fact that contemporary media landscapes and reception cultures support forensic textual engagement and "collective intelligence", that is, "the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others towards a common goal" (Jenkins et al, 2006: 39). He suggests that more and more media products are becoming "drillable", that is, their narratives, characters, and worldbuildings are being designed as complex, multilayered and multifaceted enough to "encourage a mode of forensic fandom that encourages viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story and its telling"; this, he notes, is "not an entirely new phenomenon, but rather an acceleration by degree", in response to the rapid emergence and development of reception communities and "digital tools that have enabled fans to collectively apply their forensic efforts" (Mittell, 2009c). Media entertainment, Mittell suggests, has taken on more elements of puzzle and mystery, made

more demands on the cognitive and critical faculties of consumers, as the Internet has better equipped consumers to decode and meet them, by allowing them ready access both to immense archives of texts and information, and to the skills and knowledge of other fans engaged in the same forensic enterprise.

In its most basic features and protocols, transmedia franchising generally as a mode of fiction may be understood as in dialogue with increasing cultural and technological support for forensic fandom and collective intelligence. The scope and detail of its worldbuilding, the number of texts and products it involves, and the number of them that demand navigation of complex textual puzzles and crowded media landscapes, its intricate narratives and long-form seriality, all reward and require forensic engagement; they make access to a community of fellow fans, and their knowledge about the franchises' archives, invaluable to enjoying and understanding franchised fictions to the full.[43] To conclude this section, however, I wish to sketch on top of this a more granular picture of how, why and where franchises in particular engage, absorb and reflect forensic fandom, and offer some frameworks for reading this particular feedback loop between institutional communicators and communications and participatory cultures in transmedia franchising.

To begin with, I want to engage briefly Roberta Pearson's (2009) work on characterisation in *Lost*. Though Pearson does not frame her argument in these terms, her analysis effectively stands as a case study in the effect on character of a media franchise's dialogues with forensic fandom; *Lost* is in many respects a paradigmatic "drillable" fiction, a rich and complex puzzle narrative that makes high demands on the individual and collective intelligence of consumers. Pearson, however, uses instead the suggestive term "hermeneutically driven" (141) to figure *Lost* as a text supporting and requiring forensic fandom, engaging Barthes' idea of hermeneutic codes to express *Lost* as "emphasis[ing]" and oriented around "the resolution of narrative enigmas" (141). She goes on to identify two main features of characterisation and character development in *Lost* springing from this orientation, that character biography is designed to be always "connect[ed] to central narrative enigmas", and that character "arcs culminate in

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[43] That said, as Jenkins notes in his brief consideration of "drillability" in transmedia entertainment (2009b), it should not be forgotten that transmedia franchises are also centrally concerned with remaining accessible to casual consumers who may only dip in and out of the franchise experience, as this thesis has already noted. Drillability in transmedia franchises is hence often in tension and dialogue with modularity and accessibility.

certainty." (147) "Hermeneutically driven" characterisation thus emerges from Pearson's essay as defined by closure, resolution, repletion of meaning. As Chapter One of this thesis has illustrated, however, the hermeneutics of franchise fiction are often more complex and contradictory than that. The mode typically requires the constant negotiation of a difficult balance between answering narrative questions and leaving room for speculation, between furnishing narrative worlds with a rich surfeit of detail and managing and signalling important "migratory cues" (Long, 2007: 42; events or details that point consumers towards a new franchise text and/or platform) and "origami unicorns" ("that one piece of information that makes you look at the [fiction] differently", Neil Young, interviewed by and quoted in Jenkins, 2006a: 123), between encyclopaedism and hyperdiegesis. Though Pearson's framework for understanding "hermeneutically driven" characterisation illuminates her specific case study of *Lost* very effectively, therefore, readings of how dialogues with forensic fandom inflect characterisation in other franchises may need to bear in mind that the correct model for the interaction between producer, franchise text and forensic fan may be less solving a carefully designed puzzle, and more exploration of a maze of dead ends, unfinished, uncertain and abandoned paths, irrelevancies and overdetermined details.

