**Chapter 6: An Archaeology of Nostalgia: Audience Encounters with Film Promotion Sites**

Keywords: Nostalgia; Promotional Campaign; Alternative Reality Games; Online Audiencehood; Thematic Analysis; Cultural Memory.

## 6.1. The *TRON* Phenomenon

On its release *TRON* was regarded as a flawed film and reviews in *Variety*, *The New York Times,* and *The Washington Post* point to problems with plot, continuity, and a general lack of dramatic engagement (Variety, 1981; Maslin, 1982; Arnold, 1982). One reviewer reflected that ‘its technological wizardry is not accompanied by any of the old-fashioned virtues – plot, drama, clarity and emotion – for which other Disney movies or other films of any kind, are best remembered’ (Maslin, 1982). Yet, testimony to its enduring popularity are the number of spinoffs it has spawned over the years since then including novelisations for adults and children as well as graphic novels, comics, and choose-your-own-adventure books. There have been television series and animated adaptations, a theme park ride in Disneyland, video games, console games, and a manga version released in Japan in 2010. As well as adaptations, there have been several publications about the making of the film, focusing on the visual effects production, while the film itself has been re-released and reissued in every format from Betamax to Blu-ray, with additional anniversary and collector editions.

Broadly speaking, commentary circulating around the film since its release seems to indicate three reasons for this enduring popularity. First, *TRON* was one of the earliest films to include a sustained sequence of computer-generated imagery. Totalling nearly 17 minutes, the film famously depicts three-dimensional virtual ‘light cycles’ competing in a high-speed race on the vector line grid of the master control program (Bukatman, 1994:216; Kerlow, I.V., 2004:19; Aldred, 2006:155; Darley, 2000:17). Second, in the early days of the internet it was a Disney film for children that presented one of the first cinematic visualisations of cyberspace, principally through the use of light to produce the glowing lines of vector graphs signifying the electronic space inside the computer (Bukatman, 1994:215; Sobchack, 1993:257-8). Lastly, and perhaps most interestingly for the purposes of this investigation, the film celebrated the videogame culture emerging at the time (Brooker, 2009; Jenkins, 2010).

Over time *TRON* has entered into the folk culture. In an interview in 2013, the film’s director Steven Lisberger offers his view on why the film has become iconic, suggesting that it captured the sense of utopianism that prevailed about digital technology in the early 1980s (Jenkins, 2010). Lisberger went on to say that the people the Disney film seems to have had the greatest impact on were its young audience (Ibid.). This observation is borne out by the strong memory culture surrounding the film on the web to this day now that this audience has reached adulthood (Ibid.). Characteristically, this takes the form of filmgoer’s recollections of the impact of *TRON* on their young selves. In an article on 1980s game fandom, Will Brooker remembers how *TRON* ‘offered gamers the flattering reassurance that they were not merely teenage hobbyists but trainee warriors, learning skills that could be transferred to a galactic war, or godlike, all-controlling ‘users’ revered by the champions of an electronic world’ (2009).. While author of the Cyberpunk novel, *Neuromancer*, William Gibson tweets, ‘Tron nostalgia: When I was writing *Neuromancer*, that was \*the\* bleeding-edge digital aesthetic. Those sparse green lines! Pong, meet Case’ (1982). While this post is typical of sentiments articulated on discussion boards, blogs, and wikis across the web: ‘It was *TRON* that made me look at those machines in a completely different way... Perhaps it’s nostalgia. Perhaps it’s the fact that I would enjoy watching 2½ hours of Jeff Bridges reading the phone book. Whatever it is, I don’t care. I just know that I love this movie deeply’ (Diaz, 2012). So, how can the strength and endurance of sentiments felt for this children’s science fiction fantasy from more than thirty years ago be accounted for?

As there was no sequel to *TRON* for thirty years, speculation and imagining of ‘what would have happened *if*’ and ‘what happened *next*’ circulated around the film (Walden, 2016:96). In the past, this may have taken place in private conversations, but today is made public online through blogs, fanzines, and discussion boards and over time the film assumed the status of a cult film. As Umberto Eco points out in his discussion of *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) in *Travels in Hyperreality*, a film may be considered a ‘cult’ film if it is ‘ramshackle, rickety, unhinged in itself’ and that lack of coherence, of course means it is open to speculation (1987b:198). So, cult status became an unforeseen consequence of the continuity problems bemoaned by film critics on its first release.

What *TRON: Legacy*’s promotional campaign effectively set out to do was to start to fill in the incomplete text by explaining what happened next (after the original film ends) and thereby ‘compensate’ for the lack of knowledge about the future of the story. Vinzenz Hediger explains this idea in psychoanalytic terms, as compensating for the ‘lack’ of knowledge about the future of the narrative. This can also be understood through Raymond William’s idea about the false conversion of audience experiences (speculations) into ‘finished products’ (narrative resolutions) (2004:16). In short, by converting narrative speculation into a definitive version of the future (of the story), open-endedness is converted into a fixed ending and the pleasures of anticipation and speculations are reified by *TRON: Legacy*’s promotional campaign (Ibid.).

This chapter begins by unpicking the narrative work undertaken by the film’s promotion campaign, drawing on a conception of nostalgia that distinguishes two distinct variants of the sentiment: restorative and reflective, each embodying a different conception of time, and concludes that a paratextual promotional experience, in some ways, can be as entertaining as the film itself. The chapter goes on to consider audiences’ engagement with the promotional campaign through an examination of the discussion boards on the film’s official website as this location provided the most sustained and concentrated cohort of audience expression. It discovers that *TRON* is not just regarded nostalgically as a period piece, but rather as a film that can now claim foresight for imagining the coming digital age. By the end of the campaign it becomes evident that the nostalgic sentiments are not just for the film, but for its audiences who are retrospectively vindicated for their prescient fandom.

The campaign produced by the award-winning digital film marketing company *42 Entertainment* takes the form of a web-based ‘movement’ under the banner *Flynn Lives*. Its premise is that the film’s hero Kevin Flynn disappeared in mysterious circumstances sometime after the end of the first film, and the *Flynn Lives* site is dedicated to finding him, like a counter topos to the evil corporation discussed in chapter 4. Through this narrative device, the marketing campaign set out to chart the time from the cinema release of the original film in 1982 to the release of the sequel in 2010. In the words of *42 Entertainment*, the site aims to bridge the gap between the two films with ‘twenty-eight years of connective mythology, games and interactivity’ and the campaign garnered a number of awards and accolades for its innovative approach to film marketing and promotion (2010).[[1]](#footnote-1)

The online environment has greatly expanded the scope of paratextual promotion. Before the digital era, a film’s promotional campaign would typically last for about six weeks, made up of press releases, posters and trailers for the cinema and TV. However, the potential of web-based promotion has changed this significantly. For Steven Spielberg’s *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), Elan Lee and Jordan Weisman conceived an ARG (Alternate Reality Game) called *The Beast* that rolled out over twelve weeks running up to the cinema release of the film. On the back of its success, they founded 42 Entertainment and went on to develop the *Why So Serious?* campaign for *Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan)in 2008and then in 2010 *TRON: Legacy’s* campaign – *Flynn Lives*, both of which ran for over a year.

The duration of online promotion can now be significantly extended, stretching out over weeks and months to generate awareness and anticipation for a forthcoming release; by contrast the components of the campaign tend to be delivered in short form. The need for brevity is acute in a context where the sheer abundance of online media means audiences devote less attention to any given element (ed. Grainge, 2011:12). Short instalments of the *Flynn Lives* campaign were published online in daily and weekly episodes, taking only minutes to view or play. In this way, audience engagement aggregates and develops over time, and this mode of transmission generates an experience of ‘intense seriality’ more familiar in TV’s long running series and soap operas (Ndalianis, 2012:175).

After the film’s cinema release, the promotional campaign remained available online and could be accessed in its entirety, long after the film has disappeared from cinema programmes. The ‘always on’ nature of the online environment ensures that the promotional paratext can enjoy a far longer lease of life than conventional promotional materials.Moreover it creates a kind of archive of the invented past for *TRON: Legacy*, which can be (re)accessed and (re)consumed at any time (although always with the proviso that it is unmonetized and unmonetizable. So, while forming part of the anticipatory experience, promotional content is not designed for purchase. It functions purely in relation to the film it advertises and therefore is vulnerable to erasure at any time)[[2]](#footnote-2).

What we are seeing here is a form of paratextual promotion that appropriates modes conventionally associated with pre-digital media forms: the brevity of advertising; the duration of long-running TV series and soap operas; the episodic ‘seriality’ of broadcast TV; as well as the record of an archive. Form and format conventions are no longer confined to specific media platforms and the online environment has provided the conditions for changing what promotional media can look like. In this instance for *Flynn Lives* we have a 12 month-long campaign for a 2-hour film. There were 32 episodes in the web-based campaign of around 3 minutes duration on average, as well as the discussion boards and the activities which ranged from scavenger hunts to playing Space Paranoids online. In sum , the dimensions of the *TRON: Legacy* promotional campaign exceeded the film it promotes and point to the growing general significance of promotion in an overcrowded media environment to win audience’s attention.

However, while paratextual promotion of film now capitalises on the web’s opportunities for audience engagement, as I suggested at the start of the chapter, it is important to remember that this campaign did not come out of nowhere. One of the fundamental strategies for rebooting the TRON franchise was to draw on that groundswell of nostalgia that had developed around the film over the last thirty years. The next section of the chapter will explore the different forms nostalgia can take and examine how these are put to use in the *Flynn Lives* campaign.

