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# Porting Transmedia Storytelling to Journalism

## Abstract

This thesis examines how the methods of transmedia storytelling emerging in the entertainment industry might be used in a journalism context. Journalism is facing many crises, not the least of which is a loss of readership and perceived relevance to its public. Presented with an ever-expanding array of media with which to interact, the public is more difficult to attract to a socially relevant issue or a politically important story. Faced with similar issues, the entertainment industry has developed a means to engage with fans in a way that draws them across multiple media platforms, better captures their imagination and engages them personally into the story being told. *Transmedia Storytelling* lets narrative unfold on multiple lines, from varying perspectives and with the help of the fans themselves. Scholars of the methodology describe it as the art of world building.

This thesis illustrates that journalists can better engage their publics by adapting the methods of transmedia storytelling to journalism. By comparing entertainment transmedia storytelling theory and technique with examples of journalism that illustrate one or more of these techniques, this thesis explores whether journalists can reach more individuals, achieve better engagement and participation from their publics and more thoroughly communicate the complexity and context of any story.

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PORTING TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING TO JOURNALISM

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Social Sciences

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Kevin T. Moloney

August 2011

Advisor: Dr. Adrienne Russell

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how the methods of transmedia storytelling emerging in the entertainment industry might be used in a journalism context. Journalism is facing many crises, not the least of which is a loss of readership and perceived relevance to its public. Presented with an ever-expanding array of media with which to interact, the public is more difficult to attract to a socially relevant issue or a politically important story. Faced with similar issues, the entertainment industry has developed a means to engage with fans in a way that draws them across multiple media platforms, better captures their imagination and engages them personally into the story being told. *Transmedia Storytelling* lets narrative unfold on multiple lines, from varying perspectives and with the help of the fans themselves. Scholars of the methodology describe it as the art of world building.

This thesis illustrates that journalists can better engage their publics by adapting the methods of transmedia storytelling to journalism. By comparing entertainment transmedia storytelling theory and technique with examples of journalism that illustrate one or more of these techniques, this thesis explores whether journalists can reach more individuals, achieve better engagement and participation from their publics and more thoroughly communicate the complexity and context of any story.

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## PREFACE

*“The illusion that times that were are better than those that are, has probably pervaded all ages.” — Horace Greeley*

Change is a principal subject in journalism. Journalists like me have always been eager to cover the revolution or institutional collapse that may result in a completely new world. Subjects like the Civil Rights Movement or the fall of the Soviet Bloc left the public on the edge of its seats wondering how the world would change. But as the second decade of the 21st century begins, we find ourselves covering not only the revolutions of the outside world, but also the institutional collapse of our own profession. We are on the edge of our own seats. The profession of journalism I grew up with and worked in for more than 20 years is confronting a public that is rapidly dispersing through a crowd of content providers. They range from legacy media outlets to niches of special interest. The public is seeking customized, self-filtered news and a part in the journalism conversation. Journalists are scrambling for new ideas to meet these challenges.

Facing similar audience defections, the entertainment and advertising media are turning toward an emerging storytelling technique that uses the advantages of new media, legacy media, audience participation and investigative curiosity to more deeply

engage that audience and find them where in the mediascape they dwell. Practitioners and academics call this relatively new method “transmedia storytelling” as fans of an entertainment franchise find the story not just in one medium — cinema, for example — but across an array of professional- and amateur-created content in analog and electronic media. When done well, this technique has helped bring film and television franchises enduring involvement and commitment from their fans.

By adapting the methods of transmedia storytelling to journalism, can journalists — either those associated with big legacy media companies, or a small, collaborative group of committed individuals — better engage their publics, offer deeper and more valuable participation and interaction, deliver complex stories with deeper context and find the public in a dispersed, diverse and dilettante mediascape?

## CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION

### *Context*

What about journalism draws us in? Stories connect and frame us, as Yale’s postmodern art scholar and filmmaker Michael Roemer notes. “In Western culture,” he says, “story both contextualizes and decontextualizes. It allows us to remain detached yet to become engaged — to know and feel.” (Emphasis in original)(Roemer, 1995, p. 25) Telling stories and receiving stories, in both fictional and factual form, engages us. We are drawn to a socially relevant or politically important work that may change the way we live our lives. As citizens in a democracy we hope to make informed decisions and maintain our say in politics (Beckett, C., 2008, p. 13). As journalists in the U.S. we

hope to report those stories and maintain our self-defined role as the “The Fourth Estate,” a notion Thomas Carlyle said was introduced by Sir Edmund Burke in 1787 to describe the press as an additional check on the three official branches of government (Carlyle, 1841).

In 1906 Walter Williams, the first dean of the University of Missouri’s journalism school, the first journalism school in the country, wrote “The Journalist’s Creed.” It reads in part: “I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of lesser service than the public service is a betrayal of this trust.” (Williams, 1906)

The work of Woodward and Bernstein on Watergate has been for 40 years an archetype of serving the public trust, and it has inspired journalists like me to enter the profession looking to be agents of change and public service. From Horace Greeley’s active role in the settlement of the West to Upton Sinclair’s and Jacob Riis’ late-19th-century crusading, this impulse is mostly enduring and valuable. But through the 20th century this work was delivered by way of a small array of media where information was passed on only by professional and highly filtered publishers. Though those same publishers still deliver a significant portion of the news, now almost half of Americans get their news from four to six different media platforms each day, including broadcast, print, online and mobile sources, states “The State of the News Media 2010,” from the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism (Pew, 2010a).

News gathering is also becoming more social and participatory. The public interacts with information in personalized, portable and participatory platforms.

According to a Pew Research Center study of participatory news customers (2010b), readers increasingly share links to interesting stories, swap their finds through email and social network feeds, and haggle over story meaning in discussion threads. News has become electronically shared, with eight in ten readers sharing stories that interest them as individual news aggregators and editors.

Old tools (the reach of legacy media in the 20th century, for example) disappear, and new ones arise. The diversity of access to information now available to the public means that without a planned design reaching a critical mass of news readers is much more difficult. Editors and reporters have always faced the challenge of making a socially or politically important story interesting to the public. But a look at any moment's trending topics on Twitter reveals that the public is still more likely to share and engage with celebrity or sports news than with potentially world changing events or issues (Garfield, 2010, November 23). We now have new power to filter our news to only the topics that interest us individually, screening out in advance what may be important or interesting. Legal scholar Cass Sunstein, in a 2001 examination of the effects of the filtered and self-selected information landscape created by the Internet, argued:

First, people should be exposed to materials that they would not have chosen in advance. Unanticipated encounters, involving topics and points of view that people have not sought out and perhaps find irritating, are central to democracy and even to freedom itself. Second, many or most citizens should have a range of common experiences. Without shared experiences, a heterogeneous society will have a more difficult time addressing social problems and understanding one another. (Sunstein, 2001)

Sunstein's conception of journalism in a democracy resonates deeply with journalists who consider themselves part of Burke and Carlyle's Fourth Estate. But like the democracy it hopes to serve, journalism's evolution has never come only with forward steps. Movements, like literary journalism (Sims, 1984) or public journalism (Rosen, 1999), arise, hoping to push the institution in one direction. But they are met with opposition that, for better or for worse, pushes back.

One example is the idea of objectivity, in which the journalist works hard to remove him or herself from the story, disregard personal impressions and involvements and report from, as philosopher Thomas Nagel defined, "the view from nowhere" (1989). This approach to journalism is a recent one in the 350-year history of the institution, taking root firmly in the 20th century on the heels of the partisan press of the prior two or more centuries. But its proponents, among which are both journalists and readers, declare it part of journalism's fundament (Gentzkow, Glaeser, & Goldin, 2006). New York University's Jay Rosen argues this bid for an appearance of impartiality and non-involvement is merely an artifice. "...it has unearned authority in the American press. If in doing the serious work of journalism — digging, reporting, verification, mastering a beat — you develop a view, expressing that view does not diminish your authority. It may even add to it" (2010, November 10). This most passion-inciting of journalism concepts is changing quickly, though. As Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism recently told *New York Times* public editor Arthur Brisbane, "'These norms are shifting almost invisibly beneath the seat of journalists,' Mr. Rosenstiel said. 'It's even harder for

audiences ... to recognize the cues and the hand gestures that indicate whether a story is one kind of story or another.” (Brisbane, 2010, September 4)

Despite the desire to address societal issues that attracts many journalists to the profession, institutional reform within journalism meets deep resistance from those who see its tenets as hard-won and immutable. More conservative journalists argued with religious conviction that good journalism required reporters to not be part of the story themselves nor “take orders” from their public. To the profession at large, Rosen lamented, it was “...an assault on the profession’s prerogative to judge what’s important” and a “backing away from courageous stands that defy popular opinion” (Rosen, 1999, p. 182). Journalism continues to face a problem of waning relevance to its public, but a collapsing economic model and accelerating reader flight has opened the doors to change wider than they were 15 years ago. If journalism is “The Fourth Estate,” then it is in need of a way to reach a wide public, and with the depth, complexity and interaction the public is embracing already.

### ***Convergence***

Newspapers are not alone in facing the massive changes in news delivery, consumption and profits brought by the Internet. Television, magazines and other legacy news media have suffered substantial losses of audience as the array of news delivery sources has proliferated (Pew, 2010a). The idea of “convergence journalism” hopes to counteract that through a variety of implementations.

The first of many convergent ideas in journalism is the idea of reporting one story to be produced in redundant form across many platforms. One early adopter of this technique was the Tribune Company, owners of the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper and Web site, and WGN television and radio. Tribune Company reporters would feed material back and forth between the media outlets for a wider public reach (Quinn, 2006). Another approach to convergence imagined a singular “black box” device through which the public could access print, television and audio news, eliminating those separate publishing platforms (Dwyer, 2010). Still popular in journalism thinking on convergence is the idea of all journalists becoming multimedia “backpack journalists” who deliver text, photos, video and audio available to any of the legacy and digital media platforms, an idea greeted more eagerly by publishers and editors than by journalists themselves (Quinn, 2006, p. 87). These three ideas and criticisms of them will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.

### ***Transmedia Storytelling***

If the news media must be inventive to compete for attention in a scattered landscape, so must the entertainment media. A new style of storytelling has emerged there that, if combined with the goals and ethics of journalism, could create a new genre of documentary storytelling that would attract readers to a deep and compelling story with more context and complexity. The socially or politically important reportage might better engage the public.

In 2003 scholar Henry Jenkins defined in MIT's Technology Review what he calls "transmedia storytelling" in which entertainment media companies design a franchise to be delivered across multiple channels in ways that inspire the viewer to actively engage in the story. Those viewers sleuth out answers to clues and questions, play related games, and create their own media that enriches the experience. Jenkins explained fully in his book *Convergence Culture*:

A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable 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. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. (sic) (2006, p. 95-96)

Jenkins also notes that transmedia storytelling is not new; he takes his readers back to the Middle Ages and relates how the Christian story was told to a largely illiterate public. "Unless you were literate, Jesus was not rooted in a book but was something you encountered on multiple levels in your culture." (2006, p. 119) Stained glass windows, statues and religious art line the walls and altars of even modern Catholic churches echoing how the Christian story was told across media to reach the public on its terms.

But he finds a model for transmedia storytelling design in *The Matrix* science fiction franchise. Watched alone, the films were somewhat mysterious and vague, with what seemed key pieces of the story missing or only hinted at. Questions the stories raised were left unanswered. For a viewer like me, watching a film with mild interest, it



simply seemed like an inventive and nontraditional story told without the usual heavy hand of Hollywood which often demands complete story resolution. But for the passionate fan, the mysteries were an invitation to engage and explore, to hunt for answers across a mediascape of games, animated shorts and comics. Fans drill into the material for answers. "The sheer abundance of allusions makes it nearly impossible for any given consumer to master the franchise totally," Jenkins notes (2006, p. 99).

Using a vast landscape of media makes for a synergistic story as well, where as Jenkins says, "the whole is worth more than the sum of the parts." (2006, p. 102) The transmedia implementation was planned from the beginning of *The Matrix* franchise. Producer Joel Silver said about the creators' process in an extra feature on the production DVD of *The Animatrix* animated shorts, "I remember on the plane ride back (from Japan) Larry (Wachowski) sat down with a yellow pad and kinda mapped out this scheme we would do where we would have this movie, and these video games and these animated stories, and they would all interact together." (sic) (Jenkins, 2006, p. 101). In 2009, James Cameron's *Avatar* put new use to the techniques of *The Matrix*. The *Avatar* experience included games, books, comics and user-generated content in addition to the blockbuster 3-D movie.

As the Wachowskis' method has spread, so has analysis of and variation on Jenkins' coinage. The terms "cross-media," "deep media" and "distributed phenomena" all refer back to the idea of telling a story through multiple media in an expansive, rather than repetitive, way. Academic study of the form also includes study of the way narrative and game storytelling are used. In 2009, media studies scholar Christy Dena,

now a consultant on transmedia to the entertainment industry, performed an extensive and detailed analysis of the practice for a University of Sydney dissertation. At the core of Dena's work is the idea of "transmodality," as a transmedia project involves not only narrative, but also game modes of storytelling. She also examines Aristotle's "dramatic unities" to look at how the story works in tandem with the real world of its participant readers. (Dena, 2009)

In early 2011, *Wired* magazine contributing editor Frank Rose released a new book, *The Art of Immersion: How the Digital Generation Is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the Way We Tell Stories*. His prepublication notes summed up the book's topic:

This isn't the first time the way we tell stories has changed. Every major advance in communications has given birth to a new form of narrative: the printing press and moveable type led to the emergence of the novel in the 17th and 18th centuries; the motion picture camera, after a long period of experimentation, gave rise to movies; television created the sitcom. The Internet, like all these technologies in their earliest days, was at first used mainly as a vehicle for retransmitting familiar formats. For all the talk of 'new media,' it served as little more than a new delivery mechanism for old media, from newspapers to music to TV shows. And as disruptive as that has been to media businesses, its impact on media itself is only beginning to be felt. Stories are becoming games, and games are becoming stories. Boundaries that once seemed clear — between storyteller and audience, content and marketing, illusion and reality — are starting to blur. *The Art of Immersion* shows how this is happening and why, and what it means for our future. (Rose, 2010)

Rose's book interviews the players in this new world of non-linear and immersive storytelling form, and provides for this thesis a practical, real-world understanding of the structures of a transmedia story and the history of the form.

In late 2009, Jenkins expanded his definition of transmedia by defining his “Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling.” (Jenkins, 2009, Dec. 12) The list is composed of three pairs of stylistic conflicts and four individual qualities: *Spreadability vs. Drillability*, *Continuity vs. Multiplicity*, *Immersion vs. Extractability*, *Worldbuilding, Seriality, Subjectivity* and *Performance*. (Jenkins, 2009, December 12) These principles will provide the framework for discussing transmedia storytelling as a journalism tool.

### ***Transmedia Journalism?***

If Hollywood has implemented transmedia storytelling for fictional story lines, then how can it be ported to the very structured, complete and directed world of journalism? Jenkins, Dena, Rose and others all describe transmedia in terms of entertainment stories, most of which are built on science fiction or fantasy worlds. But all three hint in their writing at the possibility of a transmedia form of journalism or documentary content, but do not discuss it beyond the acknowledgement that it is possible.

Sam Ford, while a blogger for MIT’s Convergence Culture Consortium, discussed the idea of transmedia journalism most extensively. However, he wrote two to three years before Jenkins had outlined his seven principles, and his work fails to address how specifics of that sort would work in journalism. His analysis discusses journalism in terms of the idea of news convergence across multiple media — Web, print, television — and argues that the idea of the backpack, or “über-” journalist is untenable. (Ford, 2006, August 3)

Daily journalism, with its time-constrained brevity, is not a viable option. Transmedia must be designed carefully and developed with a lengthy lead time to be effective. From conception to delivery, a Hollywood franchise takes years to launch. But also deeply embedded in the journalism tradition is the long-term investigation or the extended documentary. Coverage of a complex and ongoing issue — immigration, the aftermath of war, social struggle — lends itself perfectly to a considered approach and complex delivery.

Though journalism has implemented versions of all the aspects of transmedia storytelling in isolated or incomplete cases, it does not seem to have sewn them together into a form as complete nor effective as what Hollywood has done. “Convergence” as a term in journalism has divergent meanings, and use of the strengths of new media is scattershot. With a dispersed audience, journalism — in either the legacy media or new media — has a harder time fulfilling its “Fourth Estate” role of informing the voting public about issues facing the democracy and inspiring debate about them.

Journalists have always hoped to be not only educational, but also powerfully resonant and interesting to their public. By porting the techniques of transmedia storytelling to journalism, journalists can leverage the power of new- and old-media tools and interpersonal networks to better engage the public.

## **AREAS of INQUIRY**

Through the three chapters of this thesis I will examine the origins of transmedia storytelling, the structure of the story across multiple platforms and how this technique might be implemented in a journalism or documentary context. Each chapter will present examples and a brief discussion of their efficacy.

