The Poetics of German Transmedia Storytelling and World-building

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

at the
University of Leicester,
2020

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To Neo & Ava

ABSTRACT

Sarah Renger, The Poetics of German Transmedia Storytelling and World-building.

The art of storytelling has always been subject to change. In this era of media convergence, transmedia storytelling has emerged as a distinct new form of narrative activity taking place across multiple interconnected media platforms. Textual components of a complex narrative, called a 'world,' are distributed and thereby serialised: Each media platform can be interpreted as one instalment of a serial transmedia world, and the story told in one platform is different from the one in another.

The challenge of transmedia world-building is to provide added narrative value as well as perform narrative coherence across platforms. This serial expansion of media and texts requires a new approach to the creation of transmedia narrative worlds, and new forms of collaboration. Creators from different industries have to work together from as early as the initial phase of content development.

Research on transmedia storytelling and world-building has thus far neglected the German market; equally, the creative process has received hardly any sustained analytical attention. This thesis sheds light on German transmedia storytelling and world-building by examining the changing art of storytelling against the background of wider changes affecting the content development process. It examines the complex relationship between the creative process and the finished product of a transmedia series by following an interdisciplinary approach, based on poetics, combining the qualitative analysis of existing transmedia texts with interviews with German creators of transmedia series.

This study shows that transmedia storytelling and transmedia world-building cannot be analysed separately. It demonstrates that what goes on during the creative process inscribes itself in every aspect of transmedia world-building. The enquiry into German production culture provides new empirical knowledge on current transmedia practices. This study establishes a coherent methodology of textual analysis that can account for the full scope and depth of transmedia stories and worlds.

Material based on the research undertaken for this thesis has been published as part of:

Renger, S., 2019. Practices of German Transmedia Serial Storytelling. *Testo A Fronte,* 59, pp. 93-111.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people have assisted in a multitude of ways in the completion of this research which I want to acknowledge and for which I am very grateful.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervision team, Dr Anna Claydon and Dr Katie Moylan for their constant support, trust and understanding throughout this long journey. Thank you for your insights and your invaluable feedback, and for steering me in the right direction. You also helped me find my own voice. Thank you for always believing that I was doing something interesting, new and worthwhile – a view that helped me stay motivated even at difficult times. Thank you both for your time and dedication to this research project.

I would also like to thank Carmen Sofia Brenes for her valuable feedback on my work, and for her encouragement. The internal examiners of this project have played an important role throughout the various stages of its development, especially by helping me zoom in on what has become its central thematic and methodological concerns. Thank you Lothar Mikos for your interest in my work.

I also wish to say thank you to my students at the Film University *KONRAD WOLF* Babelsberg for their diverse and fascinating perspectives on transmedia storytelling and practices, all of which have helped me appreciate the bigger picture of my work.

I would also like to thank all the creators that agreed to be interviewed for this research, for their interest, trust, inspiration and openness.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support of people without whom this PhD would not have been completed: I want to thank my husband for supporting me emotionally throughout my whole PhD journey with all its ups and downs. Without our endless conversations on storytelling this project would have looked completely different. Thank you for standing by me!

I also want to thank my sister in crime for sharing her experiences of writing a PhD thesis (and for many English expressions I learnt from her) as well as for being such a great "Sahi" for Neo and Ava. I would also like to thank "Pepa" for so much positive energy, and for keeping Neo and Ava entertained. Without the support of you both, "Pepa" and "Sahi," this project would never have been possible.

My friends Dany and Natascha – thank you for always being there and supporting me emotionally.

Most of all, I want to thank my two kids, Neo and Ava, for choosing the red pill and being the best teachers I can imagine. You both helped me not only to find my research question and focus but also to have an invaluable work/life balance. I want to dedicate this thesis to you both, Neo and Ava!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC Studios	American Broadcasting Company Studios
AMC	American Movie Classics
ARD	Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
ARG	Alternate Reality Game
Arte	Association relative à la télévision européenne
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
f-world	fantasy world
HBO	Home Box Office
i-button	interactive button
k-world	knowledge world
MSc	Master of Science
o-world	obligation world
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PSM	Public service media
PWT	Possible worlds theory
RTL	Radio Télévision Luxembourg
SVOD	Subscription video on demand
SVT	Sveriges Television
SWR	Südwestrundfunk
TNT Serie	Turner Network Television Serie
TV	Television
UTB	Uni-Taschenbücher
UVK	Universitätsverlag Kostanz
WDR	Westdeutscher Rundfunk
w-world	wish world
ZDF	Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen

SECTION A INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT

I INTRODUCTION

1 Does Storytelling Always Equal Storytelling?

"The principles of storytelling stay the same, whether it's transmedia, VR or anything else. Storytelling is storytelling, as it's always been."[1]
(Alexander Maximilian Otto Serrano, transmedia designer of *Time of Heroes* (2013))

"We tell stories, and that's what we'll always do, never mind any new technology that may cross our paths tomorrow. That technology will be useless anyway if you aren't able to tell a good story."
(Michael Grotenhoff, producer of *Netwars /out of CTRL*[2] (2014-))

The essence of storytelling exists independent of the media through which a particular story is told. That is what transmedia designer Alexander Maximilian Otto Serrano and producer Michael Grotenhoff contend when they argue that the basic principles of storytelling are first and foremost those of a 'good story.' But is it really fair to say that the very same principles of storytelling are at work in a transmedial world and in the monomedial worlds of a movie, book or television series? Given that transmedia stories and worlds exist across multiple interconnected media platforms (Dowd, Fry and Niederman 2015; Eick 2014; Evans 2011; Jenkins 2006a, 2011; Mittell 2013, 2014; Pratten 2011; Scolari 2009; Ryan 2004b, 2007, 2013a, 2014, 2015, 2016), changes on the level of storytelling seem almost inevitable. Arguably, the art of transmedia storytelling is influenced by media platforms with different narrative affordances. Consider the German transmedia project *Netwars*, which tells its story of cyber warfare across five different media platforms: television documentary, interactive web documentary, e-book and interactive graphic novel; a television series will be added soon. All five are

[1] All translations from interviews conducted for this study are the researcher's.

[2] In the interest of reader-friendliness, the project and all its instantiations will be referred to as *Netwars*.

interwoven through transmedia world-building; the story as a whole is partitioned into five components that each sit well with their respective platform. In other words, the story that is told in one platform is different from the one in another. The challenge of transmedia world-building is to provide added narrative value and also to perform, through a variety of narrative strategies, narrative coherence across the different media platforms (Dowd *et al*. 2015; Klastrup and Tosca 2004; Long 2007; Maj 2015; Ryan 2013a; Wolf 2012).

Scholars disagree on whether or not transmedia storytelling is a new phenomenon. Jenkins (2006a) has convincingly shown that media convergence culture enabled a – new – form of transmedia storytelling that responds specifically to the interconnectivity of media. It is only in a culture of convergent media that audio-visual projects may be conceived of as transmedial from the outset, and hence as sites of transmedia worlds whose narrative universe is able to connect media with one another. The new interconnectedness of multiple media platforms through a narrative whole does indeed affect storytelling, which turns into an ongoing process of dynamic transformation. Furthermore, connected narration also affects the way in which transmedia projects are being produced. The conditions under which transmedia stories and worlds are produced impose on the creators of transmedia worlds the challenge of maintaining coherence and a sense of completeness across media platforms; no part of the overall narrative must ever feel redundant, while suspense must be created across the entirety of the platform architecture. In this endeavour, creators based in different industries must work together from the very beginning of the content development process to achieve narrative consistency as well as a sense of 'worldly' coherence across all media. Collaborative writing across different industries is called for in the production of any transmedia world.

The new culture of producing transmedia stories and worlds is marked by interdisciplinary, and other collaborative, forms of working. This thesis will analyse the components that need to be in place for these working practices to succeed, and the ways in which they are deployed. The process of creation and the specific conditions of production, on the one hand, and the finished product of a transmedia project, on the other, are bound up in complex ways which this thesis will explore.

The majority of research on transmedia storytelling and world-building has been carried out from an Anglo-American perspective, despite the fact that transmedia

storytelling also takes place in other countries, notably Germany. The bulk of German transmedia series[3] was produced between 2010 and 2016, and hailed by critics as innovative television (Kuzmany 2013; Nezik 2014; Schader 2011; Tittelbach 2017). On the rather conservative marketplace of German television, innovative formats such as transmedia storytelling are both very new and very niche. A comparison between German and American transmedia projects reveals diverging approaches to world-building: The media platform architecture of several German projects, such as the *Dina Foxx* universe, comprises no autonomous platforms, meaning that content on all platforms has to be consumed by those who wish to get to the end of the story and understand it as a whole. By contrast, American transmedia projects such as *Star Wars* (1977-) often do involve autonomous platforms, and thus offer up the option of engaging with one media platform only. World-building of this kind has a profound impact on both storytelling and production processes. German and American projects further diverge in that several non-fiction examples can be found on the German market whereas most American projects are science fiction and fantasy (Jenkins 2009c).

Given these differences and also some of the other striking characteristics of German transmedia projects, a thorough analysis of the full scope of German projects with a particular focus on storytelling and world-building promises a whole range of new insights: Research on transmedia storytelling and world-building has thus far neglected the German market, and the process of creation has received hardly any sustained analytical attention. This thesis aims to shed light on German transmedia storytelling and world-building by examining the changing art of storytelling in light of changing conditions of production.

[3] *Alpha 0.7* (2010), *Die Kulturakte* [Culture Files] (2010-2015), *Wer rettet Dina Foxx?* [Rescue Dina Foxx] (2011) (hereinafter, *Dina Foxx 1*), *Dina Foxx – Tödlicher Kontakt* [Dina Foxx – Deadly Contact] (2014) (hereinafter, *Dina Foxx 2*), *About:Kate* (2013), *Zeit der Helden* [Time of Heroes] (2013), and *Netwars*.

2 Objectives and Research Questions

This study focuses on the creation and narrative construction of German transmedia serial worlds by addressing four main objectives.

In order to advance research undertaken in literature and media studies as well as media industry studies, chapters II and III will examine the changing culture of production of transmedia projects. Rather than looking at the entire production process, the focus will be on the content development process, as this is where the greatest changes in the development of transmedia stories and worlds can be observed: Narrative links between individual platforms need to be established in this initial phase, and narrative value has to be added to each media platform. Content implementation processes such as film production, website programming and the design of a visual narrative are subject to fewer changes.

Although (German) transmediality is enacted in three industries, each with its own production culture – journalism, book publishing, and film and television –, this study concerns itself solely with film and television. It analyses transmedia projects which have been produced by a film and/or television production company and, therefore, comprise either film or television elements, or both. Many audio-visual transmedia projects – and particularly those which include a television component – are delivered in the form of a serial. This is partly due to the complexity of these projects. The present study will thus pay close attention to transmedia worlds in serials.

In addressing the first objective, the study thus aims to answer the following questions: How do German creators experience the interdisciplinary collaboration process? What impact does German production culture have on transmedia storytelling? What is the German production culture of transmedia projects characterised by?

The second objective is to counter the lack of attention paid to German transmediality. Even in this niche market, several remarkable transmedia series have emerged, which are noticeably different from those produced in other countries, including the U.S.. So what are the main qualities of German transmedia series? In order to answer this question, one German transmedia universe will be analysed in depth, using qualitative methods of research: *Netwars* is a remarkable example of transmedia storytelling which enables a cross-media experience with shifting boundaries between fact and fiction on

five different platforms. Scholars have so far neglected this specific project, and German transmedia worlds more generally. What little engagement there is tends to be superficial.

Third, this study aims to establish a method of analysis that is appropriate to the full scope and depth of transmedia stories and worlds, rather than just some of their individual components. Media industry studies has not yet developed a method that transcends the constraints of individual media; arguably, any analysis of a transmedia project's narrative universe relies on such a media-independent method if it wants to do justice to the content and processes found on all platforms, including both audio-visual media and written texts. In other words, the present study will strengthen the foundations on which qualitative research into transmedia storytelling can be carried out in the future.

Finally, this study establishes a comprehensive account of the relationship between the creative process and the finished product of a transmedia, cross-platform serial. The following questions will guide this part of the enquiry: How is the development process affected by 'new' forms of transmedia storytelling, with regard especially to authorship and collaboration? How do new forms of content development, in their turn, impact storytelling? Pertaining to transmedia storytelling and world-building as well as transmedial practices, these questions necessitate an interdisciplinary approach drawing on literary criticism, media industry and media studies, philosophy, and the social sciences. While media studies and media industry studies have so far lived separate lives, especially in German-speaking academic circles (Krauß and Loist 2018), the present study shows that a combination of the strengths of both fields will be beneficial to both. Its analysis of this interdisciplinary interplay is based on poetics, defined by Umberto Eco (1997) as the connection between a (literary) work and its creative practice. Given that the term poetics has already been applied to works of art of various kinds, and to all media (Bordwell 2008; Newman 2006), it seems an appropriate conceptual tool to use.

Eco (1997 [1962/1967], p. 17-8, emphasis in original) defines poetics as creative activity ('poïein') or, the modality of an act of production which intends to constitute an object towards its own act of consumption ("le modalità di quell'atto di *produzione* che mira a costituire un oggetto in vista di un atto di *consumazione*"). According to Eco (ibid.), an exploration of poetics must proceed from both explicit statements of an artist and the structural analysis of a work ("infatti una ricerca sulle poetiche […] si basa sia

sulle dichiarazioni espresse degli artisti […], sia su una analisi delle strutture dell'opera"). Hence, poetics encompasses the form and structural plan of a work and analyses both the original plan (the creator's intention) and the finished product (i.e. the final, transmedial project): The work of art is the trace of what it was meant to be, and also of what it is, and these two may not concur ("[U]n'opera è al tempo stesso la traccia di ciò che voleva essere e di ciò che di fatto è, anche se i due valori non coincidono" [ibid., p. 18]). Poetics thus requires an interdisciplinary approach if both the creators' intentions for the work and the work itself (a transmedia series) should come into view, as they each create the conditions for the other. Poetics can be defined as the complex interaction between a culture of production and a finished product. The work itself is, then, a "cultural text":

> Poetics can be defined broadly as a focus on the specific ways that texts make meaning, concerned with formal aspects of media more than issues of content or broader cultural forces – in short, the guiding question for poetics looking at a cultural text like a television series is 'how does this work?'. (Mittell 2013, n.p.)

What matters is not so much a hermeneutic approach (Bordwell 2008), but the construction of a cultural text. Hence, the focus should not be on the text's meaning, but on how a text's different elements come together to produce certain effects on the *Rezipient*.[4] Transmedia storytelling practices are analysed based on a poetics approach which, unlike narratology, is able to take production culture and processes into account. This is in line with Mittell's (2013, n.p.) notion, first proposed in the context of television studies, of cultural circulation as a dynamic "in which practices of the television industry, audiences, critics, and creators all work to shape storytelling practices, and thus questions about form are not restricted to the realm of the text, but deeply connected to contexts."

The following two main questions – broken down into six subsidiary questions – will guide the analysis of the creation process of both German transmedia series and the entirety of one transmedia narrative universe:

[4] More on this term in the following section.

1) **What does the creative process behind a German transmedia series look like?**
    a. How do German creators experience the interdisciplinary collaboration process?
    b. What impact does German production culture have on transmedia storytelling and world-building?
    c. What are the characteristics of the production culture of German transmedia projects?
2) **What are the ways in which a German transmedia serial world is constructed?**
    a. How do the different media platforms included in *Netwars* interlink to occasion a unified, coherent narrative and serial story universe?
    b. What are the aesthetic qualities employed to link up these worlds?
    c. What are the individual aspects of storytelling offered by each media platform?
    d. How are fictional and non-fictional storytelling combined in one transmedia universe?

3 Terminology

In addition to a single, unified method, any analysis of transmedia stories and worlds requires a set of terms that is applicable across all relevant media.

As transmedia stories play out across a variety of different media, the question of how to refer to the person engaging with them is not a trivial one. Existing research has tended to use terms that are wedded to one particular medium, as "medium specificity has shaped the nature of screen-related disciplines and the ways in which academics have approached understanding audiences" (Evans 2020, p. 14-5): viewer, player, reader, user. They fall short of describing a person who engages with the entire universe of a transmedia story. Some studies resort to the term 'audience,' as defined in media studies

(Dowd *et al*. 2015; Evans 2011, 2020; Klastrup and Tosca 2004; Mikos 2016;[5] Pratten 2011; Wolf 2012; Zimmermann 2015), even though it makes sense largely with regard to the audio-visual texts of cinema and television and is less useful in the context of games, where engagement goes beyond passive reception. It is wholly inappropriate for literary texts, which may also be included in a transmedial universe, as is the case in *Netwars*. To put it bluntly, the term 'audience' should not be used in attempts at characterising someone's engagement with the entirety of a transmedia narrative universe. While the German term *Rezipient* is used in analyses of works spanning different genres and media and has thus outgrown the sphere of literary studies (*Literaturwissenschaft*) in which it once originated, its English cognate 'recipient' fails to do justice to the highly active nature of engagement with transmedia stories. As the Portuguese producer Nuño Bernardo (2014, p. 116) puts it, transmedia stories invoke and enable 'experiences' – and this term may suggest a way out of the terminological conundrum:

> A transmedial experience should invoke the most human elements of the storytelling tradition. From beginning to end, a transmedia story should be a social phenomenon, one which draws people together and unifies them through shared experiences.

The right term should be media-independent, experience-focused – as storytelling is a social experience – and inclusive with regard to the degree of activity ascribed to the individual engagement with a story, which "must be understood as inherently transmedia" (Evans 2020, p. 15); the relatively passive process of viewing a movie as well as the activity of playing a game must both be covered.

In light of these requirements, the present, narratological study proposes the new term 'experient.' This term does not specify which medium is currently in play; it makes no assumptions regarding an individual's level of activity; and, quite clearly, it emphasises experience. Unlike Jenkins' preferred term 'consumer' (2006a), it signals that an individual has to work through a story that he or she encounters, and that the person in question should be seen as more than the mere target of a marketing campaign. Given that transmedia projects are part of an 'experience economy' (Hills 2018b), the term

[5] Mikos speaks of the 'viewer,' a decision that does not resolve the problem, as the term is laden with the same difficulties as 'audience.'

'experient' operates on both a textual and a political and economic level, which has to be acknowledged in an interdisciplinary study. The creator's business goal is that their project is taken up by consumers, but the mere 'consumption' of a project may not be enough to engage a person fully. The business goal is therefore more likely to be achieved by enabling someone to *experience* all media platforms involved. In other words, it is only an experience that can captivate a person to the extent that business goals are achieved. In any case, the term 'experient' has economic implications and includes the 'consumer.'

An 'experient' is someone who engages with the entirety of a transmedia universe; in the context of individual media platforms such as film, television or a book, established and specific terms such as 'viewer' and 'reader' may of course be used. It is important to maintain this distinction, as not everybody will be dealing with the whole of a transmedia universe. Media-specific terms do have the advantage of capturing neatly what an individual currently finds himself or herself doing: An experient may be a viewer while watching a television documentary, and a user when interacting with a web documentary, and a reader when faced with an e-book and an interactive graphic novel. In short, different media platforms each have a different impact on the experient and his or her relationship with the platform.

There have been long-standing arguments and debates about what precisely is happening when someone engages with a story.[6] According to Evans (2020, p. 1), engagement is "something more than simply watching," and as such it is even "the key indicator of success, becoming the defining term for how the screen industries understand their audiences" (ibid., p. 2). Evans (2011) had already examined the connections between media technology and media text, pointing out that in academic research an 'audience' is predominantly framed as either a group of viewers of content, or as users of technology, while in reality they are always both: "Audiences are not engaging with technology without content" (p. 6). And Evans (2008) had argued earlier still that 'passive' film viewers and 'active' gamers should not be considered polar opposites because when viewing a film, a range of cognitive and other processes are at work in the act of interpretation. She understands engagement as behaviour that prohibits any easy binary

[6] This discussion is beyond the scope of the present study, whose focus is not on participatory storytelling.

of active or passive experients (Evans 2020). Therefore, Evans proposes to abandon the monolithic concept of interactivity in favour of a more nuanced notion of multiple forms of interactivity: Television audiences deploy interpretive forms of interactivity while gamers are physically active. Tosca and Klastrup (2020, p. 8) also pay attention to a broad spectrum of modes of engagement, noting that "rather than conceiving of people being more or less active or passive in their media consumption, we propose that transmedia audiences are prone to shift between various (inter)active and interpretative modes of world consumption, world commentary and world (co-)production." Although Evans' study focuses primarily on television audience engagement, it is easy to see how her notion of different forms of audience engagement with audio-visual fictional entertainment is relevant to transmedia storytelling and the different forms of engagement encouraged by each narrative universe.

Evans was, of course, not the first to suggest that audiences or readers are engaged in an 'activity.' Long before the advent of the Internet, aesthetics of reception (*Rezeptionsästhetik*), intertextuality and narratology have put similar ideas forward. The present study draws on all of these, and especially on the aesthetics of reception; it applies the theory of narrative gaps (*Leerstellen*) to specific objects of enquiry. 'Experient' is thus used to refer to all types of activity and participation in which an individual explores a transmedia series as an open work of art with multiple meanings. Given that interpretation is a complex form of interaction between experient and text, scholarly analysis can only suggest possible readings of a text by a putative experient.

The German term *Rezipient* is used in the development of a theoretical approach to engagement with media generally – i.e. independent of transmedia projects or specific media such as books, films and games –, if only because it draws on research in literature too. *Rezipient* will not be translated, as the German theoretical tradition has arrived at a definition that is both complex and useful. (Highlighting the point of origin of the term, certain translations of German works in literary criticism use the English word 'reader.' 'Recipient' may look similar but, much unlike the German term, attributes a rather passive role to the individual in question.)

Transmedia projects and series will be considered 'text.' Hickethier (2013) defines an (audio-visual) 'text' as media units that are delimited through marks and paratexts; they are specified through content-related, formal and communicative

coherence as well as through the setting of an act of communication. Hickethier takes audio-visual text to include film, television and Internet texts whose structure invites the *Rezipient* to see them as a single entity. This definition, developed around mono-medium audio-visual texts, can be applied easily to transmedia storytelling. The various narrative media platforms involved can be said to offer up texts whose range of meanings can be analysed; the transmedia universe as a whole can equally be regarded as text. 'Text' should thus not be taken as synonymous with 'media platform.' While the latter denotes media platform architecture as the structural aspect of world-building, 'text' is located on the narrative level, referring, e.g. to narrative techniques and mechanisms. 'Storyworld' is a synonym of 'media platform' in the context of world-building, where the focus is on how individual media platforms form part of the overall transmedia universe. 'Universe' denotes the entire transmedia world with all its media platforms and storyworlds. It follows from the fact that many transmedia universes, and notably the German ones, include both fictional and non-fictional storytelling that there are both fictional and non-fictional worlds. Transmedia worlds make claims on the world; in accordance with possible worlds theory, this world in which we live will be called 'actual world,' so as to avoid calling it 'reality' – a term which throws up a number of challenges in the context of film and television theory. (The present study does not deal with cinematic and televisual 'effects of reality,' as Roland Barthes famously called them.)

Finally, the term 'creator' denotes writers, authors, filmmakers, directors, game designers, producers and transmedia designers – in short, the entire community of professionals involved in the content creation process of a transmedia project –, as 'author' in and of itself does not take sufficient account of the interdisciplinary collaboration found in transmedia production contexts.

4 Overview

The present study consists of three main parts: Section A defines the topic of enquiry and outlines its theoretical context; section B is on method; and section C comprises the presentation and discussion of findings.

The poetics of German transmedia storytelling and world-building as well as their production practices are examined through an interdisciplinary approach: Media studies and literary criticism will be brought into conversation with media industry studies. Chapter II outlines existing theoretical and empirical studies on transmedia storytelling and world-building undertaken in media studies and literary criticism. Both phenomena have so far been treated as separate objects of research even though they can only be meaningfully explored if they are recognised as integral parts of an overarching transmedia project.

In order to clear up some of the terminological confusion around transmedia storytelling, chapter II discusses its defining principles as well as characteristics of transmedia world-building, demonstrating multiple views on the term 'transmedia' that also mirror the range of terminological understandings used by creators (see chapter V.2). The chapter includes an overview of transmedia storytelling across national cultures, arguing that U.S. examples differ from their European counterparts primarily on the level of form. A comprehensive set of evaluative criteria is established, based on which four forms of transmedia project are defined. Starting from the observation that, in Europe, non-fictional transmedia storytelling seems to be more prominent than elsewhere, a theoretical discussion of non-fictionality is offered, and subsequently applied to the study of different forms and functions of non-fictional transmediality. Transtextual links between the various storyworlds within one transmedia universe are analysed through the lens of the possible worlds theory, which allows for links to be described between fictional and actual worlds – an operation that is particularly significant in the context of transmedia worlds. Drawing on Gérard Genette's theory of transtextuality, intertextual relationships within one transmedial narrative universe are also discussed. Finally, chapter II argues from a media and literary studies perspective that transmedia storytelling as distribution of text is based on a complex narrative or, rather, a single story universe which comprises serial forms that allow for each transmedia platform to be seen as part of the transmedia world as a whole.

Based on approaches taken from media industry studies, chapter III offers a theoretically grounded exploration of content development. It highlights a lack of research on transmedia production cultures by analysing the film and television

industries' production cultures as well as transmedia production manuals and the role of a transmedia producer.

Once the theoretical framework is firmly in place, chapter IV will show the pertinence of literary theory to the present research project. A single method for the analysis of transmedial stories and worlds is developed; pros and cons of using case studies in qualitative research are brought to bear on the project. A case study is then conducted, comprising two parts: qualitative textual analysis rooted in possible worlds theory and literary theory, and expert interviews.

Section C includes the results of this qualitative research study, showing how transmedia storytelling influences the creation process (chapter V) and how narrative and storytelling are, in their turn, influenced by new forms of production (chapter VI). Based on in-depth qualitative textual analyses and qualitative face-to-face-interviews with the creators of six German transmedia projects, this section offers a comprehensive picture of German transmedia serial worlds and practices. Finally, chapter VII discusses the main findings of this thesis alongside some further methodological reflections and suggestions for future research.

II MEDIA STUDIES AND LITERARY CRITICISM ON TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING AND WORLD-BUILDING

1 Introduction

> We should be clear that narrative simply represents one kind of transmedia logic which is shaping entertainment today. We might identify a range of others – including branding, spectacle, performance, games, perhaps others – which can operate either independently or may be combined within any given entertainment experience.
>
> (Jenkins 2009b, n.p.)

Transmedia storytelling, or narrative, is a form of transmediality which can be found in transmedia games, transmedia branding, and elsewhere (Jenkins 2009b), including,

arguably, transmedia world-building. Theories of transmediality focus on either transmedia storytelling or transmedia world-building, treating them as separate rather than complementary areas of transmediality. By contrast, this thesis argues that transmedia storytelling cannot exist without world-building and vice versa. Transmedia world-building needs transmedial stories. Hence, one area cannot be analysed without the other.

This chapter outlines theoretical approaches to transmedia storytelling and transmedia world-building in order to examine the complex relationship between the two. Adopting the perspective discussed in the previous chapter, this thesis examines the complex phenomenon of transmedia storytelling and world-building by way of an interdisciplinary approach. Hence, the present chapter will draw on both media studies and the study of literature. The term 'transmedia' is used in different ways by media studies and in literary criticism. While media studies does not concern itself with the question whether narrative is intrinsically medium-specific or not, literary criticism "interrogates the nature of narrative in light of the relationship between narrative and media" (Dena 2009, p. 17). In as much as it is a subdomain of literary criticism, transmedia narratology focuses on the strategies of narrative representation across a variety of distinct narrative media rather than casting transmedia narratives as telling one story or world across different media, as media studies would. Nevertheless, it is useful to discuss transmedia narratology in the context of transmedia storytelling because of questions such as, what is narrative and what are universal features of narratives across media, and also because it deals with the challenge of media blindness and media relativism. All of these will be helpful in an analysis of transmedia narratives.

Thon (2016, p. 14) explains that "'transmedial narratology' is often used as an umbrella term for narratological practices that focus on media other than literary texts." In his book *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* he provides

> a *method for the analysis* of particularly salient transmedial strategies of narrative representation as well as a *theoretical frame* within which medium-specific approaches from literary and film narratology, from comics [sic] studies and game studies, and from various other strands of current narratological research may be systematically correlated, modified, and expanded to further illuminate the forms and functions of narrative

> representation across media. (ibid., p. xviii-xix, emphasis in original)

According to Thon (ibid., p. 5, emphasis in original), narratology is not only a theory, but also a method; he goes on to argue that

> [w]hile *narratology as a theory* of narrative primarily aims at the universal characteristics of narrative in general or narrative media and narrative genres in particular, *narratology as a method* is concerned with the development of terms and concepts for the analysis of a wide variety of different strategies of narrative representation.

Therefore, transmedial narratology, too, can be seen as both a theory and a method geared towards transmedia storytelling. Both perspectives, media studies' transmedia storytelling and literary criticism's transmedial narratology, are beneficial in order to analyse the complex phenomenon of transmedia storytelling and transmedia world-building following multiple perspectives.

2 Transmedia Storytelling: A New Form of Storytelling?

2.1 Defining Principles of Transmedia Storytelling

> TS [transmedia storytelling] is a particular narrative structure that expands through both different languages (verbal, iconic, etc.) and media (cinema, comics, television, video games, etc.). TS is not just an adaptation from one media [sic] to another. The story that the comics tell is not the same as that told on television or in cinema; the different media and languages participate and contribute to the construction of the transmedia narrative world. This textual dispersion is one of the most important sources of complexity in contemporary popular culture.
> (Scolari 2009, p. 587)

As far back as ten years ago, Jenkins (2009a, n.p.) called for an inquiry into trends in transmedia entertainment: "We certainly want to understand what is new about our current push for transmedia entertainment". Jenkins argued that transmedia storytelling

did not begin with *The Matrix* (1999), the focus of his analysis of successful (American) transmedia storytelling. Over the past ten or, if we consider *The Matrix,* even twenty years there have been an increasing number of transmedia projects; many of them originate from the Anglo-American world,[7] but there are also European,[8] South American[9] and Asian[10] transmedia projects. In Germany, broadcasters try to expand their television stories across other media platforms such as the Internet or radio. The increasing number of published writing manuals for transmedia storytelling, digital storytelling or crossmedia storytelling creates the impression that transmedia storytelling is *the* new form of storytelling.[11] Jenkins' call is still heeded today, in both academia and industry: In 2014 the Franco-German public broadcaster Arte published their online article, "Crossmedia, Transmedia or Hypermedia?" (Arte 2014); in 2015, narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan asked whether transmedia storytelling was a mere industry buzzword or a truly new narrative experience. From the perspectives of literary criticism and narratology, Ryan (2016, p. 1) notices that the "term transmedia storytelling has gone viral in media studies." Indeed, media studies pay more and more attention to the phenomenon of transmediality. Following Jenkins' ground-breaking 2006 book *Convergence Culture,* a whole number of research areas have emerged, including transmedia storytelling (Long 2007; Scolari 2009), transmedia television (Dare-Edwards 2014; Evans 2011; Mayer and Denson 2011; Mikos 2016; Mittell 2013, 2014), transmedial worlds (Klastrup and Tosca 2004; Maj 2015; Ruiz 2019; Tosca and Klastrup 2020; Wolf 2012), transmedia practice (Dena 2009; Dowd *et al.* 2015; Eick 2014; Tellería and Prenger 2019), transmedia fandom (Harvey 2012; Hills, 2012, 2018b; Hills and Garde-Hansen 2017; Jenkins 2006b), transmedia gaming (Donald and Austin 2019; Veugen 2016), transmedia journalism (Detel 2014; Schlichting 2015), interactive digital transmedia narratives (Mora-Fernández 2019), transmedia fantasy and science-fiction (Rauscher 2013; Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman 2014; Wolf 2012) and transmedia comics (Weaver 2013). Even this bare list of themes and authors writing in media studies over

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[7] E.g. *Star Wars, The Walking Dead* (2003).

[8] E.g. *SKAM* (2015-2017), *The Truth about Marika* (2007).

[9] E.g. *Castigo Final* (2009).

[10] E.g. *Pokémon* (1996-).

[11] Examples of writing manuals include Bernardo (2011), Phillips (2012) and Pratten (2011).

the past fifteen years suggests that transmedia storytelling is a fast-growing field of activity.

However, many authors, mainly in literary criticism (Bordwell 2009; Jenkins 2009a; Kuhn 2013; Meister, Kindt and Schernus 2005; Mittell 2014; Ryan 2013a; Thon 2016), argue that transmedia storytelling is not a new phenomenon; they point to the Bible, Greek myths as related by Homer and others, and long-standing research into the concept of intermediality (Mikos 2016). In response, one could ask what Jesus' story and the post-apocalyptic tale of zombies in *The Walking Dead* have in common. Are these the two most prominent examples of transmedia storytelling? The story of Jesus Christ is told orally in sermons, visually, in altar pieces, and in written form in the Bible. Parts of the story have been transformed in other media. The *The Walking Dead* story universe includes a comic book series, two television serials (*The Walking Dead* as an adaptation of the comic book serial and the prequel *Fear the Walking Dead*), video games, the sneak peeks of *Talking Deads*, webisodes and social media channels as well as merchandise products. The whole body of this story is expanded across different media platforms. What the two examples share is that each storyworld started off in one medium and then grew in other media platforms. However, there are obvious differences with regard to the reasons behind these extensions and the project of world-building itself.

In order to clarify these differences and draw out what is new about transmedia storytelling a definition of transmedia storytelling is needed which distinguishes it from adjacent phenomena such as crossmedia, adaptation, cross-platform distribution and branded transmedia.

Marsha Kinder (1991) coined the term 'transmedia' and called it a 'supersystem,' indicating the multiplatform and multimodal expansion of media content. In 2006, Henry Jenkins (2006a, p. 98) adopted the term in the context of his analysis of media convergence culture, by defining transmedia storytelling as follows: 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." Most research on transmediality is based on this semiotically oriented definition (Fast and Jansson 2019).[12] According to Jenkins,

[12] Fast and Jansson (2019, p. 5) criticise Jenkins' narrower use of the term transmedia and "suggest that transmedia is a particular mode of circulation that influences social life in a broader scope."

transmedia storytelling is a product of media convergence. Jenkins' key contribution is his claim that media convergence affects the relationship between content, the experients and the art of (transmedia) storytelling: "Transmedia storytelling refers to a new aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence – one that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities." (ibid., p. 20) Jenkins argues that media convergence impacts the ways in which media are consumed, and he views fan fiction as one of the significant indicators of these changes. Media convergence does not only mean a technical shift but also cultural change in the sense that experients are no longer passive and isolated, but active and socially connected. As a consequence, media convergence informs the ways in which media are both produced and consumed. It is as much a bottom-up and consumer-driven process as it is top-down and corporate. Similarly, Mikos (2016) argues that transmedia storytelling is a trailblazer on the aesthetic, economic, technological and reception levels of media convergence. This aspect of media convergence is where the real innovation of transmedia storytelling can be found (Detel 2014; Evans 2020).

The Producers Guild of America responded to changes in the media landscape in 2010 by creating a Transmedia Producer credit. The organisation has adopted the following definition of a transmedia project:

> A Transmedia Narrative project or franchise must consist of three (or more) narrative storylines existing within the same fictional universe on any of the following platforms: Film, Television, Short Film, Broadband, Publishing, Comics, Animation, Mobile, Special Venues, DVD/Blu-ray/CD-ROM, Narrative Commercial and Marketing rollouts, and other technologies that may or may not currently exist. These narrative extensions are NOT the same as repurposing material from one platform to be cut or repurposed to different platforms. (Producers Guild of America [ca. 2010], n.p., emphasis in original)

There are five dimensions to this definition of a transmedia project: The first is narrative storylines, and it refers to serial storytelling, whereby each transmedia platform can be seen as an instalment of the whole transmedia world or fictional universe. This serial expansion of texts requires world-building, which is the second dimension. The third is technological, and refers to media platforms. The fourth dimension is to do with

the different functions of transmedia, from narrative to marketing. Fifth is the demand that the same story may not be repeated on a different media platform. In conclusion, transmedia storytelling as textual dispersion is seen as a complex narrative or, rather, a whole story universe that uses serial storytelling in such a way that each transmedia text is one new instalment of the whole transmedia world.

In spite of these attempts at terminological clarification, the term transmedia is still often used in an indistinct or inconsistent way (Veugen 2016). The following sections illuminate four defining principles of transmedia storytelling from the point of view of media studies and literary criticism by differentiating transmedia storytelling from transmedial narratology. In turn, they address a medium's narrative ability, added narrative value, intertextuality, and a systematic narration process.

1) A medium's narrative ability

Jenkins' canonical definition of transmedia storytelling implies that when a transmedia story is told across different media platforms, it should ideally play to the respective advantages of each platform. Jenkins does not explain, however, what the ideal narrative abilities of each medium actually are. His notion echoes McLuhan's (2013, p. 19) technologically determinist assertion that "the medium is the message" as part of long-standing attempts in media studies to promote medium specificity, a project which needs to be reconsidered in light of transmedia culture (Evans 2020).

Given that transmedial narratology is the interdisciplinary study of narratives across media (Ryan 2005), the field is useful not only in the context of the study of literature, but also to media studies.[13] Additionally, transmedial narratology allows for a medium-neutral, or medium-agnostic, use of the term 'narrative' – an important first step in the process of understanding the relationship between medium, narrative and story:

> As a mental representation, story is not tied to any particular medium, and it is independent of the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. A definition of narrative should therefore work for different media (though admittedly media do widely differ in

[13] By the end of the 1990s narrative theory had grown out of being a method of literary criticism only and had branched out into multimedia and transmedia narratology. Ever since, storytelling has been seen as a crossmedia phenomenon exploring narratives which manifest themselves in several media (Kuhn 2013). Given that storytelling is no longer seen as limited to literary texts, the present enquiry needs to establish if there is such a thing as transmedial narratology.

> their storytelling abilities), and it should not privilege literary forms. (Ryan 2007, p. 26)

Transmedial narratology would be inconceivable without the medium-neutral definition of narrative, as would transmedia storytelling. Ryan also draws attention to the distinction between narration and story. Similarly, Abbott (2007, p. 39) points out the importance of distinguishing a story from narration: "It is an implicit acknowledgment that a story is understood as having a separate existence from its narration. As such, it can be told in different ways by different narrators." In this regard, a story – narration as product – may enable a narrative, while narrative is the form taken by a narrated story. Thus, narrative texts have not only to satisfy the demands of storytelling – narration as process – but also the possibility of being told on different media platforms. A transmedia storytelling strategy is based on telling different components of a complex story across multiple media. This requires a sort of translation, or transposability. Chatman (1978), in his contextualist take on narratology, postulates that a story is transposable. Differentiating between abstract content (the story) and concrete manifestation (discourse), he explains: "Narrative translation from one medium to another is possible because roughly the same set of events and existents can be read out." (ibid., p. 42)

Although the narrative message is independent of the medium, not all stories can be expressed in the same way in different media:

> Each medium has particular affinities for certain themes and certain types of plot: you cannot tell the same type of story on the stage and in writing, during conversation and in [sic] thousand-page novel, in a two-hour movie and in a TV serial that runs for many years. (Ryan 2004a, p. 356)

In this regard, Ryan disagrees with Chatman's notion of the transposability of a story by emphasising the impact of the medium on the story.

This leads to two main methodological challenges: media blindness and media relativism. Media blindness means that the individual media's features are overlooked, and concepts are hastily transferred from one medium to another (Ryan and Thon 2014). Media relativism, on the other hand, suggests that every narratological tool must be "rebuilt from scratch for every medium" (Ryan 2004b, p. 34). If this is true, concepts developed on the basis of literary texts cannot directly be applied to film – a radical view

that contradicts a number of tenets of transmedial narratology. Hence, Thon (2016, p. 22) rejects a "simple either/or choice between 'media relativism' and 'media blindness'" and develops a method of analysis that takes both the universal and the particular concepts of narrative representation across media into account:

> Even though the method of analysis that is developed throughout the following chapters can be considered universal(istic) in the sense that its terms and concepts are meant to be applicable to a wide variety of narrative representations across media, the demonstration of its analytical power will necessarily remain particular(istic), with the actual analyses of transmedial strategies of narrative representation that are realized within the mediality of contemporary films, comics, and video games primarily fulfilling exemplifying functions. (ibid., p. 7)

The structure of narrative is not simply independent of any particular medium; it is universal. The universal narrative structure is, as Mahne (2007) argues, not confined to a single medium. In other words, different media have different degrees of narrativity (Herman 2002; Prince 1982). Ryan (2012, p. 107) considers the following features to be universal:

> All types of signs and all forms of art require either space, or time, or both: for instance, painting uses space, music and oral language use time, and written language uses both space – the space of its inscription – and time – the time required for its parsing by the mind. If we conceive 'medium' as a mean [sic] of expression, in contrast to conceptions that associate media with technologies or cultural institutions, we can regard space and time as the fundamental media of signification.

It is time and space as universal features in narratives in different media which enable humans to express causal relations and, therefore, narrative. Besides universal narrative features, every medium contains certain narrative characteristics. The medium's narrative abilities are one of the defining principles of transmedia storytelling because the story is influenced by the medium even as the narrative remains independent.

2) Added narrative value

Each platform, or new text, provides added narrative value to the overall story (Jenkins 2006a). Jenkins explains that the transmedia story includes various texts but does not explain how they are related to one another beyond insisting they be 'distinctive' and 'valuable.' He did not initially specify how the 'distinctive and valuable contribution' of the text may be recognised until, in 2011, he argued that the function of each text was to lead to additive comprehension. Jenkins' reference point is the notion of additive comprehension put forward by game designer Neil Young, according to which each new text adds a new piece of information to the whole. Based on this notion of additive comprehension, transmedia storytelling is different from both cross-platform distribution – where "the same content is distributed using multiple media platforms, such as a television network streaming a program on its website" (Graves 2011, p. 6) – and adaptation:

> TS [transmedia storytelling] is a particular narrative structure that expands through both different languages (verbal, iconic, etc.) and media (cinema, comics, television, video games, etc.). TS is not just an adaptation from one media [sic] to another. The story that the comics tell is not the same as that told on television or in cinema; the different media and languages participate and contribute to the construction of the transmedia narrative world. This textual dispersion is one of the most important sources of complexity in contemporary popular culture. (Scolari 2009, p. 587)

Due to the particular narrative affordances of each medium, the story as told in each will vary. From a 'world's' perspective, Wolf (2012) differentiates between two forms of world extensions that deal with pre-existing material – stories and/or worlds: adaptation and growth. He speaks of adaptation "[w]hen a story existing in one medium is adapted for presentation in another medium, but without adding any new canonical material to the world" (ibid., p. 245), emphasising that "every adaptation adds something to the story or world within the work being adapted" (ibid., p. 246). In contrast, growth is "when another medium is used to present new canonical material of a world, expanding the world and what we know about it" (ibid., p. 245-6). Hence, adaptation is a sort of (trans-)medial translation with the aim of being faithful to the source material. In this

context, medium-specificity becomes crucial in so far as common sense considers the adapted text to be a different artistic entity from the one on which it is based: "Two texts, originated and adapted across different forms, are obviously going to be different in many ways" (McCaw 2011, p. 7). The difference is the result of diverging storytelling aesthetics: "The differences between the adaptation (or adapted form of the story) and the source material is solely the result of the fact that each medium has its own storytelling and aesthetic conventions, its own syntax" (Dowd *et al.* 2015, p. 22). While it may be difficult, in an era of limitless intertextuality (McCaw 2011), to define adaptation, this thesis draws a clear line between adaptation and transmedia work, following Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling. Ideally, adaptation tells the identical story on a different media platform, by way of minor additions and only a slight reinterpretation of the original; transmedia storytelling, on the other hand, serves different parts of a whole story universe on separate media platforms. Adaptation and transmedia storytelling may be similar, but the conceptual differences between them matter. Unlike adaptation, transmedia storytelling adds something new and canonical to the overall story and world.

Given the fact that every medium has an impact on a story, the narrative value added within each medium can only be defined in relation to that specific medium. Crucially, though, every new media platform adds narrative value while being faithful to the overall transmedia story established through the connections between platforms.

3) Intertextuality

It matters to every transmedia story that all media platforms are connected to one another – but the question remains how this relationship should be designed so as to enable each platform to add narrative value. Jenkins (2011, n.p.) explains the relationship between texts in a transmedia story as radical intertextuality: "For me, a work needs to combine radical intertextuality and multimodality[14] for the purposes of additive comprehension to be a transmedia story." Since intertextual relations are part of transmedial world-building, this aspect will be discussed in detail below. May it suffice, for now, to say that intertextuality is necessary for any explanation of transmedial connectivity between media platforms.

[14] Multimodality, as based on Gunther Kress' model, concerns itself with the fact that "different media involve different kinds of representation" (Jenkins 2011, n.p.).

4) Systematic narration process

The fourth principle of transmedia storytelling – listed by Jenkins (2007, n.p.) alongside a medium's narrative ability, added narrative value and intertextuality – is related to the creative process. He refers to it as a systematic narration process, arguing that "[t]ransmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels". Jenkins emphasises that transmedia storytelling is based on each medium's own contribution to a systematic narration process. What does he mean by 'systematically'? Does it mean that a transmedia story has to be conceived of as transmedial from the outset or can 'systematically' also refer to extensions of existing stories or storyworlds? Long (2007, p. 19-20) draws a distinction between these two forms of transmedia narratives:[15]

> There is often a noticeable aesthetic difference between those transmedia narratives that were designed with transmediation in mind and those that weren't. A story intended to be told across multiple media types, or crafted with later expansion in mind, will often be woven with a notably different mindset from one that's originally intended to be a self-contained independent narrative.

As a consequence, creation and production processes really influence the aesthetics of a transmedia story. There is, however, very little research exploring this claim. With regard to transmedia projects designed as such from the beginning, Long (ibid., p. 40) states:

> This is where a crucial distinction can be made concerning true transmedia narratives like *The Matrix*, and can be considered a first step toward establishing an aesthetics of transmedia storytelling: each component of a transmedia story is designed as canonical from the outset. While it's still possible to argue for a distinction between 'primary elements' (the films) and 'secondary elements' (the comics, the video games, the anime, and everything else) in the franchise, plot points were revealed in the secondary components that greatly enriched one's

[15] Ryan (2013a, n.p.) also knows two distinct forms of transmedia storyworlds: 'Snowball effect projects' generate a variety of prequels, fan fiction and transmedial adaptations on account of the popularity of their core text while a 'systems project' is "conceived from the very beginning as a project that develops over many different media platforms. Storyworlds become commercial franchises, and the purpose of the developers is to get the public to consume as many different media as possible." Weaver's (2013, p. 8) two approaches to transmedia storytelling are called native and additive: "you either create a story that can only be told across multiple platforms or you take a story from one medium and add other media to it to deepen the world created in the focus medium."

> understanding of what was happening in the primary components. Fans that consume these additional components came away with a fuller understanding and a better experience of the world as a whole.

A main feature of this 'true' form of transmedia storytelling is narrative cohesion and a narrative 'canon,' allowing for a "unified and coordinated entertainment experience." (Jenkins 2007, n.p.) While this first type of transmedia storytelling makes for more open stories, the second form of transmedia storytelling is situated in a more restricted world and often connected to a franchise:

> It is important to consider when the decision was made to transmediate a story. When evaluating a transmedia franchise, it's important to consider when the transmediation began. If a story wasn't intended to spawn other stories, then it might have been written as a 'closed' world and later extensions may feel artificial. Academics may want to differentiate between hard, soft and chewy transmedia franchises in order to more accurately evaluate their implementation. Storytellers and producers working on transmedia franchises may want to keep this distinction in mind when either beginning a new project or joining an existing one to determine the difficulty of adding further extensions. (Long 2007, p. 165)

The question when the decision for transmedia storytelling was made will impact the transmedia storyworld's character as open or closed. *The Walking Dead,* for instance, can be categorised as transmedia extension, because the television serial is based on the comic serial, meaning *The Walking Dead* universe was extended relatively late. Consequently, the experient will be able to understand the story even if they only read the comic or watch the television serial. By contrast, Swedish participation drama *The Truth about Marika* was created across different media platforms from the outset and is, therefore, true transmedia. The project consists of a television serial of five 45-minute episodes, aired by Swedish public broadcaster SVT and made up of two parts: a drama culminating in the disappearance of Marika, the protagonist, followed by a television debate about her disappearance. Experients were invited to participate in the search, which took place online and in real life. In this case, experients had to follow developments on all platforms, indicating the openness of the different storyworlds of *The Truth about*

Marika. These two contrasting examples demonstrate that the chosen form of transmedia storytelling and world-building impacts not only the transmedia narrative but also the creative process – a fact to which theories of transmedia storytelling have so far paid little attention. Extending an existing story calls for creative and story development processes which are different from those required when a story is planned for several media platforms from the beginning. The present study will examine the respective tools and techniques at a later stage.

Going back to the question raised at beginning of this chapter – what is new about transmedia storytelling – it is now possible to conclude that the technological, cultural, aesthetic and experiential shifts of media convergence culture impact the way in which texts and projects can be created. In other words, media convergence culture, and especially the proliferation of digital forms, makes it possible for projects to be created across different media platforms from the very start of the creative process. By contrast, expanded transmedia stories can mainly be found to use pre-media convergence culture material such as the Bible or ancient Greek myths. What is new about transmedia storytelling is primarily related to the creative process, which can be characterised as cross-media planning, shifting the focus from storytelling to world-building, as will be examined further below.

2.2 Blurring the (Inter-)National Line: Forms of Transmedia Storytelling

> But while scholarship continues to dwell on the commercial industry contexts of transmediality, smaller national communities and often far less commercial cultures around the world are now beginning to make very different and altogether nationally specific uses of transmediality.
> (Freeman and Proctor 2018, p. 1)

The issue mentioned in the previous chapter, concerning differences between true transmedia and transmedia extension, seems to be overshadowed by broader scholarly debates around different forms of transmedia projects. Ryan (2016, p. 3-4, emphasis in original), for example, differentiates between East and West Coast transmedia, whereby

> West Coast stands for what most of us understand by transmedia; namely, the commercial mega-franchises of the Hollywood

> entertainment industry, such as *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *The Matrix*. […] West Coast transmedia includes novels generating films, films inspiring novels, TV series linked with ARGs, comics turned into TV series, computer games becoming films, and vice versa.

Based on this definition, West Coast should be considered an example of Long's transmedia extension, especially as it is mainly associated with American transmedia franchise. In the literature on transmedia storytelling, the term 'extension' is often used to describe structural relationships within transmedia storytelling. Problematically, it is often used interchangeably with addition, expansion and even paratext. Dowd *et al.* (2015, p. 23) have recognised this problem and contend that

> Extension draws from the narrative elements of the original source story. At first glance, it may seem that we're telling the same story, but unlike adaptation, we do not need to remain as faithful to the original material as possible. An extension includes new narrative elements that build directly on the pre-existing material, but does not extensively introduce new story elements. In some ways, this is akin to interpreting the material, finding nuances and new inferences in the plot and or characters that can be further explored and developed, but in effect, it is interpolation, inserting new material into existing material. As a result, this process creates a richer and more defined text. […]
> Expansion broadens the story, introducing parallel or companion narratives that often provide new perspectives, insight or clarity to the existing story. As a process, this is developing new story material that's inspired by the original narrative or universe. We are no longer tied to the specifics of the original story as long as we follow (or at least do not contradict) the established rules of the previous versions of the intellectual property – we draw inspiration from it.