## 6.2 The Anatomy of Nostalgia

There are different theories as to why nostalgia occurs but, in essence, it can be understood as a sense of regret that the past is gone, and that one can take solace from the possibility that, on some level, it can be recovered and experienced again. In *The Future of Nostalgia* Svetlana Boym asserts that there are two predominant ways in which a longing for the past is articulated (2001:41). First, she suggests there is a ‘restorative’ nostalgia that focusses on the *nostos* part of the word, meaning ‘home,’ and is derived from the term ‘re-staure’ meaning re-establishment (2001:49). Boym argues that ‘restorative’ nostalgia is built on a desire to create a sense of continuity with the past and places emphasis on reconstructing the thing that is longed for (2001:41). In film, this form of nostalgia has provided the impetus for the reconditioning and remastering of analogue film prints. For example, to mark the twentieth anniversary of *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), all three films in the original trilogy were ‘restored’ for re-release so audiences could buy the films all over again.

The second nostalgic tendency derives from the *algia* part of the word, and is more reflective (2001: xiii). While looking to the past, reflective nostalgia recognises the past cannot be recovered and brings in its wake a critical distance that is able to discern the difference between past and present (2001:49). This form of nostalgia has become a popular trope in television through critically reflective formats such as American Cable Network’s *Mad Men* (2007-2015), which is set in the past, but a past that is viewed through the perspective of the ‘rear view mirror’ of the present, allowing for reflection on what has changed since then. ‘Reflective’ nostalgia appreciates that the past no longer exists but meditates on the passing of time and the changes it brings with it to the meaning of things (Ibid.). Given this typology of nostalgia, the chapter will now go on to explore the ways in which nostalgia was cultivated and capitalised upon in this paratextual promotional campaign for the release of *TRON’s* sequel.

The *Flynn Lives* campaign was launched at the San Diego Comic Convention in 2009. At this inaugural event delegates were invited to an activation that took the form of a mock-up of the ‘Flynn’s Arcade’ setting from the original film. On the film’s site, QuickTime video reports of the event show fans marvelling at their first-hand encounters with old arcade game machines. The centrepiece of the experience is an encounter with a life-sized *TRON* light cycle, and we hear one man exclaim, ‘I have been waiting to play that game since I was 12 and I was in there!’ (42 Entertainment, 2010). Here, memories of the past made concrete by the recreation of Flynn’s Arcade generate a nostalgic response in its visitors (Ibid.). However not all the objects on display are ‘real,’ in the sense of being original (Ibid.). Some are props created for this event, while others, like the 1980s-era arcade game machines bring an aura of authenticity to the event (Ibid.). In this mix of original fact and fiction, the film set prop becomes as authentically ‘real’ as the actual arcade game machines, and willing acceptance of the veracity of the one, and the emotions that carries, seeps into all the rest (Ibid.).

What is unusual about the *TRON* film series is the time that elapsed between the first film in 1982 and its sequel in 2010, which amounts to a period of nearly thirty years. As the marketing company’s press statement indicated, one of the main tasks of the promotional campaign was to establish a chronological connection between the two films generating a sense of continuity across the intervening years (42 Entertainment, 2010). This is achieved through the narrative of the campaign in a number of ways. Emphasis is placed on establishing a connection between the two films. The fictional corporation Encom has a site featuring a timeline of the company’s history portraying the development of the business over the time period.

There is a further timeline in the site’s ‘Media Section’ where a headline poses the question, ‘Who is the most brilliant computer visionary ever?.’ Within the campaign nostalgia is encouraged through the re-establishment of familiar figures from the original film *TRON*, with actors once again taking up their character roles to promote the forthcoming film, *TRON: Legacy*. The character of Kevin Flynn is featured alongside real-world figures Microsoft founder, Bill Gates, and Apple’s Steve Jobs. Here we see what was referred to in chapter 4 as the ‘secondary’ world sutured into the real-world digital culture; as it were ‘Forrest-Gumping’ recent histories by inserting this fiction into that history. The actor, Jeff Bridges, and Bruce Boxleitner reprise the role of Kevin Flynn plays the part of Alan Bradley again, albeit both are 30 years older (Ibid.). So, taken together, what we saw here is the restoration of characters and stars, further validated by famous ‘real life’ figures deployed to create a sense of continuity with a familiar and established past, in the present, to promote the forthcoming film.

As noted earlier in the chapter, restorative nostalgia promotes the reconstruction of the thing that is longed for and remaining true to the aspirations of its ‘legacy’ audience who remember and cherish the original. But the *Flynn Lives* campaign also sets about reconditioning *TRON* for an audience who are encountering the story for the first time. Here we see the use of the some of the adaptive strategies that are familiar from film and television.Substitution has become a standard device to refresh long-running TV programmes like the BBC’s *Dr Who,* whereby the actors who play the Doctor are periodically replaced, or the 007 films where the figure of James Bond has been played by a series of actors over the fifty years of the franchise. Likewise, in the paratextual promotional campaign, *Flynn Lives* we see this transfer undertaken, with the aging Kevin Flynn (Jeff Bridges) of the original film substituted in the sequel by the figure of his ‘son,’ Sam Flynn (Garrett Hedlund) (Ibid.). Over weeks and months, episodes of the campaign fill audiences in on Sam’s life story and, by so doing, the paratext conditioned the character for heroic status in the forthcoming film.

The campaign also uses the adaptive strategy of ‘equivalences’ to refit *TRON* for the digital age (Hutcheon in Walden, 2016:100). In collaboration with *Disney Interactive*, *42 Entertainment* produced a playable online version of the original film’s arcade game, *Space Paranoids.* Instead of pushing coins into an arcade machine, the game was recast in a Flash version at [*www.spaceparanoidsonline.com*](http://www.spaceparanoidsonline.com/)  - as a first-person shooter-style game that renders the analogue past present once again. Taken together, the adaptation strategies of both substitutions and equivalences function to regenerate the story and set up conditions for the next instalment of the franchise but the promotional paratext does not just recycle elements from the film. It undertakes narrative ‘work’ and brings new elements into the *TRON* story world. In this way, a connection to the original is generated, erasing any signs of aging or decay, and the latest version reinvigorates the *TRON* franchise. For audiences new to *TRON*, the promotional campaign will be a first-time encounter, but for audiences familiar with the original *TRON*, these substitutions and equivalences are experienced as the overlaying of the latest version on top of the original version of the film. In *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: Uses of Nostalgia*, Vera Dika has suggested that this superimposition of the present over the past creates a ‘shifting double exposure’ as the viewer experiences similarities and differences simultaneously in a kind of textual imbrication (2003:14). Together these different forms of encounter make the experience of the viewing present richer (Ibid.). Encounters with the past and present are aggregated, creating a sense of ‘the past in the present,’ and audience complicity in the fictionalisation of recent history, in turn creates the conditions in which the paratextual promotional campaign has generated an ‘invented tradition’ (Boym, 2001:42).

## 6.3 The *Flynn Lives* Promotional Campaign

The *Flynn Lives* campaign fuels nostalgia too. It does not just refer to the memory of what has taken place in the past but generates ‘live’ events that establish the object of nostalgic sensibilities in the here and now, and interpellates new audiences into the nostalgic campaign. In the year leading up to the release of the film, a number of ‘live’ publicity events were coordinated by 42 Entertainment, as well as the website. The campaign at Comic Con may have started in a re-creation of ‘Flynn’s Arcade’ from the original film but it ended at *TRON: Legacy*’s own signature location - the ‘End of the Line’ night club, giving them a foretaste of the new film and enabling attendees to literally ‘step into the new fiction’ (42 Entertainment, 2010).

Later, an ARG (Alternate Reality Game) event was staged in San Francisco to celebrate the creation of an online version of *Space Paranoids.[[3]](#footnote-3)* At an open-air rally attended by hundreds of fans, the Alan Bradley character played by Bruce Boxleitner takes to the podium microphone to address the audience. This ARG even is filmed and reported as a news event on the film’s campaign site. Unlike conventional film promotion such as trailers and posters which propose the sequel as a future event to anticipate, events like this ARG role play codify time: first by fleshing out the franchise’s narrative back story; second by generating a sense of ‘event-ness’ in the present; and third by setting up anticipation for the film in the future.

Fans were not just invited to spectate; they were also invited to participate in these events taking on roles themselves and becoming ‘actors’ doing (unpaid) promotional ‘work’ in the *TRON: Legacy* campaign. At an earlier briefing meeting, fans were primed to take the role of a group of ‘protesters’ and hijack the open-air rally. Sporting placards and T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan ‘Flynn Lives,’ fans protest the theft of Kevin Flynn’s intellectual property by Encom and the company’s failure to thoroughly investigate Flynn’s mysterious ‘disappearance.’ By taking up this invitation, audiences were urged to break with the traditional convention of screen-based storytelling, in which the fictional world is separated from the real world and they were beckoned through the ‘fourth wall’ into a fictional diegesis of *TRON* story worldwhich, in a way, can be understood as a reflection of the *TRON* conceit of traversing the screen into the machine. Participating fans were designated as ‘Flynn’s foot soldiers’ or ‘field operatives’ and those who were unable to attend in person were dubbed ‘online warriors’ to encourage a sense of involvement, even at a distance from the live event itself. These staged events were then recorded and became news items within the campaign. The tropes of factual reportage, including hand-held camerawork and direct address to camera, were layered onto fictional foundations, and in this way, these events are incorporated into the *TRON* mythology. As a consequence, nostalgia provided an ‘interpretive frame’ through which audiences, encountering the story for the first time, approached this new franchise instalment (Gray, 2010:10).

The promotional campaign also extended its activities through social media in order to galvanise audiences into participation. Scavenger hunts were organised in cities across America and Europe and the *Flynn Lives Facebook* page informed fans about events taking place in their locality. Participants engaged in diverse ways, and to different degrees and are rewarded for their engagement with *TRON* merchandise. Typical of such engagements was the fan who blogged about her participation in the Paris scavenger hunt and linked it to the film’s *Facebook* site. Her story was titled, A *la recherché de Kevin Flynn ou comment je me suis retrouvée á participer au jeu de pistes de TRON: Legacy (Or How I became the TRON: Legacy field operative in Paris)* and was accompanied by a series of photographs documenting the experience from first learning about the scavenger hunt online, to finding the ‘treasure’ in the real world, and reporting her findings on the *Flynn Lives* site (See figure 5.).