With this note in place, I now return to the task of elaborating a more granular picture of this interaction. This is a further important dimension, for example, of the role that paratextual material plays in the production of franchise characters. As Henry Jenkins observes in his study of forensic fandom for *Twin Peaks* (2006b), combing paratextual material to construct explicatory connections between the extratextual, intertextual, and intratextual is a primary activity of forensic fan communities; providing hints, explanations, and teases about narrative mysteries, depths of backstory and worldbuilding, and secret or bonus content in franchise products is a key axis of how institutional communicators exploit paratexts to manage, enhance and extend the franchise experience.

Where there is long-form serial narrative, meanwhile, with new instalments and products hotly anticipated for their likely revelations and resolutions, there will be the sub-genre of forensic fandom "spoiler" fandom, that is, individual and groups of fans who direct their collective intelligence towards *discovering*, rather than predicting, what is to come in future franchise instalments. Spoiler fans search both online and offline for

leaked scripts, careless comments from creators or insiders, or locations of filming; as Mittell and Gray set out (2007), they take pleasure in being dedicated and savvy enough to succeed, in the implicit contest with institutional producers, and in the fact of being "spoiled" for narrative or worldbuilding developments in itself. The activities of this particular branch of forensic fandom interpolate into feedback loops with franchise texts and producers in particular ways. Mittell and Gray observe, for example, that studio awareness of an active "spoiler" culture among fans of a media property can induce institutional producers to plant "foilers", that is, "blatant misinformation in the guise of a real spoiler", and scatter red herrings throughout their texts. Where producers are looking to engage spoiler fandom specifically, therefore, franchise characters may become and become implicated in misdirection; instead of every line of the picture being meaningful, franchise characters are drawn with aspects and details that are purposefully meaning*less*. As Chapter Five has briefly addressed, meanwhile, Mittell and Gray's work on spoiler fans also illuminates that "spoiler fans see the revelatory aspect of the plotline and pleasures of suspense as relatively unimportant, obscuring more enjoyable textual qualities that they seek out such as narrative mechanics, relationship dramas, and production values"; they do not privilege the "specificities of plot" as a source of fictional pleasure, and indeed, see the "reduction of suspense" as a way of enabling greater attention to be paid to other rewarding aspects of the text, to textures of characterisation, dialogue, production design, and similar. This shift in priority may be acknowledged or even echoed in the objects of their fandom.

Although, furthermore, parasocial fandom and forensic fandom are in many respects constructed in critical and subcultural discourse as poles apart, the one positioned as naive and immersive, the other positioned as critical and analytical, they are to an extent two sides of the same coin. In a study of soap opera fandom, Sam Ford (2008) suggests that the quasi-parasocial gossip in which soap fans engage about soap characters is a form of collective intelligence; as much as spoiler-hunting or the kind of complex textual exegesis Jenkins observes from *Twin Peaks* fans, talking about characters as though they were real people involves individual and communal mastering and processing of vast quantities of intradiegetic information and textual gestures, an encyclopaedic grasp of episode sequencing and content, close analysis of characters' facial expressions, gestures and nuances of dialogue, holding in one's mind and rifling through volumes of narrative continuity. The kind of attempts in franchise extension

discussed above and throughout this thesis to foster illusions of intimacy with characters, water-cooler chat about them, and transcendence of their fictionality, may as such also be explored and interpreted as engaging and producing forensic fandom and consumption supported and defined by collective intelligence.

As a final gesture towards opening up critical understandings and analysis of feedback loops between forensic fandom and franchise producers, I want to address an assumption that seems to underlie most existing framings of these dynamics, namely, that the textual effects of dialogues with forensic fandom are best conceptualised in terms of *depth*. An idiom of digging, layers, levels, looking beyond the surface runs through critical work in the field; the discussion here is no exception. However, I wish to suggest that courting forensic fandom may sometimes result in greater *surface* complexity in media products. Forensic engagement runs on the freeze-frame, both literally, in the sense that it may involve pausing a DVD to scour a mise-en-scene for clues, and metaphorically, in the sense that the foundation of its complex interpretative manoeuvres and constructions is a practice of isolating textual elements, dwelling on them, turning them over, searching them, and examining them from multiple angles. As audiences refine their forensic reading abilities, therefore, and their skills in mobilising collective intelligence, media products may coterminously move towards a freeze-frame aesthetic, towards richly detailed production design that rewards literal freeze-frame viewing, loading meaning onto fleeting glances or gestures from characters, and developing environments or experiences, whether material or virtual, that freeze their fictional universes in time, and allow consumers to walk around them, peering into what might have been a blind spot on a film screen, or moving closer to examine something that would have been out of focus, picking up diegetic objects and literally turning them over in their hands. This is, I would suggest, a particularly useful framework for reading transmedia franchises' dialogues with forensic engagement, given the extent to which their hyperdiegetic and encyclopaedic modalities produce "overdesign" in their art direction, and the importance, as this chapter has already demonstrated, of finely detailed tableaux and models as forms of franchise extension.

