

Reconsidering Transmedia(l) Worlds

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1. Introduction

“Any thoughtful study of contemporary *transmedia* must start with the vital caveat that transmedia is not a new phenomenon, born of the digital age.”

(Jason Mittell 2014, 253; emphasis in the original)

To begin with, we would like to agree with the general sentiment of Mittell’s statement: ‘transmedia,’ which Mittell seems to use as an abbreviation of the term ‘transmediality,’ is not a new phenomenon. But can it really be a mere coincidence that these two terms and other related concepts such as ‘transmedial worlds’ have been introduced and extensively discussed in academic discourses since the early 2000s, less than ten years after the introduction of home computers and the internet to numerous private households, and at about the same time as the Web 2.0 came into existence? We do not think so. Rather, we believe that the increasing research interest of media studies in these phenomena and the various concepts used in this research field are indicators of a fundamental change in (trans)media culture that is a result of the emergence of digital technologies as well as their massive influence on our everyday lives.

The aims of this paper are to take a closer look at the terminology used to describe different phenomena in the field of transmedia studies, to differentiate between these terms and concepts and render them more precise, and to put transmedia(l) worlds into a historical context through the analysis of three case studies: the transmedial universe of *Sherlock Holmes*, the *Alien* saga, and the transmedial world of *The Legend of Zelda*. This diachronic perspective allows us to emphasize the

formation of worlds as the essential criterion that sets transmedia(l) worlds of the digital age apart from earlier transmedial phenomena, such as the general but uncoordinated transmedial representation of content (e.g. the illustration and retellings of ancient myths or biblical stories) or transmedial characters. While we agree with Mittell and others that ‘transmedia,’ used as a synonym for ‘transmediality,’ is not an entirely new phenomenon, we argue that ‘transmedia worlds’ are in fact born of the digital age. On the other hand, not only have the older transmedial worlds become much more expansive, but transmedial world-building has also become one of the most important strategies of media production under the influence of digital technologies.

2. Theorizing Transmediality

As Jens Eder and Jan-Noël Thon (2012) have pointed out, there are currently at least three or four academic discourses¹ in which ‘transmediality’² is being discussed: firstly, in the field of adaptation studies that, as Eder (2014) observes, is increasingly abandoning “its old focus on fidelity of literature-to-film adaptations” and “is beginning to open towards questions of transmediality” instead; secondly, in a literature, film, and media studies discourse centring on concepts such as ‘intermediality,’ ‘transfictionality,’ and ‘inter-’ or ‘transtextuality,’ which are employed to examine the “intricate relationships between works of art with regard to their media specific aesthetics” (Eder 2014); and thirdly, and of most importance to this paper, a rather new discourse primarily within media studies in which mainly film, series, or digital game franchises are put into a wider conceptual framework. This framework is necessitated by the realities of contemporary media production for which the detailed analysis of individual works seems no longer enough, but for which larger conceptual entities such as ‘transmedia storytelling’ (Jenkins 2007; 2011), ‘transmedial worlds’ (Klastrup and Tosca 2004; 2014), or ‘transmedia practice’ (Dena 2009) are required. Lastly, Eder identifies a discourse in communication studies and economics that “empirically investigates journalism and marketing under the generic concepts of *cross-media* and *convergence*” (Eder 2014; emphasis in the original).

Due to the fact that these discourses have developed largely side by side rather than in exchange with each other, several terms and concepts have been introduced and tend to be confused due to their orthographic similarity and overlapping tendencies. Our own approach is situated on the borders between the second and

¹ Three discourses are mentioned in an extensive footnote in Eder and Thon (2012); four discourses, now including adaptation studies, are identified in Eder (2014).

² Eder compiles a number of definitions of ‘transmediality’ with different extensions but suggests “the property of semiotic phenomena to occur in more than one medium” (Eder 2014) as the most useful working definition. For the present paper, we will adopt this rather general definition.

third discourse, though with a stronger emphasis on the third, whose focus we have extended to include novel-based franchises as well. We hope to reduce some of the confusion by drawing on concepts and terminology from both discourses, pointing out connections, and making clearer distinctions between them wherever we consider it necessary or useful. We will begin with the discussion of some central concepts.

In publications in 2001 and even more so in 2006, Henry Jenkins introduced the term ‘transmedia storytelling’³ to describe a strategy that had emerged in contemporary media culture, i.e. the “process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (Jenkins 2007). He argues that this strategy is a product of “economic convergence,” i.e. “the horizontal integration of the entertainment industry” that makes it particularly interesting for big media corporations to distribute their content across as many of their different media channels as possible in order to exploit lucrative “synergies” of cultural production (Jenkins 2001, 93).

By contrast, narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan’s concept of ‘transmedial storytelling’ – despite looking deceptively similar – denotes a much wider range of multifaceted dynamics spanning various media. Ryan regards transmedial storytelling as “a special case of transfictionality”⁴ that “operates across many different media” (2013). Moreover, she points out that these activities do not necessarily have to be preconceived but can develop over time and can be created by several independent ‘producers,’ including fans. Ryan describes this spontaneous and often uncontrollable extension of particularly popular and culturally significant texts across different media as a “‘snowball’ effect” (2013), which she then juxtaposes with a notion that is very similar, if not identical, to Jenkins’s ‘transmedia storytelling.’ Thus she sets up a continuum between the “two poles” of spontaneous versus preconceived medial distribution, with “a variety of shades” in between, all of which she summarizes as ‘transmedial storytelling’ (2013). But while Ryan uses ‘transmedial storytelling’ as an umbrella term that includes ‘transmedia storytelling,’ we would argue for a sharper distinction between these two terms. In other words, we use the term ‘transmedia storytelling’ only to describe preconceived transmedia projects that tell one unified story through different media. ‘Transmedial storytelling,’ in turn, is used for transmedial phenomena that develop(ed) in a spontaneous and unplanned manner, often over a longer period and created by various (independent) producers, both professional and non-professional. If this juxtaposition is taken into

³ To our knowledge, the term was first mentioned in Jenkins 2001. However, the concept was first fully developed in Jenkins 2006 and modified in Jenkins 2011, though most of its central ideas remained unchanged, as Eder (2014) points out.

⁴ Ryan defines ‘transfictionality’ as “the migration of fictional entities across different texts, but these texts may belong to the same medium, usually written narrative fiction” (2013).

consideration, it becomes problematic to understand these two concepts as part of a continuum, since the question of whether transmedia(l) storytelling is pre-conceived or not is a decisive and unambiguous criterion.

Another related but far less narrative-centred concept has been introduced by Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca in their seminal paper in which they coined the term ‘transmedial worlds’ to refer to “abstract content systems from which a repertoire of fictional stories and characters can be actualized or derived across a variety of media forms” (2004). One of their central characteristics of transmedial worlds is “that audience and designers share a mental image of the ‘worldness’ (a number of distinguishing features of its universe)” that “mostly originates from the first version of the world presented, but can be elaborated and changed over time” (2004). Thus “a transmedial world is more than a specific story” (Klastrup and Tosca 2004). This notion sets their definition explicitly apart from Jenkins’s ‘transmedia storytelling’ that aims at telling a unified story across several media. Furthermore, they claim that “subjects interacting with the transmedial world in any of its actualizations [...] can recognize the world by its abstract properties,” and they suggest to group these world-defining “core features” into three categories: firstly, a world’s ‘mythos’ – “the establishing story, legend, or narration of the world, with the defining struggles;” secondly, the world’s ‘topos,’ i.e. “the setting of the world in both space (geography) and time (history);” and thirdly, the world’s ‘ethos’ – “the explicit and implicit ethics, or the moral codex of behaviour for characters” (Klastrup and Tosca 2014, 297). Hence transmedial worlds clearly exceed mere storytelling because they incorporate non-narrative fan activities (e.g. on *YouTube* or contributions to fan forums) or merchandising articles (such as action figures or bedclothes) that may evoke a world by employing some of its core features but do not contribute to an overarching narrative (as in Jenkins’s ‘transmedia storytelling’) or may not even contain narrative elements at all (which would be the minimum requirement for Ryan’s ‘transmedial storytelling’). This, however, is not to say that storytelling does not play a role in transmedial worlds at all – even Klastrup and Tosca point out that a world’s “properties are usually communicated through storytelling” (2004) – but it cannot be stressed enough that there are also other important, non-narrative ways of world-building besides storytelling.

When it comes to the technicalities of world-building, Mark J.P. Wolf identifies two main strategies through which a world may be extended: either, and most traditionally, through ‘adaptation’ which he defines as a transposition of an existing story into another medium (2012, 245), or through ‘growth’ which expands the world by offering new canonical material in a different medium (245-246). However, it is important to note that both strategies may also be employed within the same medium.