Graphical user interface, website

Description automatically generated

Figure 5. Paris’ *Tron: Legacy* Scavenger Hunt, (Face blurred in image to protect identity) © Aurore Leblanc.

In turn, this post garnered comments and congratulations from online ‘watchers’ and *Facebook’s* ‘like’ icon also provided online audiences with an opportunity for vicarious participation. When the ‘like’ icon is clicked, a visual representation of the ‘liked’ object appears on the recipient’s *Facebook* profile. Here we can see *TRON: Legacy’s* paratexts migrating along chains of social connectivity, and how what has been dubbed the ‘like economy’ is promulgated by the logic of recommendations (Helmond and Gerlitz in Walden, 2016:103). Social media promotion has its own distinct temporal rhythms, as the *past* activities of one *Facebook* user are presented to the people on their contacts list as suggestions for potential future activities for them. This creates the situation in which the users’ contacts are encouraged to view recommended films, rather than any others. So, it turns out that nostalgia is not just concerned with looking back into the past, but it also looks to the future, and through social media the currency of nostalgia may be capitalised upon by the promotional campaign.

Restorative forms of nostalgia marshalled by this promotional campaign seek to capitalise on these sentiments by making things available that were thought to be gone. Over the days, weeks, and months of the campaign through repeated encounters with *TRON* tropes, and themes, both through live events and online, the film’s canonisation is cultivated. The cumulative effect of these encounters is that a clear connection is drawn between the original film and the forthcoming film which brings into being a paradox: the manufacturing of nostalgic sensibilities for a film which we have not seen yet, that has been characterised as ‘nostalgia for the future’ (Kernan, 2004:16).

## 6.4 Researching Online Audiences

Having established how *TRON: Legacy’s* promotional campaign exploited the memory culture surrounding *TRON*, and cultivated nostalgia for the forthcoming film, the chapter now turns its focus to the campaign’s reception and considers how the film’s prospective audiences experienceand engage with *TRON: Legacy’s* promotional campaign; how they participate in, and indeed contribute to the campaign.

Accessing audiences’ experiences has always been challenging for film historians . Not least because audience utterances are always scattered across innumerable locations and sites which would be difficult to map definitively. However, the potential for online audience research lies in the possibility of examining the ‘traces’ audiences leave of themselves in posts, comments, tweets and likes (Mathieu et al., 2016:295). From a media archaeological perspective, such ‘traces’ are fundamentally archaeological in nature as these vestiges constitute the material remains of audience experiences. By this definition, it follows that online community forums, discussion boards and comparable sites where people gather to discuss their shared interest can be regarded as a kind of ‘archive’ and these audience ‘traces’ form the raw archaeological data of this enquiry investigating film sites. In a fast-changing online environment where audience utterances and opinions are at one both ubiquitous and ephemeral, this approach may have the potential to locate, and ‘still’ these remains for examination.

To do this an analytical approach suited to the analysis of social media was needed. So, a survey was undertaken to review how online audiences have been researched to date; to look at which methodologies have been deployed to study them; and to learn what these studies tell us. In reception studies, audience engagement is often framed in terms of John Fiske’s pre-internet model outlined in ‘The Cultural Economy of Fandom’ where he proposes three distinct ways audiences engage with media texts as: semiotic; enunciative; and textual productivity (1992:37). However within a digital context, it becomes evident that it is in the last two categories that distinctions between analogue and online audiences are most apparent as the tools of enunciation have significantly expanded with *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, wikis, and numerous of other conduits for expression online. In turn, this expansion has meant that practices, previously associated with fan audiences, have now been adopted widely online. As Kristina Busse and Jonathan Gray observe: ‘recent years have witnessed an expansion of fannish activities into more mainstream audiences and a concurrent industry focus on viral marketing and the immense profitability of encouraging and exploiting fannish behaviours’ (2011:430).

These fannish audience behaviours are conceptualised in diverse and sometimes diametrically opposite ways. Most commonly these behaviours are regarded as forms of ‘participation’ which, in essence, focuses on the ways that audiences interact with media producers (Jenkins, 2006:3; Carpentier, 2011:198). Participation is discussed through neologisms like ‘produsage’ and ‘co-creators’ describing creative collaboration between producers and consumers (Bruns and Jacobs, 2006:7; Jenkins, 2006:105; Banks and Humphreys in Jenkins, 2013:49). Fan audiences of particular media such as a film franchise or TV series are sometimes conceptualised as ‘communities’ and ‘communities of practice’ emphasising the social aspects of audience-hood (Baym, 2000:114; Wenger in Hills, 2015:60). While ‘fannish’ audience behaviours can also be understood in economic terms, as ‘collaborationists’ in the production of content or helping to promote a franchise (Jenkins, 2006:138). But when these behaviours are perceived to be exploited for economic gain, audiences activities are framed in much less favourable terms as ‘fan labour’ (Wessels, 2011:70).

Whilst a definitive survey of how online audiences have been conceptualised would constitute a book-length account all of its own, what all these studies implicitly recognise is that online audiences are often manifest as ‘texts’ of one kind or another. Moreover, in the form of text, audience encounters are amenable to forms of qualitative analysis which examine language to gain insight into people’s thoughts and ways of communicating. In the light of this, the next step was to consider a selection of studies of online audiences more closely to understand how they tackled the task. Three online audience studies were identified and their methodologies and their research findings are reviewed next. Specifically, how the audience studies identified participant audiences; their strategies for analysing these audiences; their means of presenting their findings and how these studies may inform my approach to the *TRON: Legacy* promotion campaign’s online audiences.

The earliest online audience study took place in the 1990s and is based on three year’s participation and observation of TV soap opera Usenet-based discussion groups characterised by the author, Nancy K. Baym as a form of ‘ethnography’ (2000:24). As well as participating as a member of the group, Baym scrutinises participant’s posts using ‘discourse analysis’ in which individual interaction through language is examined for its meaning. Baym argues discourse analysis is particularly well suited to the study of online communities where ‘language stands in place of geography, institutions, and artifacts taken for granted in real world communities’ (2000:22-3). The study shows how participants develop ‘interpretive practices’ such as drawing connections between programme themes and individual experiences; using knowledge of the narrative’s past to interpret its present state; speculating about future narratives; and using extra-textual knowledge gleaned from other sources and shared with the group (Baym, 2000:71-90). Baym goes on to observe how codified modes of communication develop in the group-specific practices of friendship (2000:119-143).

As this study takes place at an early stage in the development of the web, it provides one of the first mappings of online communications within audience communities. Consequently Baym’s study focuses on how website architecture shapes participation and how communication works when it is confined to linguistic cues in the online environment and participants develop habitual and patterned ways of ‘acting’ within these textual environments (2000:197). In these ways Baym suggests, online audience groups come to function as ’interpretive’ communities’ (2000:93). But her empirical study confirms observations by Jenkins that online audiences seem to be as motivated by the social nature of the environment as much as by the focus of their shared interest (Jenkins in Baym, 2000:16).

The findings of the second online audience research study concur with Baym’s observations. This study tracks a newsgroup discussion over the period of a year as audiences anticipate the release of *The Blair Witch Project* (2004). What its author, Margrit Schreier, discovers is that the film audiences’ anticipation is dominated by the question of the film’s ontological status as to whether it is fiction or fact (2004:321). Schreier uses a different kind of qualitative analysis to scrutinise posters’ texts, as well as the frequency of occurrence known as ‘content analysis’ (Schreier, 2004:322). Like discourse analysis, content analysis is interested in establishing an understanding of meaning by categorising linguistic elements through schemas of code derived from the data. The survey demonstrates that 27.3% of posts concern the film’s reality status (Schreier, 2004:324). Moreover, results show that the closer the proximity to the cinema release date of the film, the more concerns are expressed about the ontology of the film and the more spontaneous and vivid audience expression becomes (Ibid.). Additionally the content analysis approach can be used to establish how ‘inter-subjectivity’ shapes emergent meanings (Schreier, 2004:322). Participants’ responses are not just the utterances of isolated individuals, but through a comparison of texts to topics the extent to which the coders agree becomes evident too (Ibid.). In summary then, the survey demonstrates that many respondents are interested in the same questions and that within these interpretive online communities, audiences’ views are shaped by their interaction with one another (Schreier, 2004:323).

The third online audience study was undertaken by Sarah Atkinson and tracks an 11-day ‘advertainment event’ called *The Inside* (Caruso, 2011) sponsored by Intel and Toshiba which ran in 2011 (Atkinson, 2014b:2204). The event was billed by its sponsors as a ‘social film’ in which online audiences did not just react to, but were invited to take part in a dramatic scenario to ‘save’ a woman who was trapped in a room, in an unknown location with just an Intel laptop and wi-fi to connect her to the outside world (Ibid.).The advertainment event generated activity across various social media platforms but the study focuses on a single social media site – a *Facebook* group which develops in response to the dramatic events as they unfold (Ibid.). Atkinson observes how individual assume roles in what becomes a ‘dramatic community’ (Atkinson, 2014b:2206). To examine what takes place, she employs yet another variation of qualitative analysis, known as ‘grounded theory,’ employing coding software to identify forms of linguistic behaviour with a view to developing a concept or theory of online audience practices out of the analysis of the data.

This study illustrates the performative nature of language, demonstrating how individuals assume roles within the group which serve to cohere and maintain this community of ‘actors’ (Atkinson, 2014b:2213). Her study also looks at the frequency of contribution and this indicates that 70% of all activity is of a performative dimension (Ibid.). Through posting on the *Facebook* group audience members actively work to cohere the group, maintaining the narrative consistency of the dramatic premise, as well as the suspension of disbelief of the participants (Heath, 1981 in Atkinson, 2014b:2215-6). Participants assume the roles of narrators, characters, editors and, at times, even directors, shaping the development of the ‘social’ film, and that this participation is critical to the success of the advertainment (Atkinson, 2014b:2217).

