

# ***Lost in a Transmedia Storytelling Franchise: Rethinking Transmedia Engagement***

By

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## Abstract

In the age of media convergence, transmedia storytelling – the distribution of story elements across multiple media platforms in the service of crafting an overarching narrative – is increasingly prevalent. This dissertation examines transmedia engagement through a focus on *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling franchise and a confluence of technological, industrial, and cultural shifts, including the advent of podcast technologies, the rise of alternate reality game storytelling, and increasing producer-audience communication. Taken together, these transformations create new terrain on which normative understandings of producer-text-audience relationships are continually challenged, reconfigured, and even reinforced. This dissertation views these relationships through the concept of “viewsing” (Harries, 2002) – a hybrid form of engagement encouraged by transmedia storytelling franchises in which the qualities of “viewing” and “computer use” merge. Although viewsing provides an important conceptual framework, previous scholarship stops short of applying the concept to the producer-audience and audience-audience relationships. Using a thematic analysis methodology, this study examines the fan cultures surrounding two podcasts dedicated to *Lost* – *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* – and expands the concept of viewsing to include text-audience interactivity, producer-audience participatory storytelling, and audience-audience collaboration and antagonism. It concludes that transmedia storytelling franchises encourage viewsing – interactive, participatory, and communicative multi-platform engagement.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

“We wanted to tell stories in a nontraditional way, and there were certain stories that Damon [Lindelof] and I were interested in telling that don’t exactly fit into the television show.”<sup>1</sup>

- Carlton Cuse, executive producer, *Lost*

“When we were creating the *Lost*-verse... we really started to expand it out and build the world... People will swallow a tremendous amount of story, if you feed it to them the right way.”<sup>2</sup>

- Damon Lindelof, executive producer, *Lost*

“Now I think this is kind of hard for people who just watch the show on the television because this is outside of that world.”<sup>3</sup>

- Ryan Ozawa, co-host, *The Transmission Lost Podcast*

The combination of above comments from *Lost*’s executive producers highlights the vast scope of *Lost*’s transmedia storytelling franchise – one employing an array of texts scattered across numerous media platforms in order to advance an overarching narrative. In addition, Ryan Ozawa, a *Lost* fan and co-host of the popular *Lost* podcast *The Transmission*, illuminates the complexity inherent in comprehending a story not confined to a single media platform. Taken together, these responses point to both the unique narrative potentials as well as the qualities of engagement fostered by the emergence of a transmedia approach to storytelling. As Cuse and Lindelof highlight, transmedia storytelling franchises tell stories in a “nontraditional way,” encouraging

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<sup>1</sup> Lia Miller, “To Counter the Doldrums During Summer Reruns, ‘Lost’ Fans Can Get Lost in a Game Online,” *New York Times*, April 24, 2006, accessed July 20, 2011, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C00E3DF123FF937A15757C0A9609C8B63>.

<sup>2</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Comic-Con Report – Visionaries Panel,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 26, 2008, accessed July 29, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Shape of Things to Come,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, April 26, 2008, accessed April 29, 2008.

viewers to “swallow a tremendous amount a story.” Lindelof links the scope of such a storytelling approach with the notion of world-building. Transmedia franchises create an immersive and interactive world differing significantly from that created by a single text, as is evident by Lindelof’s use of “-verse” (or universe) to describe *Lost*’s expansive qualities. Ozawa’s comment points to the difficulty of fully comprehending a transmedia world constituted by an amalgam of texts “outside” of a television series. By dispersing character and story information across multiple platforms in the service of creating a single narrative text, transmedia franchises promote producer-audience communication and foster collaboration (and even antagonism) among audiences as they struggle to master these worlds. Fostered by transmedia storytelling, theoretical speculations on the spectator shift beyond notions of the passive and the active models. A new model is needed to theorize the relationship between producers, transmedia texts, and the audience. In short, the creation of elaborate transmedia storyworlds profoundly affects audience engagement by encouraging “viewsing” – a type of interactive, participatory, and communicative multi-platform media use.

Premiering in 2004, the ABC television series *Lost* focused on a group of plane crash survivors stranded on a mysterious island. Over the series’ six-year run, *Lost*’s producers innovatively expanded *Lost*’s narrative through the use of alternate reality games, mobisodes, online videos, a novel, a video game, and jigsaw puzzles.<sup>4</sup> In addition to creating opportunities for further economic gains, this interconnected web of texts

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<sup>4</sup> Although jigsaw puzzles are not traditionally regarded as narrative texts, the completed *Lost: Mystery of the Island* puzzles revealed glow-in-the-dark text on the back, providing diegetic information. The glow-in-the dark text was an alphanumeric cipher corresponding to novels referenced in the television series. However, the puzzle boxes did not contain images of the completed puzzles or keys to the ciphers. Such tactics are indicative of the audience interactivity and collaboration encouraged by *Lost*’s producers.

allowed for the articulation of a sprawling, boundary-blurring transmedia storyworld in a way that an individual television series could not, thereby fostering new forms of engagement. *Lost*'s producers implemented a variety of techniques encouraging audience members to search out scattered and oblique transmedia paratexts. During the television series' second season, for instance, ABC aired commercials displaying a phone number and website address for the Hanso Foundation, a fictional institution within *Lost*'s diegesis. The Hanso Foundation website, in turn, funneled audiences to host of other paratextual extensions, including letters in newspapers, websites, and even live appearances by actors in character, comprising *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game. In addition to fostering audience interactivity, these paratexts encouraged a playful immersion in *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld by appearing not as works of fiction but as real life. Such interactive and immersive techniques continued, until the television series' conclusion in 2010, allowing for a prolonged text-audience engagement.

*Lost*'s storytelling strategies also encouraged engagement with its producers and audiences. Executive producers Cuse and Lindelof hosted ABC's *The Official Lost Podcast*, in which they directed fans to transmedia extensions, discussed the production of the television series, and welcomed questions and feedback from the fans. While *The Official Lost Podcast* was part of a clever audience-building strategy in the crowded and increasingly competitive multi-channel, post-network era, *The Official Lost Podcast* fueled the perception of a heightened connection between Cuse, Lindelof, and the fans. By validating fan feedback, Cuse and Lindelof fostered notions of fan agency and influence. Although this producer-audience bond proved effective at fostering an economically desirable participatory culture, it also enabled fans to challenge producers

regarding the formation of *Lost*'s transmedia canon. Hence, *The Official Lost Podcast* ultimately became a site of struggle in which fans and producers continually negotiated the canonical relevance of *Lost*'s transmedia paratexts.

In addition to *The Official Lost Podcast*, fan-produced *Lost* podcasts enabled a segment of the audience to become highly engaged with other fans. One of the most popular podcasts, *The Transmission*, focused on comprehending and mastering *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld.<sup>5</sup> Hosted by Ryan and Jen Ozawa, *The Transmission* featured fan discussions frequently centering on the collaborative sharing of information about *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld. Yet, far from being a harmonious space, *The Transmission* was marked by both external and internal tensions. *The Transmission*'s fans positioned themselves in opposition to the mainstream audience perceived as unwilling or unable to comprehend and master the wealth of storyworld information contained in *Lost*'s transmedia franchise. In addition to an insider/outsider divide, an antagonism existed within *The Transmission*'s audience centering on the "correct" way to engage with *Lost*'s transmedia franchise. *Lost*'s expansive transmedia scope confused issues of generic classification, resulting in seemingly contradictory expectations and narrative pleasures experienced by two fan groups, "shippers" and "mythologists."

*Lost*'s transmedia storytelling strategies proved effective at maintaining interest in the television series, helping it become a global hit and ushering the notion of transmedia

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<sup>5</sup> From 2004 to 2010, an average of two dozen fan-produced *Lost* podcasts ran concurrently at any given time. At the height of *Lost*'s popularity, fans produced a total of fifty to sixty *Lost* podcasts, although many of these podcasts did not last more than a few episodes. (Ryan Ozawa, e-mail message to author, October, 22, 2011).

storytelling into the cultural lexicon.<sup>6</sup> In fact, executive producer Carlton Cuse contends that *Lost* “spawned a new term – transmedia – to describe all the associated media content surrounding a TV or film project.”<sup>7</sup> Although Cuse’s claim regarding the genesis of the term “transmedia” is spurious, *Lost* was among the most popular and expansive transmedia storytelling franchises to date. As such, a critical examination of *Lost*’s transmedia franchise will provide greater insights into the transformations occurring to the text-audience, producer-audience, and audience-audience relationships facilitated by transmedia storytelling.

### Background & Problem

Henry Jenkins coined the term “transmedia storytelling” to describe the collaboration of Hollywood producers and game designers in his essay *Transmedia Storytelling* (2003). According to Jenkins, the two groups “were groping towards a reimagining of what entertainment could do in an era of networked communications, but lacked a conceptual vocabulary.”<sup>8</sup> Jenkins’ subsequent book *Convergence Culture* (2006b) provided such a vocabulary, thereby popularizing the term.<sup>9</sup> In a 2011 Comic-

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<sup>6</sup> Roberta Pearson, “*Lost* in Transition: From Post-Network to Post-Television,” in *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 239.

<sup>7</sup> Carlton Cuse, “So ‘Lost’ is Over: Now What’s to Be Found?,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2011, accessed July 25, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/30/arts/television/30lost.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/30/arts/television/30lost.html?_r=1).

<sup>8</sup> Tom Cheshire and Charlie Burton, “Transmedia: Entertainment Reimagined,” *Wired*, July 8, 2010, accessed July 25, 2011, <http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2010/08/features/what-is-transmedia?page=2>.

<sup>9</sup> In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins’ defines a transmedia story as one that “unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole” (Jenkins 2006b: 95-96).

Con appearance, Jenkins revised his definition of transmedia storytelling in the following manner:

Transmedia storytelling represents a 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*. Ideally, each medium makes its own *unique contribution* to the unfolding of the story.<sup>10</sup>

A transmedia narrative may begin with a film before then unfolding specific parts of its story in a series of online videos, a videogame, or novel. In this way, the concept of transmedia storytelling differs from adaptation in that the latter involves telling an identical (or at least similar) story on a different platform, whereas the former entails telling different portions of a story on separate media platforms.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, transmedia storytelling varies significantly from cross-platform distribution – a model in which the same content is distributed using multiple media platforms, such as a television network streaming a program on its website.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, a transmedia story is more than just a story making use of different media platforms. As Jenkins' definition indicates, transmedia storytelling involves an array of texts distributed across multiple platforms, with each making one a “unique contribution” to the overall story. In other words, a character blog or videogame that simply retells story information contained in another text does not constitute transmedia storytelling. In contrast, transmedia stories implement paratexts – each serving a unique function – in

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<sup>10</sup> “Transmedia Storytelling 202: Further Reflections,” Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins, accessed August 9, 2011, [http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining\\_transmedia\\_further\\_re.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html).

<sup>11</sup> For more on the differences between adaptation and transmediation, see Geoffrey Long, “Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics, and Production at the Jim Henson Company,” PhD diss., MIT, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> For a further discussion of transmedia storytelling and cross-distribution, see Samuel Earl Ford, “*As the World Turns* in a Convergence Culture,” master’s thesis, MIT, 2007.

order to provide an audience with greater insight into a fictional storyworld.<sup>13</sup> For instance, ABC and *Lost*'s creative team created a series of thirteen *Lost: Missing Pieces* mobisodes released on Verizon mobile phones, from November 2007 to February 2008, featuring new content that filled narrative gaps in the television series.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to note that transmedia storytelling itself is, in fact, nothing new. The creation of new, cross-platform content based on existing media texts is a storytelling strategy existing, in some form, for hundreds (or even thousands) of years.<sup>15</sup> More recently, Hollywood studios exploited the economic possibilities afforded to them by film franchises. In the 1920s, the popularity of Disney's Mickey Mouse, for example, led to the creation of a wide range of licensed tie-ins, and the late 1970s witnessed the emergence of so-called blockbuster franchises, such as *Star Wars*, *Superman*, and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.<sup>16</sup> Hollywood studios maximized the profitability of such blockbuster films through a range of ancillary tie-ins, including books, albums, and merchandise.<sup>17</sup>

Increasing media conglomeration further incentivized the creation of entertainment franchises. Beginning in 1962, with MCA's (Music Corporation of

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<sup>13</sup> The term "paratext" originates from Gerard Genette, who used the terminology to describe material surrounding a literary text (Gray, 2010: 6.)

<sup>14</sup> A mobisode – a portmanteau of "mobile" and "episode" – is a mini-episode distributed for viewing on mobile devices. The *Lost: Missing Pieces* mobisodes eventually became available for viewing on ABC.com.

<sup>15</sup> Zachary Pincus-Roth points to the work of Charles Dickens in the 1800s as an early transmedia antecedent (Pincus-Roth, 2009). Jenkins points even farther back, citing biblical stories spanning live performances, the printed word, stained-glass windows, and paintings (Jenkins, 2006b: 119).

<sup>16</sup> Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>17</sup> David Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970-1979* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000), 65.

America) purchase of Universal, large corporations and multinational conglomerates steadily acquired Hollywood studios, and the process of media conglomeration within the film industry continues to this day.<sup>18</sup> Media concentration is also at work within the television industry. Starting in 1985 with Capital Cities' purchase of the ABC network, which was in turn purchased by the Walt Disney Company in 1995, and concluding with the 2004 merger of NBC and Universal Studios, all the major broadcast networks are now part of conglomerates with economic interests in a variety of sectors.<sup>19</sup> Media franchises provide horizontally integrated conglomerates with significant revenue streams through a host of ancillary products. For instance, the Walt Disney Company owns both the ABC television network and Hyperion Books. Capitalizing on *Lost*'s success in the television market, the Walt Disney Company published the *Lost* tie-in novel *Bad Twin* through Hyperion Books, thereby increasing profit potentials through a synergistic approach to production.<sup>20</sup> "Multimedia conglomeration and the interest in synergy," Valerie Wee contends, "encouraged the culture industries to exploit the... opportunities that accrued from blurring the boundaries of media texts rather than maintaining the integrity of a media figure as a commodity in a single medium."<sup>21</sup> Transforming media properties into franchises, then, can be a very profitable business move.

The media franchise model – a property extended across multiple texts – offers a

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<sup>18</sup> Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4-5.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Jordan Clarke, "Tentpole TV: The Business and Culture of Transmedia in Network Television" (PhD diss., University of California, 2010), 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> Eli M. Noam defines synergies as "the ability to create cross-business opportunities, that is, using one part of a business to promote or benefit from another." (Noam, 2009: 342).

<sup>21</sup> Valerie Wee, "Selling Teen Culture: How American Multimedia Conglomeration Reshaped Teen Television in the 1990s," in *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity*, ed. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (London: BFI Publishing, 2004), 90.

useful framework with which to conceptualize the relationships between transmedia producers, texts, and audiences in the context of increasing media conglomeration.<sup>22</sup> Large, multinational corporations, such as the Walt Disney Company, work to create entertainment properties that can be strategically distributed across their media holdings. The current structure of the media industries, therefore, places increased significance in brands and franchises. Examining the *Lost* franchise – one spanning platforms and delivery channels – illuminates how a confluence of industrial, technological, and cultural shifts foster new forms of engagement. For as Derek Johnson correctly argues, “The notion of media franchising... shapes how analysts, executives, creators, and popular audiences each imagine the media industries of the contemporary moment.”<sup>23</sup> Reflecting the increasing emergence of transmedia franchises, scholars conceptualize the cross-platform distribution of content as “overflow” (Brooker, 2001), “screen bleed” (Hanson, 2004), “media mix” (Ito, 2005), and “deep media” (Rose, 2011).<sup>24</sup>

Taken as a whole, the body of transmedia research suggests that transmedia franchises encourage an immersive interactivity with the text, collaboration among audiences, and communication with producers. In other words, what is unique about contemporary transmedia franchises is the interactive, immersive, and participatory qualities of the engagement afforded by new media technologies. First, alternate reality games and video games place audience members in an interactive position, allowing individuals to influence the form and content of the text-audience experience. Second,

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<sup>22</sup> The level of concentration within the media industries has steadily increased since 1988 (Noam, 2009: 421).

<sup>23</sup> Derek Johnson, “Learning to Share: The Relational Logics of Media Franchising” (paper, Convergence Culture Consortium, June 29, 2010), accessed August 27, 2011, <http://www.convergenceculture.org/research/c3-learningshare-execsumm.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> I discuss these concepts in greater detail in the literature review.

the ubiquitous boundary-blurring nature of transmedia stories coupled with alternate reality game storytelling – experiences that hide the artifice of the game in an effort to present storyworld characters and events as if they were not actually fictive creations – fosters a sustained engagement and playful immersion in a fictional storyworld.<sup>25</sup> Third, new media technologies, such as podcasts, promote a range of participatory or socio-cultural activities as producers and audiences relate to each other in new and unique ways. In addition to fostering an intimate producer-audience relationship, the immediacy of contemporary digital communication allows fans to challenge the tellers of stories – and in the case of *Lost* – even dictate the direction of the narrative. Finally, the wealth of narrative information contained in transmedia stories and the communicative potentials afforded by digital and new media technologies encourage a range of collaborative and collective audience activities. Contemporary transmedia storytelling franchises encourage – and often require – a qualitatively different level of audience interactivity, participation, and communicative than that found in previous entertainment franchises, thereby shifting the relationships between producers, the text, and the audience.

This dissertation views these relationships through the concept of “viewsing” (Harries, 2002) – a conceptual tool by which to view the interactive text-audience relationship. Media convergence promotes a hybrid form of engagement in which the qualities of “viewing” and “computer use” merge. In addition to watching media content, this blended form of engagement involves a range of tactile, computer-based activities, including searching websites for hidden clues, solving complex puzzles, and playing interactive games, that affect the form of the media experience. Viewsing, then,

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<sup>25</sup> Carolyn Handler Miller, *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment* (New York: Focal Press, 2008), 288-289.

describes a text-audience relationship in which a viewer has the ability to influence a developing narrative through interactive behaviors.<sup>26</sup> Although viewing provides an important conceptual framework, previous scholarship stops short of applying to concept to the producer-audience and audience-audience relationships. This study expands the concept of viewing to represent transmedia engagement – one characterized by a broad range of interactive, participatory, and communicative multi-platform activities. Looking at viewing in this way allows this dissertation to explore the complexities of transmedia engagement in the context of industrial, technological, and cultural transformations.

### Statement of Purpose

Using a thematic analysis methodology, this dissertation investigates the following question: How do transmedia storytelling franchises alter the text-audience, producer-audience, and audience-audience relationships? With this goal in mind, this study examines discourses taking place on two podcasts: *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*. *Lost* podcasts – syndicated audio files containing conversations about *Lost* that are distributed via the Internet – serve as an ideal source of data to examine this study’s research question.<sup>27</sup> In particular, the discourses of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* regularly focused on *Lost*’s vast transmedia scope, the implementation of interactive media and participatory strategies by *Lost*’s producers, and the interplay between *Lost*’s producers and fans.

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<sup>26</sup> Dan Harries, “Watching the Internet,” in *The New Media Book*, ed. Dan Harries (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), 175-178.

<sup>27</sup> Zeynel Cebeci and Mehmet Tekdal, “Using Podcasts as Audio Learning Objects,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Knowledge and Learning Objects* 2 (2006): 45-46.

The selection of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* resulted from my desire to examine responses from both *Lost*'s producers and fans. Hosted by two of *Lost*'s executive producers, Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, *The Official Lost Podcast* – the only *Lost* podcast produced by ABC – provides unique insights into the transmedia storytelling strategies implemented by *Lost*'s producers. From 2005-2010, *The Official Lost Podcast* featured Cuse and Lindelof speaking – often candidly – about the process of producing *Lost*, providing this study with a type of rare access into the production of a transmedia franchise. In addition, Lindelof and Cuse encouraged fans to submit questions and feedback, thereby promoting the creation of a participatory culture. As such, the interplay between Lindelof, Cuse and the *Lost* fans recorded on *The Official Lost Podcast* allows this investigation to examine the producer-audience and text-audience relationships within the context of transmedia storytelling.

Whereas an analysis of *The Official Lost Podcast* provides this dissertation with insight into transmedia production, an examination of *The Transmission* fan-produced podcast illuminates aspects centering on the reception of *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling franchise. Produced by the husband and wife team of Ryan and Jen Ozawa in Hawaii, *The Transmission* combined behind-the-scenes details about *Lost*'s Hawaii-based production with intelligent commentary.<sup>28</sup> As a result, *The Transmission* became one of the most popular *Lost* podcasts as ranked by iTunes.<sup>29</sup> An analysis of *The Transmission* allows this dissertation to interrogate the responses of a portion of *Lost*'s audience

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<sup>28</sup> The Ozawas concluded each episode of *The Transmission* with a segment called “The Forward Cabin” in which they discussed shooting locations, actor sightings, and spoilers. Living in Hawaii, the Ozawas were in a unique position have access to such information.

<sup>29</sup> iTunes is Apple's digital media software. It is one of the largest and most popular aggregators of podcast content.

thereby critically examining the transmedia text-audience and audience-audience relationships. Taken together, a thematic analysis of the discourses occurring on *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* allow this dissertation to critically examine the transmedia text-audience, producer-audience, and audience-audience relationships.

### Value & Significance

This investigation fills four gaps in existing research by contributing a long-term, in-depth, qualitative study of producers and fans engaged in the production and consumption of a transmedia franchise. First, this study interrogates Henry Jenkins' (2006b) critical framework of transmedia storytelling. Although Jenkins' scholarship serves a foundational role in studies of transmedia storytelling, he does not provide significant empirical evidence to support his theoretical and conceptual claims. This study contributes such data.

Second, this research contributes to transmedia scholarship (Brooker, 2001; Hanson, 2004; Ito, 2005; Rose, 2011) through the creation of a model of transmedia engagement that accounts for the intersections of interactive, participatory, and communicative multi-platform fan activities with key technological, industrial, and cultural shifts. Whereas media fandoms often include interactive, participatory, and communicative qualities, transmedia storytelling franchises incentivize such behaviors by providing viewers with additional storyworld insights, thereby resulting in a privileging of certain fans and fan activities. Therefore, this dissertation examines the multiple relationships in the continuum between transmedia producers and fans, from casual

viewers to transmedia viewers, focusing on the ways in which transmedia producers and franchises encourage – and often require – viewings.

Third, despite the increasing popularity of podcasts, little research exists on the topic in relation to Film and Media Studies.<sup>30</sup> Much of the current podcast research centers on their use as pedagogical aids (Cebeci & Adana, 2006; Copley, 2007; Shaw, 2009; Pham, 2010). Yet, in contrast to the considerable body of scholarship focusing on online groups of television and film fans (Baym, 2000; Pullen, 2000; Wexelblat, 2002; Zweerink & Gatson, 2004; Bury, 2005; Ross, 2008), the relationship between podcasts and participatory fandom is currently under-studied. As such, this research fills an existing gap in Film and Media Studies scholarship by interrogating the podcast medium as a participatory tool for fans and producers.

Finally, this investigation fills a gap in the existing *Lost* literature (Gray & Mittell, 2007; Pearson, 2007; Johnson, 2009; Morreale, 2010). Written during the broadcast of the television series, previous studies focus on isolated seasons or texts. This investigation fills the gap in *Lost* literature by offering a more comprehensive, in-depth examination of *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling franchise.

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<sup>30</sup> Oliver Luft, "Podcasts' Popularity Surges in US," *The Guardian*, August 29, 2008, accessed March 13, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/aug/29/podcasting.digitalmedia>.

## **Methodology**

I began watching *Lost* when the first half of the two-part pilot aired on ABC on September 22, 2004. Over the following six years, I counted myself as one of *Lost*'s avid fans. I read the tie-in novel, *Bad Twin*; I played *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game; I flew across the country to attend *Lost* fan gatherings; I listened to every episode of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*.<sup>31</sup> While participating in *Lost*'s transmedia fan culture, I began to notice behaviors and tendencies encouraged by *Lost*'s producers and texts that were significantly different from my other television-watching experiences. Surrounding the television series was a web of other texts: commercials for diegetic institutions on *Lost*, encouraging me to visit websites and belief in the "truth" of *Lost*'s storyworld; mobisodes sent to my mobile phone, filling in significant narrative gaps in the television series; online videos debuted at Comic-Con, foreshadowing events to come sometimes up to a year later. More than with any other television series before, I found myself searching out these scattered (and sometimes purposefully obscured) paratexts in the hopes of better understanding the mysteries at the heart of *Lost* and extending my involvement with the characters and storyworld. *Lost*'s texts encouraged me to be interactive, to immerse myself deep in its storyworld, and to play a sort of grand game spread out across an ocean of texts.

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<sup>31</sup> In 2008, I attended the recording of Jay and Jack Glatfelter's twenty-four hour *Lost* podcast in Raleigh, North Carolina. The event, a marathon podcast for charity, featured many notable members of the *Lost* podcasting community, including Ryan and Jen Ozawa. The Glatfelters, a stepfather and son team, host the popular *The Lost Podcast with Jay and Jack*. In 2010, I flew to Los Angeles to watch the finale of *Lost*'s television series, "The End," with an audience of *Lost* fans at the Orpheum Theatre.

Fan podcasts, like *The Transmission*, also played a more significant role in my viewing experience due to the complex nature of *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling approach. If *Lost* was a game, I felt as if I was playing with the listeners of *The Transmission*. As a group, fans of *The Transmission* reversed backwards-playing audio clips, enlarged and studied fleeting televisual images, and poured over audio channels for hidden clues. In addition to technological expertise, fans contributed information about topics, such as literature, science, and philosophy, referenced on *Lost*. Although I initially listened and contributed to *The Transmission* in order to obtain a fuller understanding of *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld, I noticed a sort of hierarchical shift take place. Rather than being a marginalized secondary text, for me, *The Transmission* occupied a place of equal importance to *Lost*. While the technological and intellectual collaboration occurring on *The Transmission* played a role in my affinity, I saw the intimate and immediate qualities of the communication fostered by podcast technologies as equally significant factors. I connected with the hosts of *The Transmission*, Ryan and Jen Ozawa, and the listeners in a manner that was qualitatively different from my experience with fan message boards and blogs.

My participation in *Lost*'s transmedia fan cultures also shifted my perception of the creators behind *Lost*'s elaborate intertextual collage. *Lost*'s storyworld was so complex, consisting of a multitude of mysteries and dozens of characters distributed across media platforms and delivery channels, that Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse's commentary and insights became increasingly important to me. On *The Official Lost Podcast*, Lindelof and Cuse pointed out significant narrative details, called attention to important paratexts, and answered questions about the entire transmedia franchise.

Moreover, as the narrative neared its conclusion, the stories found on the television series and other platforms began to contradict one another. Simply put, I needed Lindelof and Cuse's help to make sense of the story they were spinning, and I was not alone. As such, *The Official Lost Podcast* became the most popular *Lost* podcast as ranked by iTunes and a cult of personality emerged around Lindelof and Cuse, positioning them as visionary creators.

As a media scholar, I could find little research in its entirety that succeeded in explaining the qualities of the culture of which I was participating. While existing scholarship provides conceptual frameworks for understanding transmedia storytelling via audience practices, (Jenkins, 2006b; Gray, 2010), to me, this was an incomplete picture. Although Jenkins' scholarship, for instance, serves a foundational role in studies of transmedia storytelling, he does not substantially apply his theories to actual audiences. The voices of those engaged in transmedia fan cultures were missing. In short, I became a fan of *Lost*, *The Transmission*, and *The Official Lost Podcast* at a time when, as a media scholar, I saw the relationships between producers, the text, and audiences as changing in relation to a confluence of industrial, technological, and cultural transformations. More work is needed to explore the ramifications of these shifts. As an academic and a member of *Lost* fan cultures influenced by these changes, I am in a unique position to do just that.

However, as a media scholar and an ardent *Lost* fan, I occupy a dual position. Scholars use the terms "scholar-fan" (Doty, 2000; Hills, 2002) and "aca-fan" (Jenkins, 2006a) to describe the "insider/outsider" identities of academics who study the fan

cultures of which they are involved.<sup>32</sup> “The term [aca-fan],” Jenkins observes, “describes specific relations to our objects of study and draws upon *situated knowledge* to help explain the contradictions of contemporary popular culture.”<sup>33</sup> Feminist theorist Donna Haraway maintains that situated knowledges are “partial, locatable, critical knowledges” that shape the ways in which one’s perspective shapes the research.<sup>34</sup> Positioning oneself within situated knowledges, Diane Wolf observes, is a way of “acknowledging how the dynamics of where we are always affects our viewpoint and the production of knowledge without privileging one particular position over another.”<sup>35</sup> Hence, my position as a member of *Lost* fan cultures informs the questions I ask and the interpretations I make. For instance, highlighting the ways in which a scholar’s situated knowledge of a fan community can result in a richer analysis regarding the practices taking place, Matt Hills argues:

A critical TV scholar writing about *Doctor Who* who had no fan affiliation or identity could still “like” and enjoy the TV show they were analyzing, but they would have no awareness of the reading protocols, hierarchies, ways of understanding the show’s history and characters etc. that fan culture would bring.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Henry Jenkins is credited with coining the term, “acafan.”

<sup>33</sup> “Coming Soon: Acafandom and Beyond,” Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins, accessed September 5, 2011, [http://henryjenkins.org/2011/06/coming\\_soon\\_acafandom\\_and\\_beyo.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2011/06/coming_soon_acafandom_and_beyo.html); emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of the Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 584.

<sup>35</sup> Diane Wolf, *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 14.

<sup>36</sup> “Acafandom and Beyond: Jonathan Gray, Matt Hills, and Alisa Perren (Part Two),” Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins, accessed September 5, 2011, [http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/acafandom\\_and\\_beyond\\_jonathan.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/acafandom_and_beyond_jonathan.html).

My dual position as a scholar-fan allows for in-depth and informed analysis of the changing relationships between *Lost*'s transmedia texts, producers, and audiences in light of a complex interplay of industrial, technological, and cultural shifts.

For my research, the hierarchical ordering of the terms scholar-fan and aca-fan is important.<sup>37</sup> For although I maintain a dual identity as both a media scholar and *Lost* fan, this study avoids the celebratory and confessional tone of *Lost* fan writing (Lachonis & Johnston, 2008). I am less interested in elevating the text or making evaluative judgments about its worth; rather, I focus on the practices encouraged by and surrounding the text in an effort to critically examine transmedia engagement. In other words, I regard myself first and foremost as a scholar, using my experiences as a member of *Lost* fan cultures to guide my research questions and inform my analysis. As Nancy Baym discusses, "I see my first obligation as both a scholar and member of fan communities as trying to come up with a sampling that will leave fans saying 'yes, that's a fair take on what we do' and academics saying 'I trust that she's given me a representative view.'"<sup>38</sup> This study has similar aims. I draw on my knowledge of the values, interpretive strategies, and hierarchies of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* fan cultures to provide an accurate account of their fan practices. At the same time, my methodological and theoretical rigor grant my account academic authority by providing a reliable and analytic explanation of the practices I examine.

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<sup>37</sup> Consider, for example, Hills' use of the term "fan-academic" to refer to fans who "use academic theorizing within their fan writing and within the construction of a scholarly fan identity, as opposed to the professional academic who draws on their fandom as a badge of distinction within the academy." (Hill, 2002: 2).

<sup>38</sup> "Acafandom and Beyond: Week Three, Part One," Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins, accessed September 5, 2011, [http://henryjenkins.org/2011/06/acafandom\\_and\\_beyond\\_week\\_thre.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2011/06/acafandom_and_beyond_week_thre.html).

In this study, I perform a thematic analysis of the conversations occurring on two *Lost* podcasts over the course of a five year period (2005-2010) in order to critically examine the changing role of producers and audiences in the context of a series of industrial, technological and cultural shifts in contemporary media. Thematic analysis (Owen, 1984; Leininger, 1985; Auerbach & Silverstien, 2003) is a methodological framework for the examination of ideas and patterns emerging from qualitative data. Qualitative research scholars Carl F. Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein define a theme as “an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas.”<sup>39</sup> This research examines the conversations of *Lost* fans and producers in order to examine what patterns of repeating ideas reveal about the shifting roles of audiences and producers in the context of transmedia storytelling, interactive media, and participatory fandom.

## **Background**

This section provides background information on transmedia storytelling practices, *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*, and podcast producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, and Ryan and Jen Ozawa. In an effort to contextualize *Lost*’s transmedia storytelling approach, I will first offer a brief survey of transmedia storytelling practices within the media industries. While by no means exhaustive, this overview illustrates how producers of television series, films, and video games increasingly incorporate websites, alternate reality games, mobisodes, webisodes, and comic books in the service of advancing transmedia stories. These paratexts serve an array of purposes, including depicting previously unseen aspects of a narrative universe,

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<sup>39</sup> Carl F. Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 38.

filling in narrative gaps in an existing storyline, conveying further characterization, and bolstering audience interest.<sup>40</sup>

Given the relatively low costs associated with their production, one of the most prevalent techniques for expanding a media property's narrative universe involves websites. These websites provide television networks and producers with the opportunity to communicate additional storyworld information and maintain engagement outside of a series' broadcast. For instance, the website for *Dawson's Creek* (The WB, 1998-2003) enabled visitors to explore the titular character's personal computer; the *Smallville* (The WB/CW, 2001-2011) website functioned as an online version of the *Smallville* newspaper; a *24* (FOX, 2001-2010) website provided information about the series' White House; and the website for *Invasion* (ABC, 2005-2006) appeared as a blog about alien conspiracies written by one of the series' characters.<sup>41</sup> Thus, rather than simply retelling or repackaging existing storylines, the practice of using paratextual websites in the service of transmedia storytelling extends a television series' characters and narratives into new platforms thereby providing audiences with new insights into a fictional universe.

Another industrial practice of narrative expansion involves the use of alternate reality games – interactive internet-based entertainment experiences. For a variety of factors, including the ability for significant sponsor and product integration and the free nature of the gameplay, alternate reality games are frequently implemented as part of elaborate promotional campaigns for films, television series, and video games. Hence,

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<sup>40</sup> "Transmedia Storytelling 101," Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins, accessed June 1, 2011, [http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia\\_storytelling\\_101.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html).

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Television Entertainment* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 76.

media industry-produced alternate reality games often operate simultaneously as both promotional texts and narrative extensions. Commonly regarded as the first alternate reality game, *The Beast* generated interest in the release of the motion picture *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (Warner Bros., 2001).<sup>42</sup> Set within the narrative universe of *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, the object of *The Beast* centered on players reaching the end of the experience's mystery narrative by solving a series of complex puzzles involving websites, online videos, and audio recordings.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, ABC produced two alternate reality games in 2001 and 2002 as part of viral marketing campaigns for the first and second seasons of the television series *Alias* (2001-2006).<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the alternate reality game *I Love Bees* promoted the release of the video game *Halo 2* (Bungie, 2004) and functioned as a transmedia extension of the *Halo* franchise by providing players with a "narrative bridge" between *Halo* and *Halo 2*.<sup>45</sup>

Beginning in 2005, the media industries also began using mobile phone technologies as a way to deliver original content to audiences in an effort to advance transmedia stories. Several technological developments, including the advent of the third-generation (3G) network and changes in mobile phone design, facilitated the shift toward greater collaboration between the media and mobile phone industries during this

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<sup>42</sup> Carolyn Handler Miller, *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment* (New York: Focal Press, 2008), 289.

<sup>43</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 123-128.

<sup>44</sup> Henrik Örnebring, "Alternate Reality Gaming and Convergence Culture: The Case of *Alias*," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 4 (2007): 453.

<sup>45</sup> Jane McGonigal, "Why *I Love Bees*: A Case Study in Collective Intelligence Gaming," in *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, ed. Katie Salen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 202.

period.<sup>46</sup> The rise of the 3G network enabled the delivery of high-bandwidth content and increases in screen size fostered a viewing experience more amenable to mobile phones. Fox pioneered the strategy of using mobisodes – episodes accessed and viewed on mobile phones – to provide audiences with original transmedia content.<sup>47</sup> In the mobisode series *24: Conspiracy* (2005), Fox innovatively extended the narrative of *24* through a series of twenty-four, one-minute episodes focusing on narrative gaps in the television series’ fourth season. In 2006, the BBC engaged in a similar strategy with a *Doctor Who* (2005-2011) mobisode series entitled *TARDISodes*, in which the mobile phone-accessible episodes functioned as short prologues to each of the second season’s episodes.<sup>48</sup> As these examples highlight, the practice of mobisode production is taking place largely within the television industry. Lucy Hood, President of Fox Mobile Entertainment, notes that the current industry logic pertaining to mobisodes favors short episodes released to mobile phones frequently – more than once a week – featuring central characters from a given television series.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to mobisodes, television networks incorporate webisodes – a portmanteau of “web” and “episode” – as a way to maintain audience engagement by continuing a television series’ narrative online. The producers of *Smallville*, for example, created a series of two- to four-minute webisodes entitled *Chloe Chronicles* (2003).

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<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 51.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>48</sup> Neil Perryman, “*Doctor Who* and the Convergence of Media: A Case Study in ‘Transmedia Storytelling,’” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 31-33.

<sup>49</sup> Laura M. Holson, “Now Playing on a Tiny Screen,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 2005, accessed December 5, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/17/technology/17mobisodes.html?pagewanted=all>.

These webisodes featured a storyworld character, Chloe Sullivan, investigating mysterious occurrences in the town of Smallville and “contain[ed] embedded clues to future on-air developments.”<sup>50</sup> In 2006, a *Battlestar Galatica* (SyFy, 2003-2009) webisode series entitled *Battlestar Galactica: The Resistance* centered on events taking place between the second and three seasons of the television series.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the producers of the CBS soap operas *As the World Turns* and *The Young and the Restless* partnered in 2007, creating a cross-promotional webisode series, *L.A. Diaries*, exploring the backstories of two characters – one from each soap opera.<sup>52</sup>

Hollywood studios and television networks also use video games as a way to extend the reach of successful media properties by enabling players to inhabit storyworlds. As Jonathan Gray observes, “Licensed games allow their players to enter these worlds and explore them in ways that a film or television show often precludes.”<sup>53</sup> In addition to these exploratory qualities, video games allow for the extension of a property’s narrative or the depiction of previously unseen aspects of a story. *The Thing* (Computer Artworks, 2002) video game, for instance, served as a sequel to *The Thing* (Universal, 1982) thereby continuing the film’s narrative.<sup>54</sup> In a similar manner, *24: The Game* (Cambridge Studio, 2006) detailed events occurring before the start of the

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<sup>50</sup> Jennifer Gillan, *Television and New Media: Must-Click TV* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 51.

<sup>51</sup> Derek Johnson, “Devaluing and Revaluing Seriality: The Gendered Discourses of Media Franchising,” *Media, Culture, and Society* 33, no. 7 (2011), 1088.

<sup>52</sup> Sam Earl Ford, “*As the World Turns* in a Convergence Culture” (master’s thesis, MIT, 2007), 153-154.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 188.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-189.

television series' third season.<sup>55</sup> In particular, the *Star Wars* and *The Matrix* franchises are notable for the expansive scope and narrative dependence, respectively, of their video games. To date, LucasArts has partnered with video game developers on over a hundred titles, including *Star Wars: Galaxies* (Sony Online Entertainment, 2001), *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (BioWare, 2003), *Star Wars: Battlefront* (Pandemic Studios, 2004).<sup>56</sup> Although not as vast as the *Star Wars* video games, *The Matrix* video games are significant for their focus on integral storyworld information. In fact, Jenkins argues that the *Enter the Matrix* (Shiny Entertainment, 2003) and *The Matrix Online* (Monolith Productions, 2005) video games made unprecedented demands on audiences by intertwining their narratives with *The Matrix* motion pictures. As Jenkins explains, "The filmmakers plant clues that won't make sense until we play the computer game."<sup>57</sup> Although *The Matrix* video games constituted an innovative strategy for narrative extension and storyworld exploration, this transmedia storytelling approach frustrated some audiences weary of having to do "research" before watching a film.<sup>58</sup> As Gray points out, "*Enter the Matrix* serves as a warning to transmedia and paratext developers: allowing audiences to explore a narrative invites play with a world... but requiring that they explore that world risks restricting how the film or television program can operate."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 88.

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 194.

<sup>57</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 94.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>59</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 196.

One method implemented by television networks and producers for allowing such playful exploration involves the use of comic books and webcomics.<sup>60</sup> For example, the *Heroes* (NBC, 2006-2010) webcomic and comic books explored the lives of the television series' central characters.<sup>61</sup> In a similar fashion, the *Fringe* (Fox, 2008-2011) comic series *Beyond the Fringe* (2011) depicts instances of the television series' overarching mythology – “the pattern” – not featured in the television show.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, after the final season of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB/UPN, 1997-2003) concluded, a series of comic books, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Eight* (2007) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Nine* (2011), continued the narrative.<sup>63</sup> While focusing on the storyworlds established in the respective television series, the *Heroes*, *Fringe*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* comic books represent an attempt to encourage – but not necessarily require –transmedia engagement.

As this overview of websites, alternate reality games, mobisodes, wedisodes, and comics highlights, transmedia storytelling is increasingly prevalent within the media industries. Reflecting this industrial shift, in 2010, the Producers Guild of America created a new credit – Transmedia Producer – for individuals responsible for cross-platform franchises “consist[ing] of three (or more) narrative storylines existing within

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<sup>60</sup> A webcomic is a comic published on a website.

<sup>61</sup> David Colton, “Graphic Novel Captures ‘Heroes,’” *USA Today*, July 26, 2007, accessed February 26, 2011, [http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2007-07-25-heroes\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2007-07-25-heroes_N.htm).

<sup>62</sup> Jeff Jensen, “‘Fringe’: Joshua Jackson Pens Key Mythology Tale in New Digital Comic ‘Beyond the Fringe,’” *Entertainment Weekly*, September 21, 2011, accessed December 8, <http://insidetv.ew.com/2011/09/21/fringe-digital-comic-first-look/>.

<sup>63</sup> “Interview with Buffy Creator Joss Whedon,” Dark Horse Comics, accessed September 10, 2011, <http://www.darkhorse.com/Interviews/1421/Interview-with-Buffy-creator-Joss-Whedon-3-26-07>.

the same fictional universe.”<sup>64</sup> *Lost*’s transmedia producers, Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, oversaw a narrative universe spanning a television series, websites, alternate reality games, a novel, a mobisode series, online videos, a video game, and jigsaw puzzles.

In addition, Lindelof and Cuse used *The Official Lost Podcast* as a way to communicate with fans. Podcasts are digital audio and/or video recordings distributed via the Internet and playable through a computer or mobile media player. Podcasting technologies revolutionize the way fans and producers communicate with each other by facilitating the creation of a communicative participatory culture. Podcasts function similarly to message boards or internet forums. Both podcasts and message boards are structured around a particular theme and both allow fans to engage in the many-to-many communication that the Internet fosters. However, whereas message boards function in a largely autonomously manner with individuals posting and replying to messages with relative freedom, podcasts are recorded and edited according to the logic of the podcast producers.<sup>65</sup>

For instance, *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* typically consisted of discussion from the hosts followed by responses from the podcast listeners. In the case of *The Official Lost Podcast*, these listener responses took the form of questions and comments posted to the *Lost* message board on ABC.com.<sup>66</sup> Cuse and Lindelof would

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<sup>64</sup> Peter Caranicas, “Producers’ New Frontier: Transmedia Storytelling To Get Its Due,” *Variety*, April 7, 2010, accessed December 8, 2011, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118017309?refCatId=10>.

<sup>65</sup> An individual or group generally moderates internet message boards. Moderators possess the ability to deny access to individuals engaging in unacceptable behavior or to remove inappropriate messages.

<sup>66</sup> In rare instances, such as the episode of *The Official Lost Podcast* on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007, Cuse and Lindelof even called podcast listeners to discuss *Lost*. On an episode

identify the individual by their ABC.com screen name, read their submitted question or comment, and then respond. For instance:

**GQ Quintano** writes:<sup>67</sup> Why is it that this so-called monster [just] stares at Locke and Eko but yet rips the pilot out of the cockpit and [kills him]?

**Carlton Cuse:** The pilot and the way in which he behaved and the way in which Eko and Locke behaved towards the monster, I think, determined their fates.... I think that your question hits the nail right on the head in terms of the monster is discriminating; the monster does not treat everyone equally.

**Damon Lindelof:** [W]hat's very interesting, Carlton, is that when Locke sees the monster for the second time in the finale of last year, it treats him much differently. In fact, it attacks him and tries to drag him into a hole.<sup>68</sup>

Whereas fan responses on *The Official Lost Podcast* were largely submitted in written form, feedback from listeners of *The Transmission* were both written and aural. In addition to submitting a question or comment by emailing the podcast's email address or by posting a comment to *The Transmission*'s blog, listeners could call *The Transmission*'s phone number and record a voicemail message.<sup>69</sup> Ryan and Jen Ozawa would read the emailed submissions or play the recorded phone messages, and then respond. For example:

**Eric:** In response to some of the things that were said in the last podcast, I don't agree that the characters like Juliet or Sawyer or Jack sort of going back on the progress they made in terms of becoming more mature... is a bad thing.... And what [*Lost*'s producers are] showing with each of [the characters] sort of making less mature choices than they have in recent episodes is that they're human and imperfect.

**Jen Ozawa:** I understand regression and characters doing something against their better judgment, but to me, it felt like the characters acting in service of the plot rather than the other way around.

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coinciding with Mother's Day on May 7, 2008, Cuse and Lindelof called their mothers – self-professed *Lost* fans – to answer their questions about the series.

<sup>67</sup> The use of “writes” hereafter indicates that the comment was made through written form, with the one of the podcasters reading the individual's comment.

<sup>68</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: January 23, 2006,” podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed January 26, 2006.

<sup>69</sup> Ryan and Jen Ozawa created an email account and established a phone number specifically for the podcast.

**Ryan Ozawa:** That's a frustration that a lot of fans have expressed.... These changes don't seem to be [made] because it's important for that to happen but more because [*Lost*'s producers] needed them to happen for the plot to end up where they wanted it to be. And really, that's just kind of weak, I think.<sup>70</sup>

These responses are indicative of the type of communication taking place on *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*.

In contrast to discussions taking place on message boards, which can often grow unwieldy as more people contribute responses, communication occurring on podcasts generally takes the form of a more orderly conversation resulting from a producer's logic. As one caller to *The Transmission* podcast put it: "Being able to listen to the *Lost* fans goes a lot faster than reading. Plus, both of you [podcasters] do all the editing for us listeners."<sup>71</sup> While the edited nature of podcasts often allows for concise, coherent, and on-topic conversations, this editorial aspect also functions as a limiting force. Podcasters serve as cultural gatekeepers, ultimately determining whose voices are heard. Potentially offsetting this limitation is the relative freedom available to podcasters in terms of podcast length and the number of podcasts produced. As such, podcasts and the conversations occurring within them are not limited by temporal constraints, thereby allowing increased opportunities for a diversity of voices.<sup>72</sup> The potentials and limitations of podcasts foster a unique communicative producer-audience and audience-audience experience that is currently under-studied.

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<sup>70</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Season Five in Review," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 19, 2009, accessed July 22, 2009.

<sup>71</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Lost on the Web," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 19, 2009, accessed July 22, 2009.

<sup>72</sup> Whereas the duration of *The Official Lost Podcast* was generally between twenty and thirty minutes, *The Transmission* was considerably longer, with episodes generally lasting between sixty and ninety minutes.

Lindelof and Cuse used podcasts as a way to engage with fans outside of a series' broadcast, thereby building a fan base and maintaining interest in the series. As television writers and producers, Lindelof and Cuse knew the value of cultivating an audience following. Before beginning their work as executive producers on *Lost*, Lindelof and Cuse worked on several relatively short-lived television series. Lindelof worked as a producer and writer on *Crossing Jordan* (NBC, 2002-2004) and a writer on *Nash Bridges* (CBS, 2001).<sup>73</sup> Cuse created and executive produced *Nash Bridges* (CBS, 1996-2001) and *The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.* (Fox, 1993-1994).<sup>74</sup>

In 2004, Lindelof created *Lost* with J.J. Abrams and Jeffrey Lieber, working from a concept from the then-head of ABC, Lloyd Braun.<sup>75</sup> In addition to creating the series and co-writing the pilot episode, Lindelof served as *Lost*'s head writer and one of the show's executive producers. Cuse started work as an executive producer on *Lost* after the first season was already underway.<sup>76</sup> Abrams' left *Lost* during the first season to direct the film, *Mission: Impossible III* (2006), prompting Lindelof to bring on Cuse – his former *Nash Bridges* boss – as an executive producer.<sup>77</sup> Although Lindelof and Cuse were not the sole executive producers, they were the most vocal and visible members of

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<sup>73</sup> Lindelof also worked as a writer for *Wasteland* (ABC, 1999) and *Undressed* (MTV, 1999)

<sup>74</sup> Cuse also created and executive produced *Martial Law* (CBS, 1998) and executive produced *Black Sash* (The WB, 2003).

<sup>75</sup> David Bertstein, "Cast Away," *Chicago Magazine*, August 2007, accessed September 5, 2011, <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/August-2007/Cast-Away/index.php?cp=2&cparticle=1&si=1&siarticle=0#artanc>.

<sup>76</sup> Cuse is first credited as an executive producer in the episode, "Solitary" (1:09).

<sup>77</sup> Jeff Jenson, "'Lost': The 'M:I 3' Connection," *Entertainment Weekly*, December 29, 2009, accessed September 5, 2011, [http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20313460\\_20333410,00.html](http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20313460_20333410,00.html).

*Lost*'s creative team.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, outside of J.J. Abrams, who co-wrote the pilot script and the season three premiere, Lindelof and Cuse were the only executive producers to pen episodes.<sup>79</sup> A cult of personality developed around Lindelof and Cuse or "Darlton" as they were often referred to by the fans.<sup>80</sup> This aura developed as a result of the pair's numerous interviews together and joint media appearances, fostering the sense among fans that Lindelof and Cuse were the sole visionary creators behind *Lost*'s transmedia franchise.<sup>81</sup> This level of status was not altogether unwarranted. In fact, Lindelof and Cuse oversaw the production of *Lost*'s entire transmedia franchise, making the final determinations on creative decisions.<sup>82</sup>

Most significant in terms of their visibility, though, was Lindelof and Cuse's involvement with *The Official Lost Podcast*. Starting in 2005 during the television series' second season, ABC began producing *The Official Lost Podcast* with Lindelof and Cuse as the hosts. In the podcast, Cuse and Lindelof provided commentary on previous episodes, responded to fan-submitted questions, and previewed upcoming episodes. In addition, Cuse and Lindelof shared exclusive details about *Lost*'s creative development,

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<sup>78</sup> J.J. Abrams, Bryan Burk, Jack Bender, and Jeff Pinker are also credited as executive producers.

<sup>79</sup> Lindelof wrote the pilot script, "Pilot, Part 1" and "Pilot, Part 2" with Abrams, from a story by Lindelof, Abrams, and Jeffrey Lieber. Working as a team, Lindelof and Cuse wrote each season finale and the series finale. In total, Lindelof penned thirty-eight episodes and Cuse wrote thirty-two episodes. The two share writing credits on twenty-eight episodes.

<sup>80</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: March 26, 2007," podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, March 26, 2007, accessed March 29, 2007.

<sup>81</sup> From 2004 to 2010, ABC hosted a *Lost* panel at Comic-Con – a convention dedicated to popular culture. Lindelof was part of the *Lost* panel every year, and Cuse attended the panel from 2005-2010. Additionally, Lindelof and Cuse made numerous interview appearances on ABC's late night talk show *Jimmy Kimmel Live* to discuss *Lost*.

<sup>82</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

including frank discussions of the difficulties of producing a transmedia franchise. By sharing behind-the-scenes details as well as by responding directly to fan-submitted feedback and questions, Cuse and Lindelof facilitated the creation of a participatory fan culture surrounding *The Official Lost Podcast*.