Two other aspects deserve a little more attention here as well: firstly, the term ‘world’ and secondly, Wolf’s use of the word ‘canonical.’ When Wolf talks about ‘worlds’ he refers to ‘imaginary worlds’ (2012, 14), i.e. fictional worlds or ‘story-worlds’ as Ryan and Thon call them (2014, 1), but not necessarily ‘secondary’

(Wolf 2012, 25-29) or ‘fantasy’ worlds. Even though many, or even most, transmedial worlds can be found in the Fantasy or Science Fiction genres (such as the *Star Wars* universe or Tolkien’s ‘Arda’), storyworlds can also be ‘overlaid worlds’ (Wolf 279), i.e. fictionalized versions of the (‘real’) primary world. For us, though, the term ‘transmedial world’ is not restricted to mean ‘diegesis.’ Instead, we perceive a second level: ‘transmedial world’ can also refer to the entirety of all texts and other instantiations through which a specific fictional world is evoked and fleshed out – not just the ‘intradiegetic world’ in which stories are set, but also the ‘extradiegetic’⁵ conglomeration of narrative and non-narrative “media windows” (Wolf 2) or rather ‘media portals’⁶ through which we experience and interact with a diegesis. Even so, Wolf’s two central strategies of world-building remain relevant on both levels.

The differentiation between these two levels is also important with regard to the second issue we would like to address – canonicity. Wolf’s definition of ‘growth’ makes it clear that, for him, a transmedial product can only be considered to contribute to a world’s growth if it adds new “canonical” material, i.e. material that presents new pieces of information that are “true” for the fictional world (270). This definition implies not only a certain authority on account of the producer(s) of a specific instantiation – which is, as Wolf argues, usually held only by the original ‘creator’ of a world, his or her estate, or another kind of licence holder – but, as a consequence, it also generally excludes less ‘official’ products and especially fan-created texts and other artefacts. This is arguably true, or even necessary, on the intradiegetic level since it can enable and ensure a storyworld’s consistency. But on the extradiegetic level, canonicity is not a necessary criterion. Any product that associates itself with a transmedial world by incorporating enough of its core features to evoke that specific world can be said to contribute to the (extradiegetic) growth of the transmedial world in question, as long as it is made available to others, for example via the internet or at fan conventions. Through various internal processes of canonization (e.g. views on *YouTube*) some of these ‘inofficial’ extensions of a transmedial world can achieve quasi-canonical or ‘fanonical’⁷ status and may spin off their own (inter-/transmedial) subworld (e.g. E.L. James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey*). In a few rare cases and when contributing to what Wolf calls “open

⁵ The terms used to refer to these two levels are mere auxiliary designations. Especially the term ‘extradiegetic’ is a somewhat infelicitous appropriation of narratological terminology, where it refers to the level on which a story’s narrator is located. Though we are well aware of this imprecision, we will employ the term ‘extradiegetic’ throughout this paper in the appropriated sense, for want of a better alternative.

⁶ Even though we find Wolf’s metaphor of ‘media windows,’ which allow various glimpses at a diegesis, very useful, we propose to use the metaphor of ‘media portals’ instead because it suggests a higher degree of immersion, interactivity, and participation instead of limiting the consumption of a transmedial world’s instantiations to passive observation.

⁷ Leavenworth defines “fanon” as “the fan-produced, unsanctioned developments of plot and character that over time acquire legitimacy within the fan community even though they may contest or be incompatible with canon elements” (2014, 315).

worlds” (270), they may even cross over to the intradiegetic level and thus find their way into the official canon. This phenomenon assigns a much more prominent and important role to (unauthorized) fan activities in the process of transmedial world creation, as it may turn storyworlds into transmedial worlds that were never intended to be transmedial by their ‘official’ creators. This will be shown by our case study of *The Legend of Zelda*.

In analogy to our distinction between ‘transmedia storytelling’ and ‘transmedial storytelling’ we further propose to distinguish between ‘transmedial worlds’ and ‘transmedia worlds.’ This means that we understand ‘transmedial worlds’ as worlds that have spread from one ur-medium to a number of different media in a spontaneous and unplanned way (as is the case with *The Lord of the Rings*), whereas ‘transmedia worlds’ are worlds which are preconceived and born in various media (e.g. *The Matrix*). The contemporary circulation of these terms creates the impression that the dynamics described are a relatively new phenomenon. Indeed, our diachronic observations of three different transmedial ‘worlds’ (*Sherlock Holmes*, *Alien*, and *The Legend of Zelda*) suggest that transmedia worlds as preconceived environments are a rather new phenomenon that differs from what is known as ‘transmedial worlds.’ To mark this distinction and to grasp these findings terminologically, we propose the term ‘transmedia worlds,’ analogous to the aforementioned ‘transmedia/l storytelling’ distinction. In the next section, we would like to contribute to the clarification of terminological confusion in (trans)media studies by introducing the triad of intermedial, transmedial, and transmedia worlds.

3. Intermedial, Transmedial, and Transmedia Worlds

However convincing Mittell’s statement, which was quoted at the beginning of this paper, might appear at first glance, its substance is highly dependent on how ‘transmedia’ is defined. If the term is understood as a synonym for ‘transmediality,’ then Mittell is quite right. Transmediality is “not a new phenomenon” (Mittell 2014, 253). One can definitely argue for the transmedial nature of century-old characters such as Sherlock Holmes or Dracula. But are transmedial worlds, for example, an equally old phenomenon? Even though some instances of transmedial ‘heritage’ are indisputable, its nature and range have undergone a substantial transformation with the emergence of digital technologies. In order to approach the concept of ‘transmedial worlds,’ we will juxtapose it to ‘intermedial’ and ‘transmedia worlds’ and point out some differences that should not be overlooked.

The observation that connections between media existed before the 1970s is undeniable. Since antiquity artworks have inspired artists all around the world to adapt the content of one artistic medium and transfer it to another. The Greek myths and narratives have induced countless painters, novelists, sculptors, or playwrights to create a vast number of masterpieces. But is it advisable to call these references or worlds ‘transmedial’?

As mentioned above, Mark J.P. Wolf emphasizes that transmedial worlds are characterized by two central strategies – adaptation and growth. Adaptation means to transfer content from one artwork or medium to another without any striking consequences for the world as a whole. Growth means the extension, the expansion of the world by adding something new to it. To be precise, adaptation is primarily a strategy of replicating, while growth is primarily a way of creating new content for the world. The filmization of a novel like *Harry Potter*, for instance, is an adaptation because the novel's substance is translated into another medium without the storyworld being considerably affected. However, the digital game *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* is an example of growth because it fills the gap between Episodes 3 and 4 and thus feeds the *Star Wars* world with content.

Our suggestion is to call worlds that primarily make use of adaptation strategies 'intermedial.' Here, most references are mere adaptations of the existing artistic content. This might be the result of the canonical status the 'mother ships,' ur-media, or ur-artworks had. The adaptations of the Bible created an intermedial world that dominated art in the Middle Ages in Western Europe and that hardly bore examples of growth. The authority of the Bible as a canonical text of Christianity shaped the social structures as well as the culture and art of the time. Due to their lack of growth, these worlds appear intermedial rather than transmedial.

Of course, there are further aspects that justify the use of the term 'transmedial' over 'intermedial.' Transmedia(l) worlds, for example, tend to exhibit a high frequency of publications. In comparison to contemporary franchises such as *Star Wars* that update their worlds sometimes on a daily basis, the expansion of intermedial worlds (in some cases) even stretched over hundreds or thousands of years. Another aspect concerns the circulation of produced add-ons. The uniqueness of the artwork preceding the age of mechanical reproduction made intermedial worlds less dynamic than transmedial or transmedia worlds. The latter produce content that circulates among millions of people (especially in the case of digital and downloadable content). The high frequency of publications, the (potential) significance of the single object for the whole world, the vast output in a short time, and above all its ubiquity are indicators of transmedial as well as transmedia worlds, which make them quite different from intermedial worlds.

The first challenge to intermedial worlds was the rise of (mechanical) reproducibility. Walter Benjamin's essay "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" ["The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"] (1935) can be read as a glimpse of this change. The subsequent steps of technological development have modified media environments so radically that intermedial worlds are indeed still possible but rare, because most of them have been transformed into transmedial worlds.

The technological framework revolutionized the modes of reception and by this also the role of the reader or viewer. The current fan has much more influence on her favourite world than the followers of intermedial worlds two thousand years before. She is not just a recipient but becomes an emitter, and she also be-

comes a hybrid of producer and consumer, the famous ‘prosumer.’ The progress from recipient to prosumer marks a shift from the omnipotent creator, the genius of the intermedial world that other artists only dare to adapt, to the designer of transmedia(l) worlds who offers the fans many possibilities to participate in the world. But we will see that these designers of transmedia(l) worlds may show a lot of resistance if somebody tries to add unwelcome content. The designers and producers of such worlds are strict licence holders and see themselves as the omnipotent owners of these worlds, similar to the omnipotent creators of the ur-medium of an intermedial world. Nintendo is an example of such a licence holder, but at the same time this case demonstrates that not even the strictest licence holder today can prevent rich (online and offline) fan cultures and their various forms of expressions (e.g. fan fiction, wikis, forums, or conventions). While the prosumer does not signify relief of the recipient’s oppression by the producer, his or her emergence may constitute an important step towards a much more liberal media culture in which people begin to scrutinize the existing standards and laws when they talk about the ownership of such transmedia(l) worlds. Who is the owner? The licence holder or the community? Is the transmedia(l) world commercial or social property?