### ***Transmedia Storytelling Structures***

This first chapter will look into the history of what has recently been labeled transmedia storytelling and will discuss Henry Jenkins' Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling listed above. These principles have been adopted by academics, authors and transmedia producers as a structural framework. They describe what a transmedia story should accomplish and how it attracts and engages readers.

Once attracted, those readers form networks within which they share, recreate, repurpose and redistribute stories. Though these networks and the use of intellectual property within them continues to be a sore point for many content creators, they can also be a powerful tool to engage the public and distribute the story. For example, law professor and intellectual property activist Lawrence Lessig describes a conflict between content producers and the consumers who use these networks to copy, remix or redistribute protected content. Lessig argues that though this remix and sharing is in violation of current copyright laws, the culture benefits by building community and cultural literacy through interaction with cultural products (Lessig, 2008). This chapter

will also look at the role of personal networks and how transmedia entertainment franchises benefit from them.

As much as digital delivery has changed in the last decade how the entertainment media has worked, gaming has altered our view of storytelling. Transmedia storytelling *transmodal*, taking advantage of both narrative elements that lead the reader step by step through an unfolding story and gaming elements that engage the reader's taste for seeking answers. This chapter will examine both narrative and games as storytelling devices.

Many transmedia entertainment franchises have emerged since the Wachowski brothers designed and built the world of *The Matrix*, and it was not the first franchise to unfold in this manner. But thanks to close examination it is the *type species* of transmedia entertainment. The chapter will look into this franchise and others, how they were designed and how they have unfolded since their debuts.

### ***Where Journalism Has Gone Before***

What has changed irrevocably in the world of journalism? This chapter will start with a look at the 20th-century's one-to-many model of news delivery, where it was valuable and where it falls short. Among the movements created to change that perspective was the Public Journalism movement driven partially by New York University's Jay Rosen. This chapter will look at why, according to Rosen and his detractors, it failed to catch on and what might be repurposed in the digital journalism world.

Here I will also examine in greater depth what the idea of “convergence” has meant in legacy journalism. How do those ideas differ from what entertainment media has begun to use media convergence to its advantage? How has journalism’s often dogmatic attachment to tradition slowed its ability to adapt to a changing media environment?

### ***What Transmedia Journalism Might Look Like***

Through the turmoil of journalism industry change, many experiments — some successful, others forgotten — have embraced the ideas of transmedia storytelling in whole or in part. I will look at some examples that have worked in order to show that transmedia storytelling is possible in a journalism or documentary context. I will also ask transmedia scholars and practitioners where differences might lie between its use in the journalism and entertainment media. How can these examples be assembled into an intentional transmedia journalism project?

## Chapter 1 — TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING STRUCTURES

*“Once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it.” — Socrates*

### ***Origin Stories***

“Transmedia storytelling” is not a new phenomenon, and is perhaps the oldest technique we have for spreading information. From memorized sagas transferred orally from one storyteller to another, to cave paintings and art, the tales told through human history have found multiple channels to their publics. Before the age of public literacy, when sacred texts were only readable by a privileged few, religions employed every means available to spread their message. Visits to traditional churches, mosques and temples around the world demonstrate this in their passionate and storytelling art works, sculptures and nonverbal symbols (Jenkins, 2006, p. 119). Origin stories and morality tales express and extend themselves in the costumes of celebration and the talismans of belief. Mythic stories have always found new life, new form and reinvention through the play of children, the imagination of artists and the personal interpretation of listeners and readers. Single-medium communication, of the kind seen



through the 19th and 20th centuries, is perhaps an anomaly. (Rosen, 2010, September 6)

The one-way, exclusive media channels of the 20th century were a creation of economics. The high cost of production and publication kept the imaginative public out of the professional process, but mass media stories never stopped being explored and reimagined by the public. Every mid-20th-century boy with a Davy Crockett coonskin cap, young Zorro with a stick for a sword or little Nancy Drew with an imaginary blue roadster immersed him- or herself into a mythology, extended a story beyond the bounds of its published and copy-protected source through backyard games, handwritten tales, and scrap-paper drawings. They made a practice of all the storytelling techniques of human history, but only very rarely with the economic means to spread those extensions to the wider world.

The many-to-many form media has taken due to the reduced cost of publishing has also caused conflicts over copyright, visions of what culture should be. Legal scholar and copyright activist Lawrence Lessig argues that the one-to-many mass media model of the 20th century was a stifling of culture and creativity. "Culture moved from a read-write to a read-only existence," he said in a 2007 TED conference. In making his point that digital technology has moved culture back to a read-write existence, he shows amateur remix videos that became viral phenomena. "The importance of this is not the technique you've seen here," he notes about the work, "because every technique you've seen here is something that television and film producers have been able to do for the last 50 years. The importance is that that technique has been

democratized. It is now anybody with access to a \$1,500 computer who can take sounds and images from the culture around us and use them to say things differently." (Lessig, 2007)

But Lessig is looking only at economics when determining that read-write culture became dormant. He implies that because professional media became so well distributed, amateur culture virtually ceased. However, like most 20th-century mass-consumption children I took the tales fed by Hollywood and the highly filtered book publishers and reimagined and extended those stories in play. I wrote fan fiction, drew doodles on class notebooks, acted in homemade plays with siblings and friends, and eventually made audio recordings and 8mm films. My closest friends and I recorded and rearranged *Star Trek* episodes on a reel tape deck, and later created and remixed music in garage bands, reinvented comic book heroes in pencil and traded exquisite-corpse prose. We used techniques available to Hollywood for the prior 50 years. What we lacked was an Internet on which to cheaply publish or work collaboratively with distant fellow fans or fellow amateur musicians, artists and storytellers.

Lessig implies that technology makes cultural remix possible, and that remix is a deadly challenge to legacy mass media companies. But a technological gap in cultural production has always existed. If new technology allows amateurs to work in ways that match the techniques of Hollywood in previous decades, economics will allow Hollywood to develop new techniques out of the reach of the amateur world. James Cameron's *Avatar*, a 2009 science fiction film and transmedia franchise, changed the standard with 3-D filming and animation techniques that are perhaps decades out of

reach of Lessig's middle-class teenaged content creators and their home computers. What has changed is access to the worldwide public. Now Lessig's middle-class teen can broadcast him- or herself to millions with a few clicks of a mouse.

In a 2008 address to the Library of Congress, Michael Wesch, a cultural anthropology professor at Kansas State University, illustrated the expanding power of personal publishing and broadcasting. He noted that the three major U.S. television networks, broadcasting 24 hours a day for 60 years had aired 1.5 million hours of programming. "But YouTube produced more in the last six months," he said. "And they did it without producers, they did it just with people like you and me and anybody who has ever uploaded anything to YouTube." (Wesch, 2008) In the 21st century it is amateur publication, not amateur production that is the game changer. The high price of entry is gone, and mass media dominance of published content might never come back (Rose, 2011, p. 228).

Oddly, the model for how Hollywood could embrace the move back to amateur contribution and build engagement with fans came from the heart of the 20th century media machine. Starting in 1977 *Star Wars* captured the imaginations of millions of would-be Jedi knights first through an approachable and classically structured story, and then through books, comics, animated films, games and toys intended only to maximize profits. These extensions, however, helped encourage fan immersion and involvement. Unintentionally, Lucasfilm set the stage for a highly successful transmedia franchise. Only reluctantly have they let some of the reins of storytelling pass out of their direct control.

*Wired* magazine contributing editor Frank Rose illustrates the influence the *Star Wars* franchise had on the current generation of game producers, filmmakers and transmedia content producers. Will Wright, the creator of *The Sims*, a life simulation computer game first released in 2000, told Rose about the franchise's appeal:

You've got lightsabers and the Death Star and the Force and all this stuff that leads to a wide variety of play experiences. I can go have lightsaber battles with my friend. I can play a game about blowing up the Death Star. I can have a unique experience and come back and tell you a story about what happened. The best stories lead to the widest variety of play, and the best play leads to the most story. I think they're two sides of the same coin. (Rose, 2011, p. 141)

That play and the imagination of fans did lead to stories. By the mid-1980s the appeal of the *Star Wars* universe gave rise to fanzines produced on Xerox machines and distributed by hand. The perceived "problem" fell to Lucasfilm's general counsel Howard Roffman. "You've stimulated these people's imaginations, and now they want to express themselves," he told Rose in an interview. "But that expression very often finds itself becoming copyright infringement. I would have a parade of people coming into my office in all kinds of tizzies — 'Oh my God, they're showing Han Solo and Princess Leia screwing!' I tried to be the voice of reason — how much damage can it do? But we did draw the line at pornography." (Rose, 2011, p. 93-94)

Initially, expansion of the *Star Wars* saga was difficult to control even within the official licensed production. Rose notes that a Marvel comic added a giant bunny to the storyline. A 1978 novel described Luke Skywalker becoming physically affectionate

with Princess Leia, who five years later in *Return of the Jedi* would be revealed to be his twin sister.

Roffman, Rose notes, set a new ground rule for the franchise: “From now on, any new installment of the *Star Wars* saga would have to respect what had come before. With Roffman’s decree,” he adds, “Lucasfilm not only found the instrument that would help reinvigorate the *Star Wars* franchise; it also created the prototype for the kind of deep, multilayered storytelling that’s emerging today.” (Rose, 2011, p. 71) “George created a very well-defined universe,” Roffman told Rose. “But the movies tell a narrow slice of the story. You can engage on a simplistic level — but if you want to drill down, it’s infinitely deep.”

In the intervening decades, transmedia producers who grew up playing with *Star Wars* action figures and dueling with toy lightsabers look for the engagement created by Lucas’ story and hope to engineer similar story expansion, expression and play from fans. In 2010 the Producers Guild of America officially sanctioned the title of *Transmedia Producer*, opening the door for practitioners to earn title credits and entertainment industry recognition. The effort to secure the title was spearheaded by noted transmedia producer Jeff Gomez, of Starlight Runner Entertainment, who in response told Web publication Tubefilter: “This credit will help move transmedia storytelling from methodology to art form, from marketing tool to a conduit for dialog, mutual expression and co-creation. The credit will empower producers and creators, allowing them to take equity in the worlds they’ve worked so hard to build, even as they move like quicksilver across a dozen media platforms.” (sic.) (Powell, 2010)

But how is a transmedia story defined or constructed?

***Lost in a Matrix of Avatars: Principles of Transmedia***

Only a few months before the Producers Guild sanctioned the role of transmedia producer, Henry Jenkins, the professor who was among the first scholars to define transmedia, assembled a list of “seven principles of transmedia storytelling” in a pair of late-2009 blog posts. In them Jenkins fleshed out concepts introduced first in a column for *Technology Review*, then in his notable book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. His definitions continue in the posts, distinguishing between what is and what is not a transmedia extension of the narrative: “We need to distinguish between adaptation, which reproduces the original narrative with minimum changes into a new medium and is essentially redundant to the original work, and extension, which expands our understanding of the original by introducing new elements into the fiction.” He continues: “...I think we can agree that Lawrence Olivier's *Hamlet* is an adaptation, while Tom Stoppard's *Rosencranz & Guildenstern Are Dead* expands Shakespeare's original narrative through its refocalization around secondary characters from the play.” (sic.) (Jenkins, 2009, December 12)

Jenkins then establishes his seven principles: *Spreadability vs. Drillability*, *Continuity vs. Multiplicity*, *Immersion vs. Extractability*, *Worldbuilding*, *Seriality*, *Subjectivity* and *Performance*. I am unconvinced that three of these principles should be oppositional pairs, however. Their qualities are not mutually exclusive in transmedia

productions and are simply a part of the array of options that may or may not be sought in the same project. I will examine them individually.

With **Spreadability** stories are spread through fan interaction. Those readers actively engage in the distribution of the material through their social networks and in the process expand its economic and cultural value. “Going viral” is an Internet-age term for an idea or production that spreads like a benevolent or malevolent microbe through the mediascape. Often these viral phenomena happen accidentally. Jenkins in his seven principles blog post cites the case of Susan Boyle, the operatic singer who drew an enormous number of fans for the contrast between a beautiful voice and a homely appearance. Her album outsold that of the winner of *American Idol* by some seven to one due to the viral video of her *Britain’s Got Talent* performance (Jenkins, 2009, December 12). But spreadability can also be engineered, as industrial rock band Nine Inch Nails proved. As a promotion for their album *Year Zero*, the band left a small USB flash drive in a bathroom before the concert. On the drive was a previously unreleased song that was immediately shared by the woman who found it. This action contributed to the advance promotion of the album to a global fan base. (Rose, 2011, p. 29-30)

With **Drillability** the story captures a fan’s imagination or interest sufficiently to encourage deep investigation into the details, the periphery and contexts of the story much as *The Matrix* franchise did. “The deeper you drill down,” Jenkins notes about the franchise, “the more secrets emerge, all of which can seem at any moment to be *the key to the film.*” (Emphasis in the original) (2006, p. 99) For example, the number on

the apartment door of the central character Neo is 101, a number that reappears throughout the films connecting events and characters. Billboards in the background of scenes contain cheat codes for the *Enter the Matrix* computer game. And license plates such as DA203 or IS5416 refer to context-appropriate Bible verses — Daniel 2:3 and Isaiah 54:16 (Jenkins, 2006, p. 99). The franchise is game-like in its tug on fans to explore for themselves, seeking answers to obscure questions unnoticed by the casual viewer.

Arriving close on the heels of the final cinema installments of *The Matrix* in 2004 was ABC's *Lost*, a story of an air-crash marooning described by Frank Rose as "so convoluted that the audience had little choice but to work together to decipher it communally online." (2011, p. 3) By building the show in non-linear fragments, the producers created what Rose described as "a kind of participatory fiction." (p. 146) by selectively releasing information within the story in timed bits. It created an illusion of interactivity. Fans exchanged thoughts and ideas on message boards until an Anchorage, Alaska computer programmer built *Lostpedia*, a wiki to collect clues and aid in deciphering the puzzle (p. 153). In April 2011, the site listed 7,200 pages in 17 languages. The forum connected to the wiki boasted 2.7 million posts from 74,000 members, 9,000 of whom are listed as "active" a year after the show's end. Pages in the wiki are divided among topics like "economics" in which academic fans analyze the survivor's resource allocations. Others include "leadership," "symbolism," "literary techniques," and topics like "flash-sideways characters." (Lostpedia, n.d.) The phenomena of the show, the social behavior of the fans and its resulting wiki all



became academic and mathematical research when Peter Pirolli, a researcher at Xerox's Palo Alto, California facility asked the question, "How do the semantic representations of a community engaged in social information foraging and sensemaking evolve over time?" Pirolli's work mathematically modeled the content, structure and trends within the wiki's articles, and how they relate to real world events (Pirolli, 2008). In productions Jenkins describes as drillable, the engagement comes with commitments that vary from the passive to the obsessed and from a broad cross section of fans.

**Continuity** is a familiar storytelling technique, and in the transmedia realm, though a story may unfold in separate lines and across diverse media, it still should maintain the coherence and plausibility of the story as a payoff to fans. Continuity is often the first place a franchise or storyline might lose the serious fan, and as a story builds in complexity it can be difficult to track many of the details. Lucasfilm maintains a database of the minutia of the *Star Wars* saga called the *Holocron*. In it 30,000 items and ideas are classified by canonicity, with the highest level marked as "G" for George Lucas himself. The effort to maintain story continuity is often reciprocated by the most serious fans, who, in the case of *Star Wars*, built the *Wookieepedia*, a fan-generated online encyclopedia of the saga's elements. The Luke Skywalker entry alone runs 31,000 words. (Rose, 2011, p. 74-75)

**Multiplicity** refers to those varying story lines within the same continuous and coherent realm. As an example one might look at the vast *Star Trek* universe in which different fictional ships, crews and stations explore the same galaxy from different

perspectives, in different time periods and facing different issues. Multiplicity can also refer to broad breaks of continuity that may enrich a transmedia universe, such as in the 2009 re-imagining of the *Star Trek* story. Official or unofficial authors may create an alternate universe where the unexpected collide, such as in the recent series of mashup books like *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* or *Android Karenina*.