Repackaging Fan Culture

Attempts to colonise and repackage fandom through transmedia and franchising strategies are becoming more common and more sophisticated. In June 2011, J. K. Rowling

announced a new project called "Pottermore",[44] an online architecture of discussion forums and interactive content built around eBook versions of the *Potter* novels. Pottermore is fan culture appropriated, structured and rebranded; when it opens to the general public in October 2011, it will offer all the pleasures and activities that may be found in a grassroots fan community – a Sorting Hat quiz; the filling in of gaps in worldbuilding and characters' backstories; a place to dissect and enthuse over the books with other fans – but on J. K. Rowling's and Warner Bros.' terms. Users are not even permitted (to ensure the community remains a safe one for young users) to select their own screennames.

Earlier in this discussion, however, I noted that the basic impulses of transmedia franchising as a fictional practice, its compulsions towards aggregation, multiplicity, remediation, prolonged and multifaceted immersion in a fictional world, in themselves resonate with those of fandom as a mode of participatory engagement with media products. Suzanne Scott suggests that more than that, "ancillary content models" full stop should be understood as repackagings of fandom (2009). For Scott, much transmedia practice generally is fundamentally a "regifting economy". Fan cultures are gift economies, the idea of the free generation, circulation and sharing of content deeply rooted in their structures and protocols. Where institutional communicators make extra fictional content available on websites or similar platforms, they employ a rhetoric of gifting; "ancillary content models", Scott argues, "[...]adopt[...]the guise of a gift economy, vocally claiming that their goal is simply to give fans more – more "free" content, more access to the show's creative team". Yet ultimately, Scott suggests, they are simply "regifting" content and practices that fans would produce and disseminate independently, for themselves, for free, redefining it in institutional terms, and bringing it within a commercial infrastructure. The practice of franchising a character in itself, therefore, is perhaps the ultimate expression of the interrelation between media industries and participatory cultures in contemporary media landscapes.

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[44] Homepage available at: <http://www.pottermore.com/> [Accessed 25 August 2011].

Conclusion

Reading the Franchise Character

As this thesis demonstrates, characters that have been franchised across media are complex fictional objects. They are conceived or re-purposed in industrial logics of convergence and synergy as items of content, pieces of intellectual property, that may be used to generate and sustain an open-ended, multi-part, multi-media work of fiction. Their imagined lives and selves are material for multiple revenue streams, that is, multiple media texts, products and experiences; they are conceptualised and treated something like tesseracts (Coppa, 2011), rich and dense with wrinkles of biography, personality, relationship, perspective, that may be ironed out into a spin-off series, an in-character blog post, or a trading card. Their names, faces and appearances brand and cohere these products into a corporately orchestrated total entertainment experience, a franchised fiction with engagement and consumption opportunities in as many media outlets as possible. They are structured and exploited as loci of consumer identification, attachment and investment, their design and representation tailored and managed to motivate consumers to follow a franchise across texts and across platforms, to manufacture interest in the franchise in the first instance, to stimulate hype, buzz, gossip, and fan-dom. They are constructed as points of entry into expansive fictional worlds, technologies, scripts and stimuli for consumer participation and interaction, whether imaginative, creative, ludic, virtual or kinaesthetic. Interacting with these industrial logics shaping their conception, presentation and functions are aesthetic logics of worldmaking, the impulse to design and evoke fictional worlds on a vast scale in minute detail, narrative complexity and hyperbolic seriality, involving the artful management of events and information in a multicursal, polycentric narrative to move consumers around and keep them interested in the total entertainment experience, multiplicity, the creation of meaning through setting in play dialogues between rewrites, reinterpretations and what ifs, and immersion.

