

From Audiences to Publics: Convergence Culture and the Harry Potter Phenomenon

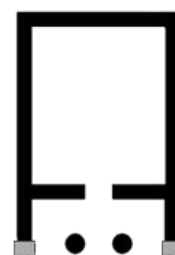
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From Audiences to Publics: Convergence Culture and the Harry Potter Phenomenon

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In the mid-nineties, changing business and communication models influenced the way in which cultural industries operated. The spheres of public and private, production and distribution, ownership and access had to be reconsidered and were characterised by convergence culture, a commercial and creative environment based on active participation that offers support for creating and sharing interpretations and original works. Convergence culture has relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic participation and fosters a sense of community growing around people's common interests and ideologies. It is also a product of the relationship between communication technologies, the cultural communities that grow around them, and the activities they support.

Crucial to the way they operate, convergent systems incorporate at least five processes, listed by Henry Jenkins as: technological convergence (the transformation of words, images and sounds into digital information), economic convergence (the horizontal integration of the entertainment industry resulting in transmedia brands such as *Pokémon*, *Harry Potter*, *Tomb Raider*, *Star Wars*), social and organic convergence (consumers' multitasking strategies to navigate the new media landscape), cultural convergence (new forms of creativity at the intersections of various media technologies, industries and consumers) and global convergence (cultural hybridity that emerges from global circulation of media products).¹

Implicitly, convergence, as it spans a range of different media and environments, simultaneously constitutes 'a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process'.² Media companies accelerate the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets and reinforce viewer commitments whilst consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other users. Consumers, but also readers, viewers, players and participants, demand to participate more fully in their culture, to control the flow of media in their lives and to talk back to mass market content so that, I would like to argue, within the context of storytelling, convergence also implies that instead of targeting audiences, stories are being designed to target *publics*.

¹ Henry Jenkins, 'Convergence? I Diverge.' in *Technology Review* (June 2001).

<http://www.technologyreview.com/article/401042/convergence-i-diverge/> [accessed 31 July 2013].

² Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 18.

Publics are defined by Daniel Dayan as different to audiences; rather than simply participating in entertainment for pleasure, they 'actively direct attention onto messages they value'.³ Dayan states: 'A public is not simply a spectator in plural, a sum of spectators, an addition. It is a coherent entity whose nature is collective, an ensemble characterised by shared sociability, shared identity and some sense of that identity'.⁴ Participation is therefore qualified, through this lens, as dependent on a discourse of belonging. Within this cultural environment, artistic participatory spaces evoke the ethos of the public sphere. They become places of deliberation accessible to all within cultural contexts which diminished in importance throughout the twentieth century because of the rise of private ownership of media entities, but which regained importance in the digital age media landscape. The Harry Potter series, conceived and produced at the height of convergence culture, provides an opportune case study through which to determine how these new participatory spaces affected and were handled by the publishing world and how digital media influenced the nature of participation in transmedia storyworlds.

By 2001, the Harry Potter series had developed into a global phenomenon. When in 2000, the publication date for the fourth book in the series was announced by Bloomsbury together with the release date for the first film by Warner Bros., the Harry Potter community was present and vociferous. Although Rowling's first three books were not written as transmedia narratives, arguably the subsequent ones, even if unofficially so, were. As the Harry Potter brand evolved, each book and film were accompanied by a PR and marketing campaign that encouraged the Harry Potter community to engage with the storyworld on multiple platforms and invited those who had not yet read the books into the ever-expanding fandom through the film and its ancillary products. Although the book and film industries kept quite separate at the beginning of the collaboration, the publication and release dates of the texts were converged to keep fans tuned in and excited.

Release dates became events, so that by the time the film *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2004) was released, fans were driven to a heightened sense of expectation as the publication dates of the books were accompanied by specific times (3.45pm on July 8th 1999 for *The Prisoner of Azkaban*). Websites accompanied each film release, inviting speculation about the differences between the books and the films, and also between each successive instalment in the franchise. Cast interviews, production interviews and 'behind the scenes' videos went viral online, and social media campaigns were developed to enhance the sense of community surrounding the franchise. The decentralisation of text and reconfigured reading patterns are made evident in the fan websites that form part of transmedia narratives and function as an online public sphere. Two prominent and well-known Harry Potter websites may be taken as examples to illustrate how fans are invited to engage with the story within this public sphere – [The Leaky Cauldron](#) and [Mugglenet](#).

