

How convergence culture through transmedia is transforming audience/text relations

As a result of technological changes and transmedia how far have the lines been blurred between audience and industry and thus created a participatory culture?

What is the audience response to these changes in media culture? Are media texts still a finite experience?

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Henry Jenkins (2013,p.1) states *“From the very start, one of the powers of the superhero has been to leap across media in a single bound”* this is the idea that will form the foundation of my research into how transmedia texts and, as a result, convergence culture is transforming the audience and text relationship. There will be particular focus on Jenkins’ ideas on cultural activators and cultural attractors, and how these can develop a convergence culture and then be applied to the medium of comics and the fandom that surrounds it.

Transmedia production is usually viewed as a fairly contemporary concept in media studies, if we keep our focus within popular culture and with the mainstream audience then this concept can be discussed as early as the 1940s with the birth of *Superman*, 50 years prior to Marsha Kinder’s coining of the phrase (1991). DC Comic’s *Superman* provides an early example of how an institution can utilise a transmedia narrative, and more importantly how the extension of that text on to different platforms, although primarily as a marketing tool for the producers, can be seen as an opportunity for the audience to develop their relationship with that narrative. This concept of transmedia as marketing within DC is something that still exists today *“as a result of interlinking stories within transmedia DC have expanded their story arcs across different comic titles. However at certain points the comics can essentially become a marketing tool for the films and video games, carrying adverts and making wholesale changes to characters and stories to force them to fit with the film/and or video game’s narrative. Ultimately because of the elements of marketing and the fact that the interpretations are so different it is hard to understand how they can all be seen as part of the same story world.”* (Tyler Weaver, 2013) When DC Comics published their first appearance of Superman in June 1938 in *Action Comics #1* and during the 1940s the iconic imagery appeared in mainstream culture so much to the extent that we witnessed the production of *Superman* safety matches and Kellogg’s cereal, but rather than these products allowing audiences to extend a narrative they were an example of media synergy and to an extent further marketing. Although I am cautious when discussing transmedia as a potential marketing tool as Mike Vogel (2013, p.1) who is one of many explains *“Transmedia gets a bad rap from some who claim it’s just disguised marketing. It’s easy to see why: both use everything from video, music, games, interactive websites, printed materials, and events to reach and engage an audience. But it’s a short-sighted comparison because it completely ignores intent.”* This is a point that was reinforced by Jonathan Gray (2010, p.1) when he discussed the literary interpretation concept, the paratext. An idea that all forms of media are in some way accompanied by further related material *“But hype and synergy frame paratexts too definitively as wholly industrial entities. Certainly, paratexts are absolutely integral in terms of marketing, and in terms of grabbing an audience to watch the thing in the first place. But we’ve often stalled in our discussion of them by not moving beyond the banal observation that hype creates profits”*.

With the production of colouring books and in particular the *Superman-Tim* series of comics which run began in 1942 we saw the first strong examples of the Superman brand developing into a transmedia narrative. Here we have a media text that was produced

primarily to market the *Superman-Tim* clothing line, this particular run of comics featured a younger character, Tim, who was constructed to appeal to a younger, more impressionable audience. The comics allowed the reader to add colour and text to uncoloured and blank sections of the books thus allowing for the user/audience to generate their own narratives within the world of *Superman*. The *Superman* narrative was soon extended across various platforms and to a much wider and international audience with the release of *The Fleischer & Famous Superman* (Animated TV, 1941 – 1942, Fleischer Studios and Famous Studios) *Superman* (Film Serial, 1948, Columbia Pictures), *The Adventures of Superman* (TV, ABC, 1951-1958) and eventually to the video game platform with *Superman* (1978, Atari, Inc) which was a direct result of the success of *Superman* (Film, Richard Donner, Warner Bros., 1978).

DC and the development of their brand and characters across different media platforms provide some of the earliest and strongest examples of transmedia developing from comics. Whilst DC were one of the innovators of using transmedia texts it is Marvel who have embraced this concept with the emergence of key new technologies such as web 2.0 and a mass of platforms that incorporate technological convergence. Marvel Entertainment's recent global success through its film franchises and the reinvigorating of all its comic titles offers some of the strongest examples of transmedia storytelling at its most successful and a fictional universe that has a very large fan base. Through examples such as Harry Potter, Star Wars and The Marvel Universe it is clear to see that transmedia narratives are hugely profitable and it can be argued that multi-platform texts are no longer merely marketing tools for a primary platform, but an extension of both the narrative and the audience experience.