Through **Immersion** the fan enters into the world of the story, if even briefly, suspending disbelief and forgetting their real-world circumstances. In the way a good movie seen in a darkened theater can swallow us and make us feel present in that scene, transmedia design should aim to draw a fan in deeply enough to forget his- or herself. As mentioned earlier, James Cameron's *Avatar* pushed the technical capabilities of cinema far beyond the reach of amateur producers with motion-capture animation techniques and seamless 3-D technology a 1950s B movie producer could only dream of. Cameron's goal, according to Rose, was to draw the viewer deeper into the world he had created, eliminating the artificial frame created by the movie screen. Cameron hoped to pull viewers through the proscenium, past the artificial visual plane of the screen and into his world. Cameron partner Jon Landau explained to Frank Rose in an interview, "3-D is about immersing the audience in your story, and the screen plane has always been this subconscious barrier." (2011, p. 54) Once there, they hoped, the most engaged fans would find a fractal-like complexity. "The casual viewer can enjoy [the film] without having to drill down to secondary or tertiary levels of detail," Cameron told Rose. "But for a real fan, you go in an order of magnitude and *boom!* There's a whole new set of patterns." (p. 49) (Emphasis in the original)

Games, while also a tool for expanding a story or looking at that story through different eyes, are also immersive experiences. *Why So Serious?* was an alternate reality game launched in late 2007 to promote the upcoming Batman film *The Dark Knight*. Several thousand fans had applied earlier online to be henchmen to the Joker, and they started receiving cryptic messages to decode and upon which to act. Clues led the most savvy players to bakeries to collect cakes held for “Robin Banks,” a name derived from the Joker’s fictional bank-robbing aims. In the cakes were cell phones that rang with further clues and instructions. The tasks designed by the game’s creators aimed to let the participants feel they had helped the Joker steal a school bus used in a key plot element of the film. “The cake phones were a mechanism that enabled thousands of people to step into the fiction long before the film’s July 2008 premiere. The 12-hour cake hunt involved only a few dozen people on the ground, but some 1.4 million gathered online to see what would happen,” described Frank Rose of the response to the game (2011, p. 10-13).

Also new on the scene for fictional transmedia franchises is the theme amusement park, like the recently opened *Harry Potter* park at Universal Orlando in Florida, where fans of the stories may make immersive, first-person explorations in the Hogwarts school and buy personalized wands from Ollivander’s Wand Shop. Before the park opened in 2010, Tom Felton, who plays Harry’s nemesis Draco Malfoy, told the *New York Times* in an interview, “We always say on set, ‘If this place was real, it would be absolutely fantastic. To actually walk into this world and be able to touch it

and taste it and smell it — well, it's just going to be fantastic." (Barnes, 2009, September 15)

**Extractability** provides something for that fan to then take aspects of that story with him or her into the spaces of his or her everyday life. Those aspects might be physical, the way the Eskimo Pie™ was an early example of merchandising for the film *Nanook of the North* (Jenkins, 2009), or in the millions of *Star Wars* action figures sold in the 34 years of the franchise. In the 1950s Disney's Davy Crockett launched a frenzy among kids for coonskin caps which, at their peak, sold 5,000 a day (Johnson, 2002, April 23). But in theory they could also be philosophical or behavioral. The creators of the films *Avatar* or *District 9* might hope for the byproduct of better intercultural understanding from films that show discrimination, insensitivity and the dark side of humanity.

**Worldbuilding** provides a rich enough tapestry on which the main story can unfold, allowing alternate stories based on different characters and circumstances. No longer, Jenkins illustrates, does a good Hollywood pitch center only on a good story, or even a character that could reappear across multiple films and books, but it must develop an entire world where multiple good characters can have multiple good stories in an endless array of possibility (Jenkins, 2006, p. 114). An early practitioner of worldbuilding was L. Frank Baum, the author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and its 13 fellow novels, comic strips, multiple short stories and stage and screen productions on that fictional world (Rogers, 2002). Jenkins describes Baum offering mock travelogue lectures where he showed slides and short films about his world (2009,

December 12). This technique of world building by the likes of Baum, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis has carried over into the 21st century with James Cameron's Pandora world in *Avatar*.

At the *Transmedia Hollywood 2* conference at UCLA in 2011, Geoffrey Long, a media scholar and program manager for Microsoft, noted, "As we move toward the next generation of connectivity and we get to the notion of entertainment for 'the cloud,' that's when you really start getting into this idea that the story world is abstracted from the medium in which it's delivered. Any given component, like a television show or a comic or whatever is actually just a window through which you look in order to understand this external world." (2011, April 8)

With **Seriality** the story unfolds not only in multiple segments of one medium — as it did for writers like Charles Dickens or in serialized films like the *Zorro* franchise, but across multiple media. For example *Zorro's* story now lives in the original 1919 serialized pulp magazine stories, 59 other novellas and novels by creator Johnston McCulley as well as a dozen other books, five serialized film series, four television series, three animated series, seven feature films starting with Douglas Fairbanks and Tyrone Power and ending more recently with Sir Anthony Hopkins and Antonio Banderas. More films have been made in French, Japanese, Italian and Spanish. The story has spread several times to comics and anime, video games, the theatrical stage, music and now to a newer novel by award-winning Chilean author Isabel Allende. Through all these permutations the story stays largely the same, with only a few grand departures from the story of a rich effete Californian who battles

tyranny behind a mask in early 1800s colonial California. (Curtis, 1998) Traditional television soap operas are also thoroughly serial, with series lasting decades on U.S. television.

At *Transmedia Hollywood 2*, Craig Hanna, CEO of the Thinkwell Group, a transmedia production company that worked on the new Harry Potter theme park in Florida, outlined the future of serial transmedia storytelling: The “Holy Grail” will be to, “...start the story in any portal, whether it’s your iPad or a book, or a movie or an online experience, or a game or a theme park; have that experience continue in another device... and then finish on a third. And then have those recognize where you started, where you went and have it alter itself to allow you to finish that story with a beginning, middle and end.” (2011, April 8)

**Subjectivity** is defined differently than in journalism where subjectivity of the reporter is considered anathema. In Jenkins’ definition the story is given complexity through the views of multiple characters or dimensions within the story. This may come about by building backstory and character through other media such as comics, as was done with *The Matrix* or the *Heroes* television series. But it can also simply use multiple personal perspectives to tell a story, as Bram Stoker used in his epistolary novel *Dracula*, constructed simply of letters between several correspondents and featuring their views on the same events. (Jenkins, 2009, December 12) In *Dracula* Stoker makes the reader feel her or she has come across a cache of letters where those opposing views build the story from frequently contradictory viewpoints. The story

changes shape as much through our understanding that we are reading a singular viewpoint on events as it does because of the events or setting themselves.

At *Transmedia Hollywood 2*, screenwriter Jane Espenson described a scene in a movie installment of the recent *Battlestar Galactica* television series in which scenes were retold through the perspective of different characters than those used on the original broadcast show. "...We were playing with your perception of scenes you've already seen. We were re-contextualizing and recreating those scenes, and reinterpreting them. They meant something different this time around." (2011, April 8) Espenson also described using Webisodes to change straight characters into gay ones in what would combine the principles of subjectivity and multiplicity.

Twitter has become a platform for fictional characters to express personal viewpoints on events that transpire in their respective fictional worlds, as Jenkins points out (2009, December 12). Many of the characters on AMC's *Mad Men* have tweeted through the fingers of fans. Character Betty Draper, who as of April 1, 2011, still had 13,562 followers despite not tweeting since August of the previous year, hinted at events that take place on the central TV show: "Want to buy my [@joan\\_holloway](http://bit.ly/bluedress?) has asked for a donation... Strange. Still, I've never had a good time in that dress." (@betty\_draper, 2010, August 17). Tweeting from these characters, as Frank Rose (2011, p. 77) illustrates, was an independent act by fans that was initially misunderstood by the show's producers. The authors found the accounts closed less than two weeks after they started, but fan uproar soon showed AMC the engagement the unauthorized tweets were producing and efforts to stop the tweets were dropped.

Rose asks, "What happens when viewers start seizing bits of the story and telling it themselves?" (p. 78)

Fans telling bits of the story is an act Jenkins' identifies as **Performance**. Here the story encourages, if not provides, action from the fans. This may take the form of cryptic clues that appear briefly in a medium that inspire investigation or decoding by fans or open plot holes that inspire fan fiction. Performance could be as direct as asking a viewer to vote for participants on a program like *So You Think You Can Dance* or *American Idol*. Sharon Marie Ross, a media researcher at Chicago's Columbia College, categorizes three types of invitations made to fans of a television franchise. The first, "overt," is clearly understood by anyone watching a program like *American Idol*, in which the viewers are invited to vote. The second she describes as "organic," in which the invitation to what she calls "tele-participation" is carefully designed to appear natural, assuming that the fans are already somehow participating with the show. She cites Canadian teen school drama *Degrassi: The Next Generation* for how it chooses episode topics that encourage discussion among an age group already comfortable with online and digital communication media, and the aim of the series is to influence the choices those fans make in their own lives. Without prodding, the fans develop strong social networks online and role play the characters on MySpace. The show itself reflects that world by delivering information in the shorthand style of SMS messaging or internet chat, a language particular to the show's target demographic (Ross, 2008, p.8). The third category Ross describes as "the messiest due to its complexity and ambiguousness." Using a style she calls "obscured," an entity like



ABC's *Lost* or *The Matrix* franchise may simply leave so many questions open or holes in the story line that a dedicated and intrigued fan feels required to sleuth out the answers. Finding those answers grants an "insider status" to those who have completed the puzzle and unlocked the next level of the virtual game.

*Degrassi* is also an example of the structures of transmedia entertainment moving away from their origin in science fiction and fantasy franchises. As transmedia storytelling continues to grow it is spreading to other genre, like the cable channel FX's situation comedy *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* or the upcoming Australian television teen drama series *Slide*. From the start, noted transmedia producer and Hoodlum CEO Tracey Robertson, *Slide* was planned for multiple platforms from the start, including outlets for fan creativity. (2011, April 8)

At *Transmedia Hollywood 2*, communications scholar Avi Santo noted that complex world creation in transmedia is now being parceled out to fans. The valuable product a media company has is no longer just its property and staff to generate content. It now has is the environment in which fans can create on the story's behalf (2011, April 8).

### ***Story Modes***

Games are an integral part of transmedia storytelling, whether covert or user-created as above, or as an officially released aspect of the transmedia story. They may fill Jenkins' principles of *extractability* with something to take home, *immersion* with a

way to put oneself into the story and with *performance* as a way of engaging with or role playing in that transmedia world.

In the post-modern era, “narrative” has been applied to all aspects of life. “Narratives of the world are numberless,” declared French semiotician Roland Barthes. “...narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.” (1978, p. 79) Equally, games are coming to be perceived as everywhere, and as game theoretician Jan Simons, of the University of Amsterdam, described, “[Game theory] has found its way into research areas such as economics, political sciences, physical sciences, biology, psychology, law and the philosophy of ethics.” (2007) Everything is a story, and everything is a game, according to students of each mode of perceiving the world. These frequently debated points of view fit well with transmedia storytelling, which eagerly embraces both narrative and game as storytelling components.

It is understandable why transmedia producers would embrace both, for together they attract a larger variety of consumers — the video game industry grossed in the U.S. a record \$21.4 billion in its peak year of 2008 (Terdiman, 2010) while Hollywood sold only \$9.6 billion in U.S. movie tickets (Barnes, 2009, January 4). “In its way,” Tom Chatfield writes in *Fun Inc. Why Gaming will Dominate the Twenty-First Century*, “the question of exactly why we play video games quite so much — and are certain to do so even more in the future — points toward a 21st-century cultural shift as profound as the explosion of mass media over the last century.” (2010, p. 5)

Transmedia producers see that games also act on different modes of immersion. We sink into narrative through empathy with subjects in a story, though we may already know their fates. We may identify with them, but we do not become them. Games, on the other hand, are most frequently described as immersive by temporarily entering a world to act as an agent. What players feel has been described as more akin to first-person emotion than empathy (Simons, 2007).

Media studies scholar Christy Dena in her dissertation (2009) theorized an approach of transmedia as *transmodal*. "Meaning," she states, "can be communicated in a number of ways, through characters, plot, game mechanics, settings, framing, sound, lighting, spacing, pacing, cursors and code." Dena argues that "a fictional world is not specific to either the narrative or game mode. That is, narrative and game modes can modulate meaning for the fictional world." (2009, p. 201) She states there is no requirement for both modes to exist in transmedia production however. The two approaches to immersion are simply arrows in the producer's quiver:

Transmedia projects aren't always narrative-based, they aren't always game-based, and they don't always involve television, film, literature, theater, digital technologies or artworks either. Since the creative practice can be implemented in any of these forms, and analysed through any of these disciplines, it is inappropriate and methodologically corruptive, I argue, to compartmentalise or identify them as either one. (sic.)(Dena, 2009, p. 202)

*Wired* contributing editor Frank Rose, in his 2011 book *The Art of Immersion*, illustrated the immersive quality of games and where they diverge from traditional narrative devices through a dog. Peter Molyneux, the founder of Microsoft subsidiary

Lionhead Studios and creator of the popular three-game role-playing *Fable* franchise, put artificial intelligence decision-making systems to work in a dog character that shows up at the beginning of game play in *Fable II*. The dog travels with the player's character as a loyal companion through thick and thin. The dog is ultimately used to create a moral choice in the story created by game play, when, after you've lost your dog and family, you are given a choice between being able to magically bring back the thousands of innocent people killed during the course of the game or you can bring back your dog and your family. "Molyneux got hate mail from players who found the choice too excruciating to make," Rose notes (2011, p. 276). "It's a personality test," Molyneux told Rose in an interview. "It reflects on what you're really like... [In a movie] you feel empathy for the character, but you very rarely feel guilt." Molyneux adds, "If I can make you care about something then the story will be much more meaningful... So I wrap the AI [artificial intelligence] around a dog. He's going to love you, he's cute and fun as a companion, and in tests people can't help but care about a dog. This is what we can do that books, TV, film cannot." (Rose, 2011, p. 277)

Games take many forms, from the venerable *Tetris*, a digital plaything with no particular end or reward system, to first-person shooters, role-playing games and god games where the player is master over a world. As much as transmedia productions have embraced all of these, so have they built alternate reality games like *Why So Serious?* mentioned earlier, in which players gather clues and play/perform in the physical world. By nature these games are cooperative, an expression of French cybertheorist Pierre Lévy's concept of collective intelligence. "None of us can know

everything; each of us knows something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills,” as Henry Jenkins described it (2006, p. 4).

An early and interesting alternate reality game produced by game designer Jordan Weisman in 2001 came to be known as “The Beast” because it started with 666 items of content hidden around the Internet in the form of Web pages to find and puzzles to solve. The game was a setup for Steven Spielberg’s *Artificial Intelligence: AI*, a film retelling of the Pinocchio fable about a robot who longs to be human. The game started 12 weeks before the film’s release with a tiny credit for “Sentient Machine Therapist” among the other often-ignored lines on movie posters and promotional materials. The idea was to let some abnormally attentive potential fan find and share the tidbit, leading to a treasure hunt that would help build the story world in the minds of the public. Within 24 hours, Rose describes (p. 21), someone had posted the discovery online. Web searches of the therapist’s name led to a phone number that when called answered with a message that the husband of the therapist had been killed in a suspicious boating accident. Within days a computer programmer in Oregon had organized an online discussion forum around the clues. By the time the film opened some 3 million people around the globe were taking part in the game. “Not only do they have every skill set on the planet,” Weisman told Rose, “but they have unlimited resources, unlimited time and unlimited money. Not only can they solve anything — they can solve anything instantly.” (Rose, 2011, p. 22)

### ***Using Networks***

For marketers, communicators and for the production of transmedia projects, those networked publics are critical for spreading information. (Russell, Ito, Richmond & Tuters, 2008, p. 62) As the public scatters from a few major producers of media content to an ever expanding array of professional- and amateur-produced content, transmedia projects must use those amateur and fan networks to engage a sizable public.