According to this view, extension means that an existing story is complemented by new narrative elements which are coherent with the source story. By contrast, the new material introduced in expansion is merely inspired by the source story, resulting in less coherence. Both extension and expansion are, however, based "on the assumption that a fictional world cannot be narrated wholly in a single medium" (Mikos 2016, p. 54).

Then what about East Coast? "East Coast means anything that is not West Coast." (Ryan 2016, p. 3) Starting *ex negativo,* Ryan proceeds to argue that East Coast transmedia is often conceived as transmedia from the very beginning, thus resembling Long's category of 'true' transmedia.

In short, both Long and Ryan look at points in time during the creative process in their search for a criterion allowing them to differentiate between two forms of transmedia storytelling. Unlike Long, Ryan also introduces a local criterion: She speaks of a Hollywood model of transmedia, labelled West Coast, and another model which presumably includes European transmedia projects and is labelled East Coast. Ryan (ibid., p. 4) proceeds to assert categorically that "[r]eal transmedia is the West Coast model, namely the expansion of popular storyworlds beyond their original medium." As a consequence, she finds that American, Hollywood transmedia projects based on franchise models dominate the scene. There may be some truth to this observation, which is reinforced by a scholarly bias towards Anglo-American transmediality, but it would be wrong to assume that countries other than the U.S.[16] and the United Kingdom do not create and produce transmedia projects. There are a number of remarkable transmedia projects in Europe, Asia, and South America, as has already been shown. Some of Germany's most notable transmedia projects have won critical acclaim both nationally and internationally, through reviews and awards. And yet, transmedia narratives from other countries have been largely ignored by both media studies and literary criticism. This may of course be due to the lower number of experients: German transmedia projects have only found a small audience, and academics tend to examine successful works (McAulay 2014). Another reason may be that, even in German-speaking countries, American quality television is well-received and has attracted a very high degree of scholarly attention (Booth 2011, 2012; Brinker 2012; Dare-Edwards 2014; Denson and Mayer 2012; Dreher 2010, 2014; Eichner 2013; Fahle 2012; Feuer 2007; Fröhlich 2013; Gamula and Mikos 2014; Hagener 2013; Hickethier 2012; Hills 2007, 2015; Jahn-Sudmann and Kelleter 2012; Jahn-Sudmann and Starre 2013; Kelleter 2012; Klein 2012; Kumpf 2013; Lang 2011; Lotz 2013; Mittell 2009, 2015; Nelson 2013; Newman 2006; O'Sullivan 2013; Rothemund 2013; Schlütz, Stock, Walkenbach and Zehrfeld 2013;

[16] Most American transmedia projects are West Coast franchise projects.

Wedel 2012; Wiehl 2014; Winter 2013). Finally, most German transmedia projects are only accessible for a limited period of time after their release, making research into them very difficult (Hills 2007).

A small number of studies do, however, focus on transmedia narratives from beyond the U.S. and the UK and support the claim that there is a substantial difference in the form of European and American transmedia projects. Eick (2014) explores one of the main reasons for the dominance of American transmedia projects: their higher budget. Money has an enormous impact on both the options available to creators and storytelling itself. Regrettably, Eick does not elaborate on this point. He is quite certain, though, that European transmedia projects have at least the potential to reach larger audiences across different national markets.

Nesselhauf and Schleich (2015, p. 52) examine the "relation between quality television and transmedial storytelling and the question whether there are German serials that make use of transmedial storytelling, which could offer a chance to reintegrate German serials into the discourse of quality TV." Their analysis of quality transmedia television compares the German transmedia serial *Time of Heroes* to American transmedia examples, precisely to make a case for the value of research into work done in Germany. The authors conclude, first, that *Time of Heroes* is quality television which, however, "gains much of its quality beyond the television screen" (ibid., p. 59) and, secondly, that the serial serves as a much better example of Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling than *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), as American "networks use interactive content to sell a product, not to innovate storytelling." (ibid., p. 55) They ask:

> How did this differ from a serial like *Breaking Bad*? There are some aspects where the transmedial approach of *Zeit der Helden* [*Time of Heroes*] goes beyond expanding the fictional world. There is undoubtedly still a hierarchy between the involved media: 'the mothership' of the serial can be watched on its own and delivers a functional viewing experience; the website, though, did not offer a satisfying coherent narrative when perceived isolated from the serial. Still, the website was not merely meant to be a goodie bag for dedicated fans who want to dwell within *Zeit der Helden* and learn a bit more about the characters and it was not just about playing games. Rather, the website provided bits and pieces of the characters' past that shed an entirely new light on their present actions and thus were firmly

> integrated into the overall story arc. (ibid., p. 57, emphasis in original)

German (quality) transmedia serials are distinct from their American counterparts, in their focus on storytelling as much as in their form: *Time of Heroes* is true East Coast transmedia, conceived from its very beginning as transmedia, while *Breaking Bad* is West Coast transmedia extension. This raises the question how the serial was produced and created and how the creators dealt with a German production industry that is so different from its American counterpart. Typically for both German transmediality research and research into German transmedia projects, Nesselhauf and Schleich provide little depth and detail to answer this important question.

Transmediality in an international context is also examined by Freeman and Proctor (2018, p. 1), who speak out against the reduction of transmediality to its commercialist potential:

> In the contemporary era of media convergence where the sharing of media across multiple platforms is increasingly accessible, transmediality has emerged as a global strategy for targeting fragmentary audiences and spreading content across a spectrum of media channels. But while scholarship continues to dwell on the commercial industry contexts of transmediality, smaller national communities and often far less commercial cultures around the world are now beginning to make very different and altogether nationally specific uses of transmediality, applying alternative modes of the transmedia phenomenon to the needs and structures of a nation or rethinking this phenomenon entirely by reapplying it to nonfictional-, cultural-, political-, social or heritage-based projects.

The link between transmediality and business is particularly strong in the United States. In order to understand transmediality beyond its commercial use, the focus needs to shift to a cultural perspective. Freeman and Proctor's 2018 book *Global Convergence Culture: Transmedia Earth* sets out to close some of the gaps of research into localized transmediality. It is remarkable that international perspectives on transmediality have first been articulated only in 2018. Freeman and Proctor's book is structured by continent, covering Europe, North and South America and Asia. Each chapter focuses on a particular

country. Astonishingly, European chapters include work on the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, France and Estonia but not Germany. That said, the book deserves credit for analysing the scope and breadth of transmediality as a way of understanding the variety of strategies available. It reflects on transmedial film, franchise, television, comics and games as well as pop music (Hills 2018a), literature (Proctor 2018), cultural heritage (Bourdaa 2018) and even the brand narratives of Portuguese port wine (Freeman and Meira 2018). The editors argue that this reflects the fact that transmediality has changed over the years:

> While in the USA and the UK transmediality has evolved into an established marketing and brand-development practice […], emerging research across Europe paints a different picture of transmediality. In Europe, transmediality can occupy the role of a promotion tool for independent filmmakers, or that of a site of construction for social reality games, or even serve as a means of political activism […]. (Freeman and Proctor 2018, p. 4)

Transmediality is no longer just about storytelling – it can be a commercially minded business practice too. International perspectives on transmediality revealed that there can be more than one form of transmedia within one country; therefore, neither time nor locality can be the only factor distinguishing different transmedial forms.

Attention therefore needs to turn to the influence of autonomous platforms. The question whether or not consuming output on one media platform can enable an experient to understand a story has an impact on the emergence of different types of transmedia projects. There is no consensus around this issue. Jenkins (2006a) postulates that no text is autonomous whereas Dena (2009) argues the opposite, using the term transfiction to describe media platforms that are interdependent in so far as the overall story can only be understood by consuming all platforms. Hybrid forms of transmedia projects could be those in which one core platform is flanked by others with an ancillary function: "While [in this case] the core text is autonomous, the accompanying texts just make sense in correlation with it" (Zimmermann 2015, p. 24). The authors' disagreements indicate the variety and breadth of types of transmedia work.

In light of all of the dimensions examined thus far, four forms of transmedia storytelling can be identified, based on two sets of criteria: first, the creative and production process and, second, the question of media platform autonomy (see Table 1).

Table 1: Forms of transmedia storytelling

	Created as transmedia project	Not created as transmedia project
No autonomous media platforms	Native transmedia	Extended transmedia
Autonomous media platforms	Additive transmedia	Expanded transmedia

1) **Native transmedia**: From the outset, the project is conceived as reaching across different media platforms, and output on all of them has to be accessed in order to understand the overall story.
2) **Additive transmedia**: Same as above, but including autonomous media platforms.
3) **Extended transmedia**: These are not initially created as transmedia projects, but start as text on a single media platform, for example as a television serial. This core text as autonomous media platform is extended afterwards across other media platforms, which are dependent on the core text. Extensions do not make sense without the core text. Therefore, this form of transmedia storytelling is a hybrid of autonomous media platform (the mothership) and extensions that are not autonomous.
4) **Expanded transmedia**: Same as above, but expanded texts on other media platforms are autonomous and can be consumed without any knowledge of the core text, to which they are, however, related – they belong to the same transmedia universe, but all media platforms are autonomous.

Table 1 demonstrates the impact of the creation process on the whole transmedia design. A transmedia project that is created as such from the outset can have a balanced transmedia design either with or without autonomous platforms (additive vs native transmedia). The remaining two forms, i.e. extended and expanded transmedia, are characterised by an unbalanced transmedia design, because the initial text is always autonomous and created as stand-alone. The difference between the third and fourth forms is found in the relation between transmedial extensions and the core text.

2.3 Blurring the Genre Line: Non-fiction Transmedia Storytelling

A documentary is "the creative treatment of actuality".
(Grierson 1966, p. 13)

Most of the theories on transmedia storytelling and world-building address fictional narratives. This is a result of what Ryan (2016) has termed West Coast transmedia, a model based on fiction franchises. However, transmedia also occurs in non-fiction settings and storyworlds, especially in Europe.

German transmedia project, *Supernerds* (2015), for example, "merges theater, television and interactive media into a transmedia project that explores the phenomenon of Supernerds, web activists and 'new dissidents' à la Snowden, Appelbaum or Assange." (Gebrüder Beetz [ca. 2015], n.p.) In addition to fiction on the theatre stage and a television live event, *Supernerds* includes second screen applications, alternate reality games (ARG),[17] a documentary and a book which, taken together, make the "abstract issue [of] 'Digital Surveillance' accessible to a wide audience […] [and] turn the abstract issue into an emotional experience." (ibid., n.p.) Consider also National Geographic's *Future of Food* project (2014) which explores new approaches to food through a series of multimedia articles of varying lengths, non-fiction videos and a printed magazine. The full scope of the series' substance, ranging from farming through food production, environmental challenges, hunger and dietary questions to nutritional and health concerns is embedded in one non-fiction storyworld. *Lebt wohl, Genossen!* [Farewell, Comrades] (2012) is a non-fiction transmedia project which includes a web documentary, a television series, a live event and a book.

The three examples demonstrate the range of non-fiction transmediality, ranging from live experience through journalism to an entire series. By and large, none of them are 'fiction.' But can the line between fictional and non-fictional narrative be drawn so

[17] Janes (2020, p. 2), in her study on the form, history, and function of promotional ARGs in contemporary media marketing, concludes that ARGs "are complex, collaborative, and deeply involving experiences – genuinely unique forms of storytelling and notoriously difficult to define." Not only can this definition also be applied to transmedia narratives and worlds, but ARGs' fluid status with blurring boundaries between text/promotion, fiction/reality, online/offline engagement have their parallels in transmedia as well. These similarities might be a reason why transmedia projects often incorporate ARGs.

clearly? This study can show how the cross-media experience enabled by *Netwars* relies in part on shifting boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. In order to show how this is achieved, the next section examines what may be considered non-fiction, and how non-fiction operates in a transmedia context.

Non-fiction is often regarded as the opposite of fiction: "The term 'non-fiction' has been used in film language to describe movies that are not in the area that the industry and the audience define as 'fictional cinema'." (Gifreu-Castells, Misek and Verbruggen 2016, p.1) The simple negation fails to do justice to non-fiction in all its complexity which, after all, includes phenomena as varied as "documentary, journalism, film essays, educational videos, museum exhibitions, scientific films, institutional, industrial or propaganda videos" (ibid., p.1). Film studies tend to associate non-fiction primarily with documentaries. The following section starts off from this existing preoccupation in order to then widen the conceptual angle.

The term 'documentary' was coined by Grierson who, in 1966, famously defined it as "the creative treatment of actuality" (p. 13) as opposed to simple, mimetic representation. Nichols (1991, p. 107) supplies more information on the nature of the creative treatment:

> Documentaries are fictions with plots, characters, situations, and events like any other. They offer introductory lacks, challenges, or dilemmas; they build heightened tensions and dramatically rising conflicts, and they terminate with resolution and closure. They do all this with reference to a 'reality' that is a construct, the product of signifying systems, like the documentary film itself. Like the constructed realities of fiction, this reality, too, must be scrutinized and debated as part of the domain of signification and ideology.

Documentary films thus have an indexical relation to the actual world but remain texts and thus have fictional implications. They are narrative dramatizations of the real world. Nichols (1991, p. 111, emphasis in original) therefore argues that documentaries "do not differ from fictions in their constructedness as texts, but in the representations they make. At the heart of documentary is less a *story* and its imaginary world than an *argument* about the historical [actual] world." It is only logical that Nichols (2001, p. 1) states that "[e]very film is a documentary." He distinguishes two kinds of film:

documentaries of wish-fulfilment and documentaries of social representation. The former "give tangible expression to our wishes and dreams, our nightmares and dreads. They make the stuff of the imagination concrete – visible and audible" (ibid., p.1) and are, therefore, fictional stories. By contrast, documentaries of social representation are non-fictional in that they give "tangible representation to aspects of the world we already inhabit and share. They make stuff of social reality visible and audible in a distinctive way, according to the acts of selection and arrangement carried out by a filmmaker." (ibid., p. 2). What they have in common is that they both tell stories.

According to Nichols (2001), three factors determine whether or not a film should be considered as a documentary film: the filmmaker, the film itself and the audience. Behind every film there is a story about how and why it was made, which has to do with the filmmaker as well as the context of production, and which influences the narrative. The film provides a number of cues as to how to understand it. Prior audience experiences also influence the way in which the film is perceived.[18] Based on these three aspects, Nichols (2001) contends that there are six different modes in which documentary films can operate, forming a loose framework for interpretation, setting conventions and meeting certain expectations of the viewer: the poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, and performative modes. These six modes express the distinct voice of each documentary film and, moving from observational to performative, represent increasing degrees of creative treatment, as shown in Figure 1.

[18] Heller (2007) argues that a documentary is not an impression of the actual world, but a reception effect based on discourse and specific structures.

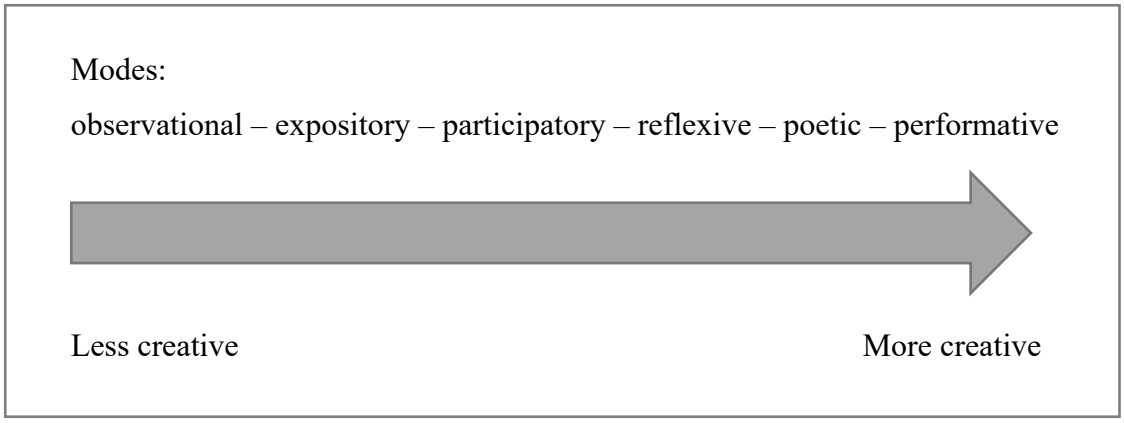

Figure 1: Degree of creative treatment in Nichols' six documentary modes

By providing a way around the strict separation of fiction and non-fiction, Nichols' six modes are a useful conceptual tool with which to examine non-fictional transmedia projects, which often blur the line between fiction and non-fiction.

It is striking how many non-mainstream transmedia narratives can be said to be neither wholly fiction nor non-fiction. Projects such as *Lost* (2004-2010), an American TV serial with transmedial extension, German transmedia project *Supernerds* and German transmedia serial *About:Kate* all blur the line. *Lost* made use of as many as three ARGs to promote the (fictional) television serial and to fill in gaps between two seasons. *Supernerds* is primarily a non-fiction transmedia project with live television and radio shows at its core, but includes a fictional interactive stage play, a second screen app, an ARG situated somewhere between the fictional and actual worlds, a documentary film, and a non-fiction book. Finally, *About:Kate* is a fictional television serial shown alongside social media and user-generated content.

Significantly, in the American project the non-fictional expansion functions mainly as a marketing tool while the two German projects use non-fiction as a narrative tool which allows them to present their digital subject on more than one level and to blur the line between fiction and non-fiction. Zimmermann (2015), in her study on *About:Kate*, argues that the diegetic and the experient's actual worlds are linked through transmedia storytelling. Using semiotic and structuralist models she concludes that

> [t]he German TV series About:Kate […] serves as a good example for [sic] a transmedial structure functionally used to communicate content. In other words, the 'histoire' (what

> happened) and the 'discours' (how what happened is told) are highly dependent on one another in transporting the semantic meaning of the whole project. (Zimmermann 2015, p. 27)

Rather than existing side by side, as is normally the case in strictly fictional or non-fictional storyworlds, the serial's storyworld on the one hand and the experient's actual world on the other are inextricably intertwined. Zimmermann (ibid., p. 34) argues that "the forth [sic] wall to the audience is frequently broken and reality and fiction are intertwined indistinctly." Her study concludes that transmedia storytelling is suitable for projects deliberately seeking out the overlap between fiction and non-fiction on the level of narrative.

Transmediality's ability to build its storyworld through both fiction and non-fiction raises the question of its 'realism.' With regard to transmedia journalism, Schlichting (2015, p. 84) argues that "journalism often becomes transmedial when the concept of realism is not as rigid as in other genres, allowing some room for authorial creativity and for the text to take on some of the characteristics of fiction." What matters more than the narrow question of realism is, then, "how one can prove the trustworthiness and reliability of these sources." (ibid.) Schlichting's line of reasoning applies to transmedia storytelling as well in that, here, too, the boundaries between fiction and the actual world are not as rigid as they may seem and are often quite deliberately challenged. Given its emphasis on interconnectedness and transgressing boundaries between different media platforms, transmedia storytelling is particularly suitable for stories between fiction and non-fiction. The strategies at play have not yet been given any sustained critical attention – a gap that this thesis aims to fill. As fictional and non-fictional narratives differ in the way they tell stories, the question is how the 'in-between' of fiction and non-fiction informs the creative process: What are the techniques and tools used by transmedia creators and how do they differ from those used in mono-medium stories? Are there media platforms that are more suitable for fiction than non-fiction? How can creators connect the different media platforms on a narrative level? These are some of the questions this thesis will address through an analysis of *Netwars*, a project firmly rooted in the grey area between fiction and non-fiction. In so doing, this thesis maps the new territory of non-fiction transmedia projects so far neglected by academic researchers (Gifreu-Castells *et al*. 2016). The present section has shed some light on non-fiction

transmediality, providing a basis for this exploration of projects ranging from transmedia journalism to transmedia documentaries, in which fictional and non-fictional worlds are merged.

3 Transmedia World-building: An Essential Feature of Transmedia Storytelling

3.1 Transmedia World-building vs Transmedia Storytelling

> World-building is often something that occurs as a background activity, allowing storytelling to remain in the foreground of the audience's experience.
> (Wolf 2012, p. 30)

Authors and theories discussed above focus mainly on the process of transmedia storytelling, based on Jenkins' model of transmedia *as* storytelling (Evans 2020). What is equally central to transmedia narratives is world-building, for the simple reason that transmedia storytelling is world-driven (Dowd *et al.* 2015). World-building is what holds all the texts of a transmedia story together (Ryan 2013a). Given that transmediality means that multiple stories are set in one and the same world, world-building is even more important in the creation of transmedia narratives than in mono-medium stories. Key issues around narrative coherence will be discussed below. Somewhat surprisingly, world-building has received less attention in media studies scholarship, although there are some exceptions in game studies. One of these exceptions is Wolf (2012, p. 2) who argues, "[o]ften when a world is noticed at all, it is only considered as a background for stories set in it, rather than a subject of study in itself." This may be because "a world is more difficult to encapsulate in a description or analysis than a particular story, character, or situation, making it easier to overlook." (ibid.)

Theories of transmedia worlds are concerned with the relationship between world-building and storytelling and with the balance between worlds and story. Klastrup and Tosca's (2004) basic framework for an analysis of transmedia worlds sees the world as the source and reference for subsequent storytelling activity. Wolf points out that worlds

often only seem to exist to support stories but that, in fact, world-building and storytelling follow different principles: While storytelling proceeds according to rules of narrative such as the demand for narrative economy (Do not include anything that does not advance the story!), world-building results in data, expositions and digressions which provide additional information about the world. World-building slows down the narrative: Information does not necessarily advance the story, but shape the mood and atmosphere surrounding it as well as the image of characters, places and events. In other words, "[w]orld-building is often something that occurs as a background activity, allowing storytelling to remain in the foreground of the audience's experience" (Wolf 2012, p. 30). Wolf (ibid., p. 29) strongly emphasises that "[w]orlds can exist without stories, but stories cannot exist without a world[.] [Because stories] involve time, space, and causality, every story implies a world in which it takes place."

In as much as worlds provide background information evoking a story and serve as a reference system they resemble genres, which are characterised by a certain repetitiveness; for instance, "the genre film uses the same material over and over again" (Altman 1999, p. 25). Klastrup and Tosca's (2004) transmedia world theory is based on findings from genre and adaptation studies. They postulate a natural link between adaptation studies and transmediality: "Both transmedial thinking and adaptation theory address the question of how 'content' can move between different platforms (verbal, pictorial, auditory etc)." (Klastrup and Tosca 2004, n.p.) The very concept of transmedial worlds goes back to Klastrup and Tosca, who argue that genre and adaptation studies can help *explain* transmedial worlds while cyberworlds[19] can *inspire* them. The definition bears striking similarities to genre theory:

> Transmedial worlds are abstract content systems from which a repertoire of fictional stories and characters can be actualized or derived across a variety of media forms. What characterises a transmedial world is that audience and designers share a mental image of the "worldness" (a number of distinguishing features of its universe). The idea of a specific world's worldness mostly originates from the first version of the world presented, but can be elaborated and changed over time. (ibid., n.p.)

[19] According to Klastrup and Tosca (2004, n.p.), cyberworlds are "computer-mediated, networked and spatially navigable multi-user environments."

The idea of the mental image (Ryan 2013a) can also be found in genre theory, according to which a genre is constructed through the imaginary as it is evoked in the imagination of the *Rezipient*. A 'genre' is the product of a negotiation between text and *Rezipient,* activated by the latter's expectations (Chandler 1997; Creeber 2001; Fowler 1989). Maj (2015, p. 86) holds that a world's description is not evoked by the narrative but that, rather, the world itself, as it grows and expands across media, evokes its worldness as the mental image of its manifold characteristics:

> Worldness is not something acquirable by a mere following of the plot – it requires cross-referencing research, gathering data, exploration, and other strategies that are highly uncommon in 'story-centered' (RYAN 2014: 382) narratives. The movement of the content in transmedial worlds differs, therefore, from the one observed in transmedia storytelling: it is no longer linear and centrifugal, but concentric and centripetal.

Both worlds and genres change over time, as new worlds or new works within the genre emerge. And since a "genre is dependent on intertextuality, it cannot be an inherent textual component" (Mittell 2001, p. 6). By definition, genres are never original. A final parallel between genres and worlds is the fact that both can be realised in different media. Mittell's (ibid., p. 3) core argument is that genres are "cultural categories that surpass the boundaries of media texts and operate within industry, audience, and cultural practices as well." Summarising the various aspects also mentioned above, Klastrup and Tosca (2004, n.p.) find that worlds and genre function in similar ways:

> A transmedial world works interpretively in the same way as a genre, with the difference that all the products / incarnations share a basic foundational story and there is only one acceptable version of an ethos, topos and mythos […]. If genres are themes, transmedial worlds are themes plus a common background story, which makes them narrower in scope, but also means that its incarnations are more coherent and homogeneous than those of a genre.

Although both transmedial worlds and genre theory touch on reference systems, transmediality and change, they differ in their account of mental images in that

transmedial worlds are based on one 'acceptable version' of the world only, which presents the world's features, as will be discussed in the following sub-chapter.

In order to understand the implications of worldness, an examination is needed of the point of entry into the world. Klastrup and Tosca (2004, n.p.) call this point of entry the ur-actualisation of the world – its basic understanding, and the most fundamental requirement for an analysis of narrative:

> If we are to analyse the life of a transmedial world from a transsystemic point of view, we need to begin by studying the ur-actualization of the world and the core elements which seem to define its worldness. First then, will it make sense to begin study [sic] worlds at the textual level, such as that of for instance story and plot. Later, a concrete analysis of an actualized world in a digital setting would need to take into consideration the software with which the world is implemented and the medium through which the world is filtered. These two elements together acts [sic] as the interface to world [sic], shaping the way the user will perceive and handle the world.

Worldness is informed by the world's ur-actualisation. Elaborating on the point of entry, Dowd *et al*. (2015) argue that the medium of entry is essential as it determines where and how the world's structure is built: All other media will be placed with a view to it so that, again, world-building functions as a reference system. In this regard, Dowd *et al*. agree with Wolf's (2012) contention that the world's initial instantiation needs to foreshadow the whole world, setting the tone for the whole universe and shaping expectations. This means, in turn, that an early failure could produce a negative image of the entire world. Wolf (ibid., p. 249) emphasises that the initial world

> must be able to stand on its own, since it introduces its world and because it will be judged on its own merits rather than by reputation of a predecessor […]. Narrative often plays a part in a world's first appearance, since the reason most worlds are made is to serve and support a particular story that the author wants to tell, a story which for some reason cannot simply be set in the Primary World [actual world] alone. Once the world is crafted to fit the initial story or stories, all later works set in the world will have to take into consideration the pre-existing aspects of the world set up by the work that preceded them.

Similarly, Dowd *et al*. have shown that at the entry point, key narrative elements, rules of the world, significant characters, conflicts, themes and aesthetic styles are introduced. The experient's perspective on a world is greatly influenced by their experience at entry.

That said, there is still no way to pre-determine the order in which the world's other elements will be received, which has led Dowd *et al*. to distinguish two contrasting types of entry point. The availability of either a single point of entry or multiple entry points is designed to fulfil the experient's need to "find the style of storytelling that best connects to them, and introduces them to the larger world and the other aspects of the property." (p. 65) From the creative viewpoint this means that the sequence in which parts of the world are devised, produced and released does not necessarily correspond to the order in which they are encountered by the experient. Arguably, it is therefore misleading to accord any special status to the initial world since each and every world within one transmedial universe can serve as entry point. Even Wolf (2012, p. 264-5) is willing to concede that "even though authors may take care to produce and release works in a particular order, audience members may still experience those works in an altogether different sequence."

3.2 Features of Transmedia World-building

> Imagine that an author writes a novel, then another author writes a sequel or prequel to it: can the two texts be said to refer to the same world?
> (Ryan 2013a, p. 367)

The previous section has made it clear that a world is the mental image shared by creators and experients. This image represents 'worldness' as resulting from the world's many features (Klastrup and Tosca 2004; Tosca and Klastrup 2020), which will be examined in the following section with a focus on how worldness is constituted. Dowd *et al*. (2015, p. 21) have offered the following definition of a world:

> What is a world? Well, in terms of storytelling, a storyworld is a fictional or constructed setting that may differ dramatically from the real world or may be historically accurate or consistent with the real world except that there are certain elements and/or

> characters that, being fictional, differ from the real world. An imagined or constructed fictional world is the context within which stories are told. It provides an allencompassing [sic] backstory without which the story would not make sense. It sets up the history of the world, the geography, the physical rules that govern the natural and elemental aspects, and creates or defines the usually sentient beings, whether human or other, that populate and interact within the world. Within these defined populations exists the cultural, political and intercultural relationships of the world. This includes government, politics and commerce as well as the level of technology and whether or not magic and the supernatural are at play. It establishes the hierarchical rules that allow for the understanding of power differentials amongst individuals and cultures as well as any mythological or religious elements. It will also establish existing conflicts, alliances and 5important pre-existing personal relationships. The world must contain all that is needed for the story to begin … and to be believable.

Storyworlds reference the concept of an actual world, an assertion which will be examined in more detail in the following two sections. First, though, it is important to consider the relationship between storyworld and the actual world outside the narrative as a way to understand the make-up of the storyworld. Proceeding from a practice-based approach, Dowd *et al*. list some of the essential features of a storyworld, which are similar to the core elements mentioned by both Wolf (2012)[20] and Tosca and Klastrup (2020).

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[20] Wolf lists three basic elements needed for a world to exist coherently:

1) Space, in which things can exist and events can occur. Its organisational tool is maps.
2) Duration or time span, in which events can occur. Its organisational tool is timelines that organise events into chronological sequences and provide a concrete image of the world.
3) Characters, who inhabit the world. The relevant organisational tool is genealogies showing how characters are related to each other, e.g. as a family tree. Genealogies allow for the contextualisation of characters through structured description of kinship and friendship.

In addition, there are the following five background structures:

1) Nature, such as flora, fauna and the laws of physics.
2) Culture, as built by a world's inhabitants; culture links nature to history and is usually central to the unique situation out of which arises a story's conflict. Culture is at the base of most characters' world view and is, therefore, central to an understanding of the story.
3) Language, which arises from culture.

World is characterised as the enabler of a story, offering up a backstory as well as the setting; its components include history, geography, physical rules, characters and culture. Tosca and Klastrup (2020) have whittled these down to three core elements on which their transmedial world theory is built. These can also be seen as a tool for the creation of – believable – transmedia worlds, as this thesis will proceed to show:

1) **Mythos** consists of the conflicts, characters, stories and rumours, and provides the 'backstory of backstories.' It is what experients absolutely need to know if they want successfully to interpret, and interact with, the world.
2) **Topos** is the setting in a specific historical period and geographical place. Within one transmedial universe's storyworld (or, as Klastrup and Tosca would have it, one actualisation of the world), there may be movement across space and time, but the general setting in terms of spatial and temporal constraints cannot be altered.
3) **Ethos** refers to both explicit and implicit ethical premises as well as moral codes. It is a form of knowledge required by those who want to act properly.

These three core elements can be found in all transmedia worlds and enable a transmedial experience – a 'networked reception' (Tosca and Klastrup 2020) – based on worldness, various forms of experience as well as specific platforms and the affordances of connectivity of each platform (ibid.). In the context of networked reception, an individual is engaged with transmedial worlds through networked activities that connect him or her with others; reception will never take place in isolation. This type of reception is also characterised by a certain degree of meta-consciousness of one's own fictional consumption, which is visible in social media interaction as well as the use of

> transmedial worlds-inspired texts to reflect on our marriages or our life at the office, to comment on current news, or to rally our friends in a political protest. In a time where many of the grand narratives have lost their explanatory power and prestige, transmedial worlds remain an unsullied stronghold that people

4) Mythology, which spawns history and provides a context for events: "Mythologies, then, provide historical depth, explanations, and purpose to the events of a world." (Wolf 2012, p. 189)

5) Philosophy, as the set of worldviews, ideas and ideologies.

> use to connect and make sense of their experience. (Tosca and Klastrup 2020, p. 2)

Strikingly, it is not only transmedia worlds that are connected with one another but also their reception, through social media as second screen. Tosca and Klastrup's (2020) study focuses on transmedial mainstream experients (i.e. not only fans) of Scandinavian, Spanish and Japanese fictional transmedia worlds and shows that these fictional transmedia worlds become intertwined with the recipients' everyday lives, in their actual worlds, not only on a narrative level but also in terms of reception. Given that their study considers the textual and experient's perspective on transmedial worlds, the remaining question is how German creators consider this networked engagement with transmedial worlds during the content development of transmedia projects.

Given that transmedia worlds expand across different media platforms and incorporate multiple stories set within a single world, can the same world be created by different media? This question is put by Abbott (2007, p. 41) as well:

> If a story has a separate existence such that it can be rendered in more than one way and even in more than one medium, how do we know it is the same story when we see it again? What is necessary for us to recognize it as such? Or is it always a new story in every rendering?

Ryan (2013a, p. 367) raises a similar point: "Imagine that an author writes a novel, then another author writes a sequel or prequel to it: can the two texts be said to refer to the same world?" Both authors highlight the challenges of achieving narrative coherence across a transmedial world. In order for coherence to emerge and for the world to be compelling, the core elements discussed above will have to be complete and consistent. According to Wolf (2012, p. 43), consistency can be defined as "the degree to which world details are plausible, feasible, and without contradiction." Consistency ensures narrative coherence which, in turn, serves as the criterion for deciding whether a world can or cannot be part of a transmedia universe. In other words,

> [w]orlds are built up as more and more stories are set in them, and if a world's consistency is to be maintained, each additional story to be added to a world must take into account all of the narrative material already present in the world. (ibid., p. 205)

World-building has to take account of the framework of core elements discussed above which will help creators structure world information and achieve coherence. Narrative is a central concern in this endeavour because "[s]tory events already act as points at which characters, places, and specific moments in time are tied together, automatically connecting maps, timelines, and genealogies." (ibid., p. 194) Wolf (ibid., p. 154) concludes that "narrative is the most common form of structure, and the one that usually determines which elements in a world are most defined and developed, or at least mentioned."

In order to be convincing and satisfying, worlds have to be complete. However, there is no such things as absolute completeness. By definition, transmedia worlds have to be open enough to accommodate expansions and extensions of their existing worlds. "While completeness can never be achieved, a *sense of completeness* can, which gives the impression that all questions could, in theory, be answered, even though they are not." (ibid., p. 61, emphasis in original) In other words, experients must be able to fill narrative gaps by way of reasoned speculation.

Filling narrative gaps is a mental activity of the *Rezipient*, as Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauß have shown in what has been termed reader-response theory or, reception aesthetics. The *Rezipient*'s activity is necessitated by uncertainty found within a text; given the near-ubiquity of intertextual allusions this leads, in an immersive reception experience, to dual readings. The meaning of a text is created during the active process of reception, and in different ways during each new reading, rather than inherent but hidden within the text, in which case there would only be one single meaning (Iser 1994). Reader-response theory emphasises that the *Rezipient* is involved in the meaning-making process, and that a text's meaning should be seen as an ongoing interaction between text and *Rezipient.* Each text will be seen to have several meanings and be regarded as at least partly uncertain. One element of this uncertainty are narrative gaps – a sort of non-explicit in-between of texts that holds a text together once the *Rezipient* begins their work. Much like semioticists have spoken about missing pieces, Jauß and Iser have pointed out how little will ever be known about an author's intention and how narrative gaps provide the very basis for the creation of meaning.

The concept of textual uncertainty and narrative gaps can be applied to audio-visual texts as well. Dablé (2012) has shown how television series in particular make use

of uncertainty, in that their serial structure creates suspense through interruptions of the story, whereby narrative information is withheld. In the face of suspension through interruption, the *Rezipient* becomes a series' co-author. Following the footsteps of Ingarden and Iser, Dablé examines the transmedial potential of narrative gaps theory, with a focus on film and television texts.[21] In her view, narrative gaps should be considered the aesthetic appearance of meaningfully missing information. She concludes that there are five types of narrative gaps: uncertainty, ellipsis, de-contextualisation, interruption, and *Darstellungsleere*.[22]

In order for narrative gaps to be filled and worldness to unfold, transmedia storytelling "depends on the active participation of knowledge communities" (Jenkins 2006a, p. 20-1). World-building has to be open enough to awaken an experient's encyclopaedic impulse (Jenkins 2007), engaging what Eco (1979) has referred to as encyclopaedic competence, which "provides background knowledge, or even foreknowledge, fundamental both for recognizing the 'worldness' and for deepening the immersion" (Maj 2015, p. 90). For the purposes of transmedia storytelling, encyclopaedic competence can be regarded as world knowledge. Encyclopaedic competence relies on a form of activity on the part of the experient, be it from the bottom up as in fan fiction[23] or less outwardly visible through a mental filling of gaps, which Bordwell (2009), from a film studies perspective, has characterised as an active process too, as it requires attention, focus, remembering, anticipation and a host of other meaning-making skills. As a result, top-down storyworlds narrated by an authorial creator can also be said to invite active participation.

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[21] She may not explicitly define transmedia but clearly uses the term in a way that is relevant to this thesis, applying the theory of narrative gaps to different media and not transmedia texts. This is what is behind her analysis of narrative gaps in film and television texts as distinct from other media. Her aim is to draw out taxonomic distinctions.

[22] Uncertainty means that something is not clearly expressed and information is only partly available. Ellipsis, by contrast, is the absence of any information. De-contextualisation breaks with the continuity of time and place. Interruption is a retarding effect. *Darstellungsleere,* as in a representational void, refers to an extreme, such as very detailed stories full of redundancy and irrelevant information (Dablé 2012).

[23] Maj (2015) posits transmedia storytelling and transmedia world-building as the two major types of transmedia, with transmedia storytelling marked by its enabling of top-down designs with authorial control and transmedia world-building by allowing for fan fiction and bottom-up designs. Maj argues that the two types should not be treated as mutually exclusive, but considers them as separate.

All authors discussed in this section agree that the world has to be complex enough to be able to expand across various media platforms. They emphasise the importance of a world's consistency, coherence and sense of completeness as a precondition for any evocation of a mental image of worldness. While Wolf (2012) explains in some detail how consistency is created, his focus is on aesthetics only. Given that narrative is the dominant structural element in world-building, there is a need for consistency on the narrative level too, and research is badly needed on both the conceptual and empirical levels to analyse this issue. The challenge of transmedia creators is to maintain narrative consistency and a sense of completeness across all media platforms, which requires different sets of aesthetic tools as well as different types of storytelling, all of them capable of evoking suspense and avoiding redundancy. The question whether storytelling or storyworld should take precedence is moot; what is needed is a thorough investigation into the relationship between story and world. Equal attention has to be paid to both storytelling and world-building.

3.3 Towards an Analysis of Transtextual Relations between Storyworlds

3.3.1 Possible Worlds Theory Approach: the Semantics of Storyworlds

> [F]ictional worlds are not imitations or representations of the actual world (*realia*) but sovereign realms of *possibilia*; as such, they establish diverse relationships to the actual world, situate themselves at a closer or further distance from reality.
> (Doložel 1998, p. 788, emphasis in original)

In transmedia world-building, relations between different storyworlds are crucial because a single transmedial universe involves, as texts, a number of different storyworlds. In literary criticism, storyworlds can be scrutinised through the possible worlds theory, a branch of analytic philosophy (Ryan 2014; Thon 2016). Possible worlds theory is a useful tool in dealing with fictional worlds (in literature and beyond), because it addresses the relations between worlds and, more broadly, aims

> to solve such problems as the definition of fiction, the truth value of statements about fictional entities, the ontological status (complete or incomplete?) of these entities, the semantic classification of literary worlds (historical, realistic, fantastic, impossible), the relationships between the worlds of distinct texts

> (expansion, transposition, modification), the description of the mechanisms of plot in terms of conflicts, and the general organization of the semantic domain of texts as a universe in which an actual world is opposed to a variable number of alternate possible worlds created by the mental activity of characters. (Ryan 2014, p. 34)

Overall, the notion of a 'possible world' has been introduced to express a certain type of modal expressions, i.e. those with modal terms such as 'possible' and 'necessarily.' The concept of possible worlds is premised on logic: a possible world gives expression to how the world we actually live in could potentially be, as a logically consistent totality of beliefs about possible sets of facts: "At the core of the theory of possible worlds is the idea that reality forms a 'modal system'." (Ryan 1992, p. 529)

Possible worlds theory examines relations between fictional worlds and the actual world. Based on Doležel's study, Ryan (2013a) argues that one fictional world can be linked to another through four different types of relations: expansion, modification, transposition and quotation. Expansion is essentially world-preserving and extends the original storyworld through time and by way of introducing characters in additional stories; modification, transposition and quotation refer to different but related worlds. Modification redesigns and reinvents the original storyworld; transposition preserves the main story of the original world but re-situates it in time or space; quotation introduces elements imported from a different and unrelated storyworld, thereby causing dissonance and incongruity (Ryan 2013a). The television serial *Better Call Saul* (2015-) constitutes an expansion of *Breaking Bad*'s storyworld by offering a prequel in which it expands the narrative potential of the character Saul Goodman. Modification as defined by Ryan bears significant similarities with adaptation – compare the American *House of Cards* (2013-) series to the earlier BBC mini-series with the same title (1990). Confusingly, Ryan (2013a) uses the term 'transmedia adaptation' for stories produced by a different company under license, and 'cross-medial adaptation' in her explanation of the same example. This is all the more puzzling given that the very purpose of her study is to provide terminological clarification with regard to transmedia and transfictional[24] storyworlds.

[24] Transfictionality "refers to the migration of fictional entities across different texts, but these texts may belong to the same medium, usually written narrative fiction. Transmedial storytelling can be regarded as

An example of transposition can be found in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) which moves Shakespeare's 1595 play to a different time and place. The television show *The Simpsons* (1989-) features regular quotations from other television shows such as *24* (2001-2014) and *Breaking Bad*. All four types of relation are helpful tools for an analysis of the functions of the relationship between fictional worlds; Ryan's work needs to be complemented by research into whether and how links to the world outside the fictional universe are structured by these same four types of relation.

Possible worlds theory as a useful tool for analysing transmedial worlds will be discussed in detail in the remainder of this section and, later, put to the test as part of the textual analysis of the transmedia project *Netwars* which includes both fictional and non-fictional worlds. Possible worlds theory was inspired by Leibniz who, in 1710, postulated that possible worlds were ideas in the mind of God. In the second half of the 20th century, Kripke, Lewis,[25] Plantinga and other philosophers elaborated on the concept with the aim of solving problems in formal semantics, pertaining, among other issues, to truth in fiction (Lewis 1978). Possible worlds theorists consider the actual world to be one of many possible ones. There is little agreement, however, on the implications of this assumption. Lewis' modal realism approach sees an essential connection between propositions and possible worlds: Every proposition is either true or false in any given possible world; the modal status of a proposition depends on the world in which it is true or false. The truth of a proposition is determined by what is true in the nearest possible world. In short, true propositions are those that are true in the actual world, where false propositions are false. Possible propositions are those that are true in at least one possible world. Necessarily false propositions are those that are true in no possible world whereas necessarily true propositions are true in all possible worlds. Contingent propositions are true in some possible worlds and false in others. Examining truth in fiction, Lewis (1978, p. 37) argues that descriptions in stories are "abbreviations for longer sentences beginning with an operator 'In such-and-such fiction ...'," whereby the operator 'In such-and-such fiction...' functions as a prefixed sentence.[26] Prefixed sentences are a fundamental characteristic of

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a special case of transfictionality – a transfictionality that operates across many different media." (Ryan 2013a, p. 365-6)

[25] Of those mentioned, Lewis (1978) has had the greatest impact.

[26] Unprefixed sentences are also available.

sentences that are either true or false. Lewis' overall purpose in speaking of possible worlds is to explore the twin notions of possibility and necessity.

In mid-1970s literary criticism, possible worlds theory was advanced based on a study of worlds created by fictional texts and of fictional universes in two main areas of research: the theory of fiction, and the semantic description of storyworlds. Umberto Eco,[27] Thomas Pavel,[28] Lubomír Doložel and Marie-Laure Ryan each rely on possible worlds theory as a useful conceptual framework for explaining the fictional status of literary worlds as well as a consideration of issues around reference in fiction, characteristics of fictionality and the relationship between fictional worlds and the actual world (Ronen 1993; Ryan 1992, 2013b). Ryan (1992, p. 530) believes that "three dimensions of the model should be activated: the notion of a system consisting of a plurality of worlds; the notion of accessibility relations between worlds; and the contrast between an actual world (AW) and its alternatives, the merely possible worlds (APWs)." The new research area of possible worlds semantics made it possible to scrutinise the concept of fictional reference: "The name 'Hamlet' is neither empty nor self-referential; it refers to an individual of a fictional world." (Doložel 1998, p. 788) Claims of this nature amounted to a paradigm shift in literary criticism away from structuralist narratology (Suhrkamp 2002),

> from a mere textuality to a reconsideration of narratives as an alternative world, from a static description of levels and agents to a holistic and schemaoriented [sic] conception of a world created by the narrative text (Fludernik 2000, p. 87).

Possible worlds theory enables narratology to shift from formal, intra-textual analysis (structuralism) to a focus on the text's meaning and the dynamics of narrative structures (semantics).

Scholars were quick to point out that the notion of possible worlds as devised in logics cannot easily be converted to literary theory[29] (Eco 1979; Ronen 1993; Thon 2016)

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[27] Looking at the universe, made up of a constellation of possible worlds, Eco (1984) recognises three types of possible worlds imagined by either the author, the characters or the *Rezipient*.

[28] Pavel (1975, p. 165) focuses on "the problem of the relationship between the literary work and the real world."

[29] Ronen (1993, n.p.) draws out the conceptual divergence between the theory's origins in logic and its application in literary theory: "Philosophers, by constructing an ontological domain for categories of linguistics and logic, approach possible worlds as a model for substantiating these abstract categories. In

because a literary world is a rather specific type of possible world, with its distinct system of modality, and consisting of both actual worlds (actual events) and possible worlds (possible events). Based on possible worlds theory's idea that reality is "conceived as the sum of the imaginable rather than as the sum of what exists physically" (Ryan 2013b, n.p.), fictional worlds, according to the literary branch of possible worlds theory, are "sets of non-actualized possibles" (Doložel 1989, p. 235). In other words, they are considered a semiotic mechanism for the construction of alternative worlds beyond mimetic representations of the actual world:

> [F]ictional worlds are not imitations or representations of the actual world (*realia*) but sovereign realms of *possibilia*; as such, they establish diverse relationships to the actual world, situate themselves at a closer or further distance from reality. (Doložel 1998, p. 788, emphasis in original)

This implies that "a literary semantics based on the concept of PW [possible worlds] regards all propositions originating in a fictional work as constitutive and therefore as automatically true in the fictional world" (Ryan 1992, p. 531). Both Kripke (1963) and Ryan (1992, 2013b) stress that the whole universe is hierarchically structured. Ryan (2013b, n.p.) argues that the "central element is known as the 'actual' or 'real' world […] while the other members of the system are alternative, or non-actual possible worlds […]." She describes narrative universes as "modal systems in which the external (i.e. physical) facts asserted by the narrator play the role of 'textual actual world'" (ibid., n.p.). In this context of literary worlds, a new set of distinctions is introduced between the actual world outside the text, the actual world of, or within, the text and both possible and non-possible worlds within the universe of a text.

According to Ryan (ibid., n.p.), an important criterion to establish the difference between possible and non-possible worlds is accessibility, defined as a form of connection to the actual world:[30]

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literary (and art) theory possible worlds serve to name concrete artistic phenomena; that is, possible worlds work as a lexicon destined to name and explicate a set of referential problems that fiction raises."

[30] Accessibility is explored from different angles by logics and literary theory: "The attempt is to show that in logic, the reference world determining accessibility relations is essentially different from the reference world assumed in a theory of fiction; that in logic the notion of reference world is relational (any compossible state of affairs can serve as a reference world) whereas in literary theory the reference world is automatically identified with the actual world" (Ronen 1993, n.p.).

> For a world to be possible, it must be linked to the actual world by a relation of accessibility. The boundaries of the possible depend on the particular interpretation given to this notion of accessibility. The most common interpretation associates possibility with logical laws: every world that respects the principles of non-contradiction and of the excluded middle is a possible world. On the basis of this model, we can define a proposition as necessary if it is true in all worlds linked to the actual world (including this actual world itself); as possible if it is true in only some of these worlds; as impossible (e.g., contradictory) if it is false in all of them; and as true, without being necessary, if it is verified in the actual world of the system but not in some other possible world.

In Ryan's (1980, p. 406) view, the actual world is an unproblematic, stable reference world for the principle of 'minimal departure':

> This principle states that we reconstrue the world of a fiction and of a counterfactual as being the closest possible to the reality we know. This means that we will project upon the world of the statement everything we know about the real world, and that we will make only those adjustments which we cannot avoid.

According to Ryan (1992, p. 532), the principle of minimal departure helps explain the way in which storyworlds are incomplete and thus different from the "complete state of affairs" of possible worlds in philosophy: Incompleteness is addressed through the ongoing import of "knowledge from the real world to fill out incomplete descriptions" (Ryan 2014, p. 36). The principle of minimal departure is the springboard for filling in narrative gaps, as it assumes similarities between the actual and fictional worlds (Ryan 1992). Ryan (2014, p. 36) goes on to argue that the principle of minimal departure "means that when a text mentions an object that exists in reality, all the real-world properties of this object can be imported into the storyworld unless explicitly contradicted by the text." In this sense, fictional worlds overlap with the actual world, without which fictional worlds would be incomprehensible (Ryan 2013b). Doložel (1989, p. 232, emphasis in original), too, argues that fictional worlds are accessible from the actual world, and characterises accessibility in more concrete terms than Ryan:

> The access requires crossing of world boundaries, transit from the realm of actual existents into the realm of fictional possibles. Under this condition, physical access is impossible. Fictional worlds are accessible from the actual world only through *semiotic channels* by means of information processing.

Fictional worlds "can be treated as semiotic objects" (Thon 2016, p. 40) with an objective existence. Ryan (2014), by contrast, considers fictional worlds to be mere constructs of the mind, although Doložel does pay some attention to the "complex relation between storyworlds […] and their narrative as well as mental representation" (cited in Thon 2016, p. 40).

Another essential distinction between possible worlds theory in philosophical logics and in literary criticism is the 'tellability' of a story. Ryan (1992, 2013b) writes that one of the defining qualities of fictional worlds is a result of the ability of a narrative to evoke multiple non-actual possible worlds in parallel to the actual world which are able to advance the plot. Plot, in turn, is seen by Ryan as movement, a sort of game played between different worlds within one fictional universe, which also includes non-actual possible worlds. Possible worlds theory thus widens the traditional notion of plot, previously seen as a sequence of events taking place in a particular world: plot appears to be a complex and dynamic network of relations between actual, actual textual, possible and non-possible worlds. In this regard, the narrative universe is a constellation of possible and non-possible events which are, in their turn, constructed as ramifications that may or may not be realised. Both actual and non-actual possibilities are constitutive elements of plot structures. Plot relies on conflict between worlds which are connected and subject to change:

> Whenever a proposition in a model world is not satisfied in the actual word, the narrative universe falls into a state of conflict. The motor that operates the narrative machine is the attempt by characters to eliminate conflict by reducing the distance between their model worlds and the actual world. Conflict can also exist between the model worlds of different characters. (Ryan 2013b, n.p.)