³ Quoted in Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (Massachusetts: MIT, 2013), p. 166.

⁴ *ibid.*

Among the first such sites to emerge, The Leaky Cauldron and Mugglenet were founded by young readers who possessed the digital literacy skills required to create sites online, build networked communities and negotiate legal matters. Their ability to navigate and negotiate the story across multiple media platforms is indicated in the interface of both sites, which offer readers various multimodal reading paths, and overall, fulfil three narrative functions. Primarily, these sites represent the fictional world of the source narrative as well as the various media versions of the story, connecting people from different parts of the production and reception process of each of the versions. Secondly, they offer performative, playful pathways of interpretation, inviting their users to post art, music, writing and many other forms of creative expression as representations of their engagement with the storyworld. Thirdly, they encourage a contribution to the conversation surrounding the source narrative, inviting viewers to comment and respond to posts and feeds generated on the sites. Overall, therefore, the main objective of the sites is to invite fans to participate and create, implying that readers are expected to engage with multiple versions at the same time, functioning in the role of hunters and gatherers, piecing the narrative together as they navigate the story space represented in the different media.

On the home page of both sites are a number of tabs that allow users to choose between various options: 'Leaky Info', 'Potter News', 'Features', 'Interactive', 'Galleries', 'The Books', 'JKR', 'The Films', 'The Park', 'For Fun' on The Leaky Cauldron, whilst on Mugglenet the choice is between 'Books', 'Films', 'Discussion', 'Fans', 'Fun', 'Media'. Just beneath the tabs, taking up approximately half the initial screen on both sites, is a news column that encourages the reader to keep updated with the latest developments taking place on the different media platforms offering versions of the Harry Potter stories. Surrounded by advertisements and links to blogs, podcasts, media clips of other versions of the story and fan productions of art, stories and many other paratextual elements, the configuration offers a busy, hypertextual network that allows the reader different types of experience. However, not all the links are equally interactive. Whilst all the tabs lead readers to further information, the level of interactivity offered in the different sections varies. On Mugglenet, if readers click on 'Books', 'Films', 'Fun' or 'Media' they are allowed a choice of reading paths, but are ultimately choosing between routes predetermined by the web managers. The same happens on The Leaky Cauldron, where, if readers click on 'Leaky Info', 'Potter News', 'The Books', 'JKR', 'The Films', 'The Park' or 'For Fun', they access new links, but there is little they can contribute. Readers can follow links, but they cannot actively participate or create their own text within these strands.

The situation is altered in the sections labelled 'Interactive', 'Discussion' and 'Fans', where in at least some of the threads, readers are encouraged to upload and actively contribute to the space, engaging in the type of public activity described by Dayan. These strands are, therefore, particularly relevant because they 'encourage the reader, listener or viewer to engage with [...] information in a newly active, potentially aggressive and intrusive manner' as they playfully create and perform their own edition of the story'.⁵ Within this context, the

⁵ George Delany and Paul Landow, *Hypermedia and Literary Studies* (Massachusetts: MIT, 1991), pp.7-11.

Harry Potter storyworld provides a focal point through which fans can identify with a virtual community they feel they belong to, at times also adopting or subverting the ideology that they may feel the story valorises.

The Pottercast (2005-13) is a good example of such identification and the appropriation of storyworld ideology. First appearing on The Leaky Cauldron website in 2005, it refers to the Harry Potter-based podcast; defined as 'an hour of Potteresque entertainment each week'. Pottercast production, which ran for 9 years releasing one hour a week, expects listeners to be familiar with both the books and the films, and throughout the Pottercast, reference to the multiplatform storyworld is frequently made, demonstrating the producers' awareness of Harry Potter as a distributed narrative. The Pottercast was produced by fans, calling itself 'Harry Potter on Air'. Drawing upon traditional structures of radio, it featured a number of host presenters so that the shows were intrinsically poly-voiced. Each show offered its listeners multiple perspectives and points of view that once again allowed readers to formulate and perform their own interpretations as the Pottercast provides a behind-the-scenes narrative of the story, told in small parts, from various angles. Pottercast content varied from discussions that focus on the interpretation of the story in a section called 'Canon Conundrums' to discussions about other versions in the chain – such as 'Extendable Ears', which includes interviews with HP actors, directors, crew members and editors of the Harry Potter books and films. Ultimately, what is of interest here, however, is the negotiation of authorial voice and narrative situation – as seen in the following analysis of Pottercast #146 – and the way in which the Pottercast narrative feeds its way back into the source narrative, as seen in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* and, as discussed below, demonstrating how different versions within multiplatform narratives affect each other, placing readers at the centre of those adjustments, through conversation and appropriation of the story.