The Spider-Man story is one that provides an example of both seriality and an infinite narrative. With the narrative being so vast and complex it has allowed different mediums to tell these stories with their own style and interpretations, these interpretations being formed as a result of the constraints of the medium and the desires of the producer. Ed Carey (2010) suggested that the success of Spider-Man as a transmedia text was down to the *“Narrative plenitude and expandability (which) allows for greater character depth and more complex stories, along with its seriality. Seriality, plenitude and lack of narrative closure have accompanied the story across different media forms.”*

The most recent example of Spider-Man being transmedia is the now almost compulsory video game tie in with *The Amazing Spider-Man* (Film, Marc Webb, 2012). *The Amazing Spider-Man* (Video Game, Activision, 2012) is not just an interactive retelling of the events of the film but a continuation of the narrative that could fill the gap between the first and second (due in 2014) films. Whilst Carey states that the focus of a transmedia text should be on *“narrative plenitude and expandability”* Aaron Smith (2012) counters this idea by discussing the ramifications of a weak text within the transmedia narrative *“If one text does not fit with the others or if it is just bad, it may be enough to turn many people away.”*

Especially for transmedia campaigns designed from the outset, one mistake (a redundant or inconsistent text) can lose massive fan support. A bad movie may be endurable, but a bad transmedia story is a nightmare.” This debate on the integral aspects of transmedia can be developed when the target audience are discussing the pleasures they receive from the text. Billy (Year 10 Student, 2013) argues that the emphasis needs to be put on character development *“The emphasis of transmedia needs to be on character, if you can’t make an interesting character then you can’t make an interesting script”* and yet Marcus is more concerned that the consistency of each text should be of the same standard *“in the short term it is the characters that are important but in the long term it is about the overall quality of the transmedia texts”*.

This is a technique that was first deployed by Shiny Entertainment and the Wachowskis with *Enter the Matrix* (Video Game, Shiny Entertainment, 2003) which had a story that was concurrent with the film release of the time and had live action sections that were filmed by the film’s directors. To fully understand the series of films the audience would have had to play and complete the video game, this was a fairly bold move at the time and the game was met with a mixed reception. Steven Poole of *Edge Magazine* describing the game with *“The most worrying new precedent that Enter the Matrix sets, though, with its massively hyped synergy and narrative overlap with Reloaded, is that it seems the film itself has been deliberately made to suffer, to donate some of its lifeblood so that its vampiric brood can feed on it. It’s as though James Cameron had cut footage out of Aliens so that it could be rendered in blocky 2D graphics in the 1987 Spectrum/C64 tie-in game released by Electric Dreams — which remains, actually, a superior film-to-game conversion.”* After this the extent to how essential the video game playing to film understanding ratio was diminished and the overlapping narratives have been reduced, but this has had a slight renaissance in recent years. Video game developers now try to construct an addition to the film narrative rather than an integral aspect of it, such examples of this would be *Star Trek* (Video Game, 2013, Digital Extremes) which was bookended by *Star Trek* (J.J. Abrams, 2009) and *Star Trek into Darkness* (J.J. Abrams, 2013) respectively. This was Digital Extremes and Bad Robot Productions working together to create a concurrent transmedia narrative with standalone texts. The varying successes of these examples can be seen to influence Marvel video games such as *X2: Wolverine’s Revenge* (Activision, 2003), *Hulk* (2003, Universal Interactive) and *The Punisher* (THQ, 2005). The Hulk game in particular was praised on its approach to transmedia development from a film *“This year Hollywood appears to have adopted an official policy of preceding its blockbusting films with associated videogames - the Hulk game follows X-Men 2: Wolverine’s Revenge and Enter The Matrix. Happily, The Hulk is a classier beast than its peers - indeed, if the trailer for the Hulk movie is at all representative, the game may well outshine the film. Staggeringly, considering it is an example of movie merchandising, some deep thought has been expended on the Hulk videogame”* Steve Boxer (The Guardian, Games Watch, 2003). It appears that the more positive response to *Hulk* was

due to its ability to stand alone rather than *Enter the Matrix*, with its integral narrative overlaps.

All of these videogames were either retellings of the film's narrative or an extension of it, usually a *what happened next* scenario. This allowed the producers of these texts to extend the narrative over the medium of video games whilst maintaining that the video game and the films could be standalone texts that the audience could choose to expand if they wished. This technique would create a narrative that would appeal to the hard core fan and also the more mainstream audience, which Smith (2012) states is a key part of a successful transmedia narrative *"Transmedia storytelling has the potential to appeal to both (hard-core and mainstream audiences), but it is not easy. The primary media has to stand on its own while simultaneously allowing for migratory cues, negative capability, and hermeneutic codes. The story must include enough for casual fans to understand but mysterious enough for loyal fans to want to know more. This is indeed a tricky balance."* Whether this safer approach to video game tie ins was a response to the negative reaction to the heavy demands *Enter the Matrix* put on the mainstream audiences has been argued by Henry Jenkins as he describes *The Matrix* as a *"cultural attractor and a cultural activator"* whilst also admitting its flaws *"The Matrix was a flawed experiment, an interesting failure, but its flaws did not detract from the significance of what it tried to accomplish."* Weaver (2013, p10) is also of the mind that a transmedia text must have the capability to standalone *"Each and every piece of your transmedia building blocks must be a complete story in its own right. There's an oldage in comics, "every comic book is somebody's first as well as somebody's last." This applies to transmedia storytelling as well."*