This opens up the space for Ryan to describe two different types of conflict: primary, between the text's actual world and its characters' sub-worlds; and secondary,

within the sub-worlds of one character. In order to show these types of conflict in textual action, Ryan needs to show that there are different types of world, too. Of the five different worlds thus postulated in relation to characters, the textual actual world as asserted by the narrator is central, and surrounded by private universes of individual characters:

> Surrounding this ontological center are the little solar systems formed by the private universes of the characters. Each of these subsystems is centered around an epistemic world, or K (for knowledge) world, which contains the character's representation of the entire system – that is, of both the actual world and the private worlds of the other characters (which themselves contain images of the private worlds of the character under consideration in a mirroring process that would lead to endless recursion if it weren't for the limitations of the human mind). From the reader's point of view, the K-world of characters contains a potentially inaccurate image of the actual world of the narrative universe, but from the character's point of view this image is the actual world itself. The private universes of characters also include model worlds, such as desires (W-world) and obligations (O-world), which capture how the character would like the actual world to be: active goals and plans, which capture projected courses of actions leading to the fulfilment of the model worlds; and fantasy worlds such as dreams, hallucinations, and stories within stories which embed, recursively, new modal systems. (Ryan 2013b, n.p.)

These sub-universes – knowledge world (k-world), wish world (w-world), obligation world (o-world), intention world (i-world) and fantasy world (f-world) – combine to create the private domain of a character (Suhrkamp 2002). Literary characters are fictionally constructed, non-actual individuals living in a hypothetical world. Ryan (1991, 199-200) likens the actions of characters in a narrative world to a game, where characters choose between various paths of action in order to best realise the textual actual world:

> From the viewpoint of its participants, the goal of the narrative game [...] is to make TAW [textual actual world] coincide with as many as possible of their private worlds [...]. The moves of the game are the actions through which characters attempt to alter

> relations between worlds. [...] The alternatives are the forking paths of projections; the strategic situation is the relative position of worlds on the board of the textual universe; and the rule of the game is to move one's pieces closer to the center.

Characters, then, are virtual identities with individual, personal characteristics. They possess an independent existence, separate from their textual function and enabling them to show up in many different narrative universes. This potential for intertextual action makes them highly suitable for transmedial worlds.

As shown in the previous section, world-building is at once open and closed. Possible worlds are, therefore, infinite, and "gaps are a universal feature of their semantic macrostructure." More specifically, "fictional and historical worlds are by necessity incomplete. To construct a complete possible world would require writing a text of infinite length – a task that humans are not capable of accomplishing." (Doložel 1998, p. 794) According to Doložel, narrative gaps are shaped by an author's aesthetic choices, which help bring the fictional world into existence. Doložel regards the act of reading as the enactment of a fictional encyclopaedia – much like in Eco's (1979) concept of encyclopaedic competence – based on shared knowledge about the storyworld. According to Ryan (2014), filling in gaps does not only rely on world knowledge but on knowledge gained in the actual world too (see above for the context of minimal departure). In terms of types of gaps, Doložel (1998, p. 796) distinguishes between fictional and historical:

> The boundary between fictional and historical worlds is firmly set by the different nature and treatment of gaps. Fictional gaps are produced by the fiction writer, are ontological and irrecoverable. Historical gaps are due to the lack of evidence or the historian's selectivity; they are epistemological and can be filled either by future evidence or by the historian's recasting of the relevance hierarchy.

Bar Bell and Ryan (2019), Doložel is the only author to extend possible worlds theory to media other than fictional and literary texts. Ryan (2013b, n.p.) argues that possible worlds theory is "valid for narratives realized in other media such as drama, film, comics, or video games" as it can be applied to the semantic description of narrative universes across media. She further highlights that possible worlds theory "does not offer

a critical ideology, but a collection of analytical tools applicable to many disciplines, in the service of many purposes," (Ryan 1992, p. 50) and states that

> [s]toryworld is a broader concept than fictional world because it covers both factual and fictional stories, meaning stories told as true of the real world and stories that create their own imaginary world, respectively. But it could be argued that in the case of nonfictional stories, the notion of storyworld is superfluous. (Ryan 2014, p. 35)

Ryan supports her claim of redundancy by pointing to references to the real world and to claims to truth.

However, as this thesis consistently argues that non-fictional stories are at least partly a narrative dramatisation of the actual world, the notion of storyworld should not be considered redundant. Support for this view can be found in Detel (2014), who examines transmedia journalism in light of transmedial worlds. In so doing, she adapts the term 'world' to a journalistic context, arguing that Wolf's (2012) distinction between primary (actual) and secondary (fictional) worlds is useless because non-fictional worlds are automatically part of the primary (actual) world. Detel points out that the main difference between the actual worlds of the experient and of the journalist is the unfamiliarity or inaccessibility of the journalist's actual world to the experient. These concerns notwithstanding, worldness should be regarded as the same in both fictional and non-fictional worlds: Both of them deal with the actual world, and it is only the relationship between primary (actual) and secondary (fictional or non-fictional) worlds which is different in fictional and non-fictional transmedial worlds. What is crucial is that there is no binary between primary and secondary worlds; they are interwoven in both fictional and non-fictional worlds. The key difference is around the issue of reference. Arguments have been put forward against the widely held view of non-fiction as 'true' and fiction as 'false':

> On the contrary, nonfictional stories can be either true or false with respect to their reference world, but fictional ones are automatically true in the world about which they are told. […] Since many different stories can take the real world as referent, there will be mutually incompatible versions of reality, and the recipients must decide for themselves whether the story is true. But in the case of fiction, there is no external referent, because the

> story creates its own world and normally constitutes the only mode of access to it. (Ryan 2014, p. 35)

Doložel (1998) draws attention to the fact that theorists distinguish fiction (without truth-claims) from history (with truth-claims), agreeing with Cohn (1989, p. 16) that "[w]e cannot conceive of any one given text as more or less fictional, more or less factual, but that we read it in one key or the other – that fiction, in short, is not a matter of degree, but of kind." Doložel concludes that while historical narratives can be wholly true, fictional narratives cannot, thereby disagreeing with Lewis (1978, p. 40), who stated that "[t]he storyteller purports to be telling the truth about matters whereof he has knowledge." According to both Lewis (1978) and Ryan (1992), it is possible to tell the truth in a fictional world on account of its author reference and the availability of information about how the author found out their subject. Lewis (1978, p. 40) succinctly suggests that "[s]torytelling is pretence" and points to "the worlds where the fiction is told, but as known fact rather than fiction" (ibid., p. 40). While the author's sources may not be apparent, claims to truth are still made. Lewis does not elaborate on the characteristics of fiction as known facts and of fiction as fiction, which makes it difficult to apply his theory to textual analysis. Suffice it to remember Ryan's (1992, p. 540) view that possible worlds theory "transcends the boundary between fiction and nonfiction." Consequently, possible worlds theory can be applied to both fiction and non-fiction.

Possible worlds theory is used to detect the constituent worlds of a given text, which makes it particularly suitable for an analysis of transmedia texts. It provides a useful vocabulary and conceptual framework to examine a narrative universe and its various storyworlds, changes of media platforms, narrative gaps, and characters. It needs, however, to be complemented by narratology, as Doložel (1989), Suhrkamp (2002) and Ryan (2013b) have pointed out. With regard to the flow of content across media and the interconnectedness of worlds within one transmedia universe it would be desirable for literary theories of intertextuality and paratextuality more thoroughly to be applied in both literary criticism and media studies. Possible worlds theory allows for a sustained analysis of the entirety of a transmedia universe, including its television, web, graphic novel and book text components, all of which can be found between fiction and non-fiction.

3.3.2 A Genettian Approach: Transtextuality, Intertextuality, Paratextuality

> Intertextuality is more about relations between texts than a single text.
> (Mikos 2016, p. 51)

As has been shown earlier, transmedial worlds are based on intertextual relations (Jenkins 2007). From the perspective of a structuralist form of literary criticism, all texts are related to one another, as every text is read in relation to another (Genette 1997a). What, then, about the following questions: Are texts related to one another only on a level recognisable as intertextuality? What are the functions of textual relations? And are theories of intertextuality transferable to transmedial texts and worlds? Theories of intertextuality offer different perspectives and use various terms; this section examines intertextuality based on Genette's theory of transtextuality, which offers the most sophisticated view of intradiegetic and extradiegetic textual relations. This approach will be useful for analysing transmedial texts and worlds, as shall be demonstrated.

Most fundamentally, the value of Genette's work lies in its giving precedence to the way a story is narrated over both its structure and the story itself. Thon (2016) and many others have recognised the usefulness of Genette's (1980) terminology for the narratological analysis of literary texts. Genette's theory and terminology are also transferable to other media texts, as demonstrated by Mittell's (2013) theory of television and transmedia paratexts, Fiske's (2011) point that television culture relies on intertextuality and Luzón and Puig's (2019) study on cultural adaptation in television serials. The reason is that Genette examines relations between texts without prejudice to the line between fictional storyworld and actual world – a line which, as has been argued throughout this thesis, is regularly blurred by transmedial worlds. Transtextuality is a broad term unburdened by earlier debates on intertextuality, covering the entire spectrum of textual relations. Genette (1997a) defines it as the obvious or concealed textual transcendence of a text. Transtextuality being a fundamental quality of texts *tout court*, every text exhibits characteristics of at least one of the five types of transtextuality:

1) **Intertextuality** is the actual presence of one text within another, e.g. as quotation.
2) **Paratextuality** refers to the pragmatics of textual transmission; paratexts include titles, subtitles and many other utterances normally thought of as accompanying a

core text. They are the variable surroundings of a text which facilitate the communicative process and steer the expectations of the *Rezipient* by giving hints on, e.g. how to classify the text in terms of genre. Paratexts are part of a complex process of mediation between book, author, publisher and reader, constituting one of the liminal devices and conventions within and outside the book.

3) **Metatextuality** is the relation by which one text bears critically on another, for example through commentary.
4) **Architextuality** refers to generic taxonomies suggested, e.g. by the title. It is the totality of the general categories pertaining to a text.
5) **Hypertextuality** is the relationship between hypertext and an earlier hypotext.

Intertextuality and paratexts are primarily discussed in the study of literature and in media studies, and will be examined below.

Certain theories of intertextuality offer definitions which are broader than Genette's. Most are concerned with relations between texts which do not belong to the same narrative world. As Wolf (2012, p. 204) has pointed out, a lot has been said about intertextuality but "relatively little has been written about the relationships between stories set in the same imaginary world and how the creation of stories and worlds affect each other." The question is whether intertextuality can be seen as a useful tool for an analysis of transmedial texts. In order to address this question theories of intertextuality from the study of literature (Kristeva 1980), television studies (Fiske 2011) and the study of secondary worlds (Wolf 2012) need to be examined.

One of the foundational texts on intertextuality is Kristeva (1980, p. 66), according to which "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another". Much like Genette and based on a structuralist account of literature, Kristeva argues that any text is read in relationship to others. Intertextuality is "the space *between* texts" (Fiske 2011, p. 109, emphasis in original). "The theory of intertextuality proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledges is brought to bear upon it." (ibid., p. 109) However, as Mikos (2016, p. 51) argues, "[i]ntertextuality is more about relations between texts than a single text."

In television studies, Fiske (2011) argues that television is essentially intertextual. Adapting a semiotic approach grounded in Barthes, he analyses the currency of culture as created through social transactions. Focusing on television culture, Fiske posits a hierarchy of primary, secondary and tertiary texts. In the case in question, the primary text is the television content itself, while secondary texts are extra-generic, produced within the wider industry; they may be reviews, gossip, magazines, written or television ads and posters. Tertiary texts emerge from the viewer's perspective and include what people say about or otherwise make of television. They are part of a network of intertextual relations. Relations between these three types vary, however, and should not be summarily treated as intertextual. Genette's somewhat narrower taxonomy of transtextuality is more differentiated than that, and his metatextuality bears a certain resemblance to Fiske's secondary and tertiary texts.

Fiske (2011, p. 109-10) proposes a differentiation between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' intertextuality:

> Horizontal relations are those between primary texts that are more or less explicitly linked, usually along axes of genre, character, or content. Vertical intertextuality is that between a primary text, such as a television program or series, and other texts of a different type that refer explicitly to it. These may be secondary texts such as studio publicity, journalistic features, or criticism, or tertiary texts produced by the viewers themselves in the form of letters to the press or, more importantly, of gossip and conversation.

Evidently, reflections on a primary text as described by Fiske are set outside that text's narrative world. To address this matter, Wolf (2012) identifies two ways in which intertextual relations between worlds can happen. The first is around time as the key criterion, and gives rise to concepts such as sequel, prequel, interquel, intraquel, transquel and paraquel – a host of entities which Genette would consider part of hypertextuality. The second concerns worlds which are linked thematically, e.g. through transnarrative characters or geographical linkages. A transnarrative character, according to Wolf (ibid., p. 66), "appears in more than one story and links the stories' worlds together by being present in them, and the character's presence in multiple stories suggests that there is more to the character than what any single story reveals." The definition is based on

Wolf's notion of transnarrative. Transnarrative is characterised by multiple stories present in one world, whereby "all the stories set in the same world can be seen as being nested within the overarching narrative of the history of the world itself; but unlike backstories, these stories can be conceived and created separately from one another" (ibid., p. 204). Wolf's two types of intertextual relations exemplify the links between two or more worlds set in the same world, through the lens of either time or theme. The problem is that time – of release, of creation – can only indicate a sequence of events but not the narrative connections between worlds and how different worlds may come together in one universe. Crucially, also, transmedial worlds situated in one universe may appear at the same time. Transmedial worlds linked thematically can, in turn, incorporate transnarrative characters and be set in the same place; however, this type of world is mainly found in film franchise and television serial prequels or sequels such as *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul*. Both worlds take place in Albuquerque, and Saul Goodman can be regarded as a transnarrative character or, in Genette's terms, a marker of intertextuality:

> Even when unrelated characters cross paths briefly, with a main character from one story becoming just an extra in the background of another, such a transmedial appearance can be a powerful way to evoke the world extending beyond the confines of a particular story; and one can imagine that every minor character and extra passing through the background has as complete and detailed a life as the main character does. (Wolf 2012, p. 172)

The world of *Breaking Bad* is extended by bringing to light the background story of Saul Goodman. The two worlds are, therefore, related chronologically, and both of them can be viewed separately. Textual knowledge about the respective other is not needed.

A hotly debated question around intertextuality is whether textual knowledge is required for an understanding of the text or not. In television studies, Fiske (2011, p. 109) argues that the viewer does not have to be familiar with the text to read it intertextually: "These relationships do no take the form of specific allusions from one text to another and there is no need for readers to be familiar with specific or the same texts to read intertextually." Again, the question is whether this is true for transmedial texts as well. As argued above, world-knowledge is required in order to create a mental image of worldness; given that transmedial worlds are also based on a reference system, textual

knowledge is important in recognising the transmedial world. Furthermore, textual knowledge can help fill in narrative gaps and, thereby, enhance the experient's immersive experience.

In terms of the filling of narrative gaps and the recognition of worldness, paratexts can be a helpful tool. Dena (2009, p. 298) points out that "paratextual information operate as secondary signals" independent of who has written them, be it the author, an editor or yet another person. Paratextual information indicates the boundary between the text, or storyworld, and the actual world outside the text. Zimmermann (2015) agrees, arguing that paratexts are a kind of threshold, described by Genette (1997b, p. 1) as an "undefined zone between the inside and outside".

In television studies, Mittell (2013), too, discusses both intra- and extradiegetic paratexts and drawing a line between television and transmedia paratexts. While the former are found outside the diegetic storyworld and help viewers deal with narrative complexity (consider, for example, commentary on a DVD), transmedia paratexts advance their storyworlds across platforms in order to promote, celebrate or introduce a text, or expand the core narrative. They should thus be considered narrative texts proper, on a different platform. However, not all transmedia projects consist of a 'mothership' and extended texts. 'Unbalanced' transmedia television projects of this kind are discussed by Mittell (2013, 2014), who argues that transmedia paratexts of a transmedial story are deployed to support and strengthen the core television narrative experience:

> So the industrial edict to protect and strengthen the core business of watching commercial television dictates a creative imperative as well: any television-based transmedia must protect the "mothership," to borrow the term Lost producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse used for the central television series at the heart of their armada of paratextual transmedia extensions. For the industry, transmedia extensions might provide an additional revenue stream, but their primary function is to drive viewers back to the television series; for creators, transmedia storytelling must always support and strengthen the core television narrative experience. This imperative creates challenges to mesh Jenkins's definitional ideal of distributed transmedia as a 'unified and coordinated entertainment experience' with the reality that television storytellers must privilege the mothership by designing experiences that can be consumed by viewers in a wide range of

> ways without sacrificing coherence or engagement, regardless of how aware they may be of the paratextual extensions. (Mittell 2014, p. 202-3)

Mittell's focus is on American television which, as has been pointed out, differs in many respects from its German counterpart, although many German transmedia projects are similarly unbalanced. *Time of Heroes,* for instance, takes a television serial as its core text, which can be watched independent of content on other platforms, but is flanked by online texts offering, among other material, backstories of characters, thus allowing viewers to deepen their connection with them. Consequently, "with regard to content bound to the core text, the additional texts strengthen particular meanings communicated in the latter" (Zimmermann 2015, p. 24). Against this background additional texts can be regarded as paratexts serving various functions, including maintaining the experient's interest, providing insight into characters and their motivations and focusing on one or another aspect of the storyworld. This does not answer the question, though, how transmedia paratexts and their function within a transmedia project should be categorised.

Mittell (2013, n.p.) suggests two types of transmedia paratexts: the what-is type of paratexts which "typically revolves around canonical coordination and narrative integration" and the what-if paratext which

> poses hypothetical possibilities rather than canonical certainties, inviting viewers to imagine alternative stories and approaches to storytelling that are distinctly not to be treated as potential canon. The goal for 'What If?' transmedia is to launch off the mothership into parallel dimensions, foregrounding tone, mood, character, or style more than continuing with canonical plots and storyworlds. (ibid., n.p.)

The two do not only differ in function, but also in terms of transmedia design: Unlike what-is paratexts, those of the what-if variety tend to be found around more balanced examples of transmedia world-building, to which they introduce new and parallel storyworlds. Mittell (2014, p. 216) emphasises that the two forms have different narrative goals:

> 'What Is' transmedia work in the same way as puzzles, with proper solutions and final revelations, while 'What If?' extensions feature more of a sense of dressing up or performative

> role-playing, spinning off scenarios with no real outcome or canonical narrative function.

Consequently, the two forms of paratext extend and expand the transmedial world in different ways: What-is enable plot coherence whereas what-if offer up 'possible' worlds.[31] In each case, transmedia creators have different options in terms of relating paratexts to the core medium and safeguard narrative coherence.

To conclude, texts can be regarded as a network of varying relationships, linked in many different ways and offering cues to experients on how they may be read. This section has demonstrated that, unlike existing theories of intertextuality which do not do justice to the complexities of transmedia textual relations, Genette's account of transtextuality is in fact able to account for this complexity in that its scope extends beyond the textual level to relate texts to what goes on around them. It is thus possible to say that transmedia world-building is grounded in transtextual relations.

3.4 Narrative Complexity as a Mode of Serial World-building

> At its most basic level, narrative complexity redefines episodic forms under the influence of serial narration – not necessarily a complete merger of episodic and serial forms, but a shifting balance. Rejecting the need for plot closure within every episode that typifies conventional episodic form, narrative complexity foregrounds ongoing stories across a range of genres […]. Complex television employs a range of serial techniques, with the underlying assumption that a series is a cumulative narrative that builds over time, rather than resetting back to a steady-state equilibrium at the end of every episode.
>
> (Mittell 2013, n.p.)

As the previous sections have been able to reveal, transmedia storytelling is based on world-building: The entirety of a single transmedia universe is host to various storyworlds which are related to one another in different ways. Some transmedia universes expand

[31] According to Booth (2014, p. 21), 'What is' questions "tend to focus on expanding the storyworld through augmentation, while 'What If' tends to deepen the world as it already exists through paratextual media context". Sconce (2004) argues that contemporary television storytelling often plays with the stylistics of storytelling by asking the audience what-if questions.

over time, and could be said to be open-ended, while others release their storyworlds in one fell swoop. Where each new storyworld functions as a new instalment, transmedia world-building uses serialised storytelling techniques to achieve narrative extension across multiple texts (Ezerin 2019). Both Bordwell (2009) and Jenkins (2009a) argue that transmedia storytelling works best in television,[32] which is best able to accommodate a serial format relying on (complex) backstories. In turn, transmedial universes and serial worlds have to be complex enough to allow for the creation of a world over an extended period of time. As such, complexity has implications for narrative. Mittell (2013) introduced the term 'narrative complexity' to model serial storytelling in television, explaining the changes of television narrative paradigms as literary and cinematic. Narrative complexity is mainly discussed in the context of quality television. This section explores how a model of narrative complexity can help analyse the serial expansion of transmedial worlds. In so doing, the section reveals elements shared by transmedial worlds and narratively complex serials.

Mittell (ibid., n.p.) has made the point that "over the past two decades, a new model of storytelling has emerged as an alternative to the conventional episodic and serial forms that have typified most American television since its inception, a mode that I call narrative complexity." For Mittell, narrative complexity is not only about the window to a realistic storyworld, but a look at that window's frame – the way the story is told. Mittell takes narrative complexity to refer to self-reflective engagement with the formal conventions of television. This new mode of viewing, labelled 'forensic fandom,' constitutes a way for viewers to intensify their engagement with the series through diegetic pleasures and heightened formal awareness. Viewers are engaged more actively in the process of comprehending a story – in decoding cues and filling narrative gaps, and even making decisions about when to watch. Complex television series stimulate the

[32] This is also the reason behind the dominance of transmedia television, which is characterised by a form of world-building with television as mothership, or core text, and other media platforms, such as the Internet, ARG's, as extensions or expansions supplied to support the core text. In the majority of transmedia television series it is possible to watch the television series and nothing but. "In essence the concept of 'trans-media' describes the way that new technologies have been used to extend dramas onto multiple media outlets in addition to the television set and takes into account the shifting patterns of movement, by both texts and audiences, across distinct but interrelated media platforms." (Evans 2008, p. 1)

desire to be both actively committed to the story and surprised by storytelling twists (Mittell 2009).

Narrative complexity is built into seriality which, by its very nature, favours a particular text/*Rezipient* relationship. Ever since the development of modern popular culture in the 19th century, seriality has become a function of evolving commercial standards and narrative schemes. In his historical review of seriality, Wedel (2012) situates serial storytelling in the context processes of industrial production as well as the age of technological reproducibility. The purpose of the processes thus examined is to make the *Rezipient* engage with content over an extended time period. To this end, the creative industries have the following tools of serial storytelling at their disposal: infinite mode (i.e. cliffhangers[33]), memories, coherence, continuity and multiple narrative threads. It is a notable quality of virtually any television series that it "lacks a crucial element that has long been hailed as of supreme importance for a well-told story: an ending" (Mittell 2013, n.p.). Infinite storytelling undermines the *Rezipient*'s desire for narrative closure, although it still offers the carrot of closure in the future, e.g. through cliffhangers which "break the story down into meaningful chunks which are compelling emotionally within themselves but which gain greater urgency when read in relation to the other instalments of the story." (Jenkins 2009a, n.p.) Through multiple narrative threads and narrative gaps, serial storytelling can find a balance of self-containment and openness. Serial worlds as well as transmedia worlds often play host to multiple narrative threads which "share the same diegetic materials, themes, or events, [so] the individual threads can become tightly woven together into what we might call narrative braids" (Wolf 2012, p. 199). Wolf identifies a total of four narrative braiding types, differentiated by how tightly they are woven:

1) **No braiding**: There is no connection between narrative threads.
2) **Thematic braiding**: Parallel threads are thematically connected so that characters and their respective situations can be compared and contrasted, although there is no direct diegetic contact between threads.

[33] A cliffhanger is a plot device, mostly in fiction, which presents a character in a difficult situation or offers shocking revelations about them so as to make the audience want to return to the series (Meisler 1995).

3) **Diegetic braiding**: Multiple threads occupy the same location and include the same minor characters and other details, but there are no causal relationships between them.
4) **Causal braiding**: Threads with causal links, in which events in one thread have repercussions for others.

All of the narrative threads may not be of the same length. Given how complex serial and transmedia worlds are, their memories rely on narrative coherence and continuity (Bordwell 2009).

The tools of serial storytelling discussed can be used to analyse transmedia worlds, as an experient's journey is geared towards consuming content on all platforms. This means that the experient's interest has to be piqued in the long term as well. Wolf (2012, p. 247) argues that transmedia worlds encourage full immersion by being displayed in different media – film, television, games, comics, text, imagery, sound:

> Transmediality implies a kind of independence for its object; the more media windows we experience a world through, the less reliant that world is on the peculiarities of any one medium for its existence. Thus, transmediality also suggests the potential for the continuance of a world, in multiple instances and registers; and the more we see and hear of a transmedial world, the greater is the illusion of ontological weight that it has, and experiencing the world becomes more like the mediated experience of the Primary World.

The role of seriality in transmedia storytelling has not been researched in sufficient depth as an organising principle of transmedia component sequences:

> We can think of transmedia storytelling then as a hyperbolic version of the serial, where the chunks of meaningful and engaging story information have been dispersed not simply across multiple segments within the same medium, but rather across multiple media systems. There still is a lot we don't know about what will motivate consumers to seek out those other bits of information about the unfolding story – ie. What [sic] would constitute the cliffhanger in a transmedia narrative – and we still know little about how much explicit instruction they need to know these other elements exist or where to look for them. (Jenkins 2009a, n.p.)

If at all, transmedia storytelling and transmedia seriality have been researched in isolation. With regard to seriality, research has been done on mono-medial, television examples; most recently, scholars have focused on complex serial narration, quality television and auteur series, but have tended to conflate these issues.[34] Given that quality television series fuse complex narration and seriality, research on complex television seriality can be a springboard for the analysis of transmedia seriality. Against the background of this thesis' focus on the creation of German transmedia series, discourses on German quality television will now be analysed.

The debate about whether and how German quality television series could be produced is as old as the broadcasting history of American quality television series in Germany (Hahn 2013). This discourse is marked by three differences between the U.S. and Germany, in its focus on ratings, audiences and production culture. Differences in the significance of ratings and audiences in America and Germany have so far received hardly any scholarly attention at all. HBO, who laid the foundations for American quality television by finding a lucrative and dedicated audience for it (Mittell 2009), "has a very small audience of subscribers, much smaller than the equivalent audience for network quality drama, they happen to be the very upscale demographic willing to pay extra for more specialised and more highbrow fare" (Feuer 2007, p. 147). In contrast, public broadcasters in Germany are legally obliged to reach out to a mass market (Förster 2014).

Another difference is the audience itself: according to Volker Herres, the head of programming of German broadcaster ARD, German audiences are used to neither complex television storytelling on television nor horizontal storytelling (Nicodemus and Siemes 2010). Horizontal narration, according to Lang (2011), involves plotlines that continue for several episodes, e.g. touching on the private life of a detective,[35] whereas

[34] One reason why research on television texts is growing may simply be that television series are available on DVD, which enable close readings of discreet parts of text (Hills 2007). On DVD it is easy to select and isolate parts of text from within a larger context and to focus especially on their aesthetic value. Hills likens DVDs to written texts, arguing that they have much less in common with oral culture. DVD releases have worked to intensify fans' and audiences' para-social sense of connection with television producers and auteurs, a practice termed "mediatised watching-with" (ibid., p. 53) through DVD extras such as the commentary, which is designed to cement the position of producers of a show. In other words, audiences are co-watching or para-watching the series with media professionals. In this regard, DVD consumption is rather similar to watching a movie: the series text can be watched as a whole.

[35] Take *Luther* (2010-), for example, where the relationship with Alice – a suspect from the first episode – is developed over all three seasons.

vertical narration is marked by repetitive structures within each episode, e.g. the solving of a crime.[36] One defining feature of complex auteur-series is the dominance of horizontal narration (Lang 2011), which distinguishes them from traditional series with dominant vertical narration. Fröhlich's (2013) study on reasons for the lack of German quality television series arrives at similar conclusions, highlighting in particular the lack of a tradition of serial storytelling as it is present in America, the United Kingdom and France: German audiences are not used to serials where a single story is broken down into episodes, but to series whose episodes each tell a different story, such as crime fiction series, *Crime Scene*. Ralf Husmann, the producer of *Stromberg* [Stromberg] (2004-2012),[37] argues that German audiences do not appreciate storylines without closure, even in daily soaps (Förster 2014). In sharp contrast to commercial American serial television with its fondness of daytime soap operas, firmly established since as far back as the 1940s (Mittell 2009), German soap operas did not come about until the 1990s and are seen as the epitome of superficial entertainment (Förster 2014).

A further difference lies in the American and German ways of producing television. While America has instituted the writer's room, and exported this practice to Scandinavia (Redvall 2013), most German television series are written by a single author and directed by a single director, such as *Im Angesicht des Verbrechens* [In the Face of Crime] (2010) or *Crime Scene*. However, recent German quality television series such as *4 Blocks* (2017-), *Babylon Berlin* (2017-), *Bad Banks* (2018-), *Dark* (2017-), and *Skylines* (2019) were mainly developed in a writer's room.

Existing research on German series is exclusively concerned with *Crime Scene* and *Polizeiruf 110* [Police Call 110] (1971-) (Nesselhauf and Schleich 2015), meaning there is a lack of studies on other series (Krauß 2018a). New research needs to take account of the differences between German and American production cultures and their impact on the serial text. Any new examination of the German creative industries will involve a re-examination of media industry studies and its focus on the content and project development process.

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[36] An example of vertical narration is *Tatort* [Crime Scene] (1970-).

[37] *Stromberg* is the German adaptation of *The Office* (2001-2003).

4 Conclusions

This chapter approached the phenomena of transmedia storytelling and world-building from a composite perspective involving media studies and the study of literature. In both these academic disciplines, transmediality is actively being researched. The chapter brought the variety of different definitions of transmediality into clear view: While media studies mainly uses the term transmedia storytelling in order to speak about a story or world that is narrated across various media platforms, literary criticism, and specifically the field of narratology, discusses whether key concepts of narratology can be applied to the study of (narrative) media other than literature.

Although the two approaches result in different concepts and theories, they are both valuable for the purposes of the present study and its focus on the creation and narrative construction of German transmedia projects. The benefit of a media studies perspective is the lively debate over differences, if any, between transmedia storytelling, transmedia world-building and adjacent phenomena such as adaptation, crossmedia storytelling and branded storytelling. The ongoing process of defining transmedia storytelling seems very much aware of the fact that transmedia projects change over time. Additionally, media studies also focus on the world-building efforts of transmedia narratives by emphasising that their world is constituted by means other than a narrative, as narratology would seem to suggest. Both media studies and literary criticism, however, regard the world as mental image; the focus of both is almost exclusively on fictional worlds. Media studies examines features of a world whereas narratology tends to analyse connections between worlds. Possible worlds theory addresses the relationship between the actual and fictional worlds. Both fields of study acknowledge that those interacting with any received work of art or design are exercising their agency; the two disciplines examine the strategies pursued by readers, viewers and others, for example when they fill in gaps opened up in the works they receive.

Transmedial narratology makes a series of concepts and questions available which this study is able to draw on, including its focus on the nature of narrative, supposedly universal features of narrative and the problems of media blindness and media relativism. Narratology provides useful theories and tools, such as possible worlds theory and

Genette's theory of transtextuality. These can be brought to bear on other theories from media studies which help contextualise the topic at hand.

This chapter has revealed four main areas in which research is needed:

1) German transmedia;
2) non-fiction transmedia;
3) transmedia seriality;
4) qualitative in-depth analysis of a whole transmedia universe.

All four will now be addressed in this thesis.

III MEDIA INDUSTRY STUDIES ON CONTENT AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1 Introduction

Transmedia storytelling has implications for both the text and the production process (Scolari 2009). As a transmedial story universe expands through different media with different narrative capabilities, new forms of collaboration are required. As a consequence, creators from different industries – including, depending on the media platforms involved, film, television, comics, books and video games – have to work together, starting as early as the project development process. This thesis argues that the entire production process, from the very beginning of development, is different in transmedia projects from mono-medium projects such as film, a television show or a novel.

As this study aims to examine the content and project development process as part of the production of German transmedia projects, it needs to take account of research undertaken in media industry studies, as defined by Krauß and Loist (2018, p. 8-9; translation S.R.) who draw out what sets it apart from production studies:

> In our view they [media industry studies] constitute an interdisciplinary field which transcends individual media and in which a wide spectrum of media industries is implicated. In addition to media production itself, the focus may be on earlier stages such as content development, or later ones like the film

> festival circuit which constitutes a bridge between production, release and distribution and thus occupies a complex position of its own within the film industry.

Krauß and Loist argue that, uniquely, media industry studies offer the tools for an interdisciplinary analysis of both the production of media content and the content development process. Taken together, studies addressing both the creation and production process of transmedia projects are few and far between. Clarke (2013) is a laudable exception, examining the industrial, organizational, and aesthetic forms of so-called tentpole TV.[38] Following a "production of culture approach" (Clarke 2013, p 18) he analyses the relationship of industry and textual production combining different data: popular and trade press as well as interviews with professionals affiliated with tentpole TV, plus textual data from analyses of TV programming. Clarke (2013, p. 18) argues that this combination enables an "understanding of texts not simply as the results of a set of pre-given conditions [production context], but as being in conversation with these conditions, either butting against them or participating within them, but always implicitly commenting upon them." This dialogue between the production context and the final text mirrors Eco's poetics approach this study is based on. It is not only this poetics approach which is fruitful for this study but also the analysed creative strategies of tie-in-novels adopted by its writers. Given that tie-in-novels are not part of the official narrative canon functioning as cross-promotion for TV as the core medium Clarke's (2009, 2013) analysis of tie-in-novels uncovers the following set of practices of its writers: First, the writers specify a specific time frame in order to avoid repetition. Secondly, they are seeding the past through character memory. Thirdly, the writers use echo characters, i.e. new characters based on preexisting ones to avoid disruptive effects. Fourthly, they use echo themes which lie between repetition and difference. This set of practices demonstrates the use of dead-end continuity "where narrative elements can be tied to the on-air series, but can never be tied from transmedia text back from the ancillary to the core." (Clarke 2013, p. 111) It is Clarke's (2013) merit to examine the labor of tentpole TV itself, and

[38] According to Clarke (2013, p. 1) tentpole TV is "a recent trend in network television programming" that experiments with creative forms including transmedia as expanded entertainment across multiple media platforms.

this thesis will analyse how these strategies work in both true and native transmedia contexts.

Bozic (2018), another exception, focuses primarily on the creation of U.S. independent transmedia projects as well as the expansion of narrative structures. The study draws on in-depth interviews with American creators and close textual analysis. There are no studies at all on the creation of German transmedia projects although there are some, which will be useful for this thesis, on the changing role of the (transmedia) producer and on transmedia production manuals. Media industry studies focus mainly on the film and television industry; since the core element of many transmedia projects is television, research on television production culture, especially television series production, provides valuable insights into the management of narrative complexity when coherence has to be maintained as well. The following section focuses on this issue, and is followed by an analysis of transmedia production manuals.

2 Production Culture in the Film and Television Industries

Production culture means "how media producers make culture".
(Mayer, Banks and Caldwell 2009, p. 2)

This section examines how creators in the film and television industries experience and perceive their own work. Its starting point are research studies undertaken in production studies which deal with the two industries. Production culture is taken to mean "how media producers make culture" (Mayer *et al.* 2009, p. 2). According to Mayer (2009), production studies is concerned with workers and their practices, and relates them to wider issues of politics, economics and culture. Production studies as research into the people who make films or television programmes has never been a major part of film or television studies (Davies 2006; Krauß and Loist 2018), partly of course because both production studies and media industry studies are relatively new fields (Mann 2009). Significantly, there has been a growing interest in production culture on the part of film and television studies researchers (Krauß and Loist 2018). This section discusses key debates in production studies pertaining to the film and television industries in order to show how the present study contributes to ongoing work in media industry studies.

Recent debates in production studies go back to disagreements about what production studies even is. One side of the argument conceives of production studies as the study of working practices with a focus on the role of the individual agent within contemporary media industries (Freeman 2016). Examples include Todd Gitlin's *Inside Primetime* (1983) which examines decision-making processes in American television; Newcomb and Alley's *The Producer's Medium* (1983) and its interviews with producers; and Robert Kubey's *Creating Television* (2004), a collection of interviews with key players in American television analysing "how television creators' biographies are intimately linked to their work" (Kubey 2004, p. 4). Most studies taking this approach discuss codes and rules of production processes and regard production studies essentially as a type of authorship studies. Another focus is on how people decide on the intended meaning of texts created in an industrial context (Davies 2006). Caldwell (2008), for example, examines the cultural practices and belief systems of film and video production workers in Los Angeles.

Mann (2009), Redvall (2013) and Krauß (2018a, 2018b) as well as Weiß and Gößler (2014) look at the function of the showrunner in the U.S., Denmark and Germany. With a view to the United States, Mann (2009, p. 100) compares the showrunner to a brand manager at Coca-Cola or Ford, as they have "taken a leadership role in helping brand the show and the network" in response to changes in the media landscape brought about by the Internet. Redvall (2013) argues that Danish broadcaster DR's concept of 'one vision' guiding the production process is the reason behind the recent success of serials from Denmark. 'One vision' is similar to the American model of the showrunner who, from the pilot all the way down to the final episode, is in charge of communicating the series' vision. While being responsible for the creative side of the series, they are involved in production, too. Therefore, Krauß (2018a, 2018b) defines the showrunner as an author/producer hybrid who most commonly spearheads the writer's room. Clarke (2013, p. 13) emphasises that the showrunner is not only responsible for the script and editing of episodes "but also for the maintenance of an entire textual world. […] Such work, however, necessitates the existence of a more aggressive breed of creative managers and middlemen to oversee all the expanding manifestations of the core series."

Redvall (2013) is one of the few scholars to investigate production practices beyond the American market (by comparing the Danish to the American market) and

focuses on collaboration within the creative work undertaken in the television industry. Others include Krauß (2018a, 2018b) and Weiß and Gößler (2014) who address the production of German quality television series, notably the German way of deploying a showrunner, and German as compared to American writer's rooms. They argue that the German television industry does not provide ideal conditions for quality and innovation to emerge. Based on interviews with authors, producers and editors as well as observations of training workshops, Krauß (2018a, 2018b) sheds light on how difficult it is to establish the concepts of a showrunner and a writer's room in the German television series landscape. This is largely due to tighter content development budgets and precarious employment conditions for authors. Krauß (2018a) argues that German television series production culture is characterised by power hierarchies which lead directly to authors' precarious positions. In many cases, clearly discernible forms of agency are missing (Krauß 2018b) and German public broadcasting bureaucracy stands in the way of anything similar to the 'one vision' principle. In fact, the German public broadcasting system leads to cacophony rather than the principles and values behind both the writer's room and the underlying 'one vision' approach represented by the showrunner. Weiß and Gößler (2014) describe the American writer's room as guided by efficiency and playful creativity. Both these qualities are said to be lacking in German television series production. American efficiency is enabled by the writer's room's beat system, which determines the beats within each act of an episode. The beat system is the dramaturgical device behind every American quality series, structuring both the entire series and each episode dramaturgically and enabling creative freedom, as Weiß and Gößler have been able to demonstrate. By contrast, the German quality television series industry is characterised by individual authors' idiosyncrasies which are often found to obstruct horizontal serial narration (Krauß 2018a, 2018b). German weeklies and dailies are, however, based on the beat system, and they do use a writer's room. By and large, German television series production is aimed at creative freedom and productive collaboration; the latter, in particular, invites comparisons with transmedia production practices, where the 'one vision' principle matters most, as it enables narrative coherence across all storyworlds.

In the European context, Bennett and Medrado (2013) examine multi-platform production culture in the UK by focusing especially on the relationship between public

service media (PSM) and independent production companies. Analysing the content creation of multi-platform texts, they examined the collaboration between digital and television production process. Based on over 100 interviews with television and digital producers as well as four participant observation placements in television and digital media production companies and two productions as case studies, their study reveals two aspects that are relevant for the creation process of transmedia projects. First, the examined independent production companies had an ethos of wanting to 'make a difference' that "forms a 'compact' between broadcast institution and the independent sector, where a strong investment in public service as a cultural and economic form exists." (ibid., p. 106) Creating for PSM functions as motivation. Secondly, collaboration between digital and television production cultures is described as difficult due to differences in language: "As a senior executive explained, the challenge of integrating multi-platform production into an established broadcast television production culture is one of ensuring that everyone speaks the same language" (ibid., p. 110). The independent production company's strategy was to involve multi-platform producers early, through development meetings, and in "equal number to their TV counterparts," and to "value […] these voices" (ibid.). Besides language, the production process was recognized as different:

> In particular, the linear production timelines of television – from pre-production planning to shooting, editing and postproduction through to transmission (TX) date – rarely matched up with the iterative modes of digital production – where developing, user testing, releasing software, getting feedback, reversioning and re-releasing are part of a longer production process that will often extend past TX date to build a community and dialogue around the project. (ibid., p. 108)

Bennett and Medrado's study is an exception in that it focuses on the content creation process in the television industry, and the creation of multi-platform texts. Results from the UK need to be re-assessed in the context of a study on the German television and transmedia context.

As far as European production studies are concerned, only one study analyses a German transmedia serial and its production practices: Stollfuß (2018) argues that the production process of *About:Kate* is characterised by what he calls 'participatory

production practice'. This mode of practice links television up with social media. The approach adopted by *About:Kate* to social media is noticeably different from earlier strategies favoured by public service broadcasters (PSB):

> *About:Kate* constitutes a novelty in the German PSB landscape by allowing audiences to become 'prosumers' of content that occurs as *part of the primary text* of the series on the TV screen. The inclusion of audiences in the sphere of professional practices seems to be key to the process of rearranging television for a networked and mobile media culture. (Stollfuß 2018, p. 38, emphasis in original)

This new approach is characterised by user-generated content forming an integral part of the television series. Integrating this content into producer-generated content during post-production raises questions around efficiency and control. Stollfuß deserves praise for dedicating himself to German transmedia serial production, although he mainly focuses on the PSB's strategy and less on the actual creation and production practice or collaboration – a missed opportunity given the challenges posed by user-generated content in transmedia projects. Collaboration is, however, at the heart of O'Connell's (2014) work which makes the case for screenwriting as intrinsically collaborative and thereby different from novel writing. The screenwriter is depicted as "part of a complex process that starts with the work of the writer but has a life well after the work is complete, increasingly in a collaborative way" (ibid., p. 114).

Although screenwriting as such is collaborative, collaboration and authorship are different in media franchising contexts, as Johnson's (2013) study shows. Johnson argues for a definition of franchise authorship that accounts for collective authorship and shared creativity, which is distinct from "traditional models of authorship that understand creativity solely in relation to individuals" (ibid., p. 108-9). His study concentrates on collaboration in media franchising contexts in the U.S., which is different from (German) transmedia contexts, but there are similarities concerning the creation of narrative worlds. Johnson's findings on world-building in particular can be applied to transmedial contexts, because he considers a narrative world as shared creative context: "What distinguishes world-building in media franchising from that in 'traditional' media works is the degree to which worlds, once built, become shared among creative stakeholders working in and across multiple production sites" (ibid., p. 108). He therefore uses the term 'world-

sharing' rather than 'world-building,' and this may be a useful perspective to adopt in the context of the creation of transmedial worlds, because different creators from various industries create one transmedial world, sharing the one vision of this world.

A rules-based system is crucial for shared world-building. Strikingly, Johnson (2013) highlights what he calls 'overdesigned' worlds in media franchising. A large amount of details of these worlds was created during the content development process, but only some of these details appear on screen: "Although few of these technical details would be included in scripts (…), the world was overdesigned in detail beyond what appeared on screen" (ibid., p. 116). This overdesigning of worlds can be regarded as a creation strategy, which makes sense in a media franchising context because the whole (franchise) world is created by successive stages of extension. This may take place over many years or even decades, notably in *Star Wars*, and throughout this time the overdesigned world with all its rules and details is a helpful reference point which enables creators to conceive and add new pieces to the franchise world which fit with earlier elements.[39] While the creation process of franchised media is different, this thesis asks if German creators still use similar world-sharing strategies because the reception of a transmedia universe is broadly similar.

Taken together, these studies either focus on one profession, e.g. showrunner, screenwriter or producer, or on one specific television show and its production process, e.g. *About:Kate*. Even the more recent studies on the role of the individual have been carried out with a view to context, in line with Freeman's (2016) notion of media industry studies as the process of understanding creative contexts. Their important contribution lies in the examination of individual professions and their respective responsibilities. As Freeman (ibid., p. 80) succinctly puts it, "The assertion of authorship is essentially an assertion of responsibility: Who is primarily responsible for the creation of this text or practice?"

The other main area within production studies aims to capture "the ways that power operates locally through media production to reproduce social hierarchies and inequalities at the level of daily interactions." (Mayer 2009, p. 15) Zoellner (2016), for

[39] Johnson (2013, p. 107) characterises franchising "as a balance between sameness and difference, between source DNA and potential elaboration of it." He describes franchising culture as dynamic, collaborative and innovative as well as repetitive.

instance, investigates the uneven power relationship between broadcasters and independent production companies. Studies of this kind pursue questions about the influence of economics and ideology on both the production process and the text (Davies 2006).

Fast and Jansson's (2019) study on transmedia work use a distinct approach to transmedia. The title of their critical analysis might be misleading in so far as they understand the term transmedia as a social condition – the extension of working conditions which are media-saturated already. Their analysis focuses on the market of digitalised work in general. Although their study's focus and transmedia terminology is different to this study's approach, some conditions and aspects of the digital transmedia work market are quite similar to producing transmedia projects. They argue that transmedia work is characterised by precarious freedom, flexibility, social recognition, dreams of self-realization, work overload and notions of availability that transcend the boundaries between work and private life. Given that digital media cause these conditions, it can be argued that transmedia creators have similar 'transmedia' work situations. It is Fast and Jansson's merit that they focus on the Swedish transmedia work market; this study aims to provide another European focus by examining German 'transmedia' working conditions in the creative industry.

Following this brief overview of work done in production studies the remainder of this section will discuss two key discoursive preoccupations found in production culture and media industry studies: the issue of access, and the industry's image of itself which one might liken to a myth. Both topics will be shown to be closely linked.

Insights into the media industry can be gained only on the basis of some form of access (Krauß and Loist 2018). Access problems are discussed first and foremost with regard to Hollywood. Ortner (2009, p. 176) describes Hollywood as a delocalised American community that draws a clear line between inside and out: "the products of Hollywood – movies and the larger world of cultural mythology of which movies partake – are all about illusions, and the boundaries around the production process, and especially around actors, are important for maintaining those illusions." Hollywood's fear of being misrepresented has led to barriers between academia and industry. National differences in industry culture notwithstanding, the film industry by its very nature gives rise to

illusion and myth. As a consequence, what has been said about access to Hollywood is the case in other countries too.

From a researcher's perspective, access issues can be addressed through either participant observation or interviews (Ortner 2009). The problem of access has been discussed in connection with suspicions raised against the objectivity of certain discourse participants. Krauß and Loist (2018) argue for a balance between, on the one hand, questions predicated on sector knowledge or an insider's perspective and, on the other hand, a (self-)critical outsider's perspective. In general, there are three factors which can facilitate access to the film and television industry. The first is interest, as Ortner (2009, p. 183) has shown with regard to agreements to be interviewed:

> I said earlier that I thought that the important factor in someone agreeing to talk to me was 'interest,' either practical (not much here) or intellectual. And as I broke through and began doing interviews, it seemed clear to me that that was the main reason people were doing this.

Interest is likely to be based on trust, which is the second factor. Freeman (2016) argues that the barrier between academia and industry can be broken down by trust. Thirdly, access may be a matter of networking and ethics which, depending on how they are played, may also help to establish trust. The fear of being misquoted can be tackled on the level of ethics by allowing interviewees to see a draft of the interview before publishing (Caldwell 2009).

The fear of being misinterpreted is strongly correlated with the second discoursive preoccupation, around self-image and myth. Caldwell (2008, p. 2) argues that 'industrial reflexivity' should be seen as a form of local cultural expression:

> Although in this book I examine both style and marketing dimensions, I also argue that industrial reflexivity needs to be understood as forms of local cultural negotiation and expression as well, for the lived production communities that create films, programs, 'making-ofs', behind-the-scenes docs, DVD bonus tracks, show-biz reports, and cross-media film/ TV franchises.

Caldwell offers explanations for the various forms of the industry's attempts at self-representation, all of which invite audience members to look behind the scenes. Consequently, off-screen production forms such as making of's and DVD comments are

in and of themselves a type of local cultural practice. Much like the on-screen culture of films and television shows, this is transformed into myth (Mayer *et al*. 2009). Mayer *et al*. (ibid., p. 1) point out that, quite frequently, researchers come "to know about media producers and their work, ironically, through the representation they make." This can only mean that off-screen practices can be analysed as texts "in much the same way that a film might be analysed textually" (Freeman 2016, p. 119), taking into account, of course, that all texts are "constructions, versions on the real that may serve different roles in a production studies project, from corporate branding and spin, to the personal reflections of an outsider looking in." (Mayer *et al*. 2009, p. 6) In fact, off-screen texts should not be regarded as reporting the truth; much like film and television texts they are "neither fact not [sic] fiction, not right nor wrong" (Freeman 2016, p. 141).

Research discussed in this section has yielded valuable insights into the role of film and television producer, particularly in the U.S. and the UK, and into the production process more generally. Here, too, though, there is a lack of research into German production culture and its script and project development processes. The present study aims to fill this gap.

3 Transmedia Production Manuals and the Role of the Transmedia Producer

> A Transmedia Producer credit is given to the person(s) responsible for a significant portion of a project's long-term planning, development, production, and/or maintenance of narrative continuity across multiple platforms, and creation of original storylines for new platforms.
>
> (Producers Guild of America [ca. 2010], n.p.)

The film and television industries have given rise to a number of script writing manuals.[40] Setting out to show how a 'good' film or television show is written, they explain drama

[40] These include Syd Field's *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (1979), Robert McKee's *Story* (1997), Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat!* (2005), John Truby's *The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller* (2007), Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (2007).

and narrative structure. Given that transmedia projects differ in their narrative structure from mono-medium stories, these manuals are of little use to them (although aspects such as character development may be similar). Three manuals have found particular critical acclaim; all of them have been written by producers. Portuguese transmedia writer, director and producer Nuño Bernardo, who also works in the UK, is the author of two manuals on transmedia creation and production: *The Producer's Guide to Transmedia: How to Develop, Fund, Produce and Distribute Compelling Stories Across Multiple Platforms* (2011), and *Transmedia 2.0. How to Create an Entertainment Brand Using a Transmedial Approach to Storytelling* (2014). British transmedia producer and consultant Robert Pratten is the author of *Getting Started in Transmedia Storytelling: A Practical Guide for Beginners* (2011). American producer Jeff Gomez shares his experiences in transmedia production in "Die Storyworld ist dein Gesamtkunstwerk, dein Publikum ihr Mitgestalter" [The storyworld is your total work of art, your audience its co-creators], a chapter in *Story: Now. Ein Handbuch für digitales Erzählen* [Story: now. A handbook for digital storytelling] (2016). The following section examines similarities beyond their authorship by critically discussing the value of these books as evidence for this study's argument that the script and development process informs the production of transmedia projects in its entirety.