The high fan activity provides an extensive interaction between the different media of transmedia(l) worlds that intermedial worlds do not have. The fan is a crucial factor for the establishment of transmedia(l) worlds because the activity of the fan increases the frequency of publications and the output in general. The ubiquity of transmedia(l) worlds based on digital technology allows the fan-created object to become potentially significant for the whole transmedia(l) world or at least for a part of this world, a subworld. Fan-supported interactions between various media or media channels of transmedia(l) worlds are part of a feedback loop that ensures the persistence of the system as a kind of ‘autopoiesis.’ Hence a prosumer can neither accept an omnipotent creator and owner nor an immutable canon or mother ship, since her role in the digital age requires much more influence than in times of merely intermedial worlds. In this context, ‘canon,’ ‘mother ship,’ and ‘omnipotent author’ become erosive categories, testimonies of a sweeping change of culture by media during the last decades.

In the section above, we discussed the nature of intermedial worlds and investigated their difference from transmedia(l) worlds. Now we will explore the differences between transmedial and transmedia worlds. We will argue that the three transmedial worlds we examine suggest two paradigm shifts that seem to have arisen around the same time as digital technologies made their way into mainstream culture. The first of these shifts took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a time that also saw the arrival of the personal computer, the VCR, and gaming consoles in millions of households. With the digital permeation of the lives and homes of so many people, these technologies reached an unprecedented visibility and ubiquity in everyday life and culture. This kind of heightened awareness was accompanied and furthered by corporate developments such as the evolution of

Hollywood from film business to entertainment business industry, a phenomenon Jenkins describes as “economic convergence” (2001, 93). ‘Economic convergence’ is, on the one hand, a result of the influence of digital technologies on the process of film production, e.g. special effects. On the other hand, it eases the distribution and reception of films beyond cinema via home entertainment devices such as the VCR. The second paradigm shift occurred at the end of the 1990s when millions of households around the world got connected to the internet and established a network that allowed a growing number of fans to participate actively in the transmedia(l) world with which they engaged. These connected digital technologies enabled an important online fan activity, which is a crucial feature of transmedia(l) worlds.

We can see that both paradigm shifts occur not just with the emergence, rise, and progress of digital technology but with the increasing use of these technologies by private households all around the world. The first paradigm shift is the change from intermedial to transmedial worlds and the second is the development from transmedial to transmedia worlds. We are not claiming that newer forms completely replaced the older forms, but the shifts indicate changes in the dominant strategies of media production.

By the end of the 1970s, digital technologies made it possible to enjoy various media like film or digital games at home. Before this time, films were shown only in cinemas and digital games like *Pong* were available exclusively in arcades, which both are public spaces. Digital technologies allowed people to individualize their media consumption so that media reception became an increasingly private affair with only family members and friends participating. For this use, it was inevitable to create new media objects that were reproducible by everyone and to be used everywhere, anytime, and as often as people wanted. Media reception was no longer only a collective and social process like visiting a museum, a theatre, or an opera house; it became also an individual process. The recipient could now consume her favourite medium whenever she wanted to; she, rather than any other social institutions or other group members, was able to set the frames of media reception. In their own home people can individualize their taste without being afraid of being judged by others. This great interest in private media consumption led to new marketing strategies like transmedia marketing so that the emergence of transmedial worlds was perfectly prepared. The output of media products increased to fulfill the requirement of participating in a particular transmedial world like *Star Wars*. In this context, the frequency of publications increased, too, and the first fan movements with (offline) fan activities appeared.

The shift from transmedial to transmedia worlds following the presence of the internet in millions of houses worldwide at the end of the last millennium is rather interesting because it has a high applicability to questions concerning both public and private use. On the one hand, people can use the internet to communicate online in small groups or exchange (self-created) content, and on the other hand, they can take part in large online communities, argue about their favourite trans-

medial world, or extend this world by using the strategy of growth. This is a crucial point. Fan communities existed before the internet emerged, but they never could become networks so easily; this is a new quality and dimension that changes the hierarchy in the relationship between producer and consumer. The internet provides an infrastructure for transmedial worlds that turns them into a well-connected community with a highly interactive structure. Hence it is evident that these structures more and more become networks without centres – they become rhizomatic. In these rhizomes, the notion of an omnipotent creator, a mother ship that is fixed and dominant at all times, is increasingly challenged.

From the perspective of a licence holder, these worlds are very interesting because nearly every participating fan in the internet is a potential consumer of transmedia franchise artefacts. In other words, these worlds with their dedicated fans are an economically substantial factor. The entertainment industry recognized this at the end of the 1990s and started deliberately to develop transmedia worlds as such. This is the difference between a transmedial and a transmedia world. The first one emerges incidentally, whereas the second one is formed and planned from its incipience. In their appearance both worlds are identical, but their origins make them different. So the transmedial world of *The Lord of the Rings* looks like the transmedia world of *The Matrix*, but they developed differently. Tolkien never thought of his work as a transmedial world, whereas the Wachowski siblings, their whole team, and the industry behind them produced *The Matrix* as a transmedia world. This illustrates yet another tendency of transmedia worlds: they tend to be generated by large teams.

At the end of this section we cannot offer an exhaustive definition of transmedia(l) worlds but rather wish to summarize those aspects that condense the most central traits of transmedia(l) worlds. It becomes clear that, unlike intermedial worlds, transmedia(l) worlds feature a high productivity as well as a (potentially) high significance of one single media object for the whole world, that transmedia(l) worlds produce a vast output of media objects in general, and that they have an enormous level of cultural presence. Additionally, transmedia(l) worlds are generated by extensive interactivity between the different media of the transmedial world, and this interactivity is deeply connected to the immense (online and offline) fan activity. But we would like to add further characteristics to these six aforementioned features.

Transmedia(l) worlds emerge when at least three different media (e.g. film, literature, or TV) work together to create an immersive environment. Beside the high frequency and significance as well as the impressive output, the interactivity between different media of transmedia(l) worlds is a very important factor for establishing transmedia(l) worlds. The mutual references and feedback, both simultaneous and delayed, are very important to sustain these environments. Apart from significance and interactivity, the factor of a new media object's (measurable) acceptance ought to be added when the world is investigated. It is of secondary

importance whether this object has been created by the licence holder or by the fan community; of importance, however, is the existence of an ongoing process of ‘autopoiesis.’

Furthermore, especially in media studies, the concept of ‘world’ expands the notion of a world that is only diegetic. This does not mean that these worlds are free of narration and narratives. Rather, transmedia(l) worlds consist in a large part of narratives and storytelling and thereby generate a diegesis or fictional (secondary) world. But transmedia(l) worlds are more than that, and media studies that focus on narratology sometimes run the risk of ignoring this fact. It is important to understand transmedia(l) worlds as transmedia(l) environments.

Occasionally the re-entry into the transmedia(l) world with its social structures is much more important than the plot. This also implies that transmedia(l) worlds are able to integrate into their worlds narrative media (such as literature), performative media (like theatre or enactments), fan-focussed franchise artefacts, and social fan activities. Currently, most transmedia(l) worlds encompass the following media: written narratives, graphic novels, TV, film, and digital games. But this does not mean that further media cannot be added to these worlds, as will be shown in the following case study.

4. Case Studies

4.1. Sherlock Holmes – A Transmedial Character in a Transmedial Universe

When Ronald B. De Waal’s bibliographical index, *The Universal Sherlock Holmes*, appeared in five volumes in 1994, it listed a total of 25,000 publications in various media (see Watt and Green 2003, 1), which present the Great Detective or at least some other core feature or main constituent of his world in one form or another. By 2012, Sherlock Holmes was awarded the Guinness World Record as the “most portrayed literary human character in film and TV” (Guinness 2012), with 254 depictions being counted. Today, it can only be estimated how many more ‘publications’ have been added since the advent of the internet in the 1990s, since when they have been accumulating steadily in numerous fan fiction forums, on *YouTube*, or elsewhere in the vastness of the World Wide Web.

This section aims at making sense of this mass of products and identifying trends and lineages in the development of this large transmedial world. Therefore, a timeline has been created, which covers the main developments within the (extradiegetic) transmedial world of Sherlock Holmes from 1887 to 2014. Thus the observations and analysis in this section will be based on the more than 350 entries distributed across the media channels of literature, stage, film, radio, television, games, digital games, comics/graphic novels, fan activities, and web-content,

which have been included in this timeline. The selection draws mainly on a number of pre-selections published both in print and online.⁸ These sources serve not only as filters but also, especially by comparing their selections wherever possible, as indicators of importance and influence – if not (quasi-)canonicity – within the transmedial world. In the areas of pastiche, parody, and fan products and activities, which are extremely extensive and unmanageable, the selection had to be limited to a few central hallmarks, such as the foundation of important Holmes societies, journals, or fan-databases. Thus it has been possible to downsize the transmedial world to manageable proportions, while still including relevant data to be able to deduce informed, viable theses about trends and lineages in the world's development.