The key to a working and transforming convergence culture is developing texts that attract and activate audiences, this is something that I think Marvel Entertainment are keenly aware of and has embraced over the past decade. Jenkins (2006) refers to the work of Pierre Levy when considering these ideas *"The artwork will be what Levy calls a "cultural attractor," drawing together ideas and creating common ground between diverse communities; we might also describe it is a cultural activator, setting into motion their decipherment, speculation and elaboration."* Cultural activity is something that Aaron Smith (2013, Chapter 2) believes is difficult to achieve due to the demands of accessibility and exhibition that are put on the audience *"Creating a time frame for each touch point of a property becomes problematic since TV shows, movies, and videogames have such different production and distribution models. For example, producers must carefully plan when the video game will be released: before, during, or after a movie's time in theatres. Designing transmedia stories around television shows is even more dangerous, since the lifespan of a show is so unpredictable."*

Spider-Man is the face of Marvel and a media phenomenon, since his first appearance in the comic *Amazing Fantasy #15* in August 1962 he has become a TV Show (live action and animation), video games, literature, film, apps and magazines. Throughout this entire media the same story tends to be told just slightly differently depending on whom the audience is and the context of its construction. What is most interesting about the Spider-Man narrative is that quite a lot of it isn't produced by Sony, Activision or Marvel but by a group of fans who are utilising both new technology and their creative flair beyond the boundaries of institutional restrictions and ownership to construct content that shares a narrative story world and production value aesthetics with its industry produced counter-parts. *"Fan produced content is the now the dominant form of media for Marvel Entertainment because of the vast amount that is produced on a daily basis and to the extent in which fans can engage with and become occupied with the texts."* George, Year 8 (2013). This point of view is becoming quite common, that the interaction between fans and contribution of them is the area that produces the most engagement with an audience and in turn developing a convergence culture.

One of the first real success stories of fan media was a response to the 1960s animated TV series of Spider-Man, which inspired some fandom and a fan produced short film. In 1989 Jim Kreig produced what is recognised as the second Spider-Man fan film *Viva Spider-Man* and unknowingly introducing the Spider-Man narrative to a convergence culture. This was both Kreig's response to a lack of live action Spider-Man (This was the year of Tim Burton's *Batman*) and homage to his beloved Spider-Man animated TV series (1969-71). The film itself develops the narrative of two specific episodes of the TV programme, *Criminal in the Clouds* and *King Pinned*. Kreig's objective was to construct a live action version of the TV programme that mimicked its design, dialogue and editing structure and could be viewed as a part of the previous episodes continuity and overall story arc. It was a result of the success of this fan film that Kreig ended up working for Marvel Animation on *Spider-Man: The Animated Series* (Fox Kids, 1994-1998).

*"While I was a film student at NYU, I attempted to excise those still repeating web-swinging montages from my mind's eye by re-creating them for my senior project, a 16mm film I called VIVA SPIDERMAN!. This project ended up on the desk of Sid Iwanter at Fox Kids while I was in my second year of graduate studies at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles . He intuitively knew a obsessed fan when he saw one and promptly introduced me to John Semper, producer, story editor and mentor. "*Jim Kreig (2002)

When Jenkins (Documentary, 2013) describes how the *"Average citizen has the ability to seize control over the media technology and tell their own stories in powerful new ways"* being the foundation for a convergence culture we can see how this is reflected in the work of Jim Krieg. For Marvel this was when the lines started to blur between audience and industry produced content. The industry took a while to respond with their own live action, the production of the first Spider-Man feature began in 2001, which was 12 years after

Kreig's fan film landed on the desk of Sid Iwaner at Marvel Animation. Sony and Marvel released *Spider-Man* (2002, Sam Raimi) to a fair amount of critical and commercial success. Since the development in technology specifically with web 2.0 and hardware, the production and distribution of fan films has become much easier to produce and exhibit. A quick search of YouTube for 'Spider-Man fan film' reveals an amount of almost 200,000 results, the quality and design of these results varies greatly from high quality short films to film and video game mash ups. Some of the most viewed are independently produced video game walkthroughs, where the user has recorded themselves playing the game then edited it in a particular order with interviews and narration, one particular walkthrough of *The Amazing Spider-Man* (Video Game, 2012, Activision) that has reached almost 3.5 million (theRadBrad, 2012) views but compare that to the 6.5 million who have watched the video of a Spider-Man toy being taken out of its box (marcarsenal1, 2011) and you can begin to get an understanding of how far fan media can now reach and how they are incredibly successful in appealing to an audience.

As we know from the Jim Kreig example, fan media is not a new concept it is merely just more accessible now. Many suggest the recent influx of audience produced content is down to the emergence of Web 2.0 and mobile technologies with Adler and Brown (2008 p.18) arguing that "*The latest evolution of the Internet, the so-called Web 2.0, has blurred the line between producers and consumers of content and has shifted attention from access to information toward access to other people. New kinds of online resources such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, and virtual communities have allowed people with common interests to meet, share ideas, and collaborate in innovative ways*". It is these shifts in media that have allowed for true participatory culture, this is participation with text, industry and most importantly fellow audience members.