First, what is the role of the transmedia producer? From a producer's perspective transmedia storytelling means the systematic planning of the whole story across different platforms (Dowd *et al*. 2015; Mikos 2016). In 2010, the Producers Guild of America created a credit for Transmedia Producers, defining a transmedia producer as follows:

> A Transmedia Producer credit is given to the person(s) responsible for a significant portion of a project's long-term planning, development, production, and/or maintenance of narrative continuity across multiple platforms, and creation of original storylines for new platforms. Transmedia producers also create and implement interactive endeavors to unite the audience of the property with the canonical narrative and this element should be considered as valid qualification for credit as long as they are related directly to the narrative presentation of a project.
> Transmedia Producers may originate with a project or be brought in at any time during the long-term rollout of a project in order to analyze, create or facilitate the life of that project and may be responsible for all or only part of the content of the project.

> Transmedia Producers may also be hired by or partner with companies or entities, which develop software and other technologies and who wish to showcase these inventions with compelling, immersive, multi-platform content. (Producers Guild of America [ca. 2010], n.p.)

Accordingly, transmedia producers are in charge of long-term planning, including the development and production of the transmedia project. One of their tasks is to oversee and safeguard narrative continuity and the story's coherence. These are the same functions as those of a film or television producer, although they may be considered more difficult to achieve when a story is told across different media platforms. Mikos (2016, p. 48) argues that media convergence has a profound impact on production:

> From the producers' point of view, this means that they must try to address the viewers' various use habits with different offers that refer to the same product. The development of digital and mobile media has thus given rise to new ways of distributing content on different media platforms in order to reach audiences through different forms of media use.

The main challenge for transmedia storytelling is, arguably, to ensure that every piece of the story is created as a recognisable part of one and the same storyworld, a challenge calling for a "unified author" (Evans 2011, p. 31) of all transmedia texts. Does this mean a single author or producer is needed, or can authorial coherence be achieved in other ways as well? Lomax (2018, p. 47-8) argues, with reference to *Star Wars,* the most successful transmedia franchise, that transmedia storytelling lies between single authorship and team-based collaboration:

> While team-structured collaborative authorship is an important aspect of transmedia storytelling, this does not preclude the potential to identify a transtextual presence of singular authorship. Therefore, the expansive transmedia history of the Star Wars franchise demonstrates the need and potential to conceive of transmedia texts not as either entirely auteur-driven or team-based, but as a site of dialogical relations between singular notions of authorship and collaborative creative practices.

However, *Star Wars*' success at world-building goes back to George Lucas' "'legendary' insistence on authorial control" (Lomax 2018, p. 35). Lomax (ibid.) describes Lucas' presence within the *Star Wars* franchise as "transtextual authorship, in which the singular author is both in control of and subject to the multifarious and dynamic textual relations of transmedia storytelling." Wolf (2012, p. 268) also highlights changes in authorship around transmedia, which he calls transauthorial: "What has changed, however, is the idea of the author as a lone figure producing a work in isolation, for whom influences and potential consequences play no role in the shaping of a work." Many transmedial worlds are 'too much' to take on for a single producer; support through employees and freelancers is needed. Somewhat surprisingly, Wolf's list of authorship forms and functions does not touch on collaboration although it is, surely, required in both creation and production for transauthorial teams to succeed. Besides looking after coherence, the transmedia producer must be qualified to identify aspects of a story that are best served by the strengths of a particular medium (Dowd *et al*. 2015). Industry and scholars tend to agree that a story is not the same if it is told in a different medium – but retelling the same story in a different medium is not even the point of a transmedia project. As has been amply shown, every story cannot be told in every medium, as some elements work best, for example, as a book, film or comic. Some elements will, however, work regardless of medium, and transmedia producers have to be able to understand and shape them. Furthermore, as Dowd *et al*. (2015, p. 37) argue, each "medium lays the groundwork for the introduction of the next element and the next and the next." Transmedia producers need to envisage a story playing out across media platforms in order to be able to maintain coherence and plan ahead. Strictly speaking, their vision is essentially the same as the core narrative, tied not to any medium but flowing as the undercurrent of the entire transmedia project (Dowd *et al*. 2015). Another name for this core element is mythology which, according to Gomez (2016), determines story rules as documented in the 'story bible,' one of the essential tools during the story development process, and serves as the basis for the strategy by which the transmedia story is developed across platforms.

The authors of all manuals agree that the experient's participation is a key element of transmedia storytelling, because "engagement with each successive media heightens the audience' [sic] understanding, enjoyment and affection for the story" (Pratten 2011, p. 1). What does this participation look like? Bernardo (2014) casts participation as a

lean-forward mode of personal interaction, arguing that transmedia storytelling methods are a great way of approaching the development of immersive and engaging properties. However, participation does not necessarily mean direct interaction, and not every platform can accommodate interactive storytelling. Moreover, the aim of the experient's participation is to experience the story – and the producer must be able to imagine and anticipate this experience. Bernardo (ibid.) goes as far as saying that people do not buy content but experiences.

Anticipating experiences means thinking about the way in which experients engage with different media and different parts of the transmedial story, i.e. about habits and behaviour. Transmedia producers need to find a balance between lean-forward and lean-back elements, inviting "participation without overwhelming them [i.e. experients]." (ibid., p. 12) The same, as well as the overall relevance of experiences, is surely true for mono-medium stories. But in a transmedia context, the experient's participation has implications for world-building: The transmedia producer's aim must be to make experients access content on all media platforms. Producers have to stimulate the desire of any experient to find out more about the transmedia universe (Dowd *et al*. 2015). Manuals are strangely silent about strategies available to producers designing an experient's journey across platforms, and what journey points may look like in the text. This lack of advice is puzzling since, as has been shown, narrative openness is a crucial element of transmedia stories and worlds, which producers and creators need to shape.

Evans' (2020) recent study on engagement in transmedia culture follows a different approach, combining industry and experient perspectives on engagement with screen content in transmedia culture. It is based on interviews with creators and focus groups with experients. Evans argues that recognising the salient properties of each medium is important to the creators interviewed. She defines the role of the transmedia producer as follows:

> The role of transmedia producers, consultants and marketers is precisely to make use of the different affordances of each technological platform and the texts that are constructed for them. The ability to recognize, understand, interrogate, analyse and create for differences between media forms was described as a key feature of this role. (Evans 2020, p. 28)

Interestingly, medium specificities are not at all important to experients who experience transmedial content:

> Transmedia practitioners distinguish themselves from other workers in the creative industries through their ability to move between specific skill sets that have traditionally been identified with individual media. For audiences, however, the distinctiveness of individual media falls away. (…) The differences between how practitioners and audiences in particular discuss engagement in the broadest sense demonstrate how understanding engagement requires thinking both medium specifically *and* medium agnostically. (Evans 2020, p. 34, emphasis in original)

This view makes sense in so far as recipients want to experience a transmedial story across all media platforms require smooth media platforms; transmedia creators need the media-specific knowledge that allows them to provide for an uninterrupted transmedia experience. Changes of media platform can be regarded as engagement. Evans (2020) has presented a flexible and precise model of engagement with four components, arguing that engagement is comprised of a type of receptive, interactive, textual or peritextual behavior, a form of emotional, cognitive or physical response to screen content, costs (financial, time, attention), and value to the industry as an economic or discursive commodity. Evans' contribution is valuable in that it focuses on the creators' understanding of transmedia engagement in the UK, the U.S. and Canada. Generating engagement is part of the content development process. This study will shed light on the German creators' perspective on transmedial engagement.

In their writing and production manuals, the authors offer guidance on key components of the creative process. They more or less agree on the following steps: The iterative and non-linear nature of the development process (Pratten 2011) notwithstanding, development starts with the story and with compelling characters. Bernardo (2014) finds that characters are more important in transmedia than mono-medium stories on account of the transmedial story's narrative complexity. Creating the story means setting out a clearly defined storyworld and documenting it in a story bible. After that, other steps can be taken in any order: Define your target group and get some real-time feedback; identify the media platforms involved with a view to maintaining

consistency and platform turn-taking; define a business model and create a distribution timeline. These are steps for a transmedia producer to take; they pertain to true transmedia projects as defined above.

For the purposes of understanding the initial steps of story and character development and the choice of media platforms, little can be inferred from the steps described in the three manuals. Furthermore, the manuals give the impression that a transmedia story can be produced and created by one person alone. This is surely not the case, as the script and project development process is a collaborative undertaking involving many creators from different disciplines. The manuals do not provide answers to outstanding questions raised earlier: How do German creators experience the interdisciplinary collaboration process? What are challenges confronted by transmedia creators as they develop a story across media platforms? How does collaboration work across industries? Who is responsible for what? What are the specific tasks and responsibilities of a transmedia producer and of transmedia authors? How can the immense narrative complexity of transmedia stories be tackled? And how can narrative coherence be maintained in a collaborative process across media platforms with different styles and narrative capabilities? None of these questions has found a satisfying answer in the existing literature; all will be addressed below.

One thing to be said for the manuals is that they successfully explore the creation of transmedia stories against the background of an increasingly fragmented media landscape. Their focus on the Anglo-American market makes them foreground commercial brands (how they are built and grown), an issue which is much less relevant in other (European) markets. Significantly, the one major study about the German market (Eick 2014) sets itself up as a guidebook for storytelling in the digital era. While Eick does not specifically examine transmedia projects, his contribution to the issues discussed here emerges from interviews with German professionals, including authors, editors, game designers, directors, lecturers, journalists and producers. Bringing theoretical literature on digital storytelling into dialogue with statements made by professionals, he arrives at the view that transmedia storytelling is more interesting for creators than experients. Eick contends that digital storytelling requires new forms of production and creation and that, therefore, established production processes have to be reassessed. Postulating a dichotomy of old/analogue and new/digital worlds, he finds that experients

in the latter are more active, and that this shift has implications for authorship: Sender-receiver models of communication are becoming wholly obsolete in the digital era. Eick does not directly address the impact of this change on the process of creating projects in the digital age, but he does at least provide a structured account of this process:

1) Formulate the project and its aim.
2) Define the storyworld.
3) Define the transmedia world.
4) Produce.

Interestingly, Eick maintains that transmedia projects should not be started from a written script but created like a game, by determining rules and designing the setting. The two main challenges, according to Eick, are the project's complexity and the experient's changes of media platform, which need to be smooth and enjoyable. Eick is of the view that links between platforms, i.e. the transmedia design, is the pivotal part of an experient's interaction with the project and should thus be at the centre of the creators' and producers' minds.

4 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that transmedia projects require new forms of collaboration and a transmedia producer who can operate as a "unified author" (Evans 2011, p. 31) satisfying complex demands. The review of work undertaken in production studies and media industry studies revealed two main foci of research: individual creators such as producers, authors, writers, actors etc. and their experience on the job, and power relationships. Production studies have so far paid very little attention to the German creative industries and have tended to shy away from research into transmedia practices. It has, however, yielded useful results with regard to questions of access – to Hollywood – and the related issue of the sector's image of itself; both these themes impact on the way in which the industry can – and has to – be examined, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

SECTION B METHODOLOGY

IV RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1 Requirement of a Coherent Set of Methods

> [T]heoretical understandings of the actual methodological processes for studying media industries remain vague.
> (Freeman 2016, p. 6-7)

It is the aim of this study coherently to analyse German transmedia storytelling and world-building in all its complexity. A transmedia universe as expanded across all its various media platforms is considered a narrative whole. An analysis of this transmedial narrative whole requires the same methodological tools across platforms; in other words, a coherent methodological approach with tools that are able to examine different media within the same narrative context is needed. This does not preclude a mixed-method approach – in fact, a mix of methods is exactly what is needed, as this will make it possible for the complexity of transmedia to come into view. In addition to the public-facing results of a transmedia project, this study examines the process of its creation. This is possible only on the basis of data gathered from people involved in the process. Consequently, this study combines "written sources" (Stokes 2003) (i.e. transmedia series) and sources obtained through interaction with people (i.e. creators of transmedia series); the interdisciplinary approach adopted by this study proceeds from the assumption that text can be read as a form of data, and vice versa. This study considers two different types of text: the existing transmedia texts of German transmedia series and, secondly, interviews with their creators. These interviews have been conducted as part of the research behind the present study.

Earlier work in media studies, the study of literature and media industry studies have failed to come up with a viable method for the analysis of transmedia series. Media industry studies lacks any kind of clear and mature methodological approach, and "theoretical understandings of the actual methodological processes for studying media industries remain vague" (Freeman 2016, p. 4). There have been calls for a critical re-evaluation of existing practices in media industry studies, including the concrete proposal

that a "critical media industries approach is a multi-method, multiperspectival approach to studying media industries, bringing together a variety of different methods as part of a holistic analysis, paying equal consideration to economic, corporate, and discursive contexts." (ibid., p. 6-7) One piece of the puzzle would be for media industry studies to acknowledge that one of its primary methods of investigation is the use of case studies, which would enable the discipline to further clarify its approach to this practice.

The present chapter demonstrates how, based on a rather patchy landscape of existing, disjointed methods this study tries to forge a more unified approach able to address transmedia universes in all their complexity; case studies are the methodological centrepiece of this endeavour. The focus on case studies is motivated by the realisation that they are an approach to research, rather than a tool (Lamnek 2010). The second section of this chapter discusses this notion in detail, outlining the strengths and opportunities available to the present study's project through a case studies approach. Subsequent sections will go on to evaluate methodological tools which can be built into a case studies approach, i.e. qualitative textual analysis based on possible worlds theory and other literary theories, and semi-structured expert interviews. The remainder of this chapter will put this new methodological framework into context.

In short, this is an interdisciplinary study combining methods and tools from literary criticism, media studies, media industry studies, philosophy and the social sciences to form a methodologically coherent approach to research.

2 Case Studies as an Approach to Qualitative Research

2.1 Possibilities and Challenges of a Case Study Approach

> [A] case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
> (Yin 1994, p. 13)

This study's research questions – how to create a German transmedia series and how to construct a German transmedia serial world – call for qualitative methods. The interrogative 'how' in and of itself introduces questions which are inherently part of a qualitative paradigm of research whose attention is directed towards the ways in which transmedia story universes are narratively constructed and transmedia universes, developed. This study does not test pre-existing hypotheses, as many quantitative studies do. Instead, it is inductive, adopting an exploratory approach that acknowledges the nature of transmedia studies as an emerging field of research. Arguably, qualitative research proceeds from a recognition of principles of openness, of research as process, of the necessity of an ongoing reconsideration of research practices, of flexibility and, finally, of research as a form of communication in its own right (Wegener and Mikos 2005). All of these are distinctive features of qualitative, rather than quantitative research. Generally speaking, qualitative research is used across many areas of scholarly enquiry to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and motivations, and aims to uncover ongoing trends in a sector or group's thoughts and opinions. Simply put, qualitative research may justifiably be associated with depth (Lamnek 2010). In its analysis of the process of creating a German transmedia series and of the series' narration process, this study subscribes to a theory of poetics rooted in Eco's (1979) notion that poetics is the combination of a (literary) work and its creative practice. Eco's two-pronged concept clearly mirrors and thus suits the twin questions put forward by the present study.

Thus, the study's poetics-based, holistic theoretical approach makes it possible to combine very different sources and types of texts in one research project and to analyse them from various different angles. The study's main research question requires a strategy that investigates the object of research within its real-life context, i.e. the German transmedia series production industry. Framing the object of research as a case study makes it easy to bring a relatively broad spectrum of methods into fruitful dialogue with one another while acknowledging the nature of the objects of research as "complex phenomena within their context" (Baxter and Jack 2008, p. 544). More precisely speaking, a qualitative case study approach aims to generate a holistic and real-world perspective (Yin 1994) of the phenomena under consideration. All the relevant dimensions of these phenomena are brought into one and the same picture. As the focus of a mixed-methods research design, case studies come with a set of great advantages

(Lamnek 2010): a case studies approach allows for the combination of different methodological tools, inviting a holistic approach through which parts of the object of research come into view which a single method may not be able to grasp. Furthermore, assumptions inherent in one method can be scrutinised through the premises of another, making it less likely that basic methodological errors go unchecked and lead to findings being spoilt by carelessness and inaccuracy. One might say, simply but pointedly, that an advantage of a mixed-methods approach is that more knowledge is created (Flick 2008).

In striving for a holistic perspective and incorporating different methodologies, the case studies approach is employed to yield more complex results than a single method could provide. The main benefit of a case study is its ability to examine a given phenomenon in its totality and, thereby, gain extensive results (Lamnek 2010; Witzel 1982). In this sense it is the purpose of a case study to comprehensively "catch the complexity" (Stake 1995, p. xi) of the activities, decisions and human interactions present in the object of research. The three aspects just mentioned – activities, decisions, human interactions – are precisely those which this study aims to discover on the textual level of transmedia serial storytelling. Decisions pertain to the why and how of options chosen or rejected by the creators; human interactions should be detected over the course of the entire collaborative process. As it is the aim of this study to analyse the complex relationship between transmedia serial text (Eco's 'work') and the process of creating a transmedia universe (Eco's 'creative practice'), in-depth, intensive scrutiny is necessary; a case study approach permits focusing on individual cases and the interplay between the different dimensions inherent in them.

Criticism of a case studies approach, commonly advanced by quantitative researchers, accuses it of covering isolated incidents without looking at the broader picture. This type of critique is rooted in a different understanding of the individual: Within a qualitative paradigm, the individual is not considered a member of a population that can simply be exchanged for any other; instead, he or she is regarded as a singularity, a unique voice able to explain and interpret parts of his or her everyday world which no-one else is able to see and describe in the same way. All the while, the individual's actions are still seen as part of larger, collective, social patterns, rather than isolated by artificial methods of research. A case studies approach is perfectly well suited to identifying and describing individual cases as parts of larger patterns and to reconstruct actions in

rigorous, scholarly discourse. Through the examination of an individual example, a case studies approach aims to adopt an outsider's perspective on what tends to be taken for granted in the everyday world; what 'goes without saying' is allowed to appear *fremd* – alien, foreign, new – and is then analysed through references to wider systems of thought already established. This is what is meant by a 'controlled scientific approach' which is distinct from the everyday interpretation of individual behaviour (Lamnek 2010). Lamnek points out that it is not the aim of a case studies approach in the social sciences simply to reconstruct an individual's behaviour, as may be the goal of researchers in other disciplines such as psychology or medical science, but ultimately to discover patterns and types of action or behaviour. The present study intends to identify and analyse typical narrative patterns of German transmedia series in light of their respective creation processes. What the study aims for is not statistical significance and a quest for the representative, as in many quantitative research projects; instead, it uses the techniques associated with a qualitative case studies approach in order putatively to generalise what has been discovered in specific cases.

These techniques and the way in which they are employed are the focus of the following section; first, though, a definition of case studies is needed that summarises the various aspects thus far identified. According to Yin (1994, p. 13) a "case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident." One main advantage of a case studies approach is that the object of research is observed, from various perspectives, in its real-life context, and findings are of a relatively high degree of complexity, one that is arguably characteristic of the object or phenomenon itself, too.

2.2 Applying the Case Study Approach

> A case studies approach prevents researchers from hastily stereotyping data obtained, or an early rush to impose structures not inherent in the phenomenon on which the data is based; case studies describe the individual object of research in very specific terms, and it is the careful interpretation of the phenomenon itself from which the bigger picture will ultimately emerge.
> (Lamnek 2010, p. 299; translation S.R.)

This section shows how the case studies approach is applied. Questions that need answering include, what is a case, what are the reasons and benefits of a (single) case study, what does the process of sampling entail, and what are the main dimensions of a case that are analysed in view of the specific research questions of this study. The section discusses how corpora are built, how texts are analysed, and how insights thus obtained can be lifted onto a more general level. Finally, this section gives an overview of the approach taken by this study. The following two sections will add further detail by explaining the specific ways in which the methodological tools mentioned are used.

In qualitative research, a 'case' can be one person or a group of persons such as a company, an organisation (including its structures), a family or even an entire culture (Lamnek 2010). By extension, media works such as a movie, a television series, a game or book can also be construed as a case. In media studies, Baur and Lamnek (2005) have examined various television formats as 'cases.' There is no reason not to consider transmedia series as cases too, and to do so by regarding them in the context of a 'culture,' as this study demonstrates.

One of the first questions this study has to answer is whether a single case is sufficient, or whether multiple cases are needed to answer the research question. Given that transmediality is a complex phenomenon, each transmedia project differs from mono-medium projects in terms of the amount of text included and, therefore, also in the degree of complexity. Examining multiple cases would come at the cost of depth and detail, and would run the risk of overlooking parts of one or another transmedia project. But as this study's aim is precisely to contribute much-needed detail to transmedia research, and the research questions are deliberately designed to address narrative detail in the context of the entirety of the content creation process of a transmedia project and its interplay with the whole text, a single-case approach is deemed more appropriate and better suited to the project.

Case selection is based on information-oriented sampling. Hartfiel (1982) proposes to consider cases which are, either, typical and may stand metonymically for a larger sample, or extreme and perhaps even unique. Typical cases may be used to validate quantitative research findings (Lamnek 2010). Extreme cases are outliers (Yin 1994) whose analysis can contribute to an understanding of the range of phenomena found in a

particular research area, and of some of their more unusual or exceptional aspects. Largely for three main reasons, this study chooses an outlier case: It is deemed to yield a greater number of insights; it may also yield insights that are useful in subsequent studies of typical cases; and, most significantly, the chosen case, German transmedia series project *Netwars*, is a flagship project of the emerging German crossmedia and transmedia industry (Kahmke 2016). It may be an outlier today, but set the standards for tomorrow.

It is striking that *Netwars* is the only German transmedia series that has been running for as long as five years, and it is still going strong. The majority of other German transmedia series have been wrapped up, including *Dina Foxx,* after two episodes, *Time of Heroes* after a single week on SWR and Arte, and *About:Kate* after eleven episodes. The three examples all expand across television, as core medium, and the Internet, and all are fictional storyworlds. *Netwars* is one of the few German examples that expands its narrative universe step by step through building a story brand. It is found on four media platforms – television, Internet, graphic novel, book – and, unusually for a German project, in the space between fiction and non-fiction. Its open-ended but well-considered production strategy sets it apart from the other projects too. Finally, its production culture and financing are unique as well.

What are the contexts in which the case is examined? Baur and Lamnek (2005) refer to historical, local, economic, political and legal, and aesthetic contexts, and argue that related cases as well as persons involved need to be considered too. For the purposes of this study, 'historical' means recent (i.e. since 2010), 'local' means German, 'aesthetic' means transmedia series, and related cases include other German transmedia series; persons involved are the creators.

A decision also needs to be made with regard to dimensions and aspects of the case. Although the case should be captured in as much of its totality as possible, not everything can conceivably be examined: The very research question determines the project's focus of serial transmedia storytelling and world-building as well as the development process. As far as transmedial narrative strategies and serial storytelling patterns are concerned, the whole *Netwars* transmedia universe is the subject of qualitative textual analysis. The texts have already been produced. With regard to production culture, expert interviews had to be conducted. Data, in the form of texts, has

been collected (and, arguably, even created). The combination of textual analysis and expert interviews is designed to cover the study's chosen set of research dimensions.

As argued, the case studies approach throws up problems regarding generalisation and does not achieve statistical representativeness. However, the case studies approach does allow for a certain kind of generalisation (Baur and Lamnek 2005; Lamnek 2010), which will be explained. Generalisation in a qualitative case study approach does not mean that findings are shown to be representative of a statistical population with a certain probability (Donmayer 2000). Generalisation, rather, means that results are transferable to other cases (Stake 2000) if contexts are comparable (Lincoln and Guba 2000). As argued, the aim of a case studies approach is to identify what is typical and individual, but not unique or idiosyncratic; case studies shed light on structures in which the case is situated (Lamnek 2010). Accordingly, Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) describe the following two types of case study which each offer a distinct possibility for generalisation: 'Embedded' case studies conceive the case as part of a whole, and the case as of interest in its relation to this whole; 'holistic' cases, by contrast, are focused on the case in its totality, including what goes on within the case as well as relations with phenomena beyond the case. As a consequence, it is perfectly proper for a case studies approach to analyse a larger number of cases (an 'embedded' approach) in order to allow for easier generalisation, but at the cost of precision, or to analyse only one case (a 'holistic' approach) in order to account for complexity. This study opts for a holistic approach, in the interest of detail, totality and complexity.

Although it may be difficult to compare a single holistic case study with others, generalisation is possible in another way too: by including systematic variation within one case. Comparing *Netwars*, the case chosen here, with others, this study considers the five other German transmedia series produced between 2010 and 2016 in terms of their world-building and production culture: *Alpha 0.7*, *Dina Foxx 1* and *2, About:Kate*, *Culture Files*, and *Time of Heroes*. To this end, expert interviews with creators of other German transmedia series have been conducted too, as will be explained below. In short, this study uses a single case analysis whose findings have been brought to bear on other cases for the benefit of generalisation.

3 Approaching Textual Analysis by Using Possible Worlds Theory in Conjunction with Literary Theories

> 'Analysis' is defined as a systematic, methodically controlled, reflective consideration of a photo, movie or television programme whose aim is to understand how meaning is constituted by it.
> (Mikos 2005, p. 460; translation S.R.)

This section explains which parts of the research question are answered through textual analysis; opportunities and challenges of this approach will be discussed, as well as the specific way in which the method is applied.

Textual analysis is used to address transmedia storytelling and world-building. The study aims to make visible the transmedial and serial narrative patterns and structures of *Netwars* by asking: How do the different media platforms included in *Netwars* interlink to enable a unified, coherent narrative and serial story universe? What are the aesthetic qualities employed to link up these worlds? What are the individual aspects of storytelling offered by each media platform? How are fictional and non-fictional storytelling combined in one transmedia universe?

Answering these questions requires a single holistic case study in which textual analysis plays a key role, because it is able to bring to the fore the textual and dramatic structures, and aesthetic qualities of different media and texts and, thereby, to examine the logic inherent in a given transmedia story universe. Qualitative textual analysis aims to elucidate, in considerable depth, the make-up of one complex German transmedia series expanded across four different media texts.

Given that the texts already exist, textual analysis serves as primary methodology although, as Wegener (2005) points out, qualitative analysis can be both: a survey and an evaluation method. As survey method (primary analysis), it scrutinises texts which already exist outside the study while, as (secondary) evaluation methodology, it focuses on texts created as part of the study. Charges levelled against qualitative textual analysis as primary methodology often try to accuse it of being 'subjective,' mirroring the "fear of a loss of respect" (Hills 2002, p. 28). While this may or may not be justified, it is

important to proceed in a transparent and systematically structured way. Analysis is carried out in seven steps, based on Mikos (2005):

1) Experiencing transmedia series
2) Creating the corpus
3) Collecting texts
4) Describing texts
5) Analysing texts
6) Interpreting and contextualising texts
7) Evaluating the texts and results

Each step will now be explained in detail.

1) Experiencing transmedia series

It should require no further explanation that transmedia series can only be analysed once they have been experienced. While this should be self-evident, it is nevertheless important to point out in how far experience in the context of an academic research project differs from private viewing. Mikos (2005) argues that a media text and its *Rezipient* are bound up in a communicative situation. The difference between a "normal reception situation" (ibid., p. 460) and its academic counterpart is the different relation between text and *Rezipient*. While in a normal reception context, the text is accorded a certain authority, the *Rezipient* in a research project, i.e. the researcher, claims to be in a position of authority vis-à-vis the text, and cites his or her research interests and theoretical knowledge to support this position. This puts the researcher in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, he or she has to be aware of the structures and conditions of a normal reception situation and, on the other hand, he or she has to abstract from them in order to be able to carry out a methodologically controlled analysis from a position of critical distance. However, there is no clear binary, as the discourse around aca/fans[41] shows (Hills 2002). The aca/fan has to be "careful not to present too much of their enthusiasm while tailoring their accounts of fan interest and investment to the norms of 'confessional' (but not overly confessional) academic writing" (Hills 2002, p. 28), and needs to be aware of their own subjectivity. In order to address this issue, the researcher carrying out the

[41] An aca/fan is a hybrid of academic and fan (Hills 2002; Jenkins [no date]).

present project has decided to experience the transmedia series several times, positioning herself, first, as 'normal' *Rezipient* (or fan) and subsequently as analytically-minded researcher. Each time, reception is guided by a different purpose, albeit one that was determined beforehand. It is crucial for the success of a research project that the object at hand is experienced repeatedly, and does not fade from view. The first round of viewings and initial exploration of possible objects of research was carried out to identify which transmedia series are of greatest interest. This researcher considers herself a fan of transmedia series, but from a mere fan's perspective she would have chosen *Time of Heroes* as a case study. From a researcher's perspective *Netwars* was chosen, for several reasons which have already been discussed.

2) Creating the corpus

Once a number of potentially relevant transmedia series had been screened, the exact corpus for analysis was set up. Based on reasons of research economy as well as the methodological considerations outlined in the previous section it was neither possible nor desirable to analyse all German transmedia series. Having selected *Netwars* as the case to focus on, a decision was made about the specific texts from the *Netwars* serial transmedia universe which were going to be the subject of qualitative textual analysis. Given that this study aims to analyse the narrative contribution of one medium in one transmedia universe and its interrelations with others, the required texts had to be narrative in nature. Although marketing is an integral component of transmedia worlds, as each storyworld promotes other storyworlds within one transmedia universe and boundaries are blurred between promotional and exclusive transmedial texts, this thesis will not deal with exclusive marketing texts in its textual analysis because their functions are different. Marketing texts do not advance the story but simply promote the transmedia universe, albeit obviously also through storytelling techniques such as narrative gaps. Promotional texts function more like ancillary texts and are only available around the time of release. Additionally, German transmedia projects often lack a marketing strategy that goes beyond simply *announcing* the transmedia project on different channels (as creators are quick to criticise). Therefore, this study regarded each of the four *Netwars* storyworlds as text – television (television documentary *Netwars/war on the web* (2014)), web (interactive web documentary *Netwars/out of CTRL* (2014)), book (two fictional e-

books/audio books/printed books[42] *The Code* (2014) and *Down Time* (2015)) and graphic novel texts (*Butterfly Attack* (2014)) – and examined them in detail.

3) Collecting texts

Next, all the texts that were to be analysed were documented. One basic condition of textual analysis is the availability of the texts to the researcher (Mikos 2005). As *Netwars* is the only ongoing German transmedia series, all four media platforms of the *Netwars* universe were available. On the project's website, www.netwars-project.com, three of the four media platforms are still available today: the whole of the web documentary can be watched there, and both the graphic novel and the e-book are available to download (the download link for the graphic novel points to the Apple App Store, Amazon, Google Play and the Galaxy App Store; the e-book's link includes an ePub format of the Kindle version). It is only the television documentary which was not available here. Thankfully, the producer had provided it for use in this study.

4) Describing texts

The analysis was based on a description of the texts. Mikos (2005) shows why it is not sufficient to describe only the content: The description produced must be aligned to the project's actual research interest. The present study used the tool of a sequence protocol (Korte 2005), which aims systematically to transcribe audio-visual material. The tool is able to differentiate narrative and action units. It is often used in film and television analysis. The purpose of a sequence protocol is to transfer the simultaneity of various different aspects into a systematic, linear structure. In so doing, audio-visual content was made available for analysis. Korte argues that one main benefit of a sequence protocol is that it forces the researcher to be a very attentive observer. Only then does he or she discover details that would otherwise go unnoticed, e.g. when preference is given solely to watching, reading, listening or playing the material. Korte's sequence protocol is based on film and television analysis, but it was transferable to both graphic novel and book texts. The aim of using the sequence protocol is to make available content from all *Netwars* media platforms for comparative analysis. Therefore, the sequence protocol

[42] In this study, only the e-book will be assessed.

included tables detailing the following aspects observed: act or episode, topic, visual and audio. The e-book came without audio features but used figures to describe the different characters' perspectives. Sequence protocols try to avoid what Mikos (2005) has characterised as the problem of burdening the description of texts with interpretative activity.

5) Analysing texts

This step constitutes the core activity of qualitative textual analysis (Mikos 2005). As a coherent method for analysing transmedia texts has yet to be established, using possible worlds theory is an innovative methodological contribution made by this study. Ryan (2013b, n.p.) argues that possible worlds theory is "valid for narratives realized in other media such as drama, film, comics, or video games" because it applies techniques of semantically describing narrative worlds to material independent of its medial representation. Possible worlds theory as medium-neutral theory or, in fact, transmedial narratological theory, focuses on crucial transmedia components beyond the mediality of each individual narrative. This aspect is highly pertinent, as well as useful for any coherent, interdisciplinary qualitative textual analysis of a transmedial world. Therefore, qualitative textual analysis as undertaken here is based on possible worlds theory (Doložel 1989, 1998; Fludernik 2005; Lewis 1978; Pavel 1975; Ronen 1993; Ryan 2013b; Suhrkamp 2002). Other reasons for, and considerations behind, drawing on possible worlds theory as a tool for qualitative textual analysis include what may be termed the theory's 'world aspect.' Given that the theory is used to divide a text into its constituent worlds, it is highly suited to an analysis of transmedia texts. As explained, world-building is one main feature of transmedia storytelling. In particular, and in contrast to mono-medium stories, the creation of a world is what transmedia storytelling hinges on, because it is the world that holds together the different media platforms. Possible worlds theory's notion of a "holistic and schemaoriented [sic] conception of a world created by a narrative text" (Fludernik 2000, p. 87) makes it possible to analyse the complexity of a transmedia and serial universe in its narrative totality, and that is what this study aims to do.

The issue of creating a world raises questions about its "invariant features [developed] in order to be recognized as the common frame of reference of diverse documents," (Ryan 2013b, p. 383) ultimately leading to the question, "[w]hat does it take

for a narrative to pitch a whole world rather than a character?" (ibid.). As argued, the universe has to be consistent and each individual storyworld must not conflict with others. The storyworld's basic, recognisable feature bears on the storyworld's truth. The notion of truth is an essential part of possible worlds theory. Because the theory aims to assess the truth of a modal expression, truth must come into play when the inherent logic and structures holding together the different fictional and non-fictional worlds of the transmedia universe are analysed.

Although the concept of possible worlds is primarily used with regard to fictional worlds and texts, the notion of establishing alternative worlds that are not mimetic representations of actual worlds is quite similar to questions raised in non-fiction theory around documentaries as reproduction not of the actual world but as arguments, assertions or claims about the actual world (Nichols 2001). Therefore, this thesis argues that possible worlds theory can yield valuable insights into non-fictional texts too. As *Netwars* consists of both fictional and non-fictional storyworlds, a coherent methodology is required, and possible worlds theory provides it.

In addition, the nature of the relationship between transmedial and actual worlds must be examined in order to best characterise the design of the transmedia universe. This includes understanding the structure of each and every transmedia storyworld in its relation to the actual world. In particular, possible worlds theory's notion of accessibility provides tools capable of analysing the overall construction of the narrative transmedial universe.

Furthermore, it is characters that lend consistency to the world: "Even when the story is not character centered, the identity of its world depends on the recurrence of certain characters identified by names that function as rigid designators." (Ryan 2013b, p. 383) As argued above, literary characters lead an independent life and can, therefore, surface in many different narrative worlds, as possible worlds theory has also shown. With regard to the present study, the question of the transmediality of characters was explored in detail.

To sum up, possible worlds theory provides a useful tool for the qualitative textual analysis of a complex transmedia series between fiction and non-fiction for the reasons discussed: It is interdisciplinary in nature, and medium-neutral, focuses on worlds as well as truth claims as reference, acknowledges the independent existence of characters, and

raises important questions about the relation between possible and actual worlds. However, possible worlds theory has its limits, especially regarding the analysis of serial transmedia storytelling, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

As argued, qualitative textual analysis as part of the case studies approach adopted by this study takes up the research question's demand for an understanding of transmedial serial storytelling by focussing on the narrative patterns and strategies in *Netwars*. In the course of this enquiry, the following elements have also been addressed: dramatic structure, intertextuality and narrative gaps. Dramatic structure allows for the unfolding of inner narrative structures and conflicts. Intertextuality is a core component of transmedia world-building. Narrative gaps are a strategy to encourage media platform change as well as an essential tool in serial storytelling. Neither one of these three elements can be meaningfully understood through possible worlds theory. Therefore, literary theories and tools compatible with possible worlds theory were brought into the mix.

Dramatic structure engages questions to do with the nature of the conflict at the heart of a story as well as the way in which the story is told (Mikos 2003). This requires terms and tools from literary criticism with a focus on plot and narrative structures. While possible worlds theory pays some attention to the architecture of worlds and their relation to the actual world, intertextuality – in terms of relations between worlds or with the world outside the narrative universe – cannot be analysed with the tools of possible worlds theory. One indication as to where relevant theories may be found is given by Doložel (1998), who argues that fictional worlds are infinite and radically incomplete. This suggestion is compatible with the theory of narrative gaps.

Two literary theories were used to complement possible worlds theory: With regard to dramatic structure and intertextuality, Genette's (1997a) theory of transtextuality provides the most sophisticated approach to intertextuality which accounts for the transtextual relations both within and outside but always in relation to a particular text, as demonstrated above; both levels are important in order to analyse relations between the storyworlds of one transmedia universe as well as the transmedia text's position vis-à-vis other texts. Genette also provides the essential terms and tools to examine narrative structures. With regard to narrative gaps, Iser's theory draws attention

to the reception of gaps as the site where meaning is made. With the help of the theory of narrative gaps, it is possible to examine the impact of a text's syntax on its semantics.

The following section explains how the combination of theories mentioned above was used in qualitative textual analysis. Five main aspects of possible worlds theory were scrutinised:

a) **World-building**: Based on each sequence protocol of a storyworld, the different worlds inherent in it were identified. Possible worlds theory allows for the following four worlds: actual textual world, possible worlds, non-possible worlds, actual world. *A posteriori* worlds were identified during the analysis. The architecture of worlds within a storyworld was visualised in an overview table. In a manner of speaking, the architecture of worlds functioned as a questionnaire directed at the text through which interconnections between *Netwars* storyworlds as well as within each world in a storyworld were examined so as to arrive at an account of world-building and storyworld relations.

b) **Accessibility:** Accessibility is an essential aspect not only of possible worlds theory but also of transmedia universes. Consequently, it was brought to bear on the analysis as an approach to examining the centre of a world set within the transmedia universe. In addition, connections to the actual world were examined with the help of Ryan's (1980) principle of minimal departure. Through identifying the nature of access provided to different worlds, changes of platforms could be located, and a medium of entry and a main storyworld (or core medium) identified. In this sense, accessibility provides a gateway into the analysis of transmedia world-building as a whole.

c) **Plot semantics**: The analysis of plot aims to identify serial narrative patterns. Possible worlds theory provided a more flexible framework to analyse the dynamics and semantics inherent in fictional and non-fictional plot structures by focusing on the conflict between worlds. Furthermore, the classification of sub-universes enabled and supported an analysis of characters. To situate this approach within narrative theory, Genette's theory was consulted with regard to its implications for structure and plot patterns.

d) **Fictionality**: Based on the notion that fictionality is not a question of degree but of kind (Doložel 1989), this study used truth-claims as a reference for determining

fictional and non-fictional parts of a storyworld, which is essential if one wants to analyse *Netwars* coherently. The question is how the – or, rather, a – truth[43] is ascertained in *Netwars*. In this context, the question of voice was analysed with the help of the dominant mode(s) of documentary according to Nichols (2001) in combination with Genette's theory of fiction and transtextuality.

e) **Radical incompleteness**: Doložel's (1998) point about the radical incompleteness of fictional worlds brings narrative gaps into view. Textual analysis needed to account for differences between fictional and historical gaps. In order to narrow down the potentially infinite number of worlds, Genette's concept of transtextuality was applied in order to suggest that the limitation of categories within a text and outside but implicating it also limits the number of possible worlds; furthermore, it made narrative gaps visible through contextualisation. The text's transtextual relations were fully taken into account, including intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality and hypertextuality. The analysis of radical incompleteness yielded information on changes of media platforms enabled or encouraged by the various storyworlds.

To conclude, the combination of possible worlds theory and Genette's and Iser's literary theories made it possible for this study, first, to understand how the different texts within one serial transmedia text work collectively to form a coherent narrative and stylistically unified story universe and, secondly, to consider the individual texts and their respective ways of storytelling. The final two steps explain how findings were interpreted, contextualised and evaluated.

6) Interpreting and contextualising texts

Following the analysis, the texts had to be interpreted against the research questions posed. In this process, texts were contextualised within the theoretical framework used.

[43] According to Nichols (1991), documentaries do not present *the* truth, but *a* truth.

7) Evaluating the texts and results

The final step was the evaluation of findings with regard to their contribution to the research area in which this study is conducted. In addition, the various methods employed, notably qualitative textual analysis, were evaluated.

The seven steps should ensure that the analysis is transparently structured in order to minimise subjectivity. However, given that film and television texts are semiotic resources and symbolic material, they offer up their potential meaning only by structuring the experient's activity, not by supplying pre-packaged meaning that simply needs to be acknowledged (Eco 1979; Fiske 2011; Mikos 2005). Hence, qualitative textual analysis can only reveal what presumed experients could conceivably make of the material offered, through the methods described. The next section discusses the complementary method of qualitative expert interviews.

4 Establishing Context through Qualitative Expert Interviews

> Experts are experts not only for themselves but for the functional context at the centre of an enquiry.
> (Keuneke 2005, p. 262; translation S.R.)

Qualitative expert interviews form the final part of the methodological nexus inherent in the case studies approach adopted. The role of these interviews is particularly pronounced with regard to the production process of German transmedia series, bringing to light the individual experiences in creating and producing them. This section explains the reasons for, and aims of, conducting expert interviews; it offers a definition of experts, explains the form of expert interviews, the process of selecting interviewees and the question of expert approachability, the interview situation itself and, finally, the analysis of interviews. Potential challenges will also be addressed.

For the purposes of this study, the creative and production process is defined as including, among other elements, the multi-faceted process of decision-making behind a transmedia series as well as the complex and often contentious process of developing and

producing a transmedia project as well as its impact on the transmedia text. Furthermore, it is the aim of this study to reveal the creators' approach to transmedia storytelling and to detect the repercussions of this approach in the final, published transmedia series text. In order to do so, this study needed to take account of the view of a wide range of creators, including producers, authors, game designers, transmedia designers and creative and art directors. While some of them have spoken publicly about their work, and continue to do so, for example in journalistic interviews or making-of's, these outputs must be regarded as promotional material unsuitable for the purposes of the present project. New data was therefore needed. However, as discussed above, interviews with creators involve a performative element that needs to be accounted for in the analysis. Interviews can be regarded as off-screen texts that should not be taken at face value but as the creator's own interpretation of a project, as Johnson (2013, p. 18) argues with regard to franchised media: "Interviews rely on the subject's own interpretation of his or her social world, and while that may provide a rich, descriptive picture, they also demand skepticism about what industrial motives or narcissistic investments motivate respondents' answers." It is important to keep in mind the performative aspect of the interviewee's career self that defends an industry position. Experts are individuals who possess significant advantages through knowledge of their particular field of research or expertise (Hoffmann 2005).

The groups of creators mentioned above are experts in their respective operational contexts (Keuneke 2005). Experts may also be regarded as representatives of an organisation or institution (Lamnek 2010). For the purposes of this study, the focus is less on the person as such but on their actions in a professional context. Expert interviews provide insights into these contexts which other forms of data – e.g. existing transmedia texts and press releases – cannot deliver. It must be noted that expert interviews are, obviously, not a direct representation of the content development process but a narrated version thereof (Krauß 2018a). Interviews with creators also have limitations. In terms, for example, of budgets the interviewees "may need to protect ongoing business interests and relationships with former clients" (Janes 2020, p. 18). If reflection and ambition of creators are foregrounded in the analysis, these interviews provide useful information about individual perspectives on the production process of German transmedia series.

Bogner and Menz (2005) developed a typology of expert interviews based on three different aims: explorative, systematizing and theory-generating. They argue that

systematizing expert interviews have a focus on practice-based experiences and the knowledge experts possess; theory-generating expert interviews are interested in subjective actions and implicit decision-making processes; and explorative expert interviews are part of a mixed-method research design aimed at structuring a particular research topic. In the present study, expert interviews are systematizing and theory-generating, because the main focus is on the practical experiences of creating and producing transmedia series and the decision-making processes that form part of these projects.

If experts are consulted in research projects, interviews are the predominant method of involving them, and semi-structured interviews are the main form used (Lamnek 2010). This is true both generally and in media industry studies specifically (Freeman 2016). Expert interviews are interviews with a specific target group. As openness is both a research focus of this study and a desired property of the methods used, the study used semi-structured, non-standardised, face-to-face interviews. Their objective is not to measure but to gain qualitative insights into individual meaning-making processes. Furthermore, this study is interested in the individual goals of experts in German transmedia storytelling and world-building, i.e. in finding out whether, for instance, one expert prioritises different aspects than another, and whether these differences may be explained by experts working in different trades or sectors. Insights on matters like these can only be gained through non-standardised, semi-structured interviews. Interview questions in conversations of this kind are understood, and presented to the interviewees, as invitations to narrate. Given that responses by the various interviewees must lend themselves to comparison, interviews followed a guideline document in order to ensure that all interviews touch on the same issues essential to the research question. Although guideline questions were pre-formulated, the way they were actually put to interviewees was dependent on the atmosphere and course of the interview itself. Success depended, partly, on using terminology that the experts were familiar with, and appreciative of. Interview guidelines normally have to fulfil the following six requirements (Helfferich 2005):

1) Openness
2) Limited number of questions
3) Clear structure and practicability

4) Orientation on natural flow of memory and argumentation
5) No reading-out of questions
6) Priority given to spontaneous narration

The interview guideline used has to be as flexible and open as possible. Helfferich (ibid.) proposes four steps for the interview guideline: collect, check, sort and subsume (CCSS). These steps can only be implemented based on a thorough theoretical understanding of interviews as genre as well as reflections on the implicit expectations behind the specific interview. Against this backdrop, the researcher decided to structure the sample of questions thematically. The sample of questions[44] engaged seven main themes: definition of transmedia storytelling, transmedia storytelling strategies, challenges and changes, transmedia world-building, transmedia practice, experients' participations, evaluation. These main topics were expected to complement the qualitative textual analysis undertaken alongside, and to answer some of the research questions which existing scholarship had not been able to address. These include, notably, the definition of transmedia storytelling from an industry perspective, the impact of production culture on storytelling strategies and the nature of German transmedia series. The order and sequence of questions differed from interview to interview, depending on the flow of the conversation. The intention was for all interviews to start with the same question, on the expert's personal definition of transmedia storytelling. This question was deemed to be the most effective springboard into a substantial conversation. It was also of particular interest as it reveals, at the very start of the exchange, the different notions of transmediality held by members of different trades. The following questions were explicitly put only if experts did not discuss the relevant thematic aspects themselves, i.e. without a prompt. In an ideal situation, the researcher asked very few questions indeed. Normally, this happened when a relationship of trust is established early on, or even before the interview itself.

As mentioned above, this study used systematic variation as a way of generalising data obtained through qualitative expert interviews and as a strategy to handle the epistemological problem of the performative aspect of expert interviews. In order to

[44] Cf. Appendix 2.

contextualise creators' utterances and to identify the nature of performative elements, interviews with creators of different transmedia series were conducted. What was said during interview could be read as text and complemented the existing transmedia texts available as published material. Selection of interviewees is a function of the selection of transmedia series analysed in the case study; the following creators of *Netwars* were interviewed: producer Michael Grotenhoff; Lena Thiele, who was in charge of transmedia design; Felix Mertikat, creative and art director of the graphic novel; and Marcel Kolvenbach, author and director of the television documentary.[45] In order to facilitate comparison with other German transmedia series, professionals working on other German transmedia series were also interviewed. German transmediality occurs in three different industries with different production cultures:

1) Journalism
2) Books/publishing
3) Film and television

As this study focuses only on the film and television industry, professionals interviewed were selected from those working on transmedia series produced by a film and/or television production company and including either film or television material, or both. Additional criteria which the series from which interviewees were drawn had to fulfil were seriality (i.e. a minimum of two episodes on at least one of the universe's platforms) and a production date of 2010 or later. 2010 was the production date of the first German transmedia project, *Alpha 0.7*. The trailblazer was followed to date by five other German transmedia series, all of which are discussed in this study: *Dina Foxx 1* and *2, About:Kate*, *Culture Files*, *Time of Heroes* and *Netwars*. At least one professional in a key position, such as author or producer, was interviewed for each series: Janna Nandzik, creator, author and director of *About:Kate*; Sebastian Büttner, head author and producer of *Alpha 0.7*; Ralf Pleger, author and director of *Culture Files*; Georg Tschurtschenthaler, producer of *Culture Files*; Kristian Costa-Zahn, producer of *Dina Foxx 1 and 2*; Severin Brettmeister, game designer of *Dina Foxx* 2; Max Zeitler, author and director of *Dina*

[45] E-book author M. Sean Coleman did not respond to any request for interview. Insights into work with him were provided by Lena Thiele.

Foxx 1 and 2; Volker Heise, creator and producer of *Time of Heroes*; and Alexander Maximilian Otto Serrano, transmedia designer of *Time of Heroes*.[46]

The experts were approached through existing contacts of the researcher (in the case of Georg Tschurtschenthaler) or contacted at festivals and conferences (Kristian Costa-Zahn at the Berlin Web Fest, Volker Heise and Severin Brettmeister at the Story:first digital storytelling lab in Munich); most experts could be reached via email, as their electronic contact details are available on their company's website. Additionally, the researcher expected a snowball effect whereby one expert would open the door to another. As in every industry, professionals working together or, even, alongside one another are assumed to be in touch and ready to share contact details with third parties.

All experts were, initially, contacted via an email message which provided them with basic information about the study and the voluntary nature of their participation.[47] All experts had the opportunity to ask questions themselves, too. Due to the fact that the experts are human subjects who provide human data, informed consent was indispensable. The consent form was signed in person before the interview was recorded. Data thus obtained was treated confidentially. All experts were asked if their real name could be used in the study. All experts could withdraw from the study at any time without the need to explain their reasons.

Interviews were conducted face to face, which usually leads to best results (Hoffmann 2005). All interviews were recorded on audio. As may be expected based on the study's focus on German transmedia series, the majority of experts are German-speaking, and interviews were conducted in German. All interviews were conducted by researcher Sarah Renger, who is a German native speaker. They varied in length between 50 and 120 minutes. Differences in duration can be explained by other commitments: Some of the experts had another meeting directly after the interview and had thus only blocked the 50 to 60 minutes requested in email conservation. 50 to 60 minutes were enough time for all the questions included in the interview guideline to be asked and for a substantial conversation. If more time was available to the expert, interviews almost

[46] Only a small number did not respond at all. Besides M. Sean Coleman, Michael Souvignier, producer of *Alpha 0.7*, did not respond, and Christian Ulmen, producer of *About:Kate* had no time available for the interview.

[47] Voluntary participation does not conflict with the methodological principle of representativeness because this study does not aim for statistical representativeness.

always lasted longer. In the additional time, interviewees talked about other projects or brought up wider issues around German transmediality, including questions of budgets, differences between German and American credits, archiving projects, rights of use, digital content, branded storytelling, transmedia designers as a distinct job profile, workload, differences between comics and graphic novels, YouTubers and the German fear of innovation.

The following section describes the way the interviews were analysed. As argued in the introduction to this chapter, media industry studies does not provide a bespoke methodology for analysing interviews; interview methodologies are readily available, however, across the social sciences (Lamnek 2010). The process of analysis consisted of four steps: (1) Producing postscripts; (2) producing transcripts; (3) analysing transcripts; (4) control. These four phases are described in detail below.