Between 1887 and 1927, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published four Holmes novels and 56 short stories, mostly as monthly instalments in the *Strand Magazine*. Since the Great Detective was first brought to life in written form, the world's ur-medium, and for the first 40 years also its main medium, has been literature. However, the first Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, already appeared with four accompanying illustrations by D.H. Friston and from the first short story onwards, Sidney Paget's popular illustrations for the *Strand Magazine* contributed greatly to the way in which the Master Detective should become visualized and portrayed for over a century. This makes Holmes an intermedial, if not transmedial character almost from his very beginning. Notably, Paget is also widely credited with the addition of the deerstalker hat and the Inverness cape, which have become two of the central iconic attributes of Holmes's depiction.

The short stories were a huge, instant success and the newly founded *Strand Magazine* quickly raised its run of copies from 300,000 to 500,000 per month. Doyle became a rich man but soon started to feel curtailed in his creative freedom by having to churn out one Holmes story after the other. After having published the first 24 short stories between July 1891 and December 1893, Doyle decided to have Holmes killed in "The Final Problem" in a fight with his newly-introduced nemesis Professor James Moriarty. Holmes's death was met with a public outcry of unprecedented proportions, including heaps of angry letters sent to Doyle and the editors as well as 20,000 cancelled subscriptions to the *Strand Magazine*. But Doyle remained unimpressed by the public pressure to revive Holmes for almost ten years, until he finally gave in and brought the detective back. Holmes first returned in what was to become Doyle's most famous work, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (serialized from 1901-1902 and framed as a posthumous Holmes case), then officially in 30 more short stories published between 1903 and 1927, and finally in a fourth novel, *The Valley of Fear* (serialized from 1914-1915).

⁸ Bunson's *Encyclopedia Sherlockiana* (1994), Kabatchnik's *Sherlock Holmes on the Stage* (2008), Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes for Dummies* (2010), Barnes's *Sherlock Holmes on Screen* (2011), as well as *The Conan Doyle Encyclopedia* (maintained online by the *Société Sherlock Holmes de France* (SSHF)), the *Baker Street Wiki*, and the website www.boardgamegeek.com.

However, the “Great Hiatus” (Doyle 2010, 297), as the ten years after Holmes’s death are known in Sherlockian studies, saw the emergence of what Watt and Green call “the extraordinary genre of story-telling [...] around Holmes” (2003, 1). It led to the production of Holmes parodies and pastiches that still flourishes not least under the label ‘fan fiction.’ In the first years, parodies predominated – the first having appeared as early as 1892 (Watt and Green 2003, 2) – since it was almost impossible for Doyle to keep people from spoofing Holmes. Over the decades and with Holmes’s transposition to newly emerging media or media channels, a steady transmedial tradition of Holmes parody developed.

With pastiches, the situation was different since copyright enforcement was easier. Nevertheless, the first known pastiche was published already in 1893, written by Doyle’s close friend James M. Barry (Watt and Green 77-78). From 1904 onwards, pastiches became more frequent, but only after Doyle’s death in 1930 did the production of Holmes pastiches really accelerate. Soon, three distinct sub-genres evolved: firstly, “Watson’s unchronicled cases” (1), in which ‘Holmesians’ or ‘Sherlockians’⁹ close gaps within the canon by telling stories that were only hinted at in Doyle’s stories; secondly, “period pastiches” (7), which employ Holmes, Watson, and other characters as well as such core features as the Baker Street setting and Victorian or Edwardian London to tell completely new cases; and finally, “non-period pastiches,” in which Holmes was placed “in parts of the world foreign to the spirit of the Canon, while others placed him in later eras. Still others had him operating in alien spheres of time and space” (137). Especially this tradition of an “alternative Holmes” (137) shows how much Holmes has become what Bennett and Woollacott call a “‘popular hero’ who ‘break[s] free from the originating textual conditions’” (qtd. in Evans 2012, 108). Evans then continues:

[Bennett and Woollacott] discuss such figures as transcending their original source materials, with character acting as a central narrative point with more import than events or setting. This sets such adaptations apart from franchises that privilege narrative events and settings, such as *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) or *Harry Potter* (2001-2011). (108)

In the context of transmedial worlds, this necessitates a differentiation between character-based, often primarily extradiegetic transmedial worlds (like those that have developed around Dracula, James Bond, or Sherlock Holmes) and world-based transmedial worlds (such as Tolkien’s ‘Middle Earth,’ the *Star Wars* universe, or Terry Pratchett’s ‘Discworld’) in which transmedial world-building plays an equally important role on both the extra- and the intradiegetic level.

⁹ ‘Holmesians’ is the name British Holmes aficionados or fans have given themselves, whereas ‘Sherlockians’ is the term their North American counterparts prefer. In this paper, we shall adopt the American term because it is the one used by the oldest, most exclusive, and prestigious American Holmes Society, the *Baker Street Irregulars*, founded in 1934 (Bunson 1994, xiii).

Another crucial development during the hiatus was the successful transposition of Sherlock Holmes to the stage. Already in 1890, Doyle himself had attempted to write a play featuring the detective, but *Angels of Darkness* was to remain unfinished. Others had similar plans for Holmes and so the first play, *Under the Clock*, was put on stage in 1893. However, the first big theatrical success – and in fact the most successful Holmes play until today – premiered in 1899: *Sherlock Holmes – A Drama in Four Acts* was written by the American actor William Gillette but is sometimes also co-credited to Doyle.

The play was so well-received that Gillette, who also starred in it as Holmes, would be touring the world with it for the next 30 years and would portray the detective in about 1,300 performances. Thus he became the first of a number of actors to be known as “the Sherlock Holmes of his generation” (Doyle 2010, 260). The play freely adapted plot elements and characters from canonical stories but also contributed to the budding tradition of ‘alternative Holmes’ by adding romantic elements.¹⁰ Additionally, Gillette’s Holmes also wore deerstalker and Inverness cape, which further cemented these attributes in the Holmes depiction. Moreover, the play introduced the equally iconic big, curved calabash pipe, as opposed to the canonical straight and short-stemmed clay pipe (Doyle 261). Ultimately, the play’s lasting success made it one of the transmedial world’s cornerstones. Over the decades, it was adapted for the cinema (*Sherlock Holmes* 1916; also starring Gillette) and for the radio (*Sherlock Holmes* 1953) and saw several stage revivals (once in 1974 and three times in 1976), one of which was also televised and came to the small screen in 1981. Thanks to his close association with Holmes, Gillette became a strong transmedial tie himself. The American artist Frederic Dorr Steele used Gillette’s Holmes as a model for his illustrations for the American Holmes publications (Doyle 261), which in turn had a fundamental influence on the Holmes image in the US. What is more, Gillette also appeared as Holmes in several radio productions, a film, and further stage adaptations.

Holmes’s first appearance in motion pictures dates back to the 30-second Mutoscope film *Sherlock Holmes Baffled* (1903). From 1921 to 1923, Holmes became a staple of the silent movie era when Eille Norwood portrayed the Great Detective in 47 silent films as well as one stage play (Doyle 266). *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1929) is another filmic hallmark of the transmedial world. It is not only the first Holmes talkie but also the first component of the Holmes world to feature the Great Detective’s catchphrase: “Elementary, my dear Watson!” (*Conan* 2014). Throughout the 1930s, Holmes remained popular in British cinema and became firmly established on US radio. The success of the radio series relied not only on

¹⁰ There is a famous anecdote according to which Gillette asked Doyle in a telegram while he was writing the play: “May I marry Holmes?” Doyle allegedly replied: “You can marry him, or murder him, or anything you want” (Doyle 2010, 259). This rather relaxed attitude towards the treatment of his (then still deceased) character has certainly contributed to the development of the ‘alternative Holmes’ tradition.

the reappearance of the same voice actors and an introductory guest appearance of Gillette, but it was also promoted by a further constant: Edith Meiser who wrote each US radio play between 1930 and 1943 (Bunson 1994, 202).

In 1939, a new era dawned: when Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce appeared in their first two films, they began to dominate the Holmes world for more than ten years. In some aspects their impact on the Holmes world, and especially on the depiction of Watson, can be felt until today. After these first two films from 1939, which are still set in Victorian England, the duo also began starring in a long series of US radio plays that ran continuously from 1939 to 1947. The episodes of the film series from 1942 to 1946 updated the setting to the 1940s and some of them stylized Holmes and Watson as “propagandists for the war effort” (Doyle 2010, 270) who foiled Nazi plans. Rathbone’s Holmes is still one of the most popular depictions among Sherlockians and, like Gillette before him, he became “the Holmes of his generation” (Doyle 260), portraying the Great Detective also on TV (*The Adventures of the Black Baronet* 1953) and on stage (*Sherlock Holmes* 1953). His impact was further enforced by the use of his picture in various advertisements (e.g. for cigarettes) and on the box of the second Holmes game (1956).¹¹

Apart from the first Holmes TV series in the US, the 1950s remained a relatively uneventful decade for the transmedial world of the Great Detective. Carleton Hobbs and Norman Shelley made their first appearances as Holmes and Watson on BBC radio in 1952, but it was only towards the end of the decade that they began starring in radio series that were aired throughout the 1960s. In 1959, Hammer Productions, known for their sensationalist horror films, released the first Holmes film in colour. It was a rather free adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (starring Peter Cushing), which strongly foregrounded the eerie elements.