Franchise characters thus emerge as non-actual individuals from the interplay between and cumulative effects of an expansive and expanding array of representations, all of which contribute or inflect fictional meaning to a greater or lesser extent, even the most risible exercise in character merchandising. The raw material for their study is less a

text than an archive, comprising multiple textual forms and genres, many of them experimental and bleeding-edge new, multiple media incarnations, that may both complete and complement and overwrite each other, multiple forms of inter-textuality, from adaptation to parody to alternate universes to narrative extensions, and multiple types of textuality; the fictional logics of franchising, and the technological, industrial and cultural logics of media convergence, script metatexts and paratexts into the franchise experience, and hence into the process of fictional meaning. Many franchises even extensively exploit paratexts as further opportunities for cross-platform engagement and the delivery of fictional information, to the point of blurring the line between fictional and paratextual material. Franchise archives support multiple configurations of the fictional encounter, and multiple levels of attention and investment from consumers; there may thus often be principles of modularity and stratification organising their entries, with different representations of their characters differently designated as central or optional to enjoyment and understanding of the franchise. Their boundaries, meanwhile, are fuzzily defined, issues of canonicity and authority constantly in negotiation. As such, therefore, not every representation of a franchise character is created and apprehended equal. Some resonate through a franchise archive more than others, understood and treated as more "authentic", as origins of meaning against which other representations should be measured, as determinants of the form of the character's other appearances. The way in which the production of content is organised and "farmed out", the way it is released and the paratextual manoeuvres around it once it has been, reflect and construct this; audiences negotiate it, sorting representations into hierarchies influenced by these industrial constructions, but based also on considerations of quality, anteriority, and even simply preference.

Overarchingly, the impulses, effects and pleasures of this inter- and multi-textual articulation of character are in one respect encyclopaedic. As a function of the desire to mine them for narrative, experiences and consumption opportunities, franchise archives exhaustively represent characters, comprehensively mapping their inner and outer contours using the instruments of multiple media and genres; they produce and assume epistemophilia in audiences, an interest in information about characters for information's sake, in minutiae of worldbuilding and backstory. At the same time, however, franchise characters also emerge from this array of expressions as built around and to an extent reducible to a set of core concepts, persistent, iconic, recognisable and repeatable

elements, such as a costume, a catchphrase, a soundtrack, a moral compass, a narrative mechanism, that make it quotable, merchandisable, rebootable and re-visionable while remaining recognisably the same fictional creation, transmedially, transtextually, and transculturally mobile.

As fictional people, then (or aliens, or creatures, or fantastic beings), franchise characters are conceived, conceptualised and treated at once and by turns as completely imagined individuals, intimately known and knowable, and as an idea that may be re-interpreted, re-written, fleshed out into takes or versions different in their particularities but intelligible as refractions of the same basic concept, a set of parameters to be worked within and around. They are designed in fine and comprehensive detail, but so that "even if you take away all the details, you still recognise that character as that character" (Long, 2011). They are intermedial figures, born of and developed through contact and slippages between the conventions, languages and protocols of multiple media. Because transmedia franchising is a typically a long-form, serial practice, meanwhile, their identities and life courses may be set and shaped in dialogue with shifts in market conditions, cultural trends and the technological landscape, with audience feedback and a consumer base both ageing with it and constantly picking up new adherents.

The characters of the most successful transmedia franchises are fixtures of the contemporary cultural landscape, turning up reliably in cinemas at Christmas or on Comic Relief specials, but also more consistently omnipresent in the collective imagination and cultural idiom, to the point that their names, faces, even stretches of their plots and dialogue are familiar even to those who have never consumed any of their primary representations. They become common reference points, and touchstones of contemporary cultural literacy (though their position in systems of cultural and subcultural capital is ambiguous and contradictory). They are thus made to bear a weight of cultural and ideological meaning, treated as and eventually coming to act as shorthand for aesthetic trends, political moments, national values, differently at different points in their transmedia lives. At the same time, they often become objects of deeply personal significance. Many consumers grow up with a franchise, knowing and enjoying its characters for long stretches of their lives (and the characters' lives), to the point that these characters and encounters with them are associated and intertwined with childhood memories, processes of identity formation, relationships and key life events. Of course,

this affection and nostalgia is a valuable resource, and like so much else about the franchise character, is frequently monetised and exploited.