1) After each interview, a postscript was produced to document information on issues that the recording did not capture, such as disturbances, problems, feelings, topics discussed before and/or after the recording. This information was of interest later and shed light on findings documented in the transcripts (Prommer 2005).
2) The next step involved the transcription of audio material to make it ready for analysis. Although Keuneke (2005) argues that it is sufficient to paraphrase expert interviews, all interviews were fully transcribed. This study did not rely on the researcher's memory alone, and transcriptions are a suitable tool for the transfer of ephemeral aspects of an interview into a form of text available for further study. Paraphrases usually include a higher degree of interpretation than simple transcription, especially with regard to what the researcher may consider missing parts. But, crucially, transcripts provide the best possible basis for content analysis, as explained in the third step. Ayass (2005) emphasises that even transcripts are partly subjective and not entirely free from interpretation. As every transcript is influenced by the person who produced it, all interviews were transcribed by the researcher herself. This was also considered helpful for the following analysis of the transcripts. Transcripts are adjusted to facilitate reading which, according to Ayass, is one of three criteria of transcripts; the others are producing both a basic and a revised transcript, and robustness. With regard to reading flow, syntax was adjusted, dialect forms were translated into standard

language, and long pauses and strong emphases were visualised. All of this reflects the objective of the interviews to gain substantive insights rather than information on the language use of experts. The transcript was produced in two iterations: first, the basic transcript was written; then, this basic transcript was revised. The third criterion, of robustness, means that no special characters and signs were used, again reflecting a desire to aid the reading flow.

3) Transcripts were analysed through methods of content analysis. The aim was to distil essential information from the interviews. Content analysis of qualitative interviews can be based on a variety of different methodological tools; this study relied on a method of structural analysis (Hermanns, Thocz and Winkler 1984), which takes account of narrative theory. It is often used in the context of biographical interviews but is deemed useful for expert interviews, too, since these include biographical information as well, and both are characterised by narrativity and retrospective. Furthermore, Hermanns *et al*.'s structural analysis allows for a scientifically controlled analysis of action patterns. Overall, structural analysis had two main steps: formal and, then, content analysis. During formal analysis, the interview was partitioned into segments based on different text types; Hermanns *et al*. term them 'communicative schemata.' Communicative schemata are argument, description and narration. Segmenting interviews first on the basis of formal criteria sheds light on underlying communicative structures which may go unnoticed in content analysis but supports the interpretation of substantive points made during interview. According to Hermanns *et al*., the nature of the transition from one communicative schema to another can be significant: Abrupt transition can indicate that the interviewee is talking about an important (biographical) event and will not be able to do so without some degree of inconsistency. The second step, content analysis, involved the segmentation (and 'sub-segmentation') of the interview text according to content categories. All segments were then also paraphrased. Subsequently, each segment was analysed in three steps: 1) identification of narrative chains, 2) reconstruction of development trajectory, 3) development of analytical categories. With regard to the first step, Hermanns *et al*. consider narrative chains as representation in words that belong together thematically but occur in different segments. As a

consequence, narrative chains had to be identified across different segments; they were visualised in order to show structures of, and changes during, the interview. As a second step based on the narrative chains identified, the interview's development trajectory was reconstructed. A development trajectory is the systematically closed biographical description of all narrative chains with their highs, lows and turning points. The aim is to reconstruct the development trajectory of the individual expert in a scientifically accountable way. The last step was the development of analytical categories, i.e. abstractions of the action and events discussed. Analytical categories can be considered typical patterns.

4) The concluding control phase served to reduce the risk of misinterpretation which can occur in the process of boiling down the transcripts to their semantic essence. In order to detect and excise instances of misinterpretation, the results obtained in the third step were related back to the entirety of the interview transcript. If any doubts remained, the researcher also referred back to the audio recording.

This section concludes by considering possible challenges that can occur during expert interviews and presents strategies of avoiding them. Challenges can arise out of the asymmetrical situation of an expert (creator) being interviewed by a non- or quasi-expert (the researcher) (Pfadenhauer 2005). While the expert possesses profound knowledge of the subject at hand, the researcher may only have basic information on the subject. This can lead to different effects during interview, including the profiling effect, feedback, and paternalism. Profiling occurs when the expert wants to present themselves in a positive (competent, likeable) way. The expert appears as more of a private person than initially intended, or strictly justifiable, and the interview risks drifting off to other, less relevant topics. To avoid this happening, the researcher used the guideline to stay the course, focusing on the expert's professional context, for example through sentences such as "What was your experience as director/author/producer …" Feedback means the expert asks the researcher a question because he or she is interested in the researcher's own opinion. As a consequence, the researcher finds herself in the position of co-expert which can, in turn, influence the answers subsequently given by the expert. Therefore, the researcher tried not to answer the questions, or to answer them in very general terms. Another strategy was to return the question to the expert by claiming not to know and to state that this lack of knowledge is precisely the reason why the interviewee was consulted

as expert in the first place. Finally, paternalism tends to occur in conversations between persons with differences in gender identification, age or social status. (Male) experts may feel superior, especially because the (female) researcher is also (a little) younger. The researcher was aware of these possible effects during both the interview and analysis.

5 Summary

With the methodologies and tools explained this study is able to answer its research questions. Given that its case study, *Netwars,* includes film, television, book and graphic novel texts straddling the line between fiction and non-fiction, both across the different storyworlds and within each one, an interdisciplinary methodological framework is required coherently to analyse the whole of the transmedia universe and its creation process. Existing studies on transmedia storytelling and world-building lack a coherent, interdisciplinary methodology, especially one that is applicable to transmedia universes that blur the boundary between fiction, non-fiction and the actual world. This chapter demonstrated that a case studies approach provides such a methodology by enabling a combination of qualitative textual analysis and qualitative expert interviews. This study used a single holistic case studies approach allowing for in-depth analysis of the totality of a complex transmedia universe. Qualitative textual analysis was based on possible worlds theory, which offers an interdisciplinary, medium-neutral tool able to focus on world-building and transmedial characters. Possible worlds theory was complemented by narratological tools due to its inability to analyse dramatic structure, intertextuality and narrative gaps. The combination of possible worlds theory, Genette's theory of transtextuality and Iser's theory of narrative gaps was a useful combined tool to examine, first, the individual texts and their particular forms of storytelling and, secondly, the ways in which the different texts of a serial transmedia text work collectively to form a coherent narrative and stylistic whole. Due to the fact that Genette's theory of transtextuality knows five categories, the concept of intertextuality, as one essential part of transmedia storytelling and world-building, could be analysed in a more differentiated and contextualised way which is entirely in keeping with the nature of transmedia worlds. The five aspects studied – world-building, accessibility, plot semantics, fictionality, radical

incompleteness – had been selected to address the two fundamental dimensions of the research question: concepts of transmedia seriality and German transmedia storytelling and world-building.

As this study also aims to examine the creation and production process of German transmedia series, it used expert interviews with creators of six German transmedia series. Expert interviews shed light on the individual experiences made creating and producing German transmedia series and were compared with other cases as a means of generalisation.

Using these qualitative methods and tools this study has not produced a representative picture of all German transmedia projects, a possible direction which has been abandoned in the interest of establishing an in-depth account of the creation process of one German transmedia series, albeit one in whose text patterns typical of transmedia as such may be discovered. This study mainly aims, inductively, to generate new theoretical approaches and hypotheses and to make the unfamiliar, familiar. Overall, the nature and purpose of the study is explorative. Taken together, qualitative textual analyses – with a focus on serial transmedia storytelling and world-building – and expert interviews – with a focus on creating transmedia series – provide answers to the research question.

SECTION C FINDINGS

V PRODUCTION CULTURE OF GERMAN TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVES AND WORLDS

1 From *Alpha 0.7* to *Netwars*: Six German Transmedia Series and their Production Backgrounds

> And that was the challenge and also the idea why the project fascinated me so much, to say that you can stage every story transmedially. This is really a case where we can prove it. [...] Although I do think it works better in certain genres, depending on people's preconceptions or their willingness to immerse themselves.
> (Alexander Maximilian Otto Serrano, transmedia designer of *Time of Heroes*)

Addressing the lack of research on the creation process of German transmedia projects, this study focuses on German transmedia series in the film and television industry. As discussed, transmedia seriality is closely associated with television because of its serialised format and its reliance on backstories. As mentioned above, there have been six transmedia series created and produced in Germany between 2010 and 2016: *Alpha 0.7*, *Dina Foxx 1* and *2*, *About:Kate*, *Culture Files*, *Time of Heroes* and *Netwars*. All of them have been reviewed as new forms of expanded (television) storytelling (see, e.g., Kuzmany 2013; Nezik 2014; Schader 2011; Tittelbach 2017).

The six projects are indeed innovative in so far as the whole narrative is told across a variety of media platforms, through transmedia storytelling. The projects are the first German transmedia series in the film and television industry which were planned as transmedia projects from the start. Some of them forced their television audiences to go beyond the media platform of television in order to find out how the story ends, while others include autonomous media platforms. These projects also mix genres. All of them are examples of complex narratives related across different media platforms with the aim to reach other (or, as to the creators interviewed stated, "younger") target groups than those who regularly watch German television channels by using innovative storytelling formats or narrative "experiments" (Sebastian Büttner). Finally, the six projects use

different serial storytelling techniques, and were based on new forms of creation and production.

This chapter addresses the question how these new forms of storytelling influence the creation process and how, in their turn, German transmedia series may be created. This will be done by answering the following questions: What does the creative process behind a German transmedia series look like? How do German creators experience the interdisciplinary collaboration process? What impact does German production culture have on transmedia storytelling and world-building? And what are the characteristics of the production culture of German transmedia projects? Based on qualitative face-to-face-interviews with creators from the six German transmedia projects this chapter develops a comprehensive account of German transmedia practices.

The following section addresses the ways in which the background of production can impact transmedia world-building. Although all six German transmedia series include television components, they differ in their world-building. One reason is related to the different experiences made producing them. These differences were discussed extensively by the creators interviewed. There are also striking differences with regard, mainly, to the intentions influencing the decision to create a transmedia project in the first place. These intentions and decisions have a profound impact on the transmedia world-building strategies adopted, and on the architecture of media platforms. This section will discuss the intentions and decisions, and introduce and contextualise the six German transmedia series.

Science-fiction thriller *Alpha 0.7* tells a story of ubiquitous surveillance. It is set in Stuttgart, Germany, in what was then the near future, i.e. the year 2017. The story is told across television (six-episodes serial), radio (six-episodes radio play), podcasts, the Internet (YouTube channel of one of the story's characters, the blog of one of the story's characters, the website of a company mentioned in the story, a music video of the story's band, a blog of the story's activists) and music (fictional band *crash:conspiracy* with music videos and an album of their own). Although the experient would be able to watch the television serial only, experiencing the narrative across all platforms helps them appreciate the intricacies of the whole story. The television serial was widely regarded as the core medium, notably by newspaper critics whose focus was almost exclusively on the television serial, *Alpha 0.7*'s transmedia world-building aims for a balance between

media: In actual fact, there is no core medium, as creator Sebastian Büttner emphasises in interview. It would, however, be quite fair to say that the combination of the television serial[48] and the radio play[49] provides the site of the fictional core narrative of *Alpha 0.7*, with the media platforms serving to deepen the narrative and enhance the viewers' and listeners' experience. Each in their own way, the media platforms add narrative value. Although the television serial comes with a seemingly conclusive ending, the radio play is able to pick up and build on the story. Alongside the television serial the podcast aired made frequent reference to the fictional website www.appollon.de. The (fictional) band *crash:conspiracy* in fact blurs the line between fiction and the actual world through the release of their album, "<>." The band does not feature in the television serial, but there are links from the band's website to Appollon's website. Additionally, Ino Control, the band's lead singer, is the performer of the podcasts. Furthermore, the band have a YouTube channel and a Facebook page;[50] their songs are about surveillance, calling for protest against the surveillance state. The Internet provides additional content on several websites which can also be said to engage playfully the line separating fiction from non-fiction: There is a project website with information on various issues pertaining to the substance of the story and documents purportedly demonstrating that the fictional story might as well be real. These documents include newspaper articles reporting on examples of surveillance activity similar to those portrayed in the serial, but occurring already in the actual world. In this sense, the project's website provides factual background information. On top of this (main) website, there are websites related to the fictional narrative; these were created solely for the project, with disclaimers stating that they are part of the project and have been set up by public broadcaster, SWR: they include the mock blog www.appollon.de, purportedly run by Johanna Berger, one of the main characters of the serial, the equally fictional website of the Protecta Society, a company mentioned within the story, a fictional website of the story's Neurowissenschaftliches Pre-Crime Center (NPC) and one character's YouTube channel. These websites all

[48] The television serial was aired from 14 November to 19 December 2010, every Sunday at 10:40pm, by German regional public broadcaster SWR.

[49] The radio play was aired between 21 December 2010 and 25 January 2011, every Tuesday at 7:20pm, on SWR2.

[50] The Facebook page is still live, the last post dating from 2 June 2020 (Crash:conspiracy Facebook 2020).

provide different kinds of information. Take, for example, Johanna Berger's blog, which contains some of the family's background story; the YouTube channel underscores the highly emotional nature of the project's topic of surveillance; and the podcast and other websites create suspense in the periods between episodes by engaging the experient in various project-related activities. Online forums and comment spaces further enhance this experience by opening up opportunities for interactivity. Each media platform functions as a point of entry – even the radio play can be listened to without the need to have watched the television serial beforehand. The television serial, the radio play and crash:conspiracy's album can each be understood on their own. It is only the fictional websites whose narrative content is designed to underpin the television serial, making it the only non-autonomous component of the project. According to Büttner, world-building is based on the idea that new narrative content should be made available in the periods between television episodes. The choice of media platform is influenced by the media available to public broadcaster SWR, i.e. television, radio and Internet. Büttner remembers that SWR once issued a call for projects whose focus was on transmedia. He and his colleague Oliver Hohengarten were excited to be given the opportunity to bring their television experiences to bear on the Internet, which had always been their dream. Büttner considered the project's topic of surveillance through brain scanners appropriate for transmedia storytelling and argues that the most important criterion for transmedia storytelling is the project's topic. Reviews were positive, with some calling it "ambitious television" (Hanfeld 2010) and "creative in non-linear dramaturgy" (Tittelbach 2017).

Dina Foxx differs in terms of both world-building and serial structure from *Alpha 0.7*. Most obviously, it is a story in two parts: The first, *Rescue Dina Foxx*, aired in 2011, and the second, *Dina Foxx – Deadly Contact*, in 2014. Each tells its own, conclusive story, and parts are connected only through the series' main character, Dina Foxx, although she is played by different actors in the two parts (Jessica Richter and Katharina Schlothauer). On the narrative level, they are unrelated. Therefore, the *Dina Foxx* universe must be considered a series rather than a serial like *Alpha 0.7*. Whilst *Dina Foxx 1* deals with the topic of data protection and is very much centred around the main character Dina Foxx, the self-proclaimed "datagrrl" (Ufa 2016), *Dina Foxx 2* deals with genetically modified food. Both parts do not only differ on a narrative level but also with regard to transmedial world-building. While *Dina Foxx 1*'s storyworld is designed to be

experienced as a whole, the individual parts of *Dina Foxx 2* are only loosely connected and do not require to be experienced in conjunction with one another. The television thriller *Dina Foxx 1* aired in April and May 2011 on public broadcast channel ZDF, ending, in a departure from genre convention, with a cliffhanger: Dina Foxx was arrested although it was clear that she was innocent. The audience was then invited to rescue Dina Foxx by solving the case of the crime online within three weeks. Experients were able to choose between two options, ARG[51] and the easier and less time-consuming option of an online game called *Spurensuche im Datenschutzraum* [Data space investigation]. At the end of the project, a television report called *Wer löst das Rätsel um Dina Foxx?* [Who can solve the Dina Foxx mystery?] was broadcast (Ufa 2016). Evidently, *Dina Foxx 1* prescribes not only the medium of entry but also the sequence of platform changes. Experients wishing to engage with the entirety of the story had to become active participants by following the prescribed path across media platforms. In this sense, *Dina Foxx 1* is what has been called an "interactive crime" drama (Peignois 2011, n.p.). By contrast, the television component of *Dina Foxx 2* can be watched without any notion of the online content (videos or interactive game), as the online content merely provides supplementary information. *Dina Foxx 2* is thus more in line with traditional viewing habits based on self-contained television programmes consumed lean-back (Nezik 2014). The two platforms of television and the Internet are narratively connected in so far as online content fills in narrative gaps opened up by the television narrative. Nezik (2014, n.p.) describes this type of world-building as, "[w]atch on television, and comprehend online the story." In comparison, the different approaches to world-building in the two parts of *Dina Foxx* concern the experient's participation in the story: *Dina Foxx 1* is a lean-forward experience which forces the experient to be active in order to be able to understand the whole story and, notably, the story's ending, while *Dina Foxx 2* makes for a more traditional, lean-back television experience with merely an option to be more active online. The different path taken by the second part was the result of a decision taken by the whole production team in view of their experiences with *Dina Foxx 1*.

[51] According to Janes (2020, p. 5), ARGs for TV shows serve different purposes than for films, aiming to "maintain viewer interest in existing storylines during the summer hiatus." American transmedia series like *Lost* used ARGs as inter-seasonal narrative extension. Although the function of the ARG in *Dina Foxx 1* is similar to the one in the *Lost* universe, *Dina Foxx 1*'s ARG continues the original storytelling by providing the missing ending.

Although the ARG of *Dina Foxx 1* was regarded a success in terms of the way it worked, it was anything but a commercial success and attracted a mere 1,000 users (Nezik 2014). To compound the problem, television viewers did not appreciate being forced to go online for more (Result 2012).[52] Both ZDF and Ufa LAB, the production company, considered *Dina Foxx* a success, especially the first part with its "engaged community," "14,000 comments," "more than 2 millions page views," "more than 200,000 video views" and "the biggest alternate reality game ever played in Germany" (Ufa [ca. 2010], n.p.). *Dina Foxx 1* achieved a 7.3% market share on the nights when it was shown, which was seen as a "respectable achievement" (Result 2012, p. 14) and, as the project's author and director Max Zeitler argues, a successful transmedia project; he contends that everybody in Germany had at least heard of *Dina Foxx*. It is true that as far as German ARGs go, the number of gamers was high. However, from a television perspective it was not a successful project: Low ratings were ascribed to the audience's lack of familiarity with, and unwillingness to, explore media platform changes, as Zeitler explains. Zeitler notes that, in Germany, transmedia projects are considered vanity projects, although *Dina Foxx 1* had a real impact on the public image of transmedia as genre. Nevertheless, the production team decided to pursue a more 'traditional' approach to world-building with autonomous media platforms in *Dina Foxx 2*. It was essential to reconceive the added narrative value offered online, which had to be substantive so as to avoid appearing merely as a gadget, as online producer Kristian Costa-Zahn has pointed out.[53] In effect, the two transmedia projects are quite distinct, although their approaches to world-building each have their own advantages and disadvantages. Costa-Zahn describes the model of transmedia world-building adopted by *Dina Foxx 1* as a community experience and that of *Dina Foxx 2* as single-user experience. Community experiences include a live event, social media communication and a communally created work. The risk in this context is that a couple of hundred people solve the story's mystery games very quickly and the

[52] Reception study *Chances and Difficulties of Transmedia Formats Using the Example of 'Rescue Dina Foxx'* concluded that the experients lacked the motivation to switch from television to online. The reason given is that neither the topic nor the main character, Dina Foxx, struck a real chord with audiences (Result 2012).

[53] According to Costa-Zahn, added values may come in the form of reaching different target groups, satisfying different user needs, serving the dual demand for lean-back and lean-forward reception options in one story or creating involvement through a complex storyworld.

game becomes less interesting for everybody else immediately. The advantages of a single-user experience, on the other hand, lie in the possibility of reruns and the beauty of one's own individual view of a story or project (Costa-Zahn). The two approaches to world-building have in common that the core medium is television.[54] This has implications for budgeting, as Costa-Zahn argues: The amount of money available determines whether or not a particular platform architecture can even be considered. He emphasises that the biggest challenge of transmedia projects is precisely the issue of financing. In light of the fact that transmedia is not a mass phenomenon (although Costa-Zahn is convinced that it has the potential to become one) there is no established business model for roll-out on a larger scale. This is also the reason why it is only public broadcasters that produce transmedia projects – they simply have more money than private investors. Private broadcasters need to make money out of the project, which is a challenge especially for online content. Costa-Zahn highlights that there are two reasons why television is the core medium in many transmedia projects: broadcaster money and at least the potential to reach a very large audience.

About:Kate also merges television and Internet, in yet another way. Of the six, *About:Kate* is the only German transmedia series with user-generated content. As the first television serial to be considered "genuinely new television" (Pilarczyk 2013, n.p.), *About:Kate* combines lean-back and lean-forward modes of reception in the following way: The core medium is a television serial with 14 episodes that provides experients the opportunity to feed user-generated content into the serial's narrative. From the third episode onwards experients were able to produce their own content in order for it to become an integral part of the television serial. In the end, creator and director Janna Nandzik decided who won. Experients were given a number of incentives including, for example, 50 euros for a photo and 150 euros for a video, plus a project t-shirt. The 14-episode television serial is centred around the main character of Kate Harff, a digital native searching for her identity; between the actual world and virtual self-presentation, she is at a loss. For this substantive reason, television was combined with social media

[54] Although *Dina Foxx 1's* media platform design is more balanced than that of *Dina Foxx 2*, the mothership in both is television, as it is not possible to play the ARG without watching the television film first or alongside; it is possible, however, to watch the television film only, without engaging with the ARG, and to then watch the solution report.

content: Kate Harff's Facebook profile tells the story of her (digital) stream of consciousness. Kate, who is in her late twenties, feels overwhelmed by digital media and seeks help by turning herself in to a psychiatric ward. The television serial, aired on Arte every Sunday at 11:45pm in the period between 27 April 2013 and 30 July 2013, deals with her time in psychiatric care and can be experienced without the need to access the other media platforms. Additional media offerings such as the project app, the project's website and social media content encouraged experients to empathise more with Kate's problem, not least through exposing themselves to the very risk of experiencing digital overload. The app, written by the Fraunhofer Institute, was conceived as second screen. The functions of additional media platforms are meta-referential and blur the line between fiction and the actual world. This liminality of the transmedia fictional world, a typical feature of German transmedia series, is realised in a way that is different from other projects, namely through user-generated content. User-generated content is something that transmedia storytelling, by definition, is open for. Arte's earlier open call for projects stated expressly that they were interested in interactive transmedia projects building bridges between television and the Internet. Additional key words mentioned in the call were 'second screen, mockumentary, non-linear live blog of a character and the integration of videos from Arte Creative,' as Nandzik recalls. Nandzik was, at that time, developing another series, *Die Ausgebrannten,* which, due to her involvement with *About:Kate,* she never finished. *Die Ausgebrannten* was going to be a story about burnout. In her research on the topic she discovered a correlation between burnout and the increasingly digital nature of our lives, which prompted her to look for a project that connects, and reflects on, the two aspects. Digital overload brings them both together, and transmedia design provides the perfect genre context for a reflection on the topic. *About:Kate* puts these assumptions to the test by exposing experients to the issue through world-building. The topic itself served as the rationale for transmedia expansion.

In a similar way, *Time of Heroes'* world-building is related to its topic and the creator's intention for the project. *Time of Heroes* is a transmedial real-time serial about someone's midlife crisis. Creator and producer Volker Heise states that the core idea was to show one family, during one week of their lives, in real time. 'One family, one week, real time' is the project's formula – the creator's one vision which had to be realised across all of the project's media platforms. Heise's formula is the transmedial universe's

rule from which all core elements across all platforms are derived. It is the root of narrative coherence and the basis of the project's worldness. *Time of Heroes* demonstrates that transmedial expansion is influenced by the serial's narrative, rather than the mere decision to create a transmedia project; in this respect, *Time of Heroes* is an exception in Germany. Transmedial expansion is a function of the serial's commitment to real-time storytelling. This commitment was grounded in the wish to make experients feel the protagonist's crisis, rather than simply telling a story *about* it. Therefore, the experient had to become part of the fictional family during the week of broadcasting. This germ of an idea emerged during a meeting in Strasbourg between Volker Heise, producer Thomas Rufus, Arte television editor Christoph Hauser, and Martina Zöllner and Kornelia Theunert from SWR. The decision to tell the story across the media platforms of television and the Internet was made against this production background: Initially, Heise had planned to tell the story in real time in a way that would have included various kinds of interruptions over the course of the television programme; but this was too risky and expensive, as Heise recalls. Instead, the team had to come up with a different way of realising a real-time project. Serrano, the project's transmedia designer, states that one of the early ideas was to develop an ARG. At some point during the process of writing the television serial the production team asked Serrano to come on board, as he possessed a great deal of experience in relation to ARGs. Having read as little as the synopsis, Serrano proposed a change of tack and to create a website rather than an ARG, because a website would offer much more added narrative value. By contrast, an ARG would have made the promise of more mystery elements than were actually foreseen and would have appealed to a different target group. Serrano argues that in most transmedia projects there is a core medium, a factor that profoundly impacts transmedia world-building, as will be discussed below. If there is a core medium the question is where its boundaries can be drawn. Boundaries are best seen as points from which to expand the story into other media in a way that motivates experients to seek out content on these other platforms. In the case of *Time of Heroes*, the additional value were characters' backstories and more real-time content online. Rules for the website were thus set as real time and backstories as reasons behind each character's crisis. In order to handle the complexity of transmedia stories, rules and the processes of formatting are essential. Both Serrano and Heise contend that they serve as a kind framing, which evokes the project's worldness. The two

creators concluded that the Internet should be involved in two different ways. First, as trace of the story in form of a timeline that showed both the television episodes and real-time online bonus clips and, second, as memory pieces designed to speak to more active online users. These pieces did not advance the story but looked backwards, revealing various characters' secrets through a game, as Heise explains. While the first form is quite similar to the experience of watching television, the second builds on distinct forms of online behaviour. Supplementing the self-contained television serial, online content (i.e. the project's website with text messages, photos, videos and blog articles purportedly written by the characters) offered a game with the lead question, "What has made Arndt and Mai, Sandra, Gregor and Christoph [the characters] who they are today?" (Zeit der Helden [ca. 2013], n.p.). From 25 to 29 March 2013 the nine episodes of the serial were broadcast on both SWR and Arte.[55] *Time of Heroes* is a great example of the topic-driven choice of media platforms. By letting the topic drive the choice of media, the whole team was able to respect Heise's guiding vision of 'one family, one week, real time' across all media platforms while achieving narrative coherence. *Time of Heroes* demonstrates that this strategy can be successful. Heise and Serrano were amazed: The online component of *Time of Heroes* was a able to reach 80,000 users (Zeit der Helden [ca. 2013]), although the television component was less successful, in spite of its generic ability to raise awareness. There are several reasons for this underwhelming outcome: One is that real-time programming, with one broadcasting slot per day for a single week only was not enough time to build an audience, Heise reports. The second may be the team's decision to try to build an influencer community around the project. Serrano explains that the team approached around 50 influencers and convinced them to share content with their communities. To this end, they were sent short customised clips. Furthermore, the team implemented the project's real time rule in its marketing strategy as well and showed a short real-time clip during the launch press conference. *Time of Heroes*' broadcasters promoted the online part through teaser films; teaser videos on the website were focused on the project's content. (This means, also, that transmedia storytelling tools were used for marketing too.) According to Serrano, transmedia is by definition both storytelling and marketing. Since *Time of Heroes* is the only transmedia serial of the study's six

[55] Running from Monday to Thursday; each evening, one 45-minute episode was shown at 8:15pm and one 30-minute episode at 10pm. The final episode was shown on Friday at 8:15pm.

examples which does not deal with either a digital issue nor belongs to the genres of science fiction or mystery thriller, this positive outcome is even more surprising. According to Serrano, *Time of Heroes* is traditional drama; he was all the more keen to demonstrate through *Time of Heroes* that every story could be told transmedially. However, he holds that some genres, notably mystery, thriller and science fiction, are more suitable for transmedia storytelling than others. Transmedia storytelling works best with epic story lines that offer the necessary space and time for a complex and extensive narrative universe. Furthermore, Serrano argues that the project proved that online stories are able to reach an older audience. The success of *Time of Heroes* shows that people are willing to use second (or even third or more) screens. Target groups cut across all age groups, from young to old. Serrano argues that the project struck a chord with experients because the story was recognisably close to their own lives.

Culture Files is another successful example of a project offering just the 'right' content for a particular target group, although, in this case, the group is much smaller. From 2010 onwards, film production company Gebrüder Beetz created and produced six television series,[56] a comic and a documentary game, all under the umbrella name of 'Culture Files.' *Culture Files* is a "European crossmedia project" that "brings the life and work of European culture icons from a range of disciplines reflecting Europe's cultural identity and heritage to a young audience on several platforms." (Gebrüder Beetz [ca. 2010], n.p.) The main media platform is television, where a documentary is shown that transcends genre boundaries by blending elements of fictional film, cartoons and documentaries. Some of the television films are accompanied by an app, comic or game. Every media platform can be experienced on its own, and interconnections between platforms within each of the six *Culture Files* are found on a thematic level. Cross-references between individual *Culture Files* are possible through the image of the investigation room and special narrative techniques. The author and director of the *Beethoven*, *Wagner* and *Tchaikovsky Files*, Ralf Pleger, was set on developing a distinct aesthetic appearance: He makes no visual distinction between fiction and non-fiction

[56] The following *Culture Files* have been produced so far: *Die Akte Kleist* [The Kleist Files] (2010), *Wagnerwahn* [The Wagner Files] (2013), *Die Akte Beethoven* [The Beethoven Files] (2013), *Die Akte Pasolini* [The Pasolini Files] (2013), *Die Akte Zarah Leander* [The Zarah Leander Files] (2013) and *Die Akte Tschaikowsky – Bekenntnisse eines Komponisten* [The Tchaikovsky Files – Confessions of a Composer] (2015).

because his aim is to use all elements and storytelling tools in a way that makes sure the story is told in the best possible way. He therefore considers it an unnecessary limitation to use non-fiction tools only. His aim is to find the emotional truth beyond the restrictive categories of fiction, non-fiction, animation, archive material and so on. *Culture Files* is one of the few examples where non-fictional narratives are foregrounded and mixed with both fiction and other non-fiction elements.

Like *Culture Files*, *Netwars* incorporates non-fictional stories in its core offer. *Netwars* is a fact-based cross-platform experience exploring the impending threat of cyber warfare. The project's website promotes *Netwars* in the following way:

> Digital war is no longer science fiction, but a daily reality and a threat to us all. netwars [sic] makes the dangers tangible – fact-based documentation in an interactive format. Experience the netwars [sic] transmedia project on five different platforms: as a TV documentary, a web documentary, a graphic novel app, an eBook/audiobook/paper book, and soon as a TV series. (Netwars [ca. 2014a], n.p.)

Each platform treats the topic in a different way: The 50-minute television documentary *Netwars/war on the web* demonstrates that digital warfare is already a reality and addresses its societal consequences through insights into the techniques of hackers as well as practices of cyber warfare as pursued by a number of different nations.

> At the heart of the [television] documentary is an exclusive hack on a German energy supplier. For the first time ever, an energy supplier is accompanied by a camera team as high-profile hackers attempt to break into its infrastructure (Netwars [ca. 2014b], n.p.).

Over five episodes the interactive web documentary *Netwars/out of CTRL* tells the story of ongoing attacks and the threat of cyber war by showing how vulnerable ordinary people are on the Internet. The web documentary is embedded in the project's website; the latter provides information on cyber war and cyber security through news items, other articles, press reviews, twitter feeds, additional features and a glossary. Furthermore, the website offers cyber security support. The interactive graphic novel relates a dramatic cyber war story in three episodes: *The Butterfly Attack* "leads you through a catastrophe triggered by hackers" (Netwars [ca. 2014c], n.p.). The first e-book *The Code* tells the story of "the

criminal underworld of the Deep Web" (Netwars [ca. 2014d], n.p.), and *Down Time* focuses on the "return of vigilante hacker Scott Mitchell" (ibid.). *Netwars*' release plan – incorporating the six platforms of website, television documentary, web documentary, e-book, graphic novel and television series – is open-ended: It started in April 2014 with the television and web documentaries; the television series is still in production. The birthday of the *Netwars* universe is Tuesday, 15 April 2014, when the television documentary *Netwars/war on the web* premiered on Arte, at Germany's prime time of 8:15pm. In Germany, documentaries are not normally scheduled for this hour, but Arte is known for showing documentaries, especially on Tuesday nights. In parallel to the television documentary the first of five episodes of the web documentary went live on Heise online, providing background information (Heise 2014, n.p.). From that day onwards, one new webisode of the web documentary was released each week, mirroring the weekly rhythm of television series programming. According to Michael Grotenhoff of Filmtank GmbH, who created and produced *Netwars*, this weekly release schedule was chosen because of Heise online and only worked because of the partner's distinctive social media communication. However, Grotenhoff argued in 2016, with the benefit of two years of hindsight, that he may not opt for this weekly release strategy again. His second thoughts are likely to be based on evolving media use patterns, especially with regard to the growth of SVOD services such as Netflix, Amazon Video and Maxdome, and pay-tv channels such as Sky or TNT Serie. The release times of the two e-books are remarkable in that the first, *The Code,* was serialised.[57] By contrast, all six episodes of the second e-book, *Down Time,* appeared on 22 January 2015. The graphic novel app, available in German, English, Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish, can be accessed via the Google Play Store where it has been available since May 2014 (N-Droid [ca. 2014], n.p.). The length of this entire release period demands a well-thought out transmedia universe with a coherent storyworld. *Netwars* is considered the flagship project of the emerging German crossmedia and transmedia industry (Kahmke 2016). This is for various reasons: First of all, *Netwars* has been the only ongoing German transmedia project. It is one of the few German examples that expands its narrative universe step by step through

[57] Its six episodes were published on the following dates: the first on 23 April 2014, the second on 16 May 2014, the third on 30 May 2014, the fourth on 6 June 2014, the fifth on 13 June 2014 and the sixth on 20 June 2014 (Bastei Lübbe [ca. 2014], n.p.).

building its own story-brand. This is enabled through the strategic approach adopted to production of the whole project, which is both open-ended and sophisticated and, in both these ways, differs from other German transmedia productions. The intention to create a transmedia project is a reflection not only of thematic concerns but of a sustainable business strategy as well: Historically, Filmtank produced international documentaries for cinema and television. In view of the increasingly digital nature of the global media landscape, the company decided to start developing crossmedia stories.

> We have started with high-quality, international documentary films for cinema and television, and we are still producing them. For several years now, these experiences have also helped us to find new, interactive narrative forms. This is how Interactive Graphic Novels, Games, Webdocumentations and transformations for the three-dimensional space are created. We bring together the old masters and the young inventors. This creates internationally award-winning works and new perspectives. (Filmtank [no date], n.p.)

Beyond the technical reasons for expansion, the company also wanted to be more independent from broadcasters. Grotenhoff describes in great detail his experiences with German television editors, who he finds difficult to deal with, and alludes to asymmetrical power relationships; other creators report similar experiences. Sometimes the collaboration with commissioning editors was felt to be opaque, and projects were shelved. In addition, reasons for the acceptance or rejection of proposals were intransparent and incomprehensible for the company; occasionally, a proposal was rejected for reasons other than its merit or topic, which caused frustration in the company. Therefore, the company decided to be more self-sufficient in order to make available to itself a wider range of topics for new projects. In the end, Grotenhoff maintains that it was Filmtank's new company profile that led to the decision to tell a transmedial or crossmedial story. *Netwars* was first proposed concurrently with the company's expansion. Transmedia projects were particularly well suited to the company's new vision and mission because of their potential for collaboration with new partners, opening up spaces for creativity and innovation. These new forms of collaboration came with their own risks. *Netwars* was a way of starting at the deep end and develop new areas of business such as digital storytelling, crossmedia storytelling, apps and games. Awards

received for, and projects[58] conceived in the wake of, *Netwars* are proof that this strategy and investment were successful. In a radically new departure for the company, Filmtank gained, through *Netwars*, a great deal of expertise in storytelling for comics (Grotenhoff).

In addition to these strategic considerations, Grotenhoff cites content and subject matter: Not every story and topic is appropriate for transmedia storytelling. Those suitable have to offer the potential for work that recognises the capabilities of different platforms and be narratively complex. Furthermore, the topic has to be of great import because transmedia projects develop over a relatively long period of time. On a personal level, creators and producers really have to love the topic. *Netwars* is a very good example of a transmedia project emerging from a desire to address both content and business strategy preferences. Both its ongoing development process and its innovative transmedia world-building strategy balance fictional and non-fictional narratives, and its autonomous media platforms allow for different forms of activity on the part of experients.

As this section demonstrates, the six German transmedia series share some similarities but differ in other respects, notably world-building, which is due to their different production backgrounds. Their media platform architecture may or may not include autonomous platforms, as Table 2 serves to illustrate, and there are differences with regard to the level of connectedness on a narrative and/or thematic level, in the mix of fiction and non-fiction and in the encouragement of different forms of experient activity. All six transmedia series incorporate television components (predominantly as core medium) but vary in their additional media platforms.

[58] See, for example, *Frogs & Friends* (2016), *Bauhaus Spirit* (2018-2019).

Table 2: Transmedia world-building: architecture of media platforms in comparison

Media Platform	***Alpha 0.7* (2010)**	***Dina Foxx 1* (2011)**	***Dina Foxx 2* (2014)**	***About:Kate* (2013)**	***Time of Heroes* (2013)**	***Culture Files* (2010-2015)**	***Netwars* (2014-)**
Television	6-episode tv serial	1 feature film	1 feature film	14-episode tv serial	9-episode tv serial	6 documentaries	1 documentary, tv serial in planning
autonomous	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Radio	6-episode radio play	-	-	-	-	-	-
autonomous	✓						
Internet	Several fictional websites	Website	Web series	User-generated content	Website with real-time content, online game	-	Interactive web documentary
autonomous							✓
Social Media	YouTube	Facebook	Facebook	Facebook	Facebook	-	Facebook
autonomous				✓			✓
Music	Fictional band with album	-	-	-	-	-	-
autonomous	✓						

Media Platform	*Alpha 0.7* (2010)	*Dina Foxx 1* (2011)	*Dina Foxx 2* (2014)	*About:Kate* (2013)	*Time of Heroes* (2013)	*Culture Files* (2010-2015)	*Netwars* (2014-)
App	-	-	-	Second screen app	-	-	-
autonomous							
Podcast	Fictional series	-	-	-	-	-	-
autonomous	✓						
ARG	-	ARG	-	-	-	-	-
autonomous							
Graphic Novel	-	-	-	-	-	6 fictional graphic novels	Interactive 3-episode digital graphic novel
autonomous						✓	✓
Book	-	-	-	-	-	-	2-episode e-book
autonomous							✓

The six German transmedia series demonstrate the range of transmedia seriality which stands in sharp contrast to U.S. transmedia branding and franchise operations. To point out some of the most striking differences, *Alpha 0.7* creates a transmedia universe between the fictional and actual worlds. *Dina Foxx* offers non-autonomous media platforms and the first successful ARG in Germany. *About:Kate* builds user-generated content into the fictional world. *Time of Heroes*' transmedial universe is based on the creator's one vision which forms the basis of a distinct sense of worldness and of narrative coherence; additionally, *Time of Heroes* demonstrates that a family drama can be expanded across different media platforms. *Culture Files* and *Netwars* both feature a non-fictional world on their respective core media platforms, and both of them mix genres. *Netwars* charts the territory between fictional and actual worlds, following its premise that 'You never know who is in control,' about which more in the following chapter. *Netwars* is also the only German transmedial series that is expanded step by step.

These distinctive features of each series amply demonstrate the wide range of German transmedia projects even within the film and television industries. What they have in common is that they aim to provide a unique reception experience and call for a number of different forms of activity on the part of the experients. Finally, all six examples provide added narrative value across all involved media platforms, thus aiding the emergence of an innovative form of (televisual) storytelling which, while still a niche practice in the context of the German television industry, shows potential for significant growth, as will be examined in detail below.

2 Creators' Definitions of Transmedia Storytelling

> I don't use the term transmedia, because it is only a marketing label.
> (Volker Heise, creator and producer of *Time of Heroes*)

A variety of definitions for the term 'transmedia storytelling' are offered not only in academia but also within the German industry context. Various concepts have been subsumed under the term, and different terms have been applied to same phenomenon. Although there are variations, all creators interviewed agreed that defining transmedia

storytelling is not an easy endeavour. However, all of them rose to the interviewer's challenge to come up with a definition, which will be discussed in this section. This examination of creators' definitions is of crucial significance for the analysis of transmedia world-building and collaboration processes as it may provide a basis for understanding different approaches as well as outcomes. Abstract definitions are not usually part of what a creator does; definitions can thus be regarded as stemming straight from practice and experience, which makes them all the more pertinent to the analysis undertaken here.

The first point to note is that not every creator interviewed even uses the term 'transmedia' or 'crossmedia.' Some have their own personal ways of defining it; for some, transmedia world-building is its keystone while others see it as pivoting around storytelling practices. Most of the creators interviewed draw a line between transmedia and crossmedia and distinguish both from branded storytelling and marketing. The crucial difference is recognised as the presence of autonomous media platforms and the question of media platform architecture, which different creators discuss in different ways. All of them will be analysed in this section.

Those not using the term transmedia are in the minority. Ralf Pleger claims he has never thought to define transmedia or crossmedia, because he is not interested in categories and definitions but cherishes his creative freedom in developing films.[59] Definitions are not a precondition for creativity. By contrast, Volker Heise and others do not use the term transmedia storytelling because they feel that 'transmedia' is a vacuous notion and should be regarded as a mere "marketing label." Instead, Heise terms his project *Time of Heroes* a "real-time television serial."

Many creators are reluctant to use the word 'transmedia,' for reasons that mirror those found in academic literature. Janna Nandzik calls 'transmedia' a "buzzword," and Lena Thiele speaks disparagingly of the "transmedia label" applied to projects that are not really transmedia. Severin Brettmeister finds that most projects given the label do not deserve it and should instead be called (crossmedia) marketing. All three find that 'transmedia' is a label employed for commercial purposes in contexts where it does not accurately describe the narrative tools used in a particular project. Creators are keen to

[59] Pleger writes film documentaries that transcend both medial and generic boundaries. It is in keeping with his practice that he rejects terms and categories.

emphasise, however, that these are observations of actual use rather than their own definitions of the term. In their own understanding, 'transmedia' denotes qualities found on a narrative level with affordances that will be examined in the following.

The criticism of 'transmedia' as a mere advertising label goes back all the way to 2010. Most creators[60] interviewed observed a 'transmedia hype' in Germany with a peak around 2013. Projects such as *Alpha 0.7* and *Dina Foxx 1 & 2* demonstrated that the sales impact of the 'transmedia' label was indeed considerable, as the many awards and reviews make amply clear; reviews tended to focus on the projects' structure over and above their narrative. Max Zeitler argues that the era of targeted projects is over, especially in Germany, because they are too complex. He sees the future in branded transmedia such as *Star Wars*. Serrano adopts a similar position, prediction a – welcome – shift away from structure and back to storytelling. It is indeed striking that there have not been any new transmedia series like the six examined in Germany since 2016.[61]

Interestingly, German 'pre-hype' projects were labelled 'crossmedia.' Some of the creators[62] argue that public perceptions as well as the terms used have changed over time – what was once crossmedia has since become transmedia. Costa-Zahn refuses even to differentiate between crossmedia and transmedia, arguing that one term has simply replaced the other.

This view is not universally shared, however. Zeitler states that transmedia and crossmedia have come to be very different things as transmedia has evolved into a cross-platform project where each participating platform must be experienced. This represents a change as compared to the times of *Dina Foxx 1*, which was then labelled crossmedia. *Dina Foxx 1* is the only German transmedia series with no autonomous media platforms; Zeitler recognises that all platforms have to be accessed in order fully to understand the story: Brettmeister and Tschurtschenthaler point out that all platforms are connected on a narrative level to such an extent that missing out on one platform is equal to missing out on a piece of the story. Based on practical experiences, Tschurtschenthaler uses different terms, depending on a project's format: If there is a looser connection between different

[60] Büttner, Nandzik, Serrano, Thiele, and Zeitler.

[61] From 2016 onwards the focus of the television industry has been on the production of quality television serials.

[62] Mertikat, Nandzik, Thiele, Tschurtschenthaler, and Zeitler.

platforms, it is crossmedia – for example if there is a film which is complemented by a game and a book; media platforms in a transmedia project are more closely linked, and experients have to engage with all platforms, says Tschurtschenthaler.

Strikingly, the argument whether or not platforms are autonomous is the one cited most often by the creators, although Büttner, Nandzik and Thiele adopt the exact opposite stance to the one put forward by the others: Their criterion for transmedia is that every platform can exist on its own while still being connected to all platforms. Their own projects include autonomous media platforms, as analysed above. To conclude, the architecture of media platforms is crucial for everybody's definition of transmedia storytelling.

According to many of the creators interviewed, another crucial element of transmedia storytelling is world-building. Media platforms are connected through a storyworld, as Büttner explains: The storyworld is key, as it tells the stories of different characters. Michael Grotenhoff also mentions the issues of worlds and distinguishes it from a project's theme by referring to the difference between crossmedia and transmedia. He argues that transmedia is one story told on different platforms, such as *Star Wars.* Transmedia is conceived as one single world, and its one single story is dispersed on different platforms. Crossmedia, by contrast, is a themed world related on different platforms. Different parts of the story are told on different platforms in order to reach different targets groups. Grotenhoff uses his own project *Netwars* as an example and points out its overarching topic of cyber security and hacking. In his view, both crossmedia and transmedia may come with autonomous media platforms, a view in line with the definition put forward by Jenkins.

Interestingly, creators from outside the film industry posit the world element as central for transmedia storytelling: Felix Mertikat, art and creative director of *Netwars'* graphic novel, Severin Brettmeister, game designer, and Lena Thiele, whose roots are in digital, interactive storytelling, argue that world-building is essential in creating transmedia projects and differs from the development of mono-medium stories such as film. They argue that mono-medium stories differ from interactive in so far as in film development storytelling is central and no world is created whereas in the development process of interactive media such as games the very first step is to create a world. For the creators mentioned, world-building is a natural (first) step. The creators discuss different

types of creation process that have to be combined in the development of transmedia projects, as will be examined below. Taken together, the creators' statements indicate that the individual's profession influences their understanding of transmedia storytelling and its creation process.

Serrano is one of the few creators to mention a criterion that goes beyond world-building and is based on storytelling. Since transmedia projects are reliant on "media jumps," because the story is told on more than one media platform, the aim is to create an experience generated by flow and immersion. The purpose and hallmark of the quality of a transmedia project has to be added narrative value delivered in such a way that the experient is prompted to change platform.

Most of the creators interviewed provide examples of 'good,' i.e. successful transmedia storytelling. Most examples are taken from non-German, and largely from American, markets, which are still considered the trailblazers of the industry. *Star Wars* was mentioned the most. Max Zeitler calls it the "biggest entertainment media project of all times." The creators refer to it to exemplify transmedia world-building, successful transmedia storytelling beyond the narrow transmedia label, and branded storytelling. They do mention differences between the German and American markets too, including Germany's smaller budgets[63] and the absence of big-name brands such as *Stars Wars*, with the notable exception of *Crime Scene.*[64] In the context of fictional transmedia, brands are considered essential, as Costa-Zahn, Tschurtschenthaler and Zeitler all point out. Costa-Zahn goes as far as saying that transmedia storytelling as such can be traced back to American brand extensions. *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001) is cited as an example of cinema marketing, and *Lost* as one of interseason transmedia. It is striking that Costa-Zahn should see such a close link between transmedia and brand extensions as transmedia has always been a cross-platform project based on storytelling while brand extensions are content produced after the main product and sometimes incorporating fan and/or community content. Costa-Zahn proposes three types of transmedia project: transmedia shows, transmedia documentaries and transmedia fiction, each functioning in their own way: a show uses transmedia mechanisms; in fiction the story has to be transmedial; and

[63] Büttner, Nandzik, Thiele and Zeitler.

[64] Büttner and Serrano.

a documentary prepares a theme in a transmedial way. What they have in common is the aim of providing additional depth to the content delivered.

All creators interviewed agree that German transmedia projects from 2010 to 2016 were unsuccessful experiments. The reasons will be analysed in the following section.

3 Transmedia Seriality as Niche Practice

Let's freak out – don't be too shy!
(Georg Tschurtschenthaler, producer of *Culture Files*)

All six German transmedia series were rolled out to critical acclaim for being creative, ambitious, and enabling new forms of (television) storytelling and notably world-building. And yet, ratings remained lower than the broadcaster's average figures. German transmedia projects did not reach a mass audience. Creators call their transmedia series "pioneer work" (Büttner), a "super experiment" (Büttner), an "innovative pitch" (Costa-Zahn), an "innovative image project" (Zeitler), "research, but not a finished product" (Zeitler), and Grotenhoff describes *Netwars* as a "niche and nerdy topic." All six German transmedia series incorporate television – a mass medium if there ever was one. So why do transmedia projects, pioneer and innovative as they are, not reach more experients? In view of low ratings and their being cast as exceptional, the six projects can be regarded as niche practice. This section explores transmedia as niche practice by focusing on the creators' experiences.

All in all, the creators mention four main reasons for transmedia being a niche practice: the nature of television audiences, broadcasting time slots, courage and innovation, and budgets.

Max Zeitler, author and director of *Dina Foxx*, contends that transmedia projects are created for a niche television audience interested more in the text's construction than in the narrative. In response to the question whether the narrative is also a reason for the niche character, he says:

> I am really not aware of a lot of other transmedial projects where it was any different. These have been projects for very small,

> niche audiences who were keen on analysing them and who were fascinated by their mechanics and their innovativeness – and that's legitimate of course, and it's very exciting, but people didn't really look too closely at whether the project really worked as an entertaining narrative.

It is important to contextualise Zeitler's argument within the production process of *Dina Foxx*. *Dina Foxx* was intended to be a transmedia project, and so the focus was always on the transmedial construction. The influence of television audiences has to be analysed in view of broadcasting time slots. The television storyworlds of all transmedia projects analysed were given time slots late in the evening which do not usually reach mass audiences anyway. Most creators interviewed expressed their dismay at the timing while pointing out that German public broadcasters tend to reach a demographic that is older than the intended experients of any given transmedia project. Serrano calls them "old people broadcaster[s]" (2016, p. 1), whose audiences do not want to watch transmedial series, as Costa-Zahn argues. Serrano, Büttner, Nandzik and Tschurtschenthaler all point out that the very motivation behind public broadcasters' decisions to co-produce a transmedia project was to reach a younger, Internet-savvy audience which they are not normally able to connect with.

Another factor contributing to the niche character of transmedia projects is the public broadcaster's marketing strategy. Most creators interviewed reported that broadcasters did not promote and advertise the transmedia projects enough, especially online; as a consequence, potential audiences were not aware of the innovative nature of the projects. The six series are little-known among German television viewers. One reason for the lack of a sustained marketing effort might be the lack of confidence on the part of broadcasters. According to many creators, public broadcasters tend to shy away from what they have gotten themselves into, thus undermining their own desire to reach a younger demographic through new forms of storytelling. Both Grotenhoff and Nandzik emphasise that stamina are needed:

> Sooner or later this will be such a big ship, and what you need is courage and determination. And I think Arte kind of ran out of that in the end. That was the reason why we didn't roll out the PR that we had planned. There was supposed to be a big press conference. In the end nobody wanted to be responsible. But once

> there were some positive reviews from the critics it was a different ball game yet again. Basically, I think the transmedia serial should have reached out to more people. It went under people's radar, for the most part, also in terms of the time when it was broadcast. (Nandzik)

The majority of creators interviewed describe both Germany as a whole and the television industry in particular as cautious and reluctant to embrace innovation – conservative and generally sceptical. Therefore, innovation, if at all, occurs elsewhere. Creators provide little more on where this may be, although Nandzik and Tschurtschenthaler will at least say that 'other countries' have seen more innovative television projects produced, and that media outlets other than public broadcasters are more interested in innovation.