The 1960s saw the production of a 13-episode TV series (1964-1965) with Douglas Wilmer and Nigel Stock. In 1968, the BBC produced another Holmes series that partnered Hammer’s Peter Cushing with Nigel Stock. Later, Stock moved on to BBC radio where he read original Holmes stories. Besides, the Holmes world of the 1960s was enriched by a number of interesting stage productions. *They Might Be Giants* (1961), a psychological study, was later adapted to film (1971). Holmes also appeared in the form of a successful musical (*Baker Street* 1965) and he was re-envisioned on stage as a woman named Shirley Holmes (*If Sherlock Holmes Were a Woman* 1969).

After two rather quiet decades, the 1970s revived and reinvented the Great Detective once more, with high activity in six different media channels. The first of four returns to the big screen was Billy Wilder’s *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970). While it was not too great a success at the time of its release, it has since then risen in esteem for its melancholy and humane portrayal of the Master Detective, which remains consciously ambiguous about Holmes’s sexual orientation by

¹¹ The first unlicensed card game from Parker Brothers appeared already in 1902 (see “Sherlock”).

insinuating that Holmes is secretly in love with Watson (Barnes 2011, 146). This idea has been extensively explored in slash fan fiction and also became one of the subtexts of Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* films (2009 and 2011) and the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-present).

The second hugely influential instantiation of the decade inverted this process: Nicholas Meyer's pastiche novel *The Seven-Per-Cent-Solution* (1974) became such a success that it was immediately turned into a film (1976) and was followed by two sequels (*The West End Horror* 1976 and *The Canary Trainer* 1993). As the title, a reference to the cocaine solution Doyle's Holmes injects himself with,¹² suggests, the film foregrounds Holmes's drug addiction and its consequences by portraying Professor Moriarty as a mere drug-induced hallucination. The novel also tells the story of an encounter between Holmes and Freud, an innovation that launched a flood of pastiches in which Holmes is paired with real-life characters (Doyle 2010, 246).

Additionally, there was a lot of Holmes activity on stage, including three revivals of Gillette's *Sherlock Holmes* in 1976, with one of the productions starring *Star Trek*'s Leonard Nimoy. In 1978, Paul Giovanni's play *The Crucifer of Blood* premiered. A revival of *The Crucifer* with Charlton Heston in 1981 was then reproduced for TV and was shown in 1991. Furthermore, there were several TV productions, including two parodies with *Monty Python*'s John Cleese.¹³ Moreover, two more Holmes board games were produced.

While the 1970s had seen a lot of innovation, the 1980s were dominated by the Granada TV series with Jeremy Brett that is famed for its canonical 'accuracy.' It ran from 1984 to 1994. At the same time, there were hardly any new productions on the radio but several on stage, and Sherlock Holmes was transposed to yet another medium: between 1984 and 1988, Holmes had a prolific start in the world of digital gaming by appearing in ten different games.

Another more recent tradition of the Holmes world also flourished in the 1980s: Holmes for children. In 1958, Eve Titus published her first children's novel *Basil of Baker Street* that featured a mouse detective whom she had named in honour of Basil Rathbone. Until 1982, four more *Basil* novels were published, and in 1986, Disney brought Basil to the big screen as the star of an animated feature film called *The Great Mouse Detective*. One year earlier, Paramount had already released *Young Sherlock Holmes*, produced by Steven Spielberg. This, in turn, had been preceded by a short British TV series called *Young Sherlock: The Mystery of the Manor House* (1982) and the animated adaptation *Sherlock Holmes and the Baskerville Curse* (1983). Holmes also became a frequent guest in various children's TV programmes throughout the

¹² See, for example, the exchange in *The Sign of Four*: "Which is it today? Morphine or cocaine? 'It is cocaine. A seven-per-cent solution. Would you like to try it?'" (Doyle 1890/2007a, 97).

¹³ *Elementary, my dear Watson!* (1973) and *The Strange Case of the End of the Civilization as We Know It* (1977).

1980s and early 1990s.¹⁴ In 1996, Shirley Holmes made a reappearance, this time as Holmes's grand-niece and protagonist of the Canadian children's show *The Adventures of Shirley Holmes* that ran until 1999. The end of the decade, and for a while also of the 'Holmes for children' tradition, was marked by the animated series *Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century* (1999-2001), which saw a genetically rejuvenated Holmes solving crimes in "New London" or on the moon.

Apart from the Granada TV series, several stage productions, a number of video games, and the aforementioned children's series, the 1990s were, once again, a rather quiet decade for the transmedial world of Sherlock Holmes. After *Without a Clue* (1988), there were no new Holmes films for more than twenty years until Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) reinvented Doyle's detective as an action hero in a CGI-enhanced Hollywood action blockbuster (starring Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law), thus stressing Holmes's physicality rather than his mental capacities (Evans 2012, 105-106).

With the exception of Ritchie's film that infused new life into the transmedial world and was followed by a sequel in 2011, the first decade of the 21st century was even quieter than the 1990s, with the main activity occurring in the maturing medium of computer games.¹⁵ Several of these games adapted storylines from the 'alternative Holmes' tradition by pitting Holmes against master thief Arsène Lupin (a tradition that dates back to a stage play from 1910) or against Jack the Ripper, which had been one of the most popular face-offs in Holmes pastiche since the 1960s (Doyle 2010, 239-240). These kinds of confrontations or crossovers are also favoured in the latest addition to the transmedial world: graphic novels. Here Holmes fights against zombies or Dracula,¹⁶ which perpetuates a tradition of Holmes pastiche established in the late 1970s.¹⁷

The 'alternative Holmes' tradition is therefore an excellent historical example of what Jason Mittell calls 'What If?' transmediality: its goal is "to launch off the mother ship into parallel dimensions, with connections foregrounding issues of tone, mood, character, or style more than continuing with canonical plots and storyworlds" (2014, 273). But while Mittell considers this strategy as a type of

¹⁴ Some examples are: *The New Scooby-Doo Mysteries*: "Sherlock Doo" (1984); *Count Duckula*: "All in a Fog" (1988); *Alvin and the Chipmunks*: "Elementary, my dear Simon!" (1988); *Chip and Dale*: "The Pound of the Baskervilles" (1989); *Slimer! And the Real Ghostbusters*: "Elementary, my dear Winston!" (1989); *Garfield and Friends*: "The Hound of the Arbuckles" (1990); and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*: "Elementary, my dear Turtle" (1992). From the titles alone, some traditional lines of the Holmes world become apparent: adaptations of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*; references to the famous fog of Victorian London that formed a core feature of the earlier canonical Holmes stories; and variations of the non-canonical but iconic catchphrase "Elementary, my dear Watson."

¹⁵ There were six instalments in Frogware's *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series between 2002 and 2009.

¹⁶ See Ian Edginton and Davide Fabbri, *Victorian Undead: Sherlock Holmes vs. Zombies* (2010) and *Victorian Undead II: Sherlock Holmes vs. Dracula* (2011).

¹⁷ For example, Fred Saberhagen, *The Holmes-Dracula Files* (1978) or Loren D. Estleman, *Sherlock Holmes vs. Dracula: The Adventure of the Sanguinary Count* (1978) (Doyle 2010, 241).

transmedia practice in contemporary (US) television that is preconceived by the initial author, the ‘What If?’ transmediality of Sherlock Holmes has developed spontaneously and under the influence of both professional and non-professional producers.

At the same time, the BBC series *Sherlock* (2010-present), one of the newest additions to the Holmes world, transposes Holmes and Watson to present-day London and employs Mittell’s second strategy of ‘What Is?’ transmedia practice. It incorporates blogs and websites that are maintained intradiegetically by Watson, Sherlock, and two other characters, while ‘spilling over’ into the real world as “diegetic extensions” (Mittell 2014, 259) created by the BBC. The blog, for example, is Watson’s modern-day way of publishing his accounts of the Holmes cases.¹⁸ It offers additional information on the cases as well as reports of other cases that are not featured in the series but are strongly reminiscent of canonical Holmes cases. On the one hand, the blog thus serves as an updated adaptation of Watson’s publishing practice. On the other hand, it establishes a connection to the canonical Watson’s battered “dispatch box,”¹⁹ in which he kept those cases that could not be published for some reason or other. This box became a treasure trove of unknown Holmes stories that countless writers of Holmes pastiches used to legitimize their writings (Watt and Green 2003, 3). In 2011, Holmes underwent another transposition to the 21st century, this time to present-day New York in the CBS show *Elementary* (2011-present). An important change here is the gender bending that Watson and Moriarty undergo: for the first time, both are played by women. This is another tradition of Holmes pastiche, practised especially in fan fiction and fan art of the digital age.

In general, the extradiegetic transmedial world that has developed around Sherlock Holmes, a transmedial character in his own right since his first appearance in 1887, is almost too extensive and diverse to fit the ‘world’ metaphor. Only the term ‘universe’ seems large and complex enough to do justice to the myriad of texts, films, plays, radio productions, games, comics and graphic novels, advertisements, and countless other instantiations that feature the Great Detective, especially the inter- and transmedial connections that exist between a number of these different products. In fact, some adaptations, transformations, or expansions have exerted as much influence on the creation of later Holmes products as the canonized works written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and therefore constitute inter- and transmedial sub-worlds of their own. In recent years, some new additions have even taken the form of transmedia sub-worlds.