Marvel Entertainment has carried the transmedia experimental baton for the past 5-10 years and has arguably developed approaches that allow their narratives to be stronger cultural attractors and cultural activators. In tandem with the release of the critically and commercially successful *Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002), was the series of accompanying number of transmedia products. It went full circle and tie in comics were produced, whilst there was also the video game, the magazines, the web site and a new animated TV series which in particular *activated* fans to produce their own media.

A criticism of this form of storytelling is that can be quite challenging to find a way in to a franchise the size of Marvel "*A disadvantage of transmedia is that could be quite daunting to someone who is new to a franchise. With so many different stories, mediums and styles of a text new audiences may not know how best to access it.*" Marcus (Year 13 Student, Documentary). However the idea of it being challenging is something that appears to develop their activator and collaborator within the audience, as can offer the opportunity for the text to have more interesting aspects of character development. One of the key foci of this short lived TV series *Spider-Man: The New Animated Series* (MTV, 2003) was the

relationship that Peter Parker had with the other characters, mainly Mary Jane and Harry Osbourne. These two characters in particular are just a part of the Spider-Man story as the iconic imagery or settings. This relationship triangle was initially a development of what had developed in Raimi's interpretation. It is this depth of character that both Tyler (2013) *"There is nothing worse than a story filled with passive people you don't care about who agree on everything"* and Carey have discussed that was the appeal for this audience as well as their inspiration to respond. One particular episode had an ending that prompted fans to continue the narrative, an ending that included a strengthening and potentially homoerotic development to Harry and Peter's relationship. This in turn led to a wealth of fan material being produced; among this were two short stories that explored this potential relationship in much more detail. Carey (2013) comments on this fan fiction with *"The ambiguous closure of this episode provides a significant narrative space to "read" a relationship between Peter and Harry. Usually, the non-normative lifestyle of the adventurer/hero suspends or inhibits heteronormative relationships, as Spiderman does with Mary Jane, but in this case a personal relationship is strengthened despite the intrusion of Spiderman on Peter's life."*

It was a strong sense of convergence culture which started to develop around the Spider-Man narrative, so much to the extent that different universes were created. Firstly we had fan fiction of the comicverse which are short stories and fan comics that tie in with the current Spider-Man comics titles but with the Spider-Man feature in 2002 the Marvel movieverse was constructed. This was a specific type of fan product, again mainly consisting of fan comics and fan fiction that was related to the specific events of Raimi's films. Fan Fiction such as *I Love You, Spider-Man* and *Check Please* were written in an almost screenplay format and had romance and relationships as the dominant themes. Jenkins (2006 p.256) discusses the need for narrative freedom, to escape the constraints of institutionalised and monetarily focused media production as the main motivational force behind fan fiction *"Mass media has tended to use its tight control over intellectual property to reign in competing interpretations, resulting in a world where there is one official version. Fan fiction repairs the damage caused by an increasingly privatised culture."* It is the reigning in of interpretations that limits these texts and fans respond with their versions or ideals. Hence why we get fan fiction that is dominated by strong and provocative themes, which are too risky for the institutions and too challenging for mainstreamers. *"I find that fandom can be extremely creative because we have the ability to keep changing our characters and giving them new life over and over. We can give them an infinite, always changing life rather than the single life of their original creation."* However it is the character depth and expandability of transmedia texts that allows for more fan fiction *"The vast, complex narrative of Spiderman has spawned video games, merchandising and an enormous fandom, which in itself has produced fan fiction based on the characters"* (Carey 2012).

While continuity is a chain that produces longevity, unlocks story potential and gives fans something to dig into and a means to demonstrate expertise, it can strangle innovation and

storytelling when it is wielded in the name of nostalgia and isn't in line with the values and storytelling tendencies of the current generation.

In 2012 a short fan film called *Spider-Man: Eclipse* was produced by Bokeh Pictures, but is essentially fan collaboration. This is a key example of an independent production company using modern technology and staff with the correct skills base to construct an 'industry standard' product. The director Al White discussed his enthusiasm for the project and how it would fit in with the current Spider-Man Film Narrative *"It was definitely a conscious decision. I wasn't interested in making something that was similar to the reboot or the Raimi films. I didn't see the point. What I love about long-running comic series like Spider-man is that there are so many different takes on the character. I grew up reading the Todd McFarlane run in the 90's and I had always dreamt of a darker, more adult Spidey film. I wanted to make people feel as uncomfortable as possible in the opening scene – showing Spidey in a situation that they aren't used to seeing him in on film. Beaten, bruised, spitting up blood and chained to the walls. Some people hate it, in particular the prolonged silence of this opening, but that was a very thought-out decision. The comics constantly dip into this darker territory and I just wanted to see that faithfully recreated onscreen."*