Yochai Benkler describes the social and economic functions of networked interaction and how technological change at the turn of the current century has engaged the public in a deeper networked environment than ever before (2006, p. 2). "The result," he argues, "is that a good deal more that human beings value can now be done by individuals, who interact with each other socially, as human beings and as social beings, rather than as market actors through the price system." Continuing he points out that nonmarket collaborations are better motivators to creativity and work more efficiently than traditional market systems. This, he notes, creates a "flourishing nonmarket sector of information, knowledge, and cultural production, based on the networked environment, and applied to anything that the many individuals connected to it can imagine." (p. 7) Benkler also outlines three ways in which the enhanced autonomy provided by the networked information economy improves the practical capacities of individuals:

(1) It improves their capacity to do more for and by themselves; (2) it enhances their capacity to do more in loose commonality with others, without being constrained to organize their relationships through a price system or in traditional hierarchical models of social and economic organization; and (3) it improves the capacity of individuals to do more in formal organizations that operate outside the market sphere. (p. 8)

Benkler points out that the advantage is much less to the formal structure found in professional media production companies. The speed of shedding old perspectives is perhaps inversely proportional to both the institutional history and the size of an organization. And the economics of traditional structures make adaptation more difficult. However, transmedia production has proven the viability of leveraging informal networks in favor of high-operating-cost legacy media. In Russell, et al., an analysis of Japanese anime fandom outside of Japan describes hungry-for-content fans quickly subtitling and redistributing the original copyrighted works in the U.S. (p. 61) Individuals and informal groups generate fan fiction related to their favorite characters both in and outside of Japan (Rose, 2011, p. 43). However, "Rather than cracking down on the fansubbers [fan subtitle translators] and Net distribution, the anime industry has continued to take a relatively accommodating stance, which in turn has kept organized fan groups toeing the party line." (Russell, et al., p. 61) Informal fan collaborators generally honor the aims of the original producers in their amateur work, and when a time approaches that the Japanese anime industry chooses to directly enter the U.S. market, a much larger and more devoted fan base will await them than would have had they cracked down on the amateur production and networked distribution. As it has for the entertainment industry, the forces of informal networks have changed the

way the news and advertising industries must operate. "Such developments will not be lost on marketers," Russell, et al., state in relation to the newly viral nature of marketing. "They will have to adopt a view of the entire field of cultural production in order to successfully invite people to participate in constructing compelling marketing 'experiences.'" (p. 65)

Though the music industry is renown for its crackdowns on networked redistribution, one of the most successful examples of embracing viral marketing and informal networks comes from a major actor in the legacy music business. Academy Award winner Trent Reznor, the front man and leader of industrial rock band Nine Inch Nails, in 2006 contacted 42 Entertainment, the creators of "The Beast" alternate reality game, about the group's latest project: A song suite about a dystopian America, ravaged by terrorism, climate change and a Christian military dictatorship. According to Frank Rose (2011, p. 27), Reznor was looking for a way to build context for the music by fleshing-out the world in his suite. In the age of music being delivered in bite-sized MP3 segments he could no longer depend on the liner notes and album art of the previous generation to hint at the world. Reznor and his art director had already constructed an online wiki describing this world and explaining how it had come to being, but he was looking for a way to draw his fans in deeper. In cooperation with the game company, the group built that engagement by, "creating a series of poignant emotional moments that people would seize and make their own." (p. 28)

The network-engaging alternate reality game launched for Nine Inch Nails' next European tour with subtle clues printed on t-shirts. Seemingly random bold-faced



letters discovered by fans within the shirt's text spelled out "i am trying to believe." The hidden message was posted on fan message boards. This led the curious to iamtryingtobelieve.com, which sent them to a site for a fictional drug used in Reznor's imagined world to sedate citizens. Email sent to the site's contact link replied with the message, "I'm drinking the water. So should you." Curiosity about the band's next album was piqued among devoted fans. Next, hidden text on another t-shirt led to a Los Angeles telephone number that, when called, responded with a recording of a newscaster announcing "Presidential Address: America is born again," followed by a distorted snippet of one of the album's upcoming songs. Then, as mentioned earlier, a concert-goer in Lisbon discovered a USB flash drive in a bathroom at the venue. It contained an unreleased Nine Inch Nails song, which she promptly shared on fan networks. "With every new development," Rose notes, "the message boards were swamped. By the time the album hit the store shelves in April, 2.5 million people had visited at least one of the game's 30 Web sites." (p. 30)

These fans, it must be noted, don't show devotion to the company that produces the music of Nine Inch Nails, and it could be argued that their devotion to the band or Reznor is hard-won. Their devotion starts with experiences and how those are provided by cultural producers. As Jenkins argues:

If old consumers were assumed to be passive, the new consumers are active. If old consumers were predictable and stayed where you told them to stay, then new consumers are migratory, showing declining loyalty to networks or media. If old consumers were isolated individuals, the new consumers are more socially connected. If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible, the new consumers are noisy and public. (2006, p. 19)

The mediascape of the early 21st century no longer requires devotion to particular commercial networks nor media outlets, and it is the task of every communicator from the amateur on Main Street to the professionals in Hollywood, on Madison Avenue, Rockefeller Center or Times Square to reach that dispersed public, engage its individuals and activate its informal social networks.

## Chapter 2 — WHERE JOURNALISM HAS GONE BEFORE

*“To fall into habit is to begin to cease to be.” — Miguel de Unamuno*

### ***Evolution***

Journalism is far from a static institution. Despite an outwardly dogmatic adherence to conservative professional principles, American journalism has steadily and persistently evolved from the partisan activism of the country's early newspapers to the hyperbole of the popular press to the direct and sober prose of the mid-20th-century. As the 21st century unfolds it continues through a chaotic evolution into a networked information economy that changes how news is produced, delivered and used. In this chapter I will examine how the nature of communication has changed and how that has altered the relationship between journalists and their publics. I will also describe journalism's attempts to react to the changing information economy through *convergence*, which so far has only moved old forms onto new platforms. *Convergence journalism* has proven an inadequate reaction to changes in the way we communicate and interact. However other movements in 20th-century journalism could prove valuable in constructing a new way in which complex news stories are told. This chapter will look at two 20th-century movements in journalism aimed at engaging and serving their publics more effectively. Despite criticism from some journalists, *literary*

*journalism* has long engaged its public in ways that reflect what transmedia journalism may accomplish — it is engaging, deep, detailed and more personal. *Public journalism* developed as an attempt to answer reader flight from newspapers in the late 1980s and early 90s. Though it also reflects some of the goals of transmedia journalism — interaction between journalist and his or her public and meaningful political engagement — it proved unsuccessful in the face of professional conservatism. From these much can be learned about how stories might be told in the most compelling and engaging fashion. We could also learn to redefine how the public is served by the efforts of all journalists, whether working independently or for the legacy media. In an age of networked communication journalists need to look back at the profession's prior failed attempts and ignored successes in order to enlighten and inform the networked publics of today.

### ***One-to-Many and Many-to-Many Models***

The 20th century is notable in the history of journalism (and information as a whole) for what legal scholar Yochai Benkler described as the “industrial information economy.” (2006, p. 1) “During this period,” he adds, “the platform of the public sphere was dominated by mass media — print, radio and television.” (p. 176) The rise of a mass media in the United States started a century earlier with the advent of high-capacity presses and daily newspapers, but achieved its apogee in the 20th century when radio and television joined print as major distributors of both news and entertainment. A principal cause for this, he notes, is the dramatic rise in cost of entry

to the information marketplace. The resulting concentration of ownership of media outlets led inevitably to a vertical communication flow, from *one* publisher or broadcaster to *many* relatively passive consumers of news and culture. (p. 187-192) It is also what legal scholar Lawrence Lessig describes as “read-only” culture as there is limited, if any, feedback from that audience (Lessig, 2008, p. 28). He argues with merit that this read-only culture was a phenomenon of the 20th century only, and that anomaly has ended with a read-write culture ascendant with the digital age (2007; 2008).

Benkler points out many disadvantages to this system as it relates to U.S. news media. He notes that since the information is filtered through a small number of people before it reaches an audience several magnitudes larger, information is inevitably lost. “In large, complex, modern societies, no one knows everything,” he says (2006, p. 198). Reducing the number of contributors to the pool of information inevitably limits the quality and completeness of the information in a society. Feedback to the publisher and therefore fellow readers is inherently limited, and the mass size of audiences homogenizes the news and limits outlier opinions in the public discourse. The concentration of media into relatively few hands also bestows an imbalance of power into the hands of a few, which potentially alters public discourse in their favor (p. 198-200).

However, Benkler also describes many of the advantages journalists themselves cite in how well the mediascape of the 20th century could work. At its best, the economic model under which legacy media largely still work provided an

independence from the largesse of government or a small set of benefactors. Thanks to this commercial advertising-based model, Benkler notes, a public sphere outside the government was possible. Large, professional newsrooms, he adds, provide mass media with the manpower and resources to perform the watchdog function in a complex society. Lastly, he says, “their near-universal visibility and independence enable them to identify important issues percolating in society.” They accredit information about issues, speed them onto the public agenda and raise their salience to the point of collective action (p. 197-198).

But many media scholars argue that these same features have already appeared within the informal structures of networked communication and have even performed the job better than the mass-media, one-to-many model in many cases (Gillmor, 2004; Russell, 2011); the networked public sphere is at least as immune to government intervention due to the dispersed nature of information sources (Benkler, 2006, p. 212); contributors to information gathering are unlimited in the networked environment (Russell, 2011); and issues salient to the public will inevitably rise to the fore (Gillmor, 2004). The outlook for legacy journalism’s one-to-many model has never been so bleak, but pertinent to building a transmedia journalism is not whether this model is better than the many-to-many at certain roles or tasks.

At this writing both models exist and may exist side-by-side into the foreseeable future. The success of transmedia entertainment franchises already shows that both models have advantages in the delivery of the story. Within the news media the large staff of an entity like the *New York Times* provided for efficient and polished coverage

of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath. Cooperative teamwork by seasoned reporters, photographers and their editors resulted in a probing look at the cause and effect of that event. Though that work could arguably be done through the networked public sphere and citizen reporters, the unity provided by the organizational structure of the *Times* made for a very cohesive body of work that led to a Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting. For better or for worse the one-to-many form of journalism delivery exists and may continue to do so for the foreseeable future. It can be a valuable tool in transmedia journalism. Likewise, the nature of the networked public and its many-to-many model of news production and interaction is an asset. For example, several of the principles Henry Jenkins identifies in transmedia storytelling are native characteristics of the many-to-many form of communication. The networked sphere inherently fosters the principles of spreadability, multiplicity and subjectivity among others. In the following chapter I will examine how both models might be used.

### ***Convergence Journalism***

“Convergence” is a central theme of early 21st-century journalism, in which once-separate media meld into each other. Newspapers become TV and radio on the Internet, and those broadcast media become publishers of text. “The people formerly known as the audience,” as Rosen (2006, June 27) described them, become news producers and distributors themselves. Superficially it appears journalists either ignored the digital age or simply hoped it would go away as legacy media have never seemed to find a solid foothold in the newer communication medium. But, “the problem

newspapers face isn't that they didn't see the internet coming," writes New York University's Clay Shirky in a blog post examining the troubles in the industry. "They not only saw it miles off, they figured out early on that they needed a plan to deal with it, and during the early 90s they came up with not just one plan but several." (2009, March 13)

One of the oldest of those plans, first instituted by the Tribune Company of Chicago and Media General's *Tampa Tribune* in the mid 1990s, took the idea of spreading the reporting resources of journalists across multiple media platforms owned by those companies. For example, a story by a *Chicago Tribune* reporter would be written for the paper, the Web site, and for broadcast on WGN radio and TV. That reporter would often be interviewed on-air about the story. At both media companies this structure is still at work. It has been implemented elsewhere, from Sarasota, Florida to Lawrence, Kansas. (Quinn, 2006)

If the above approach is a bit of a pyramid — taking one story and spreading it across multiple media — the next definition is the inverted pyramid. Digital-era prognosticators have long talked about a singular "black box" device that would be used to consume Internet content, news and entertainment media content, and communicate through multiple channels (Dwyer, 2010). This black box now exists in the form of smart phones or electronic tablet devices, but it has not come to dominate media consumption — not yet at least. It is one of the array of sources news readers use daily. According to the Pew Research Center's "The State of the News Media 2010," one third of mobile users get news from their device (Pew, 2010a). But Henry Jenkins



disputed as simplistic the idea of “black box” convergence in *Technology Review* (Jenkins, 2001):

What’s all this talk about ‘media convergence,’ this dumb industry idea that all media will meld into one, and we’ll get all of our news and entertainment through one box? Few contemporary terms generate more buzz — and less honey... There will never be one black box controlling all media... Media convergence is an ongoing process, occurring at various intersections of media technologies, industries, content and audiences; it’s not an end state. (Jenkins, 2001)

A third and more popular interpretation of convergence journalism is also often called “backpack journalism.” If the above are pyramids of either direction, this might be an hourglass. The idea taught for a decade in journalism schools is to funnel the multiple skill sets of legacy media into one multimedia journalist who reports, writes copy, shoots pictures and video, and records broadcast-quality audio. Then the work of that single person is produced for use across multiple media platforms. For the *Online Journalism Review* in 2002, veteran reporter Jane Stevens wrote:

I am a backpack journalist. I use a video camera as my reporter's notebook. I can put together multimedia stories that include video and audio clips, still photos grabbed from the video, as well as text. I can put together graphics information for Web designers. I can throw together a simple Web page. I can't do Flash yet, or simple graphics but they're on my list because they're handy skills to learn. I can do a little muckraking, if needs be, as well as write a broadcast script and a print story. I'd rather be called Maxine Headroom than Martha Stewart. (Stevens, 2002, April 2)

Critics of this method have long complained that it creates journalists who are jacks of all trades but masters of no one medium. Though the product could be delivered anywhere, the individual pieces of work — reporting, photographing,

recording — might all suffer from lack of proper attention. Sam Ford, a former blogger for the Convergence Culture Consortium at MIT wrote, “...each medium should deliver what it is best at and that journalists in various mediums should work together — CONVERGE — to create a better news product. The truth is that, when journalists do this, it probably requires MORE people working, not fewer, to be done well.” (Emphasis in the original) (2006, August 3) But in the realities of the market, this form of convergence holds a solid position. Smaller local news agencies with fewer resources depend on this idea to reach across media within a limited budget. And in the realm of remote and foreign reporting it can often be a valuable way to do the work. For reporter, producer and educator Janet Kolodzy, it — like all aspects of journalism convergence — is about flexibility. (2006)

Though convergence journalism is “multimedia” in that it makes use of multiple media delivery technologies, I argue it is not transmedia. In most examples of digital journalism so far, the same content is simply repurposed for a new medium. The public gains no added value from reading or viewing the same story in another form, and neither writing nor production changes to reflect the differing users of those media. Randy Covington (2006), director of the University of South Carolina’s Ifra Newsplex notes, “The Newsplex philosophy, boiled down to a sentence, is that news organizations will be best served if they focus on stories—not delivery platforms. The focus on production once made sense, but in today's interwoven media environment, in which the public tracks stories throughout the day from a lot of sources, news

organizations need to meet that public in places and formats that are meaningful and relevant to them.”

When Clay Shirky (2009, March 13) noted that plans were made early, he was addressing the legacy media’s business model. But content experimentation was there equally early. Fred Ritchin, an New York University professor and former *New York Times* picture editor, described this type of experimentation in a recent book on the future of photography:

In 1994-95 I was asked by the New York Times corporation to create a model of the future multimedia newspaper... We introduced a function allowing the reader to immediately see articles from newspapers worldwide on the same subject to provide contrasting points of view. We developed a way to listen to music from a concert being reviewed, as well as a REMEMBER button that readers could click to see a photo of an aging singing group change to an image of them in their prime... There was a photo accompanying an obituary on the actor John Candy that the reader could click that then transformed into a short scene from one of his movies. We had a bilingual studio visit with an artist and a virtual tour of the interior of a house for sale (the viewer could listen to the piano). (p. 100)

Many of these mid-90s innovations have come to pass in the mediascape of 15 years later. But they were not immediately adopted. He notes, “Sometimes there is a small window of opportunity when it is possible to experiment with a new media model before it is back to business as usual. It’s as if the habitués of agreed-upon form are distracted momentarily by the unknown, and for an instant the formulaic loses its ritualized status.” (Ritchin, 2009 p. 100)

Throughout the wide scope of journalism — professional and not — there are many attempts like Ritchin’s that seize the advantages in the way communication has

changed. The early *New York Times on the Web* effort is instructive not only in terms of how new technologies change the way we can tell stories, but also by the fact that it was produced by one of the most influential legacy media companies. However, few attempts to re-imagine how journalists tell their stories have successfully changed legacy journalism thinking. The “formulaic” described by Ritchin has ruled the day, and stories produced using the same methods are simply delivered in the same way they were before. When new media are used, they simply repurpose the same content for that medium. As transmedia storytelling in entertainment shows, telling the story the same way in different media adds nothing to the larger story. New publics are engaged through different media, and when the story is told in ways native to each medium, new and deeper information is added to a complex story.

### ***Literary Journalism***

Journalists have always strived to immerse their readers in their stories. How that has been done has raised as much concern from journalism’s dogmatic adherents as it has praise from the public and those willing to embrace new forms. *Literary journalism* is one label that encompasses the forms that immersive work has taken from the personal, local journalism of the 19th century, to the book-length works and *New Journalism* of the 20th century. At times it has been the norm of journalism, at others a reaction to the formulaic journalism found in the mainstream press (Sims, 2007). “An elder of the tribe of Old Journalists once wrote to me, using an oddly mixed metaphor, that (literary journalist and Pulitzer winner John McPhee) ‘...is a journalistic

spellbinder, that's all... Mr. McPhee's journalistic warp and his literary woof make very thin cloth for any of us in the profession to use for patching our worn-out bromides,'" wrote media studies scholar Norman Sims in his notable 1984 anthology of literary journalism (p. 8). The statement about John McPhee, a 1999 Pulitzer Prize winner and one of the deans of the literary journalism form, points to one side of a long-term love-hate relationship. Literary journalism has been accused by the journalism establishment as playing loose with the facts and not respecting the principle of journalistic objectivity that reached its full growth by the 1950s (Sims, 2007; Many, 1996). Yet the work has stood the test of time admirably. In 1999 students at the New York University journalism department compiled a list of the 100 best examples of journalism in the 20th century, using judges from the top of the journalism profession (Stephens, 1999, March 1). According to Sims, 41 of the 100 were works of literary journalism (Sims, 2007, p. 280).