Similarly, *Lost* fans Ryan and Jen Ozawa of *The Transmission* podcasted about their object of fandom as a way to extend the participatory experience by communicating with other fans.<sup>83</sup> The Ozawas, a husband and wife team living in Hawaii, began podcasting about *Lost* shortly after the premiere of the second season.<sup>84</sup> Ryan Ozawa, a blogger and self-described “web geek,”<sup>85</sup> is a “longtime advocate and fan of personal publishing on the web, and has been an eager participant in online communities since their earliest incarnations.”<sup>86</sup> In addition to his career handling communications for a real estate data firm in Hawaii, Ryan Ozawa regularly consults professional groups on technology and new media.<sup>87</sup> Jen Ozawa is primarily a homemaker with a love of popular culture.<sup>88</sup>

Combining their technological prowess with their *Lost* fandom, Ryan and Jen Ozawa created *The Transmission Lost* podcast in 2005.<sup>89</sup> Episodes of *The Transmission*

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<sup>83</sup> The name of the Ozawa’s podcast is a reference to a mysterious radio transmission heard by a group of central characters in the pilot episode of *Lost*’s television series.

<sup>84</sup> Before beginning *The Transmission*, the Ozawas featured a segment centering on *Lost*’s season one finale on the May 17, 2005 episode of their other podcast *HawaiiUP* – a podcast focusing on life in Hawaii.

<sup>85</sup> “About,” *HawaiiUP: Podcasting in Paradise*, accessed September 5, 2011, <http://www.hawaiiup.com/about/>.

<sup>86</sup> “Biography,” *Hawaii Blog: Blogging the Aloha State and Beyond*, accessed September 5, 2011, <http://www.hawaiiweblog.com/about/bio>.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> “Biography,” *Hale Kilinahe*, accessed September 5, 2011, <http://www.ozawa.org/jen/>.

<sup>89</sup> The first episode of *The Transmission* was released on October 15, 2005 and focused on the episode “Everybody Hates Hugo” (2:04).

were divided into four segments: a plot summary of the most recent episode; an analysis of the episode by the Ozawas; a fan feedback section in which the Ozawas played voicemails and read emails from listeners; and a segment focusing on production news, spoilers, and rumors about upcoming episodes. Shortly after the Ozawas began distributing episodes of their podcast, *The Transmission* became one of the most popular *Lost* podcasts as ranked by iTunes. In fact, *The New York Times* profiled the Ozawas in 2010 as *Lost*'s television series approached its conclusion, highlighting their status within *Lost*'s fan culture.<sup>90</sup> This popularity was tied to the Ozawas insightful, intelligent, and passionate discussions of *Lost* as well as the large listener feedback section, "You All Everybody," in which listeners participated in the podcast.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, living in Hawaii, the Ozawas were in a unique position to offer behind-the-scenes details about *Lost*'s Hawaii-based production. The Ozawas provided production details, such as filming locations, cast sightings, and even plot specifics gleaned from watching *Lost*'s cast and crew at work.<sup>92</sup> *The Transmission* concluded with a final episode released on May 20, 2011 – almost one year after the finale of *Lost*'s television series.

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<sup>90</sup> Michael Wilson, "Finding Themselves in 'Lost'," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2010, accessed October 20, 2010,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/04/arts/television/04lost.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>91</sup> The name "You All Everybody" is a reference to the hit song of the same name by Drive Shaft, a band existing within *Lost*'s diegesis. "You All Everybody" was often the longest segment of *The Transmission* and the Ozawas lauded the podcast listeners as "the real genius of the show" (Ryan & Jen Ozawa, "Meet Kevin Johnson," *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*).

<sup>92</sup> As *The Transmission*'s popularity grew, other Hawaii-based *Lost* fans reported such details to the Ozawas, thereby increasing the scope of the production information discussed on the podcast.

## Data Collection & Coding Methodology

The data collection for this study entailed downloading every episode of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* from 2005-2010. Over the course of eight weeks, I transcribed every episode of both podcasts. I then read through all the transcripts several times, making detailed, initial notes in a separate document. While entering this stage with a clearly defined research question, I approached the data with an openness and flexibility – what Richard E. Boyatzis regards as “the ability to see” patterns within the data.<sup>93</sup> Next, following the model offered by William Foster Owen (1984), I examined the podcast transcripts for the recurrence of ideas; the repetition of key words, phrases, and sentences; and the forcefulness of speech demonstrated in the conversations.<sup>94</sup> I coded these recurring ideas, repeating words, and vocal inflections by highlighting them with corresponding colors.

Next, as Auerbach and Silverstein propose, I organized the transcripts into “relevant text” consisting of “repeating ideas.”<sup>95</sup> Examples of repeating ideas within the transcripts include:

“[T]here’s a lot of other stuff that was outside the show – the alternative reality games – that we have not seen.”<sup>96</sup>

“I mean, things that happen outside of the show; you never know where you’re going to put it.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Richard E. Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), 8.

<sup>94</sup> William Foster Owen, “Interpretive Themes in Relational Communication,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70, no. 3 (1984): 275.

<sup>95</sup> Carl F. Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 37.

<sup>96</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Some Like It Hoth,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, April 18, 2009, accessed April 21, 2009.

<sup>97</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Variable,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 4, 2009, accessed May 7, 2009.

“I love all the interactive media that's going along with the *Lost* show... but I want to know, for those of us that don't have time to review all those things every week, are we going to be missing out on relevant story information?”<sup>98</sup>

In these examples, the phrase “outside the show” repeats, as do ideas centering on the role of *Lost*’s paratexts. These repeating words and ideas were, then, grouped in a theme or “a common thread that runs through the data.”<sup>99</sup> For instance, I grouped the repeating ideas above into a theme called “uncertainty regarding the narrative relationship between the television series and transmedia paratexts.” Responses grouped within this theme express an uneasiness and confusion linked to the intertextual relationship of the paratexts in *Lost*’s transmedia franchise. The responses in this theme also focused on the narrative relevance of the storytelling occurring in *Lost*’s transmedia paratexts; often questioning whether the narratives of these texts would have some bearing on the television series’ narrative.

The next stage of the thematic analysis entailed grouping similar themes in larger categories. Auerbach and Silverstein refer to these categories as “theoretical constructs” or larger ideas linking the data to theory and relevant literature.<sup>100</sup> Examining the themes emerging from the data at this point in the coding process, I organized the following themes into a theoretical construct:

- Uncertainty regarding the narrative relationship between the television series and transmedia paratexts
- Negotiating a sense of narrative reward from participation in paratextual activities

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<sup>98</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official *Lost* Audio Podcast: October 3, 2006,” podcast audio, The Official *Lost* Podcast, accessed October 7, 2006.

<sup>99</sup> Janice M. Morse and Lyn Richards, *Read Me First for a User’s Guide to Qualitative Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2002), 113.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

- Privileging the television series over transmedia extensions

Fans repeatedly questioned the narrative relevance of transmedia texts, resulting in a continual debate centering on whether participation in paratextual activities would result in significant narrative insight into the franchise's many mysteries. Central to this tension was the sentiment expressed by both producers and fans that *Lost*'s television series occupied a privileged position within the transmedia franchise.

Carefully analyzing these repeating themes and reviewing relevant literature, I grouped the repeating ideas into a theoretical construct that I termed "the contradictory logics of transmedia storytelling." This concept connects similar themes with transmedia storytelling and participatory culture literature and expresses the tension surrounding ABC's approach to storytelling. In regards to *Lost*'s transmedia extensions, for example, executive producers Lindelof and Cuse declared, "[W]e didn't want to do anything that was a waste of your time"<sup>101</sup> and "[Y]ou are not missing out on anything,"<sup>102</sup> respectively. Reconciling these contradictions fostered a sense of confusion and conflict among fans engaging in paratextual activities. On the one hand, *Lost*'s transmedia approach expands the television series into an expansive storyworld, providing audiences with greater insights into the history, characters, and logic of the diegesis. On the other hand, the producers' conflicting rhetorical stances convey transmedia content as superfluous, leading fans to question the benefits of participation.

The final stage of this study's thematic analysis involved the creation of "theoretical narratives." For Auerbach and Silverstein, a theoretical narrative:

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<sup>101</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: July 31, 2006," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed August 3, 2006.

<sup>102</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: October 3, 2006," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed October 7, 2006.

tells the story of the participants' subjective experience, using their own words as much as possible. However, it also includes the researchers' theoretical framework by including the theoretical constructs and themes in parentheses throughout the narrative. Weaving together subjective experience and abstract concepts brings together the very two different worlds of researcher and participant:<sup>103</sup>

The theoretical narrative created for this study is the result of an interplay between the audience and producers responses recorded on *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*, my own critical analyses of the emergent themes, and the study's theoretical framework.

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<sup>103</sup> Carl F. Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 40.

## ***Literature Review***

In order to critically examine how transmedia storytelling franchises alter the text-audience, producer-audience, and audience-audience relationships, the literature review section addresses four areas of inquiry: transmedia storytelling, media audiences and participatory culture, fandom, and *Lost* research. The literature review begins by interrogating conceptual frameworks applied to transmedia storytelling. Next, a review of the literature on media audiences and participatory culture that informs my theoretical approach to the study of transmedia audiences and producers follows. The literature review section then centers on fan studies, focusing on the central concepts and approaches that guide the focus of this research. Finally, the literature review section concludes with an overview of research on *Lost* in an effort to underscore the gaps in the existing scholarship.

### **Transmedia Storytelling**

Given the recent emergence of transmedia scholarship, one encounters a range of conceptual frameworks applied to narratives that cross media platforms as well as the active agency of audiences engaging with transmedia stories. This section of the literature review addresses these concepts in order to underscore the existing gap in the field.

Henry Jenkins' scholarship sits at the center of the growing body of literature focusing on transmedia storytelling. Jenkins' body of work (1996; 2006a; 2006b) focuses on fandom within Media Studies, repositioning fans not as passive consumers but

as active participants, and his research on transmedia storytelling furthers this approach by examining the ways in which economic, technological, and cultural shifts encourage a range of active audience behaviors. For instance, Jenkins views transmedia storytelling through the lens of media convergence – “the cooperation between multiple media industries” – arguing that increasing media conglomeration and the horizontal integration of the media industries facilitate changing business models and audience behaviors.<sup>104</sup> Writing in 2003, Jenkins declared, “Let’s face it: we have entered an era of media convergence that makes the flow of content across multiple media channels almost inevitable.”<sup>105</sup> This inevitability stems from contemporary business models in which media conglomerates have economic interests across the entire entertainment industry. Convergence, then, represents increased economic incentives for media conglomerates, since revenue-generating content can be dispersed across other platforms.<sup>106</sup>

As fewer and fewer media conglomerates control entertainment properties, significant revenue-generating possibilities exist for media industries to transform individual properties into worlds or brands that can be extended into a variety of media. For instance, ABC capitalized on *Lost*’s popularity by creating original online content, a videogame, a novel, a series of alternate reality games, a magazine, and ancillary products, such as puzzles, a board game, and action figures in an attempt to increase profits. Although this paratextual content contributed to *Lost*’s transmedia narrative, it also fueled consumption, thereby increasing profit potentials.

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<sup>104</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>105</sup> Henry Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling,” *Technology Review*, January 15, 2003, accessed February 15, 2011, <http://www.technologyreview.com/biotech/13052/>.

<sup>106</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 19.

If industry models change, in the age of media convergence, toward the distribution of economically viable content across a range of platforms, so too, must notions of how audiences process and derive meaning from transmedia narratives. This dissertation argues that transmedia storytelling fosters – and often requires – audience interactivity and participation, thereby shifting the relationships between producers, the text, and the audience.<sup>107</sup>

Transmedia storytelling franchises encourage a range of interactive audience activities. On the one hand, in order to engage with a transmedia story, viewers must search out paratextual extensions scattered across a variety of platforms. For instance, the BBC extended their popular science fiction series *Doctor Who* into new media platforms with a series of paratextual mini-episodes or mobisodes entitled *TARDISodes*. In order to view these episodes, fans had to interactively locate and access this content via mobile phone or internet download.<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, transmedia franchises often make use of interactive media, which allow fans to shape the entertainment experience. For example, ABC expanded the world of the television series *Alias* through two alternate reality games – internet-based interactive experiences.<sup>109</sup> As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two, the advancement of an alternate reality game’s narrative is predicated on a player’s interactivity, such as solving puzzles and locating clues. This

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<sup>107</sup> Whereas interactivity refers to the technological qualities of a medium that allow the consumer to influence the form and content of the text-audience experience, participation describes the socio-cultural qualities surrounding media discourses, centering on the relationships between producers and consumers (Jenkins 2006b: 133).

<sup>108</sup> Neil Perryman, “*Doctor Who* and the Convergence of Media: A Case Study in ‘Transmedia Storytelling,’” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 31-33.

<sup>109</sup> Henrik Örnebring, “Alternate Reality Gaming and Convergence Culture: The Case of *Alias*,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 4 (2007): 453.

level of interactivity profoundly alters the text-audience relationship. As the lead writer of the popular *I Love Bees* alternate reality game, Sean Stewart notes, “Instead of telling a story, we... present the evidence of that story, and let the players tell it to themselves.”<sup>110</sup> For Jenkins, the interactive transformation to the text-audience relationship – one in which producers encourage audiences to locate scattered transmedia texts and even advance aspects of an overarching narrative – constitutes convergence culture.<sup>111</sup>

Although Jenkins’ scholarship serves as a pivotal role in the study of transmedia storytelling by providing a conceptual vocabulary and a convergence paradigm, he does not provide significant empirical evidence to support his claims about the cultural transformations occurring to the text-audience, producer-audience, and audience-audience relationships. For instance, in his discussion of *The Matrix* franchise’s transmedia storytelling approach (2006b), Jenkins focuses primarily on transmedia producers, drawing connections among a diverse range of scholarship. Yet, the voices of transmedia audiences are largely absent from Jenkins’ scholarship. Therefore, Jenkins’ notion of transmedia storytelling needs to be interrogated, taking into account the voices of both producers and audiences engaged in the production and reception of transmedia storytelling franchises. Critically examining how audiences engage with the producers, the text, and each other allows for a richer analysis of transmedia storytelling.

In order to illustrate the ways in which this dissertation will extend transmedia scholarship by exploring these shifting relationships, it is necessary to highlight the range

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<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Jane McGonigal, “Why *I Love Bees*: A Case Study in Collective Intelligence Gaming,” in *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, ed. Katie Salen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 202.

<sup>111</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 3.

of concepts used to describe content spanning multiple media platforms. The concept of transmedia storytelling has been alternatively conceptualized as “overflow,” “screen bleed,” “media mix,” and “deep media.”<sup>112</sup> In “Living on *Dawson’s Creek*: Teen Viewers, Cultural Convergence, and Television Overflow,” Will Brooker (2001) envisions the transmedia expansion of television programming as “overflow.” Brooker uses this concept to illuminate the ways in which television “increasingly ‘overflows’ from the primary text across multiple platforms.”<sup>113</sup> In this view, contemporary television producers use overflow strategies, such as websites, alternate reality games, novels, television appearance and interviews by actors in character, Comic-Con appearances, podcasts, and ancillary merchandise to provide audiences with an extended text-audience experience that fosters a sustained engagement with the text.

While such strategies extend content into new markets, thereby creating transmedia franchises and increasing revenues, television overflow also facilitates the creation of a well-defined transmedia storyworld. In his book *The End of Celluloid* (2004), Matt Hanson conceptualizes the flow of content across media platforms as “screen bleed.” Hanson describes how narrative elements “bleed” from the film screen to other platforms, extending the reach of their fictional worlds:

Originally a technical term (when non-broadcast safe colors, which are very bright or color-saturated, bleed into others areas of the screen), screen bleed is a useful term to appropriate to describe a modern narrative condition where fictive worlds extend into multiple media and moving image formats.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Further concepts describing transmedia storytelling include “cross-sited narratives” (Marc Ruppel, 2005) and “transfiction” (Christy Dena, 2008).

<sup>113</sup> Will Brooker, “Living on *Dawson’s Creek*: Teen Viewers, Cultural Convergence, and Television Overflow,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (2001): 456.

<sup>114</sup> Matt Hanson, *The End of Celluloid: Film Futures in the Digital Age* (London: RotoVision, 2004), 47.

Taken together, transmedia texts articulate a robust storyworld by providing backstories, introducing new characters, or depicting additional parts of the world. Screen bleed is evident in the transmedia franchises of *G.I. Joe*, *Masters of the Universe*, and *Transformers*, consisting of comics, animated television programs, films, and action figures.<sup>115</sup> The interplay between these texts – each depicting different aspects of a fictional world – promotes a sustained engagement with the text.

Not all critical approaches focus on the transmedia text-audience relationship; others such as, Mimi Ito's "media mix" theory emphasize the active, participatory agency of transmedia audiences. In "Intertextual Enterprises" (2005), Ito uses the term "media mix" to describe *Pokémon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh*'s transmedia approach – one involving television, film, videogames, comic books, and toys:

*Pokémon* created a new kind of citational network that has come to be called a "media mix".... Rather than spoon-feed stabilized narratives and heroes to a supposedly passive audience, *Pokémon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh* invite children to collect, acquire, recombine, and enact stories within their peer networks, trading cards, information, and monsters.... These media mixes challenge our ideas of childhood agency and the passivity of media consumption.<sup>116</sup>

Ito's research points to an industry logic that encourages audiences to actively participate in a broad range of communicative and collaborative behaviors, such as collective problem solving or the reciprocal sharing information, beyond simply consuming media texts. These collective activities foster a sense of community among audiences due to the participatory aspects of consumption transmedia franchises promote.

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<sup>115</sup> Jason Bainbridge, "Fully Articulated: The Rise of the Action Figure and the Changing Face of 'Children's' Entertainment," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (2010): 838-839.

<sup>116</sup> Mimi Ito, "Intertextual Enterprises: Writing Alternative Places and Meanings in the Media Mixed Networks of *Yugioh*," in *E.T. Culture: Anthropology in Outerspaces*, ed. Debora Battaglia (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 184.

In addition to audience-audience participation, transmedia franchises also encourage producer-audience participation through the potentials afforded by new media. Frank Rose (2011) regards transmedia storytelling as “deep media” – a cross-platform participatory and interactive form of narrative.<sup>117</sup> As the name implies, deep media facilitate a more immersive engagement with the text resulting from stories with an expansive scope. Rose contends that deep media transforms the nature of the producer-audience relationship, resulting in an “authorship crisis.”<sup>118</sup> For example, digital technologies, such as Twitter and podcasts, foster a communicative discourse between producers and audiences that differs in both scope and directionality from previous producer-audience communication. The opening of a communicative channel permits audiences to challenge producers when a story is not presented in a cohesive or satisfying fashion, even allowing them to influence the direction of the narrative. This sort of producer-audience communication has profound implications for storytelling, for as Rose argues, “Once the audience is free to... start directing events, the entire edifice of the twentieth-century mass media begins to crumble.”<sup>119</sup> In short, deep media fosters a profound shift in how producers and audiences interact.

While the notions of overflow, screen bleed, media mix, and deep media provide theoretical perspectives regarding transformations to the text-audience, producer-audience, and audience-audience relationships facilitated by transmedia storytelling, more qualitative research is needed to more fully interrogate these concepts. A reception

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<sup>117</sup> Frank Rose, *The Art of Immersion: How the Digital Generation is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the Way We Tell Stories* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 3.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

study of producers and audiences engaged in a transmedia franchise will provide further insights into these transformations.

In *Show Sold Separately*, Jonathan Gray (2010) proposes a new approach – off-screen studies – dedicated to such analysis. Gray examines how synergistic works, such as DVD releases, videogames, internet videos, and toys, create meaning for an audience as well as how these paratexts affect a viewer’s interactive and participatory relationship with a film or television program. For Gray, the proliferation of paratexts necessitates a new type of media analysis. This type of inquiry includes not only textual analysis and audience research but also an area of research he deems “off-screen studies” to make sense of on the abundance of paratextual content in the current media landscape.<sup>120</sup> Off-screen studies, then, reposition paratextual extensions, such as those employed in transmedia storytelling endeavors, as integral aspects of the text-audience relationship. Gray explains further:

To argue... that paratexts contribute to the text and are often vital parts of it is to argue that paratexts can be part of the creative process, and not just marketing “add-ons” and “ancillary products,” as the media industries and academia alike have often regarded them. To ignore paratexts’ textual role is to misunderstand their aesthetic, economic, and socio-cultural roles.<sup>121</sup>

Repositioning paratextual extensions as more than mere promotion is a significant move within Film and Media Studies, because it emphasizes the importance these texts play in the age of media convergence. However, the production and reception of paratexts requires further study into how creators unite videogames, DVDs, alternate reality games,

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<sup>120</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

and other paratextual content into a cohesive whole as well as how audiences process this increasing textual overflow.<sup>122</sup>

### **Media Audiences & Engagement**

Taken as a whole, the body of transmedia literature suggests significant transformations to the natures of the text-audience, producer-audience, and audience-audience relationships. Therefore, the theorization of a new form of engagement that accounts for the broad range of interactive, participatory, and communicative viewing behaviors promoted by this mode of storytelling is needed. As the discussion of the previous literature suggests, the notions of active (and certainly passive) engagement insufficiently address the interactive and participatory qualities of engagement promoted by transmedia storytelling.

This section of the literature review addresses previous models of the spectator, including the “media effects,” “uses and gratifications,” and “encoding/decoding,” in an effort to illustrate the progression of theoretical speculations on the text-audience relationship. Moreover, by highlighting the various eras and media associated with these theories, this section illustrates the need for an approach focusing on transmedia storytelling, in the age of media convergence, which accounts for engagement over multiple media platforms. In short, theoretical speculations on the spectator shift beyond notions of the passive and the active models, and a new model – the interactive and participatory “viewer” – is needed to theorize the new relationship between producers, transmedia texts, and the audience.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 220-221.

The history of media audience studies centers on differing approaches to the nature of the text-audience relationship. An early approach known as the “media effects” or “hypodermic” model sees media as possessing the power to “inject” media messages into audiences, often causing audiences to behave in a particular manner.<sup>123</sup> The most influential scholars advancing this passive approach to the study of media audiences (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944/1999) came out of the Frankfurt School of Social Research in Germany. These scholars saw the mass media, such as film, radio, and print, as playing a role in the breakdown of German society during the 1930s. The “media effects” model regards the audience as a monolith that is passively subject to manipulation or moral decay stemming from the media’s ability to “inject” a repressive ideology into the masses.<sup>124</sup> The weakness of the “media effects” model is that it assumes an almost direct and unmediated link between media producers and the consciousness of the audience. Moreover, the model envisions the audience as a homogenous mass and does not consider the diversity of individual audience members. While media possesses the power to influence audiences, this power is not direct or uniformly powerful; rather, the effects of mass media messages result from a complex interplay of economic, industrial, and cultural factors.<sup>125</sup>

The “uses and gratifications” and “encoding/decoding” models emerged as approaches to the study of media audiences accounting for a more complex text-audience

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<sup>123</sup> Janet Staiger. *Media Reception Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 28-30.

<sup>124</sup> Shaun Moores. *Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption* (London: SAGE, 1993), 5.

<sup>125</sup> Subsequent approaches, such as “screen” theory in the 1970s, advance a passive textual determinism thesis through a focus on the ways in which cinema inscribes subject positions onto audience members.

relationship. Researchers employing the “uses and gratifications” approach (Katz, 1959; Halloran, 1970) study the receivers of media messages as opposed to the messages themselves.<sup>126</sup> In this way, the model emphasizes not “what media do to people” but “what people do with the media.”<sup>127</sup> The shift in focus, then, represents a more active view of the audience – one that stresses the multiplicity of interpretations and responses to media texts. Rather than conceptualizing the audience as a homogenous mass affected by a media message in a similar way, the “uses and gratifications” model points to the possibility of differing interpretations based on individual audience members’ existing beliefs and prior media consumption.<sup>128</sup> However, previous literature (Moore, 1993; Severin and Tankard, 1997) suggests that the “uses and gratifications” approach over-emphasizes viewers’ ability to freely interpret texts without also considering the role of the media message’s ideology.

By 1973, Stuart Hall’s “encoding/decoding” theory (1973) overcame the limitations of the “media effects” and “uses and gratifications” models. Developed at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and informed by semiotic studies (de Saussure, 1959; Barthes, 1972), the “encoding/decoding” model acknowledges the ideological power of media messages as well as the active, meaning-making agency of audience members. In this view, the meaning or interpretation of a media message results from a complex interplay between producers who encode texts with a dominant ideology and audience members who decode the text depending on their socioeconomic

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<sup>126</sup> Janet Staiger. *Media Reception Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 52.

<sup>127</sup> Elihu Katz, “Mass Communications Research and the Study of Popular Culture,” *Studies in Public Communication* 2 (1959): 2.

<sup>128</sup> Janet Staiger. *Media Reception Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 52.

and cultural identities. The process of decoding, then, allows for multiple readings of the text: a dominant reading, a negotiated meaning, and an oppositional reading.<sup>129</sup> Scholars employing the “encoding/decoding” model (Morley, 1980; Radway, 1987) suggest that media texts, then, become sites of struggle in which meaning is fluid rather than fixed. The “encoding/decoding” approach is not without its limitations, though. “Television and other texts do not necessarily reproduce dominant ideology in any coherent sense,” Janet Staiger contends, “so determining a preferred meaning is difficult.”<sup>130</sup> The implementation of a transmedia approach to storytelling in which multiple texts connect, compete, and even contradict each other complicates the determination of a preferred or dominant interpretation resulting from a polysemic approach to storytelling. Further, the “encoding/decoding” model focuses largely on televisual texts and does not account for the complexities of the interactive, new media producer-text-audience relationship. The active approaches to the study of media audiences need to be expanded in order to explain how meaning is constructed when the viewer interactively engages with transmedia texts and participates in a range of activities with other audience members and media producers.

The notion of the viewser conceptualizes the interactive text-audience relationship through an emphasis on the audience’s ability to affect the outcome of an interactive new media experience. Early uses of the term viewser – a portmanteau of “viewer” and “computer user” – describe the activity-blending experience of watching/playing

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<sup>129</sup> Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, edited by Douglas Kellner and Meenakshi Gigi (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 174-176.

<sup>130</sup> Janet Staiger. *Media Reception Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 83.

interactive movies,<sup>131</sup> such as *The Vortex* and *The Vortex: Quantum Gate II*, on a computer.<sup>132</sup> Dan Harries more fully develops the term in the context of contemporary new media use in his article “Watching the Internet” (2002). Harries describes a convergence in the ways in which audiences watch internet content and computer users interact with digital technology. Whereas streaming an online movie aligns more closely with notions of viewing associated with film and television, new media use often involves “computer-oriented” activities, such as clicking on hyperlinks, controlling a videogame character, and exploring a website or videogame world.<sup>133</sup> However, media convergence promotes a hybrid form of engagement in which the qualities of “viewing” and “computer use” merge. This blended form of engagement involves watching media content as well as tactile, computer-based activities, including searching websites for hidden clues, solving complex puzzles, and playing interactive games, that affect the form of the media experience. Viewsing, then, describes a text-audience relationship in which a viewer has the ability to influence a developing narrative through interactive behaviors.<sup>134</sup> For instance, the increasing use of alternate reality games, such as *The Beast* (2001) and *I Love Bees* (2004), to both promote and expand media franchises differs significantly from the process of viewing traditional forms of media in that alternate reality games allow the viewer to control the experience, outcome, and sequence of events.

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<sup>131</sup> Also referred to as full-motion videogames, interactive movies blend the puzzle-solving, exploratory gameplay of videogames with cinematic writing, acting, and photography.

<sup>132</sup> Greg Roach, “Into the Vortex,” *New Scientist*, September 23, 1995.

<sup>133</sup> Dan Harries, “Watching the Internet,” in *The New Media Book*, ed. Dan Harries (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), 172.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-178.

In *The Language of New Media* (2001), Lev Manovich sees such self-determined, interactive media experiences as altering traditional notions of narrative and description that accompany older media forms. In contrast to filmic or novelistic storytelling in which a creator narrates and describes a story to an audience, new media storytelling promotes the performance of narrative actions and acts of exploration.<sup>135</sup> Performing narrative actions, such as controlling a videogame character, searching for an obscure online video, or scouring a paratextual website for hidden clues, allows the viewer to progress through the narrative. If the user or player does not perform narrative acts, the story does not progress. This is a significant shift from the experience of film, television, and print media.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, new media provide an opportunity for users and players to explore a digital environment. As the previous research suggests (Jenkins, 2006b; Ford, 2007; Perryman 2008; Gray, 2010) producers increasingly incorporate alternate reality games, videogames, internet videos, and paratextual websites to expand the boundaries of film and television texts. A consideration of narrative actions and exploration, therefore, helps to better conceptualize the experience of the viewer of interactive and digital media by foregrounding the role these individuals have in advancing the narrative. Rather than having the story told to them, viewers now tell the story to themselves.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 247.

<sup>136</sup> While a viewer or reader could certainly stop watching or reading a media text and thereby halt the narrative, digital media represent a qualitative shift towards a more participatory and interactive engagement.

<sup>137</sup> Jane McGonigal, "Why *I Love Bees*: A Case Study in Collective Intelligence Gaming," in *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, ed. Katie Salen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 202

Anna Everett links the tactile qualities associated with the production and reception of new media narratives with an emerging “click fetish” in contemporary culture in “Digitextuality and Click Theory: Theses on Convergence Media in the Digital Age” (2003). Digital and new media texts are now capable of simultaneously engaging our senses of sight, sound, and touch through screen and computer technologies, including the keyboard, mouse, touch screen, and videogame controller, in a way that qualitatively differs from one’s experience with traditional media texts.<sup>138</sup> Everett links the lure of “sensory plenitude” associated with the merging of tactile and visual sensations resulting from “any one of several clicking apparatuses” to a shift in how audiences use media.<sup>139</sup> In this view, the sensory engagement offered by the new media text-audience relationship results in a fundamental hyper-attentiveness. In fact, Everett argues that the multitasking opportunities promoted by digital technologies actually challenge existing spectatorship theories<sup>140</sup>

Though previous literature on the new media text-audience relationship (Manovich, 2001; Harries, 2002; Everett, 2003) provides an important conceptual framework with which this dissertation approach transmedia audiences, little extant research focuses on viewings in relation to a transmedia narrative. An understanding of viewings needs to account for the range of interactive and participatory activities promoted by producers of transmedia storytelling franchises as well as how audiences comprehend interactive media and activities within a transmedia story. Therefore, in

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<sup>138</sup> Anna Everett, “Digitextuality and Click Theory: Theses on Convergence Media in the Digital Age,” in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, ed. Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2003), 16.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

addition to using viewings to describe the hybrid qualities of new media use, this dissertation expands the concept to represent the broad range of interactive, participatory, and communicative engagement opportunities available to producers and audiences of transmedia storytelling franchises. Looking at viewings in this way allows this study to explore the complexities of transmedia engagement in the context of industrial, technological, and cultural transformations.

### **Participatory Culture**

The notion of participatory culture is central to the concept of the viewer, as viewing is a participatory act. This section of the literature review examines participatory culture in order to underscore transformations occurring to the producer-audience relationship. Participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992; Jenkins, 2006a; Burgess & Green, 2009) is a concept describing a range of socio-cultural activities surrounding media discourses “in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content.”<sup>141</sup> Examples of this participation are evident in the cultures surrounding alternate reality games (Dena, 2008), “vidding” (Coppa, 2008),<sup>142</sup> and fan fiction (Stein, 2006) in which individuals create, share, and discuss media. Repositioning fans as productive, communicative participants is a significant shift – one that transforms the once rigid producer/consumer binary. According to Jenkins, producers and consumers are now “participants who interact with each other

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<sup>141</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 290.

<sup>142</sup> Vidding is the process of creating music videos by pairing music with a collection of clips from television programs or films.

according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands.”<sup>143</sup> In short, participatory cultures shift the producer-audience relationship in ways that need to be explored further.

Yet, whereas previous scholarship (Lister et al., 2003; Jenkins 2006a; Bruns, 2008) often forwards an optimism regarding the utopian possibilities and democratic potentials offered by audience participation and new media technologies, others (Burgess Green, 2009; Enli, 2008) view participatory culture as far more uncertain and complex with regards the producer-audience and audience-audience relationships. In *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (2009), Burgess and Green reject a view of participatory culture as a straightforward “shift in the power relations between media industries and their consumers,” pointing to a more complex process.<sup>144</sup> Rather than simply regarding consumption as a negative and production as a positive, the varied uses of *YouTube* by media industries and audiences suggest processes at work that challenge notions of communication, economics, and authority. For instance, although *YouTube* provides a platform for ordinary citizens to communicate, share original content, and contribute to media discourses, this participation requires technological and cultural competencies as well as the ample free time to focus on these activities.<sup>145</sup> As a result, participation in *YouTube*’s online culture privileges a certain type of (technologically and culturally sophisticated) user. Moreover, participation is time-consuming, thus those users with more leisure time possess the ability to participate at greater levels. These

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<sup>143</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>144</sup> Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 10.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

issues complicate the optimism often surrounding academic accounts of participatory culture, thereby illustrating “that in practice the economic and cultural arrangements that ‘participatory culture’ stands for are as disruptive and uncomfortable as they might be potentially liberating.”<sup>146</sup> Burgess and Green’s scholarship highlights the presence of a “participatory gap” whereby individuals lacking the extended access and technological proficiency necessary for participation in an increasingly digital culture.<sup>147</sup>

In the same way that Burgess and Green position participation as a potentially disruptive process, Gunn Sara Enli views participatory strategies less as utopian means for audience empowerment and more as a way for media producers to further their economic motives. In “Redefining Public Service Broadcasting” (2008), Enli argues that the implementation of a multi-platform approach to audience participation involving interactive websites, telephone polls, and games affords television broadcasters the prospect of continued relevance in an increasingly competitive market. Therefore, participatory strategies involving interactivity between producers and viewers are “more than... strateg[ies] for connecting with their audience and gaining legitimacy; [they are] also closely connected to the institutional aim to expand [broadcasters’] activities to digital media platforms.”<sup>148</sup> An increased presence on new media and telecommunications platforms provides broadcasters with the opportunity to reach new markets, thereby increasing their revenue-making potentials. Moreover, encouraging

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>147</sup> Henry Jenkins briefly discusses the notion of a “participation gap,” arguing that concerns about a digital divide in contemporary culture now shift to concerns about participants and non-participants (2006b: 258).

<sup>148</sup> Gunn Sara Enli, “Redefining Public Service Broadcasting: Multi-Platform Participation.” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 111.

audience participation also allows public service broadcasters the ability to create new revenue streams through sponsorship and merchandizing. In this way, broadcasters utilize a rhetoric of “technological optimism” – the belief that new technologies will provide greater opportunities for audiences to participate in media discourses – to mask the economic motives behind their use of a participatory approach.<sup>149</sup>

Thus, television producers exploit the promise of audience participation in order to increase revenue and relevance in an increasingly competitive and fragmented televisual landscape. In this way, the notion of participatory culture and communicative processes between producers and audiences becomes problematized. While presenting increased opportunities for audiences to participate in media discourses, such participation stems not from utopian desires to erase the distinctions between producers and consumers. Rather, the implementation of participatory strategies largely satisfies the economic desires of media producers.

The notion of technology is central to contemporary notions of participatory culture. While participatory cultures existed before new media, the rise of the Internet and digital technologies significantly influenced participatory cultures.<sup>150</sup> The increased access to information and the means of production and distribution, the rise of collaborative online communities, and the ability to easily and rapidly share digital content challenges the previous models of production and consumption.<sup>151</sup> In addition to

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>150</sup> Robert Darnton (2009) and Paula Petrik (1992) examine pre-digital participatory cultures, focusing on reader-author communication between Jean-Jacques Rousseau and readers of his novels in the 1700s and adolescent-produced newspapers in the United States, during the 1870s and 1880s, respectively.

<sup>151</sup> Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: Production to Produsage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 13.

affecting the productive and communicative capabilities of fans, digital and communications technologies foster what Pierre Lévy terms “collective intelligence” or the collaborative sharing of knowledge. Collective intelligence – a notion alternately conceptualized as “crowdsourcing” (Brabham, 2008; Howe, 2008) and the “wisdom of crowds” (Surowiecki, 2004) – describes the ways in which digitally connected individuals contribute information to an online group in an effort to accomplish a given objective or achieve a greater understanding of a given topic. For Lévy, this collaboration consists of “the synergy of skills, resources, and projects, the constitution and dynamic maintenance of shared memories, the activation of flexible and nonhierarchical modes of cooperation, [and] the coordinated distribution of decision centers.”<sup>152</sup> However, while Lévy emphasizes the emancipatory potentials of collective intelligence to combat technology’s exclusionary effects, he neglects to acknowledge the possibility of adversarial relationships, including factional divides, power struggles, and exclusionary behavior, within participatory cultures.

As this review illustrates, the majority of participatory culture research centers on participatory fans (Jenkins, 1992; Jenkins, 2006a; Stein, 2006; Coppa, 2008), leaving the participatory producer largely unexamined. Although production-oriented scholarship exists (Deuze, 2007; Enli, 2008; Caldwell, 2008), transmedia storytelling is largely outside the scope of these studies. Examining transmedia producers allows for additional insights into how producers foster participatory cultures through the implementation of podcasts, telephone numbers, websites, and even real-world locations. This is not to suggest that participatory fans are unimportant. In particular, transmedia fans are a

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<sup>152</sup> Pierre Lévy, *Cyberculture*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 10.

particularly significant group of fans because their participation spans media platforms and the real world. However, studies focusing on transmedia participatory fan cultures (Dena, 2008; McGonigal, 2008) do not examine participation surrounding a serialized television-based transmedia narrative transpiring over multiple years. Examining *Lost*'s transmedia participatory fan culture allows this study to explore the interplay between producers and fans in relation a cross-platform narrative unfolding over five years. This focus allows for greater insights into the producer-audience and audience-audience relationships.

## **Fandom**

Media fandom provides a way to explore transformations to the text-audience, producer-audience, and audience-audience relationships facilitated by transmedia storytelling. As such, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on fandom. Before placing this dissertation in the existing body of fan studies, however, it is necessary to first explicate the notion of the fan.

Lawrence Grossberg (1992) defines fandom in relation to a “sensibility” or “affect” that forms a sort of emotional connection between the cultural text and the fan.<sup>153</sup> While Grossberg’s argument allows for a consideration of how such a sensibility helps fans to articulate a sense of individual and collective identity, the notion of fandom as a sensibility does not adequately represent the complexities of transmedia fandom. For instance, a casual viewer of *Lost* – one who only watches the television series – and a fan

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<sup>153</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, “Is There a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom,” in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. by Lisa A. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992), 54.

who searches out the paratexts constituting *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling franchise both share an emotional investment in the text. How, then, does one differentiate between transmedia and casual fandoms? Henry Jenkins (1988) offers a useful model that regards fandom as a set of practices extending beyond viewing media texts. For Jenkins, a person is a fan:

not by being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some type of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program with friends, by joining a community of other fans who share common interests.<sup>154</sup>

Thus, for the purposes of differentiating between transmedia and casual fans, we must look at fan behaviors.

John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins (1995) distinguish between two categories of media consumers: followers and fans. Whereas followers repeatedly consume media texts, fans engage in a range of cultural practices extending beyond their media consumption.<sup>155</sup> In other words, followers watch a television series but rarely engage in practices outside that level of initial consumption. The consumption practices of fans, on the other hand, extend beyond watching media texts into a range of cultural activities, including communication with other fans and producers, participation in fan communities, and the production of their own texts, such as podcasts, songs, and fiction.

Furthermore, Nick Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998) conceptualize fandom on a continuum ranging from "the fan," "the cultist," and "the enthusiast," a spectrum in which factors of social organization and textual productivity separate the

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<sup>154</sup> Henry Jenkins, "Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 5, no. 2 (1988): 88.

<sup>155</sup> John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 23.

categories.<sup>156</sup> Although existing literature (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995; Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998) provides a solid foundation for conceptualizing fandom, scholars are in opposition to the use of terminology commonly used by the fans and producers studied in this research. Frequently, fans and producers differentiate between “hardcore fans” and “casual fans” in a way that is similar to Tulloch and Jenkins’ notions of fans and followers, respectively.<sup>157</sup> Thus, drawing on previous scholarship as well as the popular usage of terminology by fans and producers, this dissertation regards “hardcore fandom” as the consumption of a centralized anchor text and multiple paratextual extensions as well as participation in a range of related activities springing from an emotional investment in a storyworld. In contrast, “casual fandom” is the emotionally charged consumption of a centralized media text in a transmedia franchise. For example, hardcore *Lost* fans may watch television episodes of *Lost*, search out online videos, play the *Lost: Via Domus* videogame, and purchase ancillary products, such as the *Lost: Mystery of the Island* jigsaw puzzles and *Lost* action figures. In addition, hardcore fans participate in *Lost*’s alternate reality games, listen and contribute to *Lost* podcasts, and attend group gatherings, including the *Lost* Comic-Con panel and *Lost* viewing parties. In contrast, casual *Lost* fans’ media consumption does not extend beyond the consumption of a singular text; nor does this consumption lead to participation in a related (online or offline) group.

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<sup>156</sup> Nick Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998), 132-139.

<sup>157</sup> The fans alluded to here are those participating in *The Transmission* and *The Official Lost Podcast* fan cultures. I discuss these fan cultures in greater detail in the “Methods” section of this chapter.

As this dissertation focuses on contemporary industrial, technological, and cultural shifts occurring in relation to transmedia storytelling, it contributes to the third wave of fan studies. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (2007) identify three waves of fandom research. The first wave of fan studies, inspired by Michel de Certeau (1984) and John Fiske's (1992) work, focuses on fandom as a form of resistance to the dominant culture.<sup>158</sup> Whereas producers of popular culture wield power, fandom constitutes an act of ideological rejection on the part of the disempowered. Thus, for academics working within this tradition (Radway 1987; Jenkins 1992; Barker 1993), fan studies "constituted a purposeful political intervention that sided with the tactics of fan audiences in their evasion of dominant ideologies, and that set out to rigorously defend fan communities against their ridicule in the mass media and by non-fans."<sup>159</sup> In contrast to the dominant view of fans and fandom at the time, the first wave of fan scholars attempted to reposition fandom as a positive practice. Furthermore, the first wave of fan studies presumed the power structure between fans and producers in rather simplistic terms: producers possess power and fans do not.<sup>160</sup> For instance, Jenkins' analysis of *Star Trek* fans' creation of "slash" fan-fiction (1992) – a genre of fan writing depicting homosexual relationships between two heterosexual characters – highlights how fans break with the ideological norms conveyed in a media text.<sup>161</sup> This scholarship

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<sup>158</sup> Jonathan Gray et al., "Why Study Fans?," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray et al. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 2

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 154.

<sup>161</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 186-191.

sees fandom as an attempt to wrestle power away from media producers by voicing issues of gender and sexual identity otherwise unexplored in media discourses.

Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's sociological research (1984), the second wave of fan studies (Dell 1998; Harris 1998; Jancovich 2002) posits that existing hierarchies of social and cultural power manifest themselves in fan cultures. Rather than seeing fandom as a tool of empowerment, these studies underscore how organized fandom often perpetuates existing social hierarchies, thereby preserving existing power structures within society.<sup>162</sup> In other words, according to this tradition, rather than functioning as a site of resistance or subversion against existing power structures and social hierarchies, fandom actually preserves such hierarchies and inequalities in fan subcultures. For example, Mark Jancovich and Nathan Hunt's (2004) work on subcultures of cult television fans highlights the rejection and ridicule of mainstream culture fandom in a way that reinforces an insider/outsider power structure. Moreover, fans of *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek* also direct such opposition inward toward other fans deemed to be overly obsessive and socially ill-equipped.<sup>163</sup>

Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007) see their work as contributing to the third wave of fan studies – the focus of which shifts from fan communities and subcultures to “the increasing entrenchment of fan consumption in the structure of our everyday life.”<sup>164</sup> The focus of the third wave of fan studies extends beyond notions of power and class to

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<sup>162</sup> Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 156.

<sup>163</sup> Mark Jancovich and Nathan Hunt, “The Mainstream, Distinction, and Cult TV,” in *Cult Television*, ed. Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 31-33.

<sup>164</sup> Jonathan Gray et al., “Why Study Fans?,” in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray et al. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 8.

considerations of contemporary social, cultural, and economic transformations. Such work (Brooker 2002; Hills 2002; Sandvoss 2005) repositions fandom from that of a fringe, marginalized practice to an integral aspect of modern life. “[I]t is precisely *because* fan consumption has grown into a taken-for-granted aspect of modern communication and consumption,” Gray et al. contend, “that it warrants critical analysis and investigation more than ever.”<sup>165</sup> For example, in her study of tabletop role-playing games, Jennifer Grouling Cover (2010) displays the ways in which “mainstream culture is becoming participatory.”<sup>166</sup> Moreover, as media conglomerates and producers increasingly make use of transmedia approaches to storytelling, the experiences of fans participating in this storytelling mode represent a valuable contingent of early adopters – one whose activities and response shed light on an increasingly prevalent mode of engagement. As Joshua Green and Henry Jenkins (2009) observe, “[F]ans have been redefined as the drivers of wealth production within the new digital economy: their engagement and participation is actively being pursued.”<sup>167</sup> Finally, as previous literature indicates (Hanson 2004; Ito, 2005; Jenkins 2006b; Gray 2008; Gray 2010; Rose, 2011) transmedia narratives and paratextual expansions are increasingly becoming part of the contemporary media landscape. Therefore, a critical examination of transmedia fan

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>166</sup> Jennifer Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010), 156.

<sup>167</sup> Joshua Green and Henry Jenkins, “The Moral Economy of Web 2.0: Audience Research and Convergence Culture,” in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 213.

audiences “tell[s] us something about the way in which... we read the mediated texts that constitute an ever larger part of our horizon of experience.”<sup>168</sup>

## *Lost*

The ABC television series *Lost* offers scholars a particularly attractive text to study. The television series became a global hit, garnered critical praise and industry awards, and innovatively expanded into a transmedia franchise.<sup>169</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that a body of literature focuses on its production and reception. As the review of the *Lost* research will indicate, previous scholarship focuses on isolated seasons or transmedia paratexts. This dissertation analyzes *Lost*’s transmedia franchise, including the television series, an alternate reality game, a novel, mobisodes, and online videos, and therefore, significantly contributes to the body of *Lost* literature by providing a comprehensive examination of its transmedia production and reception.

Jonathan Gray and Jason Mittell examine the reception of *Lost* through an online qualitative survey, focusing specifically on the practice of “spoiling” in “Speculation on Spoilers: *Lost* Fandom, Narrative Consumption, and Rethinking Textuality” (2007).<sup>170</sup> Spoiling *Lost* by revealing “yet-to-unfold narrative developments” is a form of “cultural participation and engagement” by which fans derive pleasure by engaging in an

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<sup>168</sup> Jonathan Gray et al., “Why Study Fans?” in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray et al. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 10.

<sup>169</sup> Jason Mittell, “*Lost* in a Great Story: Evaluation in Narrative Television (and Television Studies),” in *Reading Lost: Perspectives on a Hit Television Show*, ed. Roberta Pearson (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 119.

<sup>170</sup> Gray and Mittell posted the survey in several online discussion boards the week before the finale of *Lost*’s second season. Their study focuses on fan practices taking place in the first two years of the television series.

alternative viewing practice.<sup>171</sup> Whereas previous studies of spoilers (Jenkins 2006b) see spoiling as a sort of game in which spoiler fans attempt to ruin a narrative by revealing secret production details, Gray and Mittell view *Lost* spoiling in different terms. Fans engaged in this practice see *Lost* spoilers, such as leaked television scripts, casting information for upcoming episodes, and word-of-mouth from individuals in Hawaii, as ways to further their understanding of *Lost*'s narrative storyworld. Gray and Mittell therefore position spoiling not as a "misreading" of the text but as one of many potential reading strategies offered by "hyperdiegetic" or expansive and interconnected texts.<sup>172</sup> In other words, spoilers are part of a network of paratexts that also includes those officially sanctioned by ABC and *Lost*'s producers. Positioning textuality in this way is an important move because it regards paratexts as an integral part of the text as opposed to simply ancillary extensions. While acknowledging that official transmedia texts are part of this interconnected web, a critical examination of the relationship between *Lost*'s television series and transmedia texts is outside the scope of Gray and Mittell's study. This dissertation explores this issue, analyzing the ways in which transmedia franchises shift notions of textuality from notions of a singular, unified text to a boundary-blurring, disruptive, and potentially contradictory array of interconnected texts.

In "The Fictional Institutions of *Lost*: World Building, Reality, and the Economic Possibilities of Narrative Divergence" (2009), Derek Johnson explores the concept of transmedia textuality through an examination of the fictional institutions populating *Lost*'s storyworld. *Lost*'s transmedia franchise builds a fictional universe or world from

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<sup>171</sup> Jonathan Gray and Jason Mittell, "Speculation on Spoilers: *Lost* Fandom, Narrative Consumption and Rethinking Textuality," *Particip@tions* 4, no. 1 (2007).

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

the “aggregate interrelationships and narrative structures” of television episodes and an array of media platforms.<sup>173</sup> The ubiquitous nature of the fictional institutions within *Lost*’s transmedia world, such as the Hanso Foundation or the Dharma Initiative, further facilitates this “world building.” Referenced in the television series, *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game, and even talk show appearances by an actor in character, *Lost*’s fictional institutions helped *Lost*’s producers create an elaborate narrative world. Importantly, in addition to creating a vast narrative space, Johnson emphasizes the economic potentials of transmedia world-building. Although television series, such as *24*, *Arrested Development*, and *The Office* also incorporated fictional institutions into their narratives, *Lost*’s diegetic institutions overlapped with actual, corporate institutions, “a capacity that gives the fictional institutional-building project of *Lost* greater economic viability in the current television market.”<sup>174</sup> For instance, ABC integrated product placement and corporate advertisers’ websites into *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game.<sup>175</sup> Thus, Johnson links world-building with economics, illustrating the ways in which the interplay between fictional institutions and real-world corporations can provide television networks with new business models.

Although Johnson emphasizes the revenue-generating potentials of *The Lost Experience*, his analysis does not consider the production or reception of the game; focusing instead on the integration of corporate advertisers into the game. This dissertation critically examines the production and reception of *The Lost Experience*,

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<sup>173</sup> Derek Johnson, “The Fictional Institutions of *Lost*: World Building and the Economic Possibilities of Narrative Divergence,” in *Reading Lost: Perspectives on a Hit Television Show*, ed. Roberta Pearson (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 35.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>175</sup> Chapter two focuses on *The Lost Experience*.

through an interview with one of the creators, Javier Grillo-Marxuach, an examination of statements made by *Lost*'s executive producers, Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, and an analysis of player responses. This focus allows for a deeper understanding of changing industrial models as well as the reception of new media experiences, like *The Lost Experience*.

Roberta Pearson explores the industrial conditions facilitating changing business models in “*Lost in Transition: From Post-Network to Post-Television*” (2007). Media convergence and audience fragmentation result in new industrial logics, Pearson argues, in which “[r]ather than seeking long-term synergies, media industries now seek hot properties, which enable the extraction of maximum profits in minimum time through simultaneous distribution across multiple platforms.”<sup>176</sup> *Lost* is a particularly potent example of this shifting logic. ABC distributed *Lost* content across numerous platforms, using websites, mobisodes, and original online content to expand the narrative universe and increase profits. While acknowledging that “new modes of distribution and narrative have profound implications for audience reception in the post-television age,” Pearson does not address the ways in which *Lost* audiences engage with these transmedia texts.<sup>177</sup>

Moreover, the increasing number of channels in the post-network era simultaneously lessens the power of network brands while privileging the brand of the creators and executive producers.<sup>178</sup> “The attribution of authorship to the executive producer,” Pearson argues, “has been one of the most striking aspects of [the] post

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<sup>176</sup> Roberta Pearson, “*Lost in Transition: From Post-Network to Post-Television*,” in *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 252.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>178</sup> Chapter three examines shifts occurring within the post-network era.

network era.”<sup>179</sup> Although the names of executive producers, such as Norman Lear, Steven Bochco, and Aaron Spelling, were signifiers of quality before the start of the post-network era, the increasingly communicative producer-audience relationship, in the post-network era, does place significant emphasis on the brand of television producers. Lindelof and Cuse’s hosting of *The Official Lost Podcast*, for example, emphasizes their role as creators, reinforcing their significance above the network. While Pearson points to the changing roles, she does not explore the significance of this shift to the producer-audience relationship. This dissertation examines the changing roles of the television producer and audience in relation to the complex industrial transformations in the post-network era.