In Pottercast #146, the topic of discussion is Snape and Dumbledore. The discussion of character is based on the source narrative, which the Pottercast does not attempt to modify. Rather, it aims to enhance understanding of the story through glocalisation - the personal adaptation of a mainstream story to reflect local and personal cultural realities and ideologies.⁶ The personalisation of the story is evident in the podcasts when one of the presenters quotes Rowling answering a question about Snape during a public interview. Rowling's own thoughts are presented together with presenter Sue's opinion of them. Because the three presenters are considered to be Big Name Fans (BNFs), or long-term fans who have occupied high-visibility roles, it is safe to assume that listeners of the Pottercast will be familiar with them, as demonstrated in Melissa Anelli's book, *Harry, A History: The True Story of a Boy Wizard, His Fans, and Life Inside the Harry Potter Phenomenon* (2008) and others by Valerie Frankel (2012) and E. A. Pyne (2011).⁷ Some listeners may even identify with the presenters more than with Rowling herself, so that their points of view and

⁶ For more on glocalisation, view Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture: Volume 1: The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996; repr. 2000), p.341.

⁷ See Valerie Frankel, *Harry Potter Still Recruiting: An Inner Look at Harry Potter Fandom* (Hamden: Zossima Press, 2012); Erin A. Pyne, *A Fandom of Magical Proportions: An Unauthorised History of the Harry Potter Fandom Phenomenon* (Ann Arbor: Nimble Books LLC., 2007; repr. 2011).

perspectives are integral/internal to the Pottercast, leaving Rowling to function as a voice external to the Harry Potter story that has been localised within the context of the podcast:

And Jo said that—she talked about the importance of Snape and Dumbledore to the series and that—and I found this really, really interesting but she said that the series is based around their two plot lines. (MA: Hm.) What do you think about that? I thought that was really—(FF: It makes sense.) and she continued on to say to that the plot lines of Dumbledore and Snape in the *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* were actually the two most important characters, aside from the trio. I thought that was really interesting when you reflect back that's what she was thinking. So, she developed their plot lines right away.⁸

Since the Pottercast is ‘narrowcast’ – made directly relevant to niche groups of readers – its creative assembling reflects the way in which the modern mediascape needs to be read as it reflects a process of orchestration.⁹ Through orchestration and negotiation, the source text is interpreted creatively, potentially taking on new meaning. This is not as new a trend as it may seem—in fact, it is quite the opposite, because in many ways online culture pits participatory culture as the counter-response to the closed ownership system managed by the conglomerates. Jenkins claims that, ‘historically, our culture evolved through a collective process of collaboration and elaboration [...] and as more and more amateur works have entered into circulation via the Web, the result has been a turn back toward a more folk-culture understanding of creativity’.¹⁰

Online culture thus allows readers to respond by forging their own reading paths and designing their responses both individually and collectively, providing them with a platform that allows stories to be adapted to represent a wider spectrum of ideologies and identities. The interplay between the subjective and the collective engagement with narrative through cyberspace is central to the way in which publics operate, and indicates a self-directed networking strategy that connects the Internet to the social realm rather than splitting it into off- and online worlds. David Bell claims that ‘individuals caught in the space of flows become networks themselves, and networked individualism becomes the new social pattern’ in such a way that people have assembled ‘portfolios of sociability’ to match their portfolio careers, referring to ‘project identities’ that match their project based work lives.¹¹ These new participatory patterns strengthen a dialectic of value by making subjective interpretations open to public discussion, appraisal and critique. In many cases, interaction in online fan communities goes beyond mere superficial conversation to include ‘the creation of a performance space with the potential status and recognition that entails, and, perhaps the

⁸ Pottercast #146 can be downloaded from: <<http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/pottercast>> [accessed 1 January 2014].

⁹ For more on narrowcasting, view Manuel Castells, ‘Epilogue: informationalism and the network society’ in P. Himanen, *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2001), p. 170.

¹⁰ Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p.288.