Reading the franchise character, then, means textual analysis in a range of media, forms and genres, from action figures to novelisations to twitter feeds to Alternate Reality Games, but also paratextual and metatextual analysis; it involves examining how advertisements, making-of documentaries, concept art and reviews interpolate or are incorporated into the encounter with the character, and unpacking them as producing or inflecting fictional meaning, and tracing and analysing how they circulate and shape the character as a term in the cultural vocabulary. It is a practice of explicating co-ordinated intertextuality, of illuminating how rewrites and retellings build up a picture of a character when drawn together as part of a continuous fictional project, exploring how the many texts in the franchise archive link to each other, fit into each other's gaps and cracks, expand and complete and split off from and rejoin each other. It will frequently require analysing spaces and experiences rather than texts, and as fictional texts. It involves examining how this orchestrated intertextuality is inflected by the construction and apprehension of hierarchies amongst the interacting texts, and moreover, tracing how precisely these hierarchies are established and re-negotiated, how authority, authenticity and originality are marked textually and paratextually on particular franchise instalments, and conferred upon them by consumers individually and collectively.

Perhaps most importantly, however, although this thesis began with a call for greater emphasis on fictional analysis in the study of transmedia franchising and media convergence, rather than industry or cultural studies, as Murray and Weedon suggest in their editorial introduction to *Convergence*'s 2011 special issue on adaptation, cross-media practices and branded entertainment, what is in fact required is a closer marriage between the two (3). Fictional analysis needs to be synthesised with and guided by an understanding of production protocols and industrial concepts, theories of media, media landscapes and media technologies as well as theories of fictional representation within them, audience studies, not only of fans, but also of anti-fans and non-fans, economic theory and the theory of marketing, advertising, and in particular branding. The aesthetics and fictional operations of transmedia franchising are to such a degree bound up in industrial and technological shifts, commercial logics, the desire to exploit the possibilities (both creative and economic) of different media channels, and the complex

relationship between institutional communicators and increasingly active, participatory consumers, that the two sides of franchise character analysis need similarly to be intertwined.

My intention in this thesis has been to provide some theoretical frameworks, critical positions, and conceptual tools for enabling this kind of analysis of specific franchise characters; however, there remains further general and theoretical work to be done. This theory, for example, focuses on explicating the pressures acting on franchise character design, the work franchise characters do and are required to do, and the sites, strategies and processes of characterisation transmedia franchising produces and affords. With this in place, a useful complement may be a more dedicated investigation of whether these factors and protocols are producing a reliance on or favouring of particular character archetypes, traits, or narrative positions, that may lend themselves particularly well to franchising across media. The cognitive phenomenology of franchise fiction has gone largely unexplored, yet there are many compelling lines of enquiry in this area, into how exactly consumers recall, process, connect and synthesise the volumes of fictional information and meaning delivered through the franchise experience, for example, or literally how they imagine franchised characters, what shape a character encountered in multiple media and textual forms ultimately takes in the mind's eye. This thesis, meanwhile, set out to lay a missing foundation in the field of transmedia studies, and to take a broad definition of and approach to transmedia franchising as a fictional practice. This position came from a perception that much of the existing critical work on transmedia fictional practice was in fact focused on only one sub-type, increasingly commonly known as transmedia storytelling. However, there remain unanswered questions of this second order: are other recognisable sub-types of transmedia franchising emerging besides transmedia storytelling – could adaptation-based franchising, for example, be usefully defined and theorised as a distinct model, or the small-scale transmedia experiment, where franchising is limited to the generation of very satellite paratexts or quasi-paratexts around a mother ship text or series – and are their fictional operations and protocols particular? In this work, I have aimed to survey and engage franchises with mother ships in a range of media in order to produce theory and method applicable across them, but it may also be fruitful to ask how and how far does the starting medium or mother ship medium of a franchise resonate through its aesthetics, cross-platform movements and operations – is, in other words, a franchise derived from