Whereas prior studies were written during the production of the series, Joanna Morreale’s “*Lost, The Prisoner, and the End of the Story*” (2010) centers on the conclusion to *Lost*’s six-year serialized narrative. Morreale examines the storytelling strategies implemented by *Lost*’s producers throughout its broadcast in an effort to explore how the series ultimately balanced the open-ended storytelling characteristic of serialized television with the sense of narrative closure provided by a series finale. While noting that *Lost* is a “transmedia experiment,” Morreale neglects *Lost*’s transmedia epilogue, *The New Man in Charge*, in her analysis.<sup>180</sup> Released as part of the *Lost: The Complete Collection* DVDs, *The New Man in Charge*, takes place after the events of *Lost*’s series finale, “The End,” and addresses some of the transmedia franchise’s many unresolved storylines. Releasing original content that functions as an epilogue, after the

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>180</sup> Joanne Morreale, “*Lost, The Prisoner, and the End of the Story*,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 38 (2010): 184.

conclusion of a television series, is an innovative strategy and is therefore deserving of closer scrutiny.

## **Chapter Breakdown**

This chapter serves as a general introduction to the dissertation as well as an overview of the methodology employed in the study and review of the relevant literature. Chapter Two focuses on the transmedia text-audience relationship through a critical examination of *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game. Alternate reality games – an interactive, internet-based, mystery gaming experiences – merit analysis because their implementation and increasing popularity coincides with significant shifts in promotional strategies, interactive and immersive media, and audience engagement. *Lost*'s producers used *The Lost Experience* as a way to both promote the television series and expand its narrative universe, distributing narrative elements across digital and analog media platforms and even extending the game into the spaces of everyday life. As such, *The Lost Experience* prolonged audience engagement by fostering an interactive agency and a playful immersion in a transmedia storyworld. An examination of the responses from the creators and participants of *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game illustrates how transmedia storytelling franchises encourage – and even necessitate – viewings.

Chapter Three centers on the transmedia producer-audience relationship through an analysis of *Lost* producers' use of podcasts and online video as engagement strategies. By fostering the creation of a participatory culture, these viewings engagement strategies cultivated a fan base and maintained audience engagement during the television series' hiatus periods. Yet, Lindelof and Cuse's validation of fan feedback on *The Official Lost Podcast* fostered notions of fan agency in *Lost*'s television series, prompting fans to voice criticisms. Frequently, this discontent centered on the notion of canon formation.

Although Lindelof and Cuse established a strict canonical/non-canonical binary, their subsequent use of original, online video – the so-called Comic-Con videos – problematized this binary as a result of a paratext’s shifting canonical value. In this way, transmedia franchises challenge normative understandings of canon formation. Instead of the traditional canonical/non-canonical binary, *Lost*’s transmedia franchise displays a fluid, circular model of canon in which different levels of canonicity exist, with paratexts moving in and out of the centralized anchor text’s porous canonical boundary. Among *Lost*’s viewers the inconsistencies present in *Lost*’s transmedia narrative fostered feelings of being exploited or duped by the producers. Transmedia franchises, thus, become sites of struggle for control over meaning between producers and fans in which tensions surrounding canon formation reflect notions of trust in the producer-audience relationship.

Chapter Four focuses on the transmedia audience-audience relationship through a critical examination of factional antagonism within the fan cultures of *The Transmission* and *The Official Lost Podcast*. *Lost* producers’ use of interactive paratexts, such as alternate reality games and online videos, encouraged a segment of the *Lost* audience – the viewers – to become highly engaged with its transmedia storyworld. Yet, the creation of this avid following promoted external tensions as *The Transmission*’s viewers positioned themselves in opposition to the mainstream television audience. In addition to this mainstream/viewer divide, *Lost*’s transmedia storytelling franchise problematized relationships within *The Transmission*’s viewing audience by blurring generic boundaries through the incorporation of an abundance of narratively complex paratexts. *Lost*’s expansive narrative scope confused issues of generic classification,

resulting in seemingly contradictory expectations and narrative pleasures between two fan groups, shippers and mythologists. Thus, while transmedia storytelling franchises encourage viewings, this mode of engagement also fosters external and internal clashes as viewers position themselves in opposition to both the mainstream audience as well as to other viewers.

In the Conclusion, I summarize the findings of my research, detail the contribution this dissertation makes to the field of Film and Media Studies, and present recommendations for further research by touching on the reception of the final episode of *Lost*'s television series as well as the transmedia epilogue *The New Man in Charge*. These two texts provide an ideal way of reflecting on the reconfiguration of the text-audience, producer-audience, and audience-audience relationships examined throughout the dissertation. Moreover, by examining *The New Man in Charge*, this dissertation provides a full picture of *Lost*'s transmedia franchise.

## Chapter 2 – “Breaking into The Real World”: The Transmedia Text-Audience Relationship

This chapter analyzes a series of industrial, technological, and cultural transformations in contemporary media in order to highlight the shifting text-audience relationship fostered by alternate reality game storytelling. The emergence of alternate reality games – interactive, internet-based, mystery gaming experiences – coincides with significant developments in promotional strategies, interactive and immersive media, and audience engagement within the media industries. These shifts foster a new mode of engagement – viewsing – characterized by interactive, participatory, and communicative multi-platform media use. Alternate reality games are unique media experiences immersing players in a transmedia, boundary-blurring narrative text that even extends into real-world spaces. In addition, alternate reality games facilitate an interactive text-audience agency through a range of puzzle-solving, clue-seeking, and communicative activities. In short, the immersive and interactive qualities of alternate reality game storytelling allow for a playful immersion in a fictional storyworld that actually obscures the artifice of its creation. An examination of the responses from the creators and participants of one such alternate reality game, *The Lost Experience*, illustrates how these qualities encourage – and even necessitate – viewsing.<sup>1</sup>

An increasingly popular form of transmedia storytelling, an alternate reality game (ARG) is an interactive narrative game in which players work (often together) to solve

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<sup>1</sup> The selection of *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game is based on the quantity and quality of conversation it generated on *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*. Such conversations occurred with greater frequency and intensity than all the other alternate reality games created by the producers of *Lost* during the franchise’s six-year run.

puzzles and uncover clues spread across multiple media platforms, thereby advancing the story.<sup>2</sup> In addition to utilizing television and print media platforms, a player's participation in an ARG relies on the use of "so-called real world media, such as email, fax, SMS, and websites."<sup>3</sup> Although these narratives cross media platforms, the game creators frequently use the Internet as a centralizing medium or hub uniting the narrative threads spread out across other media. In fact, Dave Szulborski argues that ARGs are "one of the first true art and entertainment forms developed from and exclusively for the Internet."<sup>4</sup> ARGs exemplify transmedia storytelling because these experiences distribute pivotal story information across an array of media texts, including television shows and commercials, newspapers, websites, and even live appearances. In order to both play the game and fully comprehend the story, participants must search out these texts.

Although ARGs are gaming experiences, they are notably distinct from video and computer games in several ways. First, a participant's involvement in an ARG advances a fictional story that – unlike most video and computer games – is presented as if it is real or true. ARGs utilize a number of techniques, such as staging live events with professional actors portraying characters, to reinforce the realism of the "story-game."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, since ARGs do not readily present themselves as games, the creators rarely convey the rules or object of the game to the participants. Second, the advancement of

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<sup>2</sup> Christy Dena, "Emerging Participatory Culture Practices: Player-Created Tiers in Alternate Reality Games," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 42

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. SMS (Short Message Service) is a means of sending text messages to and from cellular phones

<sup>4</sup> Dave Szulborski, *This is Not a Game: A Guide to Alternate Reality Gaming* (New York: New-Fiction, 2005), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Handler Miller, *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment* (New York: Focal Press, 2008), 288-289.

the interactive narrative relies on players finding clues scattered in a variety of real-world and mediated environments, including billboards, printed materials, websites, television programs, as well as telephone and text messages. Since no one player is expected to locate all the clues and because the rules of the game often are not specified, solving the game by reaching the end of the interactive narrative depends on participants' collaborative efforts.<sup>6</sup> Finally, ARGs do not require special software nor does participation in most ARGs require a fee of any sort. As such, media marketing agencies and promotional departments often create or co-opt ARGs for the express purpose of increasing awareness of new products, subtly linking gameplay to commerce and promotion.

Originally conceived by the executive vice president for ABC Entertainment, Mike Benson, *The Lost Experience* was a collaboration between writers Javier Grillo-Marxuach and Jordan Rosenberg and the London-based design firm High-Res!, with executive producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse overseeing the project.<sup>7</sup> Grillo-Marxuach, a supervising producer and writer on *Lost* during the television series' first two seasons, and Rosenberg, an ABC Fellow, created *The Lost Experience*'s narrative content and interactive, puzzle elements, and High-Res!, in turn, produced the corresponding web content.<sup>8</sup> However, it is important to note that although Grillo-Marxuach and Rosenberg were *The Lost Experience*'s "puppet masters" or game

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> The ABC Writing Program is one in which "young, talented, up-and-coming" writers receive television writing training in order to prepare them for television staff writing positions (Grillo-Marxuach, interview).

designers, they were not foregrounded as the creators.<sup>9</sup> ARGs are unique gaming experience in that they do not appear to be games at all. As such, it was not readily apparent who authored *The Lost Experience* (or that it was even an authored experience in the conventional sense).

From its inception, ABC and the creative team behind *The Lost Experience* saw the ARG as a way to innovatively promote the television series, generate advertising revenue, and prolong the audience's engagement with the text. As Grillo-Marxuach explains:

We had tried doing tie-in books for *Lost*.... [However], generating alternate content, like tie-in books and stuff like that... *just wasn't a particularly interesting way of marketing the show*.... When you have an audience that's willing to do... [elaborate] work, why not reward them with something that is innovative and plays to that strength and *keeps the buzz going on the show*?<sup>10</sup>

In addition to promoting *Lost*, from the beginning, Benson envisioned *The Lost Experience* as a way to generate “lots of advertising” revenue by incorporating the products and websites of advertising sponsors, such as Sprite, Verizon, Monster.com, and Dodge, into the game.<sup>11</sup> Finally, ABC and *Lost*'s creative team saw *The Lost Experience* as a way to extend the audience's engagement with *Lost*'s storyworld through immersive and interactive storytelling strategies. “We found ourselves at the unique intersection of transmedia storytelling becoming [popular] and having a highly energized, highly intelligent, highly tech-savvy community,” Grillo-Marxuach points out, “and it just

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<sup>9</sup> Jane McGonigal, “The Puppet Master Problem: Design for Real-World, Mission-Based Gaming,” in *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media*, ed. Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 252.

<sup>10</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011; emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

made a lot of sense.... We had a very obsessive, tech-savvy fan base that liked... this sort of interaction with the series.”<sup>12</sup> While clearly originating from market concerns associated with advertising and promotion, the type of extended “interaction” Grillo-Marxuach describes is indicative of the transformations occurring to the text-audience relationship in the context of transmedia storytelling. In short, transmedia experiences like alternate reality games facilitate viewings – interactive, participatory, and communicative multi-platform media use.

ABC and the creative team behind *Lost* launched four separate ARGs from May 2006 to July 2009: *The Lost Experience* (May 2006 – September 2006) focused on the backstories of the Hanso Foundation and the Dharma Initiative; *Find 815* (December 2007 - January 2008) centered on a game-world character’s attempt to locate the whereabouts of Oceanic Airlines’ flight 815; *The Dharma Initiative: Dharma Wants You* (May 2008 – November 2008) involved recruiting game players to reconstitute the defunct Dharma Initiative; and *Damon, Carlton, and a Polar Bear* (July 2009 – December 2009) led players on a search for seventeen limited edition *Lost* posters.<sup>13</sup> *Lost*’s use of ARGs occurs at the intersection of several key industrial, technological, and cultural shifts tied to changing promotional strategies, the rise of interactive, immersive media, and audience participation in transmedia storyworlds. I will now provide a brief

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to these ARGs, ABC created *Lost University* (July 2009 – August 2010). Although it lacked a narrative, and therefore, was not technically an ARG, *Lost University* offered interactive, online, academic-type courses on *Lost*-related topics, such as time-travel, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and survival skills. As part of the *Lost: The Complete Collection* DVDs, a *Lost University* “Master’s Program” focused on topics, such as Spanish, literature, and theology.

overview of these developments in an effort to contextualize *Lost*'s use of ARGs before examining the discourses of *The Transmission* and *The Official Lost Podcast*.

ABC's implementation of ARGs parallels shifting promotional strategies within the television and film industries in which ARGs were increasingly used to create audience interest in new entertainment properties, build an existing brand's fan base, or keep viewers engaged during hiatus periods.<sup>14</sup> The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences' decision in 2002 to begin honoring achievements in interactive media reflects this industrial shift to the use of ancillary platforms to promote televisual properties. In particular, *The Fallen: Alternate Reality Game* (ABC Family), *The Heroes Digital Experience* (NBC), and *The Dharma Initiative: Dharma Wants You* (ABC) ARGs received Emmys for Outstanding Creative Achievement in Interactive Media in 2007, 2008, and 2009, respectively.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the media industries are not alone in their implementation of ARGs as promotional tools. The automobile manufacturer, Audi, launched *The Art of the Heist* ARG in 2005 to increase consumer awareness of its new A3 line of cars.<sup>16</sup> In 2007, Microsoft promoted the release of the Windows Vista operating system with their *Vanishing Point* ARG, in which players worked together using clues from real-world locations to solve puzzles in order to uncover the identity of

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press) 2010, 200-205.

<sup>15</sup> "Interactive Television Awards," The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, accessed August 5, 2011, [http://www.emmys.com/award\\_history\\_search?person=&program=&start\\_year=1949&end\\_year=2011&network=All&web\\_category=380&winner=All](http://www.emmys.com/award_history_search?person=&program=&start_year=1949&end_year=2011&network=All&web_category=380&winner=All).

<sup>16</sup> Carolyn Handler Miller, *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment* (New York: Focal Press, 2008), 299.

the Microsoft Puzzle Master.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Reebok's ARG, *Lewis Hamilton: Secret Life*, integrated product placement tie-ins as players assisted the game's protagonist, Formula 1 racer Lewis Hamilton, in elaborate heists around the globe in 2010.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that ARGs are now a viable aspect of the contemporary promotional landscape.

The rise of ARGs, like *The Lost Experience*, owes much to technological developments in interactive media. Beginning in the 1980s with "text adventure" computer games, such as *Zork* (1980) and *Infidel* (1983), interactive fiction (IF) games allowed players to control characters and interact with environments using keyboard commands.<sup>19</sup> In its earliest form, the interface of IF games was largely text-based, resulting in a hypermediated experience.<sup>20</sup> The IF game, *Myst* (1993), constituted a significant technological leap forward for the medium through the game's use of three-dimensional graphics, digital video, sound, and text to provide players with an experienced characterized by both immediacy and hypermediacy.<sup>21</sup> Increases in processing power and graphics engines allowed for the development of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG), such as *EverQuest* (1999) – a game

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<sup>17</sup> Jessica Mitz, "Microsoft's Mystery Game is Vista Promo, *MSNBC*, January 9, 2007, accessed February 10, 2011, [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16549073/ns/technology\\_and\\_science-tech\\_and\\_gadgets/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16549073/ns/technology_and_science-tech_and_gadgets/).

<sup>18</sup> Michael Anderson, "The Year in Alternate Reality Gaming," *Wired*, December 31, 2010, accessed February 10, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/magazine/2010/12/the-year-in-alternate-reality-games/>. *Lewis Hamilton: Secret Life* featured a real-life person as its game protagonist, thereby further blurring the line between fiction and reality and making the experience appear not as a game at all.

<sup>19</sup> Nick Montfort, *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Hypermediacy is a style of visual representation that reminds the viewer of the medium (Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 272).

<sup>21</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 94.

owing much to IF.<sup>22</sup> MMORPGs allow players to explore a vast fantasy world, interact and collaborate with other game-players by joining player guilds, and complete quests or tasks dictated by the game's software. Matt Hanson links the concept of "screen bleed" – a term describing the contemporary extension of fictive worlds into multiple media platforms – to videogames such as *EverQuest*: "I believe the condition of screen bleed is proliferating due to the immersive 3D worlds we explore as game players and digital media consumers. This is why all-encompassing mythologies are the most resonant with contemporary audiences."<sup>23</sup> However, whereas previous 3D worlds, such as *Enter The Matrix* (2003), extend into other media, the world of an ARG "bleeds" into the realm of the real world. In other words, ARGs blur the boundaries between fictive storyworlds and the realism of everyday life by extending their reach into public spaces through scavenger hunt-type activities and even live appearances by actors in character. Thus, although IF and MMORPGs differ significantly from ARGs, the interactive, exploratory, and collaborative qualities of their software significantly influenced ARGs' technological development and gameplay.

The use of ARGs as promotional tools also parallels a transformation within the television industry toward brand-building engendered by the economic incentives present to media conglomerates. By 2004, all the major broadcast television networks were part of large conglomerates with economic interests in a variety of sectors.<sup>24</sup> Brand-building

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<sup>22</sup> Lisbeth Klastrup, "The Worldness of EverQuest: Exploring a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fiction," *The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 8 (2008), accessed August 26, 2011, <http://gamestudies.org/0802/articles/klastrup>.

<sup>23</sup> Matt Hanson, *The End of Celluloid: Film Futures in the Digital Age* (London: RotoVision, 2004), 47.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Jordan Clarke, "Tentpole TV: The Business and Culture of Transmedia in Network Television," (PhD diss., University of California, 2010), 11-12.

provides horizontally integrated conglomerates with significant revenue streams through a synergistic approach to production.<sup>25</sup> In other words, as conglomeration increases within the media industries, significant economic incentives exist for these companies to transform individual properties into brands that can be extended across more of their holdings, thereby multiplying the revenue-making possibilities.<sup>26</sup>

When asked about the move towards expanding television programs into other markets, *Lost*'s executive producer, Carlton Cuse discussed the changing industrial logic: "I think the biggest change that's happened in the last few years is that TV shows... are not just shows, they're brands. So, the companies that make them want to expand the brand."<sup>27</sup> Envisioning television programs as brands is a significant shift – one that allows media industries to capitalize on the popularity of successful entertainment properties. An examination of the major broadcast networks illustrates the expansion of televisual content into other media platforms, thereby expanding the brand:

ABC successfully collaborated with Hyperion to publish two *Castle* tie-in novels "penned" by the series' mystery novel-writing protagonist in 2009 and 2010.<sup>28</sup> ABC partnered with Marvel to produce a *Castle* graphic novel in 2011.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Eli M. Noam defines synergies as "the ability to create cross-business opportunities, that is, using one part of a business to promote or benefit from another." (Noam, 2009: 342).

<sup>26</sup> The level of concentration within the media industries has steadily increased since 1988 (Noam, 2009: 421).

<sup>27</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Comic-Con Report – Visionaries Panel," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 26, 2008, accessed July 29, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Carolyn Kellogg, "Richard Castle's Elaborate Fiction," *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 2010, accessed January 15, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/26/entertainment/la-et-richard-castle-20101126>.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Cavanaugh, "Marvel/ABC Announce 'Castle' Graphic Novel," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 2011, accessed August 1, 2011, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/comic-riffs/post/marvelabc-announce-castle-graphic-novel/2011/05/16/AFzCq14G\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/comic-riffs/post/marvelabc-announce-castle-graphic-novel/2011/05/16/AFzCq14G_blog.html).

NBC created a *Heroes* webcomic that was ultimately published by DC Comics as a hardcover graphic novel in 2007.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, NBC developed a *Chuck* webcomic later published as a graphic novel by DC Comics in 2009.<sup>31</sup> NBC continued the brand-building strategy in 2010 by packaging previous webisodes of *The Office* as “*The Office* Digital Shorts Collection” DVD.<sup>32</sup>

CBS adapted its popular *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* franchise into a total of seven videogames published by 369 Interactive and Ubisoft in which players investigate crimes by searching for evidence, matching DNA and fingerprints, and identifying murderers.<sup>33</sup>

Fox explored central characters’ backstories in a *Fringe* prequel comic book.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, Fox expanded the brand of the television series *Glee* into best-selling music<sup>35</sup> and a 3-D film.<sup>36</sup>

The expansion of entertainment properties is, in itself, nothing new. ABC’s gothic soap opera *Dark Shadows* is a notable antecedent, incorporating novels, comic books, games, records, and two films during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, since premiering on television in 1966, the *Star Trek* brand expanded considerably, including

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<sup>30</sup> David Colton, “Graphic Novel Captures ‘Heroes,’” *USA Today*, July 26, 2007, accessed February 26, 2011, [http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2007-07-25-heroes\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2007-07-25-heroes_N.htm).

<sup>31</sup> “Chuck Graphic Novels,” NBC, accessed February 26, 2011, <http://www.nbc.com/chuck/exclusives/novel/>.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Schneider, “‘The Office’ Opens DVD Branch,” *Variety*, December 3, 2010, accessed March 4, 2011, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118028370>.

<sup>33</sup> Ashton Raze, “CSI: Fatal Conspiracy review,” *The Telegraph*, November 18, 2010, accessed March 4, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/8143894/CSI-Fatal-Conspiracy-review.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Edna Gundersen and David Colton, “Coming Attractions,” *USA Today*, June 12, 2008, accessed March 4, 2011, [http://www.usatoday.com/life/2008-06-12-coming-attractions\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/2008-06-12-coming-attractions_N.htm).

<sup>35</sup> Edward Wyatt, “From ‘Cabaret’ to Kanye, Songs of ‘Glee’ Are a Hit,” *The New York Times*, October 11, 2009, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/12/business/media/12glee.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Dave Itzkoff, “Slushies Coming at You: ‘Glee Goes 3-D in Concert Movie,’” *The New York Times*, May 4, 2011, accessed August 25, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/04/slushies-coming-at-you-glee-goes-3-d-in-new-concert-movie/>.

<sup>37</sup> Harry M. Benshoff, *Dark Shadows* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 2.

films, novels, and an array of licensed merchandise (as well as multiple television spin-offs).<sup>38</sup> What is unique about contemporary brand-expanding strategies is the interactive, immersive, and participatory qualities of engagement afforded by new media technologies. The producers of television series, such as *Alias* (ABC, 2001-2006), *24* (Fox, 2001-2010), and *Heroes* (NBC, 2006-2010) extended their brands in unique ways, depicting character and story information in alternate reality games, internet videos, and webcomics. In particular, alternate reality games place audience members in an interactive position, allowing individuals to influence the form and content of the text-audience experience. The ubiquitous boundary-blurring nature of transmedia stories coupled with the immersive qualities of alternate reality games fosters a sustained engagement and playful immersion in the experience's fictional storyworld.

While the industrial strategy of brand-building represents potentials for greater revenue streams, paratextual content also allows for the creation of elaborate transmedia storyworlds articulated through the unique storytelling opportunities afforded by new platforms. For instance, the *Heroes* webcomic and graphic novel allowed for the exploration of stories outside of the television series, as its creators Aron Eli Coleite and Joe Pokaski discuss:

We had so many stories to tell and *there was only so much room in the TV show* – so we decided that we could tell these alternative stories in the comics. The *stories could be deeper, broader and reveal more secrets about our characters*. It was also a way *to tell stories that would be otherwise unproduceable on our show*.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Robert V. Kozinets, "Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of *Star Trek*'s Culture of Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research* 28, no. 1 (2001): 67.

<sup>39</sup> "'We Had So Many Stories to Tell': The Heroes Comics as Transmedia Storytelling," Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins, accessed February 9, 2011, [http://henryjenkins.org/2007/12/we\\_had\\_so\\_many\\_stories\\_to\\_tell.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2007/12/we_had_so_many_stories_to_tell.html); emphasis added.

As Coleite and Pokaski suggest, transmedia storytelling allows audiences to go “deeper” into a media property’s storyworld. Hence, the interconnected nature of these paratexts allows for the articulation of a well-defined narrative universe – what Matt Hills terms “the hyperdiegesis” – in a way that an individual text cannot.<sup>40</sup> When coupled with the interactive potentials of new media, transmedia storytelling franchises foster a sustained engagement or immersion in their narrative universes.

Although recent television series, such as *Alias*, *24*, and *Heroes*, incorporated a transmedia approach to storytelling, the depth and breadth of *Lost*’s transmedia franchise is unique, making it an ideal example by which to interrogate the transmedia text-audience relationship. A critical examination of audience and producer responses centering on *The Lost Experience* ARG illustrates that the creation of elaborate transmedia storyworlds profoundly affects audience engagement. ARGs transform the text-audience relationship through the immersive and interactive qualities of their boundary-blurring narratives.

## ***Promotional Texts***

During *Lost*’s first season, ABC created a range of paratexts to promote the series. In an effort to raise awareness for the premiere of the pilot episode in 2004, ABC placed promotional messages in bottles on beaches across the United States.<sup>41</sup> This unique

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<sup>40</sup> Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 137. I discuss the concept of the hyperdiegesis in greater detail in chapter four.

<sup>41</sup> Derek Johnson, “The Fictional Institutions of *Lost*: World-Building, Reality, and the Economic Possibilities of Narrative Divergence,” in *Reading Lost: Perspectives on a Hit Television Show*, ed. Roberta Pearson (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 39.

marketing approach was indicative of ABC's desire to promote *Lost* by creating an extended experience around the television series. In describing ABC's shifting promotional logic, Mike Benson, the executive vice president for ABC Entertainment, noted, "The days of doing an on-air promo and a *TV Guide* ad are long gone."<sup>42</sup> Illustrating the changing promotional landscape, ABC developed original transmedia content, including websites, novels, and online videos, intended to both strengthen the existing fan base and market the series to new viewers. The response to ABC's early promotional endeavors indicated, as Benson notes, the presence of an audience segment "hungry to become much more engaged in the program than just simply watching it."<sup>43</sup>

ABC's creation of the Oceanic Airlines website (Oceanic-Air.com) during the first season of *Lost* (2004-2005) constituted an early attempt to foster a deeper level of engagement with *Lost* through the use of new media platforms. The website for the fictional airline existing in *Lost*'s storyworld prominently featured storyworld information, including a message announcing the cancellation of all Oceanic Airlines flights. Benson discusses the logic behind these early transmedia promotional efforts:

As we saw the core audience develop over the first season, we figured it would be interesting; What if we did some things online that gave the audience more of *Lost* but from a different perspective? So we actually started to bury web addresses... that took people to Oceanic-Airlines.com and other [sites] that would help people discover more about *Lost*.<sup>44</sup>

Upon closer examination, however, visitors began uncovering hidden elements within the Oceanic Airlines website. The exploration of the Oceanic Airlines website lead to the

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<sup>42</sup> Mike Benson, interview by Rick Mathieson, *The On-Demand Brand: 10 Rules for Digital Marketing Success in an Anytime, Everywhere World* (New York: Amacom, 2010), 153.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

discovery of diegetic documents and images that provided fans with the opportunity to enhance their viewing experience. Jen Ozawa, one of the co-hosts of *The Transmission* fan podcast, discusses these elements in an episode of *The Transmission* dedicated to *Lost*'s presence on the Internet:

**Jen Ozawa:** There's hidden stuff like hidden messages... from the survivors on the island calling for help and leaving messages for family members. But just clicking around the site will turn up a lot of goodies. I think the main thing on the site is the airplane seating chart. Clicking on certain seats or clicking on certain order makes things appear. For instance, Claire's ticket, Sayid's passport, you can see Kate's mug-shot; all sorts of stuff like that.<sup>45</sup>

ABC's use of the Internet, then, provided viewers with a level of information unavailable in the television series itself. Details gleaned from the Oceanic Airlines website allowed for a deeper appreciation of *Lost* thereby reinforcing the loyalty of the existing fan base while simultaneously promoting the series to new viewers. The significant popularity of Oceanic Airlines website affected the development of ABC's promotional logic, as Benson notes: "[T]hat was really the beginning, when we saw how popular this could be, and the kind of hits that we were getting on this website. Within the first day or two we had a million hits on a website, which is pretty phenomenal. There's an audience out here that wants to participate in this."<sup>46</sup>

The fan response to the Oceanic Airlines website lead to the continuation of ABC's nontraditional promotional strategy. During *Lost*'s second season in 2006, ABC created a website ([www.TheHansoFoundation.org](http://www.TheHansoFoundation.org)) for the Hanso Foundation, a fictional

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<sup>45</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Lost on the Web," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, January 7, 2006, accessed January 10, 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Mike Benson, interview by Rick Mathieson, *The On-Demand Brand: 10 Rules for Digital Marketing Success in an Anytime, Everywhere World* (New York: Amacom, 2010), 153.

organization referenced in the television series.<sup>47</sup> Visitors to the website learned more information about the Hanso Foundation, such as the organization's mission statement, a biography of its founder, Alvar Hanso, and the Hanso Foundation's various scientific research projects.

ABC shut down the Hanso Foundation's website midway through the second season in preparation for *Lost*'s most ambitious promotional campaign yet: *The Lost Experience* ARG. Executive producers Cuse and Lindelof addressed the new promotional strategy – one that encouraged an extended engagement with the text – in *The Official Lost Podcast*:

**Carlton Cuse:** The Hanso Foundation website is down for remodeling, and when it comes back up, it is going to be awesome.... We're involved in a project, which is going to involve the Internet that's going to start in May.

**Damon Lindelof:** But you're gonna have to watch the show, and *not just the show, but what happens in between the show*.

**CC:** Between the acts of the show.

**DL:** Sort of fairly carefully in order to sort of begin the path on this, what we're calling an experience.

**CC:** Yeah, and this *internet experience* will actually be launched during one of the shows in May, and it will be a pathway that will lead to a lot of information about the show that we're not gonna get to on the show, *but it's not just... sort of ancillary*.

**DL:** Yeah, *it's not behind the scenes stuff either*.

**CC:** It's real mythology.

**DL:** It's kind of cool storytelling.

**CC:** Which hopefully is gonna, in some degree, satisfy the desire for new material on *Lost* over the summer. I mean, you know, *during that period of time when the show is down before we start the next season, we are actually gonna be telling some Lost stories*.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Viewers of *Lost* were first introduced to the Hanso Foundation in the season two episode "Orientation" (2:03) in which it was revealed that the Hanso Foundation funded the Dharma Initiative – a mysterious research collective dedicated to studying the unique properties of the island.

<sup>48</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: March 28, 2006," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed April 1, 2006; emphasis added.

Cuse and Lindelof make repeated efforts to emphasize the importance of the storytelling occurring in this “internet experience” by contrasting it with more traditional forms of “ancillary” promotion.

In fact, the use of ARGs as promotional texts marks a significant transformation towards “marketing as content.”<sup>49</sup> In contrast to previous promotional logics, ARGs and “marketing as content” blur the line between marketing and storytelling through the creation of the “new material” to which Lindelof refers. This new content, then, promotes consumption to new and existing audiences alike. Consider the following response from a *Lost* fan:

**VaVaVaVoom14:**<sup>50</sup> [The use of *Lost* websites] seems... to be a very cool way of fueling the imagination and obtaining information, if you're willing to put the effort in.<sup>51</sup>

By providing participants with an enhanced understanding of *Lost*'s storyworld, *The Lost Experience* kept existing viewers engaged in the television series during the summer hiatus period. In addition, *The Lost Experience* attempted to generate interest in new (gaming) audiences by providing them with a unique gaming experience – one that ideally would result in these players becoming loyal viewers of the television series. The type of storytelling “experience” provided by *The Lost Experience* is emblematic of “television overflow” (Brooker, 2001; Brooker, 2003) in which “media producers... construct a lifestyle experience around a core text, using the Internet to extend audience

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<sup>49</sup> Mike Benson, interview by Rick Mathieson, *The On-Demand Brand: 10 Rules for Digital Marketing Success in an Anytime, Everywhere World* (New York: Amacom, 2010), 153.

<sup>50</sup> “VaVaVaVoom14” is an ABC.com username. In order to submit responses to *The Official Lost Podcast*, individuals had to create a unique username on ABC.com.

<sup>51</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: May 19, 2006,” podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed May 22, 2006.

engagement and encourage a two-way interaction.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, the production and reception of *The Lost Experience* illustrates that extended engagement with a text is now a promotional strategy – one that has profound implications for producers and audiences.

The launch of *The Lost Experience* ARG in May 2006 underscored the interactive and immersive transmedia storytelling strategies implemented by its creators. ABC signaled the start of *The Lost Experience*, during the episode “Two For the Road” (2:20), by airing a commercial for the Hanso Foundation featuring the organization’s telephone number (1-877-HANSORG).<sup>53</sup> Individuals calling the Hanso Foundation’s telephone number reached a voice mail menu, in which the selection of different options allowed callers to access the voice mail messages of Hanso Foundation executives. During one such message, an individual identifying herself as Persephone hacked or intruded into the call in order to provide a secret password enabling callers to access secret information located on the remodeled Hanso Foundation website. The documents uncovered using Persephone’s password suggested that the ostensibly altruistic organization was engaged in a variety of nefarious activities.

ABC continued to air commercials for the Hanso Foundation throughout the remainder of *Lost*’s second season in May 2006. Each week, the commercial featured a new website address corresponding to one of *The Lost Experience*’s advertisers (Sprite, Verizon, Monster.com, Dodge). For instance, the commercial airing on May 10, 2006 contained the on-screen text “Paid for by Sprite” as well as the website address [www.sublymonal.com](http://www.sublymonal.com). Similarly, the broadcast of the Hanso Foundation commercial on

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<sup>52</sup> Brooker, Will “Conclusion: Overflow and Audience,” in *The Audience Studies Reader*, ed. Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn (London: Routledge, 2003), 323.

<sup>53</sup> The Hanso Foundation commercial functioned as *The Lost Experience*’s “rabbit hole” – a term referring to an ARG’s entry point (Handler Miller, 2008: 291).

May 17, 2006 featured the Jeep copyright along with [www.LetYourCompassGuideYou.com](http://www.LetYourCompassGuideYou.com).<sup>54</sup> In addition to traditional advertisements for Sprite and Jeep, these websites contained interactive elements, including text boxes and games, that could be manipulated to reveal diegetic information about *Lost*. Careful examination of the Jeep website, for example, revealed information about two Hanso Foundation executives as well as hidden passwords that could be used to access secret areas of the Hanso Foundation website.

In this way, *The Lost Experience* simultaneously served as an elaborate cross-promotional campaign for *Lost* and its advertising partners as well as a way to enhance the audience's understanding of *Lost*'s storyworld. However, in an interview with the *New York Times*, Benson privileged storytelling over promotion: "You have to give the audience something to connect to. I want to prove to the audience that this is something they will enjoy, that is organic to the show.... I don't want the audience to feel like 'they are just selling to me or marketing to me.'"<sup>55</sup> Despite Benson's pronouncement, fans regarded the corporate sponsor websites as secondary to those sites created by ABC. In his discussion of advertiser and ABC-created websites, Ryan Ozawa, a co-host of *The Transmission* podcast, draws an unofficial/official designation:

*The trick is to figure out if you're looking at something... that's set up just to sell ads... or if it's actually a site from the show....* These unofficial sites that are

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<sup>54</sup> Sublymonal.com was part Sprite's "Sublymonal Advertising" campaign and [LetYourCompassGuideYou.com](http://www.LetYourCompassGuideYou.com) promoted the Jeep Compass.

<sup>55</sup> Lia Miller, "To Counter the Doldrums During Summer Reruns, 'Lost' Fans Can Get Lost in a Game Online, *New York Times*, April 24, 2006, accessed May 15, 2006, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C00E3DF123FF937A15757C0A9609C8B63>.

from inside the *Lost* world are fun, but I don't think they're going to tell you anything new about the show.<sup>56</sup>

While *The Lost Experience* blurs the line between storytelling and marketing, Ryan Ozawa's comments underscore the desire to be rewarded for one's participation in promotional efforts with new insights into *Lost*'s storyworld. In this view, corporate websites featuring blatant advertising with little or no storyworld information are unofficial. On the other hand, the Hanso Foundation and Oceanic Airlines websites are regarded as "from the show" because they offer significant clues that help participants understand *Lost*'s complex mythology. As Grillo-Marxuach suggests, fan rejection of the advertiser websites stemmed from the relationship between the advertisers and ABC:

*The Lost Experience* had four major advertisers who were *generating their own content that didn't always jive with the stuff we were doing*. So that was a whole bizarre thing that was going on.... We had promised all of those advertisers that they would receive embedded clues to *The Lost Experience* so people would navigate to their pages. *We had to figure out how to integrate all that stuff*, all [these] weird tangential [connections].<sup>57</sup>

The weak "tangential" connections to *The Lost Experience*'s central story as well as the advertising partners' insistence on product placement ran counter to ARG storytelling – experiences presenting themselves not as games but as real life. Rather than promoting the television series and its advertising partners through a subtle "marketing as content" approach, the use of advertising websites and blatant product placement actually shattered the "realism" of the storyworld created by *The Lost Experience*'s alternate reality. ABC's integration of advertising content into *The Lost Experience* as well as the subsequent audience reaction to it underscores how transmedia storytelling problematizes

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<sup>56</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Lost on the Web," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, January 07, 2006, accessed January 10, 2006; emphasis added.

<sup>57</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011; italics added.

notions of promotion and storytelling. *The Lost Experience*, in particular, very purposively blurred the line between promotion and storytelling, raising the question of how much advertising audiences will accept in branded, promotional games.<sup>58</sup>

Reflecting this changing promotional landscape, fans also grappled with how to discuss and approach paratextual extensions, such as the Oceanic Airlines website, the Hanso Foundation website and phone number, and corporate advertisers' websites. In his discussion of hidden information in the Oceanic Airlines website, Ryan Ozawa struggles with how to regard the paratext: "it's not real or completely real, as far as the show is concerned."<sup>59</sup> Similarly, fans discussed paratexts as "not exactly in the show";<sup>60</sup> "sort of outside the universe of *Lost*";<sup>61</sup> "off-screen";<sup>62</sup> "outside stories connected to *Lost*";<sup>63</sup> and "off-show mythology."<sup>64</sup> In addition to a confusion in terminology, the implementation of a transmedia approach to promotion poses more challenges to viewers by encouraging a more prolonged participation, as the following exchange in *The Official Lost Podcast* suggests:

**Christy:** I love all the interactive media that's going along with the *Lost* show – the commercials, the internet sites – but I want to know, *for those of us that don't have time to review all those things every week*, are we going to be missing

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<sup>58</sup> Mike Benson, interview by Rick Mathieson, *The On-Demand Brand: 10 Rules for Digital Marketing Success in an Anytime, Everywhere World* (New York: Amacom, 2010), 155-156.

<sup>59</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Lost on the Web," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, January 07, 2006, accessed January 10, 2006.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Hunting Party," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, January 19, 2006, accessed January 22, 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Live Together, Die Alone," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, January 17, 2009, accessed January 20, 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Constant," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, March 1, 2008, accessed August March 4, 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "There's No Place Like Home," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 18, 2008, accessed May 21, 2008.

out on relevant story information? Or can we just stick to the episodes on TV? *I want to know if I'm missing out.*

**Carlton Cuse:** Christy, *you are not missing out on anything.* In fact, it's a sign that you probably have a very healthy and well-adjusted life; that you are not watching all of those other *Lost* products – as much as we love and endorse them.<sup>65</sup>

Participation in *The Lost Experience* was time-consuming, requiring fans to analyze television commercials, call telephone numbers, and scour websites for hidden clues. As such, fans negotiated the possibility of an enhanced experience provided by transmedia engagement strategies with the corresponding time commitment.

Transmedia promotion, therefore, results in a boundary-blurring expansion of the text obscuring the line between “relevant story information” and marketing. Yet, although the boundary of the televisual text is ever-expanding due to transmedia promotional strategies as Cuse’s comment illustrates, a traditional sense of textual boundary is, at times, reinforced. Cuse simultaneously privileges the television series and, in effect, dismisses the transmedia experience as inconsequential. Furthermore, ABC’s transmedia promotional logic suggests that hardcore fans – those whose fandom includes viewing the centralized text as well as paratextual extensions – are their primary target audience. Yet Cuse’s comments demonstrate that he still views hardcore fans as a marginalized, subcultural group who do not have “very healthy and well adjusted lives,” privileging casual fans, instead, as the dominant audience group. Whereas Jenkins points to the increasingly multi-platform, “migratory” behavior of audiences, a different type of

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<sup>65</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: October 3, 2006,” podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, October 3, 2006, accessed October 7, 2006.

migration also occurs within the *Lost* fan audience.<sup>66</sup> Hardcore fans “migrate” not just between multiple media platforms in the search for content but between the dominant culture and subculture of the *Lost* audience as well. *Lost*’s hardcore fans, then, become “nomads” moving between engagement with the televisual text and the viewings fostered by the use of interactive, immersive media. I explore the cultural divide between *Lost*’s mainstream and viewings audiences as well as the subcultural divide between two groups of viewers, in greater detail, in chapter four.

### ***Interactive, Immersive Media***

*The Lost Experience* is one of the most powerful examples of an interactive and immersive transmedia experience. The scope of *The Lost Experience*’s narrative extended across numerous media platforms; even using real-world spaces to advance its overarching narrative. By spanning television commercials, original and pre-existing websites, prerecorded voicemail messages, letters in newspapers, a novel, and talk show and live appearances by actors in character, *The Lost Experience* fostered a playful immersion in its fictional storyworld among viewers. As Grillo-Marxuach notes, the notion of immersion was central to the text-audience relationship: “We wanted to immerse the viewer in the reality of *Lost*. We wanted to present the idea that *Lost* was a real thing; it existed in the real world; and that you were immersed in a world with a big conspiracy in which the Hanso Foundation was true.”<sup>67</sup> Learning about the Hanso Foundation conspiracy encouraged interactivity in the form of searching the Internet for

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<sup>66</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>67</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

obscured information, solving complex puzzles, and even locating clues in real-world locations. While other television programs also incorporated ARGs, *Lost*'s mystery-infused narrative was ideally suited for paratextual extension into interactive ARGs.<sup>68</sup> As Grillo-Marxuach explains, the ARG format worked well for *Lost* because "people love the mystery of the show, and an ARG specifically is about uncovering mysteries and using the 'collective detective' to get at the truth that might not be manifested elsewhere."<sup>69</sup> In short, playing *The Lost Experience* involved the interactive "uncovering" of narrative clues hidden in a range of paratexts as well as collaborating as a "collective" to solve complex puzzles. This interactive gameplay is unique to ARGs in that, rather than immersing the audience in a game, the creators of *The Lost Experience* immersed the game into the real world.<sup>70</sup>

Before explicating the interactive and immersive qualities of *The Lost Experience*, it is first necessary to elaborate on these concepts. While definitions of interactivity or player-text interaction vary, most scholars agree that an individual's ability to affect the media text experience is central to interactivity. For example, Szulborski views player-text interaction in games "as the player's choice or decisions, as expressed through his manipulation of some element of the game interface, changing something in the virtual world of the game."<sup>71</sup> Similarly, for Carolyn Handler Miller, agency in the form of

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<sup>68</sup> Players of a *Heroes* ARG learned a secret about a central character on the NBC television series (Irwin, "Unlock Hidden TV Show Plots with Alternate Reality Games").

<sup>69</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

<sup>70</sup> Dave Szulborski astutely points out, "In an alternate reality game, the goal is not to immerse the player in the artificial world of the game; instead, a successful game immerses the world of the game into the everyday existence and life of the player (Szulborski, 2005: 31).

<sup>71</sup> Dave Szulborski, *This is Not a Game: A Guide to Alternate Reality Gaming* (New York: New-Fiction, 2005), 5.

choice and control is a crucial element of interactive entertainment.<sup>72</sup> Finally, Lev Manovich points to two types of new media interactivity: open and closed. Whereas in closed (or branching) interactivity, the user controls the order of the text by selecting from previously created elements, open interactivity involves both the modification of the text's structure and the generation of new elements.<sup>73</sup> In other words, interactivity is a technological form of new media engagement in which an individual's actions result in a continuum of mediated responses, from influencing the text's configuration to controlling the outcome of the experience.

ARGs, in general, and *The Lost Experience*, in particular, constitute interactive media in the sense that the player's actions propel the narrative forward. Unlike filmic and televisual narratives, which move forward regardless of a viewer's participation, advancing an ARG's narrative requires a more active engagement in a way that enables the game player or viewer to "directly intervene in and change the images and text that they access."<sup>74</sup> The following response, in which a viewer discusses the discovery of hidden information on the Hanso Foundation website, illustrates the interactive aspects of *The Lost Experience*'s storytelling:

**Lou:** If you go to the website and click on "Active Projects," click on the "Life Extension" project... a new thing you see now is a press release from the Hanso Life Extension Project.... [I]f you also click at the bottom of the press release, there's a hidden link, and it takes you to another page with duplicate copies of blurred text.

The game-player continues:

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<sup>72</sup> Carolyn Handler Miller, *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment* (New York: Focal Press, 2008), 56.

<sup>73</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 40.

<sup>74</sup> Martin Lister et al., *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 20.

**Lou:** There's also a small area where you can enter text as well as a submit button. If you look further down in the source code, you can find something that mentions a password, P455. If you go back to the page and click submit, it gives you another small excerpt of text.<sup>75</sup>

This comment conveys the degree of interactivity and commitment necessary for one's participation in *The Lost Experience*. In this particular instance, interactive participation reveals a textual excerpt consisting of a quote from Alvar Hanso – a storyworld character – that would later play a significant role in the ARG. While the active use of a keyboard and mouse furthers the flow of information from the creators of *The Lost Experience* to fans, advancing the story is not simply a matter of visiting a webpage and clicking a clearly defined hyperlink. Rather, as illustrated by this fan's response, moving onto the next stage of the story requires interactively scouring websites for hidden clues in the form of invisible hyperlinks, obscured passwords, and veiled intertextual connections. With that said, ARGs are more than just interactive stories; they are immersive media experiences.

Although an ARG's interactive qualities facilitate an immersive experience, the two concepts are not synonymous or inextricably linked. In other words, it is possible for a media experience to be interactive and not immersive and vice versa. For instance, a well-crafted motion picture allows for an immersive experience, yet it is far from interactive, and a videogame like *Pac-Man*, while interactive, is not immersive. Before explaining further, it is first helpful to explore the concept of immersion. Janet Murray expounds on the notion in *Hamlet on the Holodeck*:

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<sup>75</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Lost on the Web," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, January 07, 2006, accessed January 10, 2006.

Immersion is a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water. We seek the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge in the ocean or swimming pool – the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, in their discussion of the “immersive fallacy,” Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman regard an immersive experience as one in which “the frame falls away so that the player truly believes that he or she is part of an imaginary world.”<sup>77</sup> These discussions of immersion share much with new media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s concept of immediacy (or transparent immediacy): “a style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium.”<sup>78</sup> While immersion is tied to a medium’s technological capacity to seemingly remove a mediated window, narrative engagement is also central to an immersive experience. Szulborski views immersion as “the feeling of being totally absorbed and participatory in the fictional world of the game.”<sup>79</sup> Therefore, immersion is tied to both interactivity and an engrossing narrative.

The immersive qualities of ARGs, such as *The Lost Experience*, owe much to their compelling stories, which are, in turn, fostered by their truth claims. ARGs exemplify the emerging genre of “unfiction,” which offers players entrance into a

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<sup>76</sup> Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (New York: MIT Press, 1998), 97.

<sup>77</sup> Katie Salen & Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (New York: MIT Press, 2003), 56.

<sup>78</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 272-273.

<sup>79</sup> Dave Szulborski, *This is Not a Game: A Guide to Alternate Reality Gaming* (New York: New-Fiction, 2005), 24.

(fictional) storyworld that is intertwined with the real world.<sup>80</sup> One of the chief aims of ARGs, in fact, is to hide that fact that the experience is even at game at all. This underlying principle – one facilitating players’ suspension of disbelief – is often referred to as the “This Is Not A Game” (TINAG) approach.<sup>81</sup> Cuse and Lindelof perpetuated the TINAG approach in their discussions of the Hanso Foundation’s relevance to *Lost* and *The Lost Experience* in the following exchange:

**Carlton Cuse:** The fact is that we chose to reference *the Hanso Foundation*, which actually *is a genuine... beneficial organization that's based out of Scandinavia*. And we've included them in the show and in the show's mythology.  
**Damon Lindelof:** We thought it'd be cool, because they're philanthropic not a lot of people have heard about them. We love the name Alvar Hanso, it's a little shady and mysterious, so we just built it into the whole Dharma Initiative thing.  
**CC:** We thought that... *introducing the real life element of the Hanso Foundation into the fictional world of Lost would create a really interesting kind of combustion*. Unfortunately, it turned out to be... more of a thermonuclear combustion.  
**DL:** Apparently, we have pissed them off, and we are getting all sorts of legal letters, and this guy, Hugh McIntyre, who is their... Communications Director, has personally logged in several calls to Carlton and I.  
**CC:** He's actually going to be apparently doing... a sort of counteracting PR campaign, from what we've heard<sup>82</sup>.... You know, *we're trying to use real life things but blend them with fiction*, and sometimes people get angry when you do that.  
**DL:** They do. So that's really all we have to say about that, I guess. If you have a problem with the Hanso Foundation, I'm sure there's a number you can call.<sup>83</sup>

In this exchange, both producers repeatedly attest to the veracity of the institutions and characters existing in *Lost*’s transmedia storyworld. Cuse and Lindelof further create the illusion of reality through the implementation of the Hanso Foundation’s telephone

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<sup>80</sup> Carolyn Handler Miller, *Digital Storytelling: A Creator’s Guide to Interactive Entertainment* (New York: Focal Press, 2008), 289.

<sup>81</sup> Henrik Örnebring, “Alternate Reality Gaming and Convergence Culture: The Case of *Alias*,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 4 (2007): 449.

<sup>82</sup> Cuse refers here to the appearance of an actor portraying Hugh McIntyre on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, which is owned by ABC.

<sup>83</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: May 19, 2006,” podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed May 22, 2006; emphasis added.

number and the appearance of an actor portraying the fictional character, Hugh McIntyre, on the ABC television show, *Jimmy Kimmel Live*.<sup>84</sup> *Lost*'s use of "real world media"<sup>85</sup> and McIntyre's interview on a talk show – an outlet known for featuring real people, not fictional characters – clearly blurred the boundaries between fiction and reality. As Szulborski notes, "By integrating technology and devices that players already have and use on a regular basis, it becomes much easier for the player to suppress or ignore the knowledge that he is really just playing a game."<sup>86</sup> In other words, *Lost*'s vast transmedia presence made it all the easier for viewers to suspend their disbelief.

A cross-promotional book project, *Bad Twin*, between ABC and Hyperion continued to blur the line between *The Lost Experience* and the realism of everyday life. *Bad Twin* – a mystery novel about a private investigator's efforts to locate a missing person – contained references to several business entities existing in the *Lost* universe (e.g. The Hanso Foundation, Widmore Industries, Oceanic Airlines). Hyperion marketed the novel as being written by one the doomed passengers of Oceanic flight 815 before its fateful crash in the pilot episode of *Lost*.<sup>87</sup> In an effort to reinforce the veracity of this claim, an actor portraying the late author, Gary Troup, appeared in an interview on a (fictional) talk show entitled *Book Talk*.<sup>88</sup> During the interview, Troup contends that the

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<sup>84</sup> Hugh McIntyre, the "Communications Director" of the Hanso Foundation, appeared on ABC's *Jimmy Kimmel Live* on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006. During the appearance, McIntyre contends that the Hanso Foundation is, in fact, a real organization.