Television audiences were called conservative too. Janna Nandzik argues that viewers in France are more likely than their German counterparts to watch web documentaries. Heise, Serrano and Tschurtschenthaler speak about established viewing practices and viewers' demands for the same television content being delivered time and again. Viewing practices in Germany are indeed different from other countries. Any form of German serial storytelling with complex narration and horizontal storytelling was rare on German television until as recently as 2017. On a narrative level, there is a major difference between German series with closed narration on the one hand, and quality television and transmedia series with one running storyline and complex narration on the other: Quality television and transmedia series rely on narrative memory (which, according to Thompson (1996), is a key characteristic of quality television), in stark contrast to German favourites such as *Crime Scene* and *Großstadtrevier* [Big City Police Station] (1986-).

Germans are not even sure, and are having a heated debate over, whether a German equivalent to American quality television is even possible (Hahn 2013). The experts interviewed are also measuring themselves up against the American market. The two markets differ markedly in the significance they accord to ratings figures. Creators

mention other differences too, such as the different concepts of a showrunner, differences in debating culture,[65] ownership and authorship,[66] audience interaction[67] and budgets.[68]

In terms of budgets, German public broadcasters do have the money as well as access to all the different media (television, radio, Internet) needed for transmedia storytelling, as Büttner, Costa-Zahn, Heise and Tschurtschenthaler note. In this respect they are ahead of private broadcasters and thus quite powerful, as the creators interviewed point out with a certain degree of impatience. It is thus no surprise that the few German transmedia projects have all been produced by public, rather than private, broadcasters.

Creators disagree on whether there is a future for transmedia storytelling. Nandzik argues that the best times for transmedia storytelling are still ahead of us, while Büttner finds that there is no longer any need for transmedia storytelling because transmedia projects were bound up with an era before media convergence culture, in which transmedia storytelling had to shoulder the task of combining different media. Georg Tschurtschenthaler observes that from 2013 onwards, new kinds of projects have come about which he calls journalistic; he says they are media independent in so far as every medium could potentially fit the project's purpose and topic. He concludes that it was a beginner's mistake to produce digital content for its own sake rather than as a response to the nature of the topic at hand. In the global media landscape, Germany finds itself at the bottom of the pile, as Tschurtschenthaler argues. That is why, in 2016, he noted a change had taken place over the preceding two or three years: Broadcasters had become more courageous and were finally recognising that they had to be more innovative. One example cited of the new-found courage is *Supernerds,* a television film proposed by WDR to build on an existing play with the clear message: 'Let's freak out – don't be too shy!'

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[65] Zeitler.

[66] Brettmeister.

[67] Brettmeister.

[68] Costa-Zahn, Heise, Tschurtschenthaler and Zeitler.

4 Opportunities and Challenges of Creating Transmedia Worlds

4.1 Traditional vs Innovative Models of Financing

Only German public broadcasters have the money to finance transmedia projects.
(Kristian Costa-Zahn, television producer of *Dina Foxx 1 & 2*)

You have to think outside the box.
(Michael Grotenhoff, producer of *Netwars*)

One reason why transmedia storytelling is a niche practice in Germany is the issue of financing. Creators interviewed draw attention to the lack of a proven business model for transmedia projects; Costa-Zahn states that this is the biggest challenge for transmedia projects. Financing compounds other difficulties, including the management of complexity and multi-stakeholder collaboration processes. This section analyses these difficulties as well as the opportunities inherent in transmedia storytelling by arguing that transmedia practices have to navigate the balance between traditional and new models of financing, creative freedom and rigid structures imposed to manage complexity, and the smooth or disruptive nature of media platform changes.

Two ad-hoc financing models of German transmedia projects have emerged: the first involves teaming up with a public television broadcaster. This may be considered the traditional approach, especially in the context of German television production. It is also the dominant model, adopted by *Alpha 0.7*, *Dina Foxx 1, Dina Foxx 2*, *Time of Heroes* and *About:Kate.* It affects transmedia world-building in so far as the medium of television is very established in terms of what it can and cannot accommodate. Crucially, if television broadcasters contribute the lion share to the project's budget, television can reasonably be expected to be the centre piece of the transmedia universe to which other platforms such as the Internet have to be subordinate. German public broadcasters do have a budget earmarked for online content, but it is mainly spent on social media marketing. This is one of the main reasons why so many German transmedia projects are found to have an unbalanced approach to world-building (Jenkins 2006a). Heise argues that this may not be a bad thing, as a core medium is essential for transmedia storytelling, and it might as well be television. Getting funding for online content is very difficult, as

Heise explains, and German law expressly forbids tapping into commercial funding sources if a public broadcaster finances the corresponding television content.

In the second model, transmedia projects are financed through partnerships, which is unusual in the context of German television production; the model is innovative. Given that the finance plan is finalised only after the writing phase has already been completed, financing has a profound effect on the narrative process of the transmedia series relying on this model, especially regarding platform interconnections. Consequently, media platforms are not defined by their financing model, as in the first model. The new model allows for a greater degree of artistic freedom, especially with regard to the choice of media platforms.

Other differences between the first and second models have to do with publishing and collaboration. According to *Netwars* producer Michael Grotenhoff, partnerships are essential for transmedia storytelling when it comes to the publication and delivery of the story. In his view, partners are important notably for step-by-step publishing:

> And above all, get the partner involved early, because the big difference is that when you do documentary, linear storytelling, you write a story, and you get to project development, and then it's production, and then you've got the completed project and it gets released, broadcast and whatever else is done with it. And only then do you get a sense of, oh, it didn't actually go down that well with people. There may of course be three billion reasons for that. And while you're in this process of creation you have no interaction at all and no feedback. And that's why it's so important for projects where you do have all these interactive possibilities and feedback opportunities to start early with a kind of audience engagement so you avoid travelling through some sort of limbo. What you want to do is get in touch early with the people you would like to get involved with. And that has to do with partners again, and with social media. So these can also be components of the project that are communicated in advance. But this whole business of developing something in a closed circuit for three or four years and then releasing it and then to look what happens – I think that's something that really doesn't work any more. It's like something of a bygone era. People aren't having it any more. (...) That is why partners are so important: you need to build a project step by step and then also end up in the right place.

As Grotenhoff points out, the partnership model offers the potential to reach additional target groups because the partner can draw attention to the project, too, and get feedback from the target group[69] even during content development. As a consequence of early collaboration with different partners, the model becomes challenging as teams are bigger.[70]

Netwars is a quintessential representative of the second, innovative model of financing through partnership. Decisions of Filmtank, the production company, had a huge impact on *Netwars*' storytelling as well as its chances of survival in an era of digital ephemerality. When artistic freedom was clearly required, Filmtank decided to seek ways to be more in charge of their choice of topic for new projects. Grotenhoff emphasises that the future of transmedia storytelling is in partnership models that give producers more freedom. Two things helped the company find partners for *Netwars*. The first was rather traditional: The television documentary was developed at the Documentary Campus Masterschool, a bespoke training programme in which European documentary producers are advised on how to develop film ideas, find funding and reach an international audience. The second relates to the development of the graphic novel, which was funded by the Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg through prototype funding. Grotenhoff highlights that the development of the prototype allowed him to find partners he would not have been able to reach otherwise. Other creators interviewed, including Heise, Thiele and Zeitler, criticise that there is no dedicated funding for transmedia projects.

Netwars' independence from the broadcasters and commissioning editors forced them to think about partnership "outside the box" (Grotenhoff) and did indeed eventually lead to new forms of cooperation and collaboration. Filmtank was able to bring the following institutions on board as partners for *Netwars*: television networks Arte and ZDF, online magazine *Heise*, publisher Bastei Lübbe and weekly newspaper *DIE ZEIT*. The list does include public broadcasters, but overall it is unusual for a German project: Heise was able to reach target groups that Arte did not, and Bastei Lübbe had considerable

[69] Besides trailers, Filmtank conducted a number of tests with the target group. These are very important and form part of the marketing. They can influence storytelling – maybe not fundamentally, but in terms of important details. Filmtank run tests especially on the interactive storytelling used in the graphic novel and web documentary, for example in user manuals and help functions. The overall question was concerned with the added value of interactive storytelling for the target group, as Grotenhoff explains.

[70] Collaboration will be examined in more detail below.

expertise with e-books as well as an international network of its own. In comparison to traditional, linear, mono-platform storytelling, multi-platform transmedia storytelling requires a change in thinking about partnership also because partnerships are set up not for the whole project but for individual components. Partners need to have the expertise of working on a particular platform. Through this way of building partnerships, *Netwars* demonstrated its remarkable focus on distribution, marketing and reaching experients even in the early stages of project development. The new forms of collaboration were riskier and required cross-financing. The web documentary was cross-financed through both the graphic novel and the two e-books.[71]

In comparison to the other German transmedia series, *Netwars* is distinct in its partnership-based finance model which had an impact on transmedia world-building, underlining the project's flagship status. Cooperation with different partners and the low level of involvement of television broadcasters influenced the whole narrative world of *Netwars* and explains its success.[72]

Both models of financing have their impact on transmedia world-building, albeit in different ways: While the traditional model, relying on co-production with broadcasters, offers the advantage of a stable budget known to all at an early stage, the innovative model of partnerships is financially less predictable but grants more artistic freedom to the parties involved, as will be discussed in the following section.

4.2 Artistic Freedom vs Project Complexity

An opportunity offered by transmedia storytelling is its openness.
(Marcel Kolvenbach, author and director
of the *Netwars* television documentary)

[71] Grotenhoff and Thiele.

[72] *Netwars* won, among others, the international Japan Prize 2014 and the international Prix Italia 2015 for 'Best Trans-Media Experience.' Surely the most important award was the Grimme Online Award 2015 for work in the areas of 'Knowledge and Education,' awarded for the interactive web documentary as part of the comprehensive crossmedia project. The recognition was given for the screenplay and its artistic and technical realisation (Grimme Institut [ca. 2015], n.p.).

All experts are united in their view that artistic freedom is one, if not the main, opportunity offered by transmedia storytelling. At the same time, they all identify a project's complexity as the main challenge. Artistic freedom can mean many different things to different people and will be examined in this section, partly in relation to the issue of transmedia complexity.

Artistic freedom is related by many creators to mediality. Transmedia storytelling allows creators to use a broad range of different media with many possibilities. Georg Tschurtschenthaler says he loves to have so many roads open to him, and to choose a set of media platforms which can best advance the project's topic. Of all the decisions made over the course of the creation and production process, the selection of topics is what he finds most interesting, as it is the most creative decision.

Kristian Costa-Zahn also sees the biggest advantage of transmedia storytelling in combining the strengths of each medium. He ascribes different characteristics to each medium: linear television is a part of mass culture; both film and television are marked by emotional storytelling as lean-back experience; online media allow for interactivity, participation and social exchange; books are sites of individual experiences and of the imagination. Serrano also argues that transmedia storytelling, by its very nature, offers the chance of extending an experience across different media platforms. Different media platforms have different narrative abilities, as this thesis has also shown.

Different media address different target groups. An advantage of transmedia storytelling as compared to other forms of storytelling is that a whole spectrum of target groups may be reached through one and the same narrative universe and topic, as Grotenhoff and Tschurtschenthaler point out. It is interesting that both emphasise this particular aspect, because their projects include autonomous media platforms and a non-fictional storyworld on their core media platform. Hence, different experients can engage with different media platforms within the same transmedia universe.

Artistic freedom also has to do with financing and economic independence. Michael Grotenhoff emphasises that independence and artistic freedom meant that people enjoyed their work more.

Inclusion of different media and engaging experients in different ways refer to openness, which was discussed in detail above. Openness is mentioned expressly only by Kolvenbach. Marcel Kolvenbach compares transmedial openness with research for a film

documentary, which may not come as a total surprise as he is a documentary filmmaker. He argues that his findings are best presented transmedially, as transmedia allows for the greatest degree of openness: Filmmakers can make it clear to their audiences that findings may change, or be cast in a different light at some future date. Kolvenbach appreciates the fact that he does not have to impose one interpretation of his findings on viewers but is able to allow experients to draw their own conclusions. He goes on to argue that a further opportunity inherent in transmedia storytelling lies in its openness to rhizomatic development, where experients start from the same point but are able to pursue different paths. In this sense, transmedia storytelling is non-linear and allows for artistic freedom through an open narration process. Kolvenbach compares this kind of storytelling with a quest on which experients try to find traces in the snow or sand. What Kolvenbach finds interesting about transmedia projects is that the author does not need to determine the trajectory of the entire story, leaving it instead to the experient to decide the sequence of steps and the way across. Openness thus enacted impacts on the narration as experients assume some responsibility for the dramatic structure of a narrative, as Kolvenbach explains: Authors of transmedia projects have less power and control over the story, which constitutes a challenge for creators. Kolvenbach describes this way of storytelling as democratic and emancipatory, as a certain amount of autonomy is accorded to the experient.[73] In this sense, participatory storytelling is a huge part of transmedia storytelling. In short, Kolvenbach argues that participation means different creative departments and artists make contributions to a topic that is cast as open and may be transformed by the experients. Authors are no longer subjected to the ideological and commercial constraints of the past, and experients are empowered, albeit in ways that creators will still have to curate, at least to a certain extent.

Kolvenbach's explanations of transmedia openness have repercussions for the complex conditions in which authors operate. As a consequence, artistic freedom can be realised on different levels. Transmedia projects are complex on a narrative level because one narrative is told across interconnected media platforms. The creators interviewed

[73] Kolvenbach defines participatory storytelling as using existing content to create something new. Participatory or interactive storytelling means more user-generated content. Kolvenbach's vision is that broadcasters will open their archives so that everybody can begin to work with existing content. This would increase the sense of emotional attachment to a project.

describe this complexity as a challenge – one encountered on a narrative level, as a complex narrative will have to be finely tuned, but also on a technical and media level in so far as different media platforms with different narrative and technical affordances need to be lined up. Grotenhoff states that Filmtank themselves have the storytelling expertise and buy in technical expertise from other companies with which partnerships are set up and/or from freelancers; along the way, a balance is struck between technical innovation and compelling storytelling. Together, they constitute an experiment unfolding in different ways from project to project. Thus, transmedial complexity is a complex phenomenon which includes a production process that is different from mono-medium stories, as will be analysed below. World-building is a particularly complex endeavour in that various storylines are being devised and presented, a process which is more challenging in transmedia than in mono-medial storyworlds, as Costa-Zahn points out. Last but not least, complexity affects the issue of financing, partnerships and cross-financing. Any transmedia project's inherent complexity throws up the need to establish new ways of creating and producing.

4.3 Changes of Media Platform as Smooth Disruption

Every transmedia project creates media jumps.
(Alexander Maximilian Otto Serrano, transmedia designer of *Time of Heroes*)

Complexity is associated with changes of media platform. Creators describe the challenge of apportioning parts of the story to different platforms and enabling experients to cross over from one to another without any sense of disruption. Inevitably, transmedia necessitates media jumps, says Alexander Maximilian Otto Serrano. The aim for him is to create an experience that is marked by a sense of uninhibited flow and immersion. Max Zeitler disagrees with the suggestion that transmedia storytelling as such is better able to generate an immersive experience, pointing out that its inherent complexity makes it less easily 'accessible' for experients. However, the creator's aim is still to create an experience that is smooth and orderly. All creators agree that the moment of media platform change is a practical and conceptual challenge, as this section will explore.

Arguably, one big lesson learnt from the six German transmedia series has been that the change of media platform has to be voluntary, and that not every experient will make this change. According to Brettmeister, Büttner, Grotenhoff, Heise, Serrano, Thiele and Tschurtschenthaler the creators cannot mandate experients to change platform. The impact of this realisation on transmedia world-building is huge, as Michael Grotenhoff is quick to emphasise: "There simply aren't any stories where creators exert real force to make people switch from one platform to another so they can assemble different bits and pieces of a story." In light of Grotenhoff's *Netwars* being the only ongoing German transmedia project it can be assumed that autonomous media platforms – i.e. the absence of forced media platform changes – are a success factor of transmedia projects. Zeitler, the author and director of *Dina Foxx 1 and 2*, argues that switching platforms goes against the experient's habitual media consumption behaviour which is geared towards remaining on one and the same media platform for quite a while and, e.g., watch television or play a game for an extended period of time. Zeitler assumes that very few experients are willing to change platform, and *Dina Foxx* can be seen as proof. *Dina Foxx*'s game designer, Severin Brettmeister, also emphasises that platform change has to be voluntary and optional. He further argues that the American examples highlight the viability of projects with autonomous and supplementary media platforms. Forcing experients to engage with every platform in a transmedia universe simply does not work, as Brettmeister admits. One reason is that although the different media platforms within one transmedia universe have to be aligned and interconnected to generate narrative cohesion, they find themselves competing and potentially undercutting one another – primarily by competing for the experient's attention, as Georg Tschurtschenthaler contends. Tschurtschenthaler calls it a mistake that the early German transmedia projects wanted to include all types of media. Serrano puts his finger on the crux of the matter, which he calls media jumps: "You do not earn money with media jumps."

The risky nature of media jumps explains the need for strategies to avoid the experient feeling disrupted in their behaviour. Creators have come up with essentially two different strategies: the first is related to world-building and habitual ways of platform use on the part of experients, while the second relates to added narrative value on the level of storytelling. Addressing the first strategy, Tschurtschenthaler argues that a certain degree of disruption is inevitable. One way to manage this problem is to focus on second

screens, i.e. a situation in which experients already use two types of media. The process by which Tschurtschenthaler and his team visualise the problem they try to solve is the representation of target group members as personas.[74] In addition, they conduct trials and tests with target groups. In order to create the best possible experience, it is important to simplify storytelling and to avoid the feeling of overload. In other words, clarity and transparency are more important than maximising content. Transmedia storytelling strategies have been modified over the last few years, based on a different outlook: In the past, strategies reflected a producer's approach to apportioning content to different platforms. Today, the experient's perspective is central. Writing and development are based on the experient's behaviour, although achieving this goal is difficult especially during the content development process.

The second strategy addresses the issue of added narrative value. Zeitler states that any content offered has to engage the experient to such a degree that they are willing to change platform in order to further deepen their experience. Costa-Zahn also argues that a project has to incentivise platform changes. Incentives have to be positive and must not put pressure on experients. Serrano emphasises that the main success factor of a transmedia project is its quality, by which he means added narrative value. Added value may consist of content created to reach different kinds of target group, satisfying various needs of a target group, satisfying the demand for both lean-back and lean-forward experiences in engaging with a story, and supporting involvement through a complex storyworld.

[74] Personas are fictional characters who represent typical members of a particular target group. They illustrate important characteristics of the group, which may also be an existing part of the audience. Working with personas is a way of understanding the needs of a target group, to describe these needs and to identify the features and functionalities required to address them.

5 Collaboration and its Impact on Text

5.1 The Challenge of Interdisciplinarity

> Another issue is whether an author or a director will even be willing to be part of a content development process that is team-driven.
> (Ralf Pleger, author and director of *The Wagner Files, The Beethoven Files* and *The Tchaikovsky Files – Confession of a Composer*)

As argued above, the production of transmedia projects calls for new forms of collaboration. Given that the transmedial story universe expands across different media with different narrative affordances, new forms of collaboration are necessary and, as a consequence, creators from different industries have to work together, even during the initial project development phase of content development. This section examines the role of interdisciplinarity during this development process by arguing that different industries bring different approaches to the creation and development of transmedia series.

All German transmedia creators interviewed agree that the development and creation of transmedia projects call for new forms of collaboration. Considering that a transmedia story is told across multiple media platforms, these different media platforms must be narratively interconnected. Consequently, various trades and professions from different media industries such as film, television, comic, games and print have to collaborate. In the German context, this is a considerable challenge, as many German professionals have little to no experience in collaborating across disciplines, especially at such an early point as the content development process, as the creators confirmed. Although mono-medium texts such as a film and television shows require a form of collaboration during production, writing and creating a transmedia story calls for much more intense and prolonged forms of collaboration or else narrative coherence will be put at risk. Germany's tradition of auteur cinema and of venerating the one 'auteur' – usually the director – as the main artist who exercises total control over their work (Grob 2007) continues to influence television production practices. Television films and sometimes even entire series are created and written by a single person. The creators interviewed mention a total of four main challenges with regard to collaboration: personality and

professional background, time, communication and an appreciation of individual media platforms.

Lena Thiele sums up the requirements for collaboration: less ego and more willingness to work together – a challenge for most people in the film industry, she says. As a matter of fact, willingness to collaborate is a function of professional backgrounds and experiences. Working practices differ sharply across industries: Creators from the game industry, for example, are more used to collaboration during content development than creators working in film. In addition, the personality of the creator also influences their willingness to cooperate. Filmmaker Ralf Pleger calls himself an author-director and prefers to work on his own. He is, therefore, not the type of author and director who is naturally inclined to be comfortable in crossmedia or transmedia projects:

> I'm quite open about that – I guess I am what they call an auteur, so I do my own thing and hatch an idea and work out my own little *Gesamtkunstwerk*. I write my own scripts and implement them myself. That's where I feel most comfortable. That doesn't mean that I don't know other configurations. I do, and I accept them, but on the whole I'll feel less comfortable in them. And that's where another conflict is on the horizon already: whether an author or a director will even be willing to be part of a content development process that is team-driven.

This is the reason why *The Wagner Files – Confessions of a Composer* had three separate production departments: one each for app, graphic novel and film, and each working separately. The only instance of collaboration was that Pleger screened the film clips and the interview clips for use in the app.

The creators describe their difficulties with regard especially to timing and scheduling. Connecting the media platforms of a transmedia series on a narrative level requires time – and time is money, which some German transmedia series simply did not have. Time matters in two ways: whether there is or is not enough of it to carry out the necessary work together, and whether or not production is run efficiently.

Time available has repercussions for communication within the project; time is needed especially when teams are larger. Janna Nandzik argues that transmedia projects are challenging in terms of collaboration because so much time is needed to talk things through in person rather than via telephone or Skype, which are prone to

misunderstandings. The majority of creators interviewed had to collaborate with colleagues across Germany and, in some cases, even across the globe.[75] Felix Mertikat, art and creative director of the *Netwars* graphic novel, recalls that communicating team members were based in four different locations: Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Ludwigsburg. Furthermore, transmediality meant that colleagues had to agree on a very large number of issues so as to connect platforms on a narrative level, but there was never enough time. Volker Heise also remembers that collaboration under time constraints was a tough call. He argues that collaboration with television broadcasters is notoriously difficult as their work patterns are so different from those of production companies: coordination processes are almost inevitably slower[76] – a huge problem affecting the entire production process – and may even lead to the number of episodes being reduced.[77] All in all, the most challenging aspect is the different languages spoken by the online and television teams. Heise concludes that the mere task of coordinating the project and setting up the best possible communication channels and patterns whenever needed would require a full-time position. The different languages spoken by different disciplines lead to inefficiencies and may adversely affect the shared vision. Game designer Severin Brettmeister argues that communication, even on a lexical level, puts a huge strain on cross-disciplinary teams.

Besides communication, different levels of experience can also make it challenging to work in interdisciplinary teams. The greatest differences tend to be found between film and television industries on the one hand and the games industry on the other.[78] Problems are confounded by different notions of what individual media are about, and what they are able to do in terms of narrative potential and interactive storytelling.

Film producer Georg Tschurtschenthaler describes his preferred development process as follows: Based on a story-bible and a benchmark paper which depicts both

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[75] The *Netwars* production team was based in Berlin, Hamburg, Ludwigsburg and London.

[76] Grotenhoff and Heise.

[77] Nandzik.

[78] Brettmeister contends that the main difference between film and television storytelling and storytelling in games concerns the possibility of interaction. In games, interaction comes first, followed by storytelling. Players in a game have a much greater and more active role – to 'play' – than the audience of a film. Their experience is shaped by decisions they themselves have been making. The role of the player is comparable to that of a hero on their – hero's – journey. That said, games also require more explanation than film and television.

characters and the project's overall framework, him and his company develop a transmedia project in seven steps, whose specifics vary from project to project. The first three are broadly similar though: The first is to define the theme as concisely as possible, according to the benchmark paper, and to produce a similarly concise story bible. The second step includes the definition of the project's target group. The third is the choice of media in view of both the theme and the envisaged target groups. Media design is based on the target groups' user behaviour and aims to create a truly compelling experience for them. In this context it is important to simplify the story and the tools through which it is told, and to avoid anything that may lead to experients feeling overloaded. Clarity and transparency are what matters most, and certainly more than offering as much content as possible on as many platforms as possible.

While Tschurtschenthaler's approach is largely based on storytelling, *Netwars* transmedia designer Lena Thiele's view of the development process is rooted in a world-building perspective: Creative processes are based on world-building because content is inevitably developed as a world and without a view to platforms. Thiele says world-building is carried out based on the team's knowledge of the project's target group. Like Tschurtschenthaler, she places great emphasis on creating an experience. For example, the choice of platforms is a function solely of target group knowledge and the vision of experiences to be offered. Thiele describes world-building as an emotional rather than rational process. She says she tries to think of an issue which comes with an inherent problem. In order to capture it, she lays out its various dimensions and facets on post-it notes. These dimensions include both the fictional and factual. Structuring the different elements, Thiele maps each one onto a suitable platform, thereby asking herself which elements are going to be attractive for which target group on which platform.

The two approaches have implications for the whole development process. While Tschurtschenthaler's is more intricately structured, Thiele's is intuitive. Combining even these two under a single roof may be demanding.

How do creators address the challenges of collaboration? Almost all creators interviewed mention round table conversations as one key element of collaboration. These discussions alternate with phases during which everybody works on their own. The precise role and impact of the round table is evaluated and experienced differently by different creators. Most regard it as a helpful tool of collaboration, although some are

critical and see it as a time waster. Others again feel it inhibits the flow of their creative juices. Game designer Severin Brettmeister describes the development process of *Dina Foxx 2* in the following way:

> The process of collaboration was challenging and problematic because the team of ten to thirteen people focused on developing the story rather than creating a world. In terms of the game this was often a waste of time and ineffective.

This quote really illustrates the passions associated with different steps of the creation process. As far as successful tools of collaboration are concerned, some creators mention documents shared on cloud servers, useful especially when the team is spread out over different locations. Thiele adds a script-workshop to the list of useful collaboration tools, recalling one that involved herself, producers Michael Grotenhoff and Saskia Kress, an academic expert on cybersecurity from the Free University of Berlin as well as *Netwars'* art director and technical manager.

Although, taken together, not all of these tools were successful, collaborative production of a transmedia project cannot do without a "unified author" (Evans 2011, p. 31). This institution is the guarantor who makes sure that every piece of the story is conceived and implemented in view of the entirety of the transmedia storyworld, as will be examined in the following section from an industry point of view.

5.2 Implications of the Lack of a Transmedia Showrunner as "Vision Keeper"

> A transmedia designer is comparable to a conductor and animal trainer.
> (Severin Brettmeister, game designer of *Dina Foxx 2*)

One reason why collaboration on a German transmedia project is challenging is the lack of a showrunner who guards and supports the vision as a unified author. All the creators interviewed emphasise the importance of this role, although they use different names for it. This section explores the consequences of the lack of a transmedia showrunner.

Nandzik and Tschurtschenthaler speak of a 'curator.' Georg Tschurtschenthaler argues:

> In this day and age, let's see ourselves as curators and say we have been totally engaged in the topic and that it is interesting and relevant and we are telling you the story as best we can while resisting the lure of the many possibilities. And we are brave enough to say, that's it. Because quite often we'll think that this is far too easy and banal, it isn't complex enough, or it's just a yes/no story. All of this may be true, but if we want it to work for the audience it has to be simple.

Tschurtschenthaler's curator is a person with research skills and a vision of the story to tell – just like what is commonly called a showrunner. Janna Nandzik goes one step further by positioning the curator as one part of an experient/curator pair:

> And because the Internet is so close to the audience you have to be aware as a storyteller that, on the one hand, you're the curator, i.e. you have to be the master of your own story at all times. And at the same time you have to be agile and flexible enough to respond to outrage on social media or when your app doesn't work and so on.

Nandzik's definition of a curator is wider and includes being in charge of the story as well as having the power to react when things go wrong.

Of all the creators interviewed, Brettmeister talks about the role of a showrunner in most detail. In fact, he speaks of two roles: 'transmedia designer' and 'vision keeper.' Transmedia designer is the director of both linear and non-linear stories across different platforms, but not the owner of the story. In this sense the transmedia designer is comparable to a conductor or animal trainer – it is his or her responsibility to devise the choreography of the transmedia storyworld and lead the whole team. The team will have to be forged by the transmedia designer in ways that best serve the needs of the transmedia story. Brettmeister's definition of a transmedia designer focuses on the organisational level whereas his 'vision keeper' makes decisions that affect the narrative level. As the name suggests, vision keepers are owners of the vision, the idea behind the project. They are in charge of making decisions relevant to it. Being entrusted with the authority to make decisions is an essential success factor, a point that was stressed by several creators who criticised that in their projects it was often unclear who was responsible.

It is interesting that Severin Brettmeister should divide the role of transmedia producer, created as credit by the Producers Guild of America in 2010, in two. A

transmedia producer is responsible, on the one hand, for long-term project planning, i.e. the development and production of the transmedia project, and, on the other hand, for narrative continuity and the story's coherence. Although these functions do not differ from the responsibilities of a film or television producer, they are more sophisticated in transmedial projects because of the involvement of different media platforms, which result in bigger teams across different media industries. Given that this study revealed that the transmedia producer has to be more involved in the writing and creation process, which requires more writing skills than 'only' that of safeguarding narrative continuity and coherence across platforms, this study proposes the creation of the role of transmedia showrunner, mirroring the role of the showrunner in quality television series. A transmedia showrunner is strongly involved in the initial content development process, but his or her responsibilities extend into the content implementation process where they have to do with film production, website programming and/or the design of a visual narrative. A transmedia showrunner is endowed with decision making authority. Although the creators interviewed had different terms for it, they all agreed that the role is a fundamental precondition for narrative coherence.

Narrative coherence and interconnectivity rely on collaboration. As argued above, Germany has less experience with collaborative creation (Krauß 2018a, 2018b; Weiß and Gößler 2014). With regard to *Netwars*, the creators describe the work process as rather disjointed and solitary, which one might expect has impacted the interconnection of media platforms. However, *Netwars*[79] demonstrates that the team was able to disseminate the project's main argument – its one vision – of 'You never know who is control' across all media platforms, although narrative cohesion was still impacted, as will be demonstrated below. By contrast, during the development process of *Dina Foxx* the team missed out on defining the project's one vision, a development described as a failure by game designer Brettmeister.

A look at collaborative practices of German transmedia projects reveals that creators were often responsible for a broad spectrum of tasks and that one person very often had too many to carry out. Nandzik, for instance, was in charge of all app and online content and the Facebook profile, and she wrote and directed all television episodes, too.

[79] *Time of Heroes* has also been able to communicate the project's one vision successfully across all storyworlds.

That was a lot and she says that she did not have enough time, ending up writing television scripts while still editing earlier television episodes and answering Facebook comments. This resulted in "digital overload," from which Nandzik says she had to recover after *About:Kate*. Felix Mertikat and Lena Thiele also speak about their work overload. Mertikat was art and creative director as well as illustrator of *Netwars*' graphic novel. In the face of the lack of time and his double role, Mertikat describes the development process as excessively demanding.

These examples are evidence of an overload at work, which may be seen as a direct result of any transmedia project's complexity and the teams' attempts at going new ways in production and collaboration. In some cases this led to uncertainty over roles and responsibilities.[80] Max Zeitler describes collaboration in transmedia projects as challenging precisely because it is never clear who is ultimately in charge. Furthermore, there is no clear structure with defined positions like in the U.S., where projects include a story architect or experience designer. Zeitler criticises that he did not get his credit as creator afterwards, which he says is a common problem across the film and television industry in Germany.

One important lesson learnt by all the professionals interviewed is the advantage of involving all participants early in the game, even if this makes for a cumbersome and challenging process. Despite all the difficulties encountered along the way, the creators also describe their experiences of collaboration as great examples of a shared pioneering spirit. Interviews indicate that, for most, collaboration across industries to the extent encountered here was a first. In other words, the production culture of German transmedia series is not based on well-established structures. However, these proven substantive and operational structures are essential for project efficiency and act as the guardian of artistic freedom. Writer's rooms and showrunners are part of them, and they work in the context of quality television series. It is one sign of transmedia series being a niche practice that these structures have not yet been adopted.

[80] This work overload may mirror neoliberal working conditions. Given that this thesis is based in narratology and poetics, therefore, focusses on the relationship between a transmedia text and its creation process of content development, an analysis of neoliberal working conditions in a German transmedia context would lead to another focus that would be interesting to scrutinize in future research.

This section has revealed that all creators interviewed agree that the function of a transmedia showrunner is indispensable. This position is situated between content development and production and has to maintain a project's one vision across all storyworlds. Additionally, transmedia showrunner is a role in which considerable decision-making authority is vested. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, the need for a transmedia showrunner is strongly related to the nature of a project's internal communications; it would ease decision making while securing the one vision. The role requires clearly defined responsibilities to avoid missing credits and work overload. Although none of the creators reported that a transmedia showrunner with its diverse functions was involved in their projects, similar practices had been adopted by some, allowing the one vision to be successfully implemented.

VI EXPLORING DIFFERENT LAYERS OF GERMAN TRANSMEDIA SERIAL WORLDS

1 Poetics of German Transmedia World-building

1.1 Order of Worlds and Transtextual Relations

> I was responsible for all moving images, including interviews, where I was the director, and film clips online [the web documentary]. So the TV version was a self-contained narrative, and there were expert interview bonus tracks as part of the extended version [web documentary].
> (Kolvenbach, author and director of the *Netwars* television documentary)

As the previous chapters have shown, world-building happens in different ways in the six German transmedia series, and they differ from other series with regard to the architecture and connections between media platforms and, arguably, also in terms of production backgrounds. Transmedia project *Netwars* is exceptional: Throughout, its balanced transmedia design lacks both a core medium and any autonomous media platforms. As *Netwars* is the only ongoing German transmedia series and as its production process is

highly unusual, it deserves to be analysed in more detail in this chapter, which explores world-building as well as the development process, by asking how new forms of storytelling influence the creation process and how new forms of production, in their turn, inform the narrative and storytelling. Concretely, the following questions will be answered: What are the ways in which this German transmedia serial world is constructed? How do the different media platforms included in *Netwars* interlink to enable a unified, coherent narrative and serial story universe? What are the aesthetic qualities created to link up these worlds? What are the individual aspects of storytelling offered by each media platform? How are fictional and non-fictional storytelling combined in one transmedia universe?

In order to answer these questions, this first section analyses the sequence of worlds and their transtextual relations based on possible worlds theory and Genette. According to possible worlds theory, the main point of reference of fictional propositions and characters is not the actual world but the narrative text. It is thus the reference to the textual actual world that allows experients to determine what is true. This theoretical claim needs to be tested in the context of transmedia universes with their many textual storyworlds being developed across different media platforms which may or may not be able to stand alone. References to the 'textual actual world' – which, in a transmedia context, is the world within only one storyworld or media platform – does not provide sufficient ground for the analysis of cross-platform narratives. It can therefore be said that the reference point for determining truth is not only the actual textual world but that there is a need for an additional world which acknowledges that each storyworld – e.g. the television documentary's storyworld – forms part of the bigger universe of all storyworlds across all media platforms. As a consequence, this thesis proposes the concept of an 'actual transmedial world' as an expanded version of the actual textual world. The actual transmedial world includes textual worlds that are part of one storyworld as well as of other parts of the transmedia universe. By introducing the concept of the actual transmedial world, a more sustained examination of interconnections between storyworlds and transtextual relations becomes possible.

Based on the premise that each media platform can be accessed on its own, the following four tables list the five worlds of each of the four *Netwars* storyworlds – television documentary, web documentary, e-book and graphic novel. This should allow

for an easier comparison and an analysis of connections as well as for a sustained analysis of the whole of transmedial world-building.

Table 3: *Netwars*' television documentary storyworld, as based on PWT[81]

PWT	***Netwars*' TV documentary storyworld**
Actual textual world	Authorial narrator[82]
Actual transmedial world	Experts
Possible worlds	Test attack Power failure
Non-possible worlds	Unsuccessful test attack, no cyber war, smart and safe computers etc.
Actual worlds	Hacker, cyber war, cyber attacks, industrial spying etc.

Table 4: *Netwars*' web documentary storyworld, as based on PWT.

PWT	***Netwars*' web documentary storyworld**
Actual textual worlds	Animation film Information graphics
Actual transmedial worlds	Experts The Salesman
Possible worlds	User Link to Twitter War images Power failure Hackers Interconnectivity

[81] PWT is the abbreviation for possible worlds theory.

[82] The television documentary's actual textual world is narrated by the female narrator, the authorial narrator. An authorial narrator is more reliable than a first-person narrator; their utterances are framed as facts and give rise to the assumption that the world thus narrated is the actual textual world (Suhrkamp 2002). According to Ryan (1981), an authorial narrator's utterances are world-creating. In the case of *Netwars'* television documentary these utterances include the introduction of experts and themes as well as the description of events.

	Bob Dylan Puppet theatre *Faust*'s Mephistopheles Gretchen question *The Matrix* *Big Brother* *Nineteen Eighty-Four* *Brave New World*
Non-possible worlds	No cyber war, smart and safe computers etc.
Actual worlds	Hackers, cyber war, cyber attacks, industrial spying, Snowden, links to online articles etc.

Table 5: *Netwars*' e-books storyworld, as based on PWT.

PWT	***Netwars*' e-books storyworld**
Actual textual worlds	Mitchell/Mandroid/Strider/Phoenix National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU) Shylock
Actual transmedial worlds	The Salesman Nightshade Black Flag London stock market Power failure Stuxnet Malware MalCom
Possible worlds	9/11 Lehmann Brothers Flash crash of 2010 Selma Rage Against The Machine *The Lord of the Rings*

	Comic superheroes *The Godfather* *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
Non-possible worlds	No cyber war, smart and safe computers etc.
Actual worlds	Hackers, cyber war, cyber attacks, industrial spying, Snowden, links to online articles etc.

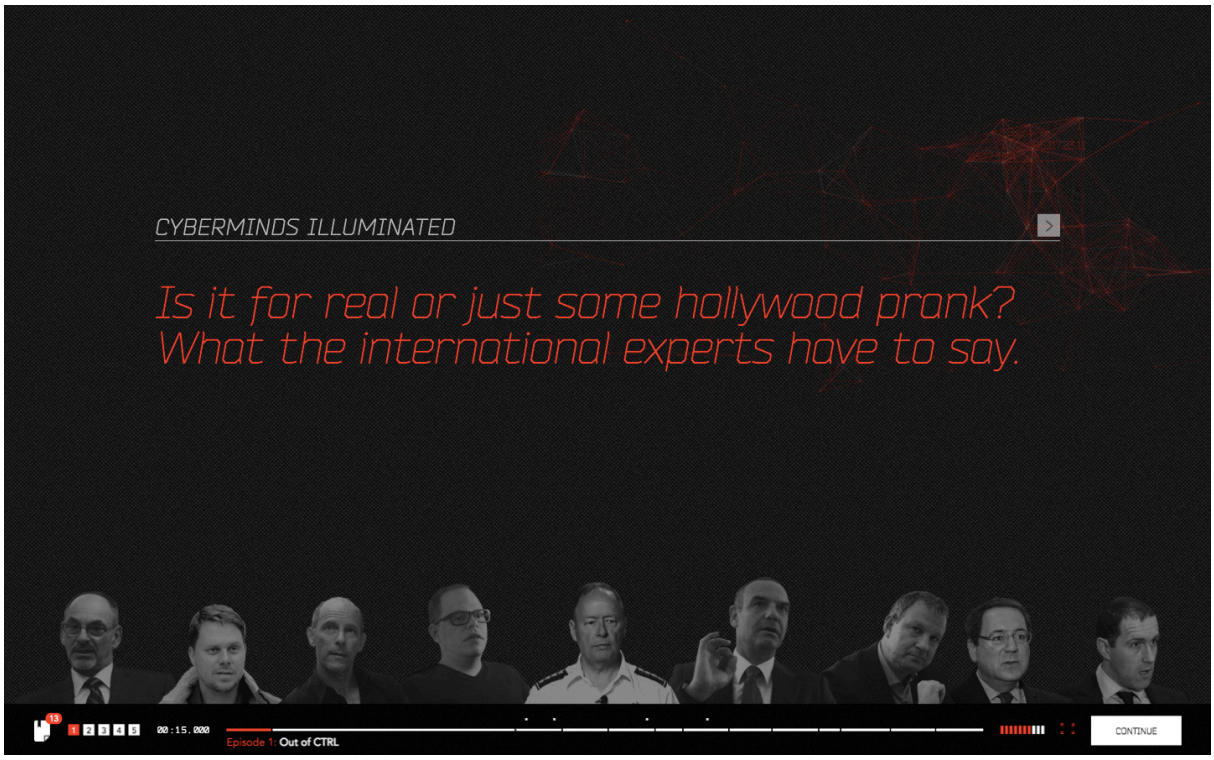
Table 6: *Netwars*' graphic novel storyworld, as based on PWT.

PWT	***Netwars*' graphic novel storyworld**
Actual textual world	Max Parsons
Actual transmedial worlds	The Salesman Nightshade Black Flag London stock market Power failure Stuxnet SCADA Simulated attacks
Possible worlds	Interactive points Music and sound Father of Max Parsons was not killed by Nightshade Science fiction
Non-possible worlds	No cyber war, smart and safe computers etc.
Actual worlds	Hackers, cyber war, cyber attacks, industrial spying, links to online articles etc.

Comparison of the actual transmedial worlds of the four storyworlds reveals that, strikingly, television and web documentary are closely connected through the experts, and that the e-book and graphic novel are linked through as many as six actual transmedial worlds (The Salesman, Nightshade, Black Flag, London stock market, Power failure, Stuxnet). As a consequence, the four storyworlds can be divided into documentaries (television and web) and novels (e-book and graphic novel). The following section will discuss relations within each of these groups.

The only actual transmedial world in the television documentary is the 'experts.' It plays some role in the web documentary too but constitutes the pivot of the television documentary. 'Experts' is related both thematically and aesthetically to the storyworld of the web documentary. Each expert in the television documentary is introduced with the help of digital aesthetics: First, a pixelated, virtual black and white picture shows the expert; then, a viewfinder scans him, and his name appears letter by letter; finally, a line starting from the letters points to him. This digital aesthetics metatextually refers to the interactive web documentary by providing a comment on the web documentary's specific type of virtuality. Each 'experts' panel consists of three individuals, some of whom are German while others are from other countries.[83] 'Experts' is metatextually integrated into the television documentary, but intertextually related to the web documentary; in the web documentary, 'experts' is integrated into the actual textual world of information graphics, as the following screenshots demonstrate.

[83] Each expert panel is concerned with a specific topic, such as Stuxnet and its worldwide effects, cyber sabotage, cyber attack threats directed at German facilities, online privacy, and the impact of Chinese industrial espionage on Germany.



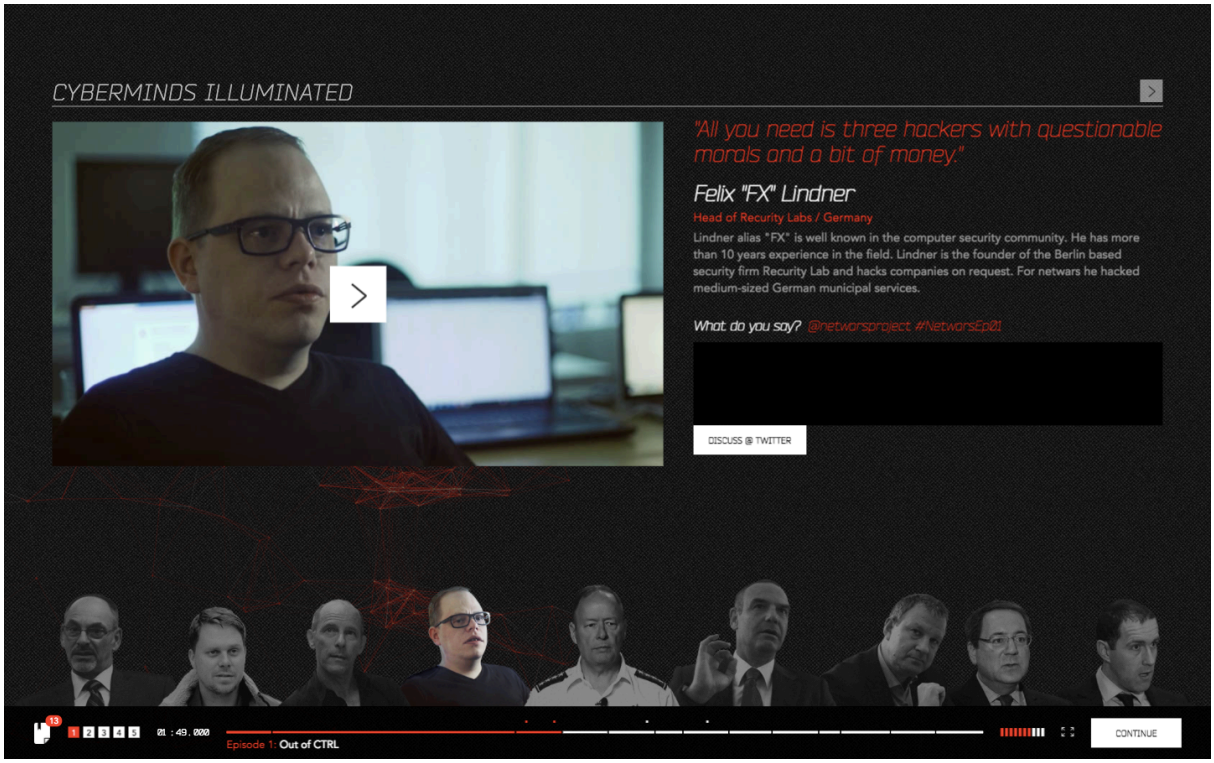


Image 1: Screenshot, *Netwars/out of CTRL*, E1

The actual transmedial world of 'experts' is a quotation from the television documentary which is aesthetically integrated into the web documentary. Quotations are short statements displayed within 'information graphics.' Experts seem to appear on a second screen, aesthetically set apart from the surrounding information graphics. The reason behind this effect, which may be perceived as somewhat incongruous, is the type of collaboration between Lena Thiele, the web documentary's creative director, and Marcel Kolvenbach, the director of the television documentary: They worked separately, with little contact between them. Expert interviews were originally made for the television documentary only, and the web documentary can be regarded as the TV documentary's subsidiary market. Thiele says this is why expert interviews are less closely and less cogently integrated, and connections between the two platforms in terms of the interviews seem rather loose.

The web documentary's second actual transmedial world is 'The Salesman.' The Salesman also appears as a character in both e-book and graphic novel. 'Experts' and 'The Salesman' differ from each other not only in terms of their connections to different storyworlds, but also in terms of their aesthetics. The world of experts is characterised by the non-fiction aesthetics of quotations, while the more fictional[84] and decontextualised aesthetics of The Salesman is rather less clear-cut. All the scenes involving The Salesman are set in front of a black screen, making it impossible to locate him. Information on name and institutional affiliation, as given for each expert, is also absent.

The decontextualised and intangible character of The Salesman is taken up in the novels, where The Salesman appears as a hidden character. His covertness is underlined in transmedial world-building in so far as the actual transmedial worlds of all storyworlds can only be appreciated in full when all other *Netwars* storyworlds are also experienced. As a consequence, the actual transmedial worlds give the impression of being hidden and requiring more effort on the part of the experient.

The two novels share a large number of actual transmedial worlds: 'The Salesman,' 'Nightshade,' 'Black Flag,' 'London stock market,' 'Power failure' and 'Stuxnet.' The first three are fictional and the others, non-fictional; this blending of fact and fiction is typical of the *Netwars* universe. Actual transmedial worlds provide narrative

[84] For a discussion of 'fictionality' see below.

coherence through world-building, thus satisfying a basic condition of transmedial world-building identified in both the creator interviews carried out for this thesis and the literature review. Coherence is further enhanced by the fact that they have been written by the same author, M. Sean Coleman.

Most of the shared actual transmedial worlds can be found within the respective spaces of documentaries and novels, but there are also relations between the two groups. These relations, comparable to the transmedia core elements discussed earlier, support the sense of a coherent story universe. Creators Felix Mertikat and Lena Thiele emphasise that core elements and rules are essential for transmedia world-building. Rules define a world and make it coherent and interesting, at least when they are based on competent decision-making (Mertikat), while core elements constitute the non-negotiable heart of the project's collaborative creation process (Thiele). The conceptual core of the project functions as a sort of style bible; in the case of *Netwars,* it is the guiding cross-platform principle, 'You never know who is in control,' or "Everybody can be hacked and we [the project] have your [the experient's] data" (Mertikat).

Relations between novels and documentaries can be subsumed under the four headings of topic, storytelling, characters and what-if questions. Evidently, all storyworlds are related through the topic of cyber war. The actual transmedial world of 'experts' serves also as a thematic basis for both graphic novel and e-book (Kolvenbach) – not on a visual level, as in the documentaries, but subliminally as background information.

Secondly, the whole of the *Netwars* universe uses fact-based storytelling. Facts are vouched for by experts but fictionalised across all four storyworlds. Fact-based storytelling ensures world-building connectivity and demonstrates that transmedia world-building and storytelling should not be treated as separate.

The third relation is on the level of characters. Although it appears that not a single character is present across all four storyworlds,[85] a case can be made that Max Parsons, the protagonist of the graphic novel, Mitchell, the protagonist of both e-books, and expert FX are mirror images of one another; a strategy that is also adopted by tie-in writers of

[85] The Salesman is part of the web documentary and both novels but does not appear in the television documentary.

American transmedia television in order to maintain narrative coherence (Clarke 2013), as argued above. There are striking similarities between these echo characters: All of them were hackers and are now deploying their skills in more legitimate ways, testing the cyber vulnerability of companies or fighting the cyber war. The three characters are arguably one and the same person; therefore, the graphic novel's actual textual world of 'Max Parsons' is in fact an actual transmedial world. Each of the three characters and their respective backgrounds stand metonymically for one and the same, single (transmedial) character.

The final level of what-if questions is most obvious in the documentaries' possible world of 'power failure.' In the television documentary, 'power failure' creates suspense. The documentary starts and ends with a scenario of power failure. The female narrator can be heard saying, "Imagine a power failure," thus postulating a possible world. Through what-if questions, the narrator alludes to the consequences of power failure. The film ends with the narrator's statement about the threat of power failure in Europe. Power failure is present as narrated theme, and also visualised: At the beginning of the documentary, a dark, clean room is shown in which, suddenly, the lights are turned on; at the end, the viewers see the lights go out. 'Power failure,' a possible world in the documentaries, constitutes in the novels. As such, it is a recurring element across the *Netwars* universe: What-if questions raised as a possible world find a response in the actual transmedial world of the novels. The e-books' and graphic novel's actual transmedial world of 'power failure' emerges from the television and web documentary's possible world, whose narrative function is to open up a narrative gap. 'Imagine power failure' is realised in the fictional storyworlds of e-books and graphic novel. What was imagined in the documentaries is told as fiction in the novels, where the possible becomes the actual transmedial world.