¹¹ David Bell, *Cyberculture Theorists: Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007, repr. 2009), p.68.

opportunity to engage in public discussions of normally private socio-economical issues'.¹² This opportunity to engage constitutes a defining difference between traditional audiences and contemporary publics. It adds an important dimension to participatory culture because it recognises fandom as a response to dramatic rather than literary modes of storytelling. According to Francesca Coppa, therefore, what fandom does is to take something three-dimensional and transform it into a number of scripts relying on readers' knowledge of the setting, plot and characters. Fandom becomes a living theatre, creating an interpretation that sits within the context of multiple interpretations that are produced as part of the online ongoing conversation about the story.

In theatre, the collective effort that staging a play demands hinges on the multiple hands at work on different parts of the performance – set, costume, lighting, actors, and so on – so that the script becomes merely a blueprint for the whole production. Fandom takes personal interpretation one step further than theatre because, having fewer market forces to account to, it is able to take its revisiting of the story to more radical boundaries. This can be seen in the YouTube video, 'The Harry Potter vs. Voldemort Rap'. This homemade video is typical of the way fan-readers appropriate character and plot, re-rendering them into styles and contexts that reflect their own realities that are then performed as public interpretations of personal responses to the story. These interpretations, however, remain closely embedded in the storyworld, evidencing the strong influence of the source text and emphasising the way in which distributed narratives are positioned at the interface of corporate and grassroots production, as demonstrated in the example below.

The 'Harry vs. Voldemort Rap' video is produced by Indy Mogul and is part of the Indy Mogul Original Short series.¹³ Gaining over 20,452,000 hits (as at 5th January 2014), the video is tagged as a test video and is shot on the roof of a high building showing a very contemporary urban scene in the background. This is the everyday world of readers: unfinished buildings and unattractive industrial landscapes containing none of the nostalgia of Hogwarts and the magical world. Whilst the set-up of this shoot is obviously basic and temporary, evidenced by the dilapidated inside of Voldemort's room and the makeshift gramophone, special attention is given to consistency in the embodiment of the characters – costumes resemble those in the movies, with actors sporting cloaks, Harry with the Gryffindor colours, and Voldemort with a reasonably high standard of make-up to create the slit-effect for his nose, visually resembling the mainstream embodiments of Harry, Voldemort and Rivers, a student reporter in Rowling's text. They also maintain the same roles. Rivers remains a reporter on the scene whilst Harry and Voldemort remain arch-enemies, the first embodying good and the second embodying evil. Here, as in mainstream versions, the two characters battle each other to determine the fate of the magical world; however, this time their power comes to the fore through rap rather than magic, a stance somewhat contradicted at the end of the short, when Voldemort kills all present by using the

¹² Nancy K. Baym, 'Talking about Soaps: Communicative Practices in a Computer-mediated Fan Culture' in Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander, eds., *Theorising Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 1998), pp. 111-29.

¹³ Retrieved from: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTHn5oFPmi8>> [accessed 5 February 2014].

Avada Kedavra spell. Magic, it will be argued throughout this analysis, is too strong an element of this storyworld to be ignored completely, and an element of magic features in most fan versions, albeit to differing extents.

Magic and rap juxtapose the fantastic and the real, the mainstream and the grassroots, in an interesting way in this clip. Rap is not able to demonstrate the epic connotations that magic does, but it serves to externalise very strong emotions, which are particularly important in the final stages of Rowling's saga. It serves to translate into popular cultural terms the angst felt mostly by Voldemort—a shady character, a disturbed child, easily judged for his evil deeds, yet one whom readers come to pity towards the end of the series. Like so many rap artists, Voldemort is cast as a victim of society and, choosing the path of self-destruction, he ends up dead. Rap as a genre tends to embody anger towards society and a sense that, had different opportunities presented themselves, had different choices been made, then this character would be otherwise. The rap genre allows the story to be performed in more direct, possibly offensive terms, with Voldemort saying to Harry, 'I'll slay your ass out like Cedric Diggory', 'You's a punk ass little kid', 'You're a peewee witch midget with a dead mommy', and Harry replying, 'If you look under my cloak you'll see my Hagrid-size balls', 'I smoked basilisk and I'll smoke you too'. And, in the end, rap also allows the victim to triumph. This is his arena, and yet, because, in real terms, it would be too harsh for pleasant entertainment, Voldemort wins through a magic spell that allows both the rap version and the original to be parodied. Again, the fantastic is brought in to subvert the reality value of the performance, and the dialectic of value embedded in fandom's response to the story is reinforced through the blend of mainstream elements of the storyworld as they are juxtaposed to the real-life world of these fans.