<sup>85</sup> Christy Dena, "Emerging Participatory Culture Practices: Player-Created Tiers in Alternate Reality Games," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 February (2008): 42

<sup>86</sup> Dave Szulborski, *This is Not a Game: A Guide to Alternate Reality Gaming* (New York: New-Fiction, 2005), 13.

<sup>87</sup> *Bad Twin* was ghostwritten by Laurence Shames (Zeitchik, "Inside Move: It's A Shames").

<sup>88</sup> The name "Gary Troup" is an anagram of "purgatory."

Hanso Foundation is, in fact, a real organization co-opted for the purposes of his book. Troup also cryptically discusses the Hanso Foundation's secret knowledge of the Valenzetti Equation – a mathematical formula ultimately playing a central role in *The Lost Experience*. Yet, in order to watch the interview, players had to locate nine video clips hidden by Grillo-Marxuach and Rosenberg on websites, such as Barnes and Noble.com and Amazon.com. In order to watch the interview and gain further information about Gary Troup, the Hanso Foundation, and the Valenzetti Equation, players not only had to locate the nine, hidden video fragments but also assemble the clips in chronological order. Therefore, in addition to reinforcing *The Lost Experience*'s truth claims, Troup's *Book Talk* appearance fostered a collaboration among *The Lost Experience*'s players as viewers worked together to locate and piece together the clips.

Moreover, the promotion of *Bad Twin* consisted of letters appearing in the *New York Times* and *LA Times* purportedly authored by the Hanso Foundation's Hugh McIntyre.<sup>89</sup> In these "Don't Believe *Bad Twin*" letters, McIntyre chastises Gary Troup for his "attacks" and "misinformation" about the Hanso Foundation and urges people to visit the Hanso Foundation's website. On the one hand, these letters functioned as advertisements for *Bad Twin*, by generating interest in an allegedly controversial novel.<sup>90</sup> The prominent display of the Hanso Foundation's website on the "Don't Believe *Bad Twin*" letters along with the phrase "experience it for yourself" encouraged individuals to learn more about the organization, thereby potentially bringing new players into the game

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<sup>89</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: May 19, 2006," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed May 22, 2006. In actuality, Javier Grillo-Marxuach wrote these letters (Grillo-Marxuach, interview).

<sup>90</sup> *Bad Twin* was the most purchased book on Amazon.com the day after McIntyre's letters appeared in newspapers (Grillo-Marxuach, interview).

and funneling more traffic to the advertising websites. On the other hand, these letters did not appear as advertisements at all; neither mentioning ABC nor *Lost*. Taken together, *Bad Twin*, the *Book Talk* interview footage, McIntyre's letters, and the Hanso Foundation website formed an dizzying array of texts, in which the line between fact and fiction was unclear.<sup>91</sup> *Bad Twin*'s promotional campaign, thus, reinforced *The Lost Experience*'s truth claims, thereby fostering a deeper immersion into *Lost*'s storyworld by, as one fan noted, "breaking into the real world."<sup>92</sup> Obscuring the artifice of *The Lost Experience* in an effort to create a sort of playful immersion in *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld was, as Grillo-Marxuach indicates, "the guiding principle behind the whole thing... [so] that we could kind of pull the wool over the audience's eyes and make them think that *Lost* is real – even for just a second – and they can play along with that idea. More than anything else, that's the goal that informed the whole thing."<sup>93</sup>

The creative team behind *The Lost Experience* furthered the game's TINAG philosophy during Cuse and Lindelof's Comic-Con appearance in the summer of 2006. During the question and answer portion of ABC's *Lost* panel, in which fan spoke directly with the two executive producers, an individual identifying herself as Rachel Blake emerged from the fan-audience.<sup>94</sup> Blake demanded that Cuse and Lindelof reveal the truth about the Hanso Foundation. In fact, Blake was an actor named Jamie Silberhartz, who was hired by ABC to both assert the veracity of *The Lost Experience* and initiate the

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<sup>91</sup> *Bad Twin* also appears in the television series. In "The Long Con" (2:13), Hurley reads a copy of Troup's *Bad Twin* manuscript discovered in the wreckage of the airplane. Later, Sawyer reads the manuscript in "Two For the Road" (2:20).

<sup>92</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Comic-Con in Review" podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, August 10, 2008, accessed August 13, 2008.

<sup>93</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

<sup>94</sup> Blake was known to players of *The Lost Experience* through her numerous online videos in she discussed the Hanso Foundation's secret dealings.

next stage of the game.<sup>95</sup> Throughout her dialogue with Cuse and Lindelof, Blake makes repeated claims regarding the truthfulness of the events depicted in the television series and *The Lost Experience*:

**Rachel Blake:** Tell us what you know about the Hanso Foundation.

**Damon Lindelof:** *The Hanso Foundation is a philanthropic organization that we have co-opted for the purposes of Lost.* We stuck it at the end of an orientation film because we thought it would be fun.<sup>96</sup>

**RB:** *Those films are real! We deserve the truth.*

**Carlton Cuse:** We came up with those films. We're writers.

**RB:** You're liars! You're promoting them as some force for good, but they're not!

**DL:** We have no connection with the Hanso Foundation.

**RB:** That's a lie! They run ads on your show. *They're putting money in ABC's pockets to prove themselves as this great philanthropic organization!*

**DL:** Well, I mean Maybelline runs ads on our shows and we're not part of the "International Makeup Global Consortium."

**RB:** Stop it! You're protecting him. *You're protecting a very real, very dangerous organization.*

**DL:** Look, it's not real! It's a television show! There is no Alvar Hanso!

**RB:** It is real! *The Hanso Foundation is real. The Dharma Initiative is real....* Where is Alvar Hanso?

**DL:** He's an actor!

**RB:** *Alvar Hanso is real* and I am living proof of that. And my name is Rachel Blake, and I am real! *And if you want the truth, you will go to HansoExposed.com! You have blood on your hands... and you disgust me!*<sup>97</sup>

Although Lindelof and Cuse's declaration regarding Alvar Hanso was something of a turnaround from their earlier pronouncements, the duration and intensity of Rachel Blake's Comic-Con appearance gave attendees the sense that the *Lost* storyworld and the real world were commingling. Further, visitors to HansoExposed.com learned that Blake, who was ultimately revealed to be the hacker Persephone, recorded damaging

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<sup>95</sup> "Jamie Silberhartz," Internet Movie Database, accessed February 20, 2011, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2061415/>.

<sup>96</sup> *Lost* characters viewed a series of orientation films referencing the Hanso Foundation during the television series' second season. Orientation films, videos, and DVDs played recurring roles throughout the transmedia franchise.

<sup>97</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: July 31, 2006," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed August 3, 2006; emphasis added.

video of a Hanso Foundation meeting in Sri Lanka. In order to hide the video from the Hanso Foundation, Blake hid seventy fragments of the complete video on different websites. Players, then, had to locate the scattered fragments and reassemble the video in order to learn more information about the enigmatic Alvar Hanso.

Viewing the entire *Sri Lanka Video*, as it was known within the discourses of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*, required viewers to locate “glyphs” or codes scattered in a variety of real-world and mediated locations. For instance, Cuse and Lindelof wore the first glyphs on bracelets during ABC’s *Lost* panel at Comic-Con in 2006.<sup>98</sup> Other glyph locations included: *Lost: The Official Magazine*; the websites of the four corporate advertisers; and even on a JumboTron during a sporting event.<sup>99</sup> Viewers, in turn, could enter these “glyphs” on HansoExposed.com – the website Blake mentioned during her Comic-Con appearance – in order to “unlock” a tiny fragment of the video.<sup>100</sup> Using a rudimentary video editor accessible on HansoExposed.com, viewers could begin to piece together the *Sri Lanka Video*. Adding to the complexity of the process was the fact that the video fragments were not revealed in chronological order, so viewers had to painstakingly put the seventy video clips into the correct sequence.

Due to the fragmentation of the glyphs across media platforms and real-world locations as well as the difficulty level of *The Lost Experience*’s puzzles, viewers often displayed a collaborative approach towards problem-solving, clue-sharing, and information dispersal. This level of collaboration surprised even Grillo-Marxuach:

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<sup>98</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Blake also wore a shirt, during her Comic-Con appearance, displaying the words “www.HansoExposed.com.”

I had read articles about *The Beast* and *I Love Bees* [ARGs].... I knew that, if you put enough people on a problem, they would [solve it].... I just didn't know it was going to happen so quickly. So Jordan [Rosenberg] and I were always trying to come up with ways for making the information more oblique, because *we just couldn't make the puzzles hard enough*.<sup>101</sup>

The difficulty Grillo-Marxuach and Rosenberg experienced resulted from ARG players exercising the group's collective intelligence - "*a form of universally distributed intelligence*, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills."<sup>102</sup> Fostered by communication through podcasts and online groups, *The Lost Experience*'s players contributed their isolated areas of expertise thereby forming a group with an immense knowledge base and skill set. As games scholar Jane McGonigal observes, ARGs "create a highly connected player-base dedicated to, and impressively capable of, defining and solving large-scale problems together."<sup>103</sup> Significantly, some of *The Lost Experience*'s puzzles did not present themselves as such, and yet, players continued to solve them with alarming speed. For instance, Grillo-Marxuach describes one particular "puzzle" hidden in the code of a webpage:

We would put binary code in the source code of webpage that if you put it in some - I don't even know what - it would result in an image and people would figure it out, and we'd be, like, 'Who are these people?' [Laughs] In terms of that kind of response, *we just kept trying to make stuff more difficult*.<sup>104</sup>

While I examine the processes of "collective intelligence" in greater detail in chapter four, I wish to highlight here the immersive and interactive qualities of *The Lost*

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<sup>101</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

<sup>102</sup> Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, trans. Robert Bononno (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 1997), 13.

<sup>103</sup> Jane McGonigal, "Why *I Love Bees*: A Case Study in Collective Intelligence Gaming," *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, edited by Katie Salen, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 204.

<sup>104</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011

*Experience*'s narrative.<sup>105</sup> These qualities allow for a unique form of viewings engagement – one that “prove[s] more conducive to the immersion that some players seek than do their accompanying shows.”<sup>106</sup>

In short, *Lost*'s producers immersed *The Lost Experience* into the real world through the incorporation of commercials, websites, newspapers, and even talk show and Comic-Con appearances by actors in character. By obscuring the fact that the ARG was actually a game, *The Lost Experience* fostered a playful immersion in *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld. Rather than regarding viewings solely as a computer-based engagement, I expand this mode of interactive engagement to account for *The Lost Experience*'s broad range of immersive and interactive strategies. *The Lost Experience*'s complex puzzle-solving, clue-seeking activities occurred across a variety of digital and analog media platforms. In fact, viewings engagement even took place outside of traditional media platforms, as Rachel Blake's Comic-Con appearance illustrates. On the one hand, *The Lost Experience* represented an innovative attempt to extend *Lost*'s narrative beyond the television thereby illustrating the changing text-audience relationship. On the other hand, *The Lost Experience* constituted ABC's efforts to generate advertising revenue and promote *Lost*. These aims were often in opposition. Thus, the viewings engagement afforded by alternate reality games presents audiences with contradictory logics.

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<sup>105</sup> Interestingly, Grillo-Marxuach and Rosenberg intended for *The Lost Experience* to be even more interactive. The ARGs' original conclusion was to be a geocaching treasure hunt in which players used Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to find tickets to a screening of the *Sri Lanka Video* and a promo for the third season of *Lost*. However, ABC canceled these plans due to concerns that players may hurt themselves in the process, resulting in subsequent lawsuits (Grillo-Marxuach, interview).

<sup>106</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 205.

## ***The Contradictory Logics of Transmedia Storytelling***

The significance of ARGs extends beyond their implementation as interactive and immersive promotional texts. For example, *Lost*'s use of ARGs illustrates the expanding boundary of the media text – a shift that transforms individual entertainment properties into complex, transmedia storyworlds. P. David Marshall regards the expanded scope of contemporary media texts as constituting “an elaborate intertextual matrix,” including films, television programs, videogames, and toys.<sup>107</sup> Linking the concept to the concentration of media ownership, Marshall notes:

[T]here have been concerted efforts to connect the various culture industries ... around a particularly prominent cultural commodity. Instead of an end product, there is a serial form of production where each product in the series is linked through a network of cross-promotion.<sup>108</sup>

In total, *Lost* provides a seminal example of an elaborate intertextual matrix consisting of: a television series, multiple alternate reality games, online video, a videogame, a novel, a magazine, and ancillary products, including puzzles, action figures, and a board game.<sup>109</sup> In addition to creating opportunities for further economic gains, this interconnected array of texts allows for the articulation of a robust storyworld in a way that an individual film or television program cannot.<sup>110</sup> In fact, callers to *The Transmission* frequently referred

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<sup>107</sup> P. David Marshall, “The New Intertextual Commodity,” in *The New Media Book*, edited by Dan Harries (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), 70.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> In addition to *Bad Twin*, Hyperion also published a series of *Lost* novels; however, these novels were produced without the involvement of *Lost*'s creative team. According to Grillo-Marxuach, “They literally showed up in the office one day, and we were like, ‘Where did this come from? Who wrote this?’” (Grillo-Marxuach, interview).

<sup>110</sup> Matt Hills describes such articulation as the “hyperdiegesis” (Hills, 2002: 137). I discuss the notion of the hyperdiegesis in greater detail in chapter four.

to *Lost* not as a television series but as a “universe.”<sup>111</sup> Similarly, speaking at a Comic-Con panel of “Television Visionaries” in 2008, executive producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse discussed “creating the *Lost*-verse” and “expanding the [*Lost*] brand,” respectively.<sup>112</sup> As Jeffrey Sconce insightfully observes, the expansive strategies used by television producers allow for the “crafting and maintaining [of] ever more complex narrative universes, a form of ‘world building’ that has allowed for wholly new modes of narration and that suggests new forms of audience engagement.”<sup>113</sup> ARGs play a central role in “world-building” because their interactive, immersive gameplay reinforces the sense of inhabiting an expansive environment that can be explored and excavated.<sup>114</sup> Although Sconce points to the emergence of new types of engagement, he focuses primarily on narrative strategies used in television programs. As I have argued throughout this chapter, ARG storytelling fosters viewings – interactive, participatory, and multi-platform media use.

It is important to note, however, that the viewings engagement encouraged by ABC and *Lost*’s creative team, through the implementation of ARG storytelling, is not typical of the entire audience. In fact, viewers frequently separated themselves from the

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<sup>111</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Hunting Party,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, January 19, 2006, accessed January 22, 2006.

<sup>112</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Comic-Con Report – Visionaries Panel,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 26, 2008, accessed July 29, 2008.

<sup>113</sup> Jeffrey Sconce, “What If?: Charting Television’s New Textual Boundaries,” in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, edited by Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 95.

<sup>114</sup> Cuse and Lindelof frequently used the metaphor of an “archaeological dig” in *The Official Lost Podcast* to describe the experience of watching the television series. As Cuse and Lindelof describe, viewers had the opportunity “unearth” new clues regarding the history and inner-workings of *Lost*’s world, during each new season. The use of ARGs further fosters a sense of exploration and excavation.

casual viewing audience, as the following comment from *The Official Lost Podcast* displays:

**Sam Fisher Cell** writes: *I agree that it's not fair to expect a normal viewer to seek out these auxiliary experiences, but I, along with many others, have enjoyed looking into them in order to give [us] a better understanding of the world of Lost.*<sup>115</sup>

This response suggests a divide between viewers and “normal” viewers whom are unwilling “to put the effort in” necessary for exploration of *Lost*’s transmedia storyworld.

Similarly, comments from *Lost*’s producers indicate dual storytelling strategies.

Executive producers Cuse and Lindelof see the television series as the domain of the entire audience, while transmedia extensions appeal to the smaller subset of viewers:

**Carlton Cuse:** They allow us to do some storytelling that we could never get to on the main show. I mean, you’re never going to see a character go through the intricacies of the interrelationship between the Hanso Foundation and the Dharma Initiative... *all that kind of stuff is not for the mothership – that is for the Internet and for people who are really committed to the mythology of our show.*<sup>116</sup>

Put a different way:

**Damon Lindelof:** [T]here might be a misperception from the studios... that they’re going to somehow break through to the masses [with online content].... Twelve million people watch an episode of *Lost*; that number of people are never going to watch a mobisode. *So in our brains, we’re doing it for the diehard fans of the show....* For us, we have no delusions that anybody in the mass culture that watches *Lost* gives a shit about when Jack first met Ethan.<sup>117</sup>

Cuse and Lindelof’s remarks are telling, indicating an awareness of the divisions within the audience: casual viewers or mass audiences for whom they create the “mothership” or

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<sup>115</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: March 9, 2008,” podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed March 12, 2008.

<sup>116</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Comic-Con Report – Visionaries Panel,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, July 26, 2008, accessed July 29, 2008; emphasis added.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid; emphasis added.

television series and a smaller group of viewers who are willing to venture into *Lost*'s transmedia universe.

A further division existed between the conflicting aims of ABC and the viewers in regards to the purpose of *The Lost Experience*. Mike Benson, the executive vice president of marketing at ABC Entertainment, describes implementing ARGs as “new, unique, creative ways to get [ABC's] products out in front of a potential audience.... [E]ven more effectively than something that you could do on television, just because you've got a little more latitude.”<sup>118</sup> Whereas ABC's goal was, in part, to create an interactive, transmedia, mythology-rich storyworld with the intention of promoting the television series and augmenting profits, viewers' goals centered on exploring *The Lost Experience*'s storyworld in order to better understand *Lost*'s transmedia narrative. This distinction is crucial.

The production and reception of *Bad Twin* illustrates these contrasting goals. In regards to the production of the novel, Grillo-Marxuach suggests ABC's rather blatant attempt to capitalize on *Lost*'s success by inserting storyworld references into an existing novel: “The book came to us sort of fully formed.... We found things that we could retrofit into the narrative about the Hanso Foundation. They were really minimal... [I]n hindsight, I feel sorry for anyone who bought that book, thinking they were going to unravel the secrets of *Lost*.<sup>119</sup> Rather than solely wanting a compelling story or interactive gameplay, viewers engaged with *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling in order to better understand the narrative located on the television series. Consider the following

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<sup>118</sup> Mike Benson, interview by Rick Mathieson, *The On-Demand Brand: 10 Rules for Digital Marketing Success in an Anytime, Everywhere World* (New York: Amacom, 2010), 155-156.

<sup>119</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

statement, from one of the co-hosts of *The Transmission*, expressing frustration about *Bad Twin*:

**Jen Ozawa:** It wasn't money particularly well spent. I don't think it added anything to the plot. It didn't add anything to the mythology. It's just there.<sup>120</sup>

As this response suggests, simply building a transmedia world that allows for audience interactivity and participation is not enough. Put another way, viewings in and of itself was not the goal of *Lost*'s hardcore fans. Rather, these viewers expect that their consumption of digital and analog media, their involvement in puzzle-solving and clue-seeking activities, and their exploration of a transmedia storyworld will grant them a privileged position in the *Lost* viewing audience related to their enhanced knowledge of the television series' narrative. For example:

**Seth Jacob** writes: Most diehard *Lost* fans know about the numbers connection to the infamous Valenzetti Equation.... [T]he numbers represent core factors in an equation that predicts the end of the world.<sup>121</sup>

As will be discussed, the revelation pertaining to the Valenzetti Equation occurred only in *The Lost Experience*, providing viewers with a sort of secret knowledge largely unknown to the television audience. This knowledge, then, affords viewers greater insights into the television series' diegesis.

Further references to information contained only in *The Lost Experience* subtly connected the ARG with the television series in a way that affected viewers' interpretation of events. In the season two episode "The Hunting Party" (2:11), a mysterious character, Tom Friendly, paraphrases an Alvar Hanso quote located on ABC's

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<sup>120</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Two for the Road," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, December 15, 2008, accessed December 18, 2008.

<sup>121</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: February 3, 2010," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed February 6, 2010.

Hanso Foundation website.<sup>122</sup> The following response highlights how knowledge of the Hanso Foundation website provided viewers with greater insight into Tom Friendly's backstory by linking him with Alvar Hanso:

**Nathan:** "We get to see... something really interesting about [Tom Friendly]. We find that *he has actually quoted Alvar Hanso from the Hanso Foundation website....* This leads me to believe that he and probably the rest of this group of Others probably have some sort of connection with the Hanso Foundation."<sup>123</sup>

Similarly, one of *The Transmission*'s co-hosts "almost jumped out of my seat" when Tom Friendly quotes Alvar Hanso.<sup>124</sup> Understanding the reference affords hardcore fans with a privileged position based on the exclusiveness of the information provided in *Lost*'s paratextual content. Viewers' activities provided these individuals with an enhanced engagement stemming from knowledge known only to them, as the following comments indicate:

**Ryan Ozawa:** This definitely validates that some of the stuff that was on that website that hadn't been previously mentioned may, in fact, be telling us something else about what's going on on the show.

**Jen Ozawa:** All the time surfing *Lost* websites is finally starting to pay off.<sup>125</sup>

The fact that Tom Friendly's backstory was never explicitly discussed in the episode and therefore not readily apparent to those who did not visit the Hanso Foundation website is significant. Moreover, given that the revelation centering on Tom Friendly's relationship with Alvar Hanso and the Hanso Foundation was made prior to start of *The Lost Experience*, the notion that participation in the ARG would "pay off" with similar

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<sup>122</sup> Discovering Alvar Hanso's quote on the Hanso Foundation website required significant interactivity on the part of viewers. The fan response from "Lou" on page twenty-three illustrates how viewers uncovered this quoted material.

<sup>123</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Fire + Water," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, January 26, 2006, accessed January 29, 2006; emphasis added.

<sup>124</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Hunting Party," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, January 19, 2006, accessed March 21, 2006.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

insights was common within the discourses of *The Transmission* and *The Official Lost Podcast*.

However, *Lost*'s producers presented fans with conflicting messages regarding whether the paratextual content created for *The Lost Experience* was directly related to the television series. In fact, Cuse reinforced the uncertainty surrounding *The Lost Experience*'s centrality in an interview in *The Los Angeles Times*:

The job of being a television show-runner has evolved and there's all these new aspects to it. It's good because *there are additional avenues open for content*. We have ways of expressing ideas we have for the show that wouldn't fit into the television series.... But it's hard to manage our time. And *we honestly put most of our time and attention on the show itself – that still is the bread and butter of our existence*.<sup>126</sup>

As Cuse's comment illustrates, the shifting industrial logic towards encouraging audience participation through transmedia storyworlds is not without its contradictions. On the one hand, *Lost*'s use of ARGs allows for "additional avenues" of transmedia content that "wouldn't fit into the television series." This transmedia approach expands the television series into a storyworld by providing audiences with greater insights into the history, characters, and logic of the world. On the other hand, Cuse privileges televisual content as the "bread and butter," resulting in a view of paratextual content as secondary to the television series.

Prior models of transmedia franchises (Jenkins, 2006b) do not account for the presence of a privileged text, in the way that Cuse describes. Although the boundary-blurring qualities of transmedia storytelling confuse/challenge notions of textuality, the current industry logic actually reinforces traditional notions of textual boundaries. Cuse

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<sup>126</sup> Maria Elena Fernandez, "ABC's 'Lost' is Easy to Find, and Not Just on a TV Screen," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 2006, accessed February 15, 2008, [articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/03/entertainment/et-lost3](http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/03/entertainment/et-lost3); emphasis added.

and Lindelof position the television series as what I term the “centralized anchor text” uniting the various transmedia paratexts. That is, the television series is the hub connecting the texts comprising *Lost*’s transmedia franchise, and therefore, occupies a place of greater emphasis and significance.

The conflicting logics of ABC’s transmedia approach to *Lost*’s storytelling resulted in a recurring theme within the discourse of *The Transmission* and *The Official Lost Podcast* surrounding the meaningfulness of participation in *The Lost Experience*. Fans frequently expressed an uncertainty centering on whether engaging in *The Lost Experience* would enhance one’s appreciation or understanding of the *Lost*’s storyworld. For instance, in a discussion of the Hanso Foundation website’s relevance to the television series, one of *The Transmission*’s co-hosts notes:

**Ryan Ozawa:** You’re always questioning, “Is the stuff on this website going to... go back to the show or is it just sort of an exercise?”<sup>127</sup>

Here, “going back to the show” implies a sense that the information contained in *The Lost Experience* will have some bearing on one’s understanding of the television series. This distinction is contrasted with a storytelling “exercise” that has little relevance to the central, televisual text. Speaking to fans at the annual *Lost* Comic-Con panel in 2006, Lindelof discussed the aims of *Lost*’s transmedia extensions: “[W]e didn’t want to do anything that was a waste of your time.... If you’re going to take the time... it should give you something that... the show is not giving you or enhances your involvement in the show.”<sup>128</sup> The most significant disclosure of information “enhancing” the engagement

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<sup>127</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Hunting Party,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, January 19, 2006, accessed January 22, 2006.

<sup>128</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: July 31, 2006,” podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed August 3, 2006.

of those participating in *The Lost Experience* was the revelation surrounding a central element of *Lost*'s mythology – a mysterious series of recurring numbers (4, 8, 15, 16, 23, 42) figuring prominently into the lives of the characters both on and off the island. The numbers appeared within the television series in a variety of contexts: the winning numbers in a multi-million dollar lottery drawing (1:18, “Numbers”); the serial number imprinted on the hatch of an underground research station (1:24, “Exodus, Part 2”); and the secret code inputted into a computer in order to delay the end of the world (2:02, “Adrift”). In addition to playing a central role in *Lost*'s diegesis, the numbers recurred in more subtle ways, appearing on props such as sports jerseys (1:18, “The Numbers”), a character's driver's license (2:17, “Lockdown”), and on vials of medicine (2:01, “Man of Science, Man of Faith”).

Learning the esoteric significance of the numbers was the culmination of the viewings engagement promoted by *The Lost Experience*. In the reassembled footage of *The Sri Lanka Video*, which takes the form of an orientation video for new members of the Dharma Initiative, Alvar Hanso reveals that the six numbers are the core values of a formula, the Valenzetti Equation, predicting an apocalyptic event. Speaking directly to the camera, Hanso reveals that the purpose of the Dharma Initiative's research was to change one of the numerical values of the Valenzetti Equation, thereby forestalling humanity's extinction.<sup>129</sup> The revelations conveyed in the *Sri Lanka Video* were “the centerpiece” of the ARG and arguably the most significant reveal in the two-year history of *Lost*. Moreover, the disclosure regarding the meaning of the numbers and the purpose of the Dharma Initiative occurred only in *The Lost Experience*. There was no mention of

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<sup>129</sup> “Hanso Exposed,” YouTube, accessed January 15, 2010, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_PPCCcXarkc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_PPCCcXarkc).

the Valenzetti Equation in the television series before or after *The Lost Experience*. The canonicity of the revelations conveyed in the ARG were key to rewarding participation in the ARG, as Grillo-Marxuach explains: “They had to be [canonical] because that’s the thing of value. It’s not like we were giving people a million dollar prize at the end of *The Lost Experience*. The prize was, if you play this game, you’ll find out what the numbers [mean].<sup>130</sup> Yet, the canonical or official nature of *The Lost Experience*’s revelations became a contentious topic within the discourses of *The Transmission* and *The Official Lost Podcast*.

In the following conversation, fans question whether the Valenzetti Equation will ever merit attention in the television series:

**John** writes: Will the Valenzetti Equation get a mention, as well as the other web stuff?

**Ryan Ozawa**: Is that something that’s actually relevant to the show? Is that something that’s going on or was that really just another universe?

**Jen Ozawa**: I don’t know. It would be great if they were able to work that in, but if it was in an ARG, I don’t know how they’re going to bring it back.

**RO**: To me, if you start talking about the Valenzetti Equation and any of those other things, it seems like that’s a completely additional dimension of what might be going on [on] the island, and that might be a little too much to try to squeeze in.<sup>131</sup>

As the above conversation suggests, the notion of whether *The Lost Experience* functions as a narrative extension in a way “that’s actually relevant to the show” was unclear.

Relevance, then, becomes an important issue and represents a rewarding of fans’ viewings by providing insights into the series’ central mysteries. Reflecting on *Lost*’s increasing use of intertextual references and paratextual extensions during the television series’ second season, Cuse offered the following analogy in *The Official Lost Podcast*:

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<sup>130</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

<sup>131</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Unanswered Questions,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, January 24, 2010, accessed January 27, 2010.

**Carlton Cuse:** You can enjoy the show on many levels. It's like a baseball game.... [I]f you don't know anything about baseball, you can watch people hit the ball and run and score runs. If you're really into baseball, you can... appreciate the game on a much deeper level.... But you can still enjoy that same game whether you have in-depth knowledge or you have less knowledge.<sup>132</sup>

The above responses indicate an ongoing tension between viewers' expectations and producers' responsibilities surrounding the usefulness of transmedia narratives. Viewers consistently speculated on the relevance of paratextual elements to the televisual text. However, their desires for rewards or validation were often frustrated due to the producers' dual responsibilities to traditional viewers of the series as well as to viewers of the *Lost* transmedia storyworld. Producers cannot always reward viewing activities because of the fear of alienating a mass audience. In the instance of *Lost*, Cuse and Lindelof want to make sure that traditional, mass audiences can still enjoy the program without the additional, in-depth knowledge of *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld. In the minds of the *Lost*'s producers, then, viewing activities are encouraged but not necessarily required.

After *The Lost Experience* concluded and subsequent seasons of the television series aired, it became clear that the ARG's events had little relevance to events on the television series, thereby frustrating fans that actively participated. As their reactions suggest, the creation of a compelling narrative extension and unique gaming experience was not a sufficiently meaningful reward for their viewing engagement. Rather, fans sought privileged information allowing for a unique insight into *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld, as this response from *The Official Lost Podcast* suggests:

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<sup>132</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: November 11, 2005," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed November 14, 2005.

**Sam Fisher Cell:** What about *The Lost Experience*?... Is all the ancillary information [including] the Alvar Hanso video [explaining the significance of the numbers]... simply throwaway information? Does this mean any [such] revelations... are not a true part of the overall *Lost* mythology?<sup>133</sup>

A 2008 *Entertainment Weekly* interview with executive producers Cuse and Lindelof further outraged fans when they declared, “It’s unfair for the audience to go to ancillary sources in order to really understand the show” and “The only true canon is the show itself,” respectively.<sup>134</sup> Such ambivalence on the part of *Lost*’s producers even undermined viewers’ loyalty to the television series. The following exchange between a caller and the hosts of *The Transmission* centering on a character that does not age, best sums up the sense of uncertainty and confusion among viewers regarding whether participation in *The Lost Experience* adequately met their expectations:

**Andy:** I have a theory about [Richard] Alpert because every time he’s on [the television series] you hear all these theories [from the fans] about how he’s time-traveling or how he’s not human, and I just don’t believe that.... I think it’s all tied to this Life Extension Project thing that’s tied in with Alvar Hanso.

**Ryan Ozawa:** So Andy is saying that this is all tied to a life extension project and those experiments from the [*Lost Experience*] game.

**Jen Ozawa:** Wow, we haven’t heard of that in awhile.

**RO:** *The thing that is an issue is that was a lot of work and a lot of mythology created for that alternative reality game, and I don’t think any of that has necessarily paid off in the show.*

**JO:** I don’t even think anyone’s explicitly said the name “Alvar Hanso” [on the television series].<sup>135</sup>

Andy connects information from *The Lost Experience* and the television series in a way that reveals not only a belief in the narrative cohesion of *Lost*’s transmedia enterprise, but

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<sup>133</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: March 9, 2008,” podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, March 9, 2008, accessed March 12, 2008.

<sup>134</sup> Jeff Jensen, “‘Lost:’ Mind-Blowing Scoop From Its Producers,” *Entertainment Weekly*, February 22, 2008, accessed March 15, 2008, [http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20313460\\_20179125,00.html](http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20313460_20179125,00.html).

<sup>135</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “La Fleur,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, March 8, 2009, accessed March 11, 2009; emphasis added.

also a richer understanding of Richard Alpert, a central character in the television series. Whereas Andy's response demonstrates how transmedia narratives allow for the possibility of "new levels of insight and experience [that] refreshes the franchise and sustains consumer loyalty"<sup>136</sup> – a key element of Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling – Ryan and Jen's comments suggest quite the opposite. Rather than offering a unified transmedia narrative, for the hosts of *The Transmission*, *The Lost Experience* and the television series represent two distinct, albeit related, narratives. Moreover, as Ryan mentions, participation in *The Lost Experience* required a significant amount of time and energy on the part of both the producers and viewers. As such, fans questioned the centrality of *The Lost Experience* to understanding and appreciating *Lost*. Yet, Cuse and Lindelof's view of ARGs primarily as subordinate to the television series led to their reluctance to "pay off" or "reward" viewers' activities in the form of relevant insights referenced on the television series. As a result, *The Lost Experience* illustrates the contradictory logics of ABC's transmedia approach to storytelling. On the one hand, *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld became an ever-expanding, immersive text encouraging interactive exploration and communicative participation with both fans and producers. On the other hand, Cuse and Lindelof's reluctance to position *The Lost Experience* as a canonical text and thereby risk alienating casual television viewers reinforced a more traditional notion of textual boundary. Models of transmedia storytelling franchises need to account for the presence of "centralized, anchor text" in which one privileged text holds a place of greater narrative significance among both producers and audiences.

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<sup>136</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 96.

## Conclusion

ABC's implementation of *The Lost Experience* highlights the shifting promotional landscape within the media industries. Interactive "story-games" and "marketing as content" approaches replace more traditional promotional strategies involving print advertisements, billboards, and television promos. Although precise "metrics" or participation figures for *The Lost Experience* are unavailable, the abundance of responses on *The Transmission* and *The Official Lost Podcast* illustrates that the ARG was extremely successful at generating interest for *Lost* during the breaks between the first and second seasons (and beyond) of the television series. Moreover, millions of people visited both the Oceanic Airlines and Hanso Foundation paratextual websites.<sup>137</sup> As Grillo-Marxuach notes, "*The Lost Experience* was wildly successful in terms of creating an on-going buzz about the show that would not have existed because the show wasn't on the air. There's no metrics for that."<sup>138</sup> Yet, beyond promoting the television series, *The Lost Experience* proved ineffective at generating significant traffic and revenue for the ARG's advertisers. However, Grillo-Marxuach sees this less as a failure of *The Lost Experience* and more as the corporate advertisers' unrealistic expectations: "If you look at how many people a day were hitting certain webpages... In terms of what our advertisers expected, which was to sort of be touched by the *Lost* magic and to have *Lost*'s success, it was an unreasonable expectation."<sup>139</sup> Therefore, while it is clear that ARGs, such as *The Lost Experience*, can be very effective as transmedia promotional

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<sup>137</sup> Mike Benson, interview by Rick Mathieson, *The On-Demand Brand: 10 Rules for Digital Marketing Success in an Anytime, Everywhere World* (New York: Amacom, 2010), 153-154.

<sup>138</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

campaigns for entertainment properties, their use as advertising spaces proves more uncertain. Viewers rejected mere product placement, viewing advertising websites as “unofficial” to *The Lost Experience*’s narrative. The reaction to *The Lost Experience* suggests that rather than generating content that is “shoehorned” into an ARG, advertisers need to work together with ARG creators to create germane connections that are then seamlessly integrated into the narrative.

*The Lost Experience* also illustrates the transmedia brand-building incentives available to conglomerates in the age of media convergence. The ARG’s network of interconnected digital and analog paratexts, including websites, a novel, and real-world locations, provided The Walt Disney Company with new opportunities for revenue as well as further spaces for corporate advertising and synergistic cross-promotion. However, the process of authoring a meaningful ARG experience can be complex; often resulting in the alienation of both viewers and casual viewers, as Lindelof and Cuse suggest during one of their annual Comic-Con appearances in 2007:

**Carlton Cuse:** In terms of *The Lost Experience*, we sort of felt it was a mixed bag. I think, you know, for the hardcore fans it was very satisfying, but we had a hard time... making it work for a large audience.

Lindelof continues:

**Damon Lindelof:** It’s really tricky because, you know, we want to do stuff that is really exclusive for the hardcore fans of the show.... But, you know, as a result of us wanting to do that, that stuff has to be in canon, you know, we can’t say, like, “Oh, that had nothing to do with us and therefore you wasted your time going through that *Lost Experience*,” so as Carlton said, it requires us to... be in full creative control of that, and not at the expense of the mothership.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: August 2, 2007,” podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

As one of the co-hosts of *The Transmission* suggests, engaging with transmedia experiences, such as *The Lost Experience*, can be equally difficult for viewers:

**Ryan Ozawa:** I mean, things that happen outside of the show, you never know where you're going to put it.<sup>141</sup>

Participation in *The Lost Experience* provided viewers with rewards by explaining the significance of the numerical sequence or “The Numbers” that played a major role in *Lost*’s transmedia franchise. Yet, in an effort to not distance the casual audience, *Lost*’s producers never significantly factored this narrative revelation into the television series, resulting in disappointment among viewers. The contradictory logics surrounding the production and reception of *The Lost Experience* illustrate how new economic and engagement opportunities available to producers in the age of media convergence clash with prior industry models.

Beyond their use as part of promotional and brand-building efforts, *The Lost Experience* illustrates the changing transmedia text-audience relationship. Transmedia storytelling franchises facilitate the creation of a narrative universe in a manner that qualitatively differs from isolated media texts. ARGs play a central role in crafting transmedia storyworlds because their interactive, immersive gameplay reinforces the sense of exploration and navigation. ARGs immerse those involved in a sprawling “unfiction” narrative that crosses media platforms and even extends into the real world. The techniques used to maintain the experience’s “This is Not a Game” approach, such as “planting” actors at live events and talk shows, blur the demarcation between the ARG and “real life,” allowing for an immersive experience unlike that provided by any other

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<sup>141</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Variable,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 4, 2009, accessed May 07, 2009.

media experience. Rather than being confined solely to media platforms, *The Lost Experience*'s characters and institutions, such as Rachel Blake and the Hanso Foundation, commingled with the realism of everyday life. The use of real-world locations and live performances to advance a fictional narrative originating on a television series marks a significant shift in storytelling strategies.

Thus, ARGs encourage a new form of engagement – viewingsing – characterized by an array of interactive, participatory, and communicative activities. Significantly, the responses to *The Lost Experience* on *The Transmission* and *The Official Lost Podcast* challenge preexisting notions of viewingsing (Harries, 2002) centering on a deterministic link to computer technologies and digital media. Rather than regarding viewingsing solely as a technology-based form of interactive engagement, my analysis expands the concept of viewingsing to include participatory storytelling and communicative collaboration spanning digital and analog media platforms. In short, my analysis of *The Lost Experience* displays how transmedia storytelling extends meaning-making beyond active engagement with the text and instead promotes an interactive, participatory, and communicative text-audience-producer engagement. A transmedia approach to storytelling, thus, raises intriguing questions about the producer-audience relationship, which I will now discuss.

## Chapter 3 – Viewings Engagement Strategies: The Transmedia Producer-Audience Relationship

This chapter focuses on transformations to the producer-audience relationship in relation to a complex interplay of technological, industrial, and cultural shifts in contemporary media through an examination of *Lost*'s transmedia franchise. In the post-network era of audience fragmentation when viewers have a multitude of broadcast and cable network options, media producers incorporate viewings engagement strategies facilitated by new media technologies in an effort to build an audience and maintain a fan base. Engagement strategies, such as the use of official podcasts and transmedia paratexts, foster a sense of intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity between producers and fans, resulting from an increasingly communicative producer-audience relationship. The implementation of these strategies promotes the creation of a participatory culture, allowing producers and fans to interact in a more direct manner than was possible before the advent of podcast technology. These logics, however, do not represent producers' utopian desire to create producer-audience equality; rather, the use of podcasts and transmedia paratexts as engagement tools springs from market concerns. That is, transmedia producers' podcasts maintain audience interest in the transmedia franchise and build a fan base by providing narrative insights, answering fan questions, and imparting details about the production process. Yet, the opening of a communicative channel permits fans to challenge producers when a transmedia story is not presented in a cohesive or satisfying fashion. Transmedia franchises, thus, become sites of struggle for control over meaning between producers and fans frequently centering on the issue of canonical or narratively relevant paratexts.

*Lost*'s six-year run on ABC (2004-2010) coincided with a confluence of significant technological, industrial, and cultural transformations, including the advent of podcast technology, shifting post-network era engagement strategies, and the rise of increasingly communicative relationships between media producers and fans, thereby facilitating a transformation in the producer-audience relationship. An examination of the responses from the producers and fans of a transmedia franchise, therefore, illustrates how these shifts' complex interplay encourages – and even necessitates – viewings. I will now provide a brief overview of these developments in an effort to contextualize *Lost* producers' use of podcasts as part of a larger transmedia discourse.

Podcasting – the digital recording and distribution of audio and/or video files – resulted from the intersection of several technological innovations beginning in the mid-1990s. The first such development was the creation of the audio streaming technology pioneered by RealNetworks in 1995.<sup>1</sup> Streaming technology is a delivery system enabling the distribution of audio files, such as music, audio books, or recordings of sporting events, from a streaming provider to an end user. RealNetworks' streaming technology, however, required that users remain connected to their network in order to listen to streaming content.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the quality of the streaming content was dependent on a user's internet connection, potentially resulting in poor audio quality or lapses in the delivery of the content. Finally, streaming providers, such as RealNetworks, acted as digital gatekeepers by controlling content providers' access to their network and audience.

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Mack and Mitch Ratcliffe, *Podcasting Bible* (Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing, 2007), 38. In 1995, RealNetworks was known as Progressive Networks. The company changed the name to RealNetworks in 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Several subsequent technological developments made the digital distribution of audio files outside of such gatekeepers possible. The first innovation was the creation of the RSS (Really Simple Syndication) format – a type of “Web syndication” or publishing technology that automatically downloaded new text-based, internet content to a user’s computer – in the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>3</sup> After subscribing to an RSS “feed” associated with a specific website, the subscriber’s RSS code monitors that website for new content. In contrast to previous internet technologies in which users had to manually monitor websites, RSS technology performs these checks and downloads new content to a user’s computer automatically. In short, RSS technology simplified the process of accessing regularly updated content on the Internet, such as news websites or blogs.<sup>4</sup> Although RSS was originally a method for transmitting text via the Internet, the innovation of the RSS “enclosure tag” in the early 2000s provided a mechanism for the distribution of audio and video files.<sup>5</sup> RSS, thus, facilitated the growth of audioblogs.

Audioblogs are an outgrowth of blogs (or weblogs);<sup>6</sup> however, whereas blogs feature posts in written form, audioblog posts take the form of audio recordings. Fueled by inexpensive digital audio recording technology and the RSS “enclosure tag” innovation, audioblogging became increasingly popular.<sup>7</sup> In a 2004 article in *The*

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<sup>3</sup> John G. Henderson, *RSS for Educators: Blogs, Newsfeeds, Podcasts, and Wikis in the Classroom* (Washington D.C.: International Society for Technology in Education, 2008), 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-4.

<sup>5</sup> Michael W. Geoghegan and Dan Klass, *Podcast Solutions: The Complete Guide to Podcasting* (New York: Friends of ED, 2007), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Blogs are personal websites dedicated to the sharing of information or commentary through written entries or posts.

<sup>7</sup> Dan Tynan, “Singing the Blog Electric: Podcast Your Way to Stardom,” *PC World*, June 24, 2005, accessed March 13, 2011,

*Guardian*, Ben Hammersley suggested the term podcasting – a portmanteau of “broadcasting” and “iPod” – to describe the rise in audioblogging.<sup>8</sup> As Hammersley describes, podcasts combine “the intimacy of voice, the interactivity of a weblog, and the convenience and portability of an MP3 download.”<sup>9</sup> In addition, audioblogging and podcasting allow for a type of broadcasting independent of streaming networks.

Several parallel innovations facilitated the consumption of podcasts. The advent of Apple’s iPod mobile media player and iTunes digital media software in 2001 allowed users to listen to downloaded audio files away from their computers. In other words, people no longer had to maintain an internet connection throughout the duration of the audio content. Furthermore, with the development of the iPodder software in 2004, users could easily download RSS enclosures to their mobile media players.<sup>10</sup> iPodder was one of the first podcast aggregators – software that regularly checks the Internet for new podcast content, downloads that content to a user’s computer, and then copies the content to a mobile media player. The confluence of these technological innovations fueled podcasting’s popularity. For instance, a study by the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project found a significant increase in podcast production – from 26,000 podcasts in 2006 to 43,000 podcasts in 2008.<sup>11</sup> The study also indicated an almost two-

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[http://www.pcworld.com/article/121203/gadget\\_freak\\_singing\\_the\\_blog\\_electricpodcast\\_your\\_way\\_to\\_stardom.html](http://www.pcworld.com/article/121203/gadget_freak_singing_the_blog_electricpodcast_your_way_to_stardom.html).

<sup>8</sup> Ben Hammersley, “Audible Revolution,” *The Guardian*, February 12, 2004, accessed March 13, 2011,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2004/feb/12/broadcasting.digitalmedia>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Steve Mack and Mitch Ratcliffe, *Podcasting Bible* (Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing, 2007), 40-41.

<sup>11</sup> Oliver Luft, “Podcasts’ Popularity Surges in US,” *The Guardian*, August 29, 2008, accessed March 13, 2011,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/aug/29/podcasting.digitalmedia>.

fold increase in both podcast production and iPod/MP3 player ownership during the same period.<sup>12</sup> In short, end users with both the technological expertise and access to digital technologies are now able to access and conveniently download these audio files.

Significantly, the confluence of these technologies affords an immediate, intimate, and interactive form of aural communication. Whereas Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin define immediacy as a “style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium,” similar representational styles are at work in aural media as well.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the qualities of podcast technologies allowing for the recording and distribution of spoken word dialogue afford a more direct, conversational exchange of ideas than the text-based communication. Furthermore, mobile telephone and “smart” devices, such as iPods, foster an intimate or emotionally close mode of communication stemming from the portability and connectivity afforded by these technologies (Ling, 2004; Chayko, 2008). Podcasting technologies also revolutionize the way people communicate with each other by facilitating the creation of participatory cultures. In short, more than just a series of technological innovations, podcast technologies represent a cultural transformation in the way people communicate.

Increasingly, television producers use podcasts as engagement tools in an effort to build an audience and maintain a fan base in the post-network era.<sup>14</sup> Beginning in the mid-2000s, the term “post-network era” describes the current period of the American television industry in which a confluence of technological, industrial, and economic

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 273.

<sup>14</sup> The post-network era is also referred to as the “post-broadcast era” (Turner & Tay, 2009: 5).

transformations result in a fragmentation of the audience as well as a gradual shift toward more self-determined viewing behaviors.<sup>15</sup> These conditions provide audiences with more programming choices as well as more control over how to view television content. For instance, the average number of channels received in American households rose from thirty-three in 1990 to over one hundred near the start of the post-network era in 2003.<sup>16</sup> A significant factor affecting the increase in programming options is the proliferation of cable networks (Webster, 2005; Webster & Ksiazek, 2011). For example, the Federal Communications Commission's most recent study, in 2006, tallied five hundred sixty-five "national cable programming networks."<sup>17</sup> By comparison, a similar study, in 2004, reported three hundred thirty-nine national cable networks.<sup>18</sup> Although the steady growth in the number of cable channels provides more content offerings for audiences, the resulting audience fragmentation poses problems for broadcast networks. As James G. Webster observes, "Whereas a broadcast network might once have expected to command 30% or 40% of those watching television, it is now fortunate to have audience shares in the double digits."<sup>19</sup>

Further compounding audience fragmentation, viewers gained greater control over when and where they watched television programming in the post-network era, thereby eroding the temporal and geographical-based restrictions characteristic of the

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<sup>15</sup> Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 15-19.

<sup>16</sup> James G. Webster, "Beneath the Veneer of Fragmentation: Television Audience Polarization in a Multichannel World," *Journal of Communication* 55, no. 2 (2005): 367.

<sup>17</sup> "Other Industry Data," National Cable & Telecommunications Association, accessed May 27, 2011, <http://www.ncta.com/StatsGroup/OtherIndustryData.aspx>.

<sup>18</sup> James G. Webster, "Beneath the Veneer of Fragmentation: Television Audience Polarization in a Multichannel World," *Journal of Communication* 55, no. 2 (2005): 367.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

network era and the multi-channel transition.<sup>20</sup> In addition to digital video recorder (DVR) and portable media player (iPod, PSP) technologies, the emergence of online video ushered in more self-determined viewing behaviors.<sup>21</sup> According to Gian Fulgoni, the chairman of the internet marketing research company comScore, seventy-five percent of the U.S. “online population” streamed videos in 2008, viewing an average of seventy videos per month.<sup>22</sup> One need only look at the economic successes of the video-sharing website YouTube to see the market potentials of online video.<sup>23</sup> In fact, as Jean Burgess and Joshua Green point out, YouTube has become “part of the mainstream media landscape” offering a range of largely amateur content.<sup>24</sup> The major broadcast networks took note of online video’s popularity and created online video services of their own, offering video content on their websites.<sup>25</sup> In addition, NBC, ABC, and Fox partnered with the website Hulu to stream a range of advertiser-supported content from full-length television programs to shorter webisodes and clips. A recent study by the Pew Research Center, in 2008, found that sixty-two percent of online video viewers prefer

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<sup>20</sup> Amanda Lotz situates the “network era” from approximately 1952 through the mid-1980s; the “multi-channel transition from the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s; and the “post-network era” from the mid-2000s to the present day (Lotz, 2007: 7).

<sup>21</sup> Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York University Press), 53-63.

<sup>22</sup> Gian Fulgoni, “Online is the New Primetime,” accessed June 1, 2011, <http://robertoigarza.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/con-online-is-the-new-primetime-fulgoni-2008.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Ross Sorkin and Jeremy W. Peters, “Google to Acquire YouTube for \$1.65 Billion,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 2006, accessed June 1, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/09/business/09cnd-deal.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), vii.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Curtin, “Matrix Media,” in *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era*, ed. Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17.

“professionally produced” content over the work produced by amateurs.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, given the popularity of professionally produced content, online video represents a new market for television networks. Online video, though, presents something of a paradox for networks, as new media platforms offer significant financial opportunities while simultaneously fragmenting the television audience even further.<sup>27</sup>

In order to remain viable in the post-network era characterized by audience fragmentation and the rise of online video, television producers incorporate an array of engagement strategies, such as the use of official podcasts and transmedia paratexts. Official podcasts – those sanctioned by a television network – provide a platform for television producers to engage with viewers outside of a series’ broadcast. Television series with official podcasts, such as *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS),<sup>28</sup> *Grey’s Anatomy* (ABC),<sup>29</sup> *Breaking Bad* (AMC),<sup>30</sup> *Battlestar Galatica* (SyFy),<sup>31</sup> and *Doctor Who* (BBC),<sup>32</sup> extend the viewing experience by providing fans with commentary and narrative insights from the writers, producers, and cast members. Podcasts allow producers to promote a series to new viewers and maintain existing fan interest by

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<sup>26</sup> “Online Video: Summary of Findings,” Pew Internet and American Life Project, accessed June 1, 2011,

<http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2007/Online-Video/01-Summary-of-Findings.aspx>.

<sup>27</sup> James G. Webster and Thomas B. Ksiazek, “The Dynamics of Audience Fragmentation: Public Attention in an Age of Digital Media,” *Journal of Communication* “in press.”