The form endures because it provides intimacy and subtlety as context for the subjects. The depth creates connections that the basic fact reporting of daily journalism neither has the time nor the space for. That intimacy lingers with readers (Sims, 2007). In his 1984 compilation of the form, Sims explained that, "Today, scraps of information don't satisfy the reader's desire to learn about people doing things." They live in complex social worlds using complex technologies, and a simple stating of facts only scratches the surface of an issue, a place or a station in life. "The everyday stories that bring us inside the lives of our neighbors used to be found in the realm of the fiction writer, while nonfiction reporters brought us the news from far-off centers of power that

hardly touched our lives.” (1984, p. 3) Sims describes literary journalism as “immersion reporting, complicated structures, character development, symbolism, voice, a focus on ordinary people — if for no other reason than that celebrities rarely provide the access — and accuracy.” (2007, p. 6) Examples through the 20th century start with John Reed, immortalized in the film *Reds* for his coverage of the Russian revolution, James Agee and John Steinbeck during the Great Depression, John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway in the Spanish Civil War, and John Hersey on the heels of the atomic bombing of Japan. The term can also include the “New Journalists” of the 1960s, such as Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, Truman Capote and Hunter S. Thompson. It has begun a new century through the words of writers like McPhee, Ted Conover, Susan Orlean and Sebastian Junger. Though its principle publication medium in the 20th century has been magazines like the *New Yorker* or *Esquire*, literary journalism has graced the pages of modern newspapers like the *Oregonian*, *St. Petersburg Times* and *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Internet publications like *Salon* and *Slate* regularly publish works that fit this category. Documentary forms of the graphic novel, like Joe Sacco’s *Palestine* or Josh Neufeld’s *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge* also merit consideration. And Sims notes that documentary films such as *High School*, *Model* and others aired by PBS fit the genre (2007, p. 284-286).

A mandate for accuracy pervades literary journalism, according to Sims who cites Tracy Kidder’s living in a Data General Corporation lab for eight months to make sure every impression, every quote was correct. Kidder spent two and a half years on his book, *The Soul of a New Machine* to put a face on new technologies and their

inventors (Sims, 1984, p. 15). Time is the key to its production, and that is a scarce commodity in most newsrooms. At the turn of the century literary journalism's most common platform has been the book.

As we examine the possibilities of new implementations of journalism literary journalism bears a close examination. It fulfills the wish for greater immersion in a story, expresses context, explains complexity and captures the imagination of its public. These are all goals of transmedia storytelling. It is also worthy of the journalism label, as Paul Many argued in a *Connecticut Review* article titled "Literary Journalism: Newspapers' Last, Best Hope" (1996):

Literary journalism focuses on the exterior world in the same referential way that garden variety journalism does. But in doing so, it uses literary techniques that, by their very nature, beg for the inclusion of a wider sort of reality. The usual language and, with it, the content of journalism, thus becomes stretched past what newspaper editors would normally consider 'factual' or 'objective.' And this may be the source of its acceptance problems.

In that 1996 article Many was searching for an answer for newspapers not long after their continuing decline started. His impulse also applies today when any story must compete with thousands of others to engage the public. In a prior age where the average news reader had only a few possible sources, the straight, inverted-pyramid, cold-facts style of news reporting could be delivered without competitive concerns. With today's diverse and networked communications, telling a rich and compelling story — particularly for the complex subjects that lend themselves to a transmedia approach — becomes more important. Equally important would be regaining lost

relevance to the public, and for that goal the *public journalism* movement proves instructive.

### ***Public Journalism***

On the heels of the 1988 presidential election in the U.S. — one widely considered to be a low point in the quality of political coverage by the legacy media (Fallows, 1996; Russell, 2011; Rosen, 1999; Rosenberry & St. John, 2010) — a group of journalists and scholars formed hoping to realign the relationship between the press and the public. *Public journalism* aimed to answer the legacy media's apparently waning relevance to the public by embracing their position as fellow citizens rather than disinterested observers: the premise of public journalism is that a true separation of oneself from the story is neither possible nor an effective activator of civic engagement. Journalists should answer to the wishes of their public, report on what interests it and respond to what the public feels is important and meaningful (Rosen, 1999).

Its goals were lofty but general, and the lack of specific actions a journalist or editor might take to improve the public discourse remained undefined. "Part of the blame," wrote journalism professor and public journalism proponent Phillip Meyer, "must go to the early promoters of public journalism who have steadfastly refused to give it a definition or anything more than a vague theoretical structure." (1996) That lack of structure, argues Meyer, left it too open to negative interpretation by the reporters, editors and producers it wished to reach. It was like "arguing over a



Rorschach test.” Meyer did define what it meant to him hoping to settle some of the debate as interest in public journalism began to slip. His defining elements included a desire to rebuild a community’s sense of itself, a longer attention span by journalists who tend to flit from one brief subject to the next, a willingness to go deeply into explaining the systems that direct our lives, more attention to the rational middle ground of issues and less attention to extremes, a preference for substance over tactics in covering political argument, and a desire to foster deliberation (1996). Jay Rosen described the movement he helped launch this way:

Essentially, it was this: Politics and Public Life, journalism and its professional identity, could be renewed along civic lines, meaning the ties that held Americans together as a community of the whole — a public. If citizens joined in the action where possible, kept an ear tuned to the current debate, found a place for themselves in the drama of politics, got to exercise their skills and voice their concerns, then maybe democracy didn’t have to be the desultory affair it seemed to have become. And maybe journalism, by doing something to help, could improve itself and regain some of its lost authority (1999, p. 5).

Resistance from working journalists centered on the idea of control; that the public didn’t have the means to educate itself on what civic matters were important. It needed the media filter (Remnick, 1996, January 29). Public journalism was not a movement to usurp the authority of the press, however (Russell, 2011). It was an effort to reinstate the authority the press had in its perceived role as the fourth estate.

“Focusing the light of public attention on any one problem long enough to spark discourse leading to a solution is the object of public journalism,” noted Meyer (1996).

Public journalism was a pre-Internet movement, slipping off the stage just as the Internet entered. And curiously, the interactive functions of a networked society

brought the public into the newsroom in ways similar to what public journalism hoped for. The ability to comment on a story is arguably the kind of citizen input that public journalism idealized, and the manner in which most media outlets do not interact directly with those comments also reflects how public journalism sought to have input without losing its authority and professional status. As media scholar Adrienne Russell noted, “Although it advocated inviting everyday people into the conversation, it left journalists in charge of that conversation, seeing them as enlightened news directors who would decide which voices would be included and how reality would be presented.” (2011)

Public journalism was a concerted effort to reform the idea of the role of the media and make its connection to the civic engagement deeper than it had been in nearly a century. Despite criticisms, it opened the conversation on how the media perceives its public and what role there may be for that public in the definition, production and distribution of news. Perhaps the ideas of public journalism were discounted or ignored as the profession of journalism has not yet grasped the changes that came with the arrival of the Internet and the networked information economy. As Russell argues, it left journalists in charge of the conversation. That leaves public journalism as imagined in the 1990s as perhaps inadequate to answer the needs of journalistic communication in a networked environment. Public journalism was, however, an idea that looked down the right road — one that leads to journalism as more of a conversation. As transmedia storytelling in the entertainment industry shows, telling relevant stories and allowing the story to be a conversation draws people deeper

by giving them a sense of ownership in that story. Through transmedia journalism we can, as public journalism hoped, build relevance to the public and engage in a conversation about what news matters.

The networked information economy and its many-to-many model of communication has changed the rules by which journalism must be produced and distributed. So far reactions from the profession have largely missed the mark by simply using a diverse mediascape to repeat the same stories across multiple media. But as the early design experiments of the *New York Times on the Web* and others like them have shown, innovation in journalistic storytelling is far from impossible. In building transmedia journalism we can look not only to those experiments but also to revolutionary ideas from journalism's past, such as the deep storytelling power of literary journalism or the better interaction of public journalism, for examples. In the next chapter I will redefine the principles of transmedia storytelling to work well within the ethical and practical standards of journalism, using examples from journalism itself.

### Chapter 3 — TRANSMEDIA PRINCIPLES FOR JOURNALISM

*“There are no new ideas in the world. Only a new arrangement of things.” — Henri Cartier-Bresson*

#### ***Almost Transmedia***

Looking at journalism in terms of Jenkins’ seven principles, all of the characteristics of transmedia as he defines it have individually been implemented in a journalism or documentary context before. Though they may not yet have been designed together in a single storyline, all the pieces of the puzzle are there already. Nothing new must be invented to apply transmedia storytelling in journalism. Many of these principles were accomplished more than 15 years ago in a single complex storyline. For the *New York Times on the Web* in 1996, photo editor Fred Ritchin and French photojournalist Gilles Peress produced an interactive photo essay that would allow the reader to drill deeper into the the story to see beyond traditional presentation. The result, “Bosnia: Uncertain Paths to Peace,” was multilinear, multimedia and interlinked with contextual information. This essay bears examination on its own for the ideas it implemented at such an early stage. Through the chapter I will also refer back to the project as an example of what is possible. Ritchin described it in his book *After Photography*:

In our construction, readers would be required to size up the information presented, then take trips and side trips through photographs, text, sound, video, with the option of extracting themselves at any time from Peress' essay to go to one of the fourteen forums and participate in various discussions, as well as to consult maps, a bibliography, or a glossary. There would be a copy of the Dayton Peace Accords and links to large numbers of other sites and other archival material provided by the *Times* and *National Public Radio*. (Ritchin, 2009. p. 104)

“Bosnia: Uncertain Paths to Peace” encouraged drilling for more information, provided personal and diverse alternative viewpoints, and expressed itself across multiple media genres. “The intent was also to take advantage of the new strategies made possible by the Web — nonlinear narratives, discussion groups, contextualizing information, panoramic imaging, the photographer’s reflective voice — rather than imitating a print-based essay.” (Ritchin, 2009, p. 102)

Building the site, Ritchin added, took months in order for photographer Peress to contextualize, pair and arrange images for the nonlinear presentation. That was longer than he had spent photographing it, Ritchin noted, and much longer than the two and a half days to edit an eight-page *New York Times Magazine* piece on the same subject. The photographs and information were analyzed by the two for every possible interpretation to help anticipate the many possible orders of images the readers could find for themselves. The order of images had a linear function, with previous and next buttons, but also had a link for “more.” Clicking on that link or an image itself would upend linearity and take the reader down a new path. Selecting images from a grid display encouraged a personal exploration of the scenes. Navigating the site makes a

story personal to each individual reader. “It was not story-telling to the reader,” he said, “but a collaborative creation of story.” (Personal communication, 2011, April 20)

Discussion was designed into the site from the start — a rarity in online journalism in 1996. Not only did the site feature 14 forums for public discussion, but four Internet terminals were installed at the United Nations in New York and two at The Hague to expand the discussion. The forums were introduced by the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright, *CNN*'s Christiane Amanpour, Soros Foundations president Aryeh Neier and others. “Yet the discussion groups were quickly dominated by some of the most racist and vitriolic comments ever to appear in the *New York Times*,” Ritchin said (2009, p. 107). Pro-Serbian commentators argued their side of the story was not being adequately represented, that they were being vilified by the media, or that the *New York Times* had a pro-Muslim slant (p. 107). Muslims compared the Serbs to Nazi Germany and Hitler's wish for *lebensraum*. “If 1 million Serbs had died in WWII we wouldn't be having this problem in Bosnia...” (Puljic, 1996, June 22). Ritchin concluded, “The discussion groups, despite entreaties for civility from former *Times* foreign editor Bernard Gwertzman, were so rampantly hostile that a reader could learn more from them than any news report as to how extensive, irrational, and personal the contested claims could be.” (p. 108)

In 1995 and 1996 the *New York Times* was ready to experiment. “I said that since the Web was new we should try something new,” Ritchin explained. He “gave them a list of ideas and this was one that they thought made the most sense — it was a transitional moment for them, and there was a certain openness that went along with

it.” (Personal communication, 2011, April 20) It was, however the first and last of its kind at the *Times*, and my research thus far has turned up no others. “It’s strange,” Ritchin told me, “but I always thought of the Bosnia project as being a primitive example of what can be done, and all these other projects would follow that would push various ideas more deeply, as well as coming up with very different approaches...” He adds, “basically institutions are very slow to change — if someone else does it (independently) they can then point to its success and do something similar (or even publish the same project) — so another question would be why so few independents are engaging journalism, and the world, differently?” (sic)(Personal communication, 2011, April 20)

“Bosnia: Uncertain Paths to Peace” was nominated by the *New York Times* for a Pulitzer Prize in 1997. But as an entity only of the original *New York Times on the Web* and not the printed paper, it was ruled ineligible. The project expressed many transmedia ideas before even Hollywood had begun to engage them. Though it did not cross media platforms from the Web to print, television, radio or anything else, it engaged many of Jenkins’ principles of transmedia storytelling. In the following I will revisit these principles, albeit in a new arrangement, and look at examples of journalism that have fulfilled them.

### ***Spreadable***

Transmedia storytelling in other kinds of media is driven by the fundamental nature of networked culture: It was invented to seize the advantages of a new

mediascape. Despite its often sluggish response to these changes, journalism has not been completely blind to many aspects of networked culture and communication. Spreadability of media, if not at first embraced, is now an element of nearly every journalism production. Visits to the Web sites of nearly any legacy and new media outlet show buttons to share stories and links on social media sites, email, SMS or a blog with a single click. Tracking systems such as the *New York Times*' listings of "Most E-mailed," "Most Viewed" and "Most Blogged" encourage the dissemination of work through the networked sphere by engaging our social instincts further. According to a University of Pennsylvania study of the *Times*' Most E-mailed list (Berger & Milkman, 2011), stories with positive themes, that inspired awe and dealt with complex subjects were the most often shared. John Tierney wrote in the *Times*' own article on the study:

The motivation for mailing these awe-inspiring articles is not as immediately obvious as with other kinds of articles, Dr. Berger said. Sharing recipes or financial tips or medical advice makes sense according to classic economic utility theory: I give you something of practical value in the hope that you'll someday return the favor. There can also be self-interested reasons for sharing surprising articles: I get to show off how well informed I am by sending news that will shock you. (Tierney, 2010, February 9)

Though the study did not track other social network sharing, such as links to share through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other services, those too play an important part in any news service's distribution model. However, legacy media's interaction with social networking is often as one-way of a conversation as they had with their publics in the last century. Policies such as those announced by the *Wall Street Journal* in 2009 keep the publication and its employees aloof from the medium



by discouraging or disallowing any engagement with the public through those media (Strupp, 2009, May 14). Employees of many legacy news media outlets require a journalist's presence online to be as a representative of the company. The rules also restrict how personal and independent interactions with others can be in the social media space (Strupp, 2009, May 15). Sam Ford, a former journalist, MIT blogger and coauthor with Henry Jenkins of the forthcoming book, *Spreadable Media*, argued, "So much of social media, as these journalists have become more active in the blogosphere, on Twitter, etc., is about expressing your views as you're working on something or after you've completed something." (Personal communication, 2011, April 21) Policies on social media use by legacy media employees reflect the environment of the last century more than they engage social media on its own strengths.

Aggregators play a part in the spread of media, and for-profit legacy media such as the *New York Times* have had a difficult relationship with them. Online publications such as the extremely successful *Huffington Post* repurpose much online news content. In March, 2011, *New York Times* editor Bill Keller sparked a brief battle of words with *Huffington Post* founder Arianna Huffington with this description:

The queen of aggregation is, of course, Arianna Huffington, who has discovered that if you take celebrity gossip, adorable kitten videos, posts from unpaid bloggers and news reports from other publications, array them on your Web site and add a left-wing soundtrack, millions of people will come. How great is Huffington's instinctive genius for aggregation? I once sat beside her on a panel in Los Angeles (on — what else? — The Future of Journalism). I had come prepared with a couple of memorized riffs on media topics, which I duly presented. Afterward we sat down for a joint interview with a local reporter. A moment later I

heard one of my riffs issuing verbatim from the mouth of Ms. Huffington. I felt so ... aggregated. (Keller, 2011, March 10)

Keller's column in the *New York Times Magazine* caught a fair share of criticism, arguing that his representation of the *Post* was unfair and that the *Times* aggregates content as well (Adams, 2011, March 11). But the brief and high-profile argument illustrated perfectly the uncomfortable relationship much legacy media has with the dynamics of the networked public sphere. Keller also noted in the same column that in the first hour after Hosni Mubarak's resignation from the presidency of Egypt, traffic to the *New York Times* Website increased by one million page views (Keller, 2011, March 10). Keller does not reveal the statistics of how that traffic was fed by emailed stories, social networking and news aggregators, but one can assume they played a part in the traffic increase. Like the symbiotic relationship of celebrities and paparazzi, news producers and news aggregators may need each other. With the proliferation of sources of news, a publication can no longer depend on the saturation of its market to ensure it is the go-to news source.

