

**MAKING TOMORROW'S STORIES: THE COMMERCIAL VIABILITY AND MATERIAL
DEMANDS OF TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVES FOR CHILDREN**

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Abstract

This project aims to explore the exciting new trends in multimedia storytelling through an economic lens. Although strongly enthused by the theoretical possibilities of digital technology in multimodal narratives, the academic world seems to turn a blind eye to the harsh material limitations of such artistic endeavors. The apparent discrepancy between the academic conversation on transmedia narratives and the latter's (lack of) commercial success reveals a significant gap between the literary and media theories surrounding multimedia storytelling and the economics of their production and marketing. This thesis offers to bridge these two realities through an exploratory analysis of the resources needed in the production and promotion of a transmedia narrative designed for children. The project is divided in three stages: a case study of the commercialization of *Inanimate Alice* as a transmedia narrative for children, an original design of a multimedia narrative for middle grade children, and an assessment of the resources—material, human, and financial—the design would require for its production. The resources assessment at the core of this exploratory research is based on the creative design for a transmedia narrative this project proposes, as a hypothetical commercial and material production. Through the analysis of production concerns for an existing transmedia story as well as a supposed one, this work identifies the array of financial and human challenges that are specific to the transmedia medium. Using Jenkins' definition of "transmedia narratives" and the current academic discussions on transmedia, this project assesses the resources needed to produce, distribute, and sell a specific transmedia narrative, in order to paint a clearer portrait of the material realities and production challenges faced by transmedia content creators.

Lay Summary

This work looks at the human and material costs of the production of transmedia narratives in order to understand the challenges behind their production process. Transmedia storytelling incorporates multimedia, multimodal, and cross-platform elements for an integrated media experience. This media framework has the potential of changing the entertainment and education industries. Looking at existing and hypothetical transmedia stories, this project assesses the costlier elements that are specific to the production of transmedia material. Having identified those problematic variables, this work proposes possible solutions or changes to our approach to transmