**Chapter 1: Transmedia: the archaeology of a concept**

Keywords: Google Ngram; Transmedia; Intertextuality; Transmedia Storytelling; Transmedia Promotion; Paratextuality; Transmedia Archaeology

* 1. **Getting Started with Google Ngram**

Tracing a concept like transmedia back to its origins is a challenge as neologisms like ‘transmedia’ inevitably come from somewhere else, and those concepts likewise derive from elsewhere too, until the researcher find themselves disappearing down an etymological rabbit hole. So, this chapter begins, as most searches do today, with a Google search engine - not its conventional search engine however, but with Google Ngram. The Google Ngram viewer is a software off-shoot of the Google books programme that digitises books from university libraries. It enables a word or phrase to be searched for and creates a graph of usage in published sources from 1800-2010 in the figure below, while promising to provide a starting point for looking at some of the ways in which the term has been understood. (See Figure 1)

Graphical user interface, application, table

Description automatically generated

Figure 1. Google Books Ngram Viewer’s charted uses of the word ‘transmedia’ in publications. © Google.

Ngram does not claim to trace etymological origins of the term, but it does show that the term, Transmedia, can be traced as far back as 1900. The term started to gain purchase when, with a capital ‘T,’ the term was employed as a trading name for media companies such as *Transmedia* Network Inc in 1943; *Transmedia* Marketing Corporation in 1972; and *Transmedia* Ltd – a film and video distribution company, set up in association with newsagent W.H. Smith in 1974, among others. However, when the parameters of the Ngram search are changed to ‘transmedia,’ with a case insensitive ‘t,’ the graph shows how the word transmedia started to be used in the sense recognised by this book. In 1971 the term can be found in *The Celluloid Curriculum: How to use Movies in the Classroom* by Richard A. Maynard referring to the adaptation of material from book to film. That is to say, a text rewritten in a way that is appropriate to both production and reception in a different media format. In it Maynard writes, ‘Harper Lee’s book is so popular in high school and reads so well that using the film is not really necessary. Even in a *transmedia* study the film is such an exact interpretation of the book that I would use it only for students with severe reading or motivational problems’ (Maynard, 1971:94) (My italics). Similarly, the term was used in *The Japanese Film: Art & Industry* by Joseph L. Anderson to refer to the way that adaptation across multiple media led to the formation of ‘transmedia mega genres’ (1982). Noel Carroll discusses the ‘transmedia’ nature of the horror genre in *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990), whilst in a study about the TV courtroom drama *Perry Mason* titled *The Defence Never Rests: A Transmedia Poetics Approach* by James Dennis Bounds, the author describes how the series was adapted for different media including novels, film, TV, radio and comic strips (1994). So, as a commercial strategy, the prefix ‘trans’ refers to the migration of material across different media platforms here.

The Ngram Viewer analysis illustrates how use of the term rose steadily during the 1990s and over this time the meaning of the word shifted. In *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age and Comedy*, Patricia Mellencamp refers to ‘transmedia oligopolies’ to describe the conglomeration of media companies forming multi-media global corporations such as Time-Warner (1990) and Sony-Columbia (1989) and the impact of these structural changes in the industry in which the ‘franchise culture’ model came to the fore, characterised by product placement, licensing practices, branding, tie-ins, spin-offs, cross-overs and ancillary markets (1992:50). In *Playing with Power in Movies, Television and Video Games*, Marsha Kinder examines the consequences of the de-regulation of children’s television at this time (1991). In the United States, the lifting of a ban on product-centred children’s television programming saw toy manufacturers collaborate to create tie-in magazines, comics and TV programmes which functioned as programme-length commercials for brands like *My Little Pony*, *Care Bears* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1991:40). Kinder argues that branded TV and their tie-in merchandise effectively began to blur the distinction between promotion and content, and that the consequence was the development of what she terms a ‘commercial supersystem of transmedia intertextuality,’ suggesting the fluid and dynamic movement of brands across different media from comic books to games, to television, to movies (1991:3; Kinder in Jenkins, 2015:261).

What becomes apparent from reading the search returns from Ngram of the earliest uses of the term ‘transmedia’ is that firstly, once the word ceases to be used as a title and begins to be used as a descriptor in the 1990s, it is adopted to articulate the consequences of media convergence; and secondly, the term, transmedia, is rarely used on its own but is almost always qualified by a second term. Indeed, it is more often appended by a secondary term that describes what it applies to. In this opening chapter, we will see the development of the terms ‘transmedia intertextuality,’ ‘transmedia storytelling,’ ‘transmedia practices,’ ‘transmedia audiences,’ ‘transmedia marketing and promotion,’ ‘transmedia paratextuality’ and ‘transmedia archaeology’ too. Then when the word has been stretched to such a degree that it becomes generally used to apply to any multimedia production, its currency diminishes and it begins to be superseded with new terms proposed like ‘post-transmedia’ (Atkinson, 2014:6).

Taking its steer from Google’s Ngram, this opening chapter traces the evolution of the concept of transmedia by tracking how its meaning changed as different terms are appended to it. What each of these conceptualisations of transmedia tells us, and what insight they may contribute to the understanding of film websites will be examined. This media archaeological excavation of the term ‘transmedia’ reveals the developing uses of transmedia forming the conceptual terrain in which this new kind of film promotional material emerged.

**1.2 From Transmedia Intertextuality to Transmedia Paratextuality**

**Transmedia Intertextuality**

One of the earliest uses of the term was appended to the word, intertextuality- transmedia intertextuality.If the word ‘transmedia’ described the end-product relations between platforms, then ‘intertextuality’ sought to explain the mechanics of those relations. Originally conceived by literary scholar, Julia Kristeva to articulate how the meaning of texts are always derived , in part, from their associative ‘dialogue’ with other texts (Alfaro, 1996: 268), the concept of intertextuality was co-opted by media scholar, John Fiske (1987). To explain relations between texts in television culture, Fiske maps the way intertextual relations operate through two vectors: horizontally among TV programmes usually associated with genre, character, or content (1987:109-110). While recognising the contribution of promotion vertically as a form of intertextuality alongside other forms of commentary like journalism and criticism (1987:110). Fiske observes a further tertiary layer of textuality generated by audiences including everything from conversations to fan creations that together make up the ‘intertextual relations’ of a television text (1987:110). For Fiske then, these intertextual relations indicate that media texts can only be fully understood in relation to commercial texts used to promote them (1987:109). It is this model of intertextual relations that Marsha Kinder and others draw on to explain what they regarded as the intensification of relations between content and promotion for branding purposes in the 1980s, which Kinder describes as ‘transmedia intertextuality (1991:3). Writing about Tim Burton’s *Batman* (1989), Eileen Meehan describes the synergistic strategies exploited across computer games, music, print, merchandising and children’s toys as ‘commercial intertexts’(Meehan in Pearson and Uricchio, 1991:49).

During the 1990s the interaction of globalisation, conglomeration and digitalisation reconfigured the possibilities of relations between media platforms, and a feature common to many of the early accounts of transmedia is a keen awareness of how the tectonic shifts in the media industries are reshaping media ecology (Klinger, 1989:5); Jenkins, 2006:11). As a consequence, there is a cartographic sensibility to many accounts at the time which sought to map these new relations and chart these new dynamics in the language of vectors, dimensions, levels, and matrices. Barbara Klinger borrows the term ‘*epiphenomena*’ from Stephen Heath discussing marketing and promotional materials, to explain how *peripheral* texts congregate around a *central* film creating what she calls an ‘*intertextual network’* (Heath in Klinger, 19895). Thomas Austin conceives of the film text as the central ‘hub’ from which dispersing elements emanate via *centrifugal* expansion (2002:30). Whilst satellite promotional texts create what he terms a *centripetal* force which refers the consumer back to the film, as well as directing audiences to an onward journey in the form of consumption of spin-off merchandise and experiences (Austin, 2002:29-30).

In the same year, P. David Marshall observes how the concentration of media ownership had led to the ‘intensification’ of cross-referencing within the media industries’ (in ed. Harries, 2002:69). He observes how the audience ‘learns’ about a product through its associations in other cultural forms’ through an ‘intertextual matrix’ of commodities (Ibid). Indeed, Marshall suggests within this model that film can function as a promotional engine for a portfolio of linked media commodities, with each medium acting as an advertisement for others within the matrix (Marshall in ed. Harries, 2002:76).

Mapping the contours of these new media relations brings with it a reappraisal of the value of marketing and promotion. For Fiske, Klinger and others promotional materials are clearly regarded as ‘secondary’ texts having little intrinsic value in themselves (1987:110; Klinger, 1989:8; Schatz, 1997:75). However, by the turn of the century, when marketing and promotion could account for around a third of a film’s budget in the domestic market for the Hollywood major studios, there is a shift in understanding of relations between film and promotion (Gerbrandt, 2010). Whilst the word, ‘hype’ is often used in a pejorative way to describe extravagant forms of promotion, Thomas Austin reclaims it to draw attention to their increasing significance (2002:65). He concludes that as promotion commands increasingly large budgets, potentially, ‘some such texts and forms may be consumed, in their own right, their ancillary experiences enjoyed as more or less autonomous from the film’ (2002:30). Marshall claims that these new media forms are establishing novel ways for audiences to engage with films, and identifies film websites for the first time providing a ‘mainframe’ for film events online (in ed. Harries, 2002:76). Furthermore, he notes that ‘without being the cultural product, the promotional forms simulate the cultural product’s presence’ – taking the shape of regular narrative content (Ibid.). So evidently the nature of promotion is changing and boundaries between films and their promotion are becoming less clear cut.

**Transmedia Storytelling**

Experiments in transmedia storytelling began to emerge at the turn of the millennium together with a number of articles seeking to articulate what was happening, exemplified in the following three instances. Will Brooker writes about the sites associated with the Warner Brother’s teen TV drama *Dawson’s Creek* (2001). *Capeside.net* takes the form of a civic town site, as if the series’ fictional setting is a real place, complete with banner adverts for local restaurants and even details of the local library’s opening hours, creating a ‘virtual theme park’ (Brooker, 2001: 460). As well as world building for the TV series, a spin-off site invites participation in the fictional world. It features a ‘slam book’ survey that has been completed by the series’ characters, giving insight into their likes and dislikes, and visitors are invited to fill it in too which leads Brooker to reflect ‘we need a new word for this process’ (2001:457). When a simulation of the main character desktop is developed on the series official website, *dawsoncreek.com*, viewers are able to access his emails, his favourite websites, and even have a poke about in his computer’s rubbish bin (Brooker, 2001:499). The site is providing new ways to engage with the characters as well as further plot detail, indicating that these websites are designed as an integrated part of the narrative. Taking his cue from Raymond William’s observations of the experience of watching scheduled television as ‘flow’ in the 1970s, Will Brooker terms these online expansions ‘overflow’ (2001: 458).

Narrative overflow appeared in film websites too. *The Blair Witch Project* site worked in tandem with the film it promoted. The site opened with the same sentence on a black screen, ‘In October of 1994, three student film makers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland while shooting a documentary’. But entering the site the visitor encounters an extensive story world presented as if it is real, including a historical timeline of the Blair Witch myth, together with contemporaneous documentation of the investigation surrounding the disappearance of the students. In an article published the same year, Jay P. Telotte regards the site as part of the film experience too (2001:32-34). Because it contains so much additional material related to the film’s narrative, de facto, he sees the film as part of an integrated package of materials ‘and reflects that this kind of storytelling, points in various ways *away* from the film’s privileged status as a product of the entertainment industry.’(Telotte, 2001: 35). (My italics).

Writing about the sites for Darren Aronofsky’s *Requiem for a Dream* (2000) and Richard Kelly’s *Donnie Darko* (2004) (both designed by Hi ReS!), James Beck notes how both departed from the ‘official film site’ format that had become industry standard by this time. Both sites seek to interpolate viewers into a ‘web experience’ of the film that expands and even alters the perceptions of the characters, offering many of the pleasures conventionally associated with narrative (Beck, 2004: 57). The *Requiem* *for a Dream* site with its fake banner ads and Tappy Tibbons TV programme site (tappytibbons.com) that purports to revolutionise lives, mirrors the character’s experience of descent into the consequences of drug addiction with its glitches and error messages. While the *Donnie Darko* site offers tentative answers to the film’s plot mysteries by, for example, providing extracts from a book titled *The Philosophy of Time Travel* written by a former teacher at the school that is passed around but never seen in the film. Beck concludes that sites like these may be ‘reframed as entertainment commodities themselves’ and suggests that in the future their roles may be reversed and the film become ‘ a kind of promotion leading viewers to the sites’(2004:57-8).

Taken together, what was becoming evident through these pioneering productions and the critical commentaries about them was the web’s potential to contribute more to film and TV than promotion. Film-related websites were making forays into fiction, contributing additional elements for which there was neither time not space in the conventional film and TV formats: fictional world building; providing opportunities to deepen character insight; backstory; plot detail; even simulating character subjectivities and the indications were that these transmedia uses of websites could be every bit as entertaining as the films themselves.

It is Henry Jenkins who adopts the term transmedia to describe changes he observes in the media industries and in an article, published in MIT’s *Technology Review,* he appends the word ‘transmedia’ to ‘storytelling’ (2003). Since then, Jenkins has written extensively about transmedia storytelling, and has become the scholar most closely associated with the concept. In *Convergence Culture*: *where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) Jenkins offers a definition of how transmedia storytelling

‘…unfolds across multiple media platforms*, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole*. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced by a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you do not need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Any given product is a point of entry into the franchise’ (2006:98) (My italics).

From the perspective of this book’s interests in film promotion, the key point to note about Henry Jenkins’ definition of transmedia is the shift away from John Fiske’s conception of media relations in hierarchical terms as primary and secondary media. Rather Jenkins observes a move towards the *levelling* of different media within a transmedia ecology, as each platform contributes to the transmedia story in its own specific way (Ibid.). One of the consequences of this is that the content of one media platform could become the promotion for other media platforms, with the implication that distinctions between promotion and content diminish. A turning point in the relations between films and their sites observed in an article in *Newsweek* about *Blairwitch.com* that in a sense the film became an extension of the website rather than the other way around and how, only afterwards, did audiences realise they had been sold a film (Ansen and Brown, 1999: 51)

In a seminal series of posts on his blog, *Confessions of an Aca Fan*, Jenkins fleshes out a set of transmedia storytelling principles incorporating the observations of scholars, designers and producers who respond to these ideas on the blog as a work-in-progress (2009). These story telling principles differ from the conventional filmic principles of narrative, genre, plot and so forth because they focus more on the affordances of the narrative to enable audiences to engage with these new kinds of fiction and are summarised under the following headings: spreadability versus drillability; continuity versus multiplicity; immersion versus extractability; world building, seriality and performance, which are worth considering in full here to understand what is distinct about transmedia.

The first principles are *spreadability* versus *drillability* that refer to different vectors of audience engagement. The former refers, for example, to ways in which social media enable audiences to participate in the circulation of content through the use of platform affordances; while the latter term coined by Jason Mittell points to the ways in which transmedia storytelling can enable audiences to delve further into a fiction. The principle of *continuity* refers to the way different media components need to cohere seamlessly in a plausible way across platforms, as exemplified by the use of precisely the same opening to both the film and the site’s landing page for the *Blair Witch Project*. While *multiplicity* points to ways transmedia storytelling can allow different character points of view can be represented – a principle could be extended to audience productions and other forms of expression too.

*Immersion* refers to the way transmedia storytelling enables audiences to enter into the fictional world (Jenkins, 2009c) whereas *extractabilit*y recognises how audiences may take elements such as toy figures and use them as resources in their own lives (Jenkins, 2009c) For example, social media architectures are designed to enable resources to be shared: sites built on platforms like *Tumblr* can be ‘reblogged’ into an individual’s own site. While the *world building* principle refers to one of the main ways in which audiences engage with fictional scenarios depicted in narrative (Ibid). This kind of storytelling capitalises on audiences’ curiosity to learn more about narrative worlds, and even interacting with them as they would with real world spaces and places (Ibid).

The fifth principle, s*eriality* refers to the way in which a narrative may be delivered in component parts over time or across discreet media platforms. In the definition cited above from *Convergence Culture* in 2006, Jenkins suggests that potentially any franchise component could act as an entryway into a production, and a transmedia production could be consumed in any order (Ibid.) However, in subsequent writings he reflects that chronology is more tenacious than he originally supposed, as can be seen in the frequent use of timelines and other orientation devices to provide temporal order to a fiction. The sixth principle is *subjectivity* in which transmedia narratives expand aspects of the fictional world from different characters perspectives. And the final principle is *performance* which recognises how, increasingly, producers take into consideration how audiences might contribute, either through invited performances in the form of competitions, or unauthorised forms of transmedia such as fan vids (Ibid.). By the end of this roster of principles, Jenkins acknowledges that this list is neither definitive nor set in stone, but he offers it up as a contribution to the understanding of emerging transmedial aesthetic formations (Ibid.). Later this series of principles is referred to as an established set of ‘logics’ although there are some discernible developments in his conception of transmedia in subsequent blog posts. Most notably, that whilst narrative forms one of the basic ingredients of transmedia, there is a recognition that elements other than narrative can be reconstituted into ‘experiences’ including games and spectacles (Ibid.).

Over time the definition of transmedia is expanded to accommodate its evolutions. In Jenkins’ first iteration of the transmedia principles, he draws a distinction between branding and transmedia, dismissing the former, and valorising the latter as *bona fide* form of transmedia (Jenkins, 2011). However, this distinction is dissolved by the increasing hybridisation of promotion and content evident in so many of the film websites under consideration in this book that are ostensibly forms of promotion, but also contribute narrative content to the whole. More recently books published in the field such as the *Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies* ( Freeman and Gambarato, 2019) and *Global Convergence Cultures: Transmedia Earth* (Freeman and Proctor, 2018) provide wide ranging compendiums of practice which confirm that transmedia is no longer just a storytelling phenomenon but has become the state of things in the contemporary media ecology. Inevitably perhaps, the consequence of this expanding remit for the concept of transmedia is a creeping genericization, and the term now serves as a descriptor for all new forms of media artefacts and merchandising activities. However from the point of view of this book’s interests, these transmedia storytelling logics have value as they provide the one of the foundation blocks to enable an explanation of development of transmedia marketing and promotion.

## **Transmedia Practices**

In terms of nomenclature, ‘cross-media’ tended to have more traction outside the United States than ‘transmedia.’ When Australian academic and producer Christy Dena presented a paper at the European Information Systems Technologies event in the Netherlands in 2004, she used the term cross-media but later adopted transmedia in her PhD which was the first doctorate awarded in the field (Dena, 2004). The Italian transmedia producer and scholar Max Giovagnoli claims to have written the first book in Europe on cross-media in 2005. Although by the time he published again, his book was titled *Transmedia Storytelling: Imagery, Shapes and Techniques* (2011). For Estonian scholar, Indrek Ibrus and the Spanish scholar Carlos A. Scolari who sought to broaden the discussion of transmedia outside North America, cross-media remains their preferred term (2012:8). Although Scolari fears the use of different terms is indicative of ‘conceptual chaos’ (2009:586). But while the conceptual terrain is evidently crowded, it would also be true to say that there is considerable consensus around the practices themselves within the context of film marketing and promotion, and debate about the naming of things is a barometer of the increasing relevance of this concept. However when the Producer’s Guild of America (PGA) gives recognition to these practices in 2010 with the new credit ‘transmedia producer’, then the transmedia begins to prevail over other ‘candidate’ terms (Giovagnoli, 2011:12-13).

The PGA defines transmedia practices in the following way:

‘A transmedia narrative project or franchise must consist of three (or more) narrative storylines existing within the same fictional universe on any of the following platforms: Film, television, short film, broadband, publishing, comics, animation, mobile, special venues, DVD/Blu-ray/CD-ROM, *Narrative Commercial and marketing rollouts*, and other technologies that may or may not currently exist’ (Producers Guild, 2017) (My italics).

From this book’s perspective, what is particularly interesting about this definition is that it makes no distinction between film and TV storytelling practices and what it terms ‘narrative commercial and marketing rollouts’ which give credence to the creative contributions of promotional materials.

Not all transmedia practices takes the form of narrative either. For example, Dena has pointed to the variety of transmedia practices across distinct environments from Peter Greenaway VJ-ing and remixing his *Tulse Luper* *Suitcases* in 2005 (2009:150) to ARGs (Alterative Reality Games) like *I Love Bees,* designed to promote the computer game, *Halo 2* in 2004 (2009:106). As a consequence, rather than confine the term to its storytelling function, a more medium-agnostic vocabulary is needed and Dena’s preferred term is *transmedia practices* which encompasses the entire breadth of activities (Dena, 2009:16).

Dena identifies two distinct forms of transmedia practice: transmedia works designed around relations between them which may be by different authors on different platforms, such as David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks* which consisted of two television series, a feature film and three books, which she terms ’*inter*compositional’ (Ibid.); The second form are transmedia works that are designed transmedially from the start such as the promotional campaign, *Flynn Lives* for *TRON: Legacy* (Kosinski, 2010) incorporating live events, the web and social media which Dena terms ‘*intra*compositional’ (2009:97). This is a distinction that is closely related to earlier conceptions of intertextuality, in so far as intracompositional transmedia are works in themselves, dependent on each other, like Fiske’s ‘vertical’ forms of textuality (1987:110), while intercompositional transmedia is characterised by relations between works, much like Fiske’s ‘horizontal’ forms of intertextuality (Fiske, 1987:109-110).

A similar distinction is made by transmedia marketing practitioner Andrea Phillips who frames these differences in geographical terms between ‘west coast transmedia’ and ‘east coast transmedia’ (2012:13). She characterises west coast transmedia as the practices that have developed in and around the Hollywood film industry including ‘big pieces of media’ such as feature films, video games and other iterations of high-end commercial franchise film (Ibid.) While east coast transmedia tend to be more focused around the web and interactivity and more often associated with independent film (2012:14). Typically, the projects she describes are more event-orientated, running for limited time periods (Ibid.) But whereas west coast transmedia are more loosely connected and so are designed to be experienced independently, east coast transmedia are more closely integrated and so, in order to understand, audiences need to engage with the whole piece to comprehend the narrative (Ibid).

Dena’s conception of transmedia practices diverges from Jenkins and Fiske because their consideration of transmedia productions is confined to ‘structural relations’ and ‘end-product traits’ (2009:107). This perspective does not recognise the new forms of project management, new roles and new tools that have had to be developed to manage transmedia productions ( Dena, 2009:99). For example, ‘world guides’ or ‘universe bibles’ have become central to ensuring continuity when projects are designed across different media platforms (Dena, 2009:141; Gomez, 2018:211; Pratten, 2018: 222). New production roles have become necessary to manage projects in operation, maintain continuity, creative vision and reduce inconsistencies, which are variously referred to as ‘transmedia czar’ (Alexander in Dena, 2009:129), or ‘universe steward’ (Gomez in Dena, 2009). While jobs like ‘Games Master’ have emerged to manage social media engagements (2009:228). As a result of all these developments in transmedia production it becomes evident that design processes are not just facilitators, but actually play a part in ‘authoring’ transmedia experiences and so Dena advocates a ‘practice-orientated’ approach to comprehend the implications for transmedia production (2009:9-10).

During this time, an abundance of transmedia primers have been published including manuals on transmedia marketing and promotion (Dowd, 2015; Giovagnoli, 2011 and 2017; Phillips, 2012; Pratten, 2011(2015); Zeiser, 2015; and www.simonstaffans.com). But there has been less critical commentary on transmedia marketing and promotion which is perhaps indicative of a production culture that tends to favour awards, honours, and prizes as a mode of appraisal rather than critical writings which are the conventional mode of appraisal in film culture - a point that will be explored in more detail in chapter 3. However in *Promotional Screen Industries*, Paul Grainge and Catherine Johnson’s account of the Lionsgate campaign for *The Hunger Games* is notable in this regard, because it discussed the distribution company’s global marketing network and the designers of the award-winning promotional campaign for *The Hunger Games* franchise, but Watson Design Group were not even named in their account. More recently pioneers in the field such as Jeff Gomez from *Starlight Runners* and Robert Pratten, founder of *Transmedia Storytellers*, have begun to write accounts of their company’s working practices which provide some insight into the production cultures in which transmedia paratexts are forged but such practices remain ‘rarely described’ (Gomez, 2018:207).

It has been argued that a preoccupation with production practices, however, can be at the expense of understanding how transmedia productions are consumed (Pratten, 2015:2) and a pivot towards a more audience-orientated approach to design can be seen in more recent writings about transmedia practice. In the first person, Dena describes her experience of Amazon’s *The Man in the High Castle* Resistance radio campaign’ in a blog post (2017). In more recent writings, both Gomez and Dena frame audience motivations to participate in transmedia productions in terms of psychoanalytic ‘drives’ (Dena, 2017; Gomez, 2018:209). A schema of drives is identified that motivate people to engage with content marketing: from the ‘nostalgia drive’ when drawn into something they have positive memories of; to the ‘novelty drive’ experiencing something rarely and uniquely available and the novelty of enjoying a task with others which we will see mobilised in the *TRON: Legacy* promotional campaign discussed in chapter 6 (Dena, 2017). In this sense, an audience-centred approach to practice is critical because as Dena points out, ‘the most obvious connection between all artforms is who is experiencing our work’ (2017:52).

**Transmedia Audiences**

The next development the concept of transmedia is appended to audiences. In the past the broadcast model of one-to-many meant that the movement of media marketing content was, for the most part, determined by its producers, and was predominantly distributive (Jenkins et al. 2013:12). But with second generation web affordances, sometimes referred to as Web 2.0, this model has been superseded by a more circulatory model of many-to-many participation in which audience choices, investments and actions play a greater role in determining what is valued in media culture (Ibid.). This shift is epitomised by the concept of co-creation and its evolution. To illustrate, in *Convergence Culture* published in 2006 Henry Jenkins defines co-creation as the collaboration of media producers from different platforms (107). But when *Spreadable Media* is published several years later, co-creation is redefined as a collaboration between producers and audiences which is indicative of a gravitation towards a more participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2013:182).

Second generation web technologies have played their part in reconfiguring media relations between producers and audiences too by designing active engagement into their architecture in different ways: from *YouTube* ‘embed’ codes, to *Facebook*’s ‘open graph’ and *Tumblr*’s ‘reblog’ and tweets on *X* (formally *Twitter*) (Jenkins et al., 2013:12). One of the consequences of this is that audiences cannot be regarded as the anonymous, undifferentiated endpoint to the production process, but rather as active and independent agents who participate in their media experiences using ‘content’ in their own ways, for their own ends (Jenkins et al., 2013:49). In short then, audiences’ interests have become the engine that propels the transmedia economy. For example, by so doing, audiences may become advocates for a brand or franchise, aligning themselves with the interests of the producers or audiences may form temporary alliances with content creators, coalescing around a franchise, even though they are neither employed by, nor regulated by those content producers. Indeed the ‘producer,’ the ‘advertiser’ and the ‘audience’ may not only collaborate but, at times, the distinctions between them become distinctly blurred too (Jenkins, 2013:7).

Fan scholars are less convinced by the proposition that Web 2.0 affordances have prompted a radical shift in audience behaviours. Matt Hills cautions against this technologically determinist tendency to reconceptualise audiences, arguing it disregards the long history of pre-internet fan practices and productions such as fan clubs and home-produced fanzines (2013:131-3). Fans participate for their own reasons; Hills argues and questions the assumption that audience practices can be ‘read’ from the technology (2013:150). More productively it is suggested that the kinds of reception practices previously attributed to fan audiences have now become everyday practices for all audiences, and Hills advocates looking at what audiences actually *do* instead (Ibid.). Conversely, Hills is sceptical of ‘narratives of Web 2.0 democratisation’ that tend to conflate all audience practices into one oh-be-joyful category of participation but fail to recognise distinctions among fan practices that fans themselves understand (Ibid). Here, Hills is in accord with Jenkins in concluding that diverse kinds of economies operate within fandom. He suggests that these may be based on notions of community, appraisal, and such like, but he recognises that it is through these economies that the tensions between so-called ‘media democratisation’ and fan practices are managed (Ibid.: Jenkins et al., 2013:92-3).

In her work on media conventions (known as ‘cons’), Erin Hana illustrates one setting in which fan audiences are distinctly ‘managed’ by the industry. At 2011 WonderCon, Anaheim, California, attendees are treated to screenings of trailers, film clips and promotional activations, together with live in-person panel presentations from the film makers and cast as part of film promotion campaigns. These experiences are designed to be ‘exclusive’ to convention attendees, often prefaced with announcements that claim, ‘Only at Comic-Con’ will audiences be able to see these promotions. But Hana argues such experiences are created through ‘the construction of exclusivity and its subsequent undoing’ (2019:4). In reality, this exclusivity is undone by the ‘live’ streaming of events online and attendees are encouraged to share their experiences as widely as possible on social media. The experience of exclusivity is designed to recruit fans into the service of the campaign because the real value of the event lies in their shares, likes, tags and posts on social media to spread the word.

While Hills’ conception of transmedia audiences is informed by his work on fandom and framed in terms of audience activity, Derek Johnson contends that notions of co-creation are idealistic and he is not alone (2013:199). Emanuelle Wessels subscribes to this view, describing how the Hollywood studio, Paramount Pictures, invited participants to enter a competition to make their own trailers for Matt Reeves’ *Cloverfield* (2008) and in so doing ceded their intellectual property rights to the studio (Wessels, 2011:78). Drawing on the Italian Marxist, Maurizio Lazzarato’s definition of ‘immaterial labour,’ Wessels argues that audience activity produces the ‘cultural content’ of trailers they make but instances like this show how their work goes unrecognised within a digital economy (2011:70-1). As a result, she concludes that participation in this competition is a form of ‘unpaid labour’ and constitutes the underbelly of a participatory culture (Wessels, 2011:70). While she recognises audiences are more or less aware of this, and engage in these labours of their own free will, the fact remains that participants contribute to the promotion of the film without remuneration or acknowledgement and this is both an inauspicious consequence of media convergence, and a feature of transmedia audience-hood (2011:81-2).

The framing of audience activity as a form of ‘labour’ has been taken up by several writers, (Andrejevic, 2009; Fuchs,2012; and Hesmondhalgh,2010) but Derek Johnson regards this audience labour within media franchises as a kind of ‘industrial occupation’ (2013b:198-199). He argues this occupation takes two forms: firstly, audiences participate without remuneration within and for the benefit of the media industries; but secondly, those industries increasingly occupy spaces ostensibly designed for audiences in online media environments as we shall see in chapter 6 that examines the proprietorial site for audiences in the franchises chat forum for *TRON: Legacy* (2010) (2013b: 199). In sum, Johnson questions what it means to be an ‘enfranchised’ audience and draws attention to the political contradictions involved in audience participation in such cultural productions (2013b: 199-201).

While these discussions circulate about audiences, fan studies tend not to frame fan productivity in these terms (Stanfill and Condis, 2014:2). Clearly from the perspective of a monetary economy, online fans are open to these kinds of exploitation by the industry but for Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis a more productive way of thinking about fandom is to focus on the alternative ‘economies’ that come into operation to understand the motivation to participate (2014:5). In common with other fan scholars, Jenkins and Hills assert that value may take other forms such as the pleasure of participation, or a sense of community, and that fan work is at its most powerful in producing and maintaining ties within a fan culture (Ibid.).

Productivity may be understood in material terms to be the ‘giving and receiving’ of things like fiction, vids, or art works, conceived within the notion of a ‘gift economy’ (Turk, 2014:1). However, Tisha Turk suggests that most fan ‘labour’ does not entail the production of anything so creative or elaborate as art works, and in practice takes the shape of more mundane but nevertheless valuable kinds of behind-the-scenes labour such as curating wikis, writing recommendations, running awards, and populating databases (2014:3). However Turk recognises that not all kinds of audience labour are appreciated or even recognised as such and the social media activity described by Hana is hardly regarded as productivity at all (2014:2).

Perhaps the most pertinent example of the tension between audience participation and audience management can be seen in the work of Colin Harvey on transmedia audiences of fantasy and science fiction. He suggests that central to the operation of any transmedia production are its audiences’ memory which enables connections to be drawn between its different components. In short, Harvey writes, ‘transmedia storytelling is all about memory’ operating along temporal vectors, vertically back into the past, recalling how past versions have been transformed into present iterations through textual strategies of reference, allusion, or homage kinds of vertical memory (2015: 38). Memory operates horizontally too enabling connections to be drawn between elements of a transmedia artefact (Harvey, 2015:93). However, Harvey argues that while memories are the ‘soft’ connecting practices within a transmedia production, these memories are always supervised by ‘hard’ practices in the form of legal frameworks such as intellectual property, copyright law and licensing arrangements. (2015:33).

Harvey argues that these legal frameworks literally determine what can be remembered and what can be forgotten and thereby define connections between elements of a transmedia artefact and relationships with audiences. What becomes clear is that while transmedia practices may depend on audience memory for their operation, relations between artefacts and with their audiences are proscribed by law (Harvey, 2015:190). Relations between transmedia audiences and producers have clearly come a long way since the UK *Potter Wars* and the *Defence against the Dark Arts* in the US when Warner Brothers studio used the law to take down fan sites by sending out legally framed letters informing fans their practices were in breach of copyright (Murray, 2010:15). However, whilst the *tone* may have changed, the *terms* of engagement have largely not and relations remain strictly brokered by law as we will see in co-created storytelling by fans and producers in the promotional campaign for *TRON: Legacy* discussed in chapter 6.

**Post-Transmedia?**

It has been suggested that while the prevailing discourse in which to understand developments in cinema in recent years is transmedia, more recent media interfaces have put into question this term as a frame of reference (Atkinson, 2014a:6). Sarah Atkinson suggests that smart phone and tablet interfaces reduce media specificity to a matter of just ‘iconic difference’ as various media are brought together on one screen (Ibid.). In the light of this, Atkinson asserts that the launch of Apple’s iPad in 2010 marks a transitional moment for the concept of transmedia (2014a: xii). She suggests that this marks a point when there is a move away from ‘mono-specific forms’ with ‘media-specific boundaries’ and that if these boundaries disintegrate, it could be argued that we are entering a ‘post-transmedia, post-platform-specific and platform-agnostic age’ (Atkinson, 2014a:6).

In some respects, this assertion is a natural conclusion to draw from a semiotic reading of the iPad interface, but it raises questions about how we understand media technologies. Drawing on the work of Lisa Gitelman, Henry Jenkins suggests that media are best understood on two separate but parallel, levels (2006:13). First, a medium can be regarded as a technology that enables communication but secondly, it can be understood as a set of protocol and practices that have developed around this technology (Jenkins, 2006:13-14). In other words, there is a distinction between media as delivery system technologies, and media as cultural systems (Ibid.). Jenkins makes the point that while media delivery systems may change, cultural understanding of media is remarkably persistent - ‘once a medium establishes itself as satisfying some human demand, it continues to function within the larger system of communication options’ - and media are still produced and experienced as distinct media platforms (Jenkins, 2006:14-15). What is questionable about this proposition of post-transmedia then is that media change cannot be reduced to technological change as this perspective overlooks the ‘cultural’ level of media experience (Ibid.), so it is debatable whether this is ‘post-transmedia.’ Like Alan Turing’s ‘universal machine,’ the iPad apes diverse media technologies, as well as their aesthetics, and that makes the iPad a *multiple* media device, rather than a *merged* media device. Different media interfaces still function distinctly from one another and the protocols of engagement are still distinct so transmediality is still very much, in evidence.

So, perhaps, rather than being post-transmedia, it might be more accurate to suggest that transmedia is moving into its next phase, in which greater consideration may be given by audiences to it. From this perspective, Atkinson’s work is instructive because it examines the ways in which cinema is developing and engaging audiences beyond the traditional parameters of screen (to paraphrase the book’s title). More specifically, she embarks on the examination of film websites and suggests that while cinema has always used other media to market itself, today digital technologies and their social practices have evolved into ‘integrated narrative extensions’ (2014a:15). Atkinson identifies some of the strategies by which promotional websites extend films narrative from alternative reality games (ARGS) to the in-world faux corporate website of the television series, *The Office* that closely emulates official organisational websites, yet gives minimal indication of the site’s fictional status (2014a:2021) What is evident is that the scope and scale of these sites has developed to such an extent that what were once regarded as ancillary media have become an integral part of the media experience.

While some writers make a distinction between transmedia storytelling and promotion practices (Jenkins, 2006; Mittell, 2012-13, Dinehart, 2010; Phillips, 2011). What is interesting in the work of more recent scholars, such as Ibrus and Scolari (2012), Atkinson (2014) and Harvey (2015), is that they do not make distinctions between *bona fide* transmedia narrative content (and therefore worthy of consideration) and forms of transmedia developed for promotional purposes, (and therefore, by inference, *not* worthy of consideration) (2012; 2014). For Harvey, film websites can be understood as an element of the transmedia production if they contribute to the film’s narrative, but advertising, licensed characters and toys do not and so he regards them as ‘affordances’ although he recognises they still play a part, if configured to give access to the story world in some way (Harvey, 2015:186). Atkinson argues that promotion and advertising have always been at the forefront, driving new cinematic forms, aesthetics, and audience engagement (2014a). To illustrate this fact, she points to notable promotional initiatives such as *The Random Adventures of Brandon Generator* (2012), an interactive story created to showcase the capabilities of the emergent HTML5 and Microsoft Explorer 7, as well as *The Inside* Trilogy (2012-3) advertising campaign created by Intel and Toshiba as evidence (2014a:4). From the perspective of these writers, promotion can be regarded as a kind of transmedia and film websites are a hybrid of storytelling and promotion. So, it is to the next iteration of transmedia, appended to promotion that this chapter now turns.