The subjective nature of fans' participation in the narrative world is reflected in a number of ways, as discussed briefly above, but also most evidently in the pen names that are chosen by readers contributing to the conversation about the narrative. Pen names such as 'snapehalfbloodprince' or 'GryffindorRulez' are consciously chosen as they create affiliations between fans of the same allegiances based on characters in the book. Basic information about fans appears beside each post; this includes the penname, the number of posts, the date and time of joining the forum and their real-world location, which is often identified as a fictitious one related to the book itself, e.g., 'Classified until such time as the ministry sees fit to release it', or "'Hagrid" shut – the rock cakes really aren't all that bad'. Although humorous and light-hearted, these associations of personal location with the places mentioned within the master narrative shows the fans' desire to immerse themselves in the world of the story.

Online culture thus extends the invitation to play and extends the world of play itself, allowing for a playful relocation of the reader into communities of like-minded readers where the fans' position outside-inside the world of their favourite character/story becomes possible. Readers form a collective identity—a public—through a network of affiliations among their mediated selves on the website. Fans often also add a signature that appears at the end of each post and serve to flesh out a fan's virtual self as fully as the medium will allow. These vary

from 'I'd give up chocolate, but I'm no quitter' to more philosophical statements such as "We need metaphors of magic and monsters in order to understand the human condition". – Stephen Donaldson'. Real-life events are also occasionally mentioned in signatures and function as identity markers, as they give an idea of the real-life culture that the blogger inhabits, for example, 'Happy 4th of July'. These are also often accompanied by pictures that range from kittens to Dumbledore, inclusions that constitute a performance of the self, facilitated by the Internet.

In *Harry, A History*, high-profile *Harry Potter* fan, Anelli, documents this playful relocation, pointing out that 2000 was a crucial year in the development of the Harry Potter public. At the peak of convergence culture, 'the Internet changed *Harry Potter* about as much as the Internet was changing everything else'.¹⁴ Rowling acknowledged that whilst the books had already developed into a cross-platform success story, at that point, because of the pervasive participatory culture of the time, the name *Harry Potter* became associated with a network community built around collective intelligence of the storyworld as well as the invitation to negotiate, appropriate and expand the storyworld through the dynamics of fandom, as described briefly above. Anelli, whose involvement in this shift and development was direct, claims that her book is in fact the 'history of a community, written by an insider [...] the personal journey of a group of people who would never otherwise have met'.¹⁵ The reconfigured media landscape and the integration of a more active reading public was not, however, problem-free, and Rowling's Foreword to Anelli's book demonstrates how all the key players had to shift or reconfigure their positions within the expanding Harry Potter storyworld.

Rowling claims that she remained 'as ignorant as possible about the degree of fan activity that was taking place both on the Internet and off it'.¹⁶ Admitting that 2000 was a turning point for the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, she positions herself as a voice exterior to the conversations surrounding her stories. She recognises that she, too, has become player in the networked storyworld. In this space, she has been joined by other writers who negotiate, expand and transpose the storyworld so that participation is in part defined by the narrative ecology imposed by the author together with mainstream production houses. She refers to the emergent qualities of fandom when she states that 'the online *Harry Potter* fandom has become a global phenomenon with its own language and culture, its own wars and festivals, its own celebrities'.¹⁷ She becomes more aware of the readers' interactive subjectivity, introduced by convergence culture, as it altered the ways in which storyworlds are designed, produced, distributed and interpreted, but is also aware of aspects and spaces of the networked community over which she has little control.

¹⁴ Melissa Anelli, *Harry, A History: The True Story of a Boy Wizard, His Fans, and Life Inside the Harry Potter Phenomenon* (New York: Pocket Books, 2008), p. 88.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. xii.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. x.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. xii.

Harry Potter's success, Anelli claims, was generated in spaces beyond corporate strategy and also beyond a resistance to corporate strategy and control. Whilst the latter certainly did have a place in this moment, it did not define it. It was defined, on the other hand, Anelli claims, by the shift from audience driven dynamics to public drive dynamics—intimate personal connections that ultimately make it 'the story of small groups of people acting in ways they shouldn't, doing things they usually wouldn't and making the kind of history that, without Harry, they pretty much couldn't'.¹⁸ At this point, the *Harry Potter* readership reconfigured itself in response to the social, cultural and organic processes of convergence culture (the new forms of creativity enabled by multitasking strategies to navigate and respond to the storyworld through cognitive constructs) and Rowling responded with mixed strategies that demonstrate blurred distinctions between reader emancipation and authorial control within the storyworld.