But what, besides being positive, deep and awe-inspiring takes a story from the publication's own pages, airwaves or Website? Keller himself notes that, "There is no question that in times of momentous news, readers rush to find reliable firsthand witness and seasoned judgment." Is there a way beyond personal relationships with a publication that leads us to that trust? Several interesting new players in the news mediascape take different tactics to accomplish that. NewsCred, Paper.li and News Trust, for example, combine the ideas of spreadable media with the trust that

recommendation from members of the public can build. NewsCred and Paper.li blend the networked communication of social media with everyone's will to be a newspaper editor. Paper.li grabs shared links, blog posts and other content from a user's Twitter and Facebook accounts and aggregates it into a personal newspaper form to be shared with friends and followers. NewsCred operates in a similar vein, though it is more customizable and can aggregate from virtually any source the user chooses. The custom digital newspapers announce to one's followers what the user finds interesting in what are to them trustworthy sources. News Trust, sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation, allows users to rate the quality of a news story on factors of factuality, fairness and how well sourced it is, among others. In addition to engaging the opinions of readers we may trust, the system works to codify why a story might be trustworthy. "The goal is not only to improve the aggregation process in order to bring together high quality news items but also to engage the community of readers in critically assessing the material, therefore becoming more engaged with it," writes media scholar Adrienne Russell (2011). The service encourages its users to think like journalists and act like editors.

Spreadable media is a native quality of the networked public sphere, and not new to news media — newspaper and magazine clippings were frequently mailed to friends and family, and posted on refrigerators and bulletin boards. Rarely, if ever, has it been advantageous to hide media content from the view of potential new customers. Like many aspects of the contemporary mediascape it is the ease and speed of sharing that has changed, and with it comes the increased speed of awareness. If at its core

journalism is about reporting stories to the larger public, then faster ways of moving that information is advantageous. As Trent Reznor has proved with earlier described examples of spreadable media, the money will follow.

### ***Drillable***

There is a mystique to journalism and journalists. A database of the “Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture” contains more than 77,000 references to the appearance of journalists in movies, radio dramas, novels, television episodes and more (Salzman, 2010). Journalists are portrayed as romantically as private investigators, and the two share a common act — digging for powerful information. In 1914 psychologist Alexander Shand described curiosity as an impulse and instinct. It is a “single impulse to know, instinctively governing and sustaining the attention,” he said (p. 438). Perhaps this is why we are so interested in journalists and gumshoes. By making content drillable, content creators and journalists can engage that impulse and help the reader become the reporter.

In entertainment media franchises like *The Matrix* or *Lost*, drillability came from incomplete and convoluted stories. This is not a quality journalism could easily embrace. Virtually every reporter or editor working today would shudder at the thought of purposefully obfuscating a story to encourage the public to dig for itself. At the same time, few journalists would argue that the story is ever complete. Information and context are inevitably left out in the process of publishing a concise story. Journalism is

a craft of distilling information either to what matters most or what fits the space available. With drillability transmedia journalism will need a different approach.

Using the connected information of electronic databases has provided a simple form of drillability. Hyperlinked words in news stories are now common in many online news media. Reading a text story on sites such as *CNN.com*, *NYTimes.com*, or *HuffingtonPost.com* reveals color-coded hyperlinked words intended to carry the reader to — most often — another piece produced by the same company. In the case of the *New York Times*, the hyperlinked words often lead to an entry in *Times Topics*, an encyclopedia-like reference service built from the company's archive. These links add a degree of context and added information in this form, and are simple to automate. Though more rare, many news sites link to content such as videos, scientific studies and government reports that confirm information in the story. These links act like in-text citations of research material. Still more rarely, hyperlinked words carry the reader to a competitor site for another perspective on the subject. The latter fits more with this paper's proposed idea of drillability.

In "Bosnia: Uncertain Paths to Peace," Ritchin, Peress and other *New York Times on the Web* editors provided a sizable set of context links for those wishing to investigate further or learn the history that led to the Bosnian conflict. As it does today, the site first listed stories by the *New York Times* staff. Following them were links to the work of *National Public Radio* on the subject, six maps to better illustrate terrain and ethnic divisions, chronologies of the history of the Balkans, and an impressive 47 links to external sources. These ranged from other journalism and photojournalism sites to

government agency reports, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic sites, missing persons reports and newsgroups (Peress, 1996). The site provided an impressive story. One reader told Ritchin it took her four hours to explore the site (2009, p. 107). But in addition an encouraging wealth of information, particularly considering the scope of the Web in 1996, was available for exploration. Its designers showed no fear that its public would be lost to the complex filaments of the Web. Ritchin described the *Times'* attitude then as one of "self-confidence." (p. 106)

In a more recent example, the *Washington Post* in the summer of 2010 published the results of a two-year investigation of U.S. national security infrastructure. "Top Secret America" involved more than a dozen reporters, editors, designers and bloggers from the *Post* who collected and digested information about American security agencies and their contractors. They assembled it into a vast relational database designed to illustrate the size of an industry that they argue is tantamount to a fourth branch of government. The story, which ran in series starting on July 19, 2010, featured written stories, photographs, videos and interactive Web graphics built to explore the incredibly complex relationships between the agencies and contractors involved (Priest & Arkin, 2010, July 19). The complexity of the subject lends itself to a deeper transmedia implementation. The interactive graphics attached to the story on the Web site do illustrate another option in drillability. Exploring the ways in which agencies and corporations, federal, state and local governments and geographic

locations are interconnected seizes our interest in exploration. Our instinct to investigate is rewarded with discoveries made from our own actions.

In the context of the standards of journalism, drillability must have a slightly different nature. It would certainly be possible to — as the Wachowski brothers did with *The Matrix* — plant hidden seeds of information throughout the mediascape to appeal to the natural gumshoes in the public sphere. But these bits of information could not be critical to the story as they often are in entertainment transmedia. In journalism the best implementation of drillability is through hyperlinking more deeply to related information on and off the organization’s own pages. “Top Secret America” embraced the power and depth of interactive databases. “Bosnia: Uncertain Paths to Peace” linked contextual information in a sidebar that offers a first step into the outlying complexities of a story.

### ***Continuous and Serial***

A staff project like that of the *Washington Post* makes continuity much simpler. Whereas in transmedia entertainment “continuity” is the goal of making many possible incarnations of a story align over time and across media, in journalism it is more continuity of editorial approach and style. No matter the medium of delivery, a “continuous” story maintains cohesive history and character. This is probably best accomplished with the work of a coordinated group of journalists, such as the staff of a major media outlet. But it is also possible with the work of a well-coordinated group of individuals contributing to a cohesive body of work.

One example is Luceo Images, a cooperative of seven photographers scattered across the country, with one based in Southeast Asia. The cooperative shares the workload of business operation and marketing, and has recently joined forces on a cooperative series of stories on the issues faced by American small towns. According to cofounder Matt Slaby, a subset of the group has already photographed towns in Nebraska, Kansas and Arizona and plans to document four more towns this year while traveling as a group in a rented recreational vehicle. In each case the group will assemble several of their members and work simultaneously to document issues such as healthcare, education, environmental justice, resource management and repurposing the rural economy. By working simultaneously on the project, the group will more easily maintain a cohesive editorial vision. The continuity of the work will also persist despite medium. Though the primary medium of delivery will be gallery walls, the work will also be proposed to news media as individual stories on the themes they plan to cover and assemble in multimedia and video form for the Web (Personal Communication, 2011, April 30).

The Luceo Images project, like much journalism, will unfold in series. Serial stories have been a fixture of journalism from its earliest days and many of its most notable and praiseworthy works have unfolded in the media over time. Prime examples include the *Washington Post's* "Top Secret America" project, which was released over three parts in July 2010, with a fourth appearing in December (Priest & Arkin, 2010, July 19), as well as the paper's historic coverage of Watergate which was a two-year investigation. Series stories have won Pulitzer Prizes for many newspapers, including



the *Denver Post*, which won the feature photography award in 2010 for a series that followed Army recruit Ian Fisher from high school through deployment to Iraq (Walker, 2009 September 11).

An important quality of transmedia storytelling is that diversity of media. Reaching potential publics where they dwell provides an opportunity to rethink what is a journalistic medium. Luceo's use of gallery walls is not new, but it is less common than publishing journalism work in legacy news media both online and off. Arguably, a gallery will attract a somewhat different public than a weekly news magazine, a documentary Web publication or a newspaper. Work in periodicals can seem disposable, destined to 'line the birdcage' the next day, whereas a gallery exhibition or a book implies permanence due to the durability of the media. Journalism does not have to live only on its traditional airwaves and pages. Other examples I argue are worth consideration in delivering journalistic content might include institutional museums where journalism content could be displayed alongside physical artifacts related to the story, or as lecture by the producing journalists where the telling of the story can be customized to the needs and interests of the audience. Mark Twain, once a journalist, was a prolific storyteller to audiences (Lorch, 1968). Literary journalist John Reed, who wrote extensively about the U.S. communist movement and the Russian Revolution was a frequent public lecturer on these subjects (Hombberger, 1990, p. 108).

Another interesting example of moving content onto new platforms is Aaron Huey's Pine Ridge Billboard project. After six years of documenting the Pine Ridge Lakota Sioux reservation in South Dakota, Huey has partnered with artists Ernesto

Yerena and Shepard Fairey to create billboards from his photographic work to spread his story of poverty and disenfranchisement on the reservation. This medium pairs with the prior publishing of Huey's work in legacy news media (Bicker, 2011, April 25).

Yet another medium used in entertainment transmedia that has a fledgeling presence in journalism is nonfiction comics. Through the last century, panel-illustrated long-form stories have moved from the earliest Superman comics to the 'graphic novel' which takes the comic illustration form into artistically deeper territory (Sabin, 1996). Several acclaimed examples of journalism nonfiction comics have appeared recently. Joe Sacco won an American Book Award for *Palestine*, a long-form graphic journalism book on the life and plight of Palestinians. He also published a book on the Bosnian war, *Safe Area Goražde*, and another on the Gaza Strip, *Footnotes in Gaza*. Sacco finds the medium advantageous in telling a historic story. He told Al Jazeera of the Gaza book, "It has a certain strength in that it can take you back in time and it can drop you in a place. I can really set the reader right in Rafah or Khan Yunis and I can do it in the 1950s or in the present day. There is an immediate connection with Gaza when you open the book." (El Haddad, 2010, January 18) Another nonfiction comic author who uses the medium as one in a small array of media to tell a story is Josh Neufeld, who began a project on post-Katrina New Orleans by serializing his work in the online magazine *Smith*. In 2009 his work was published as *A.D. New Orleans After the Deluge*. Neufeld's nonfiction comic piece is illustrated from interviews with Katrina survivors on their experiences before, during and after the storm. "My first role as writer/artist of 'A.D.' was that of a journalist, finding subjects for the story," he writes.

Neufeld's work features the stories of seven survivors, and panels were built from interviews, reference photographs and multiple visits to the scenes in the story. The Web version of the story on SMITH magazine's site features links to podcasts, videos, archived hurricane tracking reports and personal details like one character's favorite mixed drink recipes (Neufeld, 2006; 2009). All of these projects demonstrate the power and advantage to thinking of journalism beyond media boundaries to reach wider and more diverse publics, and in series to keep them intrigued and engaged over time.

### ***Diverse and Personal in Viewpoint***

In addition to continuity through a coordinated and shared subject, the Luceo Images small-town America project uses multiplicity. The photographers engaged in the project all view the same subject from naturally individual points of view. As four or five of the cooperative's members fan out across a subject town, they bring their individualism to a group effort. If Thomas Nagel's (1989) "view from nowhere" idea of journalistic objectivity is functionally impossible, then this form of multiplicity changes the shape of reporting. If a reporter's background, history and opinions are never divorced from his or her work, then adding multiple reporting voices brings a broader view on a subject.

This can be achieved by methods like Luceo's as well as by linking to outside news sources on the same subject, as was done by the creators of the "Bosnia: Uncertain Paths to Peace" project by the *New York Times*. The technique used in the Bosnia piece is not a new one to bloggers, who frequently add context and perspective

to their work with links to external reporting, and it is even older in academia where in-text cites and bibliographic information are de rigueur. In 2008, journalist and blogger Jeff Jarvis defined link journalism: “The standard journalistic technique for providing context and support for assertions is to quote sources, but on the web, the ‘link journalism approach’ is to link to other *actual reporting*.” (Emphasis in the original) Jarvis also addressed a concern that might be at the top of the minds of journalism publishers who hope to keep their publics contained on their own sites: “Oh, speaking of traffic, what about the concern that link journalism will ‘send people away’ from a newsroom’s own original reporting? Just remember Google’s law of links on the web — the better job you do at sending people away, the more they come back.” (2008, February 25)

According to a 2009 study by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, only 29 percent of Americans say news organizations get the facts straight, while 63 percent regard news stories as often inaccurate. (Pew, 2009, September 13) Writing in Nieman Reports, former journalist and media studies scholar John McManus argued that diverse perspectives from both media professionals and the public would help journalism’s trust and transparency issues:

Rather than pretending that they cover “all the news that’s fit to print,” providers would have to acknowledge their limitations of staff and space or time and invite the public as a partner in what would be a more empowering and democratic form of journalism. Now is the time. As news moves to the Web, it can more easily accommodate give and take with the community it serves. There’s room for diverse perspectives. Updates and revisions are easy to accomplish. And news is easier than ever to share. (McManus, 2009)

McManus derived his argument partially from sociologist Herbert Gans, who in his 1979 book *Deciding What's News* called for news from multiple perspectives. In an interview with NYU's Jay Rosen, Gans described it as, "reporting all ideas that could resolve issues and help problems, even if the ideas come from ideologically small groups." (Rosen, 2004, January 13)

Gans' "multiperspectivalism" applies not only to link journalism as mentioned above, but to the notion of opening the journalism conversation to the public as well. Citizen comment and citizen journalism reflect not only Jenkins' principle of multiplicity, but also subjectivity. Reader comments are now as an entrenched feature of professional journalism sites as they are of amateur media and blogs. The vitriol that seemed to surprise Ritchin and the Web producers of the *New York Times* in 1996 are part of the journalism landscape. Though allowing public comment on stories is a step closer to Gans' ideal, many argue that the American news media has remained aloof to the public discourse. Responses by journalists to comments are rare, and interaction about the reporting or editing of a story is even more rare. *Spreadable Media* coauthor and former MIT blogger Sam Ford pointed out, "A newspaper story goes up (on the Web) and you have a lot of discussion, debate, comment and response, and never, almost ever, do you hear from the reporter again." (Personal communication, 2011, April 2) Ford and others (Minter, 2011, April 20; argue that by opening journalism to comment, the media need to enter that conversation directly rather than saying, 'now talk among yourselves.' Interestingly, PBS uses that phrase exactly on its *Five Good Answers* series of blog posts that interview PBS reporters. "Want to continue the

conversation? Use the 'Comments' section beneath this entry. Feel free to talk among yourselves." (Baker, 2008, August 18)

Citizen journalism advocates also point to the advantages of citizen contribution to news. Media studies scholar and former journalist Dan Gillmor (2004), Jay Rosen (2006, June 27) and others advocate embracing a native function of the Internet age provided by the extremely low cost of entry to publishing. As Gillmor noted in a *Guardian* article, "We would invite our audience to participate in the journalism process, in a variety of ways that included crowdsourcing, audience blogging, wikis and many other techniques. We'd make it clear that we're not looking for free labour – and will work to create a system that rewards contributors beyond a pat on the back – but want above all to promote a multi-directional flow of news and information in which the audience plays a vital role." (sic)(Gillmor, 2009, October 3)

Citizen journalism is multifaceted, much debated and complex. Gillmor himself breaks that simple article on the subject into 22 different rules of engagement. By whatever means it both adds Gans' multiperspectives into the news and allows for the public ways to express its own view of the story.

New systems are emerging to embrace the idea of public news remix and repurposing. Media and immersive journalism scholar and former journalist Nonny de la Peña is one of the creators of Stroome.com, a collaborative video editing system. The project has several goals, from providing a browser-based platform for editing content to a public that cannot normally afford expensive authoring tools, to fostering

collaborative content production and content remixing. It has a history in the legacy media, as she tells Henry Jenkins in an interview:

Remix is an old culture in newsweekly journalism. For example, as a correspondent for Newsweek, I would join other Newsweek correspondents around the world in contributing material for a single story. We would all send in our individual reports to headquarters in New York where a "writer" would edit our material into the piece that would appear in the magazine. Stroome is based on the same principles. Multiple people can contribute to one story by uploading their video onto Stroome and it can be remixed right in the browser into a finished piece that can be quickly shared across the web. Stroome pushes the newsweekly idea even further, creating a social networking site that celebrates what's possible on the web today. Multiple people can remix any story and that means any contributor can choose to have a voice on how the story should be told. (sic) (Jenkins, 2010, June 23)

The Stroome system was relaunched in April, 2011 with user interface improvements sponsored by the Knight Foundation with a Knight News Challenge grant. And though de la Peña considers it a journalism tool, it has so far been embraced globally by users of all interests (Personal communication 2011, April 7).