**Transmedia Paratextuality**

The next form of the concept of transmedia is appended to promotion bringing the concept more proximate to the way in which it will be considered in this book. In *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* (2004), Lisa Kernan charts the history of film trailers and describes their function in relation to the film’s they promote: delineating a film’s genre; celebrating its stars; and providing a sense of its fictional world*.* Kernan argues that the promotional trailers also shape and seek to control the reception of the film by its audience and the press by providing some of the first ideas and meanings of the film, together with highlighting its main pleasures for their audience. Given this transmedia proximity, relations between film and its marketing and promotion are not always clearly distinguishable and Kernan describes them as ‘cinematic promotions of narrative and narrativization of promotion’ (2004:2). These observations of the elision of film and its promotion, push the definition of what constitutes the film experience beyond the film’s closing credits and provide a steer to understanding newer forms of promotion like film websites.

Finola Kerrigan investigates film marketing practices from the perspective of the creative industries and her starting point for defining the practice of film marketing is the American Marketing Association’s (AMA) definition of marketing: ‘creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large’ (AMA in Kerrigan, 2010:4). What is notable about Kerrigan’s definition is its alignment with Colin Harvey’s definition of transmedia artefacts, describing film marketing as a relational set of practices, which begin with the conception of the film and continue through various iterations of consumption from cinema release to home viewing formats (Ibid.). Like Kernan, Kerrigan describes how film marketing is designed to generate value for producers and consumers and she recognises how web-based film marketing has evolved from purely informational sites to narrative-based campaigns with increasingly blurred lines between production and consumption (2010:201-202). By this definition then, Kerrigan, too, contends that film marketing warrants closer consideration. (2010:5).

Discussing the first online trailers in the 1990s, Keith Johnston reflects how film promotion has always been a protean form that adapts to different contexts from TV to home video formats, and over the last twenty years, trailers have been available to view on mobile phones, tablet devices and the internet too (2008:145). These migrations to different platforms have inevitably prompted the adaptation of formats and aesthetics as well as forms of engagement for its audiences (Johnson, 2008:146). For example, when trailers had to be adapted for viewing online in the 1990s, they were inserted into pop-up windows for desk-top viewing (2008:151).

As trailers were now no longer only scheduled as previews of forthcoming films in theatrical settings, this form of promotion was freed from its connection to theatrical settings and now could be viewed at any time, repeatedly and subjected to the same scrutiny as the film they promoted (2008:152) This changed the status of the trailer whose very name indicated its historical connection to the film it promoted but now trailers could be consumed as media artefacts in their own right. In a monographpublished the following year*,* Johnson reiterates the observation made by Lisa Kernan before him about the dearth of scholarly attention to film marketing (2009:3). The reason for this is that marketing materials have mostly been regarded as functional, justified by box office results, without creative attribution, and with no direct economic value. The consequence for promotional forms has been ephemerality (Johnson, 2008:2).

Yet while film promotion has always been inherently ephemeral, its commercial value increases. In 2021 442 films were released in the UK and the Republic of Ireland for a week or more which although less than the average number of releases seen between 2012-2019 of more than 700, still equates to more than 8 film releases a week (BFI Yearbook 2021). These figures illustrate that competition for audiences is fierce and this has led to the intensification of film marketing and promotion. Studies in the field have noted what has been observed in the trade press over recent decades (McClintock, 2014; Rainey, 2016: Londesbrough, 2018). In *Show Sold Separately,* Jonathan Gray observes that film marketing budgets had risen to between a third and two thirds of production budgets by 2008, and how this proportion becomes exponentially greater for franchise movies. (2010:7-8). In *Film Marketing into the Twenty First Century*, Mingant, Tirtaine and Augros, report that in 2012 the marketing costs for *Skyfall* (Sam Mendes) matched its production costs, and still relied heavily on external tie-in publicity (2015:7). Clearly this has become a standard metric for event films as evidenced by *Barbie* (Greta Gerwig), one of the highest profile films of 2023, where marketing costs matched and then exceeded the film’s production budget (Rubin, 2023). In the light of such figures, Jonathan Gray asks, if promotion constitutes such an important part of a film’s budget, shouldn’t it be taken more seriously? (2010:71).

To do precisely this, Jonathan Gray draws on the work of the literary scholar Gerard Genette who uses of the term ‘paratext’ to describe the elements that orbit around a printed book and brings into existence the next iteration of transmedia (2010:6). Genette considers the material features of a book’s format such as its front cover design and type setting, as well as textual features such as dedications, prefaces, and epigraphs. He argues that these components are integral to the meaning of a book because they condition the reader’s experience, by providing ‘an airlock’ that helps the reader pass from one [fictional] world to another (Genette, 1997:408). From this survey of the components of the book, Genette that paratexts are declarative by nature as they exist to both ‘present’ -that is to say announce the text’s existence - and make a text ‘present’ in the world and by definition, therefore paratexts are inherently transmedial (1997:1). Genette concludes paratexts are worthy of greater consideration and indeed recognition because they shape the readers’ experience of the text and he points to the possibility of extending paratextual investigation beyond literature to other art forms such as film (1997:407).

The concept of the paratext was adopted by Lisa Kernan in her study of film trailers in 2004, while Jonathan Gray uses the concept to examine media marketing and promotion which marks a significant point in the development of the study of these commercial artefacts (2010:25). Drawing on literary theory to analyse artefacts widely regarded as ephemeral commercial materials, and referring to them as ‘texts’ clearly signals what Gray calls for, that promotional paratexts should be regarded as cultural objects that are worthy of consideration and film paratexts provide ‘thresholds’ that enable audiences to make sense of the experience (2010:26). The role of the ‘paratextual surround,’ in all its different forms from posters and trailers to tie-in toys and websites is to generate a ‘flow’ of meanings around the media text that enables audiences to begin the process of making sense of a film (2010:41). In this way meaning is created through the transmedial linking of one text to another - observations that accord with earlier definitions of transmedia proposed by Klinger (1989) and Kinder (1991) and illustrating how paratextuality is inherently intertextual (2010:31).

Paratexts take different roles at different points in the film experience. There are ‘entryway’ marketing texts encountered before viewing, ‘in-media-res’ paratexts encountered during the course of interactions with a media text, as well as ‘post-viewing’ paratexts such as social media-based ‘interpretive communities’(Gray, 2010:35). However paratexts are not just ports of entry. They can undertake narrative functions by providing anticipatory clues of future texts, narrative continuity with previous texts, as well as contributing supplementary material about film narrative universes (2010:43). Gray’s cartography of paratextual activity articulates what had not really been recognised until this time - the role of paratexts in defining how a text is meaningful for its audiences and the wider culture (2010:26). The concept of paratextuality adds an important dimension to this consideration of film websites because it points to the ways promotion is extending its remit into the areas formally known as ‘content’ and prompts further inquiry into exactly what these websites are doing. Gray reflects that this may come to expand the definition of what ‘counts’ as screen culture (Gray, 2010:4; Grainge, 2012:10).

Gray is not alone in holding this view. What is interesting about Paul Grainge and Catherine Johnson’s book *Promotional Screen Industries* (2015) is that it moves away from a traditional text-based approach to film studies and takes a more industry-commercial approach to looking at the infrastructure of promotion. Writing about the international network of agencies for *The Hunger Games* film series, coordinated by Lionsgate for the promotional campaign, Grainge and Johnson conclude that film marketing and promotion have long been neglected by film studies. They regard this an illustration of a chronic prejudice that has dogged scholarship in the field that has historically made a distinction between ‘commercial’ and ‘creative’ content and been dismissive of the former and lauded the latter ( 2015:4). They advocate that the aesthetic and affective pleasures for audiences of these elaborate promotions should be factored into a discussion of what cinema is today (Ibid).