<sup>28</sup> “How I Met Your Mother,” CBS.com, accessed May 27, 2011,

[http://www.cbs.com/primetime/how\\_i\\_met\\_your\\_mother/](http://www.cbs.com/primetime/how_i_met_your_mother/).

<sup>29</sup> “Grey’s Anatomy Official Podcast,” ABC.com, accessed May 27, 2011, [feed://a.abc.com/abc/xml/podcastRSS?feedPublishKey=2255](http://a.abc.com/abc/xml/podcastRSS?feedPublishKey=2255).

<sup>30</sup> “Breaking Bad Insider Podcast,” AMCTV.com, accessed May 27, 2011, <http://www.amctv.com/shows/breaking-bad/insider-podcast-season-3>.

<sup>31</sup> “Battlestar Galatica,” SyFy.com, accessed May 27, 2011, <http://www.syfy.com/battlestar/downloads/podcast.php>.

<sup>32</sup> “Doctor Who: The Commentaries,” BBC.com, accessed May 27, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/doctorwho>.

providing a forum for producer-audience discussion and commentary when the series is not on television. The fostering of a participatory culture – one in which “fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content”<sup>33</sup> – through official podcasts, therefore, is less a means for audience empowerment. Television networks and producers are taking advantage of new media technologies and participatory strategies (Siapera, 2004; Enli, 2008; Ross, 2008) in order to increase a program’s revenue and relevance. In this way, official podcasts constitute an engagement strategy in which the creation of a producer-audience dialogue serves producers’ economic aims in a fractured and competitive televisual marketplace.

Moreover, the use of podcasts as engagement tools is indicative of a larger cultural transformation within media industries, from television producers and filmmakers to novelists, toward an increasingly communicative relationship with audiences. As Mark Deuze observes, “In the context of the emergence of a global convergence culture [there is] increasing pressures on media workers to interact and co-create with their intended audiences.”<sup>34</sup> Communicative audience outreach through new media technologies provides producers with opportunities to strengthen affinity bonds with consumers (Shefrin, 2004; Murray, 2004). More and more, “dialogue branding” – the creation of a producer-consumer oral discourse as part of a brand experience – has become an effective tool for media producers.<sup>35</sup> Dialogue branding strengthens audience loyalty by forging an intimate bond that extends the brand beyond the media property and

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<sup>33</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 290.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Deuze, *Media Work* (Malden: Polity, 2007), 114.

<sup>35</sup> Larry Weber, *Marketing to the Social Web: How Digital Customer Communities Build Your Business*, (Hoboken: Wiley, 2009), 99-105. Weber discusses the use of dialogue as part of the branding process, but the term “dialogue branding” is my own.

onto the producer as well. For instance, in a 2011 *New Yorker* article, Random House editor Anne Groelle contends, “Outreach and building community with readers is the single most important thing you can do for your book these days. You need to make them feel invested in your career.”<sup>36</sup> Groelle’s declaration highlights the economic benefits of dialogue branding through producer-audience communication. Yet, an investment is given in the hopes of a return, and courting audiences through a communicative discourse can have consequences seemingly unintended by media producers. As Elena Shefrin points out, promoting a feeling of investment in a producer’s career fosters a “sense of ownership that includes an investment in the creative development” of entertainment properties as well.<sup>37</sup> In other words, eliciting fan feedback can give way to confusion and conflict when fans perceive that their desires and insights are not valued by producers.

Existing scholarship examines producer-audience communication involving television producers (Wexelblat, 2002), video game designers (Milner, 2008), and filmmakers (Shefrin, 2004) and focuses primarily on internet message boards. The discussion of podcasts’ cultural significance, however, is currently absent from contemporary accounts of producer-audience communication and participatory cultures. As television networks actively utilize podcasts as part of crucial promotional and engagement strategies, they increasingly become the platform on which communicative producers and audiences negotiate the value of participation in transmedia storyworlds. For instance, *The Official Lost Podcast* provided a space for producers and audiences to

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<sup>36</sup> Laura Miller, “Just Write It!: A Fantasy Author and His Impatient Fans,” *The New Yorker*, April 4, 2011, 32.

<sup>37</sup> Elana Shefrin, “*Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and Participatory Fandom: Mapping New Congruencies between the Internet and Media Entertainment Culture,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21, no. 3 (2004): 261-262.

discuss and evaluate a wide array of transmedia storytelling strategies centering on the television series itself as well as its paratextual extensions. Moreover, the audio and video qualities of podcast technology afford an intimate, immediate, and interactive form of communication, thereby fostering unique, currently under-studied practices between producers and audiences. Yet, the relationship between communicative producers and audiences is often fraught with instability (Soukup, 2006; Postigo, 2008) and *The Official Lost Podcast* is similarly a site of shaky ground. Thus, while this study builds upon previous research by new media theorists (Rheingold, 1993; Lévy, 1999; Lévy, 2001), it avoids a utopian view of the communication facilitated by emerging digital technologies. Although the ability to engage directly with a producer, during the production of a transmedia franchise, does invite the possibility for a more democratic form of creation, *Lost* producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse exploited the qualities of podcast communication in an effort to regulate and supervise fan participation. In short, podcasts function as a new cultural forum that constantly challenges, reconfigures, and even reinforces normative understandings of producer-audience relationships.

In addition to official podcasts, television networks and producers utilize engagement strategies encouraging – and even necessitating – viewings in an effort to further their economic gains. By 2006, television networks expanded entertainment properties over an average of four digital and analog platforms.<sup>38</sup> “These new extensions,” Derek Johnson argues, “reached out to casual audiences abandoning more traditional modes of television viewing, but also intensified fan interest by providing new

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<sup>38</sup> Derek Johnson, “Inviting Audiences In: The Spatial Reorganization of Production and Consumption in ‘TVIII,’” in *New Review of Film & Television Studies* 5, no. 3 (2007): 67.

means of engaging with television content.”<sup>39</sup> Alternate reality games (as discussed in the previous chapter) and online video afford a participatory engagement with television series by maintaining and augmenting a sense of audience investment. Speaking at a 2008 Comic-Con panel dedicated to television producers’ innovative uses of new media platforms, the co-creator of NBC’s *Chuck* and The CW’s *Gossip Girl*, Josh Schwartz notes, “We live in a world now where I feel that a week between episodes feels like a really long time.”<sup>40</sup> Schwartz points to an increasingly crowded media landscape in which online, original content functions as “a way to extend the experience of the show.”<sup>41</sup> Such extensions, then, function as a way to simultaneously promote a television program and strengthen the text-audience bond by providing viewers with prolonged access to a given world or group of characters.

The use of online narrative extensions is becoming integral to televisual storytelling in the post-network era. As Josh Friedman, the executive producer of Fox’s *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* observes, “It’s just become a reality of the business.”<sup>42</sup> While representing a strategy for building and maintaining an audience, the implementation of online videos and webisodes by television networks and producers also fosters new production and reception practices. Joss Whedon, the creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, *Firefly*, and *Dollhouse*, contends online content “[O]pens the door for a whole new type of storytelling and [represents] a way to tell stories that aren’t quite television shows, that aren’t quite movies, and are something sort of in-between.”

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Comic-Con Report – Visionaries Panel,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, July 26, 2008, accessed July 29, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Adds Whedon: “I think that narrative is changing.... It’s all changing.”<sup>43</sup> As Whedon suggests, the implementation of transmedia paratexts and official podcasts as engagement strategies, therefore, promotes a transformation toward an interactive and multi-platform media use. In order to access this content, viewers use interactive, digital technologies to search out additional content on new media platforms.

However, as the boundary of the transmedia narrative expands through paratextual extensions, so too, does the potential for tension between producers and fans. The number of paratexts in a transmedia storytelling franchise increases the possibility of narrative incoherence, and the creation of a producer-audience discourse – one fostering an intimate, immediate, and communicative relationship – provides a platform for fans to challenge producers when a transmedia story is not presented in a satisfying or cohesive manner. Official podcasts and transmedia texts, thus, become the sites of struggle between producers and fans over the formation of an official transmedia canon. In short, the use of engagement strategies involving official podcasts and transmedia paratexts profoundly alters the producer-audience relationship by encouraging viewings – interactive, participatory, and communicative multi-platform media use.

### ***Podcasts as an Engagement Strategy***

Beginning in November 2005, during the second season of *Lost*, ABC debuted *The Official Lost Podcast*, hosted by executive producers Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof. From the outset, it was clear that Cuse and Lindelof planned to use the podcast as a means to engage with fans and build an audience. In addition to recommending that

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

new fans purchase every *Lost* episode from seasons one and two on iTunes as a way to “join the party” and catch up on the series, Cuse and Lindelof also summarized the series’ narrative for the uninitiated:

**Damon Lindelof:** There’s a plane crash [in season one]. There’s a lot of people on [the plane]. They’re scared... of the island [because] there’s a monster on [it.].... That’s pretty much it. I mean, you’re caught up, so tune in.<sup>44</sup>

Cuse, then, went on to sum up the current season:

**Carlton Cuse:** We have discovered this season... that there are some other survivors of the plane crash that were in the tail section of the plane. And it’s kind of become clear that their experience was quite different than the fuselage survivors, although we haven’t really explained in great detail yet why.<sup>45</sup>

Given the emphasis on purchasing previous episodes and familiarizing new viewers with *Lost*’s narrative in the first episode of *The Official Lost Podcast*, it is evident that Cuse and Lindelof viewed the podcast, at least in part, as a way to further the television series’ success. In fact, *Lost*’s audience increased by seventeen percent, from the previous year, after Cuse and Lindelof began podcasting and ABC made previous episodes available on iTunes.<sup>46</sup> In this way, *Lost*’s producers utilized what I term a “communicative engagement” approach whereby the creation of an aural dialogue with *Lost* fans is part of an effective audience-building strategy in the crowded and increasingly competitive multi-channel, post-network era.

In *The Official Lost Podcast*, Lindelof and Cuse emphasized significant details of previous episodes, responded to fan-submitted questions, and previewed upcoming

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<sup>44</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: November 8, 2005,” podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed November 11, 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ben Grossman, “The New Deal: How TV Executives Will Find Digital Dollars in the Coming Year,” *Broadcasting and Cable*, December 31, 2005, accessed June 1, 2011, [http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/print/102252-The\\_New\\_Deal.php](http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/print/102252-The_New_Deal.php).

episodes. Given that *Lost*'s narrative structure spanned multiple media platforms and involved a patchwork of flashbacks, flash-forwards, and even so-called flash-sideways, such producer-audience communication aided audience comprehension of the franchise's complex web of non-linear and even alternate reality storylines.<sup>47</sup> In addition, Lindelof and Cuse shared exclusive details about *Lost*'s creative development, including discussions about the difficulties of producing a transmedia storytelling franchise. ABC's use of *The Official Lost Podcast*, therefore, is an example of an "increasing willingness to disseminate usually highly guarded production information... in the interests of sophisticated viral marketing and audience development schemes."<sup>48</sup> By sharing behind-the-scenes details centering on problems with the writing, casting, and production of *Lost*, Cuse and Lindelof facilitated the perception of an intimate producer-audience bond. Consider for example, the following exchange between a fan and Cuse on *The Official Lost Podcast* in regards to a storyline inconsistency:

**Nick** writes: [C]an you tell us whether that was intentional or a "whoopsie?"  
**Carlton Cuse:** I mean, we don't do this thing in the abstract. J.K Rowling has the great luxury and privilege of being utterly in control of all the characters in her universe, but we do our show in collaboration with four hundred other people, and for a variety of reasons... that story branch... kind of fell out of the tree.<sup>49</sup>

Hence, listeners of *The Official Lost Podcast* were privy to secret "insider" information otherwise unknown to the general audience. In addition to providing exclusive production details, Lindelof and Cuse furthered an insider/outsider dynamic with fans

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<sup>47</sup> *Lost*'s sixth and final season focused, in part, on an alternate reality taking place in a supernatural limbo after the deaths of the series' central characters

<sup>48</sup> Simone Murray, "'Celebrating the Story the Way It Is': Cultural Studies, Corporate Media and the Contested Utility of Fandom," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 18 (2004): 8.

<sup>49</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: May 10, 2009," podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed May 13, 2009.

through a series of recurring in-jokes, references, and terminologies featured in the podcast.<sup>50</sup> As suggested by *Lost*'s high Nielsen ratings over the series' six-year run, such a tactic was an effective component of ABC's strategy for building and maintaining an audience.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the creation of a participatory culture between *Lost*'s producers and fans was economically advantageous to the network and *Lost*'s producers.

While this participatory culture stemmed from market concerns, Cuse and Lindelof's validation of fan feedback on *The Official Lost Podcast* fostered notions of fan agency in *Lost*'s transmedia franchise. As early as the fifth episode of *The Official Lost Podcast* in 2005, fans questioned their role in influencing the production of the series, as the following exchange between a fan and Damon Lindelof suggests:

**Lostcasts** writes: How much does the speculation from your fans... change or affect the writing of the show?

**Damon Lindelof:** We are very interested... in what the fans are thinking about the show, and... what theories they come up with and what they're responding to.<sup>52</sup>

Lindelof's response is noncommittal, expressing a sort of vague "interest" in what fans are "responding to" but stopping short of specifically addressing how fan speculation influences *Lost*. Moreover, Lindelof's response is unsurprising given that fans increasingly relate to television programs through the social networking facilitated by the

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<sup>50</sup> Two frequent in-jokes centered on Carlton Cuse's alleged banjo-playing skills and the notion that Cuse did not wear pants during the recording of the podcast. In a playful manner, Lindelof and Cuse repeatedly referenced a seventh "zombie season" of the television series occurring after *Lost* concluded. The producers also used secret code words when discussing the season finales with fans.

<sup>51</sup> Roberta Pearson, "*Lost* in Transition: From Post-Network to Post-Television," in *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 249.

<sup>52</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: November 28, 2005," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed December 1, 2005.

Internet and new media technologies.<sup>53</sup> Fan discussion and speculation on message boards and podcasts, for example, strengthens the fan-text bond by extending the media experience through a communicative discourse with other fans.

Lindelof's validation of this feedback, therefore, represents an audience-building strategy by forging a producer-audience bond as well. In her discussion of internet spectatorship, Michele White contends, "Direct address appears to acknowledge personal interests while allowing the media producer to render an even more detailed version of the spectator's desires, viewing behaviors, and buying habits."<sup>54</sup> By directly addressing fans through *The Official Lost Podcast*, Lindelof and Cuse promote a more sustained and personal connection with both the producers and the text. In this way, reinforcing the notion that fan discussion and speculation are important to *Lost*'s producers can be seen as a strategic move – one in which a "communicative engagement" approach provides Cuse and Lindelof with greater insight into a wide range of audience data. In fact, Marianne Martens views participatory strategies as methods for exploiting user-generated feedback "as a source of content which can be mined and appropriated by publishers in new transmedia products," which can in turn be marketed back to fans.<sup>55</sup>

Yet, *Lost*'s producers went beyond simply paying lip service to communicative fans regarding the power of fan criticism. For example, later in the same podcast,

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<sup>53</sup> Sharon Marie Ross, *Beyond the Box: Television and the Internet* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 174.

<sup>54</sup> Michele White, *The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 24.

<sup>55</sup> Marianne Martens, "Transmedia Teens: Affect, Immaterial Labor, and User-Generated Content," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 17, no. 1 (2011): 51.

Lindelof explicitly acknowledges how fan feedback influences creative decisions on *Lost*, offering the following analogy:

**Damon Lindelof:** The equivalent is imagine if... I critiqued everything that you did in the course of a day: "I can't believe you got a double-latte at Starbucks! That's idiotic! Those things are bad for you!" That's probably going to affect your purchases the next day.<sup>56</sup>

Lindelof's frank declaration was the first indication, within the discourse of *The Official Lost Podcast*, of fan feedback's power to directly affect the production of the series. This admission was significant in that Lindelof suggests a loss of creative freedom. While highlighting how fan feedback – specifically negative criticism – affects his future decision-making, Lindelof's remarks also reinforced the voicing of such complaints. In short, *The Official Lost Podcast* functioned as a feedback loop in which fan speculation, evaluation, and criticism worked its way back into the franchise. The more “noise” or “interference” made by fans, the more significantly fans could affect the franchise's signal.

The issue of fan influence persisted throughout *Lost*'s second season, culminating with the following exchange at the 2006 *Lost* Comic-Con panel:

**Fan 2:**<sup>57</sup> [B]ecause of how huge your internet following is, you guys pretty much have immediate access to a ton of fan feedback. And I was just wondering how much influence, if any, you feel that should have on the creative process.

**Carlton Cuse:** You know... *it does have influence*.... [W]e tried to answer more questions in the season two finale, and that was in direct response to internet feedback.<sup>58</sup>

Lindelof continued:

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<sup>56</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: November 28, 2005,” podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed December 1, 2005.

<sup>57</sup> This individual's name was not given. I designated the speaker as “Fan 2” because this individual was the second person to ask a question.

<sup>58</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: July 31, 2006,” podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed August 3, 2006; emphasis added.

**Damon Lindelof:** *[T]he fans always determine the barometer. You know, it's the Goldie Locks thing – where the porridge is always either too hot or too cold, but it's never just right. And the fans are really there to tell us, you know, to temperature gauge it, because we're wrapped in our little cocoon in the show, and there's no one there to say, "Stop! Go back" other than the most loyal fans, who are on the Net.*<sup>59</sup>

Cuse and Lindelof attempt to create a sense of belonging and community – one engineered by Internet and podcast technologies – by empowering “loyal” fans to actively participate in online, digital communication with the producers thereby maintaining the series’ high artistic quality. Yet, this empowerment ultimately resulted in the contestation of the producers’ authorial power centering on the narrative of the television series as well as the formation of a transmedia canon. As David Rowe, Andy Ruddoch, and Brett Hutchins astutely observe, communities of online media fans frequently become “cultures of complaint” in which fan criticism reflects the desire to intervene in the administration of media properties.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the participatory cultures of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* became “cultures of complaint” in which fan discontent centered on the direction of the television series’ narrative.

The negative fan reaction centering on the introduction of two new characters, Nikki and Paulo, in *Lost*’s third season illustrates how the creation of a producer-audience discourse allows fans to challenge producers when a narrative is not presented in a satisfying fashion. Nikki and Paulo first appeared in “Further Instructions” (3:03) in an effort for the producers to tell the stories of other plane crash survivors on the island. Whereas the previous two seasons of *Lost* focused almost exclusively on a core group of

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid; emphasis added.

<sup>60</sup> David Rowe, Andy Ruddock, and Brett Hutchins, “Cultures of Complaint: Online Fan Message Boards and Networked Digital Media Sport Communities,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 16, no. 3 (2010): 298-299.

characters, *Lost*'s producers introduced Nikki and Paulo in an effort to shed light on the other survivors who were previously only depicted in the background. Over the course of seven episodes, elements of Nikki and Paulo's backstory emerged, including the revelation that Nikki and Paulo murdered a wealthy television producer in order to steal eight million dollars in diamonds. In an effort to run away together, Nikki and Paulo boarded Oceanic Flight 815 – the flight that ultimately crash-landed on the island. In addition to these details, on-island flashbacks revealed that Nikki and Paulo were present – albeit in the background – for several, key moments in the series.

Notably, Nikki and Paulo's very appearance on the series resulted from fan feedback. Damon Lindelof explains, "People were kind of curious about... the other castaways that we never heard from... so we basically came up with this idea for Nikki and Paulo."<sup>61</sup> Although the introduction of Nikki and Paulo sprung from a desire to satisfy audience curiosity for stories centering on characters outside of *Lost*'s principal cast, the fan reaction to Nikki and Paolo was overwhelmingly negative. Fans derided Cuse and Lindelof for Nikki and Paulo's clumsy introduction as well as for the narrative focus on storylines that had little to do with the series' main characters or mythologies. One fan expressed her dissatisfaction with the new characters in the following way on

*The Official Lost Podcast*:

**Ms. Diane** writes: I don't understand the purpose of [Nikki and Paulo].... [S]eriously, *what does this have to do with anything?* I am so frustrated.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: September 21, 2007," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed September 24, 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: April 16, 2007," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed April 19, 2007; emphasis added.

As this response suggests, fans expressed contempt for Nikki and Paulo stemming from the characters' irrelevance to the core characters as well as their tangential connection to the television series' central storylines. Additionally, Nikki and Paulo did not meet the taste standards of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*'s fan cultures.

Whereas fans generally lauded *Lost* as a series with compelling characters, fans regarded Nikki and Paulo's respective characterizations as significantly weaker. One of the co-hosts of *The Transmission* perhaps best conveyed the fan reaction to Nikki and Paulo, anointing them as:

**Jen Ozawa:** [i]nstantly, the most hideous, awful, annoying characters [in] the history of TV.<sup>63</sup>

Ozawa's assessment was indicative of the larger fan response to Nikki and Paulo. For instance, fans regarded Nikki and Paulo as "unlikable," "obnoxious," "dull," "jokey," and "a waste."<sup>64</sup> Fans used the communicative discourse provided by *The Official Lost Podcast* to voice their displeasure to Lindelof and Cuse and repeatedly demand their removal from the series:

**I Like Locke** writes: If you're too busy trying to decide, just write Paulo's death and make it a quick one.... In fact, we don't even need to *see how he dies*. Just let us know if *he did die*.<sup>65</sup>

Summing up the fan response to Nikki and Paulo on *The Official Lost Podcast*, Lindelof noted, "[T]he moment that we introduced them, you know, the fan community and audience at large basically cried foul."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Season Three: Episodes 1-3," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, September 6, 2009, accessed September 9, 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: February 12, 2007," podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed February 15, 2007; emphasis added.

*Lost*'s producers responded to Nikki and Paulo's negative reception during the same season in which the characters first appeared. The swiftness of Nikki and Paulo's removal from the television series is indicative of the power of the communicative producer-audience relationship. The backlash centering on Nikki and Paulo coincided with ABC's new scheduling strategy for *Lost* splitting the season into two parts. The implementation of this new scheduling strategy stemmed from a desire to eliminate the frequent reruns that annoyed fans during the first and second seasons of *Lost*.<sup>67</sup> ABC divided *Lost*'s third season into two blocks of episodes separated by a three-month gap between the sixth and seventh episodes. This scheduling strategy had the unexpected outcome of allowing Cuse and Lindelof to effectively revise their plans for Nikki and Paulo based on the response from fans.<sup>68</sup> Bowing to fan pressure, Cuse and Lindelof abruptly ended Nikki and Paulo's arc on *Lost*, as they indicated in *The Official Lost*

*Podcast*:

**Carlton Cuse:** You know, we had sort of bigger plans for what we were gonna do with them, but then, you know... we heard a lot [from fans] about how we were neglecting our regular characters.

**Damon Lindelof:** So we began to come up with *an alternate plan* to basically cram all the story we had come up with them, and deal with it and resolve it in a faster and more timely manner.

**CC:** And by "alternate plan," he means back-pedaling.

**DL:** We're not too proud of ourselves to know when something that we tried didn't work exactly.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: September 21, 2007," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed September 24, 2007.

<sup>67</sup> Cynthia Littleton, "Lost: The Weight of the Wait," *Variety*, October 12, 2007, accessed May 15, 2011, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117974014?refCatId=2641>.

<sup>68</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: September 21, 2007," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed September 24, 2007.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*; emphasis added.

Cuse and Lindelof's discussion suggests "the replacement of the controlling author with a regulating community" of interactive, participatory, and communicative fans.<sup>70</sup> Although such a move may appear, on the surface, to erode the producers' power, the creation of an "alternate plan" for Nikki and Paulo resulting from fans' negative feedback also represents a savvy business move. As Alan Wexelblat maintains, producer-audience communication is a way to cater to fans while simultaneously reinforcing "old models of authorial power."<sup>71</sup> Put another way, *The Official Lost Podcast*'s participatory culture enabled *Lost*'s producers to exploit an abundance of fan feedback. Lindelof and Cuse frequently couched fan feedback within the rhetoric of audience empowerment and quality control; yet, the roots of such a strategy lie in the economic sphere.

For example, in an interview with *The New York Times*, Cuse discussed Nikki and Paulo's death as "an acknowledgment of the audience" and fans' power to "influenc[e] the course of the narrative."<sup>72</sup> However, responding to negative fan feedback pertains more to producers' desire to maintain fan interest and cater to an energized fan base by not undermining trust in the producer-audience relationship. Nevertheless, the communicative channel of *The Official Lost Podcast* proved to be a space for the expression of contestation and tension where fans challenged the producers' power and the producers attempted to re-establish authority.

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<sup>70</sup> Michele White, *The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 136.

<sup>71</sup> Alan Wexelblat, "An Auteur in the Age of the Internet: JMS, *Babylon 5*, and the Net," in *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, ed. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 225.

<sup>72</sup> "Times Talks: Looking Back on 'Lost,'" *The New York Times*, accessed October 10, 2011, <http://video.nytimes.com/video/2010/05/21/arts/television/1247467895944/times-talks-looking-back-on-lost.html>.

Tellingly, the manner in which the producers removed Nikki and Paulo from *Lost* was emblematic of both viewers' regulatory power and the animosity centering on the two characters. In "Exposé" (3:14), Nikki and Paulo fall victim to the bite of a Medusa spider resulting in a state of paralysis and lowered heart rates. Believing Nikki and Paulo to be dead, two of *Lost*'s main characters shockingly bury the duo alive. Nikki's paralysis subsides and her eyes open just as dirt is cast onto her face. The two despised characters, however, never regain enough movement to escape, and the episode concludes with a shot of the freshly covered graves. The power of Nikki and Paulo's exit from the show was clear: *Lost*'s producers literally and figuratively buried two of *Lost*'s most unpopular characters. Shortly after "Exposé" aired, Lindelof again addressed the issue of fan influence, indicating the torrent of negative responses to Nikki and Paulo played a direct role in their deaths:

**Damon Lindelof:** We introduced [Nikki and Paulo], [and] *the backlash was instantaneous and unanimous....* The good news is... Nikki and Paulo are buried and dead, and *they will not be back.*<sup>73</sup>

The narrative treatment of Nikki and Paulo on *Lost* illustrates the shifting producer-audience relationship – one in which the implementation of “communicative engagement” strategies reinforce the sense that fans wield power over a transmedia franchise. The resulting struggle between fans who wanted *Lost*'s narrative to focus on the main characters and the producers who attempted to concentrate on secondary characters illustrates the disruptive qualities of online, participatory cultures. As Amy Bruckman observes, “Cyberspace is not Disneyland. It's not a polished, perfect place

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<sup>73</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: April 16, 2007,” podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed April 19, 2006; emphasis added.

built by professional designers for the public to obediently wait on line to passively experience it.”<sup>74</sup>

The tension surrounding Nikki and Paulo points to a larger issue at work in regards to participatory fandom and producer-audience communication. Fans repeatedly questioned executive producers Lindelof and Cuse about the presence of a master narrative plan. Despite continual reassurances from the producers that, as Cuse noted at the 2006 *Lost* Comic-Con panel, “We have an endpoint for the show. We have an overarching mythology for the show,” the “master plan” question persisted.<sup>75</sup> Fans privileged the notion of a grand, pre-written story over an approach in which the producers might simply be “making it up on the fly.”<sup>76</sup> As *Lost* producer and writer Javier Grillo-Marxuach observes, “People always said, ‘Did you know where you were going? Did you know what the island was?’ .... People want to know that we came up with the entire story for *Lost*, wrote it down on a series of notebooks, and put in a vault somewhere and just followed that religiously.”<sup>77</sup> However unlikely such a production model may be, the “master plan” sentiment appears at odds with fans’ preoccupation with the notion of fan influence and the desire for a producer-audience “feedback loop,” as the reaction and subsequent narrative treatment of Nikki and Paulo illustrates.

The tension between producer-audience participatory storytelling and a singular, uncompromising vision is best summed by one of the co-hosts of *The Transmission*:

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<sup>74</sup> Amy Bruckman, “Cyberspace is Not Disneyland: The Role of the Artist in a Networked World,” accessed June 1, 2011, <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~asb/papers/getty/disneyland.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official *Lost* Audio Podcast: July 31, 2006,” podcast audio, The Official *Lost* Podcast, accessed August 3, 2006.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

**Ryan Ozawa:** I'm not sure, though, that I want [*Lost*'s producers] to always be so responsive to the fans, because I like to think that, for the most part, *they're giving us the show they want to give us and not the show that we want.*<sup>78</sup>

Although these two desires appear inherently contradictory, Frank Rose does not see them as mutually exclusive; instead, the balance between producer-audience responsiveness and *Lost* producers' control of a pre-plotted master narrative is similar to audience participatory strategies dating as far back as the 1800s with authors, such as Charles Dickens.<sup>79</sup> More recently, television producers communicate with fans on internet message boards, such as Television Without Pity, in order to bolster fan loyalty and gain access to crucial fan feedback.<sup>80</sup> Although this "authorship-sharing," as Rose terms it, has a long history, what is unique about contemporary transmedia storytelling franchises is the use of viewings engagement strategies.<sup>81</sup> As Angie Knaggs argues, "Small groups of tech-savvy fans are no longer being courted and cultivated by producers; they are now invited into the text itself in small but significant ways."<sup>82</sup> This invitation to participate represents a culturally significant shift – and not solely a technological transformation – in which the new technologies simultaneously empower fans while reinforcing producers' role as cultural gatekeepers. Hence, official podcasts become sites of contestation in which this contradictory negotiation between audiences

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<sup>78</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Season Three: Episodes 1-3," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, September 6, 2009, accessed September 9, 2009; emphasis added.

<sup>79</sup> Frank Rose, *The Art of Immersion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 166.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Andrejevic, "Watching Television Without Pity: The Productivity of Online Fans," *Television and New Media* 9, no. 1 (2008): 24-25.

<sup>81</sup> "'Deep Media,' Transmedia, What's the Difference?: An Interview with Frank Rose (Part Two)" *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, accessed September 20, 2011, [http://henryjenkins.org/2011/01/deep\\_media\\_transmedia\\_whats\\_th\\_1.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2011/01/deep_media_transmedia_whats_th_1.html).

<sup>82</sup> Angie Knaggs, "*Prison Break* General Gabbery Extra-Hyperdiegetic Spaces, Power, and Identity in *Prison Break*," *Television and New Media* 12, no. 5 (2011): 409.

and producers was continually challenged and reconfigured. This struggle continued as *Lost*'s producer implemented viewings engagement strategies involving online video.

### ***Online Video as an Engagement Strategy***

In addition to using “communicative engagement” strategies facilitated by the use of *The Official Lost Podcast* during the television season, *Lost*'s producers incorporated viewings activities during the hiatus periods when the series was not on television. The exhibition of original video content during ABC's *Lost* panels at the San Diego Comic-Con best illustrates these engagement strategies. Starting in 2004, ABC began cultivating a fan audience with panels consisting of *Lost* cast members and creative staff. Cuse and Lindelof played central roles in these panels, discussing the production of the series and answering questions from Comic-Con attendees.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, ABC screened original video content during several of Cuse and Lindelof's annual Comic-Con appearances in an effort to maintain audience engagement by providing “additive comprehension” or additional narrative insights.<sup>84</sup> ABC released three Comic-Con videos, as they came to be known within the discourses of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*. These transmedia extensions depicted character backstories, offered narrative clues, and foreshadowed future storylines. The production, distribution, and reception of the *Lost* Comic-Con videos represents an engagement strategy involving viewings – one in which the use of online videos allowed “for a more sustained

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<sup>83</sup> Cuse was not present for ABC's first *Lost* Comic-Con panel in 2004.

<sup>84</sup> Neil Perryman, “*Doctor Who* and the Convergence of Media: A Case Study in ‘Transmedia Storytelling,’” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 33.

involvement with a kaleidoscopic world” by promoting a range of interactive, participatory, and communicative multi-platform activities.<sup>85</sup>

Released in July 2007, the first Comic-Con video, *The Orchid Video*, depicted a storyworld character named Dr. Edgar Halliwx explaining the scientific purposes of The Orchid research station – one of many such stations located on the island.<sup>86</sup> In the orientation video, Dr. Edgar Halliwx holds a rabbit tattooed with the number fifteen as he explains that, contrary to the cover story implemented by the Dharma Initiative, the Orchid research station is not a botanical research facility. In fact, as Dr. Halliwx explains, research at The Orchid station centers on studying “the Casimir Effect” – a “highly volatile and potentially dangerous” field with “unique properties.”<sup>87</sup> As Dr. Halliwx details the safety precautions put in place to protect researchers, another rabbit falls into the frame. Panic ensues as the researchers realize that this new rabbit also bears the same tattoo as the one held by Dr. Halliwx. *The Orchid Video* concludes as Dr. Halliwx warns the researchers to keep the two rabbits apart.

Similar to ABC’s employment of *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game during the summer hiatus period between *Lost*’s second and third seasons, *The Orchid Video* offered fans the lure of narrative enhancements in the form of online, paratextual content. Speaking to the attendees of the *Lost* Comic-Con panel, Cuse highlights *The Orchid Video*’s unique qualities:

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<sup>85</sup> Janet H. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Cambridge: MIT, 1997), 251.

<sup>86</sup> The named “Edgar Halliwx” was one of the numerous aliases used by Dr. Pierre Chang in the Dharma Initiative’s orientation films and videos.

<sup>87</sup> *The Orchid Instructional Film*, *Lost: The Complete Third Season, Bonus Features* (Burbank, CA: 2010: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2010, DVD).

**Carlton Cuse:** We do want to give you guys something special; something that no one has seen before; something that is absolutely brand new; and something that will hopefully fire your imaginations about what you're going to see in season four.<sup>88</sup>

Cuse's emphasis on *The Orchid Video*'s "special" nature is indicative of the viewings experience – one that promotes a sense of exclusivity among knowledgeable fans. As such, *The Orchid Video* functioned as a way for *Lost*'s producers to maintain fan interest between the third and fourth seasons by encouraging viewings. ABC's scheduling of *Lost*'s fourth season, in particular, presented a significant economic incentive to "fire [the] imaginations" of fans through viewings engagement strategies. In contrast to more traditional summer hiatus periods, ABC opted for an extended hiatus scheduling strategy in which an eight-month gap separated the end of *Lost*'s third season, in May 2007, and the beginning of the fourth season, in January 2008.<sup>89</sup> Providing new content in the form of *The Orchid Video* in July 2007 allowed *Lost*'s producers to maintain the series' relevance by offering willing fans a cryptic look at the series' fourth season – one that would keep fans communicating and speculating about the video's significance during *Lost*'s extended, eight-month hiatus.

*The Orchid Video* encouraged viewings because it adhered to the "This Is Not A Game" (TINAG) storytelling approach previously implemented during *Lost*'s alternate reality games. For instance, addressing the Comic-Con audience before the debut of *The Orchid Video*, Cuse and Lindelof claimed the video existed outside *Lost*'s diegesis:

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<sup>88</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: August 2, 2007," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed August 5, 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Bill Keveney, "New Season of 'Lost' is Beginning of the Adventure's End," *USA Today*, January 24, 2008, accessed June 1, 2011, [http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2008-01-24-lost-main\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2008-01-24-lost-main_N.htm).

**Carlton Cuse:** Fortunately, we had an incredible circumstance befall us. It came to our attention that this piece of film was discovered in a vault in a building in Narvik, Norway that was scheduled for demolition, and it got sent to us.

**Damon Lindelof:** It was basically [found in] a trim-bin... with all this film hanging in it.

**CC:** It had been spliced together.

**DL:** And once you see it you'll understand why they called us. We put our editors on it, and we have restored it to the best of our ability, the sound quality is kind of shoddy. What it means, who knows, but we felt that we would share it with you guys first.<sup>90</sup>

Cuse and Lindelof's claim that *The Orchid Video* was reconstructed from discarded pieces of film found in an abandoned building further reinforced the lure of additional narrative insights. In other words, Cuse and Lindelof's TINAG approach to storytelling actually reinforced the sense that *The Orchid Video* was a sort of game that could be solved. The prior implementation of alternate reality games – gaming experiences that do not overtly present themselves as games – strengthened the sense that texts displaying a similar TINAG philosophy were, in fact, puzzles or games. Solving these games, then, would allow fans to uncover hidden insights.

Although first screened at Comic-Con in July 2007, *The Orchid Video* appeared on YouTube and *Lost*-related websites, such as Lostpedia, shortly thereafter.<sup>91</sup> When *Lost*'s fourth season began in January 2008, Cuse and Lindelof directed fans to watch *The Orchid Video* in order to more fully understand events taking place on the television series. For instance, in the episode “Confirmed Dead” (4:02), the unexpected discovery

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<sup>90</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: August 2, 2007,” podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed August 5, 2007.

<sup>91</sup> Lostpedia is an online, user-created encyclopedia dedicated to *Lost*.

of an island-originating polar bear in a desert prompted the following exchange on *The Official Lost Podcast*:<sup>92</sup>

**Ben Never Lies** writes: How does a polar bear with a Dharma collar get in the middle of the desert?

**Damon Lindelof**: You know... there are properties of the island, shall we say – let's just call them properties for now – that are potentially capable of, shall we say, transporting things from the island off the island.

**Carlton Cuse**: *It might be helpful actually for those viewers who are interested in this question to go online and find the training film for The Orchid station.*

**DL**: But it's good to say if you're curious about how a polar bear with a Dharma collar ends up in Tunisia, watch that film because that polar bear has certain things in common with, say, bunnies.<sup>93</sup>

This approach to transmedia storytelling was something of a turnaround from the one implemented during *The Lost Experience*. As discussed in chapter two, Cuse and Lindelof previously expressed the belief that audiences should not have to engage in viewings behaviors in order to fully comprehend *Lost*.<sup>94</sup> Yet, the executive producers specifically emphasized *The Orchid Video* as a central element in *Lost*'s transmedia narrative:

**Carlton Cuse**: Rarely do we actually have things that aren't in the show that actually are important to the show, but in this case, [*The Orchid Video*] is important.<sup>95</sup>

Given the dissatisfaction surrounding the relevance of the narrative insights offered by *The Lost Experience* during the previous hiatus period, it is unsurprising that *Lost*'s

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<sup>92</sup> Established in the series' pilot episode, the presence of polar bears on the island was one of *Lost*'s enduring mysteries.

<sup>93</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: February 18, 2008," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed February 21, 2008; emphasis added.

<sup>94</sup> Jeff Jensen, "'Lost:' Mind-Blowing Scoop From Its Producers," *Entertainment Weekly*, February 22, 2008, accessed March 15, 2008, [http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20313460\\_20179125,00.html](http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20313460_20179125,00.html).

<sup>95</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: February 18, 2008," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed February 21, 2008.

producers reinforced the centrality of *The Orchid Video*. At the same time, however, Cuse's declaration was significant to fans, as the following responses from one of the co-hosts of *The Transmission* suggest:

**Ryan Ozawa:** [T]he creators have said, "This is canon, this is part of the show, and you actually are going to see it in the show, but these are the early hints of it."<sup>96</sup>

**Ryan Ozawa:** [The producers] said it's going to factor heavily into this season.<sup>97</sup>

Therefore, the notion of the canonical nature or narrative relevance of transmedia extensions is a significant component of viewingsing – one that I will return to in the following section. For now, I wish to highlight the interactive and communicative behaviors fostered by *The Orchid Video*.

ABC's production and distribution of *Lost* Comic-Con videos, such as *The Orchid Video*, represents an engagement strategy in which fan interest is maintained during hiatus periods by the use of interactive new media content. That is, in order to gain the narrative insights offered by *The Orchid Video*, fans had to interactively locate and watch the video online. In her discussion of the television industry's increasing use of the Internet, Sharon Marie Ross contends that television programs "rely on obscured invitations to move viewers to the Internet (and elsewhere) in pursuit of narrative enhancements."<sup>98</sup> The use of hidden cues is a savvy engagement strategy that simultaneously encourages viewingsing among hardcore fans without potentially distancing the casual audience. *The Orchid Video* functioned as an obscured invitation in that *Lost*

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<sup>96</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Shape of Things to Come," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, April 26, 2008, accessed April 29, 2008.

<sup>97</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Cabin Fever," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 11, 2008, accessed May 14, 2008.

<sup>98</sup> Sharon Marie Ross, *Beyond the Box: Television and the Internet* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 173.

producer's discussions of the transmedia extension occurred outside of the television series. This use of an obscured invitation was a reversal from the previous strategy implemented during the second season of *Lost* when ABC aired commercials for The Hanso Foundation containing a website address and telephone number. Thus, debuting *The Orchid Video* at Comic-Con can be seen as a clever move that prolongs hardcore fans' engagement with *Lost* without alienating casual fans interested solely in the television series. Yet, the implementation of hidden narrative extensions promoted a feeling of being part of an "insider" group among hardcore *Lost* fans – one that fostered a communicative discourse as viewers passed such exclusive invitations on to the mainstream audience:

**Ryan Ozawa:** Now I think this is kind of hard for people who just watch the show on the television because this is outside of that world... there is an orientation video for a station we haven't seen in the show yet called the Orchid, and it's online. It's all over YouTube.<sup>99</sup>

**Ryan Ozawa:** [T]he Orchid station... exists so far only in the exterior material for the show – it came up in Comic Con last year. You really need to watch that video, if you haven't.<sup>100</sup>

While migrating media platforms was an integral part of viewings *The Orchid Video*, the form of the video itself promoted further viewings.

In contrast to other orientation films, as they were known within *Lost*'s diegesis, *The Orchid Video* consisted primarily of outtakes from the orientation film featured in the television series. As such, many of the most integral parts of the orientation film were missing, fueling speculation from the fans regarding both the missing footage and the

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<sup>99</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Shape of Things to Come," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, April 26, 2008, accessed April 29, 2008.

<sup>100</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Cabin Fever," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 11, 2008, accessed May 14, 2008.

narrative significance of the events depicted in the outtakes. Thus, “by creating mystery about mysteries,” *The Orchid Video* facilitated discussions among fans.<sup>101</sup> *Lost*’s producers used a combination of viewings and “communicative engagement” strategies, directing fans to first watch *The Orchid Video* and then discussing fan interpretations on *The Official Lost Podcast*:

**Pile Of Atoms** writes: In the Orchid training video, we see Dr. Edgar Halliwx holding a bunny with a number fifteen on it.... I'm thinking that perhaps a few minutes into the future, something goes awry and the bunny... become[s] displaced from that moment in time and space, and ends up back in the past right before the experiment begins.

**Damon Lindelof**: I will say this, you know, Halliwx seems very concerned that those two rabbits are in the same space, so maybe he [is concerned] with [a] paradox.

**Carlton Cuse**: [T]he notion of time travel in the Orchid Station is something that is a very good observation and *something that will come back into play on the show soon*.<sup>102</sup>

Although these discussions served ABC and *Lost* producers’ interests by prolonging audience engagement, for viewers, this engagement sprung from the desire to gain a deeper understanding of *Lost*’s larger, transmedia narrative. For instance, the insights provided by *The Orchid Video* in July 2007 ushered in a revised and fuller understanding of significant events occurring over the television series’ three prior seasons. Consider the following response:

**Jed** writes: *The Orchid Video* with Dr. Marvin Candle is definitely key to... this season, so if you haven’t seen it go look at it. It mentions the Casimir Effect .... Maybe the Casimir Effect ... was strong enough to make the opening of the

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<sup>101</sup> Sharon Marie Ross, *Beyond the Box: Television and the Internet* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 199.

<sup>102</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: February 28, 2008,” podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed March 2, 2008; emphasis added.

wormhole a stable and controllable thing. Wormholes could, then, bring us the Black Rock, the drug plane from Nigeria, and the Polar Bear in Tunisia.<sup>103</sup>

Hence, *Lost*'s use of *The Orchid Video* in 2007 allowed fans to expand their comprehension of previous, significant events, including the presence of the Black Rock ship and a small, Nigerian aircraft on the island – two mysteries introduced in the television series' first season in 2004. Revealed only through transmedia paratexts, these unique insights into *Lost*'s overall narrative are emblematic of the viewings experience.

The production and distribution of *The Orchid Video* reflects the current industrial logic regarding the use of online video in which original paratextual content can promote a television series and sustain audience engagement. As Michael Curtin argues, "Online video may represent a grand opportunity for television companies, but executives are nevertheless aware that they cannot simply recirculate broadcast programming onto the web. They must develop dedicated material that is conducive to web viewing."<sup>104</sup> In other words, in order to remain competitive in the emerging market of online video, networks encourage viewings. The production of paratexts, therefore, represents an engagement strategy in which fan-text interactivity and producer-audience communication maintain fan interest during a series' hiatus period. In fact, the top ratings for *Lost*'s season four premiere, "The Beginning of the End" (4:01), suggest that such a strategy is effective.<sup>105</sup> Yet, while viewings engagement strategies fostered by

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<sup>103</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Constant," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, March 1, 2008, accessed March 4, 2008.

<sup>104</sup> Michael Curtin, "Matrix Media," in *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era*, ed. Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17.

<sup>105</sup> Robert Seidman, "Nielsen Ratings – Jan 31, 2008: ABC Gets LOST," *TV by the Numbers*, February 1, 2008, accessed June 1, 2011,

transmedia extensions and official podcasts provide television networks with new methods for sustaining and even building an audience, the use of online, original content presents potential pitfalls as well. As the narratives of transmedia franchises expand outward, so too, does the possibility for narrative incoherence. How, then, do fans make sense of transmedia paratexts that seemingly contradict and compete with the centralized anchor text?

### ***Viewing and the Struggle for Lost's Transmedia Canon***

Existing transmedia studies emphasizes the richness of transmedia storyworlds (Hanson, 2004; Jenkins, 2006b; Long, 2007; Rose, 2011) fostered by the extensive range of paratexts and media platforms incorporated into the story. In his discussion of the Jim Henson Company, for example, Geoffrey Long presents an idealistic view of transmedia storytelling in which “[b]y deliberately making each extension in canon, by creating and maintaining a consistent narrative world... there is plenty of reason for a would-be transmedia storyteller to be optimistic.”<sup>106</sup> However, little attention has been paid to the tension that develops within transmedia franchises resulting from narrative inconsistencies existing across narrative extensions. When paratexts contradict a transmedia franchise's storyworld – either deliberately or otherwise – an oppositional tension exists between producers and fans centering on the issue of canon. Arguments over canonical paratexts – disputes over what constitutes an official narrative extension –

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<http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2008/02/01/nielsen-ratings-jan-31-2008-abc-gets-lost/2537/>.

<sup>106</sup> Geoffrey Long, “Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company” (master's thesis, MIT, 2007), 162.

represent power struggles between transmedia producers, who have the power to deem texts canonical, and viewers, who do not. In other words, as John Dugan argues, “[C]anon formation becomes a discourse of power reinforcing the values of the canonizers.”<sup>107</sup> Yet, as the following discussion illustrates, the depth of transmedia storyworlds complicates the relationships between producers and fans. This results in fans questioning producers’ canonizing power and engaging in diverse interpretive strategies in an effort to construct a transmedia narrative as a consistent, coherent whole. The struggle between producers and fans over a transmedia canon challenges normative understandings of canon by complicating the traditional canonical/non-canonical binary. In its place, I argue for a fluid, circular model of canon in which different levels of canonicity exist.

Research on fans and canon formation (Uricchio & Pearson, 1991; Brooker, 2002; Dougan, 2006; Milner, 2010) emphasizes fans’ evaluation of a text’s unity, consistency, and relationship to an existing body of texts. As Ryan Milner argues, canon debates are “really negotiations over integrity” tied to the text’s validity and cohesion with an established narrative universe.<sup>108</sup> Transmedia franchises problematize this negotiation due to the wealth of paratexts used to depict the overarching narrative. Over time, as the narratives of these franchises unfold across multiple media platforms, the possibilities for narrative disunity and inconsistency increase. Paratexts displaying narrative contradictions or little relevance to a franchise’s centralized anchor text become the focus

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<sup>107</sup> John Dougan, “Objects of Desire: Canon Formation and Blues Record Collecting” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 18, no. 1 (2006): 53.

<sup>108</sup> Ryan M. Milner, “Negotiating Text Integrity: An Analysis of Fan-Producer Interaction in an Era of Digital-Connectivity,” *Information, Communication, and Society* 13, no. 5 (2010): 722-723.

of interrogatory debates among fans and producers centering on the issue of canon. Such debates involve cultural and cognitive processes in which “members of a community... express their shared values” based on their knowledge of a transmedia storyworld.<sup>109</sup> On one level, then, canon formation centers on the qualities of the text – specifically the degree to which a paratext conforms to the narrative universe articulated by official or canonical texts.

When coupled with the increasing levels of producer-audience communication afforded by official podcasts, discourses of canon formation extend the notion of integrity beyond the text and onto the producer as well. In other words, disputes over a transmedia canon are more than articulations of “the wholeness, validity, and truth of a media text.”<sup>110</sup> The conflicts surrounding canon formation are also keenly tied to notions of trust between the producer and audience; trust that the producer will provide the audience with a satisfying, unified story. As the previous discussion of *The Official Lost Podcast*’s participatory culture illustrates, communicative producers forge a bond with audiences afforded by the intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity of podcast communication. In addition to violating the validity of a transmedia storyworld, narratively inconsistent texts jeopardize the integrity of this producer-audience bond by undermining the audience’s confidence in the producer. The disunity and even outright contradiction between canonical and non-canonical texts fosters tension between producers and audiences centering on the cohesiveness of the overarching story. Therefore, transmedia franchises

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<sup>109</sup> Antti-Ville Kärjä, “A Prescribed Alternative Mainstream: Popular Music and Canon Formation,” *Popular Music* 25, no. 1 (2006): 4.

<sup>110</sup> Ryan M. Milner, “Negotiating Text Integrity: An Analysis of Fan-Producer Interaction in an Era of Digital-Connectivity,” *Information, Communication, and Society* 13, no. 5 (2010): 722.

become sites of struggle in which conflicts between producers and fans over an official canon articulate larger issues of trust in the producer-audience relationship. The struggle over the canonical nature of *The Dharma Booth Video* – one of *Lost*'s Comic-Con videos – provides a potent example of the interplay between the transmedia producer-audience relationship and canon formation.

As *Lost* established a vast transmedia presence early into the series' run on ABC, the debate centering on the notion of a *Lost* canon was a recurring theme within the discourses of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*. Consider the following exchange between Lindelof, Cuse, and a *Lost* fan on *The Official Lost Podcast*:

**Fan 3** writes:<sup>111</sup> A couple of days ago, someone on a *Lost* fan-site leaked this super-cheesy, fan fiction-esque "Procedure" video for a Dharma station called "The Goblet"... I was curious as to whether... you had seen it... and if you had anything to say about it.

**Damon Lindelof**: We have not seen it.

**Carlton Cuse**: It's fake, fake, fake!

**DL**: [B]ut we actually encourage the fans to do stuff like that. It's awesome that they are creatively activated by the show. *So more power to them is what I say.*<sup>112</sup>

While continuing to foster a participatory culture – one that is advantageous to the success of *Lost* – by encouraging fans to create and share content, Lindelof and Cuse also position themselves as cultural gatekeepers, determining what texts are canonical extensions of the show. This exchange establishes a clear hierarchy, placing the producers at the center of canon-making and the fans on the periphery of such efforts. Interestingly, whereas Lindelof stresses the notion of power, giving fans the perception – at least on the surface – that they possess the ability to participate in *Lost*'s discourse,

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<sup>111</sup> The fan's name was not provided. I identified this individual as "Fan 3" because this was the third question read by Lindelof and Cuse.

<sup>112</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: April 3, 2006," podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed April 6, 2006; emphasis added.

Cuse's repetition of the word "fake" underscores the power disparity in the producer-audience relationship. Simply put, *Lost*'s producers position themselves as the sole, true keepers of the canon, and relegate fans to the margins where fans create counterfeit, non-canonical imitations. In this way, *Lost*'s producers construct a canonical/non-canonical binary.