The participatory culture emerges through the *official* website and the YouTube comments, audiences of this film have taken to YouTube in their thousands to post their reaction to the film, most of them aligning their ideas with the directors *"I think the suit is supposed to look as if it was made by a teenager. P.S. love this film"*, *"Quite nice, good angles and acting, good enough lines and I like the costume, the battle scenes are well done, it has good flux, and it makes a lot of sense within itself somehow. Nice Avengers touch"* being just some of the more constructive comments that are posted. The official website used itself as a host for various social media outlets, on the website there was a structured marketing campaign leading up to the release date, the months prior to release fans were able to access making of videos that were released sporadically. The producers utilised social networking to its upmost taking in Facebook, Vimeo, Twitter and YouTube, this technique creates the sometimes indirect opportunity for participatory culture. Take *Spider-Man: Eclipse* as a contemporary example of participatory culture and transmedia as a tool for blurring the boundaries between industry and audience. The film in its design, cinematography, choreography and editing has all the hall marks of a professional short, but this is no surprise as it was made by independent professionals even if they were outside of the confines of the film industry and away from Sony and Marvel's influence. Tyler Weaver (2013) discussed the notion of *seriality* when discussing the transmedia appeal of superheroes and their longevity *"Seriality plus Elasticity (or, Evolutionary Ability of Character) plus Craft equals Longevity. Each creative team can build upon, pay homage to, deviate, stretch and bring their own vision to the character because of the serialised nature of American comics and the reality of reality."* This short film wasn't just a group of fans living out their fantasies but a group of professionals constructing a response to what they thought was a representation of Spider-Man that was unrealistic in Raimi's attempt at the

character (Sam Raimi's Spider-Man trilogy, 2002, 2004, 2007, Columbia Pictures, Marvel Studios). Director White stated that *"in particular giving Peter a more realistic, practical uniform to wear"* and it is these elements of homage, deviation and developing their own vision that Tyler first discussed and are evidenced in White's film.

A line appears to be drawn down the middle of fans, on one side there are those who embrace this convergence culture and the fan media that is produced as a result of it and there are those who tend not to see fan media as part of the official/real character and narrative. This almost negative opinion of fan media seems to stem from the ideas that fan media is not of the quality as the *official stuff* and therefore does not warrant to be associated with it. This debate was evident in my student interviewees with Marcus (2013) stating *"It is an extension of the narrative because the show is made for the fans and if they want to contribute and make their own parts to it and say I think this story could go this way. then I think it is perfectly reasonable to say it continues with the narrative"*. This more positive attitude to the role that fan media plays within various story worlds seems to be the dominant one research into this area suggests that 60% of students agree with Marcus. However there is still the argument that fan texts such as *Spider-Man Eclipse* do not fit within the narrative *"The quality is much different to the Sam Raimi or Marc Webb Spider-Men and I would have much more respect for the official ones as they have had much more money and time gone into them."* George (Year 8 Student, Documentary, 2013). This minor development within convergence culture is something of a hindrance upon it however research shows that even if fans do not see fan media as part of an overall official narrative they are still quite happy to engage with it and even produce their own media.

The new concept of Media Bingeing, where audiences spend an extended amount of time immersed in one particular text, is partly an audience response to the development of transmedia. Marcus (2013) explains that *"media (texts) had to evolve into transmedia so it could fit every demographic and adapt to new platforms. Media Bingeing which is instead of every week wanting to watch an episode you want to watch the whole series at once...Harry Potter so you had the books, then you had the films, then you had the video games and now they have websites devoted to it and interactive books which they have now added to it (the narrative) so I think binge media has impacted on (the success) of transmedia in a big way."* What Marcus' point demonstrates is that these changes in the way we consume our media is ultimately changing how much we consume and how we respond, this reinforces what Jenkins says about 'cultural attractors' and 'cultural activators', texts that appeal to you and then encourage you in some way make a contribution. Research into the 15-25 demographic reinforces this as 80% of a focus group of media students believe that the independent research that they completed into their chosen text demonstrated that that text was both a cultural attractor but more so a cultural activator, and it is the element of activation that is key to the emergence of a convergence culture.

Example responses from student research into cultural attractors and cultural activators:

“I would say The Simpsons is a cultural activator as it gets the audience to engage more through comics and video games. Even as the programmes are very comedic and they may enjoy this it will lead them onto other parts of the transmedia text.” Maya, Year 13 Media Student

“Because of the scale and success of Lord of the Rings and their fan base being largely reformers it is natural that fans would want to create their own films.” Alex, Year 13 Media Student

“Harry Potter is an inspirational text to its hard-core audience, it is also constantly evolving due to it being transmedia and therefore this inspires its audience to want to create and add to this world making it a cultural activator.” Ellie, Year 13 Media Student

The idea of having a text that encourages an audience to participate is something that is particularly common with comics as Weaver (2013, p2) explains *“You would be hard pressed to find a group as dedicated as the comic book fan base. Message boards, fan fiction, cosplay, you name it. These are the people-the absorbers- who will dig deep into your work, into your storyworld. Comics can help you get there, while at the same time, giving your audience a whole new world that they be looking at for the first time.”* Obviously convergence culture is not just limited to realms of sci-fi, fantasy and superheroes but it is the seriality and infinite narratives of the superhero genre and comics that enables an audience to get more involved in a participatory culture.