or centring on a film characteristically and non-trivially different from one spun off from a television show, a video game, a theme park ride, a line of toys? How much does the starting medium determine the subsequent transmedia movements of the franchise's narrative and characters, in terms of the particular platforms the franchise is extended onto (and even the order in which these cross-platform movements take place), and in terms of the type of narrative, worldbuilding, and character content provided on them? Could this be theorised in the general case, or only analysed in the particular? As I neared the end of this research project, meanwhile, it began to seem that a tenable and useful distinction could be made between franchises that are organised around a fictional world, and the impulse to explore all its corners and meet all its inhabitants, and franchises that are organised around a particular character, centred on and dominated by the thread of the character's imagined life, the character's name and image. The idea that character-based and world-based franchising are distinct variants of transmedia practice, I would suggest, could productively be explored and unpacked further. This thesis has already touched, furthermore, on the idea that the many franchises of a single parent studio or corporation (such as Square-Enix, or DC Comics) may be intuited and orchestrated as related, their narrative realities co-existing, intersecting and overlapping, their characters able to cross paths; these fictional spaces and the presentational and representational manoeuvres that produce them, I would suggest, merit further focused consideration.

More work is also needed in the area of how transmedia practice draws on, relates to and transforms particular fictional genres. As this thesis earlier discussed, for example, there has already been some critical discussion of why fantastic genres have so dominated transmedia output to date, yet as more and more diverse branches of fictional and entertainment production are coming to embrace transmedia practice, there is a growing need for analysis of sympathies between other genres and the protocols of transmedia franchising, of where their conventions, mechanisms and syntaxes encourage or problematise the extension of a creative property across texts and media. The BBC's ongoing development of *Sherlock* into a key transmedia property, for example, invites critical work on how detective stories do and do not work in transmedia. Moreover, many of the major science fiction and fantasy franchises discussed in this thesis are more accurately and usefully considered as hybrid in their genres, with the elements of other traditions they incorporate as central to their operations and success as transmedia franchises as their fantastic aspects. Investigation of sympathies between the protocols of

transmedia practice and the boarding school story as a genre, for example, with the room it makes for an expansive cast of characters, into which consumers can easily introject themselves using the multiple structures and affiliations that define the school child's life and identify (timetables, Houses, year groups), and for narrative rhythms both quotidian and climactic, may help further illuminate the transmedia extension of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, which are rooted as much in the generic syntaxes of that genre as in those of modern fantasy. There is certainly room, meanwhile, for more focused consideration than this thesis has offered of how the fact that transmedia franchising has been dominated by some genres during its emergence and institutionalisation has influenced how it has crystallised and evolved as an industrial practice and fictional modality. In addition, conversely, the ever-increasing cultural presence and impact of transmedia practice raises interesting questions about whether, for example, "transmedia science fiction" is becoming a definable, meaningful sub-field of the complex, fuzzily-bounded repertoire of iconography, archetype and formula that is "science fiction" as a cross-media fictional genre, in the same way that "science fiction film" may be said to be.

This critical theory, meanwhile, represents a conversation with a fast-moving field, and as this research project has drawn to its conclusion, new paradigms for thinking about transmedia and media convergence have emerged, that pose compelling questions for the theory and analysis of transmedia franchises. Jenkins's earlier work on media convergence, for example, emphasised that it should be thought of less in terms of "Black Box" technologies that stream multiple media through a single interface and more of a "kludge – a jerry-rigged relationship between multiple media systems" (2006a: 17); however, as he noted in his opening remarks at this year's *Transmedia, Hollywood* conference (2011a), the Black Box – the smartphone, the tablet – is more and more defining and structuring our encounters with media texts and products. The need is thus increasingly pressing for investigations into how the production, operations and experience of transmedia franchises are transformed when the bulk of their multi-media archive may in fact be stored in and consumed through a single delivery technology. On a similar note, Jenkins also introduced the conference with the provocative paradox that cross-platform production and delivery may not be necessary for a fiction to be productively thought of as transmedia storytelling, remarking that "when DC or Marvel co-ordinates storylines across 20 different issues a month in 20 different titles centred around different characters, I think that's already transmedia storytelling for most of the

practical sense in which we're talking about." (2011a) If engaged further, this idea, glossed in Jenkins's notes on the speech as the concept of "radical intertextuality within the same medium" (2011b), could challenge, extend and clarify theories and definitions of transmedia franchising as a fictional practice productively.