But the Holmes universe has not only been shaped and extended by ‘professional’ text and media production. Fan interest and enthusiasm have always kept the Great Detective alive and even revived him once. Organized fan activities date

¹⁸ See www.johnwatsonblog.co.uk.

¹⁹ See Doyle, “The Problem of Thor Bridge” (1922/2007b, 1324).

back to the 1930s, and some fan practices have a history that is almost as old as Holmes himself. Many ‘What If?’ scenarios were first explored in Holmes pastiche, a precursor of today’s fan fiction, before they were taken up by other more visible media forms.

Over the decades, the universe’s main channel has shifted away from its ur-medium of literature towards the audio-visual media of film and television. Beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, cinematic representations exerted the greatest influence on the world for a while, whereas in the 1980s and 1990s, the Granada TV series was most dominant. In the 1970s, Holmes experienced a revival that led to an increased output in almost all media. Stage and radio productions have remained constant contributions with close relations to the productions in the other media throughout, albeit with varying levels of output. Even though most of the quasi-canonical additions to the transmedial universe did not occur in literary forms, there has always been a strong undercurrent of text production in the form of written parodies, pastiches, and “Sherlockian writing”²⁰ published in fan journals, books, or online. Time and again, individual pastiches such as Nicholas Meyer’s *The Seven-Per-Cent-Solution* provided new input for the universe as a whole.

Since the 1990s, the internet has given rise to new forms of fan practice (esp. on *YouTube*, in wikis, or in online transmedia extensions such as John Watson’s blog). Furthermore, the internet has become a new platform for more traditional fan practices (parodies and pastiches, fan art, Sherlockian reading, or ‘playing the game’), thus uniting the old and the new. As Stein and Busse put it so aptly: “The new BBC Sherlock has reactivated engagement with Sherlock Holmes within digital contexts, and yet Holmes has been with us all along, or at least since he came on the scene in 1887” (2012, 9).

4.2. The *Alien* Saga

In 2012, the ubiquitous image of a giant humanoid head approached by wary astronauts foreshadowed the upcoming release of Ridley Scott’s *Prometheus*. What did the shadowy stone sculpture, featured so prominently in the marketing materials, represent? A place of worship, a picture of god, or even the ruler of an alien planet? For the casual cinema-goer it was probably just another impressive film marketing campaign with a striking poster. For the Science Fiction fan or cinephile, by contrast, the sculpture of a gigantic human face rather conjured up the ‘head’ of

²⁰ This strong tradition in Sherlockian fandom dates back to a speech by Ronald Knox from 1911. Following this tradition, Holmes and Watson are treated as real characters, their cases as actual historical events, and Doyle as their ‘literary agent.’ This is sometimes also referred to as ‘playing the game’ – a kind of prototype for ‘alternate reality games.’ Contributors write quasi-scientific analyses, in which they seek to fill in gaps (such as Holmes’s biography) or rectify contradictions and inconsistencies in the canon (e.g. the number of Watson’s wives or the place where he was wounded). Another aim is the establishment of an internal chronology of all the cases by linking canonical events to actual historical events (Cole 2005).

the *Alien* universe or, in other words, the climax of a 33-year-old cult franchise. Even though Ridley Scott's greatly anticipated return to the scary Alien creature he had given birth to in 1979 disappointed fans who had expected an illuminating prequel, the revival forms an important landmark in a continually growing world. After all, Scott's return to *Alien* parallels the world's most significant return to its original medium, film.

Tellingly, the trailer ends with android David, played by Michael Fassbender, saying that "big things have small beginnings" ("Prometheus" 2012), a statement that not only makes the *Alien* fans speculate about the epic plot but also reminds them of the first, relatively isolated *Alien* film. Seen retrospectively, its isolation resulted from its modest dimensions since it was intermedially framed only by a novelization and a comic strip adaptation instead of having been accompanied by a transmedial 'explosion,' as it is common today. Admittedly, Alan Dean Foster's *Alien: The Official Movie Novelization* (2014), based on an earlier draft of Dan O'Bannon's screenplay, slightly departs from the finished film. Yet this modification restricts itself to details concerning the Xenomorph's appearance and behaviour as well as subtleties in the relationships between the crew members. Similarly, the comic adaptation *Alien: The Illustrated Story* (Goodwin 2012) does not aspire to more than what its subtitle suggests. Subsequent sporadic releases in the gaming world, such as the Pac-Man for the Atari 2600 in 1982 and another video game for the Commodore 64 in 1984, completed Ridley Scott's comparatively static intermedial world. But no matter how inhibited the world's growth or continuation was in the early 1980s, in merely filmic terms the story is undoubtedly huge. It unfolds around the crew of the spaceship Nostromo that lands on an unexplored planet and unknowingly takes a deadly, hitherto undetected extraterrestrial aboard. In other words, it seems questionable to speak of a 'small beginning' when one takes into consideration the cinematic milestone *Alien* represented. Promoted by the tagline "in space no one can hear you scream," the film combined the already established Science Fiction genre with an ever-expanding interest in horror. While genre spectacles such as Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* and George Lucas's *Star Wars* had introduced the economic New Hollywood a few years earlier,²¹ *Alien* appeared on the verge of a new blockbuster era and paved the way for further box office hits. Heavily armed and dressed in an olive-green overall, Sigourney Weaver starring as Ellen Ripley popularized the so-called "final girl" (Clover 1992, 48), a new kind of heroine as last survivor who provoked an upheaval of horror conventions. The appearance of the meticulously (hand-)crafted antagonist was similarly impressive, earning Swiss artist H.R. Giger and his team the Academy Award for Best Achievement in Visual Effects. In fact, the Xenomorph, known colloquially as 'the Alien,' did not just appear but made the spectator witness each stage of its life

²¹ The so-called 'economic New Hollywood' refers to the New Hollywood era of economically successful blockbusters as opposed to the 'aesthetic New Hollywood' of the New American Cinema.

cycle, from the deceptively harmless-looking ‘Egg’ over the scary ‘Facehugger’ and the memorably bloody ‘Chestburster’ to the full-grown adult. In each of its developmental stages the complex, multi-layered creature features a biology of encyclopaedic detail. Scott created two cinematic icons whom it would have been a great pity to abandon at that point of time. Indeed, *Alien*’s last scene, in which Ripley finally gets rid of the Xenomorph by expelling it into space, did not mark the end but just the beginning of this promising and terrifying rivalry that continued to produce three sequels. In the course of James Cameron’s *Aliens* (1986), David Fincher’s *Alien 3* (1992), and Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), Ripley establishes an increasingly complex and ambivalent relationship to the antagonist. It develops from maternally protecting little Rebecca “Newt” Jordan from the (likewise motherly) Alien Queen over carrying the embryo of an Alien Queen herself to being resurrected as an Alien-loving hybrid in the wake of cloning experiments. In a way, the beginning of the *Alien* saga was both extensive and small in comparison to what was still to come.

Cameron’s *Aliens* marked a significant turning point in the franchise’s world-building that began to encompass more and more transmedial elements. In 1988, two years after the release of *Aliens*, Dark Horse Comics kicked off an extensive comic series, unfolding as a set of mini-series instead of a continuing storyline in order to leave room for new impulses. Thus it remained flexible in perfect accordance with a discontinuous and nonlinear transmediality. Since Lt. Ellen Ripley’s cinematic career had not yet been fully exploited, Twentieth Century Fox protected its most valuable heroine from a comic-based resettlement. Kerry Gough points out how fruitful this decision has proved:

So in denying Dark Horse the right to use Ripley in the initial series, as a result of their protection of the franchise, Twentieth Century Fox actually facilitated an enhanced creative drive on the part of Dark Horse, since without the heroic icon of the series, the team at Dark Horse was forced to work especially creatively to keep both Twentieth Century Fox and the fans happy with this next extension of the *Aliens* narrative. (2007, 52)

As a consequence, *Aliens: Book One* (Verheiden 1989) and *Aliens: Book Two* (Verheiden 1990) directly draw on the fate of secondary characters introduced by Cameron. They deal primarily with “Newt’s Tale,” as the title of one of the issues indicates. The most fundamental extension in the comics, however, is the storyworld’s geographical relocation to Earth, which supposedly became the target of an Alien infestation. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the comic series clearly constituted the powerhouse behind the franchise. Not only did the transmedial world around the *Alien* saga flourish, but the Xenomorph itself proved a viable flagship alternative to the film-bound Ripley and finally even attained a certain degree of ‘transmedial autonomy.’ This apparent contradiction indicates the creature’s crossover potential and results in a creative clash with the Predator, another Twentieth Century Fox product, “a concept first developed in comics and to this day the most successful

comics series ever to be based on a licensed property” (“Exciting” 2008). After its first release in 1990, *Alien vs. Predator* quickly included novelizations, merchandising, and eventually films. The crossover also turned the Alien into a noteworthy protagonist of the gaming world with the 1999 *Alien vs. Predator* first-person shooter computer game that gained a lot of unprecedented praise: “It was the first game to get the Alien to look right and act right, scrambling along walls and ceilings, crawling indignantly towards you if you shot its legs off. For the first time the Alien wasn’t just another bad guy in just another first person shooter. It had character” (Hartup 2014). Being responsible for two franchises, the Xenomorph made the *Alien* world grow to the point at which the world’s expansion to a universe became indisputable.