Lindelof and Cuse's subsequent treatment of canon suggests the replacement of the canonical/non-canonical binary with a more fluid model. The issue of canon became problematized as *Lost*'s producers expanded the franchise's narrative scope in such a way that the producers' role as keepers of the canon became significantly less clear.

In other words, the canonical designation went beyond simply those texts created by producers and instead came to represent official texts that had relevance to the television series. However, as the following responses highlight, the notion of canon was murky, even among those with canonizing power:

**Sam Fisher Cell** writes: From my understanding, something being "canon" means that it is a legitimate piece of the overall mythology.

**Damon Lindelof:** [C]anon basically means, like, anything in the show that is actually of the show and we refer to as being part of the show, as opposed to something that is tangential to the show.<sup>113</sup>

Lindelof offers a puzzlingly unclear definition of canon in which vague notions of a partext's relationship to the television series dictates its level of canonical value. Rather than a canonical/non-canonical binary, then, *Lost*'s producers construct a circular model of canonicity with the television series at the center. An extension that is "part of the show," for instance, is closer to the center of the franchise's official canon, while an extension that is "tangential to the show" is on the periphery of canon. While Lindelof's

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<sup>113</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: March 9, 2008," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed March 12, 2008.

explanation of canon was ambiguous, he again stresses the producers' privileged position as canonizers. In short, the producers make the final determinations, from the body of paratexts comprising *Lost*'s transmedia franchise, of what is integral to the overarching narrative. However, even producer-created paratexts foregrounded as integral pieces of *Lost*'s transmedia canon sometimes failed to satisfy the barometer of canonicity established by Lindelof and Cuse themselves. One such paratext, *The Dharma Booth Video*, undermined the integrity of the producer-audience relationship as a result of its shifting canonical value.

The release of *The Orchid Video* at the 2007 Comic-Con established a precedent for *Lost*'s use of online video in which the narrative of a paratext eventually merged with the television series' narrative. This was significant in that previous transmedia extensions, such as *The Lost Experience* ARG, the *Bad Twin* novel, and the *Lost: Via Domus* videogame, detailed events that were never directly referenced in the television series. At the time of *The Orchid Video*'s original release, the video depicted events occurring at a yet-unseen research facility located somewhere on the island. In fact, The Orchid station was not introduced into the diegesis of the television series until the season four finale "There's No Place Like Home" (4:12) in May 2008.<sup>114</sup> In their final podcast before the season four finale, Cuse and Lindelof hinted that the narrative elements established by *The Orchid Video* in July 2007 would finally surface on the television series in May 2008:

**Carlton Cuse:** We've seen tantalizing bits of The Orchid station... last year at Comic-Con. We screened a bit of some outtakes from what was the orientation

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<sup>114</sup> "There's No Place Like Home" was a three-part, three-hour season finale airing over the course of two weeks in May 2008.

film for The Orchid station. *Would it be possible that we might be seeing more of that orientation film, Damon?*

**Damon Lindelof:** If we saw the bloopers from the orientation film at Comic-Con, I would hope that we actually get to see the real deal in the finale, *I'd feel pretty ripped-off if we didn't*. That was literally the longest setup for a *Lost* gag ever.<sup>115</sup>

In addition to discussing the use of a viewings engagement strategy to “tantalize” fans during *Lost*’s hiatus period, the producers also established a canonical link between the narratives of *The Orchid Video* and the television series. For instance, Lindelof notes that he would feel “ripped off” if *The Orchid Video* was not relevant to events occurring on the television series.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, *The Orchid Video* established the intertwined relationship between the narratives of the Comic-Con videos and the television series and reinforced the notion that the producers possessed an overarching narrative design.

Yet, ABC’s screening of a subsequent video at the 2008 *Lost* Comic-Con panel resulted in tension and struggle when the relationship between the Comic-Con videos and the television series became unclear. *The Dharma Booth Video*, as it came to be known within the discourses of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*, featured Dr. Pierre Chang (the same character from *The Orchid Video*) delivering a message from the 1970s to people thirty years into the future.<sup>117</sup> In the video, Dr. Chang speaks directly to the camera and interacts with an unseen character operating the camera. Dr. Chang reveals that he was able to send this videotaped message into the future, from the 1970s, by using the unique properties of the island. Dr. Chang, then, verifies his knowledge of

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<sup>115</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: May 19, 2008,” podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed May 22, 2008; emphasis added.

<sup>116</sup> The notion of being “ripped-off” is significant. I expand on this concept beginning on page 179.

<sup>117</sup> The name “*The Dharma Booth Video*” originated from the video’s initial exhibition location. The video was originally screened, for a select group of individuals, inside a Dharma Initiative booth at the 2008 Comic-Con. The video was subsequently screened at ABC’s *Lost* Comic-Con panel.

future events, including the name of the current president and the advent of the Internet, and informs viewers that he and the other remaining members of the Dharma Initiative will soon die as a result of a violent uprising. The video concludes with Dr. Chang imploring the viewers of the video to reconstitute the Dharma Initiative so that their scientific research of the island can continue. *The Dharma Booth Video*'s most shocking detail, however, was the voice of Daniel Faraday – a character arriving on the island in 2004 – as the person operating the camera. Although Faraday never appears on camera in *The Dharma Booth Video*, it was clear to fans that the character was, in fact, present in the 1970s.<sup>118</sup> *The Dharma Booth Video* sparked speculation and discussion during the hiatus period between the four and fifth seasons of *Lost* as fans debated how Faraday could be present on the island in both the 1970s and the 2000s.

Given Daniel Faraday's presence in *The Dharma Booth Video* as well as the fifth season's focus on time travel, fans frequently discussed time travel as a device allowing Faraday to be on the island in the 1970s. For example:

**Evan:** [T]here's a new YouTube video where Pierre Chang is pretty much telling whoever is watching the video that they're going to die and to help save them, and it sounds like Daniel's in the background. I guess that's what's going to happen.... They're going to try to change the future.<sup>119</sup>

As such, *The Dharma Booth Video* was an effective engagement tool, sustaining fan discussion during the series' hiatus period and even into fifth season:

**Jen Ozawa:** It was the big event of *Lost* [at Comic-Con].... It was a huge deal.

**Ryan Ozawa:** It's a tradition they've started at previous Comic-Cons.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Comic-Con in Review," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, August 10, 2008, accessed August 13, 2008.

<sup>119</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Some Like it Hoth," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, April 18, 2009, accessed April 21, 2009.

<sup>120</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Comic-Con in Review," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, August 10, 2008, accessed August 13, 2008.

**Levi:** I wanted to hear what y'all thought of the [*Dharma Booth Video*].... And basically if you think it's going to lead anywhere.

**Ryan Ozawa:** It's a question not specifically about what airs on the television. It's part of the *Lost* universe, though.... I personally think that *Lost* podcasts were... a great part of keeping that conversation going.<sup>121</sup>

**Jessica:** I keep getting drawn back to that video that we saw from Comic-Con this past year with Pierre Chang.<sup>122</sup>

*The Dharma Booth Video*, thus, represented an attempt by *Lost*'s producers to build on previous communicative and viewings engagement strategies.

However, after Faraday dies in "The Variable" (5:14) before taking part in the events depicted in *The Dharma Booth Video*, fans struggled with the relationship between the television series and the Comic-Con video. Fans attempted to reconcile the narratives of *The Dharma Booth Video* and the television series – two texts apparently contradicting each other. For instance:

**Tony** writes: Here's why it doesn't seem that Daniel [Faraday] can be dead. In the most recent Comic-Con video, Pierre Change is warning the viewers about the impending disaster, and Daniel is heard operating the camera. Last night Chang did not believe Daniel yet about what was going to happen, so doesn't Daniel still have to be alive to be operating the camera in [*The Dharma Booth Video*]?<sup>123</sup>

The competing narratives of "The Variable" and *The Dharma Booth Video* resulted in significant confusion among fans. The efforts to resolve this tension resulted in a number of conflicting fan interpretations. Fans supported their theories with evidence from the television series and *The Orchid Video* – texts established by Lindelof and Cuse as canonical. One strategy for reconciling the two texts, for example, involved positing that

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<sup>121</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "S.O.S," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, December 5, 2008, accessed December 8, 2008.

<sup>122</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Some Like it Hoth," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, April 18, 2009, accessed April 21, 2009.

<sup>123</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Variable," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 4, 2009, accessed May 7, 2009.

the events of *The Dharma Booth Video* occurred off-screen, as the following response highlights:

**Scott** writes: Could Daniel [Faraday] have gone to Dr. Chang before visiting the meeting at Sawyer's? Well, how could he have convinced Chang of the crazy ideas of the Internet, George W. Bush being president, and the most shocking thing: that he's going to die in only a few hours?<sup>124</sup>

Because Faraday died in the scenes following the meeting at Sawyer's residence, the conjecture that Faraday filmed Dr. Chang's message to the future before the meeting is not altogether unlikely given that, at this point in the television series, *Lost*'s narrative structure included flashbacks and flash-forwards. It was not unreasonable, then, to assume that the events of *The Dharma Booth Video* might be featured in a subsequent episode.

Given *Lost*'s science fiction storytelling elements, fans also crafted elaborate theories accounting for both Faraday's death in the television series and his subsequent appearance in the Comic-Con video. Informed by the prior Comic-Con video, *The Orchid Video*, in which two identical rabbits occupied the same space, one popular theory centered on cloning:

**Douglas**: When in this world have we seen two things in one place? Originally this theory spawned from [*The Orchid Video*] with two rabbits.... I think that back in Ann Arbor, Daniel [Faraday] figured out a way to harness this or untangle this so he could use it and come back more than once. So this allows for him to actually shoot the [*Dharma Booth*] video of Dr. Chang... after having been killed. How would he shoot the video? There has to be another Daniel.<sup>125</sup>

In addition to displaying a desire to bring the events of *The Dharma Booth Video* into the center of *Lost*'s canon, these theories demonstrate the value of fan speculation. Fans

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Follow the Leader," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 11, 2009, accessed May 14, 2009.

regularly engaged in theory-making and sharing – often privileging the more complex or outlandish interpretations. On the one hand, these theories display a desire to unite *Lost*'s disparate texts into a coherent narrative whole. On the other hand, highly elaborate theories display the theorist's mastery of *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld, thereby granting the fan-theorist a unique status. In his discussion of speculation among *Babylon 5* fans, Wexelblat contends, "For those who 'guess correctly' there is the vindication of being proven right in later episodes; there is a demonstration of one's superiority to one's fellow fans.... This direct reward can also have the effect of promoting fans to authorlike status: they are recognized for a special act that creates value within the community."<sup>126</sup> In the context of canon formation, the process of reconciling the narratives of *The Dharma Booth Video* and the television series became a way for fans to gain authority within the fan community by resolving narrative inconsistencies existing across multiple media platforms.

One common strategy for rectifying the apparent discrepancies between *The Dharma Booth Video* and the television series (and thereby establishing a sense of fan-authorship) involved time travel – a plot device introduced in the television series' fifth season. In the following theory, a fan sees Faraday's background as a physicist studying time as a way to resolve the paratext's incongruity:

**Nails** writes: What if Dan [Faraday] has traveled back into the time multiple times and perhaps this is his last trek back. He said that this is their present and that he and the others can die in the present, so what if the video shown at Comic-

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<sup>126</sup> Alan Wexelblat, "An Auteur in the Age of the Internet: JMS, *Babylon 5*, and the Net," in *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, ed. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 217.

Con was indeed Dan making that video as a backup plan in case he failed further in the past to stop the Incident.<sup>127</sup>

By developing increasingly complicated theories that avoid the apparent contradiction between *The Dharma Booth Video* and “The Variable,” *Lost* fans demonstrated alternate reading strategies in an effort to cohere *Lost*’s transmedia narrative. In other words, as fans expected that *Lost*’s transmedia narrative would present a coherent, internally consistent narrative, especially among texts established as canon, they incorporated a range of interpretive strategies in order to retain the television series and *The Dharma Booth Video*’s canonicity.

On the episode of *The Official Lost Podcast* following the airing of “The Variable,” Cuse explained the reason for the narrative inconsistency. Whereas *The Orchid Video* functioned as an “obscured invitation” for viewers to embark on a canonical narrative extension ultimately leading back to the television series, *The Dharma Booth Video* essentially offered viewers an “obscured invitation” to a narrative dead-end. As Cuse explains:<sup>128</sup>

**Carlton Cuse:** We conceive our material for Comic-Con... ahead of the regular season, and so... in this case, we had an idea and we were unable to completely follow through on the idea.... [W]e really couldn't get back to that story branch [involving *The Dharma Booth Video*] based on the way the show naturally evolved.<sup>129</sup>

In spite of *Lost* fans’ efforts to reconcile the narratives of *The Dharma Booth Video* and the television series, the reality behind the inconsistency was that the producers regarded

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<sup>127</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Variable,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 4, 2009, accessed May 7, 2009.

<sup>128</sup> Sharon Marie Ross, *Beyond the Box: Television and the Internet* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 173.

<sup>129</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: May 10, 2009,” podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed May 13, 2009.

the video primarily as a promotional text for the following season – one which they did not feel obligated to honor with treatment in the television series. Cuse’s explanation of *The Dharma Booth Video* as well as viewers debates surrounding its canonicity illustrate what Joshua Green and Henry Jenkins term the “moral economy” or the “social expectations, emotional investments, and cultural transactions” between producers and consumers in the age of media convergence.<sup>130</sup> Whereas Lindelof and Cuse viewed *The Dharma Booth Video* primarily as a promotional tool intended to pique interest in *Lost*’s fifth season, *Lost*’s viewers regarded the paratext more as what I term a “canonical contract” between producers and the audience. In other words, the audience – and viewers in particular – engaged with paratexts in exchange for the producers providing them with official canonical extensions of the television series. As Green and Jenkins argue, “[M]edia companies are being forced to reassess the nature of consumer engagement and *the value* of audience participation in response to a shifting media environment characterized by... the increased power and capacity of consumers to shape the flow and reception of media content.”<sup>131</sup> However, as the conflict surrounding *Lost*’s transmedia canon illustrates, the value of interactive and participatory engagement is often fluid and contradictory.

For *Lost*’s producers, the power of online video lay in its promotional capacity. *The Dharma Booth Video* represented the network’s paradoxical desire to utilize the power of paratextual content to maintain fan interest by encouraging viewings, yet an unwillingness to consistently reward such engagement. As Cuse and Lindelof suggest,

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<sup>130</sup> Joshua Green and Henry Jenkins, “The Moral Economy of Web 2.0: Audience Research and Convergence Culture,” in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 214.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*; emphasis added.

*Lost*'s producers felt no obligation to adhere to the narratives established in these extensions:

**Carlton Cuse:** *We don't consider what goes on in Comic-Con canon.* I mean, we try to make it tie into the show, but the only thing that really is canon is the show for us.

**Damon Lindelof:** [W]e feel like we get a little bit of leeway when it comes to material that we generate for Comic-Con and the Internet and stuff like that.<sup>132</sup>

In other words, after serving its purpose by sustaining viewers' engagement over *Lost*'s hiatus period between seasons four and five, the producers abandoned the storyline involving Faraday filming Dr. Chang's message to the future. *Lost*'s viewers, however, placed a different value on their interactive and participatory engagement with paratexts across new media platforms. Encouraged by the ABC's prior use of online video as well as by Cuse and Lindelof's own words regarding the importance of *The Orchid Video*, viewers read *The Dharma Booth Video* as a legitimate, canonical extension of *Lost*'s transmedia narrative. Viewers invested their time and effort interactively searching out *The Dharma Booth Video* and communicating with others in an effort to gain insights into *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld.

*The Dharma Booth Video*'s failure to honor the "canonical contract" undermined the producer-audience bond established by *Lost*'s producer's prior "communicative engagement" strategies. Consider the following statements from the hosts of *The Transmission* after Lindelof and Cuse indicated that *The Dharma Booth Video* was non-canonical:

**Ryan Ozawa:** [I]t's been demonstrated that the Comic-Con video was what [the producers] thought was going to be coming into the story, but it turns out they

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<sup>132</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: May 10, 2009," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed May 13, 2009; emphasis added.

couldn't write it that way. Now [it is] just non-canon, non-timeline, and it's something we thought a little bit too much about.

**Jen Ozawa:** *Well, it really makes me feel ripped-off, in that case.*<sup>133</sup>

Jen Ozawa's use of the phrase "ripped-off" is telling as a consumer gets "ripped-off" by overpaying for a service or commodity.<sup>134</sup> Clearly, Ozawa feels as if she invested too heavily in an inauthentic or non-canonical text, and therefore, it is unworthy of her time. Significantly, Lindelof's own comments on *The Official Lost Podcast* support such feelings. When discussing *The Orchid Video* in May 2008 – two months before the release of *The Dharma Booth Video* – Lindelof noted that he would "feel pretty ripped-off" if the paratext and the television series did not ultimately align.<sup>135</sup> Hence, both producers and audiences use the transactional metaphor to describe *Lost*'s transmedia canon. Referencing paratexts in the television series, then, functions as the way for producers to honor the transactional "canonical contract" with the transmedia audience.

Moreover, a consumer gets "ripped-off" by the seller – not the item being sold. Therefore, while the notion of canon is tied to the integrity of the text, as Milner observes, canon formation is also keenly linked to the producer of the text as well.<sup>136</sup> By not honoring the "canonical contract" established by *The Orchid Video*, Lindelof and Cuse ignored viewer expectations surrounding *The Dharma Booth Video*'s canonical value thereby depreciating the "moral economy" of their relationship with the audience.

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<sup>133</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Follow the Leader," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 11, 2009, accessed May 14, 2009; emphasis added.

<sup>134</sup> Nadia Massoud and Dan Bernhardt, "'Rip-off': ATM Surcharges," *RAND Journal of Economics* 33, no. 1 (2002): 96-98.

<sup>135</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: May 19, 2008," podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed May 22, 2008.

<sup>136</sup> Ryan M. Milner, "Negotiating Text Integrity: An Analysis of Fan-Producer Interaction in an Era of Digital-Connectivity," *Information, Communication, and Society* 13, no. 5 (2010): 722-723.

In short, viewers did not simply want to be marketed to; they wanted *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld to function as a closed-narrative, in which paratexts and the anchor text would eventually merge, forming a coherent narrative whole. In actuality, however, *Lost*'s narrative remained open-ended, ultimately betraying fan expectations and diminishing the integrity of the producer-audience bond.

The disappointment surrounding the non-canonical nature of *The Dharma Booth Video* was still fresh in fans' minds at the final *Lost* Comic-Con panel in 2009. Since ABC debuted Comic-Con videos the previous two years, fans expected the 2009 *Lost* panel would include a similar screening. Yet, when asked about the possibility of ABC screening a new *Lost* Comic-Con video at the panel, one fan remarked:

**Jack:** I don't want anything – no video that's going to turn out to be meaningless.<sup>137</sup>

ABC did, in fact, screen a new video – a series of diegetic commercials featuring *Lost* characters – at the 2009 *Lost* Comic-Con panel. However, reflecting the tension and sense of disappointment surrounding *The Dharma Booth Video*, Cuse and Lindelof refused to answer questions about this latest video. Instead, after debuting the video, Lindelof and Cuse simply instructed fans to “trust us” about the video's canonical nature.<sup>138</sup> Ironically, after challenging conventional understandings of official texts through the creation of a fluid canon, the producers returned to a traditional canonical/non-canonical binary by which they determined what texts constitute canonical extensions of the television series. Finally, as the producers' appeal for the audience's

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<sup>137</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Comic-Con Day 2,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 24, 2009, accessed July 27, 2009.

<sup>138</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official *Lost* Audio Podcast: July 25, 2009,” podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed July 28, 2009.

trust at the 2009 Comic-Con demonstrates, the process of canon formation functions as an expression of trust in the producer-audience relationship. *Lost*'s transmedia franchise, therefore, became a site of struggle between producers and audiences as these notions of trust were continually negotiated.

## **Conclusion**

Transmedia storytelling franchises foster a significant transformation to the producer-audience relationship by encouraging viewings. Vast transmedia franchises offer media producers a range of engagement strategies to explore engineered by new media technologies. These viewings strategies serve as a way to cultivate a fan base in the post-network era of audience fragmentation and maintain audience engagement during hiatus periods through the creation of a participatory culture. Digital producer-audience communication and paratextual extensions sustain interest and prolong audience engagement by promoting a range of interactive, participatory, and communicative activities. Although transmedia franchises reconfigure the producer-audience relationship by fostering greater communication and challenging normative understandings of canon formation, this process is far from harmonious.

As my analysis of *The Official Lost Podcast* illustrates, the creation of a participatory culture between *Lost*'s producers and fans was economically advantageous to both ABC and *Lost*'s producers. Yet, because of the intimate, immediate, and interactive qualities of podcast communication, Lindelof and Cuse's dialogue branding reinforced the perception of a heightened connection between Cuse, Lindelof, and the

fans. In addition, Lindelof and Cuse's validation of fan feedback fostered notions of fan agency in *Lost*'s television series. Although originally conceived as an engagement tool serving ABC and *Lost* producers' economic aims, *The Official Lost Podcast* empowered fans to vocalize their discontent. Hence, *The Official Lost Podcast* functioned as a feedback loop in which fan evaluation and criticism worked its way back into the franchise. In the case of Nikki and Paulo, two characters widely despised by *Lost* fans, the "noise" or "interference" introduced into the feedback loop by communicative fans resulted in producers bowing to fan pressure and removing the characters in a manner emblematic of the negative reception. On the one hand, the fan reaction and narrative treatment of Nikki and Paulo on *Lost*'s television series illustrates the regulatory and even disruptive power of interactive, participatory, and communicative fans. On the other hand, *The Official Lost Podcast*'s participatory culture enabled *Lost*'s producers to exploit an abundance of fan feedback. Although Lindelof and Cuse frequently couched producer-audience communication within the rhetoric of audience empowerment and quality control, *The Official Lost Podcast*'s participatory culture ultimately reinforced Lindelof and Cuse role as cultural gatekeepers.

Although the producers encouraged textually productive and communicative fans to participate in *Lost*'s narrative universe, Lindelof and Cuse established a strict canonical/non-canonical binary. Lindelof and Cuse placed themselves at the center of canon-making and the fan-created texts on the periphery of such efforts. ABC's use of original, online video – the so-called Comic-Con videos – problematized this inside/outside, canonical/non-canonical binary as a result of *The Dharma Booth Video*'s shifting canonical value. Although *The Orchid Video* proved to be an effective tool for

prolonging audience engagement while *Lost*'s television series was on hiatus between the third and fourth seasons, this viewings engagement strategy effectively backfired when the narratives of subsequent Comic-Con video, *The Dharma Booth Video*, and the television series contradicted each other. Although Lindelof and Cuse presented *The Dharma Booth Video* to fans at the 2008 *Lost* Comic-Con panel as a canonical extension of *Lost*'s transmedia franchise, its canonical status ultimately shifted; instead, functioning more as a promotional text than a legitimate, narratively relevant paratext.

In this way, transmedia franchises challenge normative understandings of canon formation. Instead of the traditional canonical/non-canonical binary, *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling franchise illustrates a fluid, circular model of canon in which different levels of canonicity exist, with paratexts moving in and out of the centralized anchor text's porous canonical boundary. Moreover, whereas existing research on fans and canon formation (Uricchio & Pearson, 1991; Brooker, 2002; Dougan, 2006; Milner, 2010) emphasizes fans' evaluation of a text's unity, consistency, and relationship to an existing body of texts, I argue for a view of canon that also functions as an articulation of the producer-audience relationship. When coupled with the dialogue branding and producer-audience communication afforded by official podcasts, discourses of canon formation extend the notion of integrity (Milner, 2010) beyond the text and onto the producer as well. Narratively inconsistent texts jeopardize the integrity of the producer-audience bond by undermining the audience's investment of trust in the producer. Among viewers, for example, the discrepancy between *The Dharma Booth Video* and *Lost*'s television series fostered feelings of being exploited or duped by the producers – not the text itself. Therefore, the disunity and even outright contradiction between a transmedia

franchise's canonical and non-canonical texts promotes tensions between producers and audiences because non-canonical paratexts indicate a lack of a master narrative plan – a strategy privileged by fans.

The resulting disappointment surrounding *The Dharma Booth Video* illustrates that fans largely valorize viewings when producers reward their interactivity, participation, and multi-platform media use with significant canonical insights. Hence, although viewings strategies offer the lure of prolonged audience engagement, these strategies can actually have the reverse effect when producers do not consider paratextual extensions as canonical extensions of the centralized anchor text.

As this discussion demonstrates, transmedia franchises become sites of struggle in which conflicts between producers and fans over an official canon articulate larger issues of trust in the producer-audience relationship. Such tension and antagonism arises not just between producers and fans but within the fan community as well. It is to these issues that I now turn.

## Chapter 4 – Shippers, Mythologists, and Viewers, Oh My!: The Transmedia Audience-Audience Relationship

This chapter focuses on transformations to audience relationships in relation to a confluence of technological, industrial, and cultural shifts in contemporary media through an examination of *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling franchise. The use of interactive paratexts, such as alternate reality games and online video, encourages a segment of the audience – the viewers – to become highly engaged with transmedia storyworlds. Yet, the creation of an avid following promotes external tensions as viewers position themselves in opposition to the mainstream audience that they perceive as unwilling or unable to comprehend and master the wealth of story and character information contained in transmedia franchises. In addition to this mainstream/viewer divide, transmedia storytelling franchises problematize relationships within viewing audiences by blurring generic boundaries through the incorporation of an abundance of narratively complex paratexts in the service of world-building. This expansive narrative scope confuses issues of generic classification, resulting in seemingly contradictory expectations and narrative pleasures. These contradictory expectations result in factional animosity as viewers intensely negotiate the “correct” way to consume transmedia texts. Thus, while transmedia storytelling franchises encourage viewing, this mode of engagement also fosters external and internal clashes as viewers position themselves in opposition to both the casual, mainstream audience and other viewers.

*Lost*'s six-year run on ABC (2004-2010) coincided with a confluence of significant technological, industrial, and cultural transformations, including the advent of podcast technology, the emergence of narratively complex television and transmedia

world-building, and the rise of online knowledge communities engineered by the collective intelligence of fan members, thereby facilitating transformations within transmedia audiences. An examination of the responses from the producers and fans of a transmedia franchise, therefore, illustrates how these shifts' complex interplay encourages – and even necessitates – viewings. I will now provide a brief overview of these developments in an effort to contextualize the shifting relationships among audience members.

The emergence of an increasingly innovative and experimental mode of televisual storytelling is central to transmedia franchises, with most scholars dating the start of the trend to the late 1990s (Sconce, 2004; Johnson, 2005; Mittell, 2006; Lavery, 2009).<sup>1</sup> The names given to this emerging trend – “conjectural narrative”<sup>2</sup> and “narratively complex television”<sup>3</sup> – highlight both the unique storytelling qualities at work in these programs as well as the heightened investment necessary to engage with their narratives. As Mittell argues, the narratives of television series, such as *Twin Peaks*, *The X-Files*, and *Lost*, are characterized by an “episodic seriality” fusing the narrative closure of episodic television with the delayed narrative resolution of long-form serialized storytelling.<sup>4</sup> Complexity, then, results from narratives that simultaneously provide weekly closure while spinning intricate series-long narratives spanning years and consisting of hundreds of storytelling hours. The comprehension of such narratives requires a sophisticated and encyclopedic-

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<sup>1</sup> The exception is David Lavery, as will be discussed.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Sconce, “What If?: Charting Television’s New Textual Boundaries,” in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, edited by Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 105-111.

<sup>3</sup> Jason Mittell “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 58 (2006): 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

like understanding of a series' plot and characters. Steven Johnson maintains that such "[n]arratives that require that their viewers fill in crucial elements take... complexity to a new level. To follow the narrative, you aren't just asked to remember. You're asked to analyze. This is the difference between intelligent shows, and shows that force you to be intelligent."<sup>5</sup> Although narratively complex television series make significant demands on audiences, it is important to note that this storytelling approach is not solely a contemporary development. For example, David Lavery sees *Lost* as the latest in a long line of complex American television programs beginning with *Dallas* (1978-1991) and continuing with *St. Elsewhere* (1982-1988), *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991), *The X-Files* (1993-2002), *Babylon 5* (1994-1997), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *24* (2001-2010), *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), and *The Wire* (2002-2008).<sup>6</sup> As Lavery's genealogy shows, complexity has been a part of the American televisual landscape for decades. Moreover, Nancy Baym (2000) points out that this sort of complex seriality and abundance of story information is also characteristic of soap operas. However, I am less interested in the uniqueness of this storytelling mode than in its relation to transmedia extensions, which in turn creates contradictions and tensions within *Lost* fan cultures. Transmedia stories increase the potential for further complexity by virtue of the multiple media platforms mobilized in the service of world-building. In other words, transmedia stories introduce additional character relationships, backstories, and mythologies, thereby increasing the overarching narrative's complexity.

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Johnson, *Everything Bad is Good For You: How Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005), 50.

<sup>6</sup> David Lavery, "Lost and Long-Term Television Narrative" in *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives*, edited by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 316.

The complex interrelationship between transmedia texts facilitates a well-defined storyworld or narrative universe. In fact, Henry Jenkins characterizes transmedia storytelling as the art of world-building.<sup>7</sup> As discussed in chapter two, market concerns centering on transforming television programs into brands incentivize the transmedia world-building impulse. As Jeffrey Sconce argues, “Television... has discovered that the cultivation of its story worlds is as crucial an element in its success as is storytelling.”<sup>8</sup> Examples of transmedia world-building linked to television series include *Babylon 5* (Lancaster, 2001), *Doctor Who* (Perryman, 2008), and *Alias* (Örnebring, 2009). The creation of “compelling environments that cannot fully be explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium” allows for an extended engagement with fictional universes thereby increasing one’s investment with a media property.<sup>9</sup> As Sara Gwenllian-Jones notes, “This is world-building for profit” in which ancillary products, such as novels (Kompere, 2010), toys (Bainbridge, 2010), and alternate reality games (Dena, 2008), extend a television series’ reach into new markets while simultaneously promoting the storyworld to new audiences.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that the television industry’s implementation of transmedia world-building is not completely new. Pointing to the interplay between Disney’s television series and the company’s theme parks, Christopher Anderson observes:

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 113.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Sconce, “What If?: Charting Television’s New Textual Boundaries,” in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, edited by Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 95.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 114.

<sup>10</sup> Sara Gwenllian-Jones, “Web Wars: Resistance, Online Fandom and Studio Censorship,” in *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans*, ed. Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 166.

Whereas traditional notions of textuality assume that a text is singular, unified, and autonomous, with a structure that draws the viewer inward, Disney's television texts were, from the outset, fragmented, propelled by a centrifugal force that guided the viewer away from the immediate textual experience toward a more pervasive sense of textuality, one that encouraged the consumption of further Disney texts, further Disney products, further Disney experiences.<sup>11</sup>

When taken together, Disney's television series, products, and amusement parks constitute an early instance of a cross-platform narrative universe. Although each text is isolated in its own right, consumption promotes further consumption and in turn fosters the sense of a coherent whole – a consistent, cohesive world comprised of fragmentary texts. Although the move toward world-building has its roots in previous decades, new media platforms accelerate and further facilitate the creation of expansive transmedia storyworlds.

Moreover, while transmedia storyworlds present media companies with opportunities for increased revenue by expanding successful properties into new platforms and markets, the creation of such robust narrative universes ushers in new reception practices. As Sconce notes, "A commercial series that succeeds in the U.S. ends up generating hundreds of hours of programming, allowing for an often quite sophisticated and complex elaboration of character and story world."<sup>12</sup> The coupling of this narratively complex televisual storytelling with transmedia paratexts invites a reconceptualization of the diegesis. This interconnected array of texts allows for the articulation of a narratively rich storyworld in a way that an individual television program cannot. Matt Hills regards this articulation as the "*hyperdiegesis*: the creation of a vast

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 155.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey Sconce, "What If?: Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, edited by Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 95.

and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, if a singular television series constitutes a diegesis, the multiplicity of texts comprising transmedia storytelling franchises present audiences with a hyperdiegesis – an interconnected web of texts, that when taken together, constitute a vast, narratively consistent and complex storyworld.

Yet, the creation of the hyperdiegesis results in a generic hybridity originating from paratexts displaying varied generic conventions. Transmedia extensions serve an array of purposes, from depicting previously unseen aspects of a narrative universe to conveying further characterization to bolstering audience interest.<sup>14</sup> In addition to these different purposes, transmedia paratexts exhibit a range of different genres, as transmedia producers utilize those genres that lend themselves best to the aims of each paratextual extension. Transmedia storytelling franchises may incorporate webisodes, alternate reality games, and novelizations; each potentially conforming to different generic conventions. As Louisa Ellen Stein points out, a sense of genre blending within a television series is not altogether unique. Stein notes, “The current TV mediascape is replete with programs that profess to shake up familiar generic territory, combining diverse generic elements, from science fiction to teen romance, horror, family melodrama, the western, and film noir.”<sup>15</sup> What is unique, however, is the exponentially increased generic blurring found in transmedia storytelling franchises emanating from

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<sup>13</sup> Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 137.

<sup>14</sup> “Transmedia Storytelling 101,” Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins, accessed June 1, 2011, [http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia\\_storytelling\\_101.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html).

<sup>15</sup> Louisa Ellen Stein, “‘Emotions-Only’ versus ‘Special People’: Genre in Fan Discourse,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 1 (2008).

both the multiplicity of paratexts and the richness of the hyperdiegesis. This generic hybridity results in confusion not only centering on generic classifications but on the expectations of viewers as well. In regards to Hollywood cinema, Thomas Schatz argues that “genre exists as a sort of tacit ‘contract’ between filmmakers and audience” in which audience members provide filmmakers with their time and money in exchange for a particular experience.<sup>16</sup> In other words, genres function by establishing a set of narrative expectations and pleasures in the minds of the audience. The abundance of texts constituting a transmedia franchise’s hyperdiegesis problematizes and complicates this “tacit contract.” How, then, do audiences negotiate this producer/audience contract when presented with such a generically varied array of transmedia texts?

The hyperdiegesis or world-building impulse is central not only to transmedia storytelling but cult television texts as well. As Mark Jancovich and Nathan Hunt astutely observe, “[C]ult TV is defined not by any feature shared by the shows themselves, but rather by the ways in which they are appropriated by specific groups.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Sara Gwenllian Jones uses the term “cult television” “to refer to those television series that accrue substantial active fan cultures that engage in creative and interpretive practices.”<sup>18</sup> Although cult television programs often “belong to... the fantastic genres of science fiction, fantasy, horror, or speculative fiction,” cult texts are

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 16.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Jancovich and Nathan Hunt, “The Mainstream, Distinction, and Cult TV,” in *Cult Television*, ed. Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 27.

<sup>18</sup> Sara Gwenllian-Jones, “Web Wars: Resistance, Online Fandom and Studio Censorship,” in *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans*, ed. Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 164-165.

less defined by their generic conventions than by their avid consumption by fans.<sup>19</sup> Just like transmedia franchises, cult television programs create vast, coherent storyworlds that promote a multitude of interpretative possibilities. These narrative spaces in turn foster the formation of cult audiences in that these universes allow for a prolonged engagement, thereby promoting a high degree of investment in the characters and storyworld. As Umberto Eco argues, cult texts:

must provide a completely furnished world so that fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the fans' private sectarian world, a world about which one can make up quizzes and play trivia games so that the adepts of the sect recognize through each other a shared expertise.<sup>20</sup>

The creation of “completely furnished worlds” is significant in understanding why transmedia storytelling franchises (*Star Trek*, *Dark Shadows*, *Doctor Who*, *24*, *Lost*) often become cult texts. Transmedia franchises offer cult fans “additional pleasures by referencing aspects of the... metaverse” or hyperdiegesis by extending the televisual anchor text through a myriad of paratextual extensions.<sup>21</sup>

The production of cult television programs is central to a transformation within the television industry toward viewing cult television audiences as an economically attractive niche market. Once regarded as marginalized subgroups, cult television audiences now constitute a target demographic. Beginning with *Twin Peaks* in the early 1990s, Jim Collins argues “a fundamental change in the way the entertainment industries

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<sup>19</sup> Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson, “Introduction,” in *Cult Television*, ed. Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xii.

<sup>20</sup> Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1983), 198.

<sup>21</sup> Roberta E. Pearson and Máire Messenger-Davis, ““You’re Not Going To See That On TV’: *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in Film and Television,” in *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans*, ed. Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 106.

now envision their publics” occurred in which “[t]he audience is no longer regarded as a homogeneous mass but rather as an amalgamation of microcultural groups.”<sup>22</sup> One such group – the cult audience – represents a valuable market of avid, invested viewers for television networks. Television networks “target ‘cult’ audiences” in order to “establish their own brand identity and attract audiences that constitute a relatively identifiable, specific, and consistent demographic that can be further targeted by advertisers.”<sup>23</sup> Cult audiences represent an economically viable audience not only for advertisers but also for producers of ancillary products eager to cash in on fans’ affinities for television properties. For example, television producers and television companies alike capitalized on the cult success of television series, such as *Star Trek*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Doctor Who*, *Firefly*, and *The Simpsons*, by expanding these universes into a range of computer and video games.<sup>24</sup>

Courting a cult following for a transmedia storytelling franchise often problematizes audience relationships. As Sara Gwenllian Jones notes, “Distinctions between the so-called ‘general audience’ and so-called ‘fandom’ have become increasingly blurred as cult series become franchises,” resulting in tension among the different groups.<sup>25</sup> While examples of antagonisms within fan communities – what Derek Johnson terms “fan-tagonisms” – emphasize differing interpretive practices,

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<sup>22</sup> Jim Collins, “Television and Postmodernism,” in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, ed. Robert C. Allen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 342.

<sup>23</sup> Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson, “Introduction,” in *Cult Television*, ed. Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xii.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 192-196.

<sup>25</sup> Sara Gwenllian-Jones, “Web Wars: Resistance, Online Fandom and Studio Censorship,” in *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans*, ed. Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 165.

(Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995), social hierarchies (Baym, 2000), and power struggles (Zweerink & Gatson, 2002), scholars focus little attention to factional divides within transmedia storytelling franchises.<sup>26</sup> Transmedia storytelling franchises encourage viewings, and this mode of engagement fosters external and internal clashes as viewers position themselves in opposition to both the mainstream audience as well as to other viewers.

Transmedia storytelling franchises alter notions of fandom because these entertainment experiences present fans with an abundance of texts and storyworld information. As Petra Kuppers contends, “Many fans define themselves through the arcane knowledge of the [storyworld] in all its complexities.”<sup>27</sup> This sense of fan identity, however, becomes problematized within transmedia fandom. Fully comprehending or mastering a transmedia storyworld promotes collective intelligence – a notion alternatively conceptualized as the “wisdom of crowds”<sup>28</sup> or “crowd sourcing”<sup>29</sup> describing a range of collaborative activities centering on amassing knowledge and accomplishing goals. New media theorist Pierre Lévy coined the term “collective intelligence” to refer to the circulation of knowledge that becomes possible within a

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<sup>26</sup> Derek Johnson, “Fan-tagonism: Factions, Institutions, and Constitutive Hegemonies of Fandom,” in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathon Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 285.

<sup>27</sup> Petra Kuppers, “Quality Science Fiction: *Babylon 5*’s Metatextual Universe,” in *Cult Television*, ed. Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 45.

<sup>28</sup> James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds: When The Many are Smarter than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies, and Nations* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), xiii-xiv.

<sup>29</sup> Jeff Howe, *Crowd Sourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business* (New York: Crown Business, 2008), 11-17.

computer-networked society.<sup>30</sup> Lévy defines the concept as “the synergy of skills, resources, and projects, the constitution and dynamic maintenance of shared memories, the activation of flexible and nonhierarchical modes of cooperation, [and] the coordinated distribution of decision centers.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, digitally connected individuals utilize their respective areas of specialization, contributing information with the aim of pooling knowledge or accomplishing a given objective. The processes of collective intelligence link individuals with similar goals together, forming the “cosmopedia” – digitally connected knowledge groups.<sup>32</sup> Whereas, for Lévy, the term “encyclopedia” denotes a one-dimensional circle of knowledge, the cosmopedia is an “interactive multidimensional representational space” in which members of a networked community reciprocally distribute and share information.<sup>33</sup> In fact, studies of collective intelligence emphasize the role of community (Jenkins, 2006a; Bruns, 2008; McGonigal, 2008) in the collaborative exchange of information, such as with the community of alternate reality game players discussed in chapter two.

The technological shifts discussed in the previous chapter play a significant role in the emergence of the cosmopedia. Podcast technologies facilitate the collective intelligence of online fan communities by allowing for an ease in sharing hyperdiegetic information. However, while Lévy emphasizes the emancipatory potentials of collective intelligence to combat technology’s exclusionary effects, he neglects to acknowledge the

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<sup>30</sup> Lévy coined the term in 1994 when he first published *Collective Intelligence: Mankind’s Emerging World in Cyberspace* in France. It was later translated into English in 1997.

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Lévy, *Cyberculture*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 10.

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind’s Emerging World in Cyberspace*, trans. Robert Bononno (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 1997), 214-220.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 215-217.

possibility of adversarial relationships, including factional discourses, power struggles, and exclusionary behavior, emanating from groups utilizing different strategies and practices of collective intelligence. Hence, the confluence of the emergence of narratively complex and generically diverse transmedia texts; the fostering of a highly engaged, cult following by the television industry; and the rise of collective intelligence promoted by new media technologies results in significant transformations to audience relationships. I will now analyze these transformations through an examination of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*'s fan cultures.

### ***External Struggle: The Mainstream/Viewer Divide***

Viewers and producers alike distinguished *Lost* from other television series that they regarded as not making significant intellectual demands on their audiences.

Although, as Lavery notes, narrative complexity has been a part of American television for decades, he regards *Lost* as unique in that “none [of the previous programs displaying narrative complexity] has taken larger risks, posed more challenges to its viewers or itself, or given us a greater cognitive workout.”<sup>34</sup> These challenges spring from *Lost*'s open-ended narrative centering on a wealth of conspiracies and mysteries, a large cast of fourteen regular characters, and a prolonged serialized story arc spanning hundreds of diegetic years.<sup>35</sup> In fact, Mittell characterizes *Lost*'s narrative structure as “far more

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<sup>34</sup> David Lavery, “*Lost* and Long-Term Television Narrative” in *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives*, edited by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 315.

<sup>35</sup> Marc Dolan, “*Lost*,” in *The Essential Cult TV Reader*, ed. David Lavery (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 151.

complex than anything seen before in American television.”<sup>36</sup> *Lost*’s narrative structure involves a mosaic of flashbacks, flash-forwards, and even so-called flash-sideways, presenting audiences with a complex web of non-linear and even alternate reality storylines.<sup>37</sup> The combination of these varied storylines constitutes a robust storyworld consisting of an internally consistent history or mythology. Television scholars characterize the notion of mythology as a “highly elaborate plot that endlessly delays resolution and closure”<sup>38</sup> resulting in an “overarching puzzle constructed through the series as a whole.”<sup>39</sup> *Lost*’s mythology consists of a group of plane crash survivors locked in a clash between warring demigods on a mysterious island populated with a monster comprised of black smoke, a group of nefarious island natives, and a defunct scientific research organization.

*Lost*’s complex storytelling approach encouraged a sense – among both the viewer fan base and producers – that *Lost* was superior to other contemporary television programs. These groups contrasted *Lost* with programs they viewed as foregrounding character relationships and melodrama over an intricate mythology, episodic narrative resolution over a complex, long-form narrative. Consider, for example, Damon Lindelof’s sarcastic comment to fans on *The Official Lost Podcast* regarding the delayed

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<sup>36</sup> Jason Mittell “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 58 (2006): 30.

<sup>37</sup> *Lost*’s sixth and final season focused, in part, on an alternate reality taking place in a supernatural limbo after the deaths of the series’ central characters.

<sup>38</sup> Jason Mittell “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 58 (2006): 33.

<sup>39</sup> Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson, “Introduction,” in *Cult Television*, ed. Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xv.

resolution of a central element of *Lost*'s mythos – the backstories of the island's original inhabitants, the Others:

You'll get [answers], but like all good things on *Lost*, you must wait. For those of you who don't want to wait, *Criminal Minds* is fantastic this year; it really is. I hear Mandy Patinkin is going to catch a serial killer next week, so you might want to check that out.<sup>40</sup>

Here, Lindelof emphasizes the narrative pleasures of *Criminal Minds*, a procedural drama presenting audiences with a complete narrative arc in one episode (“Mandy Patinkin is going to catch a serial killer next week”), with *Lost*'s open-ended narrative structure.

Given the mocking tone with which Lindelof delivers the above statement, it is evident that he views *Criminal Minds*' episodic structure as demanding a significantly reduced “cognitive workout.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Lindelof's opposition fostered a feeling of exclusivity among *Lost* viewers by elevating *Lost* as a text requiring an encyclopedic understanding of storylines, character arcs, and paratextual information. Janovich and Hunt insightfully observe that cult fandom often centers on the denial of popular, mainstream culture. “In the process,” they argue, “fans not only ridicule the naïve and easy pleasures of ‘ordinary’ people in a way that reproduces the authority of bourgeois taste over popular taste, but can also engage in extremely vicious internal struggles.”<sup>42</sup>

While Janovich and Hunt's point regarding fans struggles certainly holds true, as I will examine in subsequent sections, it is clear that such contempt and derision exists between

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<sup>40</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: October 9, 2006,” podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed October 12, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> David Lavery, “*Lost* and Long-Term Television Narrative” in *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives*, edited by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 315.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Janovich and Nathan Hunt, “The Mainstream, Distinction, and Cult TV,” in *Cult Television*, ed. Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 28.

producers and the audience as well. Moreover, Lindelof's suggestion aimed at those viewers seeking episodic narratives to watch another television program is significant in that his success as a television producer is based on aggregating a mass audience. Instead of building a mainstream following, then, Lindelof was intent on cultivating a subculture of avid viewers.

This mainstream/viewer divide was evident within the discourse of *The Transmission* as well, with viewers positioning *Lost* in opposition to other television programs. Whereas viewers largely elevated *Lost*'s mythology – “a larger hermeneutic puzzle whose episode-by-episode disentanglement engages potentially committed viewers”<sup>43</sup> – the mainstream audience is perceived as primarily interested in melodrama. For example, in the following exchange, the hosts of *The Transmission* see the *Lost* audience as divided into two camps:

**Ryan Ozawa:** You got to admit there's a significant portion of this show's demographic [interested in relationships]. You might call it pandering, if it's not your interest, but I think when they go into the time-travel and the Dharma Initiative and scientists and polar bears, probably the people who are interested in the relationships are, like, “Give me a break, stop it with this geek stuff, and give us the relationships.”

**Jen Ozawa:** Then they can go watch *Grey's Anatomy*!<sup>44</sup>

Just as Lindelof advised uncommitted fans to stop watching *Lost*, so too, does Jen Ozawa. The Ozawas regard science fiction (“geek stuff”) as the domain of viewers and relationships as the realm of the mainstream audience. Whereas viewers are interested in the “cognitive workout” of comprehending *Lost*'s complex, labyrinthine mythology, the mainstream audience is seen as unable or unwilling to engage in such intellectual

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<sup>43</sup> Marc Dolan, “Lost,” in *The Essential Cult TV Reader*, ed. David Lavery (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 150.

<sup>44</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Little Prince,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 9, 2009, accessed February 12, 2009.

activity, focusing instead on relationships. Therefore, the Ozawas, in effect, police the *Lost* audience, drawing a clear distinction between viewers and the mainstream audience; between those invested in the series' mythology and those interested in the relationships of the series' central characters. A caller to *The Transmission* draws a similar insider/outsider divide:

**Wayne:** One point I want to make is... I don't think [the producers] have to throw in needless sex and partial nudity. It really had nothing to do with the story; it was just for the... leftover *Grey's Anatomy* people that want to keep that sort of thing going.<sup>45</sup>

Again, *Grey's Anatomy* – *Lost*'s lead-in during the 2008 television season – becomes a signifier of conventional, melodramatic series catering to casual audiences.<sup>46</sup> Pandering to this audience in an effort to increase *Lost*'s viewership is seen, by viewers, as a move that degrades the series' quality through “a lack of originality... and a tendency to ruin established shows in the pursuit of the mainstream audience.”<sup>47</sup> Whereas melodrama is a genre “whose main effect is the stirring up of emotions,” viewers position *Lost* as a program appealing to one's intellect and reason.<sup>48</sup> In other words, *Lost*'s viewers create a hierarchy that privileges their intellectually-based fandom over the perceived simplistic, emotional fandom of the mainstream television audience.

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<sup>45</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Whole Truth,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, October 6, 2008, accessed October 9, 2008.

<sup>46</sup> James Hibberd, “ABC Moves ‘Lost’ to Make Way For ‘Grey’s,’” *Reuters*, February 21, 2008, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/02/23/television-abc-dc-idUSN2040521120080223>.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Jancovich and Nathan Hunt, “The Mainstream, Distinction, and Cult TV,” in *Cult Television*, ed. Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 30.

<sup>48</sup> Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, trans. Della Couling (New York: Routledge, 1982), 61

Interestingly, fans also derided *Heroes* – a series ostensibly sharing similar science fiction conventions – within the discourse of *The Transmission*. For instance:

**Thomas** writes: I really hate these character-driven episodes.... If it weren't for the [presence of mythological elements, such as the] four-toed statue... and the conversation between Sawyer and Richard, I would rate this one in the bottom ten of all-time *Lost* episodes. As it were, it was very weak.

**Jen Ozawa**: Just go with it, dude.... Just go watch *Heroes*!<sup>49</sup>

Here, *Heroes* – a series about ordinary individuals with extraordinary abilities – functions as a television series elevating mythology over character development. As Ozawa's comment highlights, although fans of *The Transmission* frequently positioned *Lost* against other television series privileging “character” and “relationships,” they also championed *Lost* as effectively balancing character and mythos. For instance, Ryan Ozawa defended the depiction of a central character on *Lost* by contrasting the portrayal with that of *Heroes* character:

**Ryan Ozawa**: There's a cheerleader on a show about superheroes that's completely ridiculous!<sup>50</sup>

Taken together, these responses suggest, in addition to the ineffective balance of mythos and melodrama, *Heroes*' characterization is regarded as significantly weaker than that depicted on *Lost*. Thus, viewers privilege *Lost* as a complex show with compelling characters, as the following comment highlights:

**Luke** writes: On character versus mythology, I agree we don't want them to rush the story at the expense of character moments.... The strength of *Lost* is not only in its ability to create characters we genuinely connect with and love. After all, *there are other shows with good character development*. But *Lost* has, from the beginning, *placed those characters in a story with such complexity and depth* that

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<sup>49</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “La Fleur,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, March 8, 2009, accessed March 12, 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “What Kate Does,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, February 14, 2010, accessed February 17, 2010.

*no other show can come close.* It has taken narrative on the small screen to new places.<sup>51</sup>

As this comment highlights, fans expressed *Lost*'s cultural superiority in a manner that underscored an insider/outsider, mythology/melodrama, and complex/simplistic demarcations.

*The Transmission*'s fans conveyed the perception that audiences who enjoy television series, such as *Criminal Minds*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Heroes*, take pleasure in episodic, melodramatic, simplistic narratives. In addition to the perceived simplicity of episodic storytelling, such tensions can be seen as a rejection of the culture that "marginalize[s] fan-related activities as outside the mainstream and beneath dignity."<sup>52</sup> As cult television series become popular and commercially successful transmedia franchises, viewers increasingly resort to a self-imposed sense of superiority and exclusivity. In other words, although the television industry now courts cult audiences in a manner that shifts them from the margins to the center (Green and Jenkins, 2009), subcultures of cult fans reject mainstream tastes in a manner that can be "elitist and excluding."<sup>53</sup> For instance, *Lost*'s viewers conveyed the notion that they were the franchise's "true" fans because they engaged with its narrative universe in the "correct" way. Scholarship focusing on tensions between mainstream audiences and highly engaged fans (Jancovich, 2002; Stone Pitzer, 2011) highlights the presence of authenticity debates in which taste distinctions, reading strategies, and storyworld

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<sup>51</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Candidate," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 9, 2010, accessed May 12, 2010; emphasis added.