From this survey of online audience research there are clearly several ways to approach the study of online audiences. Baym takes an ethnographic approach to the analysis of her fellow participants in a Usenet discussion group, as the conversations took place. But clearly this is not feasible for my study of the *TRON: Legacy* promotional campaign as the discussion boards are now locked and have since been removed from the web, and so my research concerns a historical audience. Discourse analysis, content analysis and grounded theory are all qualitative analysis tools for analysing and reporting patterns or themes within a set of data (Barker, Pistrang and Elliott, 2016b:84). However, I concluded that I could not use content analysis because while its data may be qualitative, the outcomes are quantitative and findings are presented in frequency counts – that is to say, numerical terms. The research question for my audience study about how audiences engage with promotional campaigns does not readily lend itself to this kind of quantification (Barker, Pistrang and Elliott, 2016b:85). While grounded theory is about using qualitative analysis to find evidence based on a theory, hypothesis, or previous research findings established from the outset, I am looking to find a way to let the evidence speak for itself without presupposition about what I am going to find.

There are numerous different forms of qualitative analysis, each of which has its own emphases and perspectives but to fit the parameters of the project, I settled on an approach known as ‘thematic analysis.’ The value of thematic analysis is that it formalises an analytical approach which is both widely used and intrinsic to different forms of qualitative analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006:4). Indeed this approach is implicit to most methods of qualitative analysis, to the extent that it is often not regarded as a separate form of analysis. However its exponents argue that it should be regarded as a method in its own right (Braun and Clarke, 2006:4). For the purposes of my study of promotional campaign audiences, what makes thematic analysis appropriate is that it provides a systematic method of qualitative analysis but, crucially, does not set out with a predetermined question, but instead ‘listens’ to the data. From the perspective of this study then it was the least opinionated form of qualitative analysis. In this regard it shared a common interest with media archaeology as they both seek to examine what they find, not presume what is there.

## 6.5 The *Flynn Lives* Discussion Boards

Writing about fandom Kristina Busse and Jonathan Gray draw a distinction between ‘traditional’ and ‘industry-led’ fans, suggesting the former is an authentic social experience born of specific social formations and histories, while industry-led fandoms are heavily curated and controlled, inferring such experiences are spurious and allow audiences to do little more than ‘colouring within the lines’ (2011:431). As a consequence, the authors caution that audience studies considering industry-sanctioned fans too closely may lose their ‘critical edge’ (2011:439).

In the light of recent studies of ‘industry-led’ audiences however, this distinction does not appear to be so clear cut. In the study of *The Inside* advertainment, it is apparent that while this eventis clearly an industry-led promotion, audience utterances illustrate the personal investment made by participants, as well as a not inconsiderable time commitment (Atkinson, 2014b: 2216). In Matt Hills’ *Dr Who* fan study which points out that the *Dr Who*’s lead showrunners, Russell T. Davies, and Steven Moffat, were themselves fans before they became the show’s producers, complicates this distinction too (2015:366-7). Furthermore, Erin Hana’s research on conventions clearly demonstrates that fans are ‘part and parcel of the promotional paratext’ (2019:95). This is indicated by the use of hashtags routinely signposted at the start of each event to recruit fans to act as campaigners to share, like, tag and generate buzz online in the service of the promotion of a film (Hana, 2019:167). Taken together, these examples suggest that fandom has come to encompass any audience that actively seeks out and shares promotional content with their social networks. Furthermore the commercial imperative may not preclude rich and engaging experiences for their audiences, and insight may be gained from exploring how the relationship between media producers and their audiences is brokered, and what is to be gained from such encounters.

Discussion boards, forums and communities have become a familiar feature of online promotion and clearly the *TRON: Legacy* discussion boards fall within the definition of what Busse and Gray define as an ‘industry-led fandom’ (2011:431). To participate in the boards, fans are required to ‘sign up’ and provide personal data about themselves in the form of an email address, their age and gender, illustrating the transactional nature of engagement with franchises. In exchange for the ‘service,’ the studio marketing division seek to acquire information about their audiences for market research purposes or to directly advertise to them. In exchange board members are granted the opportunity to create a username, tagline, and post on the discussion boards, subject to a set of published terms and conditions that provide the legal basis for this proprietary site.

The terms and conditions state that any submissions to the board became the property of the *Flynn Lives* organisation, who have control thereafter over both the appearance and deletion of discussion board posts. Submissions can take the form of messages, stories, ideas, characterisations, person’s names, usernames, profiles and their posts and posts could be ‘solicited’ or ‘unsolicited’ but are all subject to the same conditions. The consequence of these terms and conditions are that authorial control is relinquished altogether, to the extent that any download of material from the boards was only allowed for ‘personal use’ - and then one copy only. These terms and conditions clearly illustrate that the primary objective of the board is promotion, and enabling fans to commune with one another is a secondary objective. In narrative terms, however, by signing up the participant crossed the threshold into the story world of *TRON.* The in-world premise provides a narrative veneer overlying this contractual relationship and participants were co-opted as members of an organisation seeking to solve the mystery of the disappearance of *TRON*’s hero, Kevin Flynn.

The *Flynn Lives* campaign site and its discussion boards have now been taken down from the web but can be accessed via the *Internet Archive* (2010). During the months leading up to the film’s cinema release on 19th December 2010, the site was ‘captured’, that is to say, recorded and archived, a total of 10 times during the course of the year. However, the last ‘snapshot’ taken on 26th December 2010 aggregates all the activity on the discussion board over the course of the year so it is this ‘capture’ that forms the data set for this investigation .

The *Flynn Lives* discussion boards hosts 56 separate discussion (text-based conversations) threads which were active between November 2008 and December 2010 until just a few days before the film’s release. The discussion threads comprised a total of 528 posts varying in length from the longest with 28 posts, to the shortest with just a single post, although, on average, discussion threads ran to around 9 posts. These discussion threads were tabulated and participant’s names were replaced with numbers to prevent identification to prepare the data for analysis. Surprisingly, whilst the boards contained more than 500 posts, only 18 posters were active on the discussion boards over this period, and clearly these participants constituted just a tiny fraction of the film’s global audience indicated by box office figures. The small number of posters was, however, consistent with observations from other online audience studies and media research companies. The demographic make-up of such forums seems to comply with the 90/9/1 convention, cited in a report from media audience research company Nielsen, which suggests that it is often the case that online communities are made up of 90% lurkers, 9% occasional participants and just 1% who actively and regularly post. (Nielsen in Atkinson, 2014b:2206)[[4]](#footnote-4).

The discussion boards were active for more than 2 years so to manage the analysis of the data set, discussion threads are subdivided into six phases that broadly speaking correlated with stages of the *Flynn Lives* campaign: from Phase 1, when the discussion boards were established, to Phase 6 when the last thread concluded a couple of days before the film went on general release.

## During the first phase 1 from 18th November 2008 - 3rdAugust 2009 participants established themselves on the Flynn Lives boards (16) with a combination of humour and *TRON* fan knowledge . The language used is peppered with a lexicon drawn from the speech of the Flynn character in the original film using terms like ‘cool’ (3), ‘man’ and ‘dude’ (7) which persist through all the phases. Poster 1 sets the agenda by highlighting the fact that it was the 20th anniversary of Flynn’s disappearance in 1989, and outlining the plan to mark this with the re-creation of Flynn’s Arcade at San Francisco Comic Con. Much of the discussion that follows reflects excitement and anticipation at the prospect of these upcoming events. Poster 1 galvanises the group into action using words and phrases like ‘momentum’, ‘energy’, ‘ready for action’, which, in turn, raises expectations by board members of a ‘new crop of members’ (3). The participants make efforts to be hospitable with posts welcoming new joiners, and posts like ‘great to have you guys aboard’ (3). The newly formed group coalesces around their shared reverence for the character of Flynn who is eulogised as being ‘in our computers, in our imagination, in our hearts’ (12).

## In Phase 2 from12thFebruary 2010 - 24thMarch 2010 board participants become more familiar with one another through a discussion thread that poses the question: ‘Why did you join *Flynn Lives*?’. This thread occasions the sharing of stories, which may be spun or real, for example, ‘I joined after my dad left home. I was 8’ (2) and ‘You don’t need some big tragedy in your life to make you want to feel like you belong’ (5). As well as incidental biography such as ‘My gym teacher is telling me to get off my PDA and play crab soccer. Yeah, like that’s a useful skill’ (5). Or ‘we used to have deep-dish eating contests and once I got sick in my purse…why am I telling you this?’ (3).

In this phase, the fictional company featured in *TRON*, called Encom is identified as an evil corporation in the sense described in Chapter 4, with terms like ‘money-grubbing’ (4) and is referred to as a ‘profit monster’ (4). The company is scornfully described as a ‘megacorp,’ managed by ‘bigwigs’ (8) that are ‘faceless’ and ‘soulless’ (3), and ‘I won’t trust a thing they have to say’ (4). In sum, the villainous ‘them’ in opposition to the discussion board’s heroic ‘us.’ The discussion board group regard themselves as ‘outsiders’ (to the evil corporation) and enthuse about becoming activists with the use of terms like ‘mission’ (18), ‘rally’ (4) ‘stand up and raise our voices’ (4) and ‘DO something’ (4) to illustrate this. The focus of their discussion is Flynn, who is narratively re-situated in the present by posters bestowing accolades upon him as the ‘soul of Encomia’ who is ‘like a father to an entire generation of thinkers, dreamers, artists, and techies’ (2) as well as providing ‘recollections’ of working with him. The starting point for the narrative of the campaign is the ‘Where’s Flynn?’ mystery. The sense of excitement and anticipation continues in this phase with a thread about the forthcoming Encom Press Conference ARG (Alternative Reality Game) event and discussion about preparations: tickets, bookings, journeys, ‘using (air) miles’ (2), ‘packing’ (2) and ‘I should pack sweaters, right?’ (2) for the event.

## In Phase 3 from 28th March – 10th April 2010, the *Flynn Lives* discussion board group become more familiar with one another and this is evidenced through the increasing use of nicknames, the sharing of personal stories about their interestin games, as well as the incorporation of further incidental biographical details. Group members identify themselves as future-looking individuals interested in ‘video games,’ rather than past-looking people taking ‘piano lessons’ (5). They see themselves as ‘rebellious’ rather than conventional (13).