Film sites are increasingly regarded as part of the ambit of contemporary cinema (Atkinson, 2014:15). What were previously dismissed as commercial texts, Sarah Atkinson argues can operate as ‘integrated’ narrative extensions that pervade and affect the psychic spaces of the audience’ and advocates these new filmic objects are an ‘unparalleled cultural form’ and worthy of greater attention. (2014:15-17; 2014a:17). So, it is not surprising that interest in online promotion has grown with a number of different approaches to mapping different forms it takes. Sergio Jesus Villen Higueras and Francisco Javier Ruiz del Olmo undertook a nationwide survey of Spanish Cinema in 2017 and assembled a typology of the different forms film sites take from directors sites to distributors sites to character-led sites and community-building sites (2018)[[1]](#footnote-1). While, given the adjectival status of the concept of the transmedia paratext, Matt Hills developed a typological framework based on what film websites and other paratextual forms do. He identifies four main functions they fulfil: informational; diegetic; auratic; and commercial but what distinguished his typology is that it was not confined to production instigated sites but also encompasses audience-led paratexts (2018 :290-1). Most pertinent to the interests of this book in tracing the development of online film promotion, Atkinson starts to develop a ‘genealogy’ of film website by identifying a textual grammar of film website narrative styles and techniques, together with a typology of predominant styles that includes dramatic; expositional; diegetic characteristics; and diegetic functions (2014:23; 26: 33). Through these different mappings, the contours of this new form come into focus.

In contrast to these textual approaches to paratexts which recognise their role in the creation of meaning around a film, others have focused on the core commercial *raison d’etre* of promotion. At a time when franchising has become the pre-eminent form of production in the Hollywood film industry and brands are central to both its formation and operation, Melissa Aronczyk draws parallels between brands and paratexts in that they both are concerned with making meaning for the products they promote (2017:111). However, she goes on to say that while brands clearly use transmedia storytelling to engage and sustain engagement with audiences, from a brand perspective, she argues, ‘The (real) value of the brand derives from the syntax, not the semantics’(Aronczyk, 2017:113). In other words, in a promotional culture that circulates around brand identities, it is the relationship between the elements that matter, not the elements themselves (Ibid). So, in practice, the individual films texts themselves (the content) can be switched in and out, with the result that the texts become subordinate to paratext (Ibid.). From the point of view of the brand, the conventional understanding of a hierarchical relationship between the film and its promotion is inverted as brands deploy film text to make meaning for themselves as we will see in chapter 5’s discussion of the producer/distributor *A24* and its social media horror promotion campaigns in Twitter (Ibid.)

So, the concept of transmedia paratextuality has been framed in a number of different ways: the meaning it generates, the contribution it can make to storytelling in film, their commercial function within brands, their value to audience engagement and participation, as well as their becoming the locus for cultural-political struggles which, taken together, all attests to their increasing significance in contemporary media culture. This then provokes further questions about what exactly a film is today? where does it start? and where does it end? what gets to be valued? and what is not? From this book’s perspective seeking to trace the development of transmedia websites, the challenge remains understanding the development of a transmedia artefact that continues to be widely regarded as a commercial text, but of little value and therefore ephemeral.

**1.3 The Historical ‘turn’ – Transmedia Histories and Archaeologies**

Much of what has been written about transmedia has been concerned with what was new and distinctive about the concept and its practice, exemplified by Henry Jenkin’s blog post, ‘I have seen the Futures of Entertainment and it works!’ (2008). The writer most closely associated with the concept of transmedia, declared transmedia storytelling to be a ‘*new* aesthetic’ (Jenkins, 2006:20-1). Likewise, Carlos Scolari asserts that ‘transmedia storytelling proposes a *new* narrative model’ (2009:586). While ‘how to’ manuals on transmedia practice regard transmedia as ‘the hot *new* thing’ (Phillips, 2012:5; Giovagnoli, 2011:16). However, more recently there has been a growing recognition of the need to situate transmedia historically as well in order to better comprehend what is going on. Jenkins has since reflected that his preoccupation in earlier writings with what was new about transmedia did not mean he advocated a ‘total break with the past,’ and he points to the continuity of transmedia storytelling with similar practices in the past (2017).

While transmediation is widely regarded as the consequence of recent economic and technological change and Roberta Pearson warns of the dangers of this:

‘Conceiving of transmedia storytelling as arising solely from present conditions of media, industrial and technological convergence, risks misunderstanding the phenomenon as being fully dependent on those conditions, rather than pre-existing them.’ (Pearson in Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman, 2014: vii)

So, historicising the concept of transmedia to comprehend what is happening in the present is illuminating. Transmedia Designer, Stephen Dinehart revisits Wagner’s 1895 concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – a ‘total artwork’ - to understand the aspirations of 360-degree transmedia entertainment today (2010). Christy Dena draws on the writings of one of the founders of the 1960s Fluxus movement, Dick Higgins, who uses the term ‘intermedia’ to understand the challenges that transmedia productions have integrating different platforms into a single work, when some platforms are perceived as art and others are not (2010).

The most frequent approach to constructing a historical perspective is by drawing analogies with past art forms, to understand the present. Angela Ndalianis likens contemporary transmedia aesthetics to those of the 17thcentury (2005:5). Despite quite different social and technological conditions, through a reading of George Lucas’s *Star Wars* (1977), she asserts that there are similarities between Baroque art and 21st-century entertainment which she terms ‘neo baroque’ (Ibid.). She suggests the film series’ spectacle can be understood as a baroque sensibility dependent on audience memory for its affect because as the film series progresses, it relies on an audience capable of making sense of films riddled with intertextual references and allusions to make sense of it all (2005:25-6). As a historiographic approach, Ndalianis finds that historic parallels provide insight into the significance of these present-day cultural objects (2005:6).

Another strategy deployed in the understanding of the history of transmedia is through a consideration of contemporary transmedia’s predecessors. Fabrice Lyczba’s work on marketing and exhibition practices in Hollywood in the 1920s is interesting in this regard (2012). What became known as ‘ballyhoo’ consisted of marketing stunts and staged events designed to extend the film’s diegetic space into the audiences’ world, and cultivate audiences for upcoming theatrical film releases (2012). Lyczba argues that this playful mode of spectatorship which he calls a ‘cinema of interactions,’ after Gunning’s notion of the ‘cinema of attractions,’ is at once congruent with the film’s story world, but not based on the film’s narrative at the same time, and this is a form of engagement that can be seen once again, in transmedia film websites today (Lyczba, 2012).

It is pertinent to remember however that historiography is shaped by the historical records available and Derek Johnson recognises how the industrialisation of transmedia practices imposed legal frameworks of ownership which led to specific kinds of historical studies emerging. Histories that focus on characters such as *The* *Green Hornet* and *The Lone Ranger* (Santo, 2006, Santo, 2015), *The Shadow* detective (Fast and Örnebring,2017) as well as *Hopalong Cassidy* (Kackman, 2008) have been undertaken for the simple reason that characters which traverse media platforms are subject to trademark laws and licensing agreements (Johnson,2013a). Johnson goes on to argues that characters like *Batman* developed as a result of the media conglomerations of the 1980s and 90s, and their synergistic production cultures, as well as through emerging digital technologies (Ibid.). He concludes that this demonstrates how transmedia characters evolve within a network of legal, economic, and technological determinants (Ibid).