<sup>52</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 40.

<sup>53</sup> Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 143.

knowledge separate one group from another. In her analysis of *Smallville* fans, for instance, Juli Stone Pitzer argues that knowledge of the television series' history, storylines, and characters afforded avid fans a "collective cultural agency."<sup>54</sup> "True" fans often leverage their subcultural agency against that of the mainstream audience in an effort to maintain the integrity of the media property.<sup>55</sup> Mark Jancovich sees this mainstream/subculture divide as central to fan cultures "because without them fans cannot create the sense of distinction" separating "authentic" and "inauthentic" fans.<sup>56</sup> Within *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*'s fan cultures, transmedia engagement often functioned as the factor separating "true" fans from the mainstream audience.

As previously discussed in Chapter Two, fans of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* used knowledge of *Lost*'s transmedia hyperdiegesis as a way to separate mainstream fans from hardcore fans, i.e., viewers. For example, the following comment highlights the notion that "diehard" or hardcore fans comprehend obscure elements of *Lost*'s transmedia mythology:

**Seth Jacob:** [D]iehard *Lost* fans know about the numbers connection to the infamous Valenzetti Equation.... [T]he numbers represent core factors in an equation that predicts the end of the world.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the significance of "The Numbers" and the Valenzetti Equation – revelations occurring only in *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game – became indicators of

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<sup>54</sup> Juli Stone Pitzer, "Vids, Vlogs, and Blogs: The Participatory Culture of *Smallville*'s Digital Fan," in *The Smallville Chronicles: Critical Essays on the Television Series*, ed. Lincoln Geraghty (Lanham: Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 119.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 119-120.

<sup>56</sup> Mark Jancovich, "Cult Fictions: Cult Movies, Subcultural Capital, and the Production of Cultural Distinction" *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 306-308.

<sup>57</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: February 3, 2010," podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed February 6, 2010.

one's level of fandom. In other words, fans possessing this insider knowledge are "true" fans, while all others are members of the unknowing mainstream. Given that these insights centered on viewings – interactive, participatory, and communicative multi-platform media use – this sustained engagement serves as the ultimate barometer of one's investment in *Lost*. Whereas the mainstream audience primarily focused on narratives occurring within the television series, the viewings audience expanded this focus outward with a sustained engagement with the hyperdiegesis. Yet, although the augmentation of one's engagement by viewings was often used as a way to separate the mainstream from the cult, even those viewers who expressed an affinity for character arcs, relationships, and emotionality were subjected to tension and derision.

### ***Internal Struggle: The Shipper/Mythologist Divide***

In addition to an insider/outsider divide, a frequent and contentious topic within the discourse of *The Transmission* centered on a perceived antagonism between the two main factions of the viewings audience, "shippers" and "mythologists."<sup>58</sup> Fans used the "shipper" (short for "relationshipper") label to describe a segment of the *Lost* viewings audience primarily interested in the franchise's character dynamics, elevating character development and relationships over mythology.<sup>59</sup> Shippers – who often identified

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<sup>58</sup> Whereas the term "shipper" entered popular usage within the discourse of *The Transmission* very early in the podcast's run, I coined the term "mythologist" to describe a particular type of *Lost* fan.

<sup>59</sup> *Lost* is not the only television series with a strong shipper contingent. For example, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Johnson, 2007) and *The X-Files* (Scodari & Felder, 2000) both had shipper fans interested in the romantic pairings of the series' respective main characters.

themselves also as “character fans” – enjoy engaging in an emotional, character-based reading of the transmedia franchise. These fans advocated for particular characters, rooted for a romantic pairing often expressed through a blending of two character names, and focused primarily on the characterizations of the central characters. For example:

**Michelle:** I haven’t shipped anyone on *Lost* since they killed off my poor Charlie.<sup>60</sup>

**Chris** writes: I’m a sworn Jater [Jack + Kate].<sup>61</sup>

**Tracey** writes: I am first and foremost a fan of character development.”<sup>62</sup>

In the first response, the use of “shipped” indicates the act of emotional investment in a particular character, Charlie. Shippers often formed an intimate, personal connection with characters, highlighted here by the use of “my” in reference to the character. The second comment illustrates the portmanteau naming convention frequently used by *Lost*’s shippers in reference to romantic couplings, with “Jater” referring to a fan with an affinity for a Jack/Kate relationship. As a result of geographical, temporal, and mortal barriers, few stable relationships existed within *Lost*’s diegesis. Hence, the use of blended names often indicated a shipper’s sense of who represented a particular character’s “correct” romantic partner. In addition to explicitly emotional readings, *The Transmission*’s shippers focused on the characterization of *Lost*’s central characters, as demonstrated by the final statement. Yet, this focus on character was also subtly linked

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<sup>60</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “La Fleur,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, March 8, 2009, accessed March 12, 2009.

<sup>61</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Season Three: Episodes 13-15,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, November 8, 2009, accessed November 11, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Two for the Road,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, December 15, 2008, accessed December 18, 2008.

to emotionality. Shippers often described their enjoyment of character-based episodes in terms of the emotions evoked:

**Carol** writes: What struck me most about this episode is how much [Charlie's] character evolved. He went from being a selfish heroin addict to a man who would give up his life for the people he loved. It was such a selfless act and *I couldn't help but tear up* when he gave Aaron the ring.<sup>63</sup>

Here, a fan's awareness of Charlie's arc over the course of three seasons fosters a visceral response. In this way, a focus on character development – even outside the context of romance – is also a type of emotional engagement. Taken together, these responses highlight the qualities of *Lost*'s franchise privileged by shippers.

In contrast, mythologists downplayed emotionality in favor of an intellectual investment in the inner workings, logic, and history of *Lost*'s hyperdiegesis. Mythologists took pleasure in the puzzle-like challenge of piecing together intertextual references, obscured aural and visual clues, and the series' dense, non-linear plot in a way that shed light on *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld. For instance:

**Mark:** It was kind of a strange... name for Benjamin Linus to be called Dean Moriarty since he was the character in *On the Road*. I guess it is fitting since Ben is on the road going from one wormhole to another apparently.<sup>64</sup>

**Ryan Ozawa:** In true, trademark fashion, the message on the phone – the whispers – was backwards, but you had to go and kind of reverse the audio. Of course, really *insightful and intrepid* fans have already reversed the audio. Aaron from Hollywood called and pointed it out to us, so let's take a listen to the backwards message. [Plays audio]<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Season Three: Episodes 19-21," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, December 12, 2009, accessed December 15, 2009; emphasis added.

<sup>64</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Shape of Things to Come," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, April 26, 2008, accessed April 29, 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "There's No Place Like Home (Parts 2 & 3)," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, June 1, 2008, accessed June 4, 2008; emphasis added.

**Jonathan** writes: This episode especially gave me exactly what I like. I find such satisfaction in seeing the pieces come together.<sup>66</sup>

As these responses suggest, mythologists lauded knowledge of popular and high culture, technological prowess, and intelligence over an emphasis on character development and relationship drama. *Lost*'s producers incorporated a range of intertextual references both inside (books, character names, settings) and outside (episode titles) of *Lost*'s diegesis.<sup>67</sup> Mythologist often called attention to these references and speculated about their significance or relevance to *Lost*'s storyworld. In the first statement, a fan points out a connection between Benjamin Linus' pseudonym and a literary character's name, drawing a parallel to the characters' respective (spatiotemporal and geographical) travels. In addition, mythologists focused on *Lost*'s many elusive aural and visual elements, such as reversed audio clips, barely audible whispers, and fleeting visual images. For mythologists, these elements represented puzzles that could be solved through careful scrutiny, allowing for additional levels of enjoyment and insight. In the second comment, Ryan Ozawa discusses one such puzzle – a telephone call received by a *Lost* character – consisting of reversed dialogue. In a manner illustrating the perception of mythologists' engagement, Ozawa refers to the mythologists who reversed the audio as “insightful and intrepid.” Furthermore, the final statement, in which a fan expresses pleasure in watching

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<sup>66</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Dead is Dead,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, April 13, 2009, accessed April 16, 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Numerous books appeared in the television series, including *Our Mutual Friend*, *Catch-22*, and *Watership Down*. Several *Lost* characters shared names with philosophers, such as John Locke/John Locke, Desmond David Hume/David Hume, and Danielle Rousseau/Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The Dharma Initiative research stations The Looking Glass and The Lamp Post referenced the literary works, *Through the Looking Glass* and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, respectively. Episode titles referenced literature, “The Little Prince” (5:04), cinema, “The Man Behind the Curtain” (3:20), and religion “The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm” (2:10).

the “pieces” of *Lost*’s non-linear storytelling “come together,” reinforces the sense that mythologists’ viewed their engagement with *Lost*’s mythology as an intellectual puzzle-like endeavor.

*The Transmission*’s main viewer groups – shippers and mythologists – regularly disputed the “correct” way to watch *Lost* – an argument stemming from the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the series. One fan addressed the tension in the following manner:

**Mario:** I know there’ll be a debate about character-driven “love-dovey” [episodes] and mythology episodes, but I like a well-rounded TV show and *Lost* definitely excels at that.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to linking character-driven engagement with emotionality, this comment conveys the belief that *Lost*’s strength lay in the producers’ ability to effectively create dynamic characters and a compelling mythos. In contrast to this sentiment, the overwhelming sense among fans of *The Transmission* was that the franchise’s characters and mythology did not occupy a place of equal status. Consider the following comments:

**Alex:** I love the show. I love the mythology. But, for me, the show is not going to be remembered for the character development, which I really don’t think has been... that strong.<sup>69</sup>

**Ryan Ozawa:** It’s in the eye of the beholder. Some people love the character stuff and they think this mythology stuff is a waste of time. Clearly, a lot of people feel the other way, but it depends on why you watch the show.<sup>70</sup>

Hence, the differing taste cultures of shippers and mythologists fostered that the sense that viewers belonged to one camp or the other. For instance:

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<sup>68</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “La Fleur,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, March 8, 2009, accessed March 12, 2009.

<sup>69</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “316,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, February 21, 2009, accessed February 24, 2009.

<sup>70</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Because You Left/The Lie,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, January 25, 2009, accessed January 28, 2009.

**Alex:** We've debated mythology versus character. Some people like the mythos stuff, some people like character, and *you can't have both*.<sup>71</sup>

This perceived “either/or” factional divide resulted in considerable tensions between viewers. When the co-host of *The Transmission*, Ryan Ozawa, interviewed fans before the 2009 *Lost* Comic-Con panel, in which attendees could ask executive producers Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof questions, one fan had the following remark:

**Colleen:** If I have to hear one more stupid relationship question, we are... gonna toss [something] at them.<sup>72</sup>

As this response illustrates, mythologists perceived shipping as a less sophisticated, lower-order fan activity than analyzing *Lost*'s mythos.

Interestingly, *The Transmission*'s pattern of factional divide was not as prominent within the discourse of ABC's *The Official Lost Podcast*. While fans regularly discussed shipping and mythology on *The Official Lost Podcast*, the sense of animosity and conflict conveyed on *The Transmission* was largely absent. This absence is not altogether surprising given Lindelof and Cuse's desire to discourage infighting between groups of *Lost* fans and thereby avoid further dividing and potentially diminishing an already fractured cult audience. The following exchange, in which Lindelof and Cuse called fans to discuss *Lost*, illustrates the producers' desire to downplay any shipper/mythologist tensions:

**Daphne:** Have you guys, from the very beginning, had a definite plan as to Sawyer or Jack, as far as Kate goes?

**Carlton Cuse:** Well Daphne, we have to out you. Are you a Jater or are you a Skater?

**Daphne:** *I am a big-time Jater.*

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<sup>71</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Dead is Dead,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, April 13, 2009, accessed April 16, 2009.

<sup>72</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Comic-Con Day 2,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 24, 2009, accessed July 27, 2009; emphasis added.

**Damon Lindelof:** Oh wow.

**Daphne:** *Uh-oh, is that bad?*

**DL:** *No, it's wonderful.* I mean, you know, I... will say this: one of us is a Skater and one of us is a Jater.... [W]e've both agreed on who she's ultimately gonna end up with.<sup>73</sup>

Lindelof makes a concerted effort to diffuse shipper/mythologist tension, stressing that the fan's shipper affinity is "wonderful." In addition, Lindelof gives a very diplomatic answer regarding the Skater – those rooting for a Sawyer and Kate romantic pairing – and Jater – those advocating for a Jack and Kate romantic pairing – fan debate in an effort to not further subdivide shippers.

*The Transmission's* viewers often linked the character/mythology divide to the notion of genre. The co-hosts of *The Transmission*, for example, posed variations of the following question to each other:

**Ryan Ozawa:** Are you a character person or a sci-fi person?<sup>74</sup>

Given that much of *Lost's* mythology centered on science fiction tropes, such as time travel, the apocalypse, teleportation, and scientific research, fans regularly substituted "science fiction" for "mythology" and vice versa in their discussions of the franchise. Ozawa's above question, then, seems to be asking, "Are you a fan of the character-driven dramatic elements or the mythology-oriented science fiction aspects of *Lost's* storyworld?" Similarly, shippers expressed the pleasures of their *Lost* fandom in a way that linked the notion of "character" to dramatic genres.

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<sup>73</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: September 21, 2007," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed September 24, 2007; emphasis added.

<sup>74</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "He's Our You," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, March 29, 2009, accessed April 1, 2009.

**Sal** writes: This episode... defines the very reason I love *Lost*. The interaction of these characters, their history, and the personal challenges they face are what makes the series great.<sup>75</sup>

Here, the fantastical aspects of *Lost*'s on-going plot receive no mention; instead, the emphasis is on character relationships ("the interaction of these characters"), backstories ("their history") and dramatic struggles ("the personal challenges they face").

Importantly, the very asking of Ozawa's original question implies that both (drama or science fiction; character or mythology) are suitably correct answers. In other words, in the minds of many viewers, *Lost* is both a dramatic series and a science fiction series.

Thus, the tension between the shippers and mythologists sprung from the diversity of generic conventions employed in the telling of the series' overarching narrative. The range of pleasures experienced by viewers best illustrates this generic hybridity:

**I Want Desmond's Hair** writes: I watch *Lost* for the *mystery*.<sup>76</sup>

**Mr. Jacob:** Literally half of the word "*science fiction*" is "science," so we're going to need episodes like this to give us the rules. You know, I can understand if some people felt it was as if they were just reading from a textbook. The story definitely played second fiddle to the knowledge that was being lectured.<sup>77</sup>

**Harold** writes: I am most interested to learn how the entire exercise – all the trials, and trauma, and travel back and forth across space and time – amounts to a heroic story.... I want to know how all this makes sense in conjunction with the *human drama*.<sup>78</sup>

As these statements emphasize, *Lost* blends conventions from a variety of (mystery, science fiction, and dramatic) genres, offering respective fans of each narrative style a

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<sup>75</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Season Three: Episodes 10-12," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, October 25, 2009, accessed October 28, 2009.

<sup>76</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Incident," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 17, 2009, accessed May 20, 2009; emphasis added.

<sup>77</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Variable," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 4, 2009, accessed May 7, 2009; emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Unanswered Questions," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, January 24, 2010, accessed January 27, 2010; emphasis added.

unique set of pleasures. The notions of genre expressed by shippers and mythologists, however, extended beyond classification in a way that revealed interpretive strategies. Louisa Ellen Stein argues, “[C]ategorization is but one of many ways in which generic discourses circulate across media text and metatext. Producers and fans alike use generic codes to associate media texts, characters, and narratives, to draw on already established meanings, and to make texts personally meaningful.”<sup>79</sup> Whereas fans expressing an affinity for character development and relationships often discussed the franchise as a drama or melodrama, fans interested in the mythos read the franchise as a science fiction mystery.

*Lost*’s hybrid makeup became even further blurred as producers expanded the franchise’s narrative universe into other media platforms. The Comic-Con videos (*The Orchid Video* and *The Dharma Booth Video*) and alternate reality games centered largely on the history, institutions, and inner-workings of *Lost*’s hyperdiegesis. The narrative of *The Lost Experience*, for instance, fleshed out the backstory of the island by expounding on the histories and motives of The Hanso Foundation and The Dharma Initiative.<sup>80</sup> In addition to further expanding *Lost*’s storyworld, *The Lost Experience*’s narrative provided clues to institutions only hinted at in the television series, in turn, offering viewers further insights into *Lost*’s hyperdiegesis. For example, as discussed in Chapter Two, *The Lost Experience* culminated with the release of *The Sri Lanka Video* – a paratext explaining the connection between “The Numbers” and the Valenzetti Equation,

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<sup>79</sup> Louisa Ellen Stein, “‘Emotions-Only’ versus ‘Special People’: Genre in Fan Discourse,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 1 (2008).

<sup>80</sup> Information featured on the Hanso Foundation website provided insight into the group’s various research projects, including life extension, electromagnetic, and genome studies.

a mathematical formula predicting the end of the world. Although originally conceived as part of *Lost*'s mythos, *Lost*'s producers never intended the Valenzetti Equation to be part of the television series.<sup>81</sup> As Javier Grillo-Marxuach, one of the creators of the alternate reality game, explains, "*It's not exactly a televisual idea.... [T]here was a lot of stuff that ended up in *The Lost Experience* that was exactly that sort of stuff: really cool, 'sci-fi-y,' heady, brainy ideas... It's not part of the dramatic narrative because it's not very dramatic.*"<sup>82</sup>

Grillo-Marxuach's discussion of a "televisual idea" highlights the ways in which media platforms foster a particular type of storytelling or representation, linking *The Lost Experience* with science fiction. As Henry Jenkins argues, "In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best."<sup>83</sup> Continuing on his blog, Jenkins elaborates on this concept, noting, "The key point here is that different media involve different kinds of representations."<sup>84</sup> For instance, the long-form, serialized qualities of *Lost*'s television series facilitated nuanced characterization and dramatic storytelling. In contrast, due to their shorter duration and interactive qualities, *The Orchid Video*, *The Dharma Booth Video*, and *The Sri Lanka Video* fostered a more expository mode of storytelling focusing on the mechanics, logic, or backstory of *Lost*'s hyperdiegesis. In fact, Lindelof and Cuse often referred to such expository storytelling as "mythological downloads," thereby linking new media storytelling with the transference

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<sup>81</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 96.

<sup>84</sup> "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections," Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins, accessed October 15, 2011, [http://www.henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining\\_transmedia\\_further\\_re.html](http://www.henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html).

of storyworld information.<sup>85</sup> Hence, by privileging expository information centering on time travel, teleportation, and the apocalypse over dramatic storytelling involving the television series central characters, *The Lost Experience* and the Comic-Con videos encouraged a science fiction reading among mythologists – one that, in turn, shaped how they read the television series as well.

Interestingly, *Lost*'s producers combined the “mythological download” storytelling approach with more dramatic transmedia storytelling focusing on the television series' central characters.<sup>86</sup> In contrast to *The Lost Experience* and the Comic-Con videos, the *Lost: Missing Pieces* mobisodes or webisodes focused primarily on relational dynamics between two central or supporting characters with a strong emotional component.<sup>87</sup> By providing further insights into the personal, familial, romantic, and antagonistic relationships of these characters, the *Lost: Missing Pieces* encouraged further levels of identification and attachment. For instance, of the thirteen mini-episodes, eleven focus on personal relationships, with “The Watch,” “The Deal,” and “Artz & Crafts” focusing on familial dynamics, “The Adventures of Hurley and Frogurt,” “Buried Secrets,” “Tropical Depression,” and “The Envelope” centering on romantic

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<sup>85</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: March 24, 2010,” podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed March 27, 2010.

<sup>86</sup> Although one of *The Lost Experience*'s storylines did focus on protagonist Rachel Blake's relationship with Alvar Hanso, this aspect of the alternate reality game engendered considerably little discussion or investment within the discourses of *The Transmission* or *The Official Lost Podcast*, largely because the ARG focused on a peripheral character.<sup>86</sup> In contrast to the series regulars, Rachel Blake appeared only in *The Lost Experience* for a six-month period in 2006.

<sup>87</sup> ABC produced a series of thirteen, one-to-three minute episodes available first to Verizon Wireless customers on mobile phones and then days later on ABC.com. For those fans accessing the content on their mobile phones, these episodes functioned as mobisodes. For those accessing the content on ABC.com, these episodes functioned as webisodes.

relationships, and “King of the Castle” and “Operation: Sleeper” depicting an antagonistic relationship.<sup>88</sup> In addition, “Jin Has a Temper-Tantrum on the Golf Course,” depicts a central character’s emotional breakdown and “Jack, Meet Ethan. Ethan? Jack” emphasizes a sense of apprehension and dread stemming from a pregnant plane crash survivor’s impending childbirth.

In contrast, only two of the *Lost: Missing Pieces* episodes, “Room 23” and “So It Begins,” focus centrally on *Lost*’s mythos, with a significantly lessened appeal to emotionality. As such, responses to the *Lost: Missing Pieces* episodes often centered on melodramatic readings. For instance, in their discussion of the season four finale, “There’s No Place Like Home,” (4:12 – 4:14) the co-hosts of *The Transmission* recall the *Missing Pieces* mobisode “Buried Secrets,” which hints at an unrequited romantic relationship between Michael and Sun, a married woman:

**Jen Ozawa:** What was that weird look between Michael and Sun when she told him she was pregnant?

**Ryan Ozawa:** That was odd. It was a pregnant pause, so to speak. Like he didn’t know what to say... and he basically had to convince himself to be happy for her because that’s what she wanted, but that was not his natural reaction.

**JO:** Well, how close did they get? There were hints of a flirtation back in... the *Missing Piece* where they almost kiss.

**RO:** Between Michael and Sun? So you think they were getting kind of friendly?

**JO:** I think Michael might have been a little jealous [about Sun’s relationship with her husband, Jin].

**RO:** I completely forgot about... the *Missing Piece* where [the producers]... kind of hinted that they were getting a little flirty.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> “Operation: Sleeper” and “The Watch” cross categories, focusing on romantic and antagonistic relationships and familial and romantic relationships, respectively. In addition, “Artz and Crafts” concludes with the sound of the smoke monster, a central mythological element. “Jack, Meet Ethan. Ethan? Jack” also foreshadowed the presence of the island natives known as the Others and the fact that pregnant women on the island die during childbirth; two significant pieces of *Lost*’s mythos.

<sup>89</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “There’s No Place Like Home (Parts 2 & 3),” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, June 1, 2008, accessed June 4, 2008.

Here, a mobisode and a fan-produced podcast inform a melodramatic reading – one centering on forbidden love – of a character’s fleeting look in a way that encourages an emotional engagement. In this way, the format of the *Lost: Missing Pieces* episodes enabled *Lost*’s producers to convey additional levels of characterization and depict previously unseen elements of the characters’ backstories, thereby encouraging a more dramatic reading of the franchise.

In short, *Lost*’s transmedia narrative resulted in a blurring of generic boundaries based on the incorporation of texts conforming to varied conventions. In fact, after the series concluded in 2010, one fan looked back on the entirety of *Lost*’s transmedia franchise and classified it in the following manner:

**Jay:** [It’s a] character-driven, sci-fi, mystery, soap opera.<sup>90</sup>

Despite this generic hybridity, though, a tendency existed among mythologists, during the television series’ run, to view *Lost* as a science fiction text, thereby shaping their expectations and pleasures.

### ***The Collective Intelligence of Lost’s Mythologists***

The notion of intelligence – and collective intelligence – separated mythologists and shippers both implicitly and explicitly. *The Transmission*’s mythologists “work with [their] collected facts and viewpoints to actively author, discover, and invent new, computer-fueled ways of thinking, strategizing, and coordinating” in a way that illustrates

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<sup>90</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Lost Podcasting Panel at Comic-Con,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 26, 2010, accessed July 29, 2010.

Lévy's notion of collective intelligence.<sup>91</sup> Hence, a shared sense of the collaborative, reciprocal distribution of knowledge and theories united mythologists. Yet, this collective intelligence also functioned in a divisive manner with mythologists largely positioning themselves against shippers whom they perceived as engaging in an unintelligent form of engagement. Examining a popular, recurring storyline – one interpreted in differing ways by mythologists and shippers – over the course of two seasons offers a powerful example of the factional divide within the discourse of *The Transmission*.

The “Oceanic Six” storyline centered on six characters who finally escape the island, only to learn that they must return in order to save the lives of the people left behind.<sup>92</sup> The Oceanic Six's return to the island was made more difficult by the island's teleportation in the season four finale, “There's No Place Like Home,” (4:14) triggered by Benjamin Linus' turning of the so-called “Frozen Donkey Wheel.”<sup>93</sup> The Oceanic Six ultimately returned to the island in “316,” (5:06) only to find themselves – and those they left behind – not in the present day but in the 1970s. Whereas mythologists focused on the “cognitive workout” of theorizing the mechanics of the island's disappearance and subsequent geographical and temporal movement, shippers focused on the relationships

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<sup>91</sup> Jane McGonigal, “Why *I Love Bees*: A Case Study in Collective Intelligence Gaming,” in *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, ed. Katie Salen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>92</sup> The phrase “Oceanic Six” originated within the diegesis of the television series in reference to the six, alleged sole survivors of Oceanic flight 815.

<sup>93</sup> The name “Frozen Donkey Wheel” originated in the March 21, 2008 episode of *The Official Lost Podcast* as Cuse and Lindelof's codename for the final scene of the season four finale. Producers Cuse and Lindelof previously used “The Bagel” (season one), “The Challah” (season two), and “The Rattlesnake in the Mailbox” (season three) as codenames for the final scenes of the finales. In the season four finale, The Frozen Donkey Wheel turned out to be a literal ice-encrusted wheel.

and characterizations of the Oceanic Six and those left behind on the island, with a particular focus on emotionality. An analysis of shippers' and mythologists' varying pleasures illustrates how "struggles for discursive dominance constitute fandom as a hegemonic struggle over interpretation and evaluation through which relationships among fan, text, and producer are continually articulated, disarticulated, and rearticulated."<sup>94</sup> Far from being a harmonious, homogeneous whole, *The Transmission* podcast became a platform on which two groups of *Lost* fans negotiated seemingly mutually exclusive desires and engaged in struggles for dominance.

Stemming from the divergent pleasures of mythologists and shippers, the Oceanic Six storyline was "polarizing" within the discourse of *The Transmission*.<sup>95</sup> On the one hand, seasons four and five offered shippers the satisfaction of watching characters develop, relationships form and fall apart, and characters struggle and die. On the other hand, the Oceanic Six storyline presented mythologists with aspects of *Lost*'s mythos, including teleportation, time travel, and island history. As one fan noted:

**Andrew:** [These seasons are] kind of all over the place for different people depending on what you want out of the show.<sup>96</sup>

As Charles Tyron maintains, "In SFTV [Science Fiction Television] today the goal is typically for the new serial narrative to avoid the melodramatic and character-driven elements associated with the soap opera. However, those boundaries can become

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<sup>94</sup> Derek Johnson, "Fan-tagonism: Factions, Institutions, and Constitutive Hegemonies of Fandom," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathon Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 285.

<sup>95</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "316," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 21, 2009, accessed February 24, 2009.

<sup>96</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Jughead," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 2, 2009, accessed February 5, 2009.

blurred.”<sup>97</sup> *Lost*’s Oceanic Six storyline, in particular, constituted a potent example of this blurring of generic boundaries, offering fodder for mythologists and shippers alike.

*Lost*’s producers were cognizant of the shipper/mythology divide. Speaking at a Comic-Con panel in 2008, Cuse addressed the issue in the following way: “We think we’re primarily making a character show with some mythology and that’s the way we treat it.”<sup>98</sup> Cuse continues:

The characters don’t indulge themselves in the mythology of our show.... The characters don’t stop and ponder the nature of the smoke monster.... The metaphor for us is that the cake is the character and the frosting is the mythology. The frosting tastes best, but you wouldn’t want to just taste the frosting.<sup>99</sup>

Significantly, unlike other cult television series with rich mythologies, such as *The X-Files*, *Twin Peaks*, or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Lost*’s characters rarely discuss (or even acknowledge) the elements of its mythos. This storytelling approach encouraged discussion, analysis, and speculation within the discourse of *The Transmission* as viewers collaboratively attempted to better understand *Lost*’s storyworld. As such, *The Transmission*’s discourse illustrates Lévy’s concept of the “cosmopedia” – a digitally connected knowledge group united by the processes of collective intelligence.<sup>100</sup> *Lost*’s transmedia scope encouraged such practices because of the depth and breadth of the franchise’s narrative. In fact, in discussing *Lost*’s narrative universe, producers Cuse and

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<sup>97</sup> Charles Tyron, “TV Time Lords: Fan Cultures, Narrative Complexity, and the Future of Science Fiction Television,” in *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader*, ed. J.P. Telotte (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 307.

<sup>98</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Comic-Con Report – Visionaries Panel,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 26, 2008, accessed July 29, 2008.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind’s Emerging World in Cyberspace*, trans. Robert Bononno (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 1997), 214-220.

Lindelof use the metaphor of an iceberg to discuss *Lost* in a way that recalls Matt Hills' notion of the hyperdiegesis:

When you see an iceberg sticking out of the ocean... that this is just about one-tenth of its overall mass. The rest of it, most of it, lies below the water's surface.... *What you saw on television, the show itself, was the ten percent of the iceberg above the water.* But the majority of our time in the writer's room was spent constructing the part below it. The details.<sup>101</sup>

In other words, in order to piece together the complex puzzle constituting *Lost*'s mythology, viewers had to account for both seen and unseen elements. As a result of this storytelling approach, it was not uncommon for viewers to express their confusion and ask for help in comprehending *Lost*'s mythology. For example:

**Carol** writes: I am totally confused.<sup>102</sup>

**Ryan Ozawa:** [The mythology] is absolutely tying my brain in a knot.<sup>103</sup>

**Pamela:** I'm calling because I wanted to ask the *Lost* gurus a question, and by gurus, I mean you guys and the people who call in to your podcast because you guys can come up with the best theories, and certainly *I could never come up with the stuff that you guys can come up with or come up with the answers you know.*<sup>104</sup>

As these responses suggest, *Lost*'s mythology – a storyline spanning hundreds of diegetic years, involving a composite of flashbacks, flash-forwards, and flash-sideways (sometimes even within the same episode) and stretching across multiple media platforms – was too much for any one individual to master. As a collective whole,

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<sup>101</sup> Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, foreword to *Lost Encyclopedia*, by Paul Terry and Tara Bennett (Indianapolis: Dorling Kindersley, 2010), 9; emphasis added.

<sup>102</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "This Place is Death," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, February 16, 2009, accessed February 19, 2009.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Namaste," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, March 23, 2009, accessed March 26, 2009; emphasis added.

however, *The Transmission*'s contributors possessed "a wide variety of talents"<sup>105</sup> and a "diverse enough set of minds,"<sup>106</sup> allowing for the facilitation of problem solving and a comprehension of the franchise's transmedia mythology. Therefore, the notion persisted throughout *The Transmission*'s run, that viewers' collective knowledge, experiences, and theorizations were far greater than the sum of their individual contributions.

One of the most significant examples of collective intelligence surrounding the Oceanic Six storyline centered on mythologists' working together to better understand the mechanics of teleportation and time travel depicted in seasons four and five. In "Confirmed Dead" (4:02), a newly introduced character discovers a polar bear skeleton in the Tunisian desert. The presence of a Dharma Initiative collar adjacent to the polar bear as well as the skeleton's significant age fostered discussion among mythologists. For example:

**Ryan Ozawa:** As far as the mythology of the show, that was probably the biggest mind-blower, because it's not just *how*... that bear ended up [in the desert] but *when* that bear ended up. I can't come up with any rational explanation for it, and the... [aspects of] space and time and relativity and all of the science stuff [that the producers are] throwing at us.<sup>107</sup>

As this response highlights, mythologists occupied themselves largely with positing "rational explanations" for science fiction tropes, such as teleportation and time travel. In his discussion of science fiction, Stan Beeler argues that the genre "depends heavily upon the creation of a coherent and internally consistent parallel universe; thus, no matter how outlandish the fictional deviations from the 'real world,' these deviations must logically

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<sup>105</sup> Jeff Howe, *Crowd Sourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business* (New York: Crown Business, 2008), 148.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>107</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Confirmed Dead," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, February 9, 2008, accessed February 12, 2008.

fit together.”<sup>108</sup> In order to piece together *Lost*’s mythos in a way that conformed to science and logic, mythologists pointed out intertextual references, shared a diverse range of knowledge, and theorized possible explanations.

In an effort to better understand the logic of teleportation at work in *Lost*, one mythologist draws a link between the name of the character making the discovery of the polar bear skeleton, Charlotte Staples Lewis, and a noted author sharing a similar name:

**Jeff** writes: The C.S. Lewis [reference] could be huge. *The Magician’s Nephew* deals with travel between worlds. The island could be like that where things come through portals to the island.... Maybe [the] Dharma [Initiative] discovered that something taken from the island can be used as a transportation portal, like the wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* was made from the tree of the fruit of Narnia.<sup>109</sup>

In addition to emphasizing the presence of an intertextual reference (Charlotte Staples Lewis/C.S. Lewis), this fan shares his knowledge of C.S. Lewis’ novels in a way that informs a reading of events taking place on the television series. Moreover, viewers called and emailed *The Transmission*, contributing their varied expertise, including French translations,<sup>110</sup> world history,<sup>111</sup> and biblical knowledge<sup>112</sup> in an effort to better comprehend the representation of teleportation and time travel depicted in the Oceanic

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<sup>108</sup> Stan Beeler, “Stargate SG-1 and the Quest for the Perfect Science Fiction Premise,” in *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader*, ed. J.P. Telotte (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 272.

<sup>109</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Confirmed Dead,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 9, 2008, accessed February 12, 2008.

<sup>110</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Little Prince,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 9, 2009, accessed February 12, 2009.

<sup>111</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Confirmed Dead,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 9, 2008, accessed February 12, 2008.

<sup>112</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “This Place is Death,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 16, 2009, accessed February 19, 2009.

Six storyline. As Ryan Ozawa, co-host of *The Transmission*, notes, “Every time someone posts something we learn something new.”<sup>113</sup>

In addition to the exchange of specific knowledge, a large component of *The Transmission* centered on speculative theorizations about the mechanics and logic of *Lost*’s hyperdiegesis. For example, coinciding with the Oceanic Six’s escape from the island, Benjamin Linus’ turned the “Frozen Donkey Wheel” causing the island to move through both space and time. During the Oceanic Six storyline, mythologists frequently engaged in the sharing of theories focusing on the science of such geographical and temporal movement. In the following example, a fan offers one such theory:

**Pete** writes: My theory on the island moving is that it moves in time but stays in the same physical place. However, because the Earth rotates on an axis, this creates the appearance that the island moves geographically. When the island makes a time jump... it pops back up in the same physical space, but the Earth has rotated underneath it... thus placing the island in different places on the planet.<sup>114</sup>

Moreover, mythologists conveyed the distinct sense that the circulation of theories regarding the inner-workings of *Lost*’s hyperdiegesis was a chief pleasure. For instance:

**Heath:** It’s fun hearing the theories.<sup>115</sup>

**Ryan Ozawa:** We theorize our brains out.<sup>116</sup>

**Gia:** I felt like I could listen... to the commentary and totally get my *Lost* fix even without watching the episode.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Confirmed Dead,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 9, 2008, accessed February 12, 2008.

<sup>114</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Jughead,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 2, 2009, accessed February 5, 2008.

<sup>115</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “There’s No Place Like Home,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 18, 2008, accessed May 21, 2008.

<sup>116</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Dead is Dead,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, March 13, 2009, accessed March 16, 2009.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

After sharing their speculations, viewers often concluded their calls or emails by expressing interest in the hosts' and listeners' reactions to their theories.

**Evan:** Let me know what you guys think.<sup>118</sup>

**Donald:** I wanted to call in and get your opinion.... I wanted to know what you guys think.<sup>119</sup>

**John:** Can't wait to see what y'all think about it.<sup>120</sup>

The use of "you" and "guys" here signifies not only *The Transmission's* two hosts, but the community of mythologists as well. The resulting circulation and recirculation of ideas allowed others to revise, contribute, and evaluate theories with the aim of collaboratively achieving a better understanding of *Lost's* mythos. Hence, the communicative sharing of theories and knowledge was a central factor in the enjoyment of mythologists. In fact, these fans conveyed the sense that *The Transmission's* collective intelligence granted them a certain social standing. Consider, for example, the following responses:

**Drew:** I just wanted to thank you guys for what you do. You make me seem much smarter around my friends than I actually am.<sup>121</sup>

**Pam:** You guys get my utmost respect for helping me look good around my friends when I talk about *Lost*.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Little Prince," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 9, 2009, accessed February 12, 2009.

<sup>119</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "This Place is Death," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 16, 2009, accessed February 19, 2009.

<sup>120</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "La Fleur," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*. Podcast audio program, March 8, 2009, accessed March 12, 2009.

<sup>121</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "La Fleur," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, March 8, 2009, accessed March 12, 2009.

<sup>122</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "He's Our You," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, March 29, 2009, accessed April 1, 2009.

Knowledge of *Lost*'s hyperdiegesis becomes a form of social positioning among other fans. Yet, the perception – among mythologists – that they engaged in an inherently intellectual endeavor ultimately fostered a sense of dissatisfaction with the Oceanic Six storyline resulting from the narrative's character-driven, relationship, and romance-oriented aspects.

In contrast to the “cognitive workout” of comprehending *Lost*'s mythos, mythologists grew tired of the Oceanic Six storyline centering on the personal struggles the six characters faced off-island. For example:

**Kyle:** I'm getting sick of the Oceanic Six.<sup>123</sup>

**Jesse:** I actually enjoyed this episode, when [the story] was on the island. Everything that happened off the island [focusing on the Oceanic Six], I couldn't care less about.<sup>124</sup>

**Sobaka:** We've spent the last few episodes with the Oceanic Six.... I *really*, *really* don't like these episodes.<sup>125</sup>

Whereas mythologists privileged the storyline transpiring on the island due to its predominant focus on *Lost*'s ongoing science fiction-oriented plot, they viewed the Oceanic Six off-island storyline as an unsatisfying detour. In particular, mythologists expressed disappointment with the focus on emotions and relationships:

**Alex:** The stuff with Sawyer seeing Kate [while time-traveling] and all his *sturm and drang* and talking to Juliet about how he feels; *it really felt like a transparent effort to go after the female demographic and the romance-hungry demographic*, and to me, it was just *incredibly disappointing stuff.... I resent the pandering to that perceived audience.*<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Little Prince,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, February 9, 2009, accessed February 12, 2009.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “316,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, February 21, 2009, accessed February 24, 2009.

<sup>126</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Little Prince,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, February 9, 2009, accessed February 12, 2009; emphasis added.

Interestingly, even a storyline involving time travel – an aspect of *Lost*'s mythology receiving considerably positive attention from mythologists – is regarded as “incredibly disappointing stuff” when coupled with an appeal to emotionality (“sturm and drang”) and romance.

As the above comment illustrates, fans perceived shipping as a gendered form of engagement in a manner that supports existing research on gender, shipping, and television programs (Scodari & Felder, 2001). Despite this perception, the division between shippers and mythologists within *The Transmission* was not neatly defined along gender lines. As illustrated in the following section, a significant number of male fans expressed an affinity for emotional, character-based engagement.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, while some fans expressed the belief that the shipper/mythologist factions were mutually exclusive, this is an overly simplistic position. Clearly, a fan's engagement with a media property could include both intellectual and emotional aspects. As such, I am interested in the perception of exclusivity among these fan groups and how particular types of engagement fostered tension between *The Transmission*'s fan groups. Examining how shippers and mythologists discussed the Oceanic Six storyline illuminates these issues.

### ***Shipping the Oceanic Six***

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<sup>127</sup> It is important to note that precise demographic information pertaining to the number of men and women participating on *The Transmission* is not available. Podcast participation took the form of written and aural responses, making it difficult to assign gender based on fan names and/or voices alone.

The Oceanic Six return to the island in “316” (5:06), and the two divergent narratives – the on-island story lauded by mythologists and the Oceanic Six’s story celebrated by shippers – began to merge. Ironically, rather than bringing about greater harmony between *The Transmission*’s main fan groups, the convergence of these two narratives prompted further discussions about the “correct” way to engage with *Lost*. As previously mentioned, *Lost*’s producers were well aware of the factional divide between shippers and mythologists. Reaffirming Cuse’ prior stance regarding character versus mythology (“We think we’re primarily making a character show.”),<sup>128</sup> Lindelof privileges the character-driven, emotional aspects of *Lost*:

**Damon Lindelof:** *We know that a lot of people talk about the mythology, but the stuff that we always respond to most are the sort of smaller emotional beats, which is why we feel like the flashbacks and flash-forwards are really the life-blood of the show.*<sup>129</sup>

While acknowledging that fan discussion centers largely on the mythology, Lindelof elevates the flashbacks and flash-forwards as “the life-blood of the show.” In contrast to the on-island narratives, the flashbacks, flash-forwards, and flash-sideways focused primarily on the lives of the series’ central characters. As such, shippers lauded the off-island storylines for the ways in which they informed events occurring on the island. In other words, shippers perceived the characters – and not the mythology – as the element distinguishing *Lost* from other television series.

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<sup>128</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Comic-Con Report – Visionaries Panel,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 26, 2008, accessed July 29, 2008.

<sup>129</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Lost at HIFF,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, October 20, 2009, accessed October 23, 2009; emphasis added.

Shippers often discussed the character/mythology debate in a way rejected mythologists' sensibilities and expressed a sense of superiority. Linking mythological engagement with a sense of disappointment, a shipper offered the following comment:

**Tim** writes: *I only like the mythology in so far as it relates to the characters and how it makes the characters relate to one another.... Anyone watching *Lost* solely for answers to the big questions of the show is going to be very disappointed at the end.*<sup>130</sup>

This statement implies that character-based fandom is ultimately the "correct" way to engage with *Lost* because it is a more fulfilling and meaningful form of fandom.<sup>131</sup>

Furthermore, shippers linked their affinity for character-based stories and a sense of "true" fandom with notions of genre. For instance:

**Mr. Jacob:** *I know some people don't like the character-based episodes, but I think that's always been *Lost*'s best attributes. The sci-fi stuff is great and I love sci-fi, but I love it enough to know that the best sci-fi stories are rooted in compelling, well-written, and well-acted characters.*<sup>132</sup>

Whereas mythologists often derided shipping engagement for a privileging of melodramatic storylines, this fan repositions shippers. Rather than being mindless, emotional fans, then, shippers regarded themselves as those possessing a fuller understanding of genre.

Interestingly, shippers lauded the same emotional aspects derided by mythologists. Shippers' comments on *The Transmission*, for instance, elevated

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<sup>130</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Some Like it Hoth," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, April 18, 2009, accessed April 21, 2009; emphasis added.

<sup>131</sup> The conclusion of the television series figures heavily into this fan's sense of the correct way to engage with *Lost*. This is significant. I return to this point beginning on page 224.

<sup>132</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "He's Our You," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, March 29, 2009, accessed April 1, 2009; emphasis added.

emotional readings of episodes in a manner that reinforced the sense that their fandom was the “true” form of *Lost* fan activity. For instance:

**Anonymous in Canada:** For all those naysayers, *for all those people who hated the Oceanic Six storyline*, I gotta say this is your “I told you so” moment right here. Kate-centric storylines, Jack-centric storylines – all the way back to season one – are ultimately going to be what makes this show great... and everyone’s losing that. Everyone wants more of the smoke monster... more mysteries of the island, [the] temple, yada yada yada. *You gotta understand... the emotional aspect of the show!*<sup>133</sup>

Speaking to “those people who hated the Oceanic Six storyline” – specifically mythologists – this shipper rebukes these fans (“I told you so”) and discusses *Lost*’s mythos in a dismissive manner (“yada, yada, yada”). Within the Oceanic Six storyline, one such instance of the “emotional aspect of the show” focused on by both shippers and mythologists was the romantic couplings of four central characters: Jack, Kate, Sawyer, and Juliet.

Although the producers firmly established the Sawyer/Kate/Jack love triangle in the television series’ first season, the Oceanic Six storyline introduced new relational dynamics and (Sawyer/Kate; Kate/Jack; Jack/Juliet; Sawyer/Juliet) couplings. As such, mythologists derisively dismissed this aspect of the storyline not as a triangle but as the “love-trapezoid”<sup>134</sup> and the “paralle-love-ogram.”<sup>135</sup> Shippers, however, intensely focused on the Sawyer/Juliet relationship – one that was threatened by the return of Jack, Kate, and the rest of the Oceanic Six:

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<sup>133</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “316,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 21, 2009, accessed February 24, 2009; emphasis added.

<sup>134</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Namaste,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, March 23, 2009, accessed March 26, 2009.

<sup>135</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Whatever Happened, Happened,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, April 6, 2009, accessed April 9, 2009.

**John:** Sawyer and Juliet – *I love them together*. They look perfect; they’re the perfect couple. I’m just gonna say it right now; if Kate comes between them two, Juliet’s gonna have to kill her. Or else *I’m gonna kill her*, because this is the perfect couple.<sup>136</sup>

**Evan:** I’m kind of just wishing Jack and Kate would have just stayed [off the island]. *I would have liked it if Sawyer and Juliet just got to live out their lives....* If Sawyer leaves Juliet for Kate, *I’m going to be very mad....* At first I was kind of hoping that Sawyer would... end up with Kate, but now that definitely changed.<sup>137</sup>

As these responses illustrate, mythologists and shippers evaluated the Ocean Six storyline in contrasting ways. Yet, although notions of romance figured significantly into the Sawyer/Juliet/Jack/Kate relationship subplot, this aspect of the Oceanic Six story was embedded in a larger narrative involving elements celebrated by mythologists, such as time travel, teleportation, and island history. How, then, does one make sense of the tension emanating from the factional divide between shippers and mythologists?

Even with shippers openly declaring their affinities for character-driven storylines and dynamic characters, shipping was still regarded as a lower-order fan activity. For instance, Jen Ozawa, the co-host of *The Transmission*, discloses her shipper status, as if revealing a guarded secret:

**Ryan Ozawa:** I’ve got to put this out there. Ever since day one we were watching *Lost* and since our podcast began years ago, you spent a great deal of time mocking shippers... and I agree it can get a little cheesy, but something happened this week that sort of *outed you*.

**Jen Ozawa:** Well... okay, this actually has been building up for a little while because I like Sawyer. I think he’s an interesting character. Okay, I’m a Skater.

**RO:** She’s a Skater! She just melted at those scenes with Kate and Sawyer.... It was embarrassing. And I’m like, “Oh, my god. You’re a Skater!” So again, for those of you who were along with us for all this time, I apologize. *It turns out there’s been a closet Skater in our midst – a shipper – all along.*

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<sup>136</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “La Fleur,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, March 8, 2009, accessed March 12, 2009; emphasis added.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*; emphasis added.

**JO:** I won't talk about it anymore.... No more Skater talk.<sup>138</sup>

Ryan Ozawa playfully treats the revelation ("It turns out there's been a closet Skater in our midst – a shipper – all along") as if expressing interest in romance and relationships constitutes an act of betrayal. Ryan Ozawa's response highlights the notion that a shipping discourse, such as "Skater talk" – one centering on the romantic coupling of Sawyer and Kate – is an unsophisticated, lower-order fan activity.

Even among shippers, for example, the perception persisted that shipping was a simpleminded endeavor – one elevating emotionality over critical distance. In the following response, a shipper expresses shame in discussing a love triangle involving Kate (or Freckles), Sawyer, and Juliet:

**Michelle:** *I'm a little embarrassed* because this is my first time calling and what do I call about: shipping – *um, yeah, very intelligent*. But after having seen "La Fleur," I think, with all due respect to the Kate fans out there, it's time for Freckles to go.... Basically I'd be fine if, you know, she disappeared and Sawyer, would be, like, "Oh yeah, what happened to that chick?"<sup>139</sup>

Hence, although a sense of collective intelligence united mythologists, this shared sense of collaboration and knowledge also acted as an exclusionary force. Mythologists imposed a hierarchical structure privileging intellectual engagement over emotional engagement. In addition to the notion that shipping is unintelligent, the sense of embarrassment conveyed above stems from the frequent criticism *Lost*'s character-driven storylines received. Throughout *The Transmission*'s discourse, for instance, mythologists repeatedly denigrated *Lost*'s relationship storylines narrative by comparing them to soap operas:

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<sup>138</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Economist," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, February 16, 2008, accessed February 19, 2008; emphasis added.

<sup>139</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "La Fleur," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, March 8, 2009, accessed March 12, 2009; emphasis added.

**Elias:** The soap opera thing, the love triangles... are putting me off.<sup>140</sup>

**Alex:** So that's my complaint; why do we need maudlin sort of "chick-flick" type stuff, soap operas... Why can't we just have the originality that made *Lost* wonderful?<sup>141</sup>

**Ryan Ozawa:** [T]hat's what frustrated me about the shipper stuff, the romance stuff, [and] the soap opera stuff.<sup>142</sup>

These responses highlight mythologists' prejudice toward emotional engagement ("love triangles," "maudlin," "romance stuff") – one, in turn, marked as feminine ("chick-flick type stuff"). As Nancy Baym observes, "Even among low-culture forms, soap operas are singled out for particularly patronizing treatment.... This heightened stigmatization is attributable largely to the fact that soaps are a women's genre that focuses on emotion."<sup>143</sup> Thus, mythologists used genre as a way to denounce storylines featuring romance dynamics and more importantly as a way to marginalize those fans interested in such aspects.

Although divided on the "correct" way to watch *Lost*, the sentiment that *Lost*'s producers could not satisfyingly resolve the franchise's many unresolved elements ultimately united shippers and mythologists. Such a viewpoint stemmed from the unique qualities of *Lost*'s long-form, complex, transmedia narrative – one presenting viewers with an abundance of character and mythological storylines. The large number of narrative possibilities contained within the franchise fostered the sense – particularly as

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<sup>140</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Incident," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, May 17, 2009, accessed May 20, 2009.

<sup>141</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Dead Is Dead," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, April 13, 2009, accessed April 16, 2009.

<sup>142</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Incident," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, May 17, 2009, accessed May 20, 2009.

<sup>143</sup> Nancy Baym, *Tune In, Log on: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000), 38.

the series neared its much-publicized final season – that *Lost*'s producers could not adequately satisfy both shippers and mythologists. Consider the following comments from viewers expressing an affinity for both *Lost*'s mythos and characters:

**Alex:** I have a few concerns after “316.” I think the issue boils down to mythology versus character and the balance between the two.... *I don't think there's enough time, really, to get all the mythology stuff done*, if they're going to continue to kind of focus on character stuff.... to the expense of the mythology.... [The producers] have added in some many new characters that the show has gotten cluttered.<sup>144</sup>

**Jackie:** I think Darlton [Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse] should have asked [ABC] for seven seasons instead of six seasons because everything feels very rushed and forced. The character development isn't anywhere near what it was in previous seasons.... *I hope they're not trying to get too much done in too short a period of time, but I'm starting to feel that way.*<sup>145</sup>

Thus, shippers and mythologists repeatedly returned to the concept of time in their discussions of character and mythological closure. Tellingly, both of the above fans perceive the focus on character or mythology, respectively, as the chief problem – one exacerbated by a lack of time. In short, the sense of apprehension conveyed by shippers and mythologists stemmed from the tension between the limited time producers possessed to tell *Lost*'s transmedia story and the franchise's copious amount of unresolved narrative elements.