The discussion in this phase is infused with references to the past, present, and future, and the opposition between the villains in the evil corporation of Encom and the heroes of the *Flynn Lives* group. A parallel was drawn between the stories of the two heroes: Where’s Flynn? (the old hero) and Where’s Sam? (the new hero). The past is brought into the present on the discussion boards in a series of ways: ‘recollections’ of Flynn in the past; musings about Sam’s childhood; memories of gameplay; and even an attempt at retro 1980s slang as one poster remarks ‘Totally tubular – I’m speaking to you from the eighties, in honor of Kevin Flynn’. (5)

The Encom press conference ARG event takes place during this phase and the new hero, Sam, makes his debut appearance by parachute drop from a helicopter at the event to take his father’s place as the hero of the future in the forthcoming sequel. *Flynn Lives* members are at the centre of events taking place, participating in diverse ways. There are San Francisco-based discussion board members, ARG event volunteers, non-San Francisco based members and ‘foot soldiers’ in the scavenger hunts taking place at locations worldwide. Following the events, *Flynn Lives* members become the focus of the discussion, providing eyewitness accounts of the ARG. In exchange, boards members are granted access to additional story information in the form of Encom’s ‘intranet’ and newspaper articles. These activities generate further expressions of anticipation and excitement among *Flynn Lives* board members.

## In Phase 4 from 14thApril – 13thMay 2010, the ‘them’ and ‘us’ opposition between *Flynn Lives* members and the evil corporation, Encom, is brought into sharper focus. Encom continues to be disparaged as ‘the Brass’ (2), ‘the big guys’ (10) and ‘the suits’ (8). However, this dichotomy is complicated by the fact that Encom are not just an evil corporation, accused of stealing Flynn’s intellectual property, but are also the publishers of the eagerly anticipated online version of Space Paranoids that the fans enjoyed playing – ‘Can’t talk…. playing S.P.’ (2), ‘I love this game almost as much as I hate Encom.’ (4) and ‘Man, are y’all playing the new Space Paranoids? Killer!’ (14). Similar ambivalence was expressed towards the Encom CEO, Alan Bradley who addressed the Encom Press conference event - Is he a hero (one of ‘us’) or a villain (one of ‘them’)?

The main focus in this phase for the group is to assume the function of the heroes themselves and solve the mystery of the disappearance of Flynn, which is framed in terms such as ‘mission,’ ‘covert operation,’ ‘cooperation,’ ‘DL communication,’ ‘intel’ and the rallying cry: ‘we’ve got a Flynn to locate!’ (10). The investigation shifts gear with the revelation that Poster 8 is a former colleague of Flynn’s at Encom. They claim to have possession of one of Flynn’s computer servers which might throw some light on the mystery of his disappearance. In response to this revelation, posts are couched in terms of ‘theories’ (8), ‘maybes’ (5) and ‘what ifs’ (5) about Flynn’s disappearance to engender curiosity. ‘Recollections’ of Flynn laud him as a hero, ‘artist’ (7), ‘thinker’ (7) and ‘he seemed so worried in those last days.’ (8) Through these ‘recollections,’ the figure of Flynn is no longer confined to the past, but features in the present, even if he is not actually ‘present.’ At the same time the group start to express their support for the new action hero, Sam: ‘we’re here for you, Sam’ (13) and ‘I think we should really reach out to Sam, wherever he is.’ (12), and parallels are inevitably drawn between the hero of the past and the hero of the future (forthcoming film).

## In Phase 5 from 18thOctober – 13thNovember 2010, after a hiatus over the summer, the boards are ‘open’ again in October, just eight weeks before the release of *TRON: Legacy*. Board communications assume familiar patterns including the use of the ‘Flynn’ lexicon, nicknames, jokes, incidental biographical details, and expressions of affirmation regarding the group. Poster 1 refers to their ‘old buddy’, and ‘my friend’ and other posters voice enthusiasm that the boards have resumed. ‘So glad we’re back on the boards’ (2) and ’Woo-hoo! I’ve got a whole lot of blabbering to do – been saving it up for weeks!’ (5). Once again, the Game Master, Poster 1 sets the tone – ‘wait till you see what I’ve got up my sleeve’ and Poster 9 ‘Gotta go, but I’ll be back soon.’ They are joined by Poster 14 generating a level of excitement and anticipation about the forthcoming *TRON* night with ‘Can I just say how psyched I am?’ (14) and ‘Can’t wait to see everyone there’ (14) which is a persistent theme through the phases, whilst at the same time distributing free badges (pins) to discussion board members which are referred to as ‘blingage’ (6).

As this phase took place at the time of US mid-term elections, discussion about Flynn takes a topical turn. Here the boundaries between fact and fiction are playfully traversed as Posters muse about voting for Flynn and hypothesise what Flynn would do, as well as expressing a wistful desire for fictional heroes in the absence of real-world heroes. Posters maintain Flynn’s profile and on the discussion board, he is the ‘default’ hero in both real world and fictional situations. There is a further revelation that another Poster is also a contemporary of Flynn, and an employee of Encom and, to justify the revelation, a discussion ensues about the virtues of having a ‘man on the inside’ (8). A distinction is drawn between Encom, which stole Flynn’s intellectual property, and Poster 9 who acknowledges Flynn as the designer of Circuit Cycles, to reassure members of the discussion board that they are one of ‘them’. This poster also contributes to the sense of anticipation, ‘Stay tuned.... I’ll be rolling it out soon enough’ (9).

## In Phase 6 from 17thNovember – 15thDecember 2010, in the days running up to the Thanksgiving holiday in the US, the campaign enters its final phase. On the discussion boards the focus is on Sam Flynn, whose hero status is confirmed by the ‘daredevil stunt’ (12) of parachuting into the ARG Encom press event. Discussion about Sam takes the form of expressions of empathy for this character (who, remember, is yet to be seen in the forthcoming film release). They include ‘Let’s imagine’ (3) story games that focus on the new hero, Sam, in the ‘Where’s Sam?’ format mirroring the earlier question surrounding his father– ‘Where’s Flynn?’. Posters develop a biography for the new hero, storying his childhood and imagining what he is doing.

Plans for the Side Channel (but which was called various names on the board including ‘side channel attack’ and in a discussion thread ‘phone phrenzy’ but also ‘supersurge’ (1), and ‘phone blitz’ (9) and ‘whatchamawhoozit’ (10) )are made to send a collective ‘message’ from the board to Flynn. Plans for this last stunt generate a sense of both anticipation and excitement, framed by the repetition of the word ‘wait’ used by different members of the group as well as ‘waiting’ (2), ‘the wait is on’ (11) and ‘sweating out this wait’ (12) and ‘No, no. NO. We literally can’t wait’ (3), to the extent that one poster writes ‘so excited, seeing spots’ (6) elevating excitement to a crescendo of expectation at the end of the campaign.

Whilst the general thrust of discussion is forward looking, threads in this phase insist on Flynn’s role in all this. Poster 1 attributes the last stunt to the old hero. ‘This whole thing is based on a theory of Kevin Flynn’s (naturally)’ referring to a book written by Flynn as his source and even providing a scan of a page from the book, like a citation. Poster 8, who performs as a contemporary of Flynn, describes taking a walk down memory lane to visit a place Flynn once visited and finding a clue which Poster 1 affirms was the missing clue. This poster interjects with stories from the past: ‘Let me give it a spin. Back when I worked with Flynn…’ and aggrandises Flynn still further by suggesting he may have built his own ‘proto-type internet in one of those cramped offices.’ In an audio clip containing an extract from Flynn’s *Digital Frontier* on the site, Flynn makes predictions about the future, from the past that seem implausible now to some posters: ‘Digital teleportation’ – are you kidding me?’ (11).

The final phase of the site campaign ends two days before the release of the film on

15th December 2010, and posters express gratitude and affection in the final thread titled ‘A Truckload of Thanks’. There is a sense of achievement from this shared experience, and an enduring sense of anticipation in the campaign. The group themselves are the focus of the discussion board now - ‘I kinda love everyone here’ (2),’And the feeling is more than mutual, Girl’ (3), ‘Who’s up for a virtual group hug’ (4), and ‘Had a great time with everyone here’ (5). Poster 1 commends the group for ‘our spirit and our drive’ ascribing heroic characteristics not only to the characters from the film but to the discussion board contributors as well. The discussion board concludes with a quotation from Flynn by Poster 8 – ‘I think I know what he would say: ‘I told you so, man’.

**6.6 Thematic Analysis**

Analysing the meaning of these discussion threads is a staged process. The researcher’s first task is familiarising themselves with the data; then ‘coding’ (interpreting) features of the data at both semantic and interpretive levels; then sorting the codes into thematic groups; mapping these relations visually to chart the relations between them; and finally, reflecting on the dataset, defining, and naming the themes and analysing what the data revealed about the posters engagement and experiences of the promotional campaign (2006: 1623). Below is an indicative discussion thread tabulated and headed with the topic and the date it began. The number of the poster is identified in the first column and their posts are recorded chronologically in the second column. (See Figure 6 below)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Poster** | **Discussion Thread 17: THIS IS BIG, PEOPLE!! 28th March 2010** | **Coded**  **for** |
| 4 | Just heard from a friend - that Encom event is bigger than we thought. |  |
| 6 | So? Are we still on? |  |
| 4 | Definitely, but we should tread lightly - Alan Bradley deserves our respect. |  |
| 5 | OK, so we wait until he's done and then GET LOUD |  |
| 1 | Something like that - we'll iron out the details before the big event |  |
| 5 | Right on. Totally tubular. I'm speaking to you from the Eighties, in honor of Kevin Flynn. Grody to the max, fer shur... |  |
| 1 | Thankfully, the '80's sounded nothing like that. Listen - I just don't want to freak out the keynote. We want him to know we're on his side - he's one of us... |  |
| 7 | Well, he still works for Encom, but I get your point. |  |
| 5 | Whatevs... |  |
| 2 | I'm fine with that. |  |
| 1 | I'm going to work on a meet up plan, and I'll get back to everyone with the deets. |  |
| 2 | Rockin' - thanks, Z-dog. |  |

Figure 6. Discussion Thread 17.