This initial research into the target demographic for key transmedia texts and the various authors, collaborators and producers of them demonstrates to me that there is definitely a group of fans who are currently embracing transmedia storytelling. A significant amount of this particular group are also happily making their contributions to the texts and the culture that surrounds it, whether this is a group of students who are leaving comments on forums or in the comments section of YouTube or Al White investing time and money into a *“Love letter for the fans”* Marcus (Year 12 Student, 2013) when producing the highly accomplished fan film Spider-Man Eclipse. The key arguments against this culture, that this form of narrative construction puts to high a demand on audiences, that the inconsistency in the quality of individual texts diminishes good story and characters, that the varying representations and misrepresentations create a lack of continuity and that fan media has no authenticity and can not be linked to the official texts appear to be falling on the deaf ears. The fans continue to develop a convergence culture by embracing transmedia stories and the participatory role in which they play themselves is becoming increasingly important to the various story worlds and the future of transmedia.

Class: Media 13B		Unit: MS4 – Text, Industry and Audience	Weighting: 50% of A2 and 25% of overall A Level	
This unit is designed to develop candidates' knowledge and understanding of the relationship between media texts, their audiences and the industries which produce and distribute them. Progression from AS is demonstrated through this emphasis on the relationship between text, audience and industry and the debates surrounding the nature of that relationship . Candidates' understanding of the media will also be more informed by appropriate theoretical perspectives .				
Week	Lesson	Objectives	Tasks	Complete
1	1. Introduction to the concept of transmedia.	Define transmedia Describe a transmedia text Identify the difference between synergy and transmedia.	Task 1. Teacher to briefly describe transmedia and the current debates surrounding the concept. Task 2. Independent research by students to compile information on one example of transmedia . Task 3. Short presentations to the class on their case study.	
	2. The role of transmedia within the Media Industry	Demonstrate an understanding of transmedia Analyse a detailed case study	Task 1. Students will be asked to quickly recap their thoughts on transmedia and discuss some further examples Task 2. A teacher led analysis of <i>Spider-Man</i> as a transmedia text considering the institution of <i>Marvel Entertainment</i> and the Target Audience . Task 3. Students to answer a clear set of questions on <i>Spider-Man</i> as transmedia , considering the target audience and technology .	
	3. Developing a transmedia narrative	Apply knowledge of transmedia to a new narrative . Develop a transmedia narrative	Task 1. Students to research a text that they think would be suitable for a transmedia narrative . Task 2. Develop a visual based presentation that discusses how this text could benefit from a transmedia narrative .	
	4. Developing a transmedia narrative	Continue to develop a transmedia narrative	Task 1. Teacher led discussion on the various platforms that are available to transmedia narratives Task 2. Students to apply the ideas of different platforms and continue with the development of their presentations. Task 3. One to one discussion with teacher and student to assess the progress of their presentation in preparation for the delivery in the next lesson.	
	5. Deliver transmedia presentation	All students to deliver their presentations on their new transmedia narrative.	Task 1. Students to deliver their presentations to the class Task 2. Each presentation will be subject to peer feedback. What went well? And even better if....	