There is broad value in the critical study of fictional franchises. In them can be seen much about evolutions and shifts in representational technologies and how we use them, new structures and devices for articulating subjectivity, transformations in what it means to be an author or an audience, industrial reconfigurations and popular aesthetics, the role that media and media products play in contemporary life, how we imagine, create and respond to fiction in the twenty-first-century. Chapter Six observed, meanwhile, that there are resonances between franchise practice and the transformative creativity of fans; it argued that the theories and concepts of fan studies could as such be useful tools for reading franchise fictions, but conversely, I would suggest that frameworks for understanding the fictional operations and logics of transmedia franchising may in their turn be valuable lenses for illuminating the nature of fan fiction, or fan art, or vids as fictional practices and genres. Perhaps most importantly, however, convergence culture, transmedia, and franchise practice and thinking are echoing more and more widely across contemporary media and fictional landscapes, such that they are increasingly leaving traces even on more contained fictions. As Chapter Four suggested, media are becoming increasingly intermedial, and so too even ostensibly single-medium fictions; texts that pre-date media convergence are being repackaged in it, reproduced as eBooks, reformatted as DVDs with deleted scenes and extras, redistributed on YouTube, revitalised with a web presence (in June 2011, for example, Faber and Faber released a digital edition of *The Waste Land* as an iPad app, which integrates into the text of the poem audio readings, interactive footnotes, facsimiles of manuscript pages, and videos offering critical perspectives on the poems). The aesthetics and imagination of transmedia franchising, the desires and expectations of its audiences, its worlds and plots and characters, are becoming more and more broadly influential; the protocols of media convergence – the constant multichannelled flow of information and content; the dense cloud of paratexts that surrounds media products and events; the distribution logics of configuration, personalisation, and multiplying consumption opportunities; participatory audienceship – are not just encouraging transmedia entertainment, they are increasingly pressures acting on and shaping all contemporary fiction to a greater or lesser extent.

Concepts, paradigms and theories developed to understand transmedia franchising as an art of media convergence, therefore, may be valuable starting points for understanding the effects of convergence culture on fiction more broadly. The work in this thesis on franchise textuality and intertextuality, for example, may be usefully re-engaged with a wider focus, an investigation carried out into whether other forms of contemporary text may productively be conceptualised as archontic, or a full-scale revisiting of Genette's typologies of transtextuality in the light of the contemporary media and cultural climate, and how it is configuring fictional texts together with each other and with their reviews, advertisements, storyboards, deleted scenes, concept art, analysis, narratives of production. Its comments on transmedia franchising as an art of the information age, meanwhile, may act as a springboard for explorations of how a culture of collective intelligence, high-speed communication and information at your fingertips is interacting with fictional convention and imagination, influencing plotting, transforming genres, coterminously with changing what it means to be a consumer of fiction. Generally speaking, meanwhile, it is becoming increasingly necessary that the study and teaching of fiction, not only at higher education level, but also at primary and secondary level, move towards interdisciplinarity, transliteracy, and transmedia literacy, that is, the ability to understand interfaces between media, multimedia and intertextual logics, and the aesthetics and operations of large-scale, immersive, cross-platform narrative and worldbuilding. As Jenkins et al (2006) and Project New Media Literacies demonstrate, some of the most useful things that can come out of a growing theoretical understanding of media convergence culture and transmedia franchising are paradigms for what literacy means in an age of media convergence, what competencies are required to be an informed, engaged, critical consumer of fictional and media communications in contemporary media landscapes, and how these paradigms may be translated into pedagogy.