During the analysis, features of the data that appear to be interesting or pertinent to the research questions are identified as ‘codes’ in the third column on the right (Braun and Clarke, 2006:18). These coded features may be of interest on a *semantic* level, relating to the linguistic characteristics of posts, or at an *interpretive* level indicating underlying conceptualisation, assumptions and ideologies that shape the sematic content of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006:13). Any formal linguistic features such as punctuation and case are noted too. (See Figure 7 below)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Poster** | **Discussion Thread 17: THIS IS BIG, PEOPLE!! 28th March 2010** | **Coded For** |
| 4 | Just heard from a friend - that Encom event is bigger than we thought. | ‘Live’ event planned . ‘Hearsay’ sentence construction used to introduce new information. |
| 6 | So? Are we still on? | Impatience, excitement, and anticipation  Question marks. |
| 4 | Definitely, but we should tread lightly - Alan Bradley deserves our respect. | Manages group role play in ARG |
| 5 | OK, so we wait until he's done and then GET LOUD | Rehearse future actions and uppercase letters |
| 1 | Something like that - we'll iron out the details before the big event | Repetition of ‘big’ |
| 5 | Right on. Totally tubular. I'm speaking to you from the Eighties, in honor of Kevin Flynn. Grody to the max, fer shur... | Retro 1980s-style language play |
| 1 | Thankfully, the '80's sounded nothing like that. Listen - I just don't want to freak out the keynote. We want him to know we're on his side - he's one of us... | Different generations of Tron audiences.  Manage group role play in ARG |
| 7 | Well, he still works for Encom, but I get your point. | Encom – good or bad?  Alan Bradley – hero or villain? |
| 5 | Whatevs... | Group behaviours |
| 2 | I'm fine with that. | Group behaviours |
| 1 | I'm going to work on a meet up plan, and I'll get back to everyone with the deets. | Gamesmaster makes plans |
| 2 | Rockin' - thanks, Z-dog. | Excitement and anticipation. Nicknames |

Figure 7. Discussion Thread 17 with thematic coding notes

The threads are then scrutinised and codes generated without judgement or reflection of what to include or exclude from the data set at this stage (Braun and Clarke, 2006:19). Once this coding process is complete for each phase, a list of ‘candidate’ themes is developed (Braun and Clarke, 2006:20).

To begin to make sense of the data, the list of candidate themes and their relation to one another are provisionally visualised in a sketch (Braun and Clarke, 2006:19). The full set of interpretive sketches are available to view in Appendix 1. Below is an illustrative sketch from Phase 3 which includes Discussion Threads 17 – 26 (See figure 8). These interpretive sketches are not intended to be end-point final representational diagrams, and are better regarded as ‘tools to think with.’ In the process of making a graphical representation of the themes in this discussion thread it becomes clear that there were central themes and peripheral themes, main themes, and sub themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006:20). Some themes are more significant than others either by prevalence or repetition (Ibid). Some codes fit into multiple themes, and there were themes which did not seem to fit within emerging patterns of themes at all and were recorded as miscellaneous (Ibid.). (See Figure. 8)

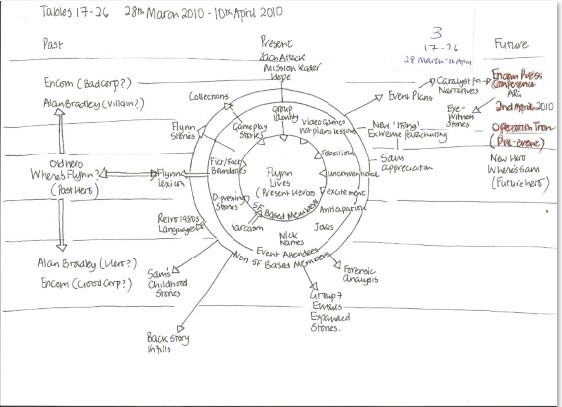
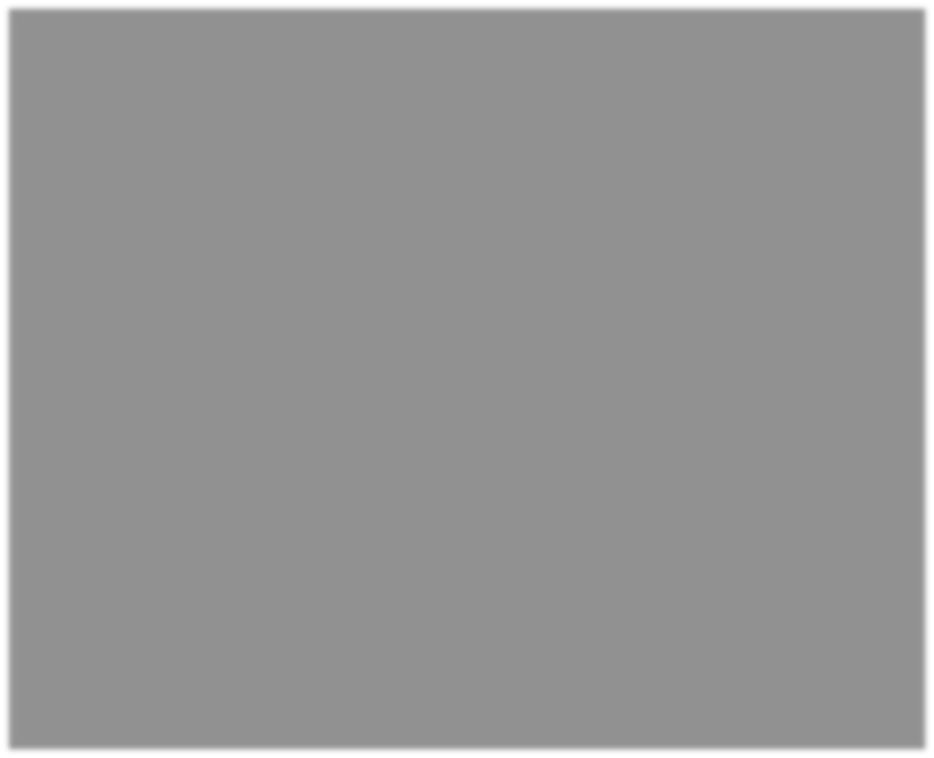


Figure 8. An interpretive sketch of phase 3: Threads 17-26 - 28th March - 10th April 2010

As the discussion threads were generated over a period of months on the Flynn Lives discussion boards and grouped together into time periods, it made sense to generate not just one but a series of maps to represent each phase over the months before the film’s release and in total six were generated. The final stage in the analytical process was to identify the essence of the themes and decide which aspect of the data each theme captured. Having named the themes and visualised them as interpretive sketches, a narrative account of the contents of the interpretive sketches was developed based on close reference to the posts and the posters who are identified by number. This account should be read in conjunction with the interpretive sketches of the six phases of the discussion board in Appendix 1.

## 6.7 What Can the Discussion Boards reveal about Online Audiencehood?

The primary aim of this web-based promotional campaign is evidently to establish a connection between the original film and its sequel across a period of thirty years and what is immediately apparent in all six phases of the campaign is how posts articulate an awareness of the passing of time. The campaign begins with a commemoration to mark 20 years since the disappearance of *TRON*’s hero, Flynn in 1989. In temporal terms, this anniversary can be seen as a restorative form of nostalgia as it creates continuity with the past by narratively bringing the past into the present. However, over the course of the campaign a series of events, puzzles and challenges takes place and the prevailing expression of posters is anticipation and excitement at the prospect of these forthcoming activities as they are announced: ‘totally faced’ (14), ‘I can’t wait’ (3), ‘sounds like it is going to be epic’ (5), ‘See that all over the room? That’s my mind being blown’ (14), ‘I’m so there. Just brought my ticket.’ (7), Ooh, I like what I hear’ (2), ‘So excited – seeing spots’ (6) and ‘Can I just say how psyched I am?’ (14), and ‘we’ve got the world’s attention after all this time – people are ready to DO something’ (4). This prevailing sense of anticipation and excitement about the future is conveyed not only with words, but also through frequent use of exclamation marks and capital letters that, taken together, generate a sense of momentum building towards the forthcoming release of thesequel.

What is conspicuous by its absence, however, is any discussion abouteither of the films themselves in the discussion boards. In fact, *TRON* is only mentioned in the discussion threads once during its operation. This may be because it is assumed that the board sits inside the story world of *TRON,* and so it does not need naming explicitly. Indeed, if restorative nostalgia is defined as a longing for home, then, it can be argued that the *TRON: Legacy* website is a fictional ‘home’ of sorts and there is no need to name it as it is implicit and assumed. When members sign up to the boards, de facto, they enter into the story world and the site declares ‘By signing up, you are committing to help our organisation, Flynn Lives, track down all leads relating to the mysterious disappearance of Kevin Flynn, digital pioneer and former CEO of *Encom*’ (42 Entertainment, 2010) So once site visitors are inside the world of *TRON*, the story world, in a sense, becomes a given.