The franchise’s transmedial appeal and cult status grew so strong that it attracted a considerable number of followers, which culminated in Simon Clarke’s foundation of the Aliens Fan Club in 1991. He provided a forum for numerous fans who could not wait to discuss the creature’s phylogenetic taxonomy, to express their dissatisfaction with the last two *Alien* movies, to produce their own fiction, and to predict the production company’s plans for future instalments (Brooker 1999, 64). Club members received the Facehugger newsletter and gathered at events, such as the 1993 and 1999 Aliens Conventions. Even though the club was soon exclusively run online and offered free membership, it was abandoned in 2000 due to legal issues with Twentieth Century Fox. Of course, this did not keep fans from feeding the Web 2.0 with *Alien* content. Launched in 1997, the “Alien Legend” website has offered the opportunity to join discussion boards on any imaginable topic related to *Alien* and to exchange detailed information about the saga including the so-called “Alien 5: Rumor Control” section, which provides sequel- and prequel-hungry fans with relevant hints, quotations, and news.²² Another web-based example is the fan wiki “Xenopedia” (2006), a self-professedly “comprehensive collaborative database documenting all information on the Alien, Predator and Alien vs. Predator universe, including Prometheus” in pursuit of “building better worlds.”²³ As these quotations illustrate, there seems to be some confusion about whether to talk of ‘worlds’ or ‘universes.’ The “AvP Galaxy” makes yet another terminological suggestion, in an attempt to grasp the sheer infinity of the Alien’s transmedial life. On its cover page, it moreover identifies itself as the “pulse of the Alien & Predator community” (“AvP Galaxy” 2002), and justifiably so. Since 2002, the website has gathered 1,913,156 posts on 28,643 topics by 18,270 members. Considering this ever-growing fan discourse, the massive excitement over the official announcement of *Prometheus* was no surprise. On “AvP Gal-

²² On 7 December 2014 the website featured a total of 208,775 posts, 11,765 topics, and 2,012 members.

²³ First and foremost, the phrase “building better worlds” is a citation of the Weyland Corporation’s company slogan. But in this context, it can also be understood as the fans’ ambition to be part of transmedial world-building dynamics.

axy,” for instance, a forum solely devoted to *Prometheus* already opened in May 2009, three years before the film’s release, and has since then produced almost 2,000 topics and 100,000 posts.

However ubiquitous the Alien has been, the recurrent releases of video games, comics, and novelizations were not yet enough. The fans’ questions raised over the years finally had to be at least partly answered, of course not just anywhere but on the big screen. Undoubtedly, Ridley Scott faced a major challenge when producing the official prequel to a saga that looked back on 33 years of transmedial world-building. In order to live up to expectations and adequately respond to its transmedial heritage, the story around *Prometheus* had to provide not only cinema-goers but all fans with multiple entrances to the storyworld. Returning to the very roots of the *Alien* adventure meant for Twentieth Century Fox that it had to elaborate on Weyland Corporation, the driving force behind all the space missions. A large-scale transmedia event therefore introduced CEO Sir Peter Weyland by having him give a presentation at TED 2023, a futuristic version of existing conferences. After seeing this TED video on the Weyland Industries website, fans are immediately directed to another website centred on “Project Prometheus,” where yet another online video unveils what exactly Weyland had in mind when announcing “cybernetic individuals.” Here, David 8 elaborately introduces himself as an android and offers the audience the opportunity to engage with one of the feature film’s major characters.

The mere fact that the Alien’s cinematic reappearance was so fiercely anticipated highlights how much the saga had emancipated itself from its original medium. As much as the 1979 *Alien* film represented a small yet (in cinematic terms) huge beginning of an encompassing phenomenon, *Prometheus* can be described as a small element with big momentum for an ever-growing transmedial universe. Therefore this popular instance of transmedia storytelling may be regarded from two perspectives. On the one hand, the story’s return to its source medium and its creator definitely represents the climax of a transmedial world that had grown so complex that it seemed to have reached a temporary closure with *Prometheus*. This sense of closure, however, did not last long, in spite of Scott’s ambition to solve the riddle of the infamous Space Jockey. Rather, the majority of the movie audience experienced a downright “voyage into the unknown that conjures more questions than it answers,” which is at least how Ben Walters (2012) describes it. On the other hand, *Prometheus* is indeed rather a ‘project’ than a feature film, developing its own transmedial world from the very outset and thus constituting a franchise of its own. Accordingly, the “AvP Galaxy” cover page does not list *Prometheus* as a subsection of *Alien* but places it on the same level with the other established franchises of *Alien*, *Predator*, and *Alien vs. Predator*. In other words, *Prometheus* is not part of the *Alien* world but of the *Alien* universe. Hence cinema-goers faced the paradox of watching both a prequel and a preconceived emancipation from the storyworld at the same time. In a sense, *Prometheus* does in fact signify a closure, yet not by concluding its cinematic heritage but by introducing a new dimension and awareness

of transmediality. It shows how, over the last three decades, the *Alien* saga has developed from an intermedial world to a transmedial universe, from a cinematic landmark to a digital project, and it thus illustrates how the concept of transmediality itself has changed its shape from an accidental effect to a plan. It was only recently that Ridley Scott announced the sequel of the prequel, namely *Prometheus 2*, as well as a newly designed Xenomorph who will most probably be digital from head to toe (Schmitt 2014). Will Sir Peter Weyland bring this digitally tamed creature to his next TED talk? In any case, the story will be conveyed transmedially.

4.3. The Transmedial World of *The Legend of Zelda*

In the field of digital games, *The Legend of Zelda* is one of the most popular franchises of all times and has delighted millions of fans since its emergence in 1986. It is one of the most significant digital games ever and the mother of the Action Adventure genre, one of the most popular genres in the current industry of digital games and entertainment. So it is not surprising that *The Legend of Zelda* has become a fascinating transmedial world.

The mother ship of this world is the medium of digital games. By now more than 40 digital games have been released. The seventeen games of the main sequence²⁴ are most influential for the transmedial world of *The Legend of Zelda* and form a kind of canon. Their singular status also shows in their commercial success and in the fact that they have repeatedly been adapted into other media of the transmedial world of *The Legend of Zelda*. Moreover, these games seem to be so important that Nintendo has introduced numerous remakes since 2003. Before this time, only two remakes of games of the main sequence had appeared but subsequently there have been fifteen remakes.²⁵ This fact suggests a change in the marketing and distribution strategy of Nintendo. Yet it also illustrates the effects of digitalization because nine of the remakes were developed for the Virtual Console, an online market place for the latest Nintendo consoles like Wii U or Nintendo 3DS. The Virtual Console offers the possibility to download many different games (especially Nintendo game classics) that can be played via an emulator. Moreover, in 2003 *The Legend of Zelda: Collector's Edition* appeared as the first special edition in the transmedial world of *The Legend of Zelda*. The second special edition was the

²⁴ Nine of these games were originally released for steady consoles like the Nintendo Entertainment System, Nintendo 64, or Wii, and the other eight were published on the so-called handhelds like Gameboy or Nintendo 3DS.

²⁵ The remakes concern the most important and popular games of *The Legend of Zelda*: "The Legend of Zelda" has been remade three times; "The Adventure of Link," "A Link to the Past," "Link's Awakening," and "Ocarina of Time" have been remade twice; and "Majora's Mask," "Oracle of Ages," "Oracle of Seasons," "The Minish Cap," and "The Wind Waker" have been remade once.

Four Swords Anniversary Edition of 2011 that celebrated the 25th anniversary of *The Legend of Zelda*. This anniversary was furthermore celebrated with four remakes as well as a new title for the main sequence.

Hence it becomes clear that since 2003 Nintendo has increasingly adopted popular marketing strategies of the entertainment industry. Thus it is not surprising that the company released spin-off products like “Link’s Crossbow Training” (Shooter), “Battle Quest” (a compendium of (digital) games), and “Hyrule Warriors”²⁶ (Hack and Slay), which transcend the familiar genre of Action Adventure and extend the marketing strategy of Nintendo to similar genres. The trend towards a transmedial use of the world of *The Legend of Zelda* becomes apparent in this genre shift and in the appearance of Link and Zelda as transmedial characters, a fact that affects different media, genres, and games. An early example of this trend is the *Smash Bros* sequence. Link and Zelda soon became popular avatars in Nintendo’s Beat ‘em up medley of a range of well-known Nintendo games.

From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, Nintendo had also tried another marketing strategy when it allowed other producers to develop *The Legend of Zelda* games for non-Nintendo platforms. The result of this marketing strategy were six games: three for C-Di and one each for Game & Watch, Satellaview, and Nelsonic. But owing to a lack of success, Nintendo ceased to move in this direction in 1996. Nintendo’s earlier marketing strategies were cleverer. The first game in 1986 was a great success, followed by an equally successful second one the next year. Most companies would use this achievement and publish a game each year, not so Nintendo: “Ordinarily, when you have a 10 million-selling franchise in only two games, you start cranking out some serious sequels, but that’s not Nintendo’s way” (Fahs and Thomas 2012). Therefore “A Link to the Past” was released only in 1991. It thus became clear very early in the history of *The Legend of Zelda* that the quality of the games has always been more important to Nintendo than a short-lived economic success and that this product was intended to remain compelling for a long time.