Rowling recognised that story franchises developed within a culture of convergence are intrinsically designed to maintain long-term, large-scale engagement with publics that are required to possess both traditional and digital literacy skills and results in a practice of 'playing the text' in order to fully engage with story.¹⁹ Applying the skills (appropriation, multitasking, distributed cognition, collective intelligence, networking, negotiation) outlined by Jenkins in *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (2006), readers do not simply engage with one version of the story, but are able to hunt for information through the whole media landscape.²⁰ The ability and desire to engage with story in this way is in fact described by Margaret Mackey as a form of 'extreme literacy'.²¹ Her term 'extreme literacies' describes a type of engagement that she calls 'suction'. Suction refers to the ability to become and remain successfully literate when engaging with transmedia texts in a participatory context. In her words, therefore:

Extreme literacies imply obsessive literacies and we see many manifestations of obsessiveness in our contemporary culture. Suction of the giant cross-media stories; exploration of the imagination's nooks and crannies in role-playing games in different media; virtual friendships built around commitment to particular fictions; all such phenomena involve an overwhelming and consuming form of fictional engagement, and lead to new varieties of literate behaviours.²²

She views *Harry Potter* as 'the extreme literacy story of 2001' because Harry is:

[...] the boy who is everything—a saviour of traditional and extended print reading among the young, a frontman for AOL Time Warner as the film's publicity campaign dominates that mega-corporation, a bastion of brand awareness among businessmen awakening to the potential

¹⁸ Anelli, pp. 18-19.

¹⁹ Mackey, Margaret, *Literacies across Media: Playing the Text* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 1999; rev. edn. 2006).

²⁰ Henry Jenkins, 'Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century' (2006). <http://henryjenkins.org/2006/10/confronting_the_challenges_of.html> [accessed 20 July 2013].

²¹ Margaret Mackey, 'Extreme Literacies and Contemporary Readers' in *English in Education*, vol. 36, no 2 (2002), pp. 31-39 (p. 35).

²² *ibid.*, p. 35.

of children's literature—and the focus of intense imaginative engagement among both young readers and young consumers.²³

Ultimately, what Mackey's findings concluded was that transmedia storyworlds offer a wide range of possible reading paths, perhaps an infinite variety, that become available as readers engage with the same story in different media and with varying degrees of participation which determine the level of creative control and decision-making awarded to them. Each media version allows the reader entry into the narrative world because each media version is a window onto the world. Whereas in the case of traditional linear narratives the task of the reader is to observe and follow a given order, and within that order to engage in interpretation, the task of readers of transmedia storyworlds is to 'browse around' and participate in a long-term, large scale conversation.²⁴ Readers establish order through principles of relevance of their own making, and to construct meaning from the proliferation of narrative versions, that in contemporary times, unlike with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz* or *The Lord of the Rings*, are all made available on the mainstream market contemporaneously.

As transmedia trends continued to develop through to the present day, the question of commercial interest as opposed to the democratisation of the creative space remains contentious. Within the contemporary media landscape one may argue that storytelling is today's social capital in community so that whilst stories are perceived as entertainment, functioning as instruments for external ends (such as the generation of commercial, social and political change) the cultural shift from an audience to a public can mean that they also become a means to internal change, a function of personal development through meaningful human connection, as demonstrated by Anelli's account. What becomes increasingly relevant in the historicisation of this cultural moment is therefore the question of digital age legacy. What will our digital legacy be and which parameters will transmedia and the publics it is generating around stories push forward towards the creation of new forms of community and storytelling?

The notion of a legacy is hardly tied to the present moment but more to the pull of the past and the promise of the future. As technology rapidly changes social and cultural environments the question of the media's influence on our public spheres resumes its central position in discussions on participatory culture. Perhaps, as a product of convergence culture, transmedia is less of a fixed formula propagated by massive corporate conglomerates but rather functions as a behavioral language that is desirable because of its potential to offer a cultural environment in which there are really no transmedia experts, simply explorers trying out new ideas, watching closely to map what goes wrong, and fixing the mistakes as rapidly as possible.

²³ Mackey, *Extreme Literacies and Contemporary Readers*, p. 32.

²⁴ Warren Sack describes the prolific web interchanges between thousands of people as 'large-scale conversations'. He describes these exchanges as large because many people participate in them, network-based because they grow around shared interests and public because they are shared online. For more see: *What Does a Very Large-Scale Conversation Look Like?* (2005).
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