The temporal constraints of network television production further exacerbated the issue of narrative resolution. In fact, when asked about the presence of a master narrative plan, Damon Lindelof offered the following analogy:

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<sup>144</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “316,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, February 21, 2009, accessed February 24, 2009; emphasis added.

<sup>145</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Life and Death of Jeremy Bentham,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, March 2, 2009, accessed March 5, 2009; emphasis added.

**Damon Lindelof:** We write a script every eight days. *That's not a lot of time*, so you can have grand plans about all the things you want to do, but the beast needs to be fed above all other things. So you can't spend too much time thinking about the groceries you're going to buy next week when you have to figure out what you're going to eat for dinner.<sup>146</sup>

In his response, Lindelof highlights the difficulties and demands of writing a network television series. This statement seems to validate the concerns of the dominant factions within *Lost*'s fan base, especially when coupled with Cuse's prior statement about the difficulties of overseeing a transmedia storytelling franchise:

**Carlton Cuse:** The job of being a television show-runner has evolved and there's all these new aspects to it. It's good because there are additional avenues open for content.... *But it's hard to manage our time.*<sup>147</sup>

Both Lindelof and Cuse stress the issue of time – limited time from episode to episode as well as limited time to focus on other media platforms.

With the producers' limited time and energy to adequately resolve *Lost*'s many unresolved character and mythological elements, the antagonism between shippers and mythologists can be seen as a sort of misdirected animosity – the articulation of a hostility directed at fans instead of producers. Shippers and mythologist worried that their investment in *Lost*'s transmedia franchise would ultimately go unrewarded; however, rather than blame the producers – the creators of the characters and mythology – these fan groups viewed each other as the source of the problem. Lindelof and Cuse inadvertently reinforced this view, as discussed in Chapter Three, by establishing that fan feedback – particularly negative criticism – influenced the production of television series.

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<sup>146</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Comic-Con Report – Visionaries Panel," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, July 26, 2008, accessed July 29, 2008; emphasis added.

<sup>147</sup> Maria Elena Fernandez, "ABC's 'Lost' is Easy to Find, and Not Just on a TV Screen," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 2006, accessed February 15, 2006, [articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/03/entertainment/et-lost3](http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/03/entertainment/et-lost3); emphasis added.

In other words, because limited time existed for the producers to resolve story elements, fans expressing varying desires and expectations possessed the ability to influence the direction of the narrative toward either mythological or character-based closure. Thus, the underlying tension between shippers and mythologists is actually an expression of the disruptive qualities of producer-audience participatory storytelling.

## **Conclusion**

*Lost*'s complex narrative structure placed significant demands on audiences. In addition to an open-ended narrative involving an abundance of mysteries, an unusually large cast of characters, and a serialized story arc spanning hundreds of diegetic years, the narrative structure of *Lost*'s television series consisted of a puzzle-like patchwork of flashbacks, flash-forwards, and flash-sideways. By blending the closure of episodic television with the delayed resolution of serialized storytelling, *Lost*'s producers depicted a range of character-based and series-long, mythological storylines. Although this storytelling approach is not completely unique, both fans and producers distinguished *Lost* from other contemporary television series in a way that reinforced a sense of intellectual superiority. *The Transmission*'s fans conveyed the notion that audiences who enjoy other television series take pleasure in episodic, melodramatic, simplistic narratives. While such insider/outside divisions are not altogether uncommon within fan cultures, as fans often differentiate themselves from the mainstream, it is significant that Damon Lindelof – an executive producer whose success is predicated on amassing a large, aggregate audience – also encouraged such divisions on *The Official Lost Podcast*.

Lindelof's opposition to those audiences desiring narrative resolution or "answers" fostered a feeling of exclusivity among *Lost* highly engaged fans – the viewers – by elevating *Lost* as a text requiring a heightened intellectual engagement. For Lindelof and fans of *The Transmission*, "true" *Lost* fans possessed an encyclopedic understanding of the television series' storylines and character arcs, and were therefore capable of comprehending *Lost*'s delayed narrative.

Transmedia storytelling franchises increase the potential for further narrative complexity as a result of the multiple media platforms and paratexts used to advance the overarching story. This interconnected web of texts allows for the articulation of a narrative universe – the hyperdiegesis – in a way that an individual television series cannot. In particular, *Lost*'s paratexts introduced additional character relationships, backstories, and mythologies. *Lost*'s viewers used knowledge of *Lost*'s transmedia hyperdiegesis as a way to separate themselves from mainstream fans – those viewed as unwilling or unable to comprehend and master the wealth of story and character information contained within *Lost*'s hyperdiegesis. Whereas viewers perceived the mainstream audience as focusing primarily on narratives occurring within the television series, the viewing audience considered themselves "true" fans because their fandom included engagement with *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game, the Comic-Con videos, and the *Lost: Missing Pieces* mobisodes. Yet, *Lost*'s transmedia scope resulted in internal tensions among *Lost*'s viewers as well, stemming from the interplay between viewers' affinity for particular aspects of *Lost*'s storyworld and the varied generic traits depicted in *Lost*'s paratexts. For instance, whereas *The Lost Experience* and *Lost*'s Comic-Con videos (*The Orchid Video* and *The Dharma Booth Video*) focused on science

fiction tropes, the *Lost: Missing Pieces* primarily depicted relationship drama. These paratexts further blurred the generic hybridity of *Lost*'s television series and shaped how viewers read the franchise as a whole.

The varying pleasures experienced by two viewer groups – shippers and mythologists – resulted in factional antagonism as these fans intensely negotiated the “correct” way to consume *Lost*'s franchise. On the one hand, mythologists expressed an affinity for the inner workings, logic, and history of *Lost*'s hyperdiegesis, positioning their engagement as an intellectual endeavor. Given that much of *Lost*'s mythos centered on science fiction tropes, such as time travel, teleportation, and the apocalypse, mythologists regarded *Lost*'s franchise as a grand science fiction text. On the other hand, shippers engaged in emotional, character-based reading of the hyperdiegesis, viewing the franchise largely in dramatic or melodrama terms. Furthermore, although a shared sense of the collaborative, reciprocal distribution of knowledge and theories united mythologists, the perception of their collective intelligence also functioned as an exclusionary force. Mythologists denigrated shipping as a lower-order and less intelligent mode of engagement. In contrast, shippers privileged themselves as “true” fans – those who understood the centrality of the franchise's central characters.

How does one account for the antagonism between shippers and mythologists given that both segments of fans share similar tastes – an affinity for *Lost* – and engagement patterns – viewing? Although antagonisms within fan communities are not uncommon, I argue that the underlying cause of the tension present in *The Transmission*'s fan culture is unique to transmedia storytelling franchises. provide viewers with a wealth of story information – one that ultimately fosters a fragmentary,

divisive experience. Both shippers and mythologists shared the perception that *Lost*'s producers could not satisfyingly resolve the franchise's character and mythological storylines in time for the television series' much-publicized conclusion. By previously validating fan feedback – particularly negative criticism – Lindelof and Cuse reinforced the notion that vocally discontented fans could influence the direction of the television series' narrative. Hence, the confluence of an expansive transmedia scope, limited time to resolve the franchise's narrative elements, and a communicative producer-audience relationship fostered tensions between shippers and mythologists. In other words, the antagonism between shippers and mythologists is actually an expression of the uncertainty surrounding a transmedia participatory culture in which fans possess the agency to steer the narrative towards either mythological or character-based resolution. The appeasement of one fan faction – the shippers or the mythologists – represents the denial of the other group's pleasure. Seen in this way, the tension between *The Transmission*'s viewers stems from the perception that each opposing group robs the other of a satisfying fan experience.

Significantly, although fans regularly discussed shipping and mythology on *The Official Lost Podcast*, the sense of tension present on *The Transmission* was largely absent. Given that ABC and *Lost*'s producers functioned as gatekeepers by selecting the fan responses included on *The Official Lost Podcast*, the lack of infighting between shippers and mythologists is unsurprising. Although Lindelof and Cuse fostered an internal/external, viewer/mainstream demarcation on *The Official Lost Podcast*, the absence of antagonism between shippers and mythologists on the podcast represents the producers' desire to avoid further subdividing the fan base of highly engaged viewers.



## Dissertation Summary and Conclusion

Over the course of this dissertation, I examined the shifting relationships between producers, texts, and audiences in the context of transmedia storytelling franchises through a thematic analysis of the conversations occurring on two *Lost* podcasts: ABC's *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* fan-produced podcast. Using the concept of viewings, I argued for a new model of transmedia engagement that accounts for the broad range of interactive, participatory, and communicative multi-platform activities encouraged by stories that cross multiple media platforms. Existing scholarship (Harries, 2002), posits a deterministic link between viewings and new media technologies, focusing predominantly on the text-audience relationship. My analysis of the production and reception of *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling franchise expands this concept of viewings to include text-audience interactivity, participatory producer-audience storytelling, and communicative audience-audience collaboration (and antagonism) spanning digital and analog media platforms. The producers of *Lost*'s transmedia franchise, for instance, encouraged audiences to search out scattered paratexts and play interactive alternate reality games; communicate with executive producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse and other fans as a way to extend their engagement and more fully master *Lost*'s narrative universe; and even participate in *Lost*'s discourse as a sort of regulating community through the voicing of feedback. Simply put, *Lost*'s transmedia franchise encouraged – and even required – viewings.

## ***The End***

In my closing remarks, there is no better fit for reflecting on the reconfiguration of the text-audience, producer-audience, and audience-audience relationships fostered by transmedia storytelling franchises than by examining the finale of *Lost*'s television series and the subsequent release of the epilogue *The New Man in Charge*. On May 23, 2010, *Lost*'s television series concluded with a two-and-a-half-hour episode appropriately entitled "The End." Whereas the narrative structure of the previous five seasons involved on-island storylines combined with off-island flashbacks or flash-forwards, *Lost*'s sixth and final season incorporated a new storytelling technique: flash-sideways.<sup>1</sup> Episodes in the final season consisted of on-island storylines combined with what Lindelof and Cuse regarded as flash-sideways – the depiction of an alternate timeline in which the television series' central characters never crash-landed on the island.<sup>2</sup> In this alternate "sideways" reality, for instance, the island is underwater; Sawyer, a character established as a con man in previous seasons, is a police officer; and dead characters, such as Boone and Shannon, are alive.<sup>3</sup> Although fans speculated about the significance of the alternate reality throughout the sixth season, the revelation centering on the relationship between "the sideways" and the on-island events did not occur until the series finale. Gathered in a church in the series finale's final moments, the central characters learn that they are, in

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<sup>1</sup> "The Other 48 Days" (2:07) and "Ji-Yeon" (3:07) are the exceptions. "The Other 48 Days" consisted entirely of flashbacks depicting events transpiring on the island and did not feature an off-island storyline. In addition to an on-island storyline, the narrative of "Ji-Yeon" included both flashbacks and flash-forwards focusing on the lives of Sun and Jin before they arrived on the island and Sun's life after she escaped from the island, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: February 4, 2010," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed February 7, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Both fans and producers used the phrase "the sideways" in reference to season six's alternate timeline.

fact, dead and that “the sideways” represents a supernatural limbo.<sup>4</sup> “The End”

concludes with the church doors opening, engulfing the characters in a bright light.

Although executive producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse entered a self-imposed “radio silence” shortly before “The End,” thereby discontinuing *The Official Lost Podcast*, the response to the series finale on *The Transmission* varied.<sup>5</sup> For example:

**Matt:** The finale was beautiful. It was perfect. It was an excellent way to end the series.<sup>6</sup>

**Sobaka:** It was kind of a “meh” finale for me. It was good; it wasn’t great.<sup>7</sup>

**Scott:** [T]he series failed for me.... I was just hoping for a more satisfying end.<sup>8</sup>

Given the factional divide and seemingly contradictory pleasures of *The Transmission*’s main fan groups, this range of responses is perhaps unsurprising. Yet, even among those fans lauding “The End,” the lack of narrative closure for *Lost*’s mythological elements represented something of a failure:

**Tony:** The last show was fantastic. *I was a little disappointed in not finding out all the answers.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Many characters experienced an awakening or realization of their presence in “the sideways” limbo before this moment; however, it was not until Jack Shepard, the television series’ central protagonist, learned of his own death that the revelation regarding the significance of the alternate, sideways reality was made explicitly clear to the audience.

<sup>5</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: May 7, 2010,” podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed May 10, 2010. The May 14, 2010 episode of *The Official Lost Podcast* was the final podcast featuring Lindelof and Cuse. Two additional video podcasts followed featuring cast and crew members.

<sup>6</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The End,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 24, 2010, accessed May 27, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The End Revisited,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 31, 2010, accessed June 3, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid; emphasis added.

**Sean:** [It] was a beautiful episode and a beautiful way to bring our characters to an end, but overall, I felt that it was a *disappointing conclusion to the mythology* of the island.... They didn't tie up all the loose ends they could have.<sup>10</sup>

I argue that this disappointment was a product of *Lost*'s serialized, transmedia approach to storytelling. The narratives of transmedia storytelling franchises are expansive, making narrative resolution within one text (or even one platform) difficult. *Lost*'s transmedia narrative, in particular, spanned a television series, alternate reality games, online videos, mobisodes, a videogame, a novel, and even jigsaw puzzles. In her analysis of *Lost*'s conclusion, Joanne Morreale discusses the television series as a "puzzle narrative."<sup>11</sup> Yet, solving a puzzle without all the pieces is impossible, and some of *Lost*'s narrative elements, such as those contained in *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game, existed outside of the television series.

My analysis of the production and reception of *The Lost Experience* in Chapter Two illustrates how *Lost*'s producers utilized interactive and immersive media to both promote the television series and expand its narrative universe, distributing narrative elements across both digital and analog media platforms. The network of interconnected paratexts constituting *The Lost Experience*, including websites, a novel, and television commercials provided new opportunities for revenue as well as spaces for corporate advertising and synergistic cross-promotion. In addition, *The Lost Experience* enabled producers to advance a transmedia narrative and depict stories outside of the television series through what co-creator Javier Grillo-Marxuach described as non-televisual

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid; emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> Joanne Morreale, "Lost, The Prisoner, and the End of the Story," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 38 (2010): 178.

storytelling.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, by distributing interactive elements across multiple media platforms, the qualities of *The Lost Experience*'s storytelling blurred the boundaries of the text.<sup>13</sup> This vast scope immersed viewers in a sprawling work of “unfiction” – an experience presenting itself as neither a story nor a game but as real life.<sup>14</sup> *The Lost Experience*'s use of “real world media,” such as telephones and newspapers, as well as the extension of the experience into public spaces further fostered a playful immersion in *Lost*'s storyworld.<sup>15</sup> Yet, rather than immersing the player into the game, *Lost*'s producers immersed the game into the real world.<sup>16</sup> When coupled with a “This is Not a Game” storytelling approach that actively obscures the artifice of the experience's fictive creation, *The Lost Experience*'s boundary-blurring, interactive, and immersive qualities challenge existing understandings of textuality.

While presenting innovative opportunities for narrative expansion, *Lost*'s use of transmedia storytelling strategies resulted in an abundance of narrative elements in a way that problematized closure. Ultimately, “The End” resolved little of *Lost*'s transmedia mythology – what Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta Pearson regard as “the overarching

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<sup>12</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> In total, *The Lost Experience* consisted of websites, online videos, a letter appearing in several major newspapers, appearances by actors portraying game characters Rachel Blake and Hugh McIntyre, podcasts, and real-world scavenger hunt-type activities.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Handler Miller, *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment* (New York: Focal Press, 2008), 289.

<sup>15</sup> Christy Dena, “Emerging Participatory Culture Practices: Player-Created Tiers in Alternate Reality Games,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 42.

<sup>16</sup> Dave Szulborski astutely points out, “In an alternate reality game, the goal is not to immerse the player in the artificial world of the game; instead, a successful game immerses the world of the game into the everyday existence and life of the player (Szulborski, 2005: 31).”

puzzle” created by the franchise as a whole.<sup>17</sup> Fans discussed the television series’ lack of narrative resolution in a way that echoed the sentiments expressed in Chapter Three concerning the value of paratextual engagement. As one of the co-hosts of *The Transmission* pointed out, one of the “primary objections” to the series finale was:

**Ryan Ozawa:** [t]he things about the island that [the producers] never got around to explaining.... *A lot of people really feel conned by Lost*; that they didn’t get around to a lot of the things they introduced in the early seasons.<sup>18</sup>

Although Ozawa expresses the notion of being “conned by *Lost*,” he mentions the producers as well (“they”), thereby linking Lindelof and Cuse with the act of being tricked or manipulated. Hence, unsatisfied fans felt conned by the producers and not the franchise itself. Ozawa’s use of “conned” is telling and mirrors earlier notions of being “ripped-off” by *Lost*’s producers, as discussed in Chapter Three’s examination of *The Dharma Booth Video*.<sup>19</sup>

The producer-audience discourse surrounding a popular fan theory also fostered notions of being tricked by *Lost*’s producers. The resulting tension stemming from the apparent contradiction between Lindelof and Cuse’s prior comments and the narrative closure provided by “The End” illustrates the link between canon formation and producer-audience trust examined in Chapter Three. An early theory accounting for the events taking place on *Lost*’s mysterious island setting was that the passengers of Oceanic flight 815 did not survive the plane crash and were, in fact, in purgatory. For

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<sup>17</sup> Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson, “Introduction,” in *Cult Television*, ed. Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xv.

<sup>18</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The End Revisited,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 31, 2010, accessed June 3, 2010; emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “Follow the Leader,” podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 11, 2009, accessed May 14, 2009.

instance, when addressing Lindelof and Cuse at the 2006 *Lost* Comic-Con panel, a fan acknowledged the widespread knowledge of this speculation among *Lost* fans:

**Fan 9:**<sup>20</sup> We've all heard theories about they're dead... they're in purgatory.<sup>21</sup>

Although this conjecture was well known among fans of *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission*, equally prevalent was Lindelof and Cuse's discrediting of the purgatory theory.

Both Lindelof and Cuse publicly discounted the speculation surrounding purgatory on multiple occasions.<sup>22</sup> As such, Lindelof and Cuse's own words became a canonical text of sorts. For example, the episode "D.O.C." (3:18), in which a new character arrives on the island and alleges the discovery of the crashed Oceanic flight 815 with no survivors, prompted fans to question if *Lost*'s island setting really was a sort of purgatory after all. On the following episode of *The Official Lost Podcast*, Lindelof and Cuse reasserted the truthfulness of their prior statements:

**Carlton Cuse:** You know what immediately is going to happen is people are gonna say, "Those guys were *lying*. Carlton and Damon were *lying*. It really is purgatory." How are we going to respond to that?

**Damon Lindelof:** We're going to say that we're not *lying* and *it's not purgatory*.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This individual did not provide his name. I identified the individual as "Fan 9" because he was the ninth person to ask a question during the 2006 *Lost* Comic-Con panel.

<sup>21</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: July 31, 2006," podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed August 3, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that *Lost*'s producers, at times, also reinforced this theory. For instance, Laurence Shames ghostwrote the *Lost* tie-in novel using the pseudonym Gary Troup – an anagram of "purgatory." In the episode "This Place is Death (5:05), Benjamin Linus drives a van with the name "Canton-Rainier" – an anagram of "reincarnation" – printed on the side.

<sup>23</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: April 30 2007," podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed May 3, 2007; emphasis added.

Lindelof and Cuse's repetition of "lying" demonstrates the ways in which notions of trust, canon, and the producer-audience bond are linked. As such, Lindelof and Cuse's extratextual comments on *The Official Lost Podcast* factored significantly into the development of subsequent fan theories. Even when events occurring within *Lost*'s narrative universe appeared to actually confirm the purgatory theory, fans largely discounted this possibility. For example:

**Ryan Ozawa:** One of the very first, you know, "*Lost* 101" theories was [the characters] are in purgatory.... And season one, episode one, the creators said... "It's not purgatory."<sup>24</sup>

As Ozawa's response highlights, the authorial voice of "the creators" carried substantial weight within *The Transmission*'s fan culture.

The discrepancy between events taking place in "The End" and Lindelof and Cuse's canonical statements jeopardized the nature of communicative producer-audience bond fostered by *The Official Lost Podcast*. In the series finale's penultimate scene, a character explains that events transpiring on the island throughout the television series' six seasons actually occurred, but "the sideways" reality depicted in the sixth and final season was an afterlife taking place after the deaths of *Lost*'s central characters. Thus, in effect, "the sideways" was a sort of purgatory. Despite the relatively straightforward resolution to "the sideways" offered in "The End," fans expressed significant confusion:

**Jerry:** [T]he ending was kind of confusing.<sup>25</sup>

**Deborah:** I am confused.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Cabin Fever," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 11, 2008, accessed May 14, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The End," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 24, 2010, accessed May 27, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

**Boone:** I'm super confused.<sup>27</sup>

This sense of perplexity stemmed from the seeming incongruity between Lindelof and Cuse's canonical statements made on *The Official Lost Podcast* and the events depicted in the series finale. Put another way, fans struggled to reconcile Lindelof and Cuse's disavowal of the purgatory theory with the revelation pertaining to "the sideways." For instance:

**Jason:** I think I'm just more confused than anything else.... That answer in "the sideways" was a little bit too close to purgatory for me. I thought *we had the promise* that it was absolutely not purgatory, but man, that's close.<sup>28</sup>

**James:** I was understanding everything so well until this finale. All I can say is I'm lost.... I don't know, purgatory? *They promised us* it wasn't purgatory, but apparently that's what it seems to be.<sup>29</sup>

In a manner displaying the connection between notions of trust, canon, and producer-audience communication, fans use the word "promise" to discuss Lindelof and Cuse's official statements. Therefore, just as *The Dharma Booth Video*'s canonical status shifted, so too, did the explanation regarding purgatory.

The lack of narrative resolution and the shifting canonical status of the purgatory theory resulted in fans reflecting on the experience of *Lost* fandom. When looking back on the franchise, fans often regarded the *Lost* fan experience in transactional terms. For instance, on the final episode of *The Transmission*, one of the co-hosts posed the following question:

**Ryan Ozawa:** Was *Lost* worth it?... Was it worth the investment?<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid; emphasis added.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid; emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Lost Year," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, May 20, 2011, accessed May 23, 2011.

Although Ozawa discusses an investment in *Lost*, Lindelof and Cuse's "dialogue branding" on *The Official Lost Podcast* extended the *Lost* brand onto the producers as well, with fans investing in the producers' ability to deliver a satisfying, cohesive story. Joshua Green and Henry Jenkins theorize Ozawa's claims of a producer-audience "investment" in the age of media convergence as operating according to a new "moral economy" or social, emotional, and cultural exchange.<sup>31</sup> The logic dictating the previous moral economies between producers and audiences, Green and Jenkins point out, is no longer valid.<sup>32</sup> In particular, the confluence of industrial, technological and cultural transformations examined throughout this dissertation shift the terms of the exchange between transmedia producers and audiences by fostering viewings.

In a manner indicative of my analysis of *Lost*'s shippers and mythologists in Chapter Four, fans of *The Transmission* viewed the investment in *Lost*, Lindelof, and Cuse in differing terms. The varying pleasures experienced by groups of *Lost* viewers – shippers and mythologists – resulted in factional antagonism over the course of *The Transmission*'s run as these fans intensely negotiated the "correct" way to consume *Lost*. Mythologists' engagement centered primarily on the mechanics of *Lost*'s narrative universe. These fans took pleasure in the puzzle-like challenge of analyzing intertextual references, examining obscured aural and visual clues, and speculating about the television series' complex plot in a way that informed their understanding of *Lost*'s overarching transmedia narrative. In contrast, shippers engaged in emotional, character-based readings, developing attachments for particular characters, advocating for

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<sup>31</sup> Joshua Green and Henry Jenkins, "The Moral Economy of Web 2.0: Audience Research and Convergence Culture," in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 214.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

particular romantic couplings, and focusing on the characterizations of the central characters. Whereas mythologists denigrated shipping as a lower-order and less intelligent mode of engagement, shippers rejected mythologists' emotionally cold reading of the characters.

For many shippers, "The End" was a success because the episode resolved many of the central characters' storylines:

**John:** Of course there were some questions unanswered, but they brought the stories of the characters to a conclusion very nicely.<sup>33</sup>

This segment of *The Transmission*'s viewers did not perceive the unresolved mythological elements as problematic because their engagement centered primarily on the characters, and the finale focused heavily on this element. Much of the television series' narrative revolved around characters attempting to escape from the island. The series finale brought closure to this aspect by depicting six central characters fleeing the island, aided significantly by the sacrifice of the television series' central protagonist, Jack Shepard. In addition to the sadness of witnessing Shepard's sacrificial death, the resolution of character storylines in "the sideways" also evoked feelings of joy. "The End" concluded with the reunification of familial, romantic, and platonic character couplings. In many cases, at least one member of the pairing died in a previous season or episode, thereby triggering feelings of happiness tied seeing beloved characters reunited with their loved ones. For instance, stepsiblings Boone and Shannon, spouses Sun and Jin, and friends Charlie and Hurley come together in the church in the final moments of "The End." Thus, those fans celebrating "The End" did so largely in emotional terms:

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<sup>33</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The End Revisited," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, May 31, 2010, accessed June 3, 2010.

**Jo:** [The finale] was amazing; it touched me in my heart.<sup>34</sup>

**Brian:** I liked it. It had a lot of heart.<sup>35</sup>

**Anthony:** My wife is sitting here bawling. My allergies are kicking in, and I can't see straight. [The producers] brought it home – very nice, very pleased.... Wow, I'm amazed.<sup>36</sup>

These fans praise the series finale for its ability to move them emotionally and make no mention of the episode's perceived failings.

In contrast, mythologists predominantly criticized "The End" for its privileging of emotionality over intellect. Significantly, these fans again used a transactional metaphor to describe their disappointment, viewing the lack of mythological closure as violating an agreement between producers and the audience. For example, the following fan views the producers' refusal to resolve the franchise's mythological elements as a violation of a producer-audience promise:

**Tall** writes: The finale was a huge emotional success – I cried – but I'm sorry to admit, it was also an intellectual failure. When our emotions die over time, will we still be debating significant storyline questions that [the producers] never intended to answer? I'll remember... *the promise of a huge payoff* at the end would help *make some kind of sense* to me.<sup>37</sup>

Here, a "payoff" represents more than just an emotionally satisfying story; it signifies concluding *Lost*'s transmedia story in a way that validates fans viewing the television series and engaging with paratexts, listening to the producer and fan-created podcasts, and speculating about *Lost*'s mythology. In other words, mythological coherency is crucial to the notion of a meaningful return. Over the course of six years, *Lost*'s

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<sup>34</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The End," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, May 24, 2010, accessed May 27, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The End Revisited," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, May 31, 2010, accessed June 3, 2010; emphasis added.

producers introduced layer upon layer of complex and at times seemingly unrelated mythology. As the above response suggests, mythologists desired a conclusion to the franchise that would connect these elements in a coherent, meaningful way; that would help them “make sense” of the overarching mythology.

As demonstrated by my analysis of the mainstream/viewer divide in Chapter Four, *Lost*’s viewers – both shippers and mythologists – regarded the franchise as uniquely complex. The difficulty of comprehending *Lost*’s transmedia narrative was a “valuable” aspect of *Lost* fandom, as highlighted by the following statement:

**Ryan Ozawa:** Yes, it was hard for people.... You couldn’t have a story resolved in an hour, but that was definitely valuable to me.<sup>38</sup>

Yet, mythologists viewed the lack of mythological resolution as running counter to the franchise’s most unique qualities. In other words, for mythologists, the mythological storytelling – not the characters – distinguished *Lost* from other media properties. The absence of mythos in “The End,” therefore, devalued the engagement of these fans.

Consider the following response:

**Else** writes: I needed more answers; more closure than was offered. Putting everyone in a lit room, hugging and smiling feels good but answers absolutely nothing. *If I wanted to feel good, I would have gone to a James Taylor concert and saved the six years of trouble.*<sup>39</sup>

The negative response to “The End” demonstrates that mythologists view emotionality or “feeling good” as a simpler and less sophisticated, lower-order type of engagement.

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<sup>38</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The Lost Year,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, May 20, 2011, accessed May 23, 2011; emphasis added.

<sup>39</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, “The End Revisited,” podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, May 31, 2010, accessed June 3, 2010; emphasis added.

Additionally, the above response further highlights the transactional nature of *Lost*'s producer-audience relationship by emphasizing the notions of desire ("If I wanted to feel good") and investment ("six years of trouble").

As I discussed in Chapter Four, notions of genre played a central role in shipper/mythologist antagonisms. Despite the television series' generic hybridity, shippers and mythologists read *Lost* alternatively as a melodrama and science fiction. The paratextual expansion of *Lost*'s narrative further blurred the television series' blended generic makeup by depicting additional relationships and introducing science fiction-oriented elements. For those fans viewing the franchise through the lens of science fiction, explanations were a crucial component missing from the series finale. For example:

**John:** For a long time, *I thought the story was a science fiction head-trip.... All the time in seasons two through five that was spent on science fiction tropes, like time travel, now seems like misdirection.*<sup>40</sup>

This response illustrates the connection between intellectual stimulation ("head-trip") and notions of genre ("science fiction"). Tellingly, the use of "misdirection" in the above response again implies the notion of being conned by *Lost*'s producers, linking the nature of the trick to shifting generic classifications. Ryan Ozawa expressed similar sentiments regarding *Lost*'s generic oscillation:

*I used to call it "stealth sci-fi" [because] it sort of struck everyone as a great dramatic story and a melodrama, but it had these elements of sci-fi and it turned into a sci-fi show, and that's what I was so happy about. But, in the end, it... turned back into a character melodrama.*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The End Revisited," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, May 31, 2010, accessed June 3, 2010; emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "The Lost Year," podcast audio, Lost Podcast: The Transmission, May 20, 2011, accessed May 23, 2011; emphasis added.

As this response suggests, for many fans, *Lost* was either science fiction or a melodrama – it could not be both. In addition, this viewpoint highlights the perception that the shipper and mythologist fan groups were mutually exclusive.

Echoing the tensions discussed in Chapter Four between shippers and mythologists, one's appreciation (or lack thereof) of "The End" became a sort of barometer of one's *Lost* fandom. In fact, the tension still simmered at the "Lost Podcasting" panel at the 2010 Comic Con. When one of the panelists, Jay Glatfelter of *The Lost Podcast with Jay and Jack*, asked the audience in attendance to raise their hands if they did not like the series finale, those raising their hands were greeted with a loud cacophony of "boos" from the rest of the crowd.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the perception existed among many fans that those voicing discontent with the finale were not "true" fans, and the most divisive factor was the issue of narrative resolution.

Given the frequent discussions on *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* centering on *Lost*'s paratextual extensions, it is surprising fans expected that *Lost*'s narrative would be completely resolved within the television series. In fact, months before "The End," Lindelof and Cuse hinted on *The Official Lost Podcast* that narrative resolution, for at least one of the television series' most infamously unresolved mysteries, would eventually appear outside of the television series. In the following exchange, a fan questions whether the on-island appearance of a large palette of food from the Dharma Initiative, an organization defunct for decades, would be explained:

**Arie Margolis** writes: In the [season two] episode "Lockdown," who was responsible or behind the dropping of the palette of Dharma food that lands on the island?

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<sup>42</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Lost Podcasting Panel at Comic-Con," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 27, 2010, accessed July 30, 2010.

**Damon Lindelof:** We have every intention of answering where the palette came from; however, *it might not happen in the actual show itself*.<sup>43</sup>

Lindelof's comment highlights one of the defining characteristics of transmedia storytelling: the lack of a single text containing all the story information.

In a manner illustrative of *Lost*'s innovative storytelling approach, narrative closure came in August 2010 when ABC included a twelve-minute epilogue to the franchise as part of the DVD and Blu-ray release of *Lost: The Complete Collection*. The epilogue, *The New Man in Charge*, depicts events transpiring after "The End." Near the conclusion of the on-island portion of the series finale's narrative, Hurley becomes the guardian of the island – the "new man in charge" – and Benjamin Linus accepts a position as Hurley's second-in-command.<sup>44</sup> Although both Hurley and Linus appear in "the sideways" afterlife in the series finale, their dialogue suggests that the two served as protectors of the island for some time. *The New Man in Charge*, then, features notable occurrences taking place after the finale and before their subsequent deaths and appearance in "the sideways." In particular, the epilogue consists of two scenes: the first centers on an off-island Dharma Initiative facility and the second involves Walt, a central character established as unique in the first seasons but whom was largely absent from the series' latter seasons. In the span of twelve-minutes, *The New Man in Charge* provided answers for numerous unresolved mysteries, including an explanation of why pregnant

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<sup>43</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, "The Official Lost Audio Podcast: March 10, 2010," podcast audio, The Official Lost Podcast, accessed March 13, 2010; emphasis added.

<sup>44</sup> *The New Man in Charge*, *Lost: The Complete Sixth Season, Bonus Features* (Burbank, CA: 2010: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2010, DVD).

women on the island die during childbirth, the source of the Dharma Initiative food drops, and the purpose of the enigmatic Room 23.<sup>45</sup>

The strategy of extending characters and storylines beyond the narrative of a series finale is, in itself, nothing new. For example, after the final season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a comic book series published by Dark Horse Comics entitled *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Eight* (2007) continued the television series' narrative.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the narratives of *The X-Files* and *Star Trek: The Original Series* extended into motion pictures after each television series concluded. *Lost* is unique, however, in that the use of post-season finale content did not represent an attempt to continue the narrative indefinitely. Rather, *Lost*'s epilogue functioned to further conclude the franchise's overarching narrative by resolving storylines not featured in the series finale. This is a crucial distinction. The interconnected web of paratexts surrounding *Lost*'s television series allowed for the articulation of a narrative universe – the hyperdiegesis (Hills, 2002) – in a way that an individual television series cannot. Yet, by introducing additional characters, depicting previously unseen backstories, and introducing new mythologies into the franchise, the paratexts constituting *Lost*'s hyperdiegesis problematized narrative closure. As such, *The New Man in Charge* illustrates shifting transmedia storytelling strategies.

Significantly, the release of *The New Man in Charge* also highlights the economic potentials of transmedia storytelling. As explored in Chapter Two, increasing

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<sup>45</sup> The epilogue concludes with the suggestion that Walt will become the island's next guardian.

<sup>46</sup> "Interview with Buffy Creator Joss Whedon," Dark Horse Comics, accessed September 10, 2011, <http://www.darkhorse.com/Interviews/1421/Interview-with-Buffy-creator-Joss-Whedon-3-26-07>. In 2011, Dark Horse comics began a subsequent comic book series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Nine*.

conglomeration within the media industries incentivizes brand-building strategies present to companies in the age of media convergence. Expanding television programs into brands allows media industries to capitalize on the popularity of successful media properties. For instance, taking advantage of *Lost*'s success in the television market, the Walt Disney Company expanded *Lost* into a franchise including a videogame, a novel, a magazine series, and ancillary products, such as action figures and a board game. Although such expansive strategies increase profit potentials, fan reaction to the release of *The New Man in Charge* suggests there are limits to brand-building strategies. Although clearly functioning as a value-added incentive to purchase *Lost: The Complete Collection*, fans expressed displeasure with having to pay for the narrative resolution provided by *The New Man in Charge*. At the 2010 "Lost Podcasting" panel, a longtime *Lost* podcaster noted:

**Jack Glatfelter:** People are saying they should have shown it without having to pay for it.<sup>47</sup>

While the industrial strategy of brand expansion represents potentials for greater revenue streams, branding-building through the production of paratextual content creates potential pitfalls as well. On the one hand, *Lost*'s transmedia storyworld functioned as an expanding, immersive text encouraging a sustained engagement with *Lost*'s narrative universe through interactive, participatory, and communicative multi-platform media use. On the other hand, at times, *Lost*'s transmedia strategies alienated both casual viewers and transmedia viewers, as illustrated by my analysis of *The Lost Experience* and *The Dharma Booth Video*. Mainstream fans were weary of the significant time commitments

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<sup>47</sup> Ryan Ozawa and Jen Ozawa, "Lost Podcasting Panel at Comic-Con," podcast audio, *Lost Podcast: The Transmission*, July 27, 2010, accessed July 30, 2010.

necessary to engage with transmedia storyworlds, and viewers expressed frustration with *Lost*'s producers reluctance to consistently unite the scattered narrative threads into a coherent whole.

## ***Lost's Lessons & The Future of Transmedia Storytelling***

I began this project by stating that *Lost* was among the most popular and expansive transmedia storytelling franchises to date. As such, *Lost* provides crucial lessons for producers of future transmedia franchises. *Lost's* producers experienced difficulty making transmedia experiences – particularly alternate reality games – work for both the television audience at large and the subset of highly engaged viewers. I argue that this failure stemmed from the unidirectional flow of narrative information within *Lost's* transmedia storytelling franchise. In other words, characters, institutions, and storylines spread outward from *Lost's* anchor text – the television series – rarely working their way back to the center. For instance, the backstories of Alvar Hanso and the Hanso Foundation – elements first introduced in *Lost's* television series – received considerable paratextual treatment in *The Lost Experience*; yet, this narrative information never factored significantly into subsequent seasons of the television series. In this way, *Lost's* transmedia franchise can be viewed as operating according to a centrifugal force of sorts, spinning narrative information from the centralized anchor text outward to paratextual extensions. However, *Lost's* viewers expressed a desire for this directionality to ultimately reverse itself in a way that merged the narratives of the transmedia paratexts and the television series into a coherent, unified whole. Hence, producers of future transmedia franchise need to make use of omni-directional narratives that flow both outward from the centralized anchor text and inward from transmedia paratexts, thereby validating transmedia engagement with valuable storyworld insights. Although *The Orchid Video* represents a notable exception in which paratextual story elements surfaced

in the television series, the subsequent Comic-Con video, *The Dharma Booth Video*, illustrates another important lesson.

Producers of transmedia storytelling franchises need to build consistent universes that encourage exploration. As Elizabeth Evan notes, “Transmedia storytelling makes particular use of fictional worlds, exploiting the fact that the viewer only sees part of that world and will be encouraged to subsequently seek out information on those hidden parts via the extensions onto multiple platforms.”<sup>48</sup> While paratextual expansion increases a storyworld’s scope, providing space for further audience exploration, inconsistencies existing between paratexts undermine the viewings experience. For example, the incongruity between events depicted in *The Dharma Booth Video* and the television series centering on the death of Daniel Faraday resulted in significant frustration among viewers because it highlighted the absence of a consistent storyworld timeline. However, as Javier Grillo Marxuach suggests, minimizing such narrative inconsistencies is difficult given the realities of contemporary transmedia franchise production, which involves a complex collaboration of television network executives, producers, and writers.<sup>49</sup> In order to further reduce the possibilities for narrative contradiction – those resulting in paratexts ultimately being deemed non-canonical extensions – future transmedia producers would be wise to focus paratextual extensions on secondary characters and previous narrative gaps. By depicting a central character engaged in events occurring ahead of the timeline established in the television series, *The Dharma Booth Video* presented *Lost*’s producers with a unique challenge – one which ultimately

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<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 11.

<sup>49</sup> Javier Grillo-Marxuach, interview by Michael Graves, August 25, 2011.

caused difficulties as they attempted to reconcile the paratext with the television series. In contrast, *The Orchid Video* and *The Missing Pieces* mobisodes centered on storylines occurring within *Lost*'s universe before the events depicted in the television series, thereby presenting significantly lesser chance of narrative contradiction. This is a crucial distinction. Thus, the resulting disappointment surrounding *The Dharma Booth Video* illustrates that although transmedia world-building offers the lure of sustained engagement, these strategies can actually have the opposite effect when transmedia producers fail to build internally consistent narrative universes.

Incorporating subtle connections between the centralized anchor text and paratextual extensions is an effective strategy for enabling both the circulation of an omni-directional narrative flow and the construction of an internally consistent storyworld. *Lost*'s producers largely resisted drawing such connections for fear of alienating the casual viewing audience; however, noteworthy examples from the television series highlight how producers of future transmedia franchises can reward viewings engagement with subtle yet significant references. For instance, in the season two episode "The Hunting Party" (2:11), a member of the Others, Tom Friendly, paraphrases a quote from Alvar Hanso located on ABC's Hanso Foundation website. To viewers, this reference linked Alvar Hanso with the Others in a way that provided them with a richer understanding of *Lost*'s narrative universe and afforded them a privileged position based on the exclusiveness of the information. Yet, given the subtle manner in which Friendly delivers the dialogue as well as the quote's tangential relevance to events occurring in the episode, there existed little risk in alienating those viewer unfamiliar with the Hanso Foundation website. Moreover, *Lost*'s producers crafted connections

between *Bad Twin*, the *Lost* novel, and the television series in a way that validated knowledge of *Lost*'s paratexts. As established by *The Lost Experience*, the "author" of *Bad Twin* was a passenger on Oceanic flight 815. In "The Long Con" (2:13), Hurley reads a copy of the *Bad Twin* manuscript discovered in the wreckage of the airplane, and later in the same season, Sawyer reads the manuscript in "Two For the Road" (2:20). The presence of the *Bad Twin* manuscript in *Lost*'s television series constituted an unobtrusive and savvy strategy for meaningfully rewarding viewings engagement without alienating casual viewers. These instances generated a significantly positive response from *Lost*'s viewers, highlighting that connections between a centralized anchor text and paratexts do not have to be overt. The Hanso Foundation website and *Bad Twin* intertextual references are also significant in that one's comprehension of the events on the television series was not predicated on recognizing the reference. Hence, as *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling approach illustrates, it is more effective when transmedia producers create subtly meaningful connections between transmedia texts in a way that validates viewings without requiring it.

## ***Dissertation Conclusion***

Chapter Two examined *The Lost Experience* alternate reality game – an interactive, internet-based, mystery gaming experience – in an effort to explicate the qualities of viewings engagement. My analysis of *The Lost Experience* highlights how transmedia storytelling – and specifically alternate reality games – extend meaning-making beyond active engagement with the text and promote an interactive text-audience engagement in which the qualities of “viewing” and “computer use” merge.<sup>50</sup> This blended form of transmedia engagement – viewings – involves watching media content as well as interactive, computer-based activities, such as locating paratextual content, solving complex puzzles, and collaborative communication. In addition, this dissertation contributes to Jenkins’ model of transmedia storytelling (2006b) by examining the production and reception of *The Lost Experience* as well as its place within *Lost*’s transmedia franchise. While Jenkins provides a conceptual vocabulary and a convergence paradigm, his model of transmedia storytelling does not account for the presence of a privileged text within a transmedia franchise – what I term the “centralized anchor text.” Interestingly, although ABC’s implementation of *The Lost Experience* conforms to Jenkins’ model of transmedia storytelling in which “[e]ach franchise entry needs to be self-contained,” my analysis of fan responses on *The Transmission* and *The Official Lost Podcast* demonstrates the desire for quite the opposite.<sup>51</sup> In place of two independent, albeit related, narratives, *Lost* fans desired a unified transmedia experience

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<sup>50</sup> Dan Harries, “Watching the Internet,” in *The New Media Book*, ed. Dan Harries (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), 172.

<sup>51</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 96

in which the narratives of *The Lost Experience* and the television series merged into a coherent whole. However, *Lost*'s producers opposed such narrative unification for fear of alienating the mainstream audience – those only watching the television series – thereby illustrating the uneasy tensions surrounding shifting promotional and engagement strategies in the age of media convergence. In addition, Lindelof and Cuse's discussions of *Lost*'s television series as “the mothership”<sup>52</sup> and “the bread and butter”<sup>53</sup> illustrate a view of transmedia content as secondary to the franchise as a whole. Thus, Chapter Two offers a model of transmedia storytelling franchises in which the presence of “centralized anchor text” occupies a privileged place of greater narrative significance among both transmedia producers and audiences.

Chapter Three focused on the participatory and engagement strategies implemented by ABC and *Lost*'s producers. Within Film & Media Studies, a considerable body of research focuses on media fandom linked to online message boards (Baym, 2000; Pullen, 2000; Wexelblat, 2002; Bury, 2005; Ross, 2008). Similarly, existing scholarship examining producer-audience communication (Wexelblat, 2002; Milner, 2008; Shefrin, 2004) centers primarily on internet message boards. Yet, the cultural significance of podcasts in relation to participatory cultures and producer-audience communication is currently under-studied. As highlighted by my analysis of *The Official Lost Podcast*, the ability to engage directly with a producer, during the production of a transmedia franchise, does invite the possibility for a more democratic

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<sup>52</sup> Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, “The Official Lost Audio Podcast: August 2, 2007,” podcast audio, *The Official Lost Podcast*, accessed August 5, 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Maria Elena Fernandez, “ABC’s ‘Lost’ is Easy to Find, and Not Just on a TV Screen,” *The Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 2006, accessed February 15, 2008, [articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/03/entertainment/et-lost3](http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/03/entertainment/et-lost3).

form of creation. For instance, Lindelof and Cuse validated fan feedback, granting *Lost*'s communicative fans agency to influence the production of the television series.

However, Lindelof and Cuse frequently exploited the qualities of podcast communication in an effort to regulate and supervise fan participation. Although Lindelof and Cuse couched producer-audience communication within the rhetoric of audience empowerment and quality control, the creation of the participatory culture fostered by *The Official Lost Podcast* stemmed from economic motives in the crowded and increasingly competitive post-network era. ABC utilized *The Official Lost Podcast* as part of savvy promotional and engagement strategies, in which producer-audience communication – what I regard as “communicative engagement” and “dialogue branding” – cultivated a fan base and maintained interest in *Lost*'s television series. The intimate, immediate, and interactive form of communication afforded by podcast technologies – qualities enabling fans to hear Lindelof and Cuse's voices – helped strengthen fan's brand loyalty to both *Lost* and the producers. In other words, by speaking to the audience, responding to submitted feedback, and often addressing fans by name, Lindelof and Cuse facilitated a heightened connection between themselves and the fans. Although this producer-audience bond proved effective at fostering a participatory culture, it also enabled fans to challenge producers regarding the formation of *Lost*'s transmedia canon.

My analysis of *Lost*'s online paratexts *The Orchid Video* and *The Dharma Booth Video* – the so-called Comic-Con videos – illustrates how transmedia storytelling franchises challenge normative understanding of canon formation. Instead of the traditional canonical/non-canonical binary, I argue for a fluid, circular model of canon in which different levels of canonicity exist, with paratexts moving in and out of the

centralized anchor text's porous canonical boundary. In 2007, *The Orchid Video* proved an effective tool for maintaining audience interest between the third and fourth seasons of *Lost*'s television series by depicting a character's backstory, providing insight into the inner-workings of *Lost*'s storyworld, and foreshadowing a future storyline. In this way, *The Orchid Video* represented an engagement strategy involving viewings. Yet, whereas *The Orchid Video* functioned as a legitimate narrative extension, the narrative of the subsequent Comic-Con video, *The Dharma Booth Video*, contradicted events depicted on *Lost*'s television series, thereby illustrating its non-canonical status. Although Lindelof and Cuse presented *The Dharma Booth Video* to fans at the 2008 *Lost* Comic-Con panel as a canonical extension of *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling franchise, its value as a canonical paratext ultimately shifted in 2009. In other words, over the course of two years, *The Dharma Booth Video* moved back and forth across the centralized anchor text's porous canonical border.

The use of *The Dharma Booth Video* by *Lost*'s producers failed to honor what I termed the "canonical contract," thereby undermining the producer-audience bond established by *The Official Lost Podcast*. Existing research on fans and canon formation (Uricchio & Pearson, 1991; Brooker, 2002; Dougan, 2006; Milner, 2010) emphasizes fans' evaluation of a text's unity, consistency, and relationship to an existing body of texts. However, I argue for a view of canon that also functions as an articulation of the producer-audience relationship. When coupled with the producer-audience communication afforded by *The Official Lost Podcast*, discourses of canon formation extend the notion of integrity (Milner, 2010) beyond the text and onto Lindelof and Cuse as well. In addition to the violating qualities of the text, non-canonical or narratively

inconsistent texts threaten the integrity of the producer-audience bond by undermining the audience's investment of trust in the producer. For fans, the fluid nature of *Lost*'s transmedia canon resulted in feelings of being exploited or duped by the producers when the narratives of *The Dharma Booth Video* and the television series did not form a coherent narrative whole. Hence, *Lost*'s transmedia storytelling franchise became a site of struggle in which tensions between producers and fans over an official transmedia canon articulate larger issues of trust in the producer-audience relationship.

Chapter Four examined how *Lost* fans used new media technologies to engage with each other. *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* expanded fans' productive capabilities by facilitating the flow of hyperdiegetic information among fans. As such, *Lost* podcasts increased the collective intelligence (Lévy, 1999; Lévy, 2001) of the participating fans. However, the audience-audience communication occurring on *The Official Lost Podcast* and *The Transmission* also promoted both external and internal tensions largely centering on notions of intelligence. Thus, in contrast to the utopian view offered by Pierre Lévy, my analysis demonstrates the exclusionary aspects of collective intelligence. *The Transmission*'s highly engaged fans (and even *Lost*'s producers) championed *Lost* for its delayed narrative resolution and dense mythology – qualities perceived as requiring what David Lavery regards as a “greater cognitive workout” than other television series.<sup>54</sup> These viewers largely positioned themselves as engaging in a fan activity requiring a significant level of concentration and comprehension. Within *The Transmission*'s fan culture, the knowledge gleaned from

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<sup>54</sup> David Lavery, “*Lost* and Long-Term Television Narrative” in *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives*, edited by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 315.

transmedia engagement often functioned as a way to separate “true” fans from the mainstream audience. Mythologists and shippers – *The Transmission*’s central viewer groups – perceived the mainstream audience as unwilling or unable to comprehend and master the wealth of story and character information contained in *Lost*’s transmedia storyworld. In addition to this external tension, an internal tension centering on the perception of intelligence existed between mythologists and shippers. While both groups engaged with *Lost* podcasts and demonstrated knowledge of *Lost*’s hyperdiegesis, debates centering on the “correct” way to engage with *Lost* divided these factions of avid fans. Mythologists imposed a hierarchical structure privileging their intellectual engagement over shipper’s emotional engagement, thereby illustrating collective intelligence exclusionary qualities.

Although antagonisms within fan communities are not uncommon (Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995; Baym, 2000; Zweerink & Gatson, 2002; Johnson, 2007), I argue that the underlying cause of the tension within the discourse of *The Transmission* is a product of *Lost*’s transmedia storytelling approach. By providing fans with a wealth of story information spread across multiple media platforms, *Lost*’s producers ultimately fostered a fragmentary, divisive experience – one that became further fractured as Lindelof and Cuse encouraged notions of fan agency in *Lost*’s television series. *The Official Lost Podcast* functioned as a feedback loop in which fan evaluation and criticism worked its way back into the franchise. The narrative treatment of Nikki and Paulo, two characters widely despised by *Lost* fans, reinforced the notion that communicative fans could influence the direction of the television series’ narrative by introducing “interference” or discontent into the feedback loop. Given that many viewers perceived the shipper and

mythologist factions as mutually exclusive, the producers' appeasement of one fan faction seemingly represented the denial of the other group's pleasure. In this way, the antagonism between mythologists and shippers is really an expression of the uncertainty surrounding a transmedia participatory culture in which fans possess agency to shift the narrative towards either mythological or character-based resolution in "The End."

In closing, the value of this dissertation's approach is in the ways that the concept of viewings enables this study to rethink the complex interplay of technological, industrial, and cultural transformations in the age of media convergence. The confluence of new promotional, engagement, and storytelling strategies within the media industries; the rise of interactive media and podcast technologies; and shifts in how producers and audiences engage with each other fosters new forms of engagement. Taken together, these transformations create new terrain on which normative understandings of producer-text-audience relationships are continually challenged, reconfigured, and even reinforced. By bringing together diverse scholarship on technology and new media, media industry practices, and cultural shifts, this dissertation provides a rich analysis of engagement with transmedia storytelling franchises.

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