Jenkins' transmedia principle of subjectivity, where a story is told through the eyes of different characters within that story, is also a time-honored technique in journalism. In radio many notable documentary projects have been produced by providing a subject with a recorder to report on his or her own life. The technique has appeared in regular shows like NPR's *Radio Diaries*, but perhaps most notably in *Ghetto Life 101*, a documentary by radio producer David Isay in which two 14-year-old boys recorded their own lives in one of Chicago's worst housing projects (Isay, 1993, May 18). Closer to transmedia is the Canadian National Film Board's nonlinear and

multimedia presentation *Out My Window*, which examines life in the world's high-rise buildings through the first-person voices of the residents themselves. The nonlinear presentation encourages an interactive and drillable exploration of the lives of the subjects in 49 stories about 13 cities told in 13 languages. The project in 2011 won an International Digital Emmy Award for nonfiction (Cizek, 2010).

Followthrough has long been a weakness of traditional journalism. From my own experience I remember watching many stories reported early in their progression, but without closure after that story was resolved. Perhaps a person was arrested for driving under the influence, and though the arrest was reported, the ultimate disposition of the case was not. Sam Ford noted, "It's something that transmedia might help answer: the number of dropped stories that any publication has. We hear the launch of something but then we never hear how that something went six months down the line." (Personal communication, 2011, April 21) This issue exists largely because journalism is time consuming, staff is limited and the next day the attention is on a new story. By opening the doors of journalism to the public, problems of followthrough may be corrected by the public itself.

### ***Immersive***

Drawing the public into a story is a long-time goal of journalism. Writers — from those constrained by the time and space of the newspaper story to long-form literary journalists — work to build mental images of the world on which they are reporting. Former *Chicago Tribune* correspondent Laurie Goering explained to me



years ago that an old editor she respected once asked her to “tell me how it smelled” to get her to think of making those mental images in the reader’s mind (Personal communication, 1995). Visual storytellers set scenes in a space to help the public break Diderot’s ‘fourth wall’ and help the viewers through the proscenium or the screen (France, 1995).

Games provide one way for the members of the public to immerse themselves in a story through action and first-person emotion. Games as a method for experiencing a piece of the news are also starting to appear more frequently. Examples of “news games” include *Wired* magazine’s “Cutthroat Capitalism, a game that accompanied a piece on Somali pirate raids. Game design professor Ian Bogost of the Georgia Institute of Technology described it: “A smart player will rarely fail — and that is the strongest rhetorical point presented in the negotiation process. If a ship can be captured, its hostages and cargo are always worth *something*.” (Emphasis in the original)(Bogost 2010, p. 4) The point of the game is to show the economic incentives of piracy in an engaging, first-person manner. “Games allow us to address systems instead of stories,” Bogost told *The Atlantic* in an interview. “In particular, they can offer this experience of how something works rather than a description of key events and players.” (Chokshi, 2010) Games continue to build clout as a reporting tool. The *New York Times* in 2007 published on the Web several games created by Bogost and his Persuasive Games designers (GamePolitics.com, 2007, May 25), and a new game is anticipated from the *Times* in 2011 (GamesForChange.com, 2011).

Through online distribution, games can easily be attached to a journalism project or series of news items, they do not need to be online exclusively. USC researcher Nonny de la Peña is currently working on a board game to tell part of the story of the California eugenics movement of the 1930s. “How does this happen? How do people do this to each other?” are the questions she hopes the game asks. In the game players must answer IQ questions from the time that she’s says are clearly culturally specific. If your game play partner answers three questions wrong they become “unfit” and you send them to a sterilization camp in Sonoma. “It’s about the money,” she says. “The whole system is about the unfit, and the unfit were going to waste the money of the society... and this is how much money...” (Personal communication, 2011, April 7) The game will debut at the 2011 Games for Change conference in New York.

Alternate reality games, in which players move themselves through the real world in pursuit of game goals, are also turning up in journalism. In 2009 the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle partnered with the Rochester Institute of Technology to build a city-wide alternate reality Game (ARG). “Picture the Impossible” was a game intended to attract and engage Rochester citizens under 40, a demographic they felt they weren’t reaching. More than one thousand team-organized players scanned the paper’s content — from text to photos, crosswords and online features — in a scavenger hunt that took them through the city’s history. Though it wasn’t directly news related, the success of the experiment has caught the attention of the newspaper’s managers. “A hundred years ago, putting news in a newspaper caused people to take

action in certain ways,” managing editor for content and digital platforms Traci Bauer told the Nieman Journalism Lab in an interview. “That doesn’t seem to motivate people under 40. The people who write letters to the editor to newspapers aren’t people under 40, they’re people in their 60s. That’s no longer the way to get people to use information and act accordingly.” (Becket, L., 2009, September 15)

Nonny de la Peña, Peggy Weil and others have also been experimenting with ways to make journalism more immersive. They write:

The fundamental idea of immersive journalism is to allow the participant, typically represented as a digital avatar, to actually enter a virtually recreated scenario representing the news story. The sense of presence obtained through an immersive system ... affords the participant unprecedented access to the sights and sounds, and possibly feelings and emotions, that accompany the news. (de la Peña, Weil, Llobera, Giannopoulos, Pomés, Spanlang, Friedman, Sanchez-Vives & Slater, 2010)

De la Peña equates the experience to “being there” where the visitor can interact with the environment around them and investigate the context of the news, so long as the environment is grounded in the real world (Jenkins, 2010, June 23).

As technology advances, so do the possibilities for deeper immersion and allowing the public to feel the scene for itself. In 2007 de la Peña and collaborator Peggy Weil built a virtual Guantanamo Bay prison camp in the online virtual world Second Life. There visitors could experience the life of a detainee based on recorded interviews with former detainees. In the virtual space those videos play on screens around the camp. The user’s avatar is hooded and strapped to the floor of a military transport plane then released into a cage in the camp. The user’s avatar is unable to

move any further through the Second Life virtual space, but your avatar is not tortured. “Rather than a torture chamber, we elected to build a contemplation chamber,” Weil said. “A series of spaces to report and contemplate the practices going on in Guantanamo, as well as the current news via RSS feed.” (draxfordepres, 2009)

The project is not the first nor the only by the two. They have previously collaborated on immersive pieces designed to help the public understand the price of carbon consumption and a piece based on the interrogation logs of Iraq war detainees. In the latter the user finds him- or herself in a stress position used in U.S. detainment camps. Though not actually in the physical position, virtual mirrors showing the user’s avatar in that position resulted in accelerated breathing and a sense of discomfort. “You know where are your legs and your hands but at the same time you see the other guy, the guy that is supposed to be you, and you look at him and... OK I’m really flexed, I’m in an uncomfortable position, so you start to believe that you are him,” related one study participant interviewed about his experience (de la Peña, et al, 2010). “The overarching intention was to apply best practices of journalism and reportage to this unique 3D space to intensify the participant’s involvement with the events,” de la Peña and her collaborators wrote (2010).

De la Peña and Weil are currently working on an immersive journalism piece to accompany a USC multimedia documentary project, “Hunger in the Golden State.” The site explores multiple aspects of the problems of hunger, food production and distribution and food waste in California. Taking a real reported event in which a food bank recipient slipped into a diabetic coma while waiting in line for food, de la Peña

and Weil plan to build an immersive experience in which users will find themselves in that line, forced to react to the event. The production would use actual audio of the event to build the scene. The audio is “pretty amazing,” de la Peña said. “You’re really there in the line and they’re calling out numbers and it’s chaotic.” (Personal communication, 2011, April 7)

De la Peña notes that immersive journalism has its critics, particularly about the inherent subjectivity of participation. But journalism’s best practices and transparency are the keys, she says. “If we can point to our sources, provide excellent research and be open to comment and criticism, immersive journalism can live up to its potential. In a sense, it’s simply about applying traditional journalistic principles to the new technologies.” (Priego, 2011, January 3). And as James Cameron’s *Avatar* raised the technological bar for Hollywood beyond the reach of amateur producers, so might immersive journalism technologies for journalism. “As far as major journalism organizations should be concerned,” she told me, “immersive journalism gives them back their authority, their editorial control... all of those things they just really miss.” (Personal communication, 2011, April 7)

### ***Extractable***

What can the public take from the news and put to use in its daily life? In the entertainment media this usually means items, from Eskimo Pies to Han Solo action figures. But journalism does not usually merchandise in the same way. One answer to this principle is, of course, the idea that the information we receive from news sources

changes our everyday actions and engages us in the community. But as Traci Bauer of the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle noted above, “That’s no longer the way to get people to use their information accordingly.” (Beckett, L., 2009 September 15) To answer this goal, the newspaper launched a game, and I argue that games are a compelling option for the public to extract from journalism and take into their daily lives. A compelling game or immersive experience can long outlive the news cycle, keeping the public in tune with news events long after the media have moved on to the next event.

Souvenirs are not strangers to journalism. They may come in the form of souvenir and special editions of newspapers like those from the wedding of Britain’s Prince William and Kate Middleton (The Telegraph, 2011, April 29), or the reprinted editions of historic newspapers, staff-written books and unrelated items offered by *The New York Times* online store (The New York Times Store, 2011, May 1). Extractability in this sense should be meaningful. What the public should take away should match the ideals of the journalistic endeavor and provide personal and enlightened value. An answer offered by two recent digital entities is “connection.” With declining newsroom budgets, many journalists are looking to crowdfunding to subsidize reporting of expensive stories. Kickstarter is one of the oldest, and though it is used by more than journalists, many have funded projects through its system. At this writing 247 projects use “journalism” as a keyword (Kickstarter.com, 2011). A newer entry is Emphas.is, a system specific to visual journalism projects. Both entities use all-or-nothing models to fund a project. The person or project wishing funding proposes a

budget for the work, and only if that amount is met or exceeded will the project receive its funding. Kickstarter states on its FAQ:

1. It's less risk for everyone. If you need \$5,000, it's tough having \$2,000 and a bunch of people expecting you to complete a \$5,000 project. 2. It allows people to test concepts (or conditionally sell stuff) without risk. If you don't receive the support you want, you're not compelled to follow through. This is huge! 3. It motivates. If people want to see a project come to life, they're going to spread the word. (2011)

Extractability comes in the form of rewards to the donors, however. Both systems require a proposal to provide a tiered set of rewards to donors who are more motivated by something physical and related to the story. Typical rewards may be as simple as a postcard from the target country or as luxurious as a hard-cover book of the finished work. *Emphas.is*, in addition to the physical rewards, offers access to the journalist on the ground. Donors receive regular updates on progress from the photojournalist through a blog feed and direct interaction. Before their official launch in March, a teaser screen appeared on the site that read, “What if you were on Robert Capa’s email list in 1944? What if Don McCullin was blogging from Vietnam? Now imagine if you’d sent them there yourself.” (Parker, 2011, January 12) The questions refer to some of history’s greatest photojournalists in hopes of attracting the medium’s fans through both nostalgia and connection. So far their success has been good. Aaron Huey’s “Pine Ridge Billboard Project” proposed a budget of \$17,250, and with four days left in the funding cycle had raised \$19,791 from 212 backers. In exchange, backers get communication access to Huey as well as rewards from a handwritten thank you to a

Shepard Fairey or photographer's print, to even a personal appearance by Aaron Huey himself (Huey, 2011).

Tomas van Houtryve, another Emphas.is photojournalist, raised \$10,075 for his \$8,800 proposal to travel to Laos in order to finish a seven-year project on communism in the 21st century. Van Houtryve's backers not only provided money, but on-the-ground contacts for his now-underway project. "I can't, in good financial conscience, sit on the Internet all day telling people how I work," van Houtryve told the Emphas.is blog in an interview. "But if I'm paid as a teacher, or if backers are contributing, that's sustainable, it's not time lost. And it's even nicer to be able to do it out in the field, instead of entering an academic structure or setting up a workshop. That's a golden combination." Systems like these also offer a reward to the journalist or group undertaking them, adding to the conversation in ways proponents of citizen journalism advocate. "I'm trying to give people a vastly different experience than they would get from a newspaper or magazine website." he said. "If you post a comment there, no one ever gets back to you, or it often becomes a shouting match with other people leaving comments." (Johnson, M., 2011, April 25)

Not every journalist sees crowdfunding as a silver bullet for funding long-form work, nor as a fair trade for the donor. Luceo Images' Matt Slaby, points out, "I don't think that the content itself (and access to it) is what should be privately monetized. To me, in spite of being a contributor to them, they come off as begging on the virtual street corner where the giver gets some token item in exchange for a disproportionate



contribution... It's an interesting idea, but seems like its monetization strategy is working against its marketing efforts." (Personal Communication, 2011, March 19).

### ***Built in Real Worlds***

Jenkins' principle of worldbuilding is of significant importance in a transmedia entertainment production. When imagining a new world for a fictional story, all the complexities and nuances must be imagined and created as well. However, journalism and documentary stories already exist within a preexisting world notable for its complexity, nuance and unpredictability. It is not the task of a journalist to build that world, but to explore its many possible stories in the most enlightening way — or to facilitate the public doing that for itself. If journalism has fallen short it is in its effort to simplify and make more approachable issues and events that defy simplification.

A notable example in which the authors strove to move away from standard event-based reporting of the war in Afghanistan in hopes of documenting more of the nuance was the 2010 documentary *Restrepo*. Directed by photographer Tim Hetherington and writer Sebastian Junger, the film follows a company of U.S. Army soldiers through 14 months of duty in a remote and dangerous valley. The film is not all about action, however. Hetherington describes the goals of the film:

There's a great emphasis in war reporting on capturing the actual "bang-bang" fighting of war—and many reporters feel that any work would be incomplete without a sense of this "action." We were no different, but because there was an incredible amount of fighting going on in the Korengal Valley, recording the actual firefights got quite boring. What was infinitely more interesting and revealing was how the soldiers carried on in these situations. People who haven't experienced war inevitably base their understanding of it [on] the mediated versions of

news or Hollywood. These representations are often limited and can't quite reveal the humor, boredom, and confusion inherent in combat. It's something we felt was important to represent. (Hetherington, 2010)

The film received high praise in the media for its portrayal not only of the 'bang bang' but of that day-to-day functioning in a combat zone. The film also won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for an Academy Award. *New York Times* media writer David Carr said of the film, "...for the most part public interest and understanding of what American soldiers do on our behalf remains remarkably limited in wars that go mostly untelevised and undernoticed. American men and women fight, die and kill a long ways from home, and many want it to stay that way." (Carr, 2010, June 16) Hetherington, it should be noted, was killed in Misrata, Libya, April 20, 2011.

In "Bosnia: Uncertain Paths to Peace" Peress widened the world of the Bosnian conflict by taking the public away from the points of breaking action and into the suburbs of Sarajevo. Once there, images become windows into corners of that world to be wandered at an individual pace and an order that is not predetermined by the publisher. "Any confusion that resulted for the reader seemed minimal compared to the actual chaos in Bosnia," Ritchin said of the structure (2009, p. 105). The project, with its massive scale, pulled its public into a world they doubtfully would have entered on their own.

### ***Inspiring to Action***

What about journalism inspires the public to action? If journalists enter the profession hoping to inspire change and engage the public in democracy, facilitating a way for the public to act on information is a significant goal. This impulse is as old as journalism itself and has many powerful historic examples. From Jacob Riis' lengthy and immersive photographic investigation of the slums of New York in 1888 to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Woodward and Bernstein's Watergate investigations and the cumulative photographs of the Viet Nam war, journalism — particularly the long-form variety — has been a vehicle for inspiring change.

One example has endured every year for a century. The *New York Times* *Neediest Cases Fund* comes from publisher Adolph Ochs himself, who, in 1911, encountered a homeless man to whom he gave a few dollars and his business card. "If you're looking for a job," he said, "come see me tomorrow." The next year the *Times* began publishing stories of the 100 neediest cases in New York, a tradition that is repeated every year. The program has raised more than \$256 million in its hundred-year history (New York Times).

However, appeals are rarely so direct and journalists themselves hope to inspire action without asking so bluntly for the public to take action. We hope the change will come organically from our work. To that end, Nicholas Kristof, a columnist for the *New York Times* said in a story for *Outside Magazine*, "Good people engaging in good causes sometimes feel too pure and sanctified to sink to something as manipulative as marketing, but the result has been that women have been raped when it could have

been avoided and children have died of pneumonia unnecessarily — because those stories haven't resonated with the public.” Kristof argues that journalists, activists and philanthropies all need to work on their message and adopt the methods of marketing:

Any consumer-products company rolling out a brand of toilet paper will agonize over marketing. The messaging will be carefully devised, tested with focus groups, revised based on polling, tested in a particular market, tweaked, and tested again. And that's for a product whose launch makes no difference for humanity. In contrast, if an aid group is trying to raise support for a new program that could save many lives, it will often rely on a hodgepodge of guilt and statistics that limit its effectiveness. It has been said that "statistics are human beings with the tears dried off." That's precisely the problem — all the psychological research shows that we are moved not by statistics but by fresh, wet tears, with a bit of hope glistening below. (Kristof, 2009)

Kristof argues that to inspire action journalists must first tell compelling stories about individuals rather than statistics. They could also provide an outlet for action that may actually help that individual. Transmedia storytelling techniques would not only reach wider publics, but provide deeper engagement with the story being told, more context and a conversation about the issue rather than just a lecture.