2	6. Introduction to fan fiction and fan media	<p>Define the meaning of fan fiction and fan media</p> <p>List example of the various mediums that fans may choose to work within</p> <p>Describe the target demographic and psychographic profile texts that inspire fan media.</p>	<p>Task 1. Teacher to discuss the meaning of fan fiction and look at some key examples e.g. <i>Doctor Who</i> and <i>Star Wars</i>.</p> <p>Task 2. Students to research examples of fan fiction and consider the motivation behind it.</p> <p>Task 3. Analyse some Fan media and discuss whether the person who has produced it fits within the target demographic and psychographic profile.</p>	
	7. Developing fan media	<p>Apply knowledge of transmedia and fan media to students own ideas.</p> <p>Develop an outline plan for your own fan media considering which text it is a response to.</p>	<p>Task 1. Introduction to the task '<i>Developing your own fan media</i>'. This project can be within any media that is appropriate for fan production. The media will not actually be constructed but a detailed outline will be developed.</p> <p>Task 2. Students to complete a worksheet '<i>My Fan Media</i>' this will incorporate all the information for teacher approval.</p> <p>Task 3. Under the guidance of the teacher students will start to develop and mock up examples from their fan media.</p>	
	8. Introduction to Convergence Culture	<p>Apply knowledge of transmedia and fan media to the theory of Convergence Culture.</p>	<p>Task 1. A teacher led discussion and introduction to Convergence Culture and its importance within the current Media industry.</p> <p>Task 2. Watch Interview with Henry Jenkins, students are to make notes on the key points that he makes.</p>	
	9. Controlled Assessment	<p>Referring to key texts discuss the role of Convergence Culture and transmedia with the Media Industry.</p>	<p>Task 1. Students to write a timed response to the question which allows a summative assessment of their progress over the previous 8 lessons.</p>	
	10. Linking our ideas and case studies to the exam.	<p>Examine an A2 past paper</p> <p>Choose an exam question that is applicable for the topics that we have covered.</p>	<p>Task 1. Teacher to explain the MS4 exam paper and how is best to approach it.</p> <p>Task 2. Students to identify the question <i>With reference to your three main texts, discuss the key features of their distribution or Assess the main advantages of the internet for your three main texts.</i></p> <p>Task 3. Under the guidance of the teacher, students are to construct a response plan for their chosen question, highlighting all the key areas they would like to discuss.</p>	
3	1. Introduction to Key TV Text 1 – Doctor Who (BBC ONE, 1963- Present)	<p>Develop understanding of <i>Doctor Who</i> – Genre, Audience and Industry.</p> <p>Apply knowledge of <i>Doctor Who</i> to the BBC One Remit and the functions of a Public Service Broadcaster.</p>	<p>Task 1. A teacher led introduction to <i>Doctor Who</i> as one of the key texts to be discussed in the MS4 exam. Focus will be on primary and secondary audience and the BBC as an institution.</p> <p>Task 2. Students to create their own remit that they think should be applicable for any Public Service Broadcaster</p> <p>Task 3. Consider whether <i>Doctor Who</i> is suitably scheduled.</p>	

<p>2. A textual analysis of the opening sequence focussing on Audience and the Remit.</p>	<p>Analyse a specific 4-6 minute sequence from <i>Doctor Who</i> Apply analytical findings to questions on the <i>Doctor Who</i> audience and the BBC. Compose a written statement on whether you believe <i>Doctor Who</i> is a suitable text for BBC One.</p>	<p>Task 1. A teacher led analysis of a <i>Doctor Who</i> TV episode, pausing and highlighting key points as students make notes. Task 2. Students to watch again making notes independently which will then be discussed with their peers. Task 3. Answer exam type questions on the sequence regarding its remit and the target audience. Task 4. Students to write a statement on whether they believe that <i>Doctor Who</i> is suitable to be on a Public Service Broadcaster.</p>	
<p>3. Doctor Who and transmedia</p>	<p>Review the official <i>Doctor Who</i> website Differentiate what aspects of the website are for different audiences. Judge the success of the website content in terms of constructing a transmedia narrative.</p>	<p>Task 1. Students to go to the official <i>Doctor Who</i> website and provide a brief content analysis. Task 2. Discuss what elements of the website appeal to both the text's primary and secondary audiences. Task 3. In pairs decide whether you think that website and its content allows for a continuation of the <i>Doctor Who</i> narrative – Explained in detail.</p>	
<p>4. Audiences responses to Doctor Who – Fan Media</p>	<p>Consider why the target audience for <i>Doctor Who</i> might be inspired to construct fan media. Demonstrate the key differences between fan media and official <i>Doctor Who</i> content</p>	<p>Task 1. A teacher led discussion of <i>Doctor Who</i> fan media with key examples such as fan fiction and short parody videos. This will also include a recap discussion on fan media. Task 2. Students to independently research any other existing examples of <i>Doctor Who</i> fan media. Task 3. A brief exhibition and discussion of the examples that students have found with questions from teacher and peers. Task 4. Answer questions regarding the differences between fan media and official <i>Doctor Who</i> content.</p>	
<p>5. Convergence culture and the Doctor Who audience.</p>	<p>Explore the possibility of <i>Doctor Who</i>'s content and fan media being a factor in the creation of a Convergence Culture. Compare the success of the fan media compared to the official content – Judged on written fan responses.</p>	<p>Task 1. A teacher led discussion of Convergence Culture and how this developed by the use of <i>Doctor Who</i> as a key transmedia text. Task 2. Judging by critical comments, forms of exhibition and personal opinion how successful has the fan media been compared to the official content.</p>	

End of Scheme Assessment

Explore the different ways in which audiences and/or users respond to *Doctor Who*

AND

Explore how *Doctor Who* uses digital technology in its marketing.

500 word response to each making reference to the content on the official web site, fan produced media, transmedia texts and convergence culture.

Outline and Justification for Scheme of Work

Key Objectives

- 1. Assimilate the concepts of transmedia and Convergence Culture into lessons and lesson structure**
- 2. Establish clear links between these concepts and the WJEC specification**
- 3. Ensure that the topics covered allow for outstanding teaching and learning**

The research that I have conducted into convergence culture can be linked directly to the MS4 unit of the WJEC Media Studies specification and the year 13 A2 media students who will be undertaking it. The unit is split into two sections, section B being focused on Industry and Audience, it is this section where I will modify my scheme of work so that key ideas regarding transmedia and audience participation are delivered as part of the overall scheme. The specification states that all candidates should consider the following as appropriate *“marketing and promotion, audiences responses and user interaction and debates about the relationship between audiences/users and text”*. All of these areas have been explored in varying detail within this assignment.