What is evident on the discussion boards is how posters set out to establish themselves within this new community through what Baym described as ‘interpersonal practices’ including the performance of humour (Baym, 2000:209). Some messages adopt a jokey tone, for example, ‘wanna see a picture of my cat wearing sunglasses? Just kidding’ (3,) or ‘You’ve only read it 12 times? Slacker!’ (12). But, also through light sarcasm too, such as this post - ‘I love your energy, but it might be time to step away from the keyboard and hydrate’ (3), or ‘Ha (that quip didn’t deserve two ha’s) (4). By Phase 3 posters are starting to use nicknames for one another, suggestive of a growing sense of familiarity between them. Personal stories are shared in threads where members discuss why they joined *Flynn Lives* and memories from their pasts of when they began playing games. Individual identities emerge through what they say about themselves through their by-lines and what might be termed ‘incidental biography’ which is infused with reflective nostalgia about gaming experiences and enables posters to relate to each other within the community, as can be seen in these posts:

‘I used to go to this rad arcade every day after school. My mom worked weird hours so she wanted me to stay at the library until she could pick me up. Guess how well that plan went over…’ (13)

‘Probably as well as my “piano lessons” (which I was supposed to be taking the whole summer of ’05 but instead I was at the rec centre spending my allowance on video games…until my folks found out what was going on and I stopped getting an allowance, of course’) (5)

Established posters are welcoming to newcomers to the discussion boards, ‘Great to have you guys aboard’ (3) and praise one another’s posts, ‘Nicely said’, CG (7). Over the course of the campaign as posters become increasingly engaged in the boards, it is noticeable how they begin to account for the times when they are not posting on the discussion boards. For example, in phase 3 ‘Sorry I was in class’ (14) and ‘We’re off to Napa. I’ll be out of touch for the rest of the day.’ (3). During the last phase, a sense of investment is evident in posts such as ’Who’s up for a virtual hug?’ (4); and ‘Had a great time with everyone here.’ (5); ‘the feeling is more than mutual, girl.’ (3); Posts like these indicate how over the months relations between posters begin to coalesce into a kind of online community.

Both interpretive and informative practices are indicative of the development of an online community. One of the most commonly used interpretive practices is personalisation when posters articulate how the story has personal significance for them (Baym, 2000:71). For example, ‘Sorry to bring everyone down, but I’ve been thinking about how much Sam lost in his young life. He must be lonely especially with the holidays approaching.’ (2) Character interpretation is evident too (Baym, 2000:72). Central to numerous discussion threads are restorative nostalgic posts expressing what the character Kevin Flynn meant to them. For example, in Discussion Thread 10 ‘Shout Out to Flynn’, Poster 15 describes Flynn as ‘someone who thought there was a higher purpose to technology and a human-scaled interaction with infinity’ while Poster 10 describes how ‘Kevin Flynn changed a generation and that generation is changing the world’. In this way the meaning of the film for its audiences is articulated. How *TRON* has come to be regarded as an early champion of computer games, and forerunner of games culture today.

Following the appearance of the Alan Bradley character at the live ARG Encom Press Conference event, discussion about his role in the forthcoming film commences: ‘Are you starting a thread to complain about Alan Bradley?’ (4); ‘I was wondering about him too. That speech in San Francisco confused me’ (12). ‘That’s where Alan Bradley should be. Right by Sam’s side looking out for Kevin Flynn, not sucking up kudos from the suits at Encom and posing for pictures…I’m just saying’ (8). Typically, such character interpretation is based on knowledge about the original *TRON* which provides a reservoir of narrative information to draw upon (Baym, 2000:78). However for posters who do not have this experience to draw on, retrospective commentary is replaced by speculative commentary about the forthcoming film (Baym, 2000:81).

Discussions threads about the hero of the forthcoming film start to story his past ‘He was just a kid when his dad went missing. You have to understand he’d just lost his mother’ (3) as well as his present ‘Let’s imagine all of the cool things Sam might be doing right now’. (3). To fuel speculation, participants produce knowledge and information. Periodically extra-textual information is pitched in discussion threads for the group to consider such as screen grabs from Encom’s intranet (Thread 24), and a ‘new tech’ magazine cover from 1985 (Thread 3) in a kind of performed reminiscence (Baym, 2000:92). Extra-textual knowledge and information is extemporised too: ‘Little known fact: Jordan (Sam’s mother) also designed a building near the Embracadero (the site of our awesome protest to disrupt the Encom press conference last April) (7)’, and there are interjections in the narrative which alter the audience group’s perspective. One poster assumes the role of one of Flynn’s contemporaries– ‘I guess it’s a good enough time as any for me to make a kind of confession. I used to work at Encom with Kevin Flynn’ (8). All these posts can be understood as performances of restorative nostalgia and through the posts participants undertake narrative ‘work’ to incorporate these new story details into the *TRON* mythos.

The discussion board participants begin to move beyond interpretive practices to what could be more accurately described as performative role play that Sarah Atkinson suggests can be productively understood in terms of Vladimir Propp’s dramatis personae schema for the character functions in Russian folk tales, including the hero, the villain, and the hero-helper among others (2014b: 2202). In the original *TRON* (1982) the Proppian hero function is undertaken by Kevin Flynn, and in the discussion threads we see Poster 8 extoll Flynn in heroic terms describing him as an ‘artist’, ‘designer’, ‘philosopher’, ‘author’ ‘visionary’ and an ‘inspiration’ throughout the campaign. This reverential tone is taken up by other posters too with comments like ‘Kevin Flynn was like a father to an entire generation of thinkers, dreamers, artists, and techies’ (2), and ‘Kevin Flynn pretty much invented the best games around’. (5) However, Flynn’s disappearance, de facto, suspends him from his hero function in the narrative of the campaign. So, the *Flynn Lives* group participants become the focus of the campaign’s narrative and assume the function of ‘hero,’ pursuing the campaign’s quest to find Flynn. Importantly, they establish an opposition between the villainous evil corporation of Encom (them) and the heroic members of the *Flynn Lives* board (us) which is maintained through all six phases.

During the campaign Sam is introduced to the *TRON* story world as Flynn’s son who will feature in the forthcoming sequel*.* Stories about Sam’s childhood are extemporised by posters enabling readers to get to know the character so that by the time the film opens, Sam will be established as a character and be as familiar to fans as his predecessor, Flynn. Sam’s spectacular entry into the Encom press conference ARG event in San Francisco by parachute creates the conditions for the invention of a new hero. Parallels between the old hero and the young new hero are made when Sam too disappears, and the ‘Where’s Flynn?’ quest becomes a ‘Where’s Sam?’ quest within the campaign’s diegesis.

Over the course of the campaign, the discussion boards shift from functioning as an interpretive audience community to becoming a dramatic community. Posters assume roles. Poster 1 is the game leader who rallies the group employing terms like ‘momentum’, ‘ready for action’ and ‘be ready for anything’ in their posts. They encourage a sense of belonging to a group too using collective pronouns referring to ‘our losses and gains,’ ‘our organisation’ our allegiance,’ our strength’ and ‘How much we’ve accomplished.’ During the campaign, the games leader introduces games and challenges, orchestrates participation in the live ARG event, as well as providing actual material rewards in the form of film related merchandise like T-shirts and badges (pins) as rewards to individuals for participation. Poster 8 performs as a contemporary of Flynn on the discussion boards, persistently drawing attention to the past with restorative nostalgic narratives such as ‘I used to work at Encom with Kevin Flynn’ and ‘I can picture it. He had his quiet moments…. when he was really concentrating on something – he wouldn’t come out of his office for the whole day…’ and even creating a sense of enigma by referring to his ‘secret projects’ designed to cultivate speculation amongst board readers.

Over the course of the campaign, participants become narrators themselves providing eyewitness accounts of campaign events – ‘This is a posting for all you Flynn Livers who aren’t here. Here’s what happened…’ (7). Posters concoct stories about imaginary events. Poster 5 explains how he used his fake Encom badge to get into the Encom campus and is asked to describe ‘what it’s like inside the evil empire?’. Increasingly over time board members do not just comment but contrive stories of their own making. In a thread about the whereabouts of Sam, a game of ‘Let’s just imagine’ (3) takes place and posters discernibly shift into a storytelling mode with additional adjectives to embellish their narrative performances. For example, a skyscraper is described as ‘massive’ (10) and a holiday resort is ‘crazy expensive’ (13), while Sam’s biography is imagined with musings about his childhood and stories about his mother introduced into the narrative. Poster 8 relays stories about going to see sites Flynn ‘visited’ and starts their post with the opening, ‘*Let’s give it a spin*. Back when I worked with Flynn….’ (my emphasis). What is apparent here is the way in which posters start to participate in shaping the fiction through their own discussion board performances, drawing connections between the original film and the sequel through the duration of the promotional campaign.

Over the course of the months in which the discussion boards are active, the diverse ways in which posters ‘perform’ becomes apparent. Posts narrate campaign events. Posters role play stories about fictive experiences. Posters hypothesise about a character’s whereabouts and create biographies for new characters. At other times participants perform as characters in the story world diegesis and eulogise the virtues and significance of *TRON*’s hero, Flynn. There are even posts that playfully traverse the boundaries between fact and fiction. In a thread about the US mid-term elections, one poster muses how Flynn might vote and how ‘Maybe when Flynn comes back from…. wherever, he’ll be an international hero, run for public office and then we can really vote for him.’ (11). In summary, posts composed in the threads on the site’s discussion boards take on the form of extemporised performance.

Oral poetry scholars Milman Parry and Albert Lord provide insight into the nature of extemporised performance that is relevant here. In the 1930s, Parry and his student, Albert Lord made a study of Serbo-Croatian oral poetry singers and they were specifically interested in the processes through which performances were created (Edwards, 1983:152). Through a close examination of the form they concluded that epic oral poems were constructed through improvisation *during* performance, but that these performances are not entirely extemporaneous as they were built around formulaic schema (Edwards, 1983:159). The subject and the structure of a poem are known in advance, and so key elements are fixed, and this provides a framework in which extemporising can take place (Duffy, 2014:127-8). Poetic performances are composed of stock elements drawn from ‘a rich storehouse of ready-made building blocks’ to build the elements of their performances, much like topoi (Hirsch, 2014).[[5]](#footnote-5)

Parry and Lord’s concept of improvisation as ‘composition in performance’ suggests discussion board conversations are similar to improvised performance. The promotional campaign provides a defined duration for the boards and by implication the performance in the run up to the theatrical release of the film. The story world of *TRON* can be understood as the ‘essential idea’ in which all posters operate (Ibid.) While the story world is not explicitly named as such, as was noted earlier, the presumption is that all board participants inhabit this story world and respond to narrative events from within. Widening the focus still further, there is a sense in which all participants are ‘performing ’on the discussion boards. This is evident in the concerted use of Flynn-style vocabulary by board posters referred to earlier), together with references to the *TRON* story world: such as the ‘grid’ which is the term used to describe the computer system Flynn made for his research(7, 8); ‘recognisers’ which are the large hovering vehicles on the grid which function as pursuit and attack vehicles (13); and ‘Dumont’ referring to the tower guardian programme whose job it is to protect the Encom mainframe (8).