## Chapter 4 — BUILDING TRANSMEDIA JOURNALISM

*“If you know yourself you are doomed.” — Alexey Brodovitch*

### **Changes**

The communication model that shapes all media has irrevocably changed. Like it or not, journalists and media organizations work in a many-to-many, networked information economy. Legacy news media are no longer the sole source of news for the public, and that public is dispersing through a wide and varied mediascape. There the public has the ability to create news of their own, share news from others and interact with the publishers or with their own friends and followers about that news. Where a news organization could once depend on a somewhat captive audience, they must now attract a willing — if not eager — one. And journalism is not alone in this situation. Entertainment, advertising and music media face the same issues of audience flight and competition from amateur creators. Their business models have been upended as sharply as journalism’s. In all of these cases, for amateur and professional, content creators must no longer wait for the public to come to them. They must seek out the public where it has gone, connect with it on its own terms and give it a reason to pay attention. Content creators must use a medium in a way that exercises that medium’s strengths rather than seeing it as simply another hole into which they can

pound the old peg. More than a decade ago some in the entertainment media seized this idea despite discomfort and misunderstanding from the Hollywood establishment. The Wachowski brothers and others used pre-existing media and storytelling techniques to find *fans* wherever they could be found.

### ***Fans?***

But can journalism have fans? That word brings shudders to many a hard-boiled old journalist like me. We imagine ourselves as working for the improvement of society, not solely to please its members. We aim to report good and bad, for better or for worse, and the public must understand that we do it because it's true. We feel our publics should look to us for information first, pleasure second — a reverse of how the entertainment industry might feel about its fans. But that point of view fit a period where our audiences were captive. In the 20th century the public was reliant on professionals for news, with few other options. Now the options are many and the communication no longer one-way. To reach the public with a story we journalists see as important or compelling means that we must find the public where it already dwells. There we must engage readers so that they are more likely to pay attention to the story, share it, interact with it, contribute to it and understand its complexities. Ideally, like the fans of *Lost*, they may be so engaged that they take the story into their lives and seek out more informational depth on their own. As many smart entertainment franchises haven't proven, journalism can have fans and can do that with no surrender of ethical principles, no pandering to tastes and without dumbing down the story. I

argue that our dumbing down of content contributes to audience loss. So where do we start?

### ***How do we assemble the puzzle?***

Few inventions are simply pulled from the ether. New creations generally arise from raw materials at hand or the scavenged parts of something else. They are puzzle pieces rearranged and combined to form something new. Hollywood, Madison Avenue and Tin Pan Alley have rearranged their puzzles in reaction to the new networked media environment to create transmedia storytelling for their media. In the last chapter I described all of the pieces we have at hand to build a transmedia approach to journalism. By reassembling these pieces the way the creators of *The Matrix*, *Lost*, and other transmedia entertainment stories have over the past dozen years, journalists too can recreate the way they deliver complex stories.

First, a transmedia approach to journalism would require that it be designed as transmedia from the start. Editors must consider what media are available to them and how the individual strengths of those media can be used to the story's advantage. I do not argue that every story should have a transmedia approach, nor should every story attempt to use every possible transmedia principle or medium in its creation. Many stories are brief, or straightforward, or — as we used to say on one staff — “a quick hit.” But even those quick or simple stories lend themselves best to one medium or another. Already in the mainstream of journalism we are seeing larger newspapers cover a story exclusively in video for their Web site if the story lends itself best to that

approach. This is a start on the small scale, but as the complexity, social relevance or ongoing nature of a story increases, so should the planning behind delivery. What elements best fit print, video, audio, games, columns or blogs? How will those pieces be delivered to make best advantage of their form?

“Bosnia: Uncertain Paths to Peace” was perhaps the closest to transmedia journalism I have found, but it is still only a *multimedia* piece. It was an entity solely of the *New York Times* Web site. Though it was drillable, spreadable and interactive, it was available only to readers of that Web site. It depended on the public to find it rather than the editors building it to find new publics. A *transmedia* piece would use video in native spaces, such as cable or public TV channels if available, or YouTube and Vimeo channels where more than established readers might find it. Audio might be used in cooperation with local public broadcasting stations to find car-bound commuters. Games — most applicable to explain a newsworthy system — would exist beyond the news organization’s own Web site so they might be found by those gamers who might surf some other news sites. Blogs should act like blogs, encouraging interaction between commenter and author, and link themselves through the Web’s blog networks in addition to a legacy media site. If long-lived and compelling enough, the story could expand to printed and electronic books or brick-and-mortar gallery spaces with tangible, physical artifacts of the story on view with images, video, audio and even lectures designed specifically for those spaces. Most importantly, material in these media would not simply repeat the story in another form the way most Web



multimedia stories now do. We should hope our publics will want to seek out new deliveries of a story for the new and complementary information they could provide.

This, too, asks for new thinking from legacy media. By design, few news sites encourage the reader to leave. Much as big-box superstores design their spaces to keep shoppers wandering, or the typewriter keyboard was designed to slow down touch typists, news sites only link internally. The *New York Times*, for example built its own competitor to *Wikipedia* — *Times Topics* — so contextual info would be found from among the *Times*' own reporting. But, as Jeff Jarvis has said, "the better job you do at sending people away, the more they come back." (2008, February 25) In the networked information economy, they will go away on their own and find information in myriad places. Locking them in will not make them fans. As Google has proved, helping them find what they are looking for will.

And of economics? If we encourage our publics to leave our pages, our airtime or our Web sites in pursuit of information, or with encouragement to interact with and spread our stories, how will we keep eyes on our ads and pay our bills? This is not a thesis on economic models, and I do not pretend to have answers for how journalism will be as profitable as it once was. However, as Trent Reznor's working model of financial success in the digital economy shows, connecting with fans and giving them a reason to buy equals financial success. (Masnick, 2009, February 1) Reznor, who on the heels of his own transmedia experimentation, left his long-time record label and is succeeding admirably on his own using this very model. If your fans (or your publics or

readers if you prefer) connect with you, they will stick with you, watch for what you produce and spread your stories the same way they spread Reznor's.

***What kinds of stories best lend themselves to transmedia?***

As mentioned before, much of the boilerplate of daily journalism is the daily story of an occurrence the day before — a crime, an accident or disaster, a government meeting. These stories by themselves unfold too quickly and are reported on too tight a deadline to become transmedia stories on a large scale. However, they do form the context and drillable added information of a larger project that might report on the long-term effects of a disaster such as Joplin, Missouri's tornados of 2011, or of a complex crime wave, or an investigation into alleged government corruption or mismanagement.

But journalism is about far more than the quick-hit daily stories. Long-term investigative project stories and series stories lend themselves very well to a transmedia approach. Not only do they have longer production schedules for the reporting alone, but they also involve much planning. One such series that has regularly come to mind as I have thought about this is a series of stories produced by the *Chicago Tribune* in the late 1990s. (Anderson, 1998, March 15) Curious about the efficacy of international child aid organizations like The Christian Children's Fund, Save the Children and others — many remember television ads (and lampoons of them on *Saturday Night Live* and *South Park*) featuring actress Sally Struthers introducing young Third-World children and noting that only seventy cents would feed the child for a day (mycommercials,

2009, October 26). *Tribune* staff writers sponsored children through several organizations for years in advance of the investigation, then fanned out to find those children and report how the money was used. The result showed mixed behaviors from the organizations and resulted in some promised reforms to better match the advertising. The series ran in print, was published on the *Tribune's* early Web site and the reporters were interviewed on *WGN* television and radio. But despite the multiple media, the stories were merely advertisements and teases for the print stories.

Subjects like this are complex. They have compelling characters and intricate systems to model, issues requiring detailed examination, and relate to actions of the public. They also have adequate lead time to produce before publication. This story is naturally spreadable as its subject has touched the lives of the public through those ubiquitous and memorable late-night TV spots. Drillability exists already in prior coverage of the subject, in the lampoons and Web videos available and in conversations among the public, but drillability could also be encouraged through on- and off-site linking to contextual stories and information such as tax records for the charities under investigation and their ties to entertainment and political personalities. The story was already printed in serial form as the investigation unfolded, charity by charity. It involves fascinating characters in the sponsored and interviewed children who could be allowed to report their own stories or make their own pictures or audio to share their personal experience. The same could be done with the various organizations' field workers who — with careful editorial oversight to avoid excessive spin — could illustrate the difficulties on the ground and how different they may be

from public perception. Immersive journalism pieces, if technology and ease of public use allow, could very viscerally illustrate the circumstances of life in the places where these agencies work, and engaging games could be built to *play* the complexities of non-governmental organization funding, aid distribution or fundraising. Games could even feature the opposing goal of pirating or profiting from international aid. The stories could be written for print and Web as they were before, but also as video and audio produced not as teasers but as functional stand-alone TV and radio pieces that add new information, different perspectives and different qualities suited for their medium. When done well, these stories naturally tease for each other, as a compelled reader, viewer or listener will want to seek more information. Through a radio partnership, audio vignettes of some of the subjects could be aired to tell small pieces of the overall story. Television and Web video might pick up another piece of the larger issue most suited to video's talent for illustrating time and motion. The news organization or group of independents producing the work could reach further by forming partnerships with museums and other display spaces for physical story artifacts. The story itself is about the extractability provided by these aid organizations: Send your monthly fee and receive in return letters from your sponsored child. Those letters could be displayed in original form along with images of — or made by — subject children and artifacts from the cultures in which they live. Physical presence of artifacts can be very emotionally immersive, as anyone seeing John Kennedy's limousine in person at the Henry Ford Museum will attest. Reporters and editors could offer public lectures on the subject, making the experience by the public of the story

more personal. And extractability and public action are also native to this story, with a compelled public more likely to support the better aid groups described in the investigation and pressure those requiring reform. These are merely a few of the myriad possible ways the various principles of transmedia could be applied to this investigative piece. As the techniques evolve, so will the quality of transmedia storytelling.

### ***Who will produce transmedia journalism?***

In 1997 and 1998 when the *Tribune* produced its sponsorship organization series the production time and costs were high. Multiple foreign correspondents were dispatched to find sponsored children in remote locations on several continents. To produce the story in transmedia form would add not only the extra work for reporting through other media — videographers, audio reporters and producers — but also more producers at the home office. Naturally, this scale of story would be produce most efficiently by a large legacy news organization as the *Tribune* was in the late 90s. But producing an investigation of this kind — even for transmedia — does not require that scale of organization. Single journalists have produce enormous and complex work on their own for centuries, of which Tomas van Houtryve, mentioned in the last chapter for his multi-year project on 21st-century communism, shows. A transmedia production could theoretically be produced by a single person devoting much time and an array of skills to the task. However, as described in Chapter 2, a one-man-band approach has its limits. I argue as we approach an age in which I predict most journalism will be produced on a freelance basis (Russell, 2011, p. 46), that a small

group of specialists could easily produce deep, detailed and sizable transmedia journalism pieces. Such a group would ideally have people of varying skills and areas of expertise to produce elements of the story to professional standards. The entirety of the *Tribune's* child sponsorship organization series was created by a handful of reporters and editors. Independent and committed storytellers of all levels of professional experience have long produced journalism outside the legacy media's infrastructure as pamphleteers, documentary filmmakers and photographers, and nonfiction writers.

### ***Why is this still journalism?***

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, one of the source dictionaries approved by the professional Associated Press Style standard, has six definitions for journalism. They largely all boil down to very simple sentences to describe what most journalists see as a complex social entity. The first reads: "the collection and editing of news for publication through the media." (Mish, 2000) There is nothing in any of the definitions that states nor implies that journalism is the product of a certain kind of person, a defined type of organization, nor the bearer of a license. By this definition anyone can be a journalist regardless of prior training or affiliation with legacy media. Neither does it prescribe a style of writing, production or delivery, nor mandate that journalism be a one-way lecture instead of a conversation. Journalism is the reporting of factual stories, a documenting of the real world and a providing of valuable or

interesting information. Transmedia journalism is no break with any of these definitions.

My own journalism ethics are rather conservative. After teaching journalism for 32 semesters, I have boiled all journalism ethics down to two principles: *Do not deceive the public* and *do not misrepresent the subject*. All else is a restatement of one of those principles or simply a standard of practice, and standards of practice have changed and evolved throughout journalism's history. Journalism and its varied practitioners have a strong sense of ethical duty, to report factually and fairly, and make a best effort to examine the most complete story. Transmedia journalism changes neither of those nor any other core principles. When done well, it would only accomplish those goals better.

This is an effort to better fulfill what I see as a professional journalistic obligation: to tell the most complete story possible. For example, by providing drillable stories we encourage the reader to find more complete contextual information and the inevitable multiple perspectives on any story. We encourage a more informed electorate. By reporting for diverse and personal viewpoints our stories become more complete and compelling, for a personal view is always more engaging. As journalists our work can easily keep balance in those perspectives so minority views will have proportional representation. By making our work more immersive and providing ways for our publics to take our stories into their personal lives and act on them, we better achieve our nearly universal goal of fostering positive social change. Long-time journalism traditions, standards and ethics brought to bear on any style of production

will only make it more sound. We are simply storytellers. What separates us from fiction writers is a respect for the facts and a standard for solid research and fact checking. Our stories have for centuries changed lives, checked governments, illustrated foreign lands and concepts and humanized people. We have also failed at all of the above throughout our history. Transmedia journalism is simply storytelling across many media channels for sake of finding more and newer publics. It will be no exception to our long and honored tradition.

### ***What is left to do?***

This work has aimed at demonstrating the potential value of transmedia storytelling to journalism. Many questions remain as to how best to implement the various facets of transmedia storytelling in the production and distribution of news. For example, we need to explore the scalability of transmedia journalism: How small of a cooperative group could produce it? How long would it take? Would it require the resources of a *New York Times* or a *Chicago Tribune*? How will it be received and used by the public?

As part of my ongoing research into the possibility of transmedia journalism I hope to assemble that small cooperative group of working journalists with expertise in multiple media forms and delivery systems, and create a transmedia journalism piece as a proof of concept. This will not only answer most of the questions above, but also reveal many new and unexpected ones. This, like many large-scale journalism works, may be a multi-year process.



While this thesis is not about the economic models of journalism, it acknowledges the impact of economics on every aspect of producing good journalism work, whether under the employment of a legacy news organization or as a freelance independent. Further research into the economic factors and benefits of transmedia journalism could be done to understand how and where it fits financially. Is it possible to have effective transmedia journalism behind a pay wall like that inaugurated by the *New York Times* this year? Or does that preclude it from working? How would independents fund such work, and how would crowdfunding and other new media financial models contribute to the transmedia storytelling? What are unforeseen ethical questions must be addressed to stay within the standards of journalism?

**-30-**

“-30-,” or “###,” or “ENDIT” traditionally close a news story sent to editing. Every journalist knows that these marks simply denote the end of a draft, and never, truly, the end of a story. As D.W. Harding said, “The most important thing is not what the author, or any artist, had in mind to begin with but at what point he decided to stop.” (Tharp & Reiter, 2003, p. 178). I make those references not only because it is time for me to stop this draft, but also because it illustrates one of my points: Transmedia journalism acknowledges and even embraces the fact that no story is ever complete. Reporters type those characters onto the screen when time has run out more often than they do when the story is completely told. A transmedia approach would help our stories continue to tell themselves through public engagement, subsequent investigation and public contribution.

When done well, transmedia journalism would distribute the narrative of real-world events across a variety of online, print and even brick-and-mortar media, and thereby engage the public in the media where it already circulates. Using these principles would allow the public to drill deeply into the context and complexity of stories that are told from multiple perspectives and, when appropriate, through the words of the subjects themselves. These cohesive stories could unfold over time to hold the attention of the public and draw them to immersive experiences where they enter a virtual or physical piece of the story. If accomplished well, their immersion into the story could inspire them to share that experience with their social networks online and

off and inspire them to action. That action could be by interacting with the journalists and the public, by writing to a government representative or by carrying a picket sign.

The entertainment, advertising and music media are all facing the same challenges journalism is. As one answer to this problem these other media are implementing transmedia storytelling techniques at an ever faster rate and reaping the benefits of a loyal fan base for their work. To attract fans into their auditoriums, to the front of their stages and into the stores selling their goods, they are finding their publics where they have gone and letting them in on the creation of the story itself. They are telling stories that unfold across many platforms in ways native to those platforms. They are, as Trent Reznor's simple model states, connecting with fans and giving them a reason to buy. By adopting transmedia storytelling techniques, journalists can also connect with fans and give them a reason to buy. Once connected those fans become better informed publics and the backbone of a functioning democracy.

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