One feature of the *Netwars* universe is that each media platform can be experienced separately. As argued earlier, autonomous media platforms are the distinctive feature of German transmedia series. *Netwars'* producer Grotenhoff went as far as saying, in 2016, that transmedia world-building only works if each project platform is autonomous, and he criticises projects and stories that force experients to access every story platform. In light of recent crossmedia/transmedia trends and developments in Germany he concludes that producers used to expect too much from experients in terms

of their ability to navigate different platforms, leading to failure and frustration. Forcing experients to change platforms did not work. That said, media platforms obviously have to be connected, and ideally it is the producer who initiates an experient's journey across platforms. *Netwars'* particular form of world-building fulfils Grotenhoff's demand for autonomous but interconnected media platforms. His vivid descriptions of the difficulties encountered while creating connections, especially between television and web documentaries, make explicit reference of the content development process: Developed at the Documentary Campus Masterschool, the television documentary's traditional approach to storytelling (linear and mono-medium rather than open to cross-platform connections) was a disappointment for Michael Grotenhoff. He recalls that workshop leaders were primarily interested in developing a stand-alone television documentary and did not appreciate the potential for transmedia storytelling, seeing other parts as mere extensions and merchandise rather than an integral part of a future storyworld. Grotenhoff does acknowledge, however, that the Documentary Campus Masterschool was the perfect place to find a broadcaster (Arte) and other partners.

Thiele, too, is critical of *Netwars'* failure to connect media platforms on a narrative level, and attributes this lack to the process of collaboration. Based on the particular tradition of producing German transmedia projects she sees a number of challenges: *Netwars'* platform architecture was only discussed late and came into play on account of various partnerships entered into. New partners brought in new concepts and ideas, which had to be accommodated. As a result, collaboration between teams remained a clunky affair, and everybody often went their own way, as has now become evident on the level of narrative links between platforms. Consider, for example, the figure of The Salesman, who is part of both the web documentary and book series. Due to scheduling and timing problems, Thiele and Coleman, the author of the book series, did not work together closely. Thiele ended up writing the entire description for the character, who was subsequently included by Coleman in his book series, where he ended up as a minor figure.

Television and web documentaries being unconnected on a storytelling level, they had to communicate all the more intensely with the other media platforms to initiate changes of platform. Grotenhoff attributes the associated challenges to the nature of the cooperation with Arte, citing problems around closing credits and labelling as well as

social media. By contrast, online platform Heise, another partner, is praised for being more effective: At peak times, Heise had 1.3 million users, many of whom received newsletters and saw related posts. As a result, more Heise users watched the television documentary than vice versa (i.e. fewer Arte viewers went online to experience the web documentary). Narrative coherence as well as consistent quality between the graphic novel and book series was achieved through the choice of the same author, says Grotenhoff.

To summarise, *Netwars* is the only German transmedia series with no core medium, and transmedia world-building allows for each platform to be experienced autonomously. In terms of media platform architecture this means there is no single defined point of entry: The experient can start with a storyworld of their choosing, although information found in one storyworld may provide the answer to questions arising in another. Crucially, every storyworld adds narrative value: The television documentary is a piece investigative reportage; the web documentary makes it clear to the experient that the issue at hand is personal, and they may be affected by it and be attacked; the graphic novel offers a fictionalised account of the topic, set in the future, and allows for participation in the story; the e-book, finally, provides a lean-back fictional story. Experients looking for more information may access content on other platforms. Each of the four *Netwars* storyworlds thus serves as the world's ur-actualisation; in terms of storytelling this means that each has to provide basic world information and offer both narrative gaps, to be filled by other platforms, and a conclusive narrative of its own. Narrative gaps will be analysed in the following section.

1.2 Narrative Gaps and the Requirement of Encyclopaedic Competence

Big Brother is watching you.
(*Netwars/out of CTRL* 2014, E4)

Netwars world-building is characterised by openness and closure, as platforms are autonomous but connected. Openness can be seen in narrative gaps, which serve three main functions: prompting a change of media platform, enabling coherence across

platforms, and participatory storytelling. All three functions presuppose encyclopaedic competence on the part of experients.

The first, changes of media platform, relates to *Netwars'* possible worlds. Given that possible worlds are infinite, narrative gaps are an essential part of storyworlds. This section examines narrative gaps inherent in some of the infinite possible worlds, namely those which refer to texts outside the *Netwars* universe. In addition, transtextual relations of these possible worlds to the actual textual and actual transmedial worlds will be analysed.

Possible worlds outside the *Netwars* universe are more or less clearly identifiable, because the transtextual codes used vary. Some of the possible worlds outside are fictional, others non-fictional. Non-fictional possible worlds in the (fictional) e-book include '9/11,' 'Lehmann Brothers' and the 'Flash crash of 2010.' These are intertextual references because they function as quotations. They are non-fictional in that their point of reference is the actual world. Their purpose is to demonstrate that the e-books' fictional story is "close to the truth" (Netwars [ca. 2014c], n.p.). By contrast, fictional possible worlds refer to other film, television, music and literary texts. Some of these are directly quoted, others indirectly. The web documentary's possible world '*The Matrix*,' for instance, is not explicitly mentioned within the storyworld but brought into play by way of a symbol, the red and the blue pills. By the end of the first episode, the user can decide whether they want to go on and, if so, how: "Now it's up to you to decide how the journey continues." (*Netwars/out of CTRL* 2014) The user can choose between the red and the blue pills, which are hypertextual references to *The Matrix*. The red and blue pills have become popular cultural symbols embodying the choice between knowledge, truth and freedom (red), and falsehood, ignorance and security (blue). A user who knows *The Matrix* knows that the story will only continue when the red pill is chosen. This hypertextual reference represents the user's wish world, a sub-species of possible worlds. Users can decide whether to click on the red pill – "Hit me with the facts," which will make the next episode start – or the blue one: "Leave me in oblivion," which links to a YouTube video (*Netwars/out of CTRL* 2014). Like in *The Matrix,* the user does not know yet what the truth is: "Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is, you have to see it for yourself" (*The Matrix* 1999), as Morpheus tells Neo in the film. This possible world is contingent on the user's choice of how to continue; the narrative gap thus also

involves the project's level of participatory storytelling, which has been identified as the third type of narrative gaps. Users will experience for themselves how vulnerable they are.

The possible world[86] of '*The Matrix*' is also connected to other *Netwars* storyworlds through its genre. *The Matrix* is a science-fiction film, and it can be argued that the main message of the project is that "[d]igital war is no longer science fiction but a daily reality and a threat to us all" (Netwars [ca. 2014a], n.p.), which is most drastically shown in the graphic novel. The graphic novel's possible world of 'science fiction' is metatextually related to the graphic novel through the announcement that "[t]he story is anything but science fiction. The scenario is alarmingly realistic." (Netwars [ca. 2014b], n.p.) Programmatically absent, science fiction as genre is still brought into the experient's view and realm of expectation by being mentioned, as negation.

Two other genre fiction references are the possible worlds of *Brave New World* and *Big Brother*. Both are mentioned explicitly in the web documentary by The Salesman:

> Of course, with all this information they have on you, you do run the risk of being shot out of this beautiful Brave New World. (…) Do you really think that you have nothing to hide? Well, I'm sorry to say, but you do my friend, you just don't know it yet. (*Netwars/out of CTRL* 2014, E3)
>
> Things started looking pretty bleak back there in our last episode, didn't they? Big Brother is watching you, and all that. (*Netwars/out of CTRL* 2014, E3)

Dystopian novel *Brave New World* is cited, here, as the symbol of a peaceful, free and stable world. It refers to Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four,*[87] which shows a world of continuous oppressive surveillance in a totalitarian state. It is here that the term Big

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[86] Another possible world of the web documentary, 'How does it feel,' is a phrase taken from the chorus of Bob Dylan's song *Like a Rolling Stone*. The song can be interpreted as sarcastic treatment of a girl from a rich family who ends up sleeping rough. It is the sarcasm that is taken up by the *Netwars* web documentary which, equally, plays on the theme of losing everything – through power failure or a nuclear bomb.

[87] In the e-book *The Code*, Rebecca and Mitchell turn the fire alarm off by entering the code number "1984," thus evoking a possible world connected to the web documentary. The purpose of fictional possible worlds is to add to the storyworld's narrative complexity through intertextuality across different media platforms.

Brother originates; since 1999 it has assumed a second life on television through the eponymous reality game show, featuring people who share a house where they are monitored by live television cameras and personal audio microphones. The catchphrase 'Big Brother is watching you' has come to epitomise abuses of government power, especially through mass surveillance measures. In *Netwars*, too, the user is constantly being watched and hacked.

Beyond science fiction, *Netwars* references other fictional storyworlds as well, especially in the e-books. The e-books' possible world of '*The Godfather*' serves to describe the atmosphere in a scene in the e-book *Down Time*: Rebecca and Franklin of the NCCU find themselves talking about their latest case in an Italian restaurant with a Godfather air. This intertextual reference brings in gangster texts.

Intertextual references to the rock band 'Rage Against The Machine' and the possible world of 'comic superheroes' illustrate Mitchell's motives for hacking:

> We used to get inside different companies' security systems and leave funny messages to let them know we'd been inside. We never did anything bad. We were kids. We were all Rage Against The Machine, you know. It was pretty childish.
>
> As a young boy, he had loved comic books, and in one conversation with a former member of Black Flag – a hacker called Nightshade – he had floated the idea that they could consider themselves as modern superheroes, they had the power to stop chaos and go after the bad guys, after all. (*The Code* 2014, n.p.)

The possible world of 'comic superheroes' is hypertextually related to Mitchell's personality. There are obvious similarities between Mitchell and superheroes, notably their multiple personalities. Batman's secret identity, for example, is Bruce Wayne; Clark Kent is Superman. With regard to their motivations for vengeance, Mitchell resembles Batman in so far as both Mitchell and Bruce Wayne vowed to avenge the murder of their parents.[88] Both go about it in similar ways, which set them apart from other superheroes: They use their physical and intellectual skills to fight crime. They both also have an archenemy, Batman's Joker, and Strider's/Phoenix's The Salesman. Hence, these

[88] Mitchell's parents were killed; then, 17-year-old Mitchell killed the murderer, and Strider was born.

possible worlds require encyclopaedic competence on the part of the readers who want to fully understand the e-book's protagonist, although this knowledge is not required to understand the narrative.

These possible worlds function as narrative gaps on both the narrative and world-buildings levels. They are hypertextually related to storyworlds both within *Netwars* and beyond. It could thus be said that the transmedia story universe is not only told across media but also with the help of different media references. As a consequence, possible worlds function, on the one hand, as an extension of the narrative story universe and, on the other hand, as ties to established texts and genres outside.

Other possible worlds within the *Netwars* universe help create a coherent world, which is the second function of narrative gaps. These possible worlds can only be realised when other storyworlds are accessed and the possible worlds, thus, contextualised. The television documentary, for example, provides an overview of the overall universe's main topic in as much as research on the topic is what underpins the other storyworlds. In other words, what is hinted at as possible worlds in the television documentary may be realised as actual transmedial worlds in other *Netwars* storyworlds. Possible worlds can thus be regarded as narrative gaps, and the television documentary's radical incompleteness constitutes a bridge between its own storyworld and others. To put it simply, radical incompleteness is a tool of world-building. The e-book even ends with a narrative gap: "He [The Salesman] was going to become a ghost for a while until he recouped. But not for too long. There was some payback to do." (*Down Time* 2015, n.p.) With the conflict between The Salesman and Mitchell unresolved, a third season of the e-book and/or another media platform is on the (narrative) horizon. Narrative openness is grounded in transmedial world-building between openness and closure.

The third function of narrative gaps is situated on the level of the experient's activity within *Netwars'* participatory storytelling framework. Participatory storytelling looks different on each media platform, which allow for different degrees and forms of activity on the part of the experient. Two types can be identified: a more toned down form of interactivity, e.g. through active reading and decoding cues, associated with the television documentary and e-book; and the more involved version, e.g. through making meaningful choices or clicking on a button to get further information provided by the web documentary and graphic novel. In the following section these types will be analysed in

detail, beginning with the latter and a focus on the web documentary and its connection to the graphic novel.

One of the web documentary's possible worlds is the 'user.' Online, the experient acts as user, developing more active forms of reception than in watching a film. Users have to click and choose, thereby turning, arguably, into characters in the storyworld. Users interact with other characters such as The Salesman, who address them directly, in the second person. Move by move, users create their own sub-worlds[89] while pursuing a goal similar to one pursued by one of the (other) characters, which is to get closer to the actual textual and actual transmedial worlds. Characters in a narrative world act as though in a game: They make their own choices (Ryan 1991). The mere promise of an experience indicates the presence of an action – of interaction as well as involvement:

> Learn first-hand about the dimensions and dangers of data abuse, surveillance, cyber attacks, manipulation of public opinion and the cyber-weapons business, in an exciting mix of fact and interactivity. Are you ready to put your security to the test? (Netwars [ca. 2014a], n.p.)

By interactive means, the web documentary makes it clear to experients that the story matters to their real lives because each user can be attacked. As such, it personalises the topic of cyber war (Grotenhoff). There are four things the user can do to interact with the documentary: choose an option by clicking on it; express their opinion on Twitter; position themselves as a friend of The Salesman by directly addressing him; and taking part in a quiz. Throughout, the user's data is tracked – from as early as the first quiz in the very first episode. The quiz consists of five questions with three possible answers each. Clicking on an answer initiates the download of a zip folder. At the end, there are five zip folders which spell out a sentence: "01_You," "02_never," "03_know," "04_who is," "05_in control." In a manner of speaking, this is the premise of both the web documentary and the whole *Netwars* universe. As the overall universe's rule and the project's one vision, it is the foundation stone of worldness across media platforms, as has been argued and as expert interviews have also shown (see above). In addition, the statement exemplifies the interactive nature of storytelling, where users are not in

[89] An empirical study of different users' reception of the storyworld could provide reliable data on these sub-worlds. In this study, textual analysis may reveal plausible assumptions about them.

complete control of the story: The story unfolds along a linear structure, and its interactive elements never really affect its course. In short, interactive elements can be seen as a symbol of the web documentary's thematic premise that the user will never know who keeps track of their data, and of which data.

By contrast, in the graphic novel's possible world of 'interactive points,' which is also related to the experient's activity, the experient does not fall victim to cyber attacks or hacking but, rather, assumes the – active – role of offender: It is the experient who executes the hack, by clicking on options offered. The experient has no other choice but to click, or else the graphic novel would come to an end. The experient's options are to click on interactive points, which come in a variety of aesthetic forms: as i-button, orange button, and as red things with different functions (see Image 2), all interactive (see Table 7).

Table 7: *Netwars*' graphic novel's interactive points

Interactive point	**Content**	**Function**
i-button	Hidden non-fictional information	Change of platform, reminder
orange button	Additional hidden fictional content Required hidden fictional content Next panel	Fill a narrative gap Create suspense Raise awareness, enable continuity
red things	Additional hidden fictional content	Fill a narrative gap

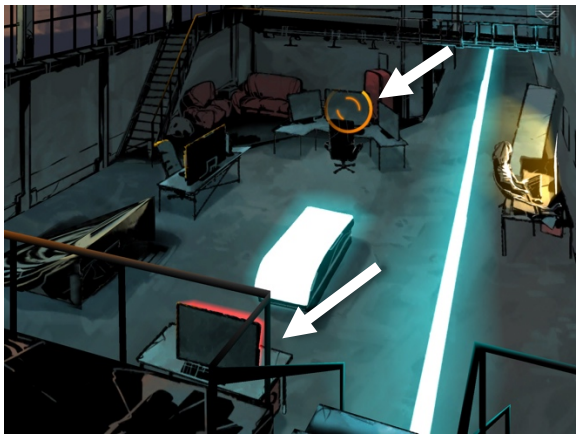

Image 2: Screenshot, *Netwars*, *The Butterfly Attack*, E1, ch. 2

Image 3: Screenshot, *Netwars*, *The Butterfly Attack*, E1, ch. 12

Image 4: Screenshot, *Netwars*, *The Butterfly Attack*, E1

The i-button (Image 3) indicates hidden non-fictional information. This information is not necessarily needed, and the experient is free to choose whether to click on it or not. Clicking on it, the experient is presented with a text box opening up from right to left and naming the topic on which information is available (see Image 4). Once more, the experient has the opportunity to click on the text box, in which case the information is delivered in the form of an article, occasionally with additional links. The experient may defer reading if they so wish. The app's menu includes a 'facts' tab with i-button information displayed in a way that is similar to website articles. In short, i-buttons are paratextually related to both the graphic novel's storyworld and to the *Netwars* universe as a whole. It is a paratexual relation enabling changes of platform. Therefore, the i-buttons exemplify the graphical novel's radical incompleteness by pointing out aesthetically that the fictional storyworld is based on non-fictional facts. I-buttons also function as a reminder that the fictional story is close to reality, and vice versa.

By contrast, orange buttons operate within the confines of fiction. They come in three different forms: as buttons with additional fictional content such as email messages, chats, twitter feeds and news items; required hidden fictional content; and pathways to the next panel. With the first, the experient can choose to click or not to click. The choice is a function of the buttons' status as narrative gap. Experients who want to delve deeper into the story are able to read on; they can, however, continue without the information provided. Felix Mertikat relates that it was difficult to decide what type of information to include: If information is essential to the story, why is it not in the graphic novel itself? And if it isn't, why should it be supplied at all? As a consequence, creators were looking for content that provides additional value – and specifically, additional facts. In this regard, *Netwars* follows Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling as the grand total of radical intertextuality, multimodality and additive comprehension.

The second form of orange button unlocks required fictional content, through which the position of the experient is changed. Experients have no choice: They must click on the orange button and, thereby, turn into a hacker. Activity is enhanced, which creates suspense. While both these forms have a narrative function, the third form enables continuity. Here, the orange button is a substitute for wiping; no hidden content is revealed. Mertikat states that this form was introduced wherever creators wanted experients to focus more on the image.

The third type of interactive points are items in 3D panels that are coloured red; they provide additional fictional content. In this regard, they are similar to the first form of orange button. However, they differ from them in narrative gap terms. Interactive red items are not icons but integrated in the graphic novel itself, and therefore less clearly visible. Their role is less important for the narrative than that of the orange buttons. Mertikat emphasises that the activity of finding hidden content is more important than the information itself.

All in all, interactive points in the graphic novel have in common that they are not essential for the story. However, they do influence the act of storytelling, the narration, in so far as experients can decide whether or not they want to explore more. Mertikat explains that the main challenge around interactivity was how to use it as a storytelling device. Creators did not want the experient to decide whether to go left or right, as this would mean introducing more than one story. Instead, they introduced interactive points with additional information and hidden content which the experient has to find. Mertikat calls this 'real interaction.' The graphic novel's activity revolves around hidden content to be discovered by experients. The additional value of interactivity comes in the form of non-fictional content and further information, much like on the website and in the web documentary's zip-folder.

This form of interactivity is possible because the graphic novel is digital rather than printed. Although the project's website uses the term 'graphic novel,' Mertikat points out that *The Butterfly Attack* is, strictly speaking, an e-comic. He says that, in terms of narrative, there are no differences between an e-comic and any other type of comic. However, e-comics open up wider possibilities, including the use of music and sounds; comics are turned into audio-visual experiences. Sounds and music clearly progress over time, whereas visual elements such as images are static; however, the comic's sequence of images creates the impression of movement, which is then enhanced by sounds and music. As a result, *Netwars*' graphic novel can be described as something between a comic and a film – a narrative gap is created merely through this ambiguity of medium.

Another additional possibility of an e-comic has to do with the composition of images. *Netwars'* storyworld offers three striking aesthetic features. First and most prominently, full-colour images are superimposed on black and white images already shown. This device is used to indicate that time has passed – black and white images

belong to an earlier time, and time is shown to be open-ended. Secondly, *Netwars* is able to visualise discontinuity within one image (see Image 5). And thirdly, there are images emerging from a process of combining several earlier ones. These, too, indicate discontinuity by suggesting that a single image would be incomplete (see Image 6).

Image 5: Screenshot, *Netwars*, *The Butterfly Attack*, E2

Image 6: Screenshot, *Netwars*, *The Butterfly Attack*, E2

Tablet and smartphone technology allow for audio-visual storytelling. *Netwars'* graphic novel storyworld makes use of this possibility by adding music and sounds to form e-comics.[90] Sound in the graphic novel is imported from the web documentary, albeit in a reduced form. Mertikat explains that sounds perform a narrative function only at certain points rather than continuously. Using music was a challenge, as it had to be aligned with the reader's pace. Similarities between e-comic and film arise from the technological differences between printed and e-comics. Mertikat argues that e-comics tell the same stories as printed comics, albeit in different ways. First, there is the factor of time, with implications for perception as well as storytelling itself. An e-comic can include more images than its printed counterpart, namely around 40. Like in film, these 'additional' images contribute to the atmosphere of a story. E-comics can follow the progressive unfolding of an action. Another difference concerns cliffhangers: In print, a cliffhanger is automatically created just before a page turn. Readers see all the panels on a double spread, and then wonder what might follow on the next. By contrast, e-comics work with delay to create suspense, making images appear later than expected or in a new form – each panel can be a surprise, like in film. Mertikat emphasises that differences between comic and film will only emerge once the storyboard has been written. He explains that an advantage of filmic storytelling is that images can create an atmosphere, which is a lot

[90] According to Mertikat, the term 'graphic novel' is used in various ways, although there is a consensus that it was coined by publishers with the aim of selling comics to a new target group: more highly educated people who wouldn't read a 'comic.' The term graphic novel, in German, is a direct import from American English; the German term 'cartoon' denotes the same as the American English term 'comics.' Clearly, the German use of the word 'graphic novel' can be recognised as a marketing buzzword or, as Mertikat somewhat cheekily puts it, an additional label indicating superior-quality comics. This study uses all three terms: graphic novel, comic and e-comic.

more difficult to achieve in a comic, not least because of the limited number of pages available.

In contrast to these 'active' forms of interactivity, the television documentary invites rather more 'passive' forms of participation in storytelling although, aesthetically, it references the web documentary and its forms of interaction. Participation of the television documentary's audience comes in the form of deciphering clues. In order to reveal distinct characteristics of a participatory mode of storytelling, it is crucial to contextualise the television documentary *Netwars/war on the web*, on the one hand, with other examples in film and television and, on the other hand, within the *Netwars* transmedia universe.

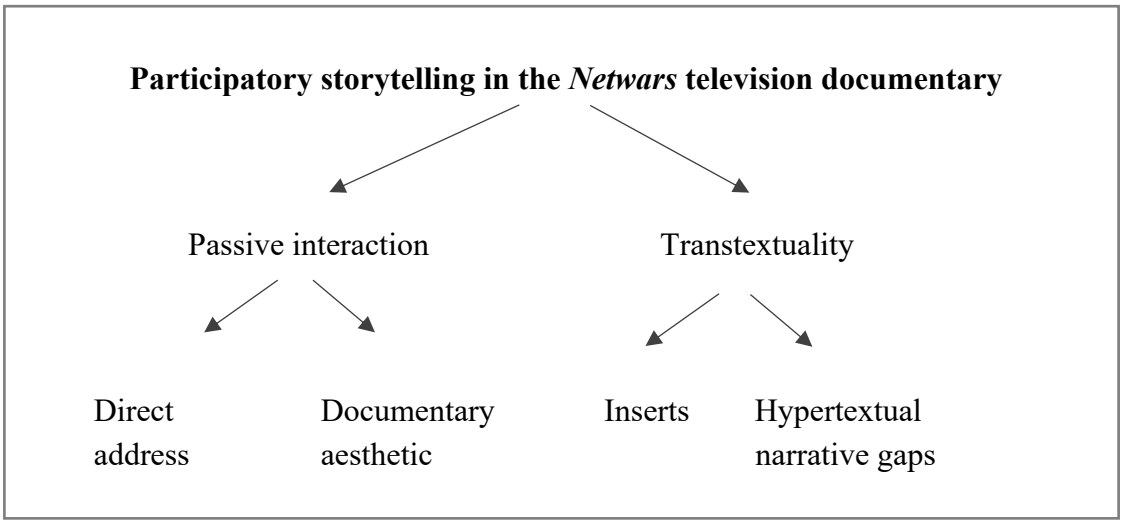

Figure 2: *Netwars/war on the web*, participatory storytelling

Netwars' television documentary provides for two main forms of participatory storytelling, as demonstrated in Figure 2 above: passive interaction and transtextuality. The first occurs in two forms. Direct address implies a connection between text and the viewer. Documentary aesthetic provokes a kind of unredeemed active reaction. For example, at the start, the audience is addressed directly by the female narrator: "Imagine a power failure." This is similar to the direct address found in the web documentary, where The Salesman speaks directly to the user. Documentary aesthetic is expressed on the visual level through the expert panels. Three experts are presented simultaneously in

a split screen, against a black background. One may be foregrounded, along with a short statement, while the other two remain visible in the background as moving images. Experients are given the impression that they can choose which expert they want to listen to. The impulse to click on the image of an expert is stimulated by the experience of the interactive web documentary, where experients can indeed make a choice. Furthermore, the short expert statements in the television documentary create the impression of being cut from a longer interview, as is common practice in documentaries. As a consequence, interviews shown in the television documentary appear to be incomplete. The real function of cut statements is as one piece of a more complex thematic puzzle which can be explored within the television documentary itself as well as the whole *Netwars* universe. In this transmedial context, the cuts differ from those usually presented in a documentary.

The second form of participatory storytelling, transtextuality, functions in two different ways, too. First, there are inserts that refer directly to other media platforms outside *Netwars'* narrative universe, such as the Twitter account[91] and Arte's website.[92] These are metatextual relations, because both the social media channel and the broadcaster's website provide comment on *Netwars*. Secondly, hypertextual relations within the narrative universe function as narrative gaps that can be filled with the help of other media platforms. Experients need actively to draw on other platforms and thus participate to fill narrative gaps. Narrative gaps may be to do with themes that are merely alluded to, e.g. in expert statements or the film's pretitle sequence,[93] as well as with non-possible worlds. These types of gaps become obvious only when an experient accesses other *Netwars* media platforms, especially the fictional ones. This is another important aspect characterising *Netwars'* particular mix of fact and fiction and the serial's distinct form of transmediality.

Participatory storytelling in the e-book appears as multiperspectivity: Multiple narrative perspectives of different characters are allowed to come to the fore. Multiperspectivity is "conceptually related to the philosophy of perspective" (Hartner

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[91] "Participate #netwars" (*Netwars/war on the web* 2014).

[92] "[…] and also on ARTE future" (*Netwars/war on the web* 2014).

[93] *Netwars/war on the web* (2014), TC 00:00:00—00:02:05.

2012, n.p.). It is created by presenting the same event from the viewpoints of different characters, either simultaneously or in succession. This narrative strategy piques the reader's interest by foregrounding incompleteness: Evidently, each character's sub-world lacks certain bits of information and, therefore, each additional perspective adds new information, as seen from one particular angle. But while each character's sub-world is characterised by incompleteness, multiplicity in storytelling minimises the incompleteness experienced by the reader. Ultimately, the reader knows more than the e-books' characters; suspense is created when readers are led to ask whether or when or how a character might find out about a certain event or discover a certain piece of information. This type of engagement can be regarded as activity:

> It is furthermore a general characteristic of multiperspective strategies of narration that they tend to force the reader 'into much closer scrutiny of the text' (Hutchinson 1984: 35). Since each new perspective potentially provides a 'different view on plot and character' (ibid.), the viewpoints employed have to be continually revised, re-evaluated and re-contextualized. Multiperspective narrative structures are therefore never semantically empty, but always contribute to the overall meaning of the text. (Hartner 2012, n.p.)

Multiplicity calls into question the very notions of intersubjective truth, reality and knowledge – again a key message of the e-books: "Truth was such a grey area." (*The Code* 2014, n.p.)

As has been argued, different media platforms play host to different forms of interactivity, depending on their respective capabilities and characteristics: Television documentaries and e-books favour lean-back forms of reception and relatively passive forms of interaction. Both of them, as part of the transmedia universe, do, however, provide the experient with opportunities for participation that require more decisive action, especially in that they call for changes of platform. Experients need to know how to respond to these clues, i.e. possess the necessary encyclopaedic competence. They need to know the *Netwars* universe and be able to process the narrative complexity of transmedia storyworlds. Furthermore, the narrative mode of participation is supported especially through transmedial contextualisation: Participatory patterns in the narrative are based on transmedia design and transtextual relations rather than qualities inherent to

a particular medium. By contrast, the more lean-forward media of web documentary and graphic novel call for more active forms of participation by using technological elements specifically designed and deployed to initiate interactive behaviour. In terms of transmedia world-building, interactivity is one way of arriving at narrative coherence. In short, while media platforms obviously differ in many ways, they are connected through related concepts and practices of interactivity and participation, all of which require encyclopaedic competence. This section has demonstrated that coherence is aimed for not only on a thematic level but also through narrative connections between storyworlds. The following section will show how this is linked to transmedia storytelling.

2 Poetics of German Transmedia Storytelling

2.1 Fictionality as Fact-based Storytelling

2.1.1 Fictionalised Storytelling

What if the power fails?
(*Netwars/war on the web* 2014)

Previous chapters demonstrated that *Netwars'* world-building includes both fictional and non-fictional storyworlds and that other German transmedia series, too, transcend the limits of both fictional and actual worlds in various different ways (including, but not limited to, social media, user-generated content, and fictionalised storytelling in non-fictional worlds). *Netwars'* fictional storytelling is exceptional, however, in that it is fact-based. Unusually, too, *Netwars'* mix of fictional and non-fictional storytelling is played out both across storyworlds and within each individual one. In other words, every storyworld employs both fictional and non-fictional storytelling strategies. Traditionally non-fictional documentaries are fictionalised in several ways, and even fictional novels are based on facts, as presented in the documentaries. This section analyses *Netwars'* signature mix of fiction and non-fiction by referring to the concept of truth claims and Nichols' modes of documentary.

Unsurprisingly, the documentaries can be related to generic taxonomies of documentaries. Given that the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is made within the context of truth claims, the question is how the truth – or, rather, *a* truth – is asserted in the documentaries. The verb 'to claim,' within the concept of a truth claim, throws up the question of language in which something is stated, said, claimed – such as the truth. In practice, language is only present as voice, which can be analysed with the help of the system of dominant modes of the documentary (Nichols 2001). Both *Netwars* documentaries share the actual transmedial world of 'experts' with its dominant mode of participation. The world of 'experts' is dominated by interviews, which is in itself an essential part of the participatory mode, because it implies and evidences some form of interaction between the filmmaker and the subject. The suggestion is that the filmmaker's position is influenced by this interaction, showing him to be a researcher or investigator too. Interestingly, Marcel Kolvenbach, author and director of the television documentary, argues that transmedia storytelling as such is based on research and facts, meaning transmedia storytelling will always be closer to academic writing than to fictional screenwriting. In turn, non-fictional genres are said to be more suitable for transmedia storytelling than fictional ones. On screen and across other transmedia platforms, truth appears as a form of interaction that would not exist were it not for the camera and the filmmaker's role as researcher and investigator. Individual voices are given a chance to speak out, and the viewer gets the impression of witnessing a form of real dialogue between the filmmaker and their subject. The truth claim, here, is present as the subjective viewpoint of an individual expert. The expert's viewpoint is given credence through information about their name and institutional affiliation as shown on screen; these pieces of information are introduced to support the individual truth claim.

In addition to the participatory mode, both documentaries are also shaped by the expository mode: This is the mode which, in the television documentary, characterises the actual textual world of the 'authorial narrator' and, in the web documentary, the actual textual world of 'animation film.' The most prominent feature of the expository mode is the so-called voice-of-God commentary[94] that addresses the experient directly and is almost inevitably assumed to say the truth. In the television documentary it is realised in

[94] The female speaker can be heard but not seen (Nichols 2001).

the form of the female speaker; her statements put forward the main argument of the film and are accorded a higher truth value than the accompanying images. The logic inherent in the web documentary's animation film is based on the information conveyed through spoken words, which are framed as more reliable than the images by which they are accompanied. Taken together, these worlds can be regarded as non-fiction on account of the truth claims put forward within them.

These similarities with traditional documentary forms notwithstanding, the two *Netwars* documentaries stand out through their fictional storytelling strategies. The web documentary's fictionalised narrative patterns are of a different kind than those employed by the television documentary, which is due to the different forms of participatory storytelling present in each. In other words, differences in participatory storytelling give rise to different fictional narrative structures: The television documentary follows a linear three-act structure,[95] while the web documentary contains several, inextricably

[95] The drama overall follows a three-act structure along the lines of Aristotle's notion that a "'whole' is [something] that has a beginning, a middle and end" (Aristotle, Baxter and Atherton 1997, p. 77). Aristotle says that a "'beginning' is what does not necessarily have to follow anything else, but after which something naturally is or happens; an 'end', the other way round, is what naturally is after something else, either of necessity or usually, but has nothing after it; a 'middle' is what comes after something else and has something else after it. Well-constructed plots, therefore, must neither begin at an accidental starting-point nor come to an accidental conclusion, but must have followed the principles we have given." (ibid.) *Netwars/war on the web's* well-constructed plot begins with the documentary's exposition of the film's theme – cyber warfare today – through four expert statements. The documentary ends with a vision of the future. As a whole, the story unfolds in three acts. The first (TC 00:00:00—00:14:53) comprises, in addition to the exposition, important background information on setting, backstories and conflict, among others. The second act (TC 00:14:54—00:33:40) advances the conflict in 'rising action' through a series of events moving towards a climax. The turning point is reached in the scene with Guy Mizrahi, the pirate (TC 00:24:24—00:26:44). In spite of cyber gangsters not wanting to speak out in front of a camera, the film allows viewers to get in touch with one cyber gangster, Guy Mizrahi, who gives them an insight into the process of recruiting and educating hackers and the development of cyber surveillance measures for governments; the interview comes to an abrupt end, however, when Mizrahi decides that he is not prepared to share any more information. This is the story's pivotal point. In the following 'falling action' the conflict unravels, and the third act (TC 00:33:41—00:52:02), finally, resolves the conflict at least partly, but only as a 'test': The possible world of a 'test attack' does present a sort of ending, but the worldwide threat of a real cyber attack remains present, due to the non-possible world of 'no cyber war.' It is striking that the film also ends with the possible world of 'power failure,' which dominates expert statements dealing with the future. In a manner of speaking the possible world of 'power failure' serves as a narrative arc filled with suspense which also holds together various different worlds: the actual textual and actual transmedial worlds, the possible world of a 'test attack' as well as both the non-possible and actual worlds. Links between the first and third acts are also established through the sub-world of experts. Experts in the television documentary are regarded as characters with their respective sub-worlds who fit into the documentary's overall three-act structure. Both the first act, setup, and the third act, resolution, are linked, both in terms of the dramatic structure and with regard to the sub-worlds of experts: The documentary starts with the knowledge world 'world of experts,' who give their statements on the status quo of cyber warfare – comparing, e.g., a laptop and a bomb (TC 00:00:00—00:00:30), discussing a new kind of criminal (TC 00:00:30—00:00:50), and introducing the notion of cyber warfare in the first place (TC 00:00:50—00:01:15), and ends with the

intertwined narrative threads. The web documentary's actual transmedial world of 'The Salesman' follows a linear narrative structure that is interrupted by the actual textual world of 'animation film' and 'information graphics' as well as the actual transmedial world of 'experts.' It is 'The Salesman' that holds together the web documentary's narrative outline and thereby the film's structure. The whole web documentary's script follows an organisational pattern similar to a fictional detective story: It starts by establishing a problem or issue, providing background information pertaining to it,[96] which is subsequently examined,[97] before some kind of conclusion or solution is reached. In the last episode of the *Netwars* web documentary this conclusion takes the form of reaffirming that the user will "never know who is in control" (*Netwars/out of CTRL* 2014, E5); it is also revealed that The Salesman is in fact Mephistopheles.

Quite clearly, the organisational principle followed by *Netwars'* web documentary is designed to give credence to the underlying premise that, in the actual world, 'You never know who is in control.' This is the entire project's key thematic concern – its 'one vision.' Given that "[a]t the heart of documentary is less a *story* and its imaginary world than an *argument* about the historical [actual] world" (Nichols 1991, p. 110-1, emphasis in original), the actual transmedial world of 'The Salesman' can also be regarded as non-fictional, or a claim made about the truth. In order to examine the nature of this truth

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experts' wish world, evoked through their hypothetical statements about the future (commenting on smart technology, shifting notions of protection and future security design possibilities [TC 00:50:30—00:51:24]). The middle, second act of the documentary, features a mix of knowledge, intention and obligation worlds, although the knowledge world is the predominant one. The status quo of cyber warfare as established in the first act gives rise, ultimately, to a vision of the future, demonstrating the documentary's overall trajectory, into which the private domain of experts provides a window. Against the background of these poetological observations, the documentary can be regarded as structured through different worlds. The arrangement of experts' sub-worlds – the combination of k-, w-, i- and o-worlds – determines the film's rhythm and editing system.

[96] The problem or central concern of the documentary is established in the first episode, "Out of CTRL." Its outline is given through expert interviews, the character of The Salesman and the first quiz, which signals to the user that they will be actively involved.

[97] Examination is the process of contextualising the issue, e.g. through background information provided. The climax is reached in the third episode, whose central thematic concern is the Internet's unwieldy interconnectedness as well as the negative aspects of unchecked data collection practices. The Salesman finally asks what Germans call the 'Gretchen question,' a notion going back to Goethe's drama *Faust* – in Part One, the central female character Gretchen asks Faust, the eponymous protagonist, about his adherence to religious dogma: "What is your way about religion, pray?" Faust's response is infamously evasive. 'Gretchen questions' have since become those pertaining to uncomfortable but urgent moral issues. Thus, The Salesman's, "Are you sure you have nothing to hide?" (*Netwars/out of CTRL* 2014, E3), becomes the web documentary's pivotal moment, making explicit the crucial point of the wider issue at stake. From now on, the user is much more involved.

claim it is important to recognise the voice in which it is made. The web documentary's voice, present primarily in the world of 'The Salesman,' is the 'voice of perspective': "Perspective is what the specific decisions made about the selection and arrangement of sounds and images convey to us. This voice advances an argument by implication." (Nichols 2001, p. 48) The claim made in this voice of perspective is 'See for yourself!' It has profound implications for interactivity and participatory storytelling. On top of this structurally manifested concern with interactivity there is still also the model of a standard documentary, equally powerfully manifest in the web documentary: It contains "a tension between the specific and the general, between historically unique moments and generalizations." (Nichols 2001, p. 66) Generally speaking, the actual transmedial world of 'The Salesman' is the locus of specific elements, although the most specific components can be found in interactive information graphics, for the simple reason that they track the user's computer. In contrast to these elements, 'expert' and 'animation film' worlds contribute general content. When these components are all taken together, the web documentary's storyworld as a whole appears as a hybrid of fiction and non-fiction. As its own composite of fiction and non-fiction, the actual transmedial world of 'The Salesman' can be considered symptomatic of both the documentaries and the *Netwars* universe as a whole.

Within *Netwars'* transmedial world-building efforts, the television documentary is partly fictionalised. Its possible world of 'power failure' – which it merely hints at, by asking, 'What if the power fails?' – is taken up and fleshed out by the (fictional) novels. Marcel Kolvenbach explains that expert interview transcripts were used as the basis for e-book scripts. Both graphic novel and e-book set out to explore the suggestion of power failure offered by the documentary and show full-scale what may happen, thus realising the possible world through fictional storytelling. The possible worlds of 'power failure' and 'text attack' – another theme explored by both graphic novel and e-book – can be seen as the most complex, fictional worlds which are present within the television documentary. 'Test attack' is unique in that its fictional storytelling elements include the breaking down of scenes into smaller segments, an emphasis on action and fast-moving events, and a much smaller number of interview excerpts.[98] All in all, it can be said that

[98] For example, the second scene of this world is about the first encounter between FX and Oehler, the manager of power and water treatment company, Ettlingen, and is edited in the following way: Goldfish,

the *Netwars* television documentary uses fictional storytelling elements in order to heighten the audience's emotions – a classic strategy pursued by hybrid television genres and formats such as reality television, scripted reality and documentary drama (Hill 2005; Kilborn 2003; Klaus and Lücke 2003; Mikos 2012; Wegener 1994) in which the interplay of fact and fiction becomes one of the focal point of the action. Therefore, it can be argued that the medium of television is particularly well suited to evoking this combination of factual and fictional storytelling and that, furthermore, *Netwars*' transmedia world-building strategy is wholly reliant on this mixture of fact and fiction without which it may not be able to enable, in the viewer, its coherent storytelling experience. Against the background of a classification of narratives based on their respective degree of distance from the actual world outside the text, *Netwars* can be shown to include "accounts of actual historical events or involve reference of a fairly specific kind to such events" (Maitre 1983, p. 79). In this regard, the television documentary is the storyworld in which the largest number of factual storytelling elements are combined with fictional narrative strategies.

The novels, too, unfold in the conceptual grey area between fiction and non-fiction, albeit in a way that is different from the documentaries. Fictional storytelling, here, is above all related to the question of genre, while non-fictional storytelling is rather indirectly connected to transmedia world-building. It may be difficult to apply to literature Nichols' (2001, p. 1) contention that "every film is a documentary" and that there is, therefore, no such thing as a binary of film and documentary, since there is no direct equivalent of a documentary in literature. Nichols' (ibid.) other fundamental premise, that "documentaries of wish-fulfillment"[99] are fiction, would mean that the *Netwars* e-books are fiction: The Salesman's wish-world is absent from the web documentary but present in the e-books.

FX driving a car, power and water treatment company Ettlingen seen from the outside, Oehler at his desk, FX arriving at Ettlingen (*Netwars/war on the web* 2014, TC 00:12:50—00:14:00). This sequence is typical of the breaking-down of fictional narratives into shorter images in which the camera acts more as an observer than as analyst or commentator. Another distinctive quality of the television documentary is its 'film within a film' component: 'Test attack' offers up a self-contained plot with its own beginning, middle and ending, i.e. the dramatic structure of a separate conflict, on a secondary level. This is only made possible through fictional storytelling elements.

[99] "These films give tangible expression to our wishes and dreams, our nightmares and dreads. They make the stuff of the imagination concrete – visible and audible." (ibid.)

Additionally, the paratextual framing of both novels refers to fiction. They are advertised on the project's website as 'novels' and, in themselves, evoke connections with various fictional genres too. The e-book, with thrillers: "Dive into the thrilling serial novels" (*Netwars* [2014d], n.p.). The graphic novel is framed as science fiction, as argued above, through its paratextual suggestion that it is *not* science fiction. Adding another paratextual layer, art and creative director Felix Mertikat labels the graphic novel "cyberpunk," referring, presumably, to the characters' sunglasses and long black leather jackets reminiscent of Neo in *The Matrix* trilogy (see Images 7 and 8).

Image 7: Screenshot, *Netwars*, *The Butterfly Attack*, E1

Image 8: *The Matrix*, original theatrical poster, by Steve Troughton

Thus there is yet another hypertextual link established between *Netwars* and *The Matrix,* a trilogy associated with cyberpunk, a sub-genre of science fiction (Gillis 2005), bringing the number of levels on which *Netwars'* graphic novel is related to science fiction to three: aesthetic (the noir look), thematic (near-future-earth setting,[100] tales of hackers), and world-building. The e-books, in addition to displaying characteristics of a thriller, invoke science fiction too, through world-building, as well as the 'gangster' genre, through the theme of organised cybercrime (The Salesman as godfather). On the level of paratextual framing, information is given in the e-book about the author, M. Sean Coleman: "He continues to write novels, graphic novels and tv scripts from his home in London" (*The Code* 2014, n.p.). The author of both novels is framed as an expert for fictional content.

Besides these fictional elements present on the level of genre, fictionality is put in perspective through the denial of a clear genre description and also by way of a reference to the actual world. E-book paratexts include direct references to events and developments in the actual world: "Experience two dramatic cyber war stories that could already be a reality" (Netwars [2014d], n.p.). In this invitation, the actual world is established as a site of truth, prompting the question how it is realised within the e-book. Transmedial world-building makes non-fictional contexts available to the entirety of the *Netwars* universe: The actual transmedial worlds of 'power failure,' 'Stuxnet,' 'Malware' and 'Malcom' are part of the two documentaries and may therefore provide non-fictional input for the e-books.[101] As a consequence, fictionality appears as fact-based storytelling. Aesthetically, it is visible in the graphic novel's interactive points described above, which may be read as symbols of the in-betweenness of fiction and fact. Experients can choose whether or not to click on the interactive points and read the information provided there, meaning each experient will be able to situate themselves on a slightly different position on the fiction/fact scale. Much like film and documentary, fiction and fact are not in

[100] Mertikat assumes that "[f]our or five years down the line and we'll have faster Internet and mobile devices all over our bodies, variables and flat monitors and what not. That's the world we live in. That means we had to set rules. Set in Europe, five years into the future, what is the political situation, what is the technology available there. We had to exclude things, more so than invent them, but exclude a few options that would be feasible, but that we did not want to have in there."

[101] Additionally, these actual transmedial worlds are part of the website in form of contextualised information.

binary opposition to each other, but found on a scale. In other words, this study disagrees with Doložel's (1989) claim that fictionality is not a matter of degree but of kind.

2.1.2 Transmedial Character of The Salesman

> Of course, The Salesman was just a pseudonym. No one knew his real name apart from him, and he would never tell anyone again. His real name was his kryptonite – it left him naked and exposed. He had spent a lifetime building aliases, personas, and characters behind which he could hide, and through which he could build his empire. He doubted whether there was a single person alive who could connect all of his personas.
> (*Down Time* 2015, n.p.)

One of the actual transmedial worlds is 'The Salesman,' a narrative bridge between web documentary, graphic novel and e-book injecting emotion into the abstract topic of cyber war. The transmedial character of the Salesman functions as a tool of transmedia world-building and, as a fictional character, lifts the 'actual' topic of cyber war onto a fictional level. This section examines how this works, arguing, on the one hand, that The Salesman adds narrative value to the story and, therefore, works as a prompt for changes of media platform and, on the other hand, plays the role of antagonist across all media platforms, thereby illustrating the main message of the *Netwars* universe: 'You never know who is in control.'

Transmedia world-building by way of The Salesman creates the impression of a shady, covertly-operating, hidden character whose personality can only be gleaned by experiencing content on all media platforms. The Salesman, and also the actual transmedial world of 'The Salesman,' are sliced up and distributed across storyworlds. Therefore, the transmedial character of The Salesman, moving across storyworlds, is part of the overall actual transmedial world of 'The Salesman', which is only completed by experiencing all parts of the actual transmedial world of 'The Salesman.'. In each platform, The Salesman seems to play a different role: In the web documentary, he mainly appears as host and storyteller; the e-book's storyworld focuses on his role as gangster boss; and the graphic novel reveals The Salesman as hidden mastermind.

The experient's view of The Salesman and his roles on a particular platform will be greatly influenced by the degree of their prior exposure to other *Netwars* storyworlds. In the web documentary, The Salesman introduces himself as a friend by speaking directly to the user. This breakdown of the fourth wall is typically found in non-fiction formats – it is something initiated by television show hosts or, occasionally, by presenters of documentaries. In fictional contexts, it is rarely used. The most prominent example in a recent quality television series can be found in *House of Cards*, where Frank Underwood's direct address to viewers provides them with background information that would not be available otherwise.

In *Netwars*, The Salesman functions as central theme and host – a reflexive and performative mode of web documentary worlds. Evoking the reflexive and performative modes of documentary, i.e. highly subjective forms of representation, his appearances serve to intensify the experients' awareness of the fact that both the web documentary and the entire *Netwars* universe are artefacts. In contrast to the other worlds of the web documentary – animation films, experts, information graphics – the function of The Salesman is not to make claims about the truth but to call into question other worlds and, therefore, to cause users to reflect upon what they have seen and heard. This function can be regarded as an element of participatory storytelling, stimulating an active reading of the web documentary's text.

Besides being a character, host and the user's friend, the Salesman also appears as storyteller. In the fourth episode he is presented as puppeteer. In contrast to storytellers in other media, such as film, television or a book, puppeteers are usually visible to those to whom the story is told, and part of the show, albeit in the background. One might say that the puppeteer storyteller is always also a participant. The fact that, after the show, The Salesman is revealed as puppeteer contributes to his aura of a hidden, manipulative mastermind – a constellation foregrounded by the graphic novel through the conflict between Nightshade and The Salesman, who is not present in the graphic novel. The web documentary's puppet show scene demonstrates quite clearly that The Salesman is in control – literally, pulling the strings. The question is only which parts of the surveillance apparatus and the ongoing cyber war he controls. Arguably, The Salesman resembles

Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*[102] who is, also, characterised as elusive – making a deep and often positive impression on other characters while at the same time embodying a whole world of negation, denial and destruction. In the web documentary, The Salesman appears, mainly, as a charming and eloquent character, and the darker and destructive sides of his character are only intimated; they are, however, the dominant character traits in the e-book and graphic novel.[103] In the former, The Salesman is characterised as Europe's most powerful gangster boss, the head of Black Flag and Water Boys, his moral system based on gangster rules. Gangs, in gangster films, are "constituted as the supreme social authority that demands unquestioning loyalty" (Leitch 2002, p. 104). Two of the key gangster world rules are never to question the leader, and never to cross into another gang's territory: "People knew The Salesman. They feared and respected him." (*Down Time* 2015, n.p.)

Playing a number of very different roles, The Salesman resists categorisation, as the creators are happy to confirm: Lena Thiele, creative director of the web documentary, explains that the very aim of introducing the character of The Salesman was to polarise experients[104] in order to hammer home that it is really they who will never know who is in control. The character oscillates between good and evil, like so many other movie villains; specifically, though, his aesthetics are inspired by the American film, *Strange Days* (1995). In *Strange Days,* the dichotomy of good and evil is shown visually as white and black. It is thus not surprising that The Salesman should appear only in front of a black screen, a symbol of his evil side, contrasting sharply with his good side of being the experient's friend and being on the experient's side, to which he himself draws attention with an enigmatic smile. Inherent contradictions apparent in the smile and the tension between what can be seen and heard, are intensified through staging and light: In

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[102] In the puppet show scene, The Salesman tells seemingly different stories: one about politics and another about religion. However, they do not really differ thematically and may be altogether more similar than first assumed. A hypertextual reference to Goethe's *Faust*, this notion constitutes another instantiation of the 'Gretchen question.' While in *Faust*, the question epitomises the opposition of the two systems of religion and modern subjectivity, in *Netwars,* the two systems contrasted, and ultimately unified, are religion and politics.

[103] Like the Salesman, Mephistopheles leads others astray.

[104] Thiele is proud to explain the success of casting actor Nikolai Kinski as The Salesman. Kinski has a history of polarising audiences. At the storydrive conference in Frankfurt am Main, Michael Grotenhoff and Lena Thiele tested the character's appeal through a trailer. One half of the audience loved him, and the others hated him. This was exactly the effect intended.

a series of high-contrast images, his face is clearly divided into brightly-lit and shadowy (or, 'shady') areas (see Image 9).