Performance is also evident in the crafting of puns based on the film - ‘The deed is done. I am a Bit tired’ (1) referring to a component in a computer programme which carries information in the film. Another illustration of punning can be seen in the post, ‘it’s not just me being paranoid’ (1) referring to the Space Paranoids game invented by Flynn. Use of terms like these is not accidental. They function as in-jokes on the discussion boards – that is to say, jokes for those readers who can spot the film reference and this kind of oblique word play is aimed at those familiar with the world of *TRON*. With regard to the film site’s discussion boards, the work of Parry and Lord provides insight into some of performative strategies in use. Moreover, its central tenet regarding the formulaic use of language chimes with the topos, which has been one of the guiding propositions in this media archaeological approach to the examination of film sites.

Discussion boards have provided fora for audience interaction since the advent of the internet. But it should be remembered that online forums like this are proprietary environments for the promotion of the film. Clearly some of these posters are not just members of an audience community, but ‘actors’ who take specific roles on the boards. This is not the first time we see the manipulation of spaces designed for audiences online. In his *Movie Marketing Madness* blog posts, Chris Thilk comments on the use of ‘fake’ message boards for films such as *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (3June 2004) and *Wicker Park* (2 September 2004). So, this observation raises a raft of further questions: Who were these posters? Are they paid actors? Or are they dedicated fans? Further clues are provided in a short paratextual film titled *TRON: The Next Day* released on *YouTube* to promote the release of home viewing formats in 2011, a year after the film’s cinema release. Here Poster 8 is ‘revealed’ to be the character, Alan Bradley, although clearly the poster is not necessarily the actor taking the role. But what we see are narratives imbricated with one another in this on-going paratextual promotion. What is particularly interesting about this paratext is that it focuses on the *Flynn Lives* organisation from the promotional campaign. In this way, the *Flynn Lives* group are actually incorporated into the story world of *TRON*, illustrating the increasing blurring of the boundaries between promotion and content, as well as building foundations for potential future films..

Of course we cannot know for certain who the posters are through this method of analysis but that is not the point. For the purposes of this enquiry, what is significant is that thematic analysis reveals evidence to suggest views, opinions and perspectives are being cultivated to inculcate events of the past in the present, and to introduce characters in the service of the film’s promotion. To answer the question posed at the start of the chapter, during the campaign these discussion board posters cultivated a sense of nostalgia about the past, as well as anticipation for the future. On reflection then, Busse and Gray’s assertion about the authenticity of ‘traditional’ fans as distinct from the manufactured nature of ‘industry-led’ fandom assumes an authenticity in the former, but not in the latter may not be an accurate representation of fan experiences (2011:431). Participants post on discussion boards in the full knowledge that people are reading what they write, so the posters are clearly performing themselves or fictive personas they have invented, and distinctions based on the notion of authenticity collapse. While the value of using thematic analysis lies in the fact that it has revealed how this nostalgia has been cultivated for a film that is still yet to be viewed.

## 6.8 Games Memory Culture: From the Margins to the Mainstream

In this last section of the chapter, the focus pulls out from its detailed scrutiny of the *Flynn Lives* discussion boards and the promotional campaign, to return to its consideration of *TRON* in the broader cultural context. By the end of the promotion campaign for *TRON: Legacy*, not only has *TRON* become emblematic of, and almost cultural shorthand for, the beginnings of the digital age, it has also become a focal point of nostalgia for gaming culture because it represents the time when games first became widely available and entered the zeitgeist. Video game historian Sean Fenty observes that the potency of this cultural memory has grown over the years, as it is not just gamers from the 1980s who experience a sense of nostalgia about the game playing of their youth (Fenty in Walden, 2016:103). Indeed, Fenty suggests that nostalgia has become a generalised experience for successive generations of gamers (Ibid.). Gaming technologies are changing all the time, and so all who play games may feel nostalgia as iterations of games supersede one another, and older games and their platforms are consigned to obsolescence (Ibid.). Games historians concur that one of the consequences of this is the burgeoning restorative nostalgic culture of games online (Ibid.; Herz, 1997:65; Newman, 2004:165-6; Suominen, 2008; Wolf, 2007). Games archives, museums and emulators have fuelled the appetite for what has been described as, ‘a perfect past that can be replayed, a past within which players can participate, and a past in which players can move and explore’ (Ibid.).

So, it would appear that the production of the *TRON* promotional campaign is not entirely in the hands of the franchise. Studies of media memory suggest that memory cultures do not simply repeat, but actively edit the past by positioning it within new frames and contexts (Holdsworth in Walden, 2016:103). This observation is borne out by examining historical accounts of games culture and how they have evolved. In one of the first histories of games, *Joystick Nation*, J.C. Herz observed how the memory cultures of gamers of the early 1980s tended to erase from collective memory any recollection of the many poor games that flooded the market at the time (Herz in Walden, 2016:104). Instead, gamers preferred to focus on their favourite games, which were played and replayed and survived to be ported onto the next platform (Ibid.). It is these games that are lauded and have come to represent the whole of 1980s arcade gaming culture in popular memory (Ibid.). In much the same way, it appears that cultural memory has erased the shortcomings of the original film *TRON*, but continues to celebrate its prescience. Over time, these forms of remembering/misremembering have had the effect of creating an edited, idealised version of the early days of the games arcades, and, more broadly, of our cultural past.

Alongside this process of editing of the past, the barometer of cultural value has seen a dramatic shift in attitudes towards games (Ibid.). Herz has documented the low cultural esteem in which games were held in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Ibid.). She tells how ‘in the public perception, arcades smacked of moral turpitude’ and were generally regarded as sites of delinquency (Ibid.). The childhood recollections of the editor of a videogame culture fanzine *1-Up*, Raina Lee, bears this out, as she recalls, ‘They (her parents) did not really let me go alone to arcades, because they were regarded as bad places with bad teenage boys...’ (Guins in Walden, 2016:104). It seems that arcades were regarded as ‘teenage hangouts’ in bus stations and the dark and dingy corners of shopping malls (Herz in Walden, 2016:104).). Since then, however, attitudes towards games and games culture have undergone a transformation as the games community and wider culture have come to regard arcade games less as the locus of youthful delinquency and more as the unlikely location of the first green shoots of a nascent digital culture.

## 6.9 Conclusions

To examine the development of film promotional websites the writings of theorists like Foucault, Ernst, Kittler, Chun and Huhtamo had proved valuable in previous chapters. However on the issue of audience media experiences, these writings were less forthcoming. In the emerging field of media archaeology, scholastic neglect of media technologies in media history is often redressed by a greater consideration of media hardware. But the result is that media audiences are often side-lined and often conspicuous by their absence from much of this commentary. This presented a problem for a research project concerned with the development of film sites, particularly since the development of a ‘participatory’ culture in which media audiences play an active and integral part (Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013:2).

This chapter set out to undertake an archaeological investigation of audience engagement and experiences of the promotional campaign for *TRON: Legacy* and its audience community’s discussion boards. Here online community spaces, discussion boards and chat fora are regarded as a new kind of ‘archive’ of audience sentiments and expressions. For the most part social media repositories like these are regarded as sites of ephemeral expression but I maintain that online archives like these hold archaeological imprints of audience encounters, long after a film’s cinema run is over.

Under the guiding hand of the marketing agency *42 Entertainment*, the promotion campaign drew connections between the original 1982 film and its forthcoming sequel twenty-eight years later, through its extensive in-world site and a series of ‘live’ events at media conventions, ARG events and scavenger hunts around the world. Close analysis of the site’s social media demonstrated how nostalgia was cultivated through the discussion boards over a period of months in the run up to the cinema release of the film. But *42 Entertainment* could not cultivate nostalgia by its efforts alone. A consideration of games culture indicated that a broader impetus was at work here. During the near thirty years since the original film, as games have moved from the margins to mainstream culture, it became clear that reflective nostalgia fuelled this promotional campaign too. What this chapter shows is that through the film’s online promotional campaign, the past has been (re)constructed and nostalgia has been cultivated for a forthcoming film release that has indeed enabled the ‘past to be seen in new ways’ (Parikka, 2012:157).

1. These accolades include a *Themed Entertainment Award* (TEA) and a *Webbys* nomination. The campaign was also finalist at the Cannes *Cyber Lions* awards and won several *Movie Virals* awards. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Flynn Lives site was taken down at the end of 2014, four years after the film’s cinema release. The site www.flynnlives.com may now only be accessed via Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine up to 1st September 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. An ARG (alternative reality game) is a story that ‘plays out in real time, using real communications media to make it seem as though the story were really happening, and here an open-air ‘press conference’ was attended by hundreds of fans (Phillips, 2012:19). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Published in 2006, a report titled *The 90-9-1 Rule for Participation Inequality in Social Media and Online Communities* by the Nielson Norman Group found that in most online communities, a tiny percentage of users make most of the contributions. Most users, it concluded, participate very little and either read/observe or lurk but do not actively contribute. This was not a new discovery. But the implication of this was that only a tiny minority of the potential audience were actually participating in such fora and it explains the presence of the use of merchandise as rewards to encourage participation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Since its publication in 1960,Parry and Lord’s theory about ‘composition during performance’ has been applied to a range of cultural forms from jazz improvisation (Gillespie, 1991) to doctors’ accounts of patients’ medical case histories, (Ratzan, 1992) to professional wrestling (Duffy, 2014) to explain how ‘composition in performance’ is achieved (Edwards, 1983:152). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)