The parallel histories approach is taken up by Matthew Freeman who proposes that transmedia practices today bear many of the hallmarks of the work of earlier 20th-century figures such as L. Frank Baum and Walt Disney (Freeman 2014a, 2014b, Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman, 2014). He demonstrates how early 20th-century forms of advertising was the antecedent of industrial transmedia storytelling through an examination of L. Frank Baum’s, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) (Freeman, 2014:2362). Freeman’s account shows that Baum was interested in ‘visual advertising’ and the art of department store window dressing (2014:2365). He observed how visual advertising could turn the processes of consumption into a form of entertainment, and thereby blur distinctions between content and promotion (Freeman, 2014:2364). Baum went onto develop a dense transmedial scheme to advertise the novel’s sequel, *The Marvellous Land of Oz* (1904) including mock newspapers and comic strips that formed a narrative bridge between the novels, filling in the gaps between one version and its sequel. Freeman describes this as ‘narrative-fronted promotional content’ which bears close similarity to the role of film websites (Freeman, 2014:2369-2371). In *Historicising Transmedia*, Freeman reflects that by ‘revisiting old media, a richer understanding of new media’s complex contradictory roles in contemporary culture may be achieved’ (2017:9). Mover through an exploration of precursors, it becomes evident that the industrial strategies of transmedia storytelling today are not new at all, but ‘reorientations within these practices’ (Johnson, 2013a).

In *Hollywood Online: Internet Movie Marketing Before and After The Blair Witch Project* (2023), Ian London provides the first history of film marketing and promotion online from 1993. From an industrial perspective he shows how the major Hollywood studios set out to harness the commercial potential of the internet: from the experimental early years between 1993-1995, to the first standalone film websites in 1994, and on through the 1990s when the ‘official’ film website started to become established as an industry norm, propelled by the business potential of the internet for ticket sales, home entertainment purchases and merchandise promotion. What is particularly interesting from a historical perspective is how the book’s focuses on mistaken assumptions about film marketing’s online history that have arisen as a lack of scholarship in this field.

The book’s central focus is the long-standing myth that found footage horror, *The Blair Witch Project’s* website was the catalyst for the Hollywood majors to embrace the internet. In no small part this narrative can be attributed to contemporaneous coverage in the trade paper *Variety* at the time with articles titled ‘ Studios will start using ‘Net, sez Berg’ (Graser, 1999), and another article that declares that Blair Witch Marketing’ use of the internet was a ‘wake up call for both the majors and the indies’ (Graser, 2000) which London suggest have been taken as read by academic accounts too. But, as London establishes the Majors had been developing their internet strategies since the advent of the web, this tuned out not to be the case, illustrating the perils of taking contemporaneous responses as fact, and raising questions about industry sources like *Variety* in piecing together the history of the development of film websites.

This study’s focus is on the development of online film marketing techniques, and the commercial value of these sites to the industry. For the most part London’s interest is one the commercial circumstances that gave rise to online promotion. But in the final sentence of his PhD thesis, upon which the book is based, London predicts the film website may come to represent ‘a new form of collector’s item’ (2012:321). An observation that recalls to mind Walter Benjamin’s essay ‘Unpacking my Library’ where he observes that once something is collected, its meaning changes from its functional utilitarian value to something which is studied and held in esteem ((1955) 1999:62). It is through a survey of collections of film websites in chapter 3 that the book examines the life of these artefacts once their promotional work is done.

**Transmedia Archaeologies**

The final term to which we see transmedia attached is archaeology. Scolari et al.’s *Transmedia Archaeology* signals a shift in ways of examining the past from ‘historical’ to ‘archaeological’ (2014). The approach taken by these authors is clearly media archaeological in spirit in that their investigations move back into the past from the present, in search of first-hand encounters with what they describe as ‘textual fossils’ to comprehend how transmedia properties were produced, and consumed by their audiences (2014:6). This approach is implicitly informed by what Thomas Elsaesser terms ‘new film history’ which seeks to avoid narratives of causality, and identify continuities with the past, rather than treating the present as a break with what preceded it (2004:75).

The archaeological approach to transmedia history developed by Freeman, Scolari and Bertetti evokes Marshall McLuhan’s famous aphorism that we look at the present through a ‘rear-view mirror’ and ‘we march backwards into the future’ by glancing at what is behind from time to time to orient ourselves so we understand where we come from in the past (1967:74-5). As Robert Logan attests, in this way the past is regarded, not as a series of chronological events but as a ‘dynamic process with a discernible pattern that repeats itself from culture to culture and from technology to technology’ (2010:359). This concurs with Freeman’s proposition that transmedia is consequence of the alignment of cultural and industrial interests at a particular time (2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016).

However, while this archaeological strategy of drawing of parallels between early twentieth century practices and contemporary transmedia has proved fruitful, the ‘rear view mirror’ approach to understanding history has its limitations. As has been pointed out, there is nothing wrong with this approach, but the past cannot automatically serve as a navigational guide to the new because it does not account for what is different in the present (McLuhan and Parker 1968: xxiii). Consideration of audiences is instructive in this regard. Audience experiences of, and encounters with the transmedia worlds of Oz are understood as a consequence of the mode of reception defined by producers but the account of them in these archaeologies is confined to a handful of published reader’s letters (Freeman, 2014c:46-47). Today, however, the participatory nature of social media constitutes a radical departure from the models of transmedia at the start of the twentieth century, as they contain an abundance of audience participatory utterances and practices that will have to be factored into any history of transmedia since the advent of the web.

The transmedia media archaeologist Bertetti outlined three approaches to the historicising of transmedia that have emerged in recent years: firstly, a narratological approach that focuses on textural, and sometimes semiotic analysis, narrational continuity and shared story worlds; secondly, a focus on fictional characters which explores how they are built and spread across media, as well as the economic, legal and productive mechanisms that fostered their development; and the third approach is consideration of audiences, their experiences and contributions to transmedia productions (2018:267). However, Bertetti devotes only a short paragraph to this last approach to the historicising of transmedia history. Apart from Carlos Scolari’s study of the comic fable, *El Eternauta* as a transmedia icon of popular resistance against military dictatorships in 1950s Argentina, to date, few studies have dealt with historical participatory culture’ (Freeman et al., 2018: 267). As a result, transmedia archaeological studies tend to focus on the textural features of transmedia and the cultural infrastructures that made them possible, while research on their audience experiences remains limited. It is into this lacunae that this book’s final chapter, chapter 6 pitches its investigation of audience engagement with the franchise campaign for *TRON: Legacy* (2010).

**1.4 Conclusions**

Film promotion is chameleon, manifesting afresh with every new campaign. By definition then, it always presents as novel and takes an array of different forms.~~.~~ The forms of film promotion of particular interest to this book are artefacts that undertake their commercial role by contributing to the experience of the film. Whilst these kinds of online film promotion assume all kinds of different shapes, what they all share is that they take their cue from the film they promote, which makes them inherently transmedial. So in order to begin this investigation of these curious hybrid objects, this chapter set out to first to understand this concept of transmediality using Google’s Ngram. Based on the resources scanned for the Google Book Library project, its search returns are presented as a stratigraphic representation of published materials and provided a way to discover what had been published in the field.

Like any tool, of course, inevitably Ngram has its limitations. For example, a published source will only feature in the search return a single time, irrespective of its acclaim, the number of times it has been bought, let alone read. Furthermore, Ngram cannot gauge how much impact any book has as it does not measure citation and reference (Zhang, 2015). But what Ngram does indicate is how the term transmedia is almost always framed as an addendum to other terms in its early iterations. As a tool, NGram is therefore inherently archaeological and this approach set the direction of travel for the rest of the chapter. By continuing on this survey of transmedia and its applications, an archaeology of the concept was generated which reveal some of the key features of transmedia marketing and promotion. In the light of this preliminary investigation the next step was to consider ways in which the development of film websites may be explored.

1. This study drew on data collated by the ICAA (Spanish Institute of Cinematography and audio-visual arts) across a cohort of 187 sites related to film releases in 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)