The reluctance to produce a new title for the main sequence distracts from the fact that in the 1980s Nintendo had tried to establish *The Legend of Zelda* as a transmedial product. In 1989, a TV series based on the plot of the first game was launched. However, it was a flop and the series was ceased after its first season. This has been the only attempt to produce a TV series about *The Legend of Zelda*, and its failure also explains why no filmization of *The Legend of Zelda* exists.²⁷ Also, only two novels, adaptations of “Ocarina of Time” and “Oracle of Ages” by Jason R. Rich and Craig Wessel, are available.²⁸ It has become clear that Nintendo al-

²⁶ “Hyrule Warriors” is also the first crossover in the transmedial world of *The Legend of Zelda*.

²⁷ Another reason could be the fiasco of the *Super Mario Bros.* film in 1993.

²⁸ Jason R. Rich’s *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* was published in 1998, Craig Wessel’s *The Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Ages* in 2003.

ready tried very early to generate a transmedial world of *The Legend of Zelda*. Since these attempts failed, Nintendo has instead focussed on the medium of digital games in the following years. The mother ship became the ark.

It is an interesting discovery that Nintendo does not use all possible media (such as film, TV, and literature) that make transmedial worlds like *Game of Thrones* so successful but rather seems to be sceptical of narrative media²⁹ – with the exception of manga and comics. The manga and comics published so far adapt the plot of the most popular games of *The Legend of Zelda*'s main sequence, but there are some differences that make it necessary to distinguish two phases, the first between 1986 and 1996 and the second between 2000 and 2011. In the first phase, seven manga and one comic were published as adaptations of the first four games of the main sequence. Since four of the seven manga were released only in Japan, their impact was very limited.³⁰ The comic was produced in 1990 and the looks of its characters were adapted from the TV series. Both the comic and the TV series failed in their attempt to conquer the US market. In the second phase after 2000, only nine manga by Akira Himekawa (pseudonym of the female mangaka Honda and Nagano) appeared. They were also adaptations of popular games of the main sequence but, in contrast to the first phase, only one of them, “A Link to the Past,” is an adaptation of an early game. All other manga are adaptations of games of the main sequence after 2000. A likely reason for the publication of manga adaptations therefore seems to be the wish to allow the fans to re-enter and immerse themselves in the transmedial world of *The Legend of Zelda*, while offering only a few insignificant additions. It seems that whereas remakes of Zelda game classics are part of some kind of consolidation of the canon, the manga figured primarily as instruments of marketing.

If we try to apply our reconsideration of transmedia(l) world theory to *The Legend of Zelda*, we have to admit that *The Legend of Zelda* does not seem to be a transmedial world because it only uses two media (digital games and manga) extensively. All other media publications either failed or have not yet been attempted. Moreover, the mother ship is very dominant and the manga are mere adaptations that seem to serve as an associated marketing strategy. This leads us to the question: Why is *The Legend of Zelda* a transmedial world? Because two media or phenomena exist that make *The Legend of Zelda* a vital transmedial world – merchandise and fan activity.

²⁹ In the gaming industry as well as in game design and game studies, the possibility of transferring characteristics of game-playing to narrative media has been discussed for decades. Nintendo has found an answer of its own.

³⁰ The second manga series of 1986/7 is exemplary for the economic failure of these manga because the publisher went bankrupt before publishing the third volume that was then released in a manga magazine.

Nintendo's merchandise activity is hard to examine because of a lack of information on the chronology of its franchise activity. This activity reveals a wide range of different products like clothes, collectable figures, toys, backpacks, key chains, purses, posters, dishes, bedclothes, and special boardgame editions such as a *The Legend of Zelda Monopoly*. These objects seem to be very ordinary but they document how important a transmedial world is for its fans: through merchandise, the transmedial world becomes a part of everyday life, i.e. the 'real' world. Hence transmedial worlds form an integral part of our reality and merchandise items are an evidence of that.

The online and offline fan activities are also very difficult but, with the help of the internet, at least possible to survey. Offline fan activities are very important for fans because they offer moments when the community becomes visible and perceives itself as such. On a micro level, there are game parties with friends or fan sessions in the local comic/game stores. On a macro level, conventions or events during which cosplay or activities like bookfairs are staged are manifestations of fan groups as social phenomena.

The internet and other technologies like digital cameras further support these activities by connecting a large number of separate fan groups with the overarching fan community of *The Legend of Zelda*. Such online fan activities are easier to investigate. If we explore the online fan community of *The Legend of Zelda*, we find numerous phenomena that are quite typical of the online activity of fans of transmedia(l) worlds. There are fan sites like "Zelda Universe" (since 2001) or "Hidden Triforce" (since 2004; after inactivity relaunched in 2009), forums like "Zelda-Forum" (since 2004), wikis like "Zelda Wiki" (since 2005 renamed as "Zelda Universe") and "Zeldapedia" (since 2005), or fan fictions.³¹ Fan fictions are traceable from the late 1990s onwards. Hence it is evident that online fan activities in the transmedial world of *The Legend of Zelda* began with the spread of the internet in households around the world and took on their current shape in the following five years.

All these online fan activities like *YouTube* videos,³² essays, and fan groups in social media like *Facebook* perfectly illustrate the social structure of transmedial worlds and the role of the fan as producer as well as consumer. She can access her favourite world without adding to it, but the possibility to contribute to it is given and is used excessively. Today, the fan is also a prosumer: she consumes and produces fan games or fan art and shares with other fans the experiences of offline events like cosplays by exchanging pictures and reports.

³¹ See, for example, www.fanfiction.net (Web. 8 December 2014) and <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/8288452/1/The-Legend-of-Zelda-Ocarina-of-Time-The-Novel> (Web. 8 December 2014).

³² See, for example, a fan-made history of *The Legend of Zelda* on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2iV2_MQ7ak (Web. 8 December 2014).

This section could at best offer a glimpse into the transmedial world arisen around this digital game, and yet it suggests some interesting observations concerning this particular transmedial world as well as transmedial worlds in general. To sum it up, the transmedial world of *The Legend of Zelda* consists of four different media or phenomena: digital games, manga or comics, merchandise items, and finally offline and especially online fan activity. Other media popular in many transmedial worlds, such as television, film, or literature, had no impact or never existed. Also, the mother ship is very dominant in this transmedial world and forms the most important medium for extensions, whereas manga are only adaptations that accompany the new digital games. Through merchandise, *The Legend of Zelda* becomes part of the everyday life of its fans, and through these fans and their activity in the internet, *The Legend of Zelda* becomes a transmedial world, mainly because of an interaction between the producer and developer Nintendo and the prosuming fan.

5. Conclusion

This essay was an attempt to reconsider existing theories on transmedia(l) worlds and to examine how these phenomena permeate our culture and challenge media and cultural studies. Although transmediality already existed before digitalization, we have argued that digital technologies are catalysts for transmedia(l) phenomena. The case study of the transmedial world of *Sherlock Holmes* has put to the test our thesis of transmedia(l) worlds being closely tied to the digital age because the world of *Sherlock Holmes* is a very specific one compared to other intermedial worlds of its time. Thus *Sherlock Holmes's* world seems to be a transmedial world *avant la lettre*, although there are some important differences between the early period of *Sherlock Holmes* and current transmedial worlds, especially when it comes to the world's impact and degree of output. Nevertheless, this case study has demonstrated the complexity of these worlds as well as the permeability of the borders between our categories of 'world.' Our exploration of the transmedial world of *Alien*, in turn, has exhibited how far-reaching these worlds can be and to which extent they are able to integrate transmedial (sub-)worlds within a transmedial universe. The relationships between these worlds and sub-worlds as parts of a universe or as connections between various universes are interesting research objects and pose a compelling challenge to transmedia studies. Finally, our study of the transmedial world of *The Legend of Zelda* has shown that transmedia(l) worlds are made jointly by producer and consumer. Not even the strictest licence holder could prevent a rich fan culture and consequently an unintended growth of a transmedia(l) world.

Our aim has also been to clarify the confusing discourse that questions the established paradigms of media studies. The consequences of digitalization form a challenge for academia and have a great impact on our everyday lives and our culture. In this context, it is important that we carefully observe the ongoing process-

es evoked by digitalization and counter the extreme positions of media rejection and media euphoria. While differentiating between ‘intermedial,’ ‘transmedial,’ and ‘transmedia world,’ we do not ignore the continuities in media and art history. But we insist that each of these continuities includes seemingly irrelevant changes that may turn out to be important. The worlds created by referring to the Bible are different from those originating in the context of, for example, *The Lord of the Rings*. The existence of the ur-medium, i.e. the mother ship or the original, is increasingly challenged and the quality and quantity as well as the pace and complexity of transmedia(l) worlds have changed. Transmedia(l) worlds have become the rule and not the exception, and we have to acknowledge them as phenomena of the digital age.

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