My preliminary research began into discussing the idea that traditionally and still in some forms of contemporary media that transmedia was seen as a marketing tool, some of the students that I interviewed confirmed this and even provided examples such as comics to tie in with the films and poor quality video game tie ins that don't allow for character development or narrative extension. It is these areas of debate that would be engaging and accessible for the year 13 students and inevitably be valid for the MS4 exam due to the topics relativity in contemporary media.

My research also meant I had to consider the response of certain audiences and the extent to which they participate with varying transmedia texts, ultimately constructing a convergence culture. During the AS units I have tended to teach audience response through the audience reception theory and how different demographics and psychographics can respond differently to the same text, therefore limiting my teaching to the production of fan websites, audience feedback and web 2.0. With the specification stating that candidates must *“create and sustain well-organised and coherent arguments linked to media contexts and critical debates”* and *“communicate detailed knowledge and understanding of media concepts”* I believe introducing the concepts of and the debates surrounding transmedia and convergence culture will allow them to demonstrate this in their exam.

I will be teaching the TV industry and within this focussing on three key texts, this is the area where it will be easiest to assimilate my research topics. The first of these key texts being *Doctor Who* (BBC One, 1963-Present), which contains a wealth of content and examples that could provide evidence for strong debates within written responses, especially how this transmedia text appeals to an increasingly wide audience and fulfils its purpose within the BBC remit. Other texts that I will teach such as *Dead Set* (E4, 2008) which offers strong examples of viral marketing, fan websites and fan art and *The O'Reilly Factor* (FNC, 1998 – Present) which could be approached from more of a technological focus as it has utilised this to great effect in its exhibition and delivery. I will make the relevant convergence culture additions to my current scheme of work with the objective of developing the students understanding of the concepts of Audience and Industry and in turn enabling them to write stronger exam responses.

I will develop learning activities that are centred on two areas, group collaboration and independent research. These concepts are accessible for any media student who has a strong grounding in this subject, once the terminology and theory has been taught and understood they could then apply this to any text they wish. *“Research how transmedia is used and could be developed by a certain media text”* carrying out this research as part of a homework assignment or with teacher guidance would be achievable for most students within this cohort. The cohort will have developed key research skills from their AS Illustrative Reports and the A2 Research Investigations (Both independent coursework elements) and it is the application of these skills to exam-based topics that will allow them to successfully learn independently.

There are aspects of the OCR GCSE specification “Recall, select and communicate their knowledge and understanding of media products and the contexts in which they are produced and consumed”, where you could incorporate this but I feel that that a much more grounded understanding of Audience and Industry concepts is required and needed to make it a worthwhile addition to the scheme of work.

The concept of transmedia is not something that should be merely taught but utilised as mode of planning a scheme of work. If I were to develop a scheme that included transmedia presentations and transmedia activities I believe it would encourage students to become independent learners and create a more effective learning environment. Previously my lessons have been more of a multimedia learning environment rather than a transmedia one, this does have its advantages, multimedia teaching allows students to access and learn from different media such as web content, videos, images and sounds which can all be delivered through a desktop PC or mac. However a transmedia way of teaching would encourage students to actively engage with what they were learning and discover through different platforms and interfaces what they needed to learn, this would enable them to become much more active learners. Jenkins suggests that a transmedia mode of learning would determine that *“Students have to decide whether what they find belongs to the same story and world as other elements. They have to weigh the reliability of information that emerges in different contexts. No two people will find the same content and so they end up needing to compare notes and pool knowledge with others. That’s why our skill is transmedia navigation – the capacity to seek out, evaluate, and integrate information conveyed across multiple media. ”*

One of the key aspects of a successful transmedia text and therefore scheme of work is the notion of seriality. If seriality is applied to planning then the audience or the students are always going to come back for more and that each lesson should end on a cliffhanger, seriality would only work if topics were taken and broken up into meaningful sections that whilst could stand on their own as lessons inevitably they were part of a whole story arc or scheme of work. Seriality is something that Weaver (2013) has discussed in depth but Jenkins (2010) applies this clearly to more pedagogical approach for the notion *“What constitutes the equivalent of the cliffhanger in the classroom? What represents the story arc which stitches a range of television episodes together? Or by contrast, what has to be present for a story or lesson to have a satisfying and meaningful shape even if it is part of a larger flow?”*

Ultimately the concepts of transmedia and convergence culture can be applied to my pedagogical practice in two forms. Firstly it ties in extremely well with the current WJEC specification and will encourage students to question and debate the concepts of Industry and Audience in more detail. The second would be to let these ideas influence my actual planning and practice and using transmedia teaching and learning activities and seriality within the scheme to make lessons more effective and engaging.

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