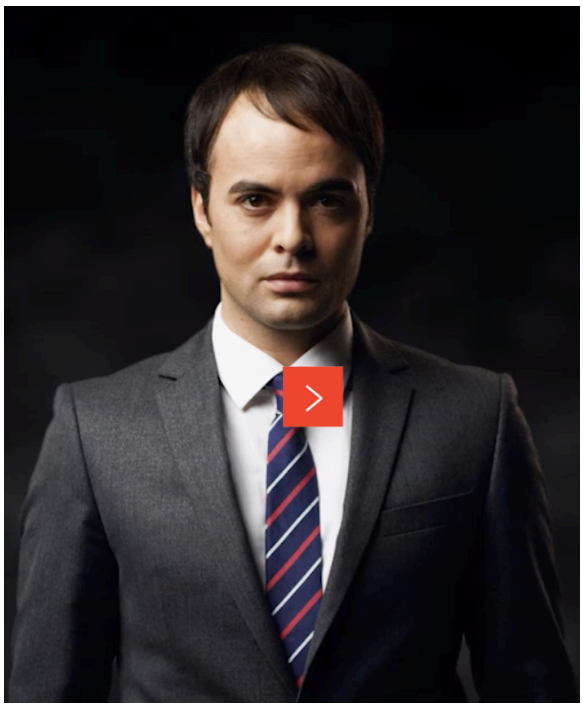

Image 9: Screenshot, *Netwars/out of CTRL*, E1.

The character serves, first and foremost, as a means to inject emotion into the abstract topic of cyber war. It was not a given initially that an entire character should be developed to achieve this aim although, as Thiele explains, it became clear quite soon that it should be done in this way. The character was based on a lot of research around cyber warfare, science fiction, movie villains and game theory. A comprehensive background story was needed in order to motivate the character's actions, without which experients may not care as much as creators hoped they would. This process of character development is thus in line with established techniques of fiction writing.

To conclude, the hidden character of The Salesman both symbolises and realises transmedia narrative value: The character as a whole, with all his different roles and 'faces,' can only be understood by experients accessing all *Netwars* media platforms and

switching platform whenever the story requires it. The character's hidden qualities can serve as motivation for the experient to try and discover new aspects of The Salesman.

Hiddenness also provides the basis for The Salesman's second function: his fictional construction as antagonist exemplifying the project's message that 'You never know who is in control.' While this message is hidden, different storyworlds provide a number of hints, which will be analysed in the following section. The message is communicated by five zip folders yielding the cautionary statement, "01_You," "02_never," "03_know," "04_who is," "05_in control" (*Netwars/out of CTRL* 2014, n.p.); at first, the zip folders are hidden and require some curiosity and an active process of discovery on the part of the experients. The web documentary's zip folders form part of the overall project's fact-based storytelling strategy in that they represent non-fictional articles proving The Salesman's arguments. Arguments are contextualised through these articles, although their meaning is only discovered if the user discovers and reads the articles. Articles are all but invisible, indicated merely by very little dots above the tracking strip at the bottom of the screen (see Image 10). In total there are 18 articles, compiled also in a zip folder on the left-hand side.[105]

[105] The user may click on both the little dots and the zip folder. Clicking on a dot reduces the number shown above the zip folder by one, making it easier for the user to get a sense of how much is left to be discovered.

Image 10: Screenshot, *Netwars/out of CTRL*, E1.

Examining the first function of The Salesman through his different roles has revealed that The Salesman can be compared to the elusive character of Mephistopheles. In Goethe's *Faust*, Mephistopheles is the antagonist of Heinrich Faust; in a similar way, The Salesman performs the role of antagonist across all platforms. By the end of the web documentary, he appears as an antagonist to the user him- or herself. He seems to hide more than he reveals when he says, "I told you that we are in this together, right? But I wouldn't let you down. Well, I lied. Fuck. You're actually working for me." (*Netwars/out of CTRL* 2014, E5) This particular narrative gap casts further doubt on who is in control, and who The Salesman really is, and whether he is good or evil.

The web documentary's central suggestion that 'You never know who is in control' is taken up in the e-books in the form of The Salesman's radical incompleteness:

> Of course, The Salesman was just a pseudonym. No one knew his real name apart from him, and he would never tell anyone again. His real name was his kryptonite – it left him naked and exposed. He had spent a lifetime building aliases, personas, and characters behind which he could hide, and through which he could build his empire. He doubted whether there was a single person alive who could connect all of his personas. Not a single person could ever identify him – nobody could even get close to him. He was an enigma. (*Down Time* 2015, n.p.)

It is this radical incompleteness which makes for the elusive character of The Salesman and forms the basis of his position as antagonist. He simply cannot be caught or pinned down in any way. In *Down Time,* the e-book, Mitchell tries to capture The Salesman, godfather of organised crime in the Dark Web who has a whole team working for him, many of whom are former members of Black Flag who have been recruited by The Salesman, notably Shylock who, like Nightshade in *The Code*, is one of the more publicly visible henchmen of the hidden mastermind. The Salesman, an elusive personality first introduced in the web documentary, re-appears in the e-book; his power is underscored by transmedia world-building as the fullness of his character can only be ascertained by experiencing all remaining *Netwars* storyworlds, an activity the experient has to be ready to embark on.

2.2 Serial Narrative Patterns to Create Narrative Cohesion and Consistency

You never know who is in control.
(*Netwars/out of CTRL* 2014)

Transmedia world-building uses serialised storytelling techniques where each new storyworld can be regarded as a new instalment of a transmedia universe. In this sense, each transmedia universe is serialised. *Netwars* is exceptional among German transmedia series in so far as the whole universe is not only serialised but each storyworld implements serial storytelling in a multitude of different ways. With the exception of the television documentary, each storyworld consists of at least two episodes: the web documentary consists of five; the graphic novel, of three; and the e-book, of two. Fictionalised storytelling with its array of fact-based strategies is thus not only a tool of transmedia storytelling but of serial storytelling, too. Binding together the different *Netwars* storyworlds, it is serial storytelling that enables coherence. As argued above, the creative industries are able to deploy the following tools of serial storytelling: infinite mode, memories, coherence, continuity and multiple narrative threads. All of them have been implemented by the creators of *Netwars*, as will be analysed in this section arguing that *Netwars'* serial storytelling strategies can be characterised as constructions of an arc aimed at ensuring narrative consistency.

Given that each storyworld is self-contained and that, at the same time, all storyworlds are connected on a thematic and narrative level, *Netwars* comprises both horizontal narration across all storyworlds and vertical narration within each individual storyworld. Horizontal narration occurs on both thematic and narrative levels: the topic of cyber warfare is developed across all storyworlds based on the message that 'You never know who is in control.' In fact, it is this message that truly represents *Netwars'* arc-shaped serial transmediality, as it enables consistency across fictional and non-fictional storyworlds.

Additionally, the character of The Salesman can be regarded as horizontal narration in the sense of a cumulative narrative. An elusive character narrated in fragments across web documentary, e-book and graphic novel, each focusing on different roles, The Salesman necessitates narrative memory. The serial device of memories functions differently in transmedia projects such as *Netwars* as compared to mono-medium serial storytelling, as *Netwars* is non-linear, i.e. the sequence in which media platforms are accessed by the experient is not predetermined by creators. Experients select their own preferred point of entry. This, in turn, informs the use of narrative memories. Prior knowledge on the part of the experients cannot always be expected. Memories rely on the presence of a cumulative narrative, accruing over the course of a linear structure. *Netwars'* only cumulative narrative is the actual transmedial world of The Salesman. In this environment, memory assumes the function of a puzzle, encouraging experients to track down more and more pieces towards the construction of a whole, rather than that of a persistent narrative device. In addition, *Netwars'* memory strategy is related to fact-based storytelling: Facts supply the context of a framework remembered and repeatedly instantiated within which stories are told. Finally, *Netwars* uses more traditional strategies of narrative memory: recaps, recurring elements and multiperspectivity.

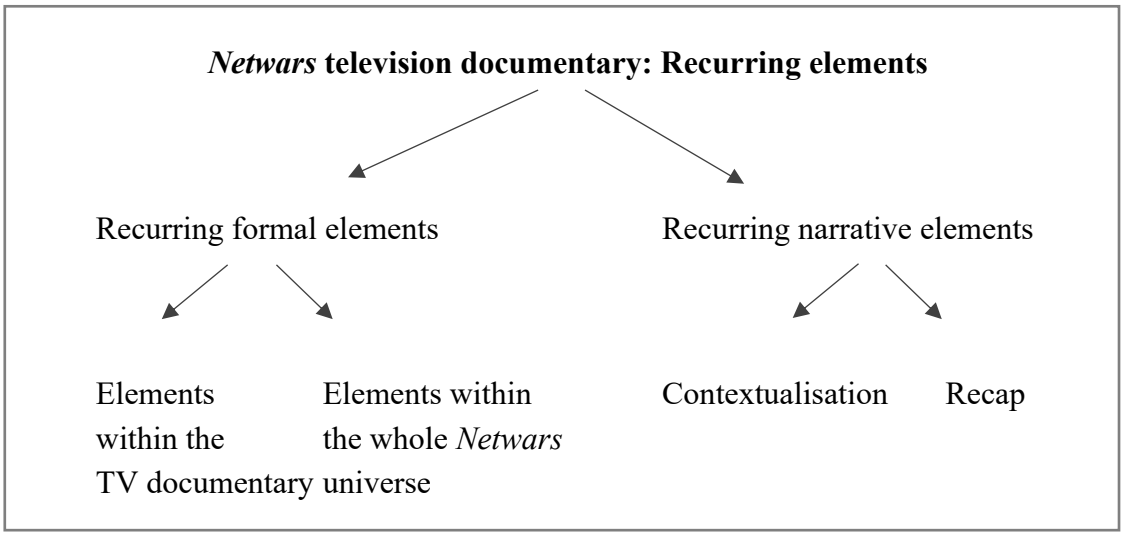

Figure 3: *Netwars/war on the web*, recurring elements

Netwars' television documentary uses two different types of recurring elements with different functions, as outlined in the chart above: formal and narrative (see Figure 3). Recurring formal elements are found on two levels: Some appear in the television documentary's storyworld, such as the specifically 'digital-age' way in which new experts are introduced;[106] others are part of the overall *Netwars* universe, such as the sounds associated with data. Both are aligned with the purpose of creating a coherent story and universe. Elements within the television documentary storyworld also serve to structure the documentary, representing a sort of visual anchor orienting the narrative arc and issuing reading instructions for the experients. The same visual aesthetic of the introduction and framing of experts becomes increasingly important over the course of the story. In this regard, complex narration unfolds within the documentary's storyworld that is part of the transmedia universe. Moreover, the repetitiveness of presenting, time and again, the same visual structure of expert panels invites a reading of the text that concerns itself more with what the experts say, as reading instructions have obviously been established already. This dynamic is comparable to a framework communicating through its formal structure (in this case, three experts within one image); expert statements are grouped through recurring formal elements.

[106] In a split screen three experts are presented side by side; only one is currently being interviewed.

The television documentary's recurring narrative elements also fulfil two different functions: contextualisation and recap. Contextualisation is intimately intertwined with complex narration, by way of narrative gaps in images. Take, for example, the documentary's first image – a clean room in the dark where, suddenly, the light is turned on. On its own, it cannot be read; contextualisation, by the end of the first act, allows experients to make sense of it when the image is situated within a larger pattern of preceding actions and voice-over narration. It is an example of striking visual symbolism that the light is turned on in the opening scene, and turned off at the end of the first act, reminding viewers throughout to be aware of the fact that they need to shed light on unfolding events in order to decode what is going on. *Netwars* can thus serve as an example of narrative complexity intensifying an experient's engagement with a story through diegetic pleasures and heightened formal awareness.

The second function, recap, is fulfilled by various images orienting the experient with regard to both setting/location and the overall storyline. For example, the image of a goldfish introduces the test attack storyline; this storyline is situated in space through the image of power and water treatment company Ettlingen as seen from outside; finally, the image of Mao Zedong provides further information on the location, making it clear to viewers that it's China. This repetition of images as a means of providing locational information about the ensuing narrative is comparable to serial storytelling patterns of soap operas or telenovelas with their finite set of locations, each introduced by its corresponding, recurring, typified image.[107]

The two e-books also include repetitive elements, such as repeated exchanges about information obtained during parts of an ongoing investigation in the NCCU office, or Mitchell working at night as Strider or Phoenix at his home office. Additionally, the two e-books are characterised by multiperspectivity, which is also a typical feature of soap operas. In *Netwars'* e-books, multiperspectivity allows creators to relate the same event from different viewpoints, thus shifting the experient's attention from the 'what' to the 'how.'

[107] For example, German soap opera *Gute Zeiten, schlechte Zeiten* [Good Times, Bad Times] (1992-) is set in Berlin. The television tower at Alexanderplatz, Berlin underground stations and other local sites are repeatedly shown.

Multiplicity occurs as part of *Netwars'* strategy of simultaneously following multiple narrative threads in order to create narrative complexity. As a consequence of *Netwars'* transmedia world-building strategy with its suite of autonomous media platforms, multiple narrative threads are found within each storyworld rather than across several. What happens across storyworlds is the actual transmedial worlds, as discussed above. Multiple narrative threads within one storyworld will be examined in the following section, which uses the example of the television documentary.

Besides the repetition of images, *Netwars*' television documentary features interconnected storylines, another pattern primarily associated with soap operas. The television documentary's actual textual and actual transmedial worlds can be compared to storylines; while intersecting on screen, they do not actually affect one another. They are interconnected only in a relatively loose way in so far as they are thematically related, and by involving the same sets of characters, e.g. FX, Frank Boldewin and David Sanger, who each play a role in two or three different worlds. Some of the documentary's narrative storylines end with a cliffhanger,[108] as soap operas often do, for the same reason of encouraging viewers to keep following the series. Other narrative storylines broaden the theme of a previous one by supplementing it with an additional point of view,[109] in another parallel to serial storytelling in soap operas and elsewhere, where the same problem is depicted from the perspectives of different characters. These theme-focused recaps are equipped with different contextual information in each case and, in sum, provide a broader view on the issue at hand. In contrast to serial narratives, however, the television documentary needs to be viewed from beginning to end, because recaps are closely linked to the narrative storyworld and can only be understood based on pre-existing storyworld knowledge. Consequently, the documentary's storyworld appears more coherent and connected, its different worlds not separate, and changes between worlds taking place in a smooth and orderly manner, building on thematic connections and following the arc of the overall story.

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[108] Consider, for instance, the scene about the plans for a test attack and about manager Oehler's not knowing when FX will attack his company. By the end of this scene the light in the clean room is turned off.

[109] 'Stuxnet,' for instance, is presented by expert Frank Boldewin in Berlin Teufelsberg, with a focus on the past. This is followed by the first expert panel, which focuses on the present and future.

As the analysis of the television documentary's multiple narrative threads demonstrated, cliffhangers are a natural ally of serial storytelling in general and transmedia narratives specifically, which need to be open in order to expand and extend across platforms. Plotlines must not be closed off, or else the experient may lose interest. In contrast to cliffhangers in mono-medium serials such as television series, cliffhangers in transmedia projects operate within an infinite narrative mode, aiming to instigate changes of media platform. As analysed above, many of *Netwars'* possible worlds questions remain unanswered, and what-if questions are only picked up in other storyworlds, as is the case with the possible worlds of 'test attack' and 'power failure.' The biggest cliffhanger can be found at the end of the second e-book: The Salesman remains at large. Presumably, the television series, which is ongoing, will pick up the thread, as is suggested by images found online (see Image 11). Vertical narration implies closed narrative threads as well as autonomous storyworlds.

Image 11: Screenshot, *Netwars* website

As argued and demonstrated in this section, each storyworld uses serial storytelling patterns, often in more than one way. Given that the television documentary provides experients with an overview of the overall universe's topic, it makes sense that it is the only platform that contains only one episode told in successive instalments –

through recurring elements and interconnected storylines – within its own storyworld. These elements of seriality also give experients the impression that the documentary is part of the wider *Netwars* universe. In contrast to the e-books and web documentary, the graphic novel is a serial, whose fictional story is told over three episodes.

All in all, serial storytelling in *Netwars* serves to create narrative cohesion and coherence. It is a transmedia example of narrative complexity within both the wider *Netwars* universe and each of the four individual storyworlds, as this section has amply shown. This study argues that narrative complexity within each storyworld allows experients to engage with each media platform separately; this may be one of the main reasons for its enduring popularity with experients. Narrative complexity means added narrative value across all four *Netwars* media platforms.

Given that all German transmedia series straddle the border between fiction and the actual world, albeit in different ways, ranging from social media through user-generated content to differences in fictionalised storytelling strategies, it can now be concluded that transmediality puts a fictional narrative in closer proximity to the actual world than mono-medium fiction, although the remaining distance constitutes a vital aspect of the genre. *Netwars* uses the fictional character of The Salesman to make the abstract, non-fictional topic of cyber warfare more accessible and provide coherence across the different platforms along the way. Fictional storytelling is contextualised and underpinned by facts and research. Narrative coherence is achieved by the unusual use of narrative memory, less linear than elsewhere and more like a puzzle game, operating in an infinite mode motivating changes of media platform and crossing multiple narrative threads in a sustained attempts at creating narrative complexity.

All in all, *Netwars* differs from the other five German transmedia serials not only in terms of serialised and fictionalised storytelling strategies but also in its approach to transmedia world-building: *Netwars* consists of essentially autonomous media platforms and multiple points of entry, as no core medium can be identified. In a final contrast with the other German transmedia series, *Netwars* is unique in its mix of diverse genres.

VII DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

1 Introduction

This thesis has argued for the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of transmedia storytelling and world-building, including the creative process leading up to them. This chapter presents an overview of important findings and discusses their contribution to existing scholarship on the issues. The chapter is organized in five sections. The section following this introduction reflects on the methodology used; the third section discusses findings based on poetological analysis and relates them to ongoing debates in media and media industry studies as well as literary criticism. The fourth section discusses findings specifically related to transmedia seriality, and the fifth reflects on limitations of this study. Based on these limitations, some avenues for further research on transmediality will be recommended. The chapter ends with conclusions.

2 Methodological Reflections

> [A] critical media industries approach is a multi-method, multiperspectival approach to studying media industries, bringing together a variety of different methods as part of a holistic analysis, paying equal consideration to economic, corporate, and discursive contexts.
> (Freeman 2016, p. 6-7)

This study of German transmedia storytelling and world-building prides itself in its unwavering acknowledgement of the topic's complexity. This premise served as the starting point for its search for methodological sophistication and coherence. In light of the obvious lack of a tried and tested methodology for the study of transmedia universes as complex wholes, the new set of methods needed to be able to examine different types of data, including the existing texts of *Netwars,* the transmedia universe chosen as example, and interviews with German creators of transmedia series. The interdisciplinary case study approach chosen was able to accommodate and put to best use a customised combination of methods and tools from media studies, media industry studies, literary

criticism, philosophy, and the social sciences. The study's thematic focus came into view from various angles, resulting in a holistic and realistic picture which provided the answers to the research questions posed at the start. It overcame what it identified as a major weakness of existing scholarship, which is that transmedia storytelling and world-building had so far been examined on a textual level or, in terms of production, discussed theoretically, but that research had not taken any notice of the real-life experiences of the projects' creators. Through a series of in-depth interviews, this study was able to fill this gap. For the first time, also, insights have been produced specifically into the experiences of German transmedia professionals creating and producing German transmedia series. Furthermore, the holistic approach adopted here provides answers to the question how the creative and production process inscribes itself in the transmedia text in general and in transmedia world-building in particular. The present section reflects in detail on the methodological tools of qualitative textual analysis, with regard to both existing transmedia texts and expert interviews.

An interdisciplinary approach was all the more necessary since *Netwars,* the transmedia project chosen as case study, comprises film, television, book and graphic novel texts straddling the line between fiction and non-fiction not only across the different storyworlds but also within each individual one. As chapter IV argued, the lack of studies on transmedia storytelling using coherent, interdisciplinary methods of qualitative textual analysis is felt most urgently when it comes to transmedia universes which renegotiate the lines between fiction, non-fiction and the actual world. This study finds that the analysis envisaged is viable if possible worlds theory is used. The distinct advantage of this theory is that it is media-independent, and tools based on it can be used to analyse the full breadth of a narrative universe which comprises the four media mentioned above. Doložel (1998) and Ryan (2013b) indicate that possible worlds theory may be applied to texts beyond the narrow confines of fiction. The question raised by this study was, however, how a theory developed in philosophy and applied so far only to the study of literary texts could be used for media texts beyond literature. This study was able to show that it is indeed possible to use it to analyse audio-visual and even interactive media, precisely because of possible worlds theory's ability to capture narrative. Furthermore, this study offers evidence that possible worlds theory can analyse non-fictional narrative worlds as well because it takes truth claims as well as a narrative world's relation to the

actual world into account. Using tools based in possible worlds theory made it possible to examine how *Netwars* is situated between fiction and non-fiction and threw light on the serial's fictionalised, i.e. fact-based, storytelling.

In the course of carrying out the textual analysis it became obvious that the categories provided by possible worlds theory for the study of worlds were not sufficient, because of the theory's insistence on the actual textual world, as chapter VI.1.1 has shown. In the analysis of cross-platform narratives, the truth reference is not only the actual textual world but also the world which this study proposes to call the 'actual transmedial world.' By introducing this category of world, it became possible to examine the structure and sequence of transmedia worlds and transmedial world-building, for which the case study of *Netwars* may count as evidence.

Possible worlds theory had to be linked to narratology, as Doložel (1989), Suhrkamp (2002) and Ryan (2013b) have all suggested at various points. The combination of possible worlds theory, Genette's theory of transtextuality and Iser's theory of narrative gaps has turned out to be a very useful composite tool to examine, first, individual texts and their particular storytelling and, secondly, how the different texts of a transmedia serial text work collectively to form a coherent narrative and stylistic whole. Genette's theory of transtextuality is comprised of five categories, allowing for the concept of intertextuality, which is so central to transmediality, to be analysed in a differentiated way that pays attention to context too – another obvious requirement in the context of transmedia worlds. In short, this theory-based study developed an integrative approach to the analysis of transmedia texts which are genre hybrids.

One of the study's methodological challenges was to find a strategy to extrapolate case study findings onto a more general level. In order to compare findings of the *Netwars* case study with other German transmedia series, this study considered all five other German transmedia series produced between 2010 and 2016. This was done through qualitative expert interviews with a wide thematic purview, touching on world-building as well as production processes. Resulting from this enquiry was a series of insights into patterns of the creation processes of German transmedia series and into transmedia storytelling and transmedia world-building more generally. Findings from the examination of *Netwars* can be triangulated with these further insights, and all of them can now serve as the basis for further research into transmedia universes in general.

Analysis of the complex relationship between transmedia serial storytelling and the process of creating a transmedia universe included a consideration of the why and how of decision-making processes. Textual analysis of an unusually wide range of sources within the framework of a case study centred research design has been an innovative and arguably fruitful contribution to media industry studies, yielding multiperspectival results and supporting Krauß and Loist's (2018) assertion that media industry studies can indeed draw on textual analysis.

This study set out to interview authors and producers who had the initial idea for a transmedia series and were also involved in developing their project further. Interviewing at least one individual working on each transmedia series[110] was indeed possible. Gaining access to them was not a problem. All interviewees could comfortably be contacted via email, and most of them responded within a few days or, in a few cases, weeks. In terms of the sample of creators it was striking that only one creator from *Alpha 0.7* and one from *About:Kate* was ready to participate. From the remaining four transmedia series at least two creators per project took part; notably, all *Dina Foxx* creators contacted were willing to be interviewed. It is worth seeing these different reactions against the background of the differences in public image of the two series: *Dina Foxx* is the most popular of the six examined series and a German showcase project for transmedia storytelling. By contrast, as Sebastian Büttner explained, the final version of *Alpha 0.7* is not what he and his colleagues had hoped to create. This might be one reason why his partner and the producer did not respond to the request for interview. With regard to *About:Kate*, no convenient time for interview could be found.

All interviewees were open-minded and said they were delighted that transmedia storytelling was finally going to be scrutinised in an academic context. All of them were, and continue to be, very interested in the findings. It can be assumed that this interest in the substance of the present study was one of their reasons for participating. This would

[110] In addition to authors, creators and directors, the researcher also interviewed two television editors, but they did not provide any information pertinent to this study. As it turned out during interviews, they had not been involved directly in the content development process. Generally speaking, editors perform the role of project sponsor, an aspect which was not at the heart of this study. The researcher subsequently decided against conducting further interviews with editors and did not analyse the two interviews that had been conducted.

be in line with Ortner's (2009) contention that the main reason for someone to agree to be interviewed is their intellectual curiosity with regard to the matter at hand.

Related to the participant's interest is the performative element of the interviews. Two performative elements were striking. The first is related to the problem of credits in the *Dina Foxx* project. The researcher identified a gap around this issue which could be filled with the help of interviewing multiple creators such as the producer, writer/director and game designer. Building trust led to the writer/director discussing the problem off-the-record. It is a common problem in Germany to date. Obviously, it was important to the writer/director that the researcher knows about it when she contextualises the other interviews. The writer/director was keen to emphasise that *Dina Foxx* was his idea. Additionally, the researcher had the impression that he was relieved that someone was (finally) listening. This performative element can be described as a 'self-reflexive attempt.' The second performative element occurred during the interview with *Netwars'* TV documentary's writer/director Marcel Kolvenbach, who was very pleased to be interviewed and expressed his wish to be quoted in the thesis. Several times he summarised his key points and insisted they be quoted. His motivation to participate can be described as 'narcissistic.'

All interviews were conducted in German and in Germany. The sample of questions prepared worked well. The order in which they were asked depended on the flow of each conservation, a fact that had been anticipated. The three possible challenges and adverse effects to which expert interviews may be liable – profiling, feedback and paternalism – did not ultimately cause any problems. All in all, the researcher had the impression that interviewees felt comfortable during the interview situation and trusted the researcher. One indication was that some experts gave additional, off-the-record information on budgets and internal collaboration.

Writing postscripts (Prommer 2005) immediately after interviews was helpful in terms of reflecting what had been said, whether the questions had been effective and whether the researcher was able to do what she had planned; it was thus possible to review the approach taken after each interview. All interviews were transcribed in German. Structural content analysis was based on Hermanns *et al*. (1984), which covers retrospective action patterns as well as communicative schemata. They allowed for the segmentation of the transcript and the establishing of thematic and analytical categories.

The reconstruction of the interviews' trajectories entailed identifying implicit arguments, motivations and experiences and enabled the researcher to recognise patterns between them.

Given that there had been little empirical or theoretical knowledge on methods of analysing transmedia universes coherently and from different perspectives before this study commenced, the complexity of transmediality was captured for the first time by an analysis of a wide range of transmedia texts, including those delivered by expert interviews as part of a case studies approach. It is this study's contribution to not only introduce the specific mix of methods but also develop further the principles and practices of possible worlds theory in view of transmedial texts. This study's examination of how transmedia storytelling and world-building are related to the creation and production processes had always planned to study the phenomenon as a complex one; it produced evidence that an interdisciplinary approach can indeed be recommended.

3 Relationship Between German Transmedia Storytelling, Transmedia World-building and Production Practice

> When you're developing a business model for your project, it is important to keep in mind that people do not simply buy content. They buy into an experience.
> (Bernardo 2014, p. 12)

Chapters II and V revealed a two-fold gap around German transmediality: Both scholars and the industry were focused on American transmedia projects, provoking this study's initial question why there are only a few German transmedia examples. Chapter II drew attention to one reason that is particularly relevant for academia, which is the ubiquity of references to Jenkins' (2011, n.p.) definition of transmedia, which is based solely on the American version of transmedia: "The Hollywood based model of transmedia assumes a story told or a world explored across not simply multiple media but multiple texts, which can be sold to audiences separately and which represent multiple touch points with the brand." This study's findings revealed some of the significant differences between American and German approaches to transmedia world-building. Although the six

German transmedia series examined differ in their world-building practices – some of which include autonomous media platforms while others don't, some of which take different approaches to the mix of fiction and non-fiction than others, and some of which promote different forms of experient activity than others – they have ostensible similarities that make them distinct from the American examples. None of the German projects is a brand or a transmedia franchise along the lines of the Hollywood-centred model of U.S. transmedia projects. Production practices and processes are different, as all German transmedia series were created as transmedia projects from the outset whereas Hollywood projects tend to be expansions of a successful core storyworld. The present study confirms Long's (2007) suggestion that transmedia projects look different if they are planned as transmedia from the get-go. In this sense, German transmedia series are akin to Ryan's (2016) East coast model rather than the West coast model which dominates the American transmedia landscape. However, the creation strategy of world-sharing across different industries that is used within transmedia franchising (Johnson 2013) is also applied by German creators in order to handle repetition and difference within the whole transmedia universe.

Three of the six German transmedia series are designed to be experienced as a whole. In this regard, *Dina Foxx 1, Time of Heroes* and *About:Kate* differ from their American counterparts in which each medium entry point can be accessed independently. The majority of German transmedia series has one mothership which is complemented by additional storyworlds, in line with the picture developed by Clarke (2013) and Mittell (2014) of a project with one core medium, usually a television serial, and paratextual transmedia extensions 'protecting' the mothership. Like Mittell, this study finds that financing models, especially those based on co-production with broadcasters, effect transmedial world-building in so far as the medium of television is bound to be at the heart of the project. With the exception of *Dina Foxx 1,* all German transmedia series include an autonomous television storyworld which is complemented by additional, non-autonomous storyworlds on other media platforms.

Netwars is notable for its balanced transmedia world-building strategy and the absence of a core medium. It is thus possible to experience only one storyworld, in line with Jenkins' (2006a) picture of a balanced transmedia universe where no medium or text assumes a superior position over all others. Arguably, *Netwars* comes closest to the

American practice of building a transmedia brand, which may be a function of its financing model. Chapter VI traced the influence of the absence of a television broadcast partner.

Netwars' financing strategy, based on an innovative partnership model, follows from the perception of power imbalances in the broadcaster/independent producer relationship discussed in chapter III.2, where tensions between the production processes found in an independent company and in public broadcasters have been outlined with a view, primarily, to both timing and decision-making processes. Creators participating in this and other studies indicate that arrangements with, and decisions of, public broadcasters very often take their time. The reasons for this deserve further critical attention. One reason identified by German producers for the length of decision-making processes is the absence of a transmedia showrunner with the authority to make crucial decisions and the ability to communicate and implement a project's one vision at all times. Transmedia projects in particular rely on a large number of arrangements made within a short space of time. This study demonstrated that *Netwars* is an example of economic and editorial independence, and that this logistical and financial independence led to a sense of great artistic freedom, as examined in chapter V.4. Strikingly, the collaboration between public broadcaster and independent production companies was more challenging due to the reasons described, which contradicts Bennett and Medrado's (2013) finding that 'making the difference' functions as a form of contract between PSM and independent production companies in the UK. 'Making the difference' may mean a willingness to innovative and take risks, but the German creators certainly do not perceive German public broadcasters as innovative or brave. This leads to obvious cultural differences that deserve further research.

With respect to defining transmedia terminology, the findings confirm that, in industry parlance, 'transmedia' is a vague term which is used rather inconsistently: transmedia, crossmedia, branded storytelling and interactive storytelling are habitually conflated, and creators each have their own definitions and preferred terms, as revealed in the interviews. Although their general understanding of transmedia storytelling is influenced by Jenkins' definition, they use 'transmedia' predominantly for projects conceived from the very beginning as involving more than one media platform. In other words, there is an interdependence between creation processes and terminology.

Therefore, it seems plausible to differentiate between the four forms of transmedia projects presented in chapter II.2.2, with 'native' and 'additive' referring to projects created as transmedia from the start and 'extended' and 'expanded' designating others. These terms meet the complexity of transmedia in general and take particular note of different forms of creation processes and their respective impacts on storytelling and world-building. Furthermore, the four forms cover the issue of autonomous media platforms, which is of great to the creators interviewed but has been discussed less in the academic literature so far. With regard to the strikingly different views on transmedia storytelling and world-building and on autonomous media platforms held by German creators on the one hand and scholarly authors on the other it may not be a surprise that creators are concerned more with the implications of autonomous media platforms as this is something that impacts the entirety of their work on a project. However, there are also similarities between the industry and academic views on the term 'transmedia.' Both dismiss the term as a buzzword or marketing device. Given that both have multiple views on the term 'transmedia,' this indicates a variability of discourses on the part of both creators and scholars. This demonstrates the wide range of transmedia storytelling and world-building within the academic and industry contexts.

This study revealed that it is a huge challenge for German transmedia creators to maintain consistency and create added narrative value across autonomous media platforms in one transmedia universe. However, all projects can be said to succeed in providing added narrative value on every platform. This study agrees with Jenkins (2006a) that it is important for transmedia projects to provide added narrative value on each platform. All six German transmedia projects do so, thereby producing innovative forms of (televisual) storytelling and transmedia production practice, albeit as a niche activity in German television, as shown in chapter V.3.

Other differences between German and American projects include the issue of the size of project budgets. All creators interviewed agreed that one reason for the dominance of American productions is their higher budgets. More money means more staff and more time available. Smaller German budgets result in work overload for some creators, as argued in chapter V. The aspect of work overload is also in line with Fast and Jansson's (2019) notion that digital media can cause work overload amongst other conditions. One impact of the disparity is found in academic research, which tends to focus on successful

audio-visual content. Higher budgets have to do with different understandings of innovation and risk. The present study confirms the suggestion by Freeman and Proctor (2018) that transmedia projects from smaller markets such as Germany do less than American ones to appeal to larger audiences.

Ultimately, all of these issues have to do with one of the four defining principles of transmedia storytelling: the process of systematic narration. Following Long (2007) and Weaver (2013), this study examined in detail the fact that transmedia projects intended from the start to be told across various platforms differ both aesthetically and narratively from those that were expanded afterwards. It is very striking indeed that both the creators interviewed and the transmedia serial paratexts only label the former as transmedia. This is in stark contrast to some of the academic definitions. It is obvious that the creation process will look very different if a narrative universe is created from the start as crossing multiple media platforms. While expansion is usually driven by many authors, native and additive transmedia have to have a "unified author" (Evans 2011, p. 31), as both the interviews and the other elements of this study's textual analysis confirm. Numerous terms are in use for this role, including transmedia producer, vision keeper and even curator. In order to achieve narrative cohesion, the role is regarded as indispensable, no matter what its name. Narrative cohesion is further achieved by communicating 'one vision.' This study has proposed the concept and role of a transmedia showrunner as guardian of this vision. The transmedia showrunner's role is strongest during the content development process; in this it resembles that of a television showrunner more than that of a transmedia producer. Given that studies concerning German showrunners and the writer's room are few and far between, this study provided new insights into German showrunners practices. Confirming Krauß's (2018a, 2018b) results, this study showed that German creators have no experience at all with the role of a showrunner nor with collaborative writing in a writer's room. This is partly due to budgetary constraints especially during the content development phase. While the academic literature is mainly concerned with the advantages of a unified author, this study provides new empirical insights into authorial coherence by examining it in the context of production culture, in relation to the professional backgrounds of those involved and in view of their willingness to collaborate and, if needed, submit to one authorial vision represented by the transmedia showrunner. More work is needed to examine this complex constellation of interests and

actors and to uncover the economic, social and structural preconditions for the implementation of a German showrunner.

One consequence of the absence of a transmedia showrunner is that the one vision is missing, a point that Severin Brettmeister has been making with regard to *Dina Foxx*. While many scholars mention narrative cohesion as one of the preconditions of transmedia world-building, the majority do not explore this aspect in relation to the creative process, nor to the question how narrative consistency can be maintained across platforms with different aesthetic affordances. Findings indicate that it is strongly related to the process of collaboration and suggest that communication, time and money all impact on it. The different languages of various industries working together can be a particular challenge during the content creation process, as Bennett and Medrado (2013) have already suggested. The creators interviewed admit to having little experience with either collaboration or narrative consistency, a fact that can now be attributed with some certainty to the absence of a transmedia showrunner. German transmedia series vary in terms of their degree of narrative consistency. Findings suggest that this is due to all three of the core elements of transmedia worlds listed by Klastrup and Tosca (2004), i.e. mythos, topos and ethos. Mythos is of particular importance with regard to coherent storytelling across platforms, and this study's findings align with Gomez' (2016) argument that a distinct mythological framework with its own story rules is both a core element of the narrative of a transmedia universe and an essential tool during story development.

A factor that is intimately linked with the issue of narrative cohesion is the mental image of worldness (Klastrup and Tosca 2004; Long 2007; Ryan 2013a; Tosca and Klastrup 2020; Wolf 2012). Klastrup and Tosca as well as Wolf argue that worldness has to be introduced first on one single media platform. This study disagrees, for the simple reason that the sequence in which an experient accesses platforms cannot be predetermined. This study's textual analysis sheds further light on worldness by arguing that the mental image of a world is linked to the choice of genre. The case could be made that fictional storyworlds and genres influence each other first and foremost on a narrative level while non-fictional content tends to become a question of genre as a consequence of its chosen topic. In terms of genre, academics and industry representatives hold strikingly different views. While academic scholarship focuses on fictional transmedia

projects and tends to deal with non-fiction in the context of transmedia journalism, if at all, some of the creators interviewed argue that transmedia projects are easier to finance if they are non-fictional.

This study has been able to highlight the range of transmedia series in film and television. *Time of Heroes* can be regarded as evidence that fictional genres even outside science-fiction and fantasy are suitable for transmedia universes. Furthermore, *Netwars* and *Culture Files* demonstrate that German transmedia series are found between fiction and non-fiction, as suspected by Zimmermann (2015) and Schlichting (2015) who argued that transmediality enables creators to expand a narrative universe across fictional and non-fictional storyworlds on account of a story's particular approach to realism. The in-depth textual analysis of *Netwars* offers evidence that transmedia universes can be set simultaneously in both fictional and non-fictional storyworlds and still present a coherent narrative – a result which makes an innovative contribution to the rather barren landscape of non-fiction transmedia scholarship. One of *Netwars'* strategies of crossing genre boundaries is to throw up what-if questions as transmedia paratexts (Mittell 2013, 2014).

While scholars disagree on whether, or to what extent, transmedia storytelling constitutes a new form of storytelling, industry representatives are quite adamant that it is new, although some reject the label 'transmedia' as vacuous or pompous. If transmedia is indeed a new form of storytelling, interviewees are surely right in pointing out that it is a new form of both creating and producing content. Given that creation and production processes are closely linked to world-building it should not come as a surprise that the industry pays much more attention to world-building than academics. This may be for several reasons: As chapters V and VI indicated, transmedia storytelling exploits the individual storytelling capacities of each platform involved, and transmedia world-building makes use of media platform interconnectivity by creating a coherent narrative throughout the whole transmedia universe. In other words, it is precisely the world-building that necessitates new forms of creation. The production culture of transmedia projects, especially in Germany, continues to be a promising field of research, especially with regard to world-building. This study's insights into German transmedia production culture provide a window into these processes, and they contribute new empirical knowledge to the study of German production culture more widely.

Eick's (2014) contribution of theoretical knowledge to transmedia development includes naming two main challenges: a project's complexity and the management of experients' changes of media platform. This study confirms that these are indeed on the minds of creators. Serrano and Tschurtschenthaler designated platform changes as "media jumps" which transmedia creators have to make as smooth as possible. In contrast to the academic literature creators emphasise that changes of platform have to be voluntary and optional. In order to avoid a feeling of disruption on the part of experients, creators resort to two main strategies (see chapter V.4.3). The first is to choose media platforms based on knowledge about target group preferences, and the second involves maximising added narrative value. With regard to both, this study offers new empirical knowledge.

Changes of media platform can be regarded as one form of experient participation in a flexible model of transmedial engagement (Evans 2020). Jenkins (2006a) argues that transmedia storytelling depends on the active participation of experients; the role of experients has changed quite radically over the course of the years in which transmedia projects have been produced, as the *Netwars* case study revealed. *Netwars* storyworlds allow for different forms of interactivity by stimulating and sustaining an encyclopaedic impulse. German creators argue that feeding the encyclopaedic competence of experients is a challenge, and the analysis of German transmedia series has pointed out that encyclopaedic competence is required by different projects in different ways, depending on the wider context of world-building. This makes sense given that encyclopaedic competence can be regarded as a form of world knowledge. All creators interviewed agreed with existing research findings that interactive storytelling and participation are not the sole prerogative of transmedia producers. However, they disagreed over whether or not participatory or interactive storytelling was a necessary part of transmedia storytelling.

Much like Bernardo (2014), this study supports the creator's view that experients are willing to pay for experiences but not simply for content. German transmedia series are aiming, and able, to provide experiences, for example through *About:Kate*'s allowance for user-generated content. This approach may be regarded as a new form of 'participatory production practice' (Stollfuß 2018).

Therefore, the term 'experient,' established in this study, has turned out to be appropriate in order to define the person who engages with the entirety of a transmedia universe and experiences its content on different levels.

All in all, this study demonstrates digital work overload of precarious workers that have to be 'always on' and flexible due to budgetary constraints as well as media saturated-working conditions. This is in line with Fast and Jansson's (2019) analysis.

4 German Transmedia Seriality

> The goal for 'What If?' transmedia is to launch off the mothership into parallel dimensions, foregrounding tone, mood, character, or style more than continuing with canonical plots and storyworlds.
> (Mittell 2013, n.p.)

One of the major contributions of this thesis goes back to the gap in transmedia seriality. Bordwell (2009) and Jenkins (2009a) argue that transmedia storytelling work best in television, and all German transmedia series do indeed include a television component. This has been found to be based on a reason other than narrative capabilities, namely the mundane issue of finance. It is altogether remarkable how small a role the concept of seriality plays in transmedia storytelling according to German creators. This study has, however, provided empirical knowledge on transmedia seriality with regard to narrative complexity in transmedia universes, narrative gaps, paratexts, cliffhangers, multiple narrative threads and transnarrative characters.

First of all, transmedia seriality by its very nature requires narrative complexity and thus constitutes a mode of serialised storytelling (Mittell 2013). This study demonstrates that there is no reason to assume that the mode of narrative complexity should only be realised on television, but that it can also be found in transmedia narratives, not least because of the active role of fans. What has been called 'forensic fandom' includes experients decoding narrative cues and filling in narrative gaps. The textual analysis of *Netwars* made a range of different forms of narrative gaps visible which function either as a prompt to change media platform (narrative gaps opening up

so that one element of a transmedia universe may be linked up with another) or as a way of furthering encyclopaedic competence through transtextual relations.

In intertextuality debates academics disagree whether textual knowledge is necessary if one wants to understand a text. This study suggests that transtextual relations within a transmedia universe do require textual knowledge or else the experient will not understand the project's worldness nor comprehend the nature of platform interconnectivity. This assertion contradicts Fiske's (2011) assertion that textual knowledge is not required to read a text intertextually. This study also demonstrates that German transmedia series use two types of paratexts: what-is and what-if questions. The latter in particular make for *Netwars* cliffhangers, and at times act as prompts for changes of media platform. Since what-if questions "launch off the mothership into parallel dimensions" (Mittell 2013, n.p.) they are a suitable tool for connecting fictional and non-fictional storyworlds, as the case study of *Netwars* indicated.

Netwars' different media platforms are connected paratextually as well as through the serial transnarrative character of The Salesman. Although the *Netwars* universe consists of storyworlds that can be experienced independently, the character of The Salesman holds them all together. Consequently, The Salesman can be regarded as a transnarrative character (Wolf 2012) and a form of intertextuality that is connected on both the thematic and narrative levels. Results presented here include new insights into the construction of transnarrative characters.

Transmedia seriality can appear on two levels: across the whole universe and within one storyworld. Multiple narrative threads are, therefore, necessary. Of the four braiding types proposed by Wolf (2012), the narrative threads of German transmedia series use three: thematic, diegetic and causal braiding. Wolf's fourth type, no braiding, could not be found. Reasons why braiding occurs include that the German transmedia series were originally conceived as transmedia projects, and creators confirm that narrative connectivity is a precondition for transmedia storytelling.

5 Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

It is important that this study identifies its limitations. This section discusses four main limitations and then points to future research on transmedia storytelling and world-building.

This study focused on the narrative construction of transmedia serial worlds. It relied heavily on qualitative textual analysis, partly of expert interviews, in a case studies approach in order to examine how a German transmedia universe is constructed. Transmedia texts offer opportunities for experients to make sense of them, but they do not present experients with unchangeable and easily transferable units of predetermined meaning. Some of these opportunities for sense-making are what this study has been able to identify. In other words, this study is not one about reception. It does not answer questions concerning the motivations for experients to engage with a (particular) transmedia series, or motivations for the change of media platforms.

The second limitation is the study's examination of transmediality in Germany. Although transmedia storytelling and world-building are – to a considerable degree – global in nature, the media industry is in many ways still a local and national affair. Therefore, conclusions drawn from this research cannot easily be applied to other contexts as the production process in different media industries can vary, as is clearly visible in differences between transmedia texts stemming from different national contexts.

The third limitation has to do with the chosen type of transmedia project. This study focused on only one of three possible German transmedia industries: film and television. As production practices impact on transmedia texts and depend on the context of the industry in question, conclusions from this study should not be transferred to book publishing or journalism without a considerable amount of additional research into these sectors. Furthermore, this study was focused only on transmedia series; serialised transmedia storytelling and world-building are different from non-serialised transmedia worlds and stories in terms of narrative complexity, so these non-serialised forms deserve further attention.

Finally, this study kept a tight focus on the content development phase within the overall production process. This initial phase requires collaboration across industries, and

the nature of collaboration affects the transmedia text. However, production practices in the following phases – filming, distribution etc. – come with their own requirements as well which deviate from those found in mono-medium stories, and further research is needed on those later stages as well.

The limitations themselves point to the future directions that research on transmedia storytelling and transmedia world-building can take. Given that creators interviewed described the collaboration with German public broadcasters as challenging, it would be interesting to hear the other side and analyse the experiences of broadcasters in creating and producing transmedia projects. Furthermore, the creators reported difficulties in terms of financing transmedia series. Dedicated research into the German transmedia market could examine funding patterns and business opportunities. Further research into transmedia seriality in other countries could shed additional light on the situation in Germany and potentially identify other forms of transmedia seriality as well. It could also examine transnational narrative patterns in transmedia. Sectors and industries such as publishing and journalism would also be of interest as points of comparison for research undertaken so far, not least in their interactions with film and television, the industries studied here. Research on German transmedia journalism and transmedia publishing would illuminate the phenomenon of German transmediality in an even more detailed and complex way and lead to new conclusions about typical patterns of German transmedia storytelling and world-building practices. Finally, a reception study could shed light on experients' motivations for engaging with transmedia series and for changing platform. It could result in a broad overview of target groups for transmedia projects.

6 Conclusions

In addressing German transmedia serial practices, this study has been able to provide the evidence that transmedia storytelling and transmedia world-building cannot be analysed separately. It has shown that the established academic custom of prioritising either worlds or stories is unhelpful. Transmedia storytelling and world-building depend on and influence each other. Transmedia world-building is influenced by every element of the

creative process, as this investigation into the broader context of German production culture has shown. Through an in-depth textual analysis of *Netwars* and using a contextualisation of *Netwars* within German transmedia seriality, this study has reached the following seven conclusions on the creation and narrative construction of German transmedia seriality:

1) The combination of possible worlds theory and literary theories of transtextuality and narrative gaps offers a suitable and coherent methodology to analyse a whole, complex transmedia universe. The introduction of the concept of an 'actual transmedial world' has been the vehicle to analyse a transmedia universe that is between fictional and non-fictional storyworlds and to examine relations between one universe's storyworlds in order to map the entirety of its transmedia world-building exercise.
2) German creators have three main motivations for creating transmedia series: The first is to engage in world-building, wishing to tell a story across platforms (*Alpha 0.7* and *Dina Foxx* are based on this motivation); the second is storytelling and the wish to provide a cross-platform experience for experients (as was the case for *About:Kate* and *Time of Heroes*); the third is the desire to create a transmedia project for its own sake and to explore the capabilities of different digital media (this was behind *Netwars* and *Culture Files*).
3) German transmedia series are conceived as transmedia projects from the very beginning. Combined with a step-by-step approach to transmedia world-building, this can be successful, as *Netwars* demonstrates.
4) Transmedia creation and production require a transmedia showrunner as "vision keeper" (Brettmeister) who ensures that narrative cohesion is maintained across all storyworlds of a narrative universe.
5) An innovative "outside the box" (Grotenhoff) finance model is a crucial factor of project sustainability. German transmedia projects need a new business model that is independent from the public broadcasters if artistic freedom is to be secured.
6) German transmedia storytelling is able to combine fictional and non-fictional storyworlds within one narrative universe. Transmedia storytelling offers suitable patterns for a mix of the two.

7) Autonomous media platforms meet the experients' media habits better than non-autonomous ones.

APPENDIX

1 List of Interviewees, Interview Dates and Interview Locations

About:Kate

Janna Nandzik, creator, author and director – 21 April 2016 – Berlin

Alpha 0.7

Sebastian Büttner, head author and producer – 11 April 2016 – Berlin

Culture Files

Ralf Pleger, author and director – 13 September 2016 – Berlin

Georg Tschurtschenthaler, producer – 02 March 2016 – Berlin

Dina Foxx 1 and 2

Kristian Costa-Zahn, producer – 01 March 2016 – Berlin

Severin Brettmeister, game designer – 14 March 2016 – Berlin

Max Zeitler, author and director – 04 April 2016 – Berlin

Netwars

Michael Grotenhoff, producer – 05 April 2016 – Berlin

Marcel Kolvenbach, author and director – 04 April 2017 – Berlin

Felix Mertikat, art director and creative director – 07 September 2016 – Ludwigsburg

Lena Thiele, transmedia designer and creative director – 14 September 2016 – Berlin

Time of Heroes

Volker Heise, creator and producer – 07 March 2016 – Munich

Alexander Maximilian Otto Serrano, transmedia designer – 22 March 2016 – Berlin

2 Basic Interview Questions

A Definition and Examples of Transmedia Storytelling

1) How would you define transmedia/cross-media storytelling?
2) What makes transmedia storytelling different to traditional forms of storytelling?
3) Can you name some examples for transmedia storytelling?
4) Can you name some German examples?

B Transmedia Storytelling Strategies

1) What made you decide to tell a transmedia series?
2) What stories are more appropriate to tell transmedial? Why?
3) What kind of criteria for transmedia storytelling do you have?
4) What media platforms are more appropriate for transmedia storytelling? Why?
5) How do you tell a transmedia story?
6) Which are the core narrative elements that work in any medium?
7) Which narrative elements are medium specific?
8) What is the additional value of transmedia storytelling?

C Challenges and Chances

1) What are the challenges of transmedia storytelling?
2) What are the chances of transmedia storytelling?

D Transmedia World-building

1) How is transmedia world-building progressing?
2) To what extent is it different to traditional storyworld-building?
3) How would you describe the transmedia world-building of your transmedia project?

E Transmedia Practice

1) Can you describe your role and responsibilities in creating the transmedia project?
2) What was your experience of the procedure for content development?

3) How did the collaboration work?
4) What were the target groups?
5) To what extent do the role and the responsibilities of the producer change in transmedia producing?

F Experient's Participation

1) What techniques do you have in transmedia storytelling to encourage experient's participation?
2) To what extent the "future-communication" with the experients is considered during the writing process of a transmedia story? What are the challenges? What are the chances?
3) How are these techniques different to traditional forms of storytelling?
4) How important is the fan's feedback?
5) What is the impact of fan's feedback on storytelling?

G Evaluation

1) How successful was the transmedia project?
2) How did you measure the success?

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