Equally, however, franchise fictions do merit critical study in their own right. For better or worse, they are a significant part of the reality of the contemporary fictional landscape; for many people, franchise products and experiences make up a large proportion of their time spent with fiction. Established franchise juggernauts are growing ever more dominant, and even gaining new leases of life (at the time of writing – August 2011 – the eighth film instalment of the *Harry Potter* franchise has recently broken box office records, and Rowling's new transmedia experiment *Pottermore* has opened its

doors to early adopters; the *X-Men* franchise has been given a recent film reboot), new ones continue to emerge, and more and more long-abandoned properties are being dusted off and given the twenty-first-century franchise treatment (*The Smurfs* being the most recent). Entertainment franchising is often treated with suspicion and distaste, "lamented" as contributing to "the increasing standardization and rationalized control of culture", articulated as the fast food of the contemporary cultural landscape (Johnson, 2011: 4). The economic model and industrial structures that underpin it are bound up in exploitative, oligarchal capitalism, while its exhaustive, immersive aesthetic and logic of saturation touch on deep-rooted cultural anxieties, evident in critical responses to earlier forms of *Gesamtkunstwerk*; the total work of art has been, and, it seems, continues to be, feared and denigrated as "produc[ing] hypnosis, [...] sordid intoxication, [...] fog" (Bertolt Brecht, cited in Swalwell, 2002: 49), as "overwhelm[ing]" (Swalwell, 2002: 48), "manipulat[ing]" (Bauer, 2005: 74) and deadening the critical and imaginative faculties of audiences through excess, overstimulation and the overdetermining of meaning and effect. This contributes to their relative marginalisation as objects of critical study. Yet fictional franchises' shameless commercialism, recycling of ideas and escapist pleasures do not change the fact that they are complex, rich and intricate in their design and fictional operations, sustaining and rewarding close critical analysis of their construction and the ways they produce meaning and effect. If anything, moreover, their ubiquity, popularity, and the uncritical way in which they are often consumed and enjoyed should demand more unpacking of what they are doing and saying and how exactly they are doing and saying it, not less.

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The complexity of fictional franchises as "texts", explained in Chapter One and engaged throughout this thesis, does not only raise issues for critical analysis, it also poses bibliographic problems. Any specific franchise texts and products referenced as illustrations or examples in the body of this thesis are listed in the bibliography that follows; as noted in the Introduction, however, much of the thinking in this thesis comes from reflection on and engagement with sustained and extensive experiences and consumption of transmedia franchises, immersion in and exploration over time of the many paths and corners of franchise archives. This problematises bibliography both practically and theoretically. The labour of mapping every text, product and experience in a franchise's archive is a major research project in itself; the conceptual and theoretical framework of the franchise archive that underpins and structures this work may be critically useful, meanwhile, but it translates awkwardly into bibliographic entries. How may a franchise archive be defined as a primary source, for example, when it is ongoing, when it is the product of multiple authors, multiple publishers, and multiple owners, when as an orchestrated intertext it includes reissues and repackagings of the same content, paratextual material, and material that is neither straightforwardly primary nor secondary in nature?

These issues could sustain study in themselves as a further dimension of the challenges transmedia and franchise entertainment poses to contemporary critical theory and practice. Here, however, I take as a provisional solution the approach of providing references to existing attempts to catalogue the archives of the five franchises identified in the introduction to this thesis as its primary case studies, of citing these encyclopaedic fictions in terms of encyclopaedias.[45] The following collaborative labours are unofficial, rarely the product of formal academic research, and not subject to stringent editorial review, yet they give a fuller picture of these franchises as primary sources than I and this thesis ever could alone, suggesting, perhaps, that informal, grassroots collective intelligence has value not only for consumers looking to get the most out of the franchise

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[45] Another option consonant with the thinking and frameworks of this thesis would be to express individual franchises in terms of their brand identity, core concepts or the objects of fictional content that fuel and organise their proliferation; again, however, determining these defining principles with any rigour is in itself a research question that could sustain an entire thesis.

experience, but also for critical practice in their study. Still, however, it should be kept in mind that even these comprehensive databases do not fully map the diffuse outer limits of franchise archives as they have been theoretically constructed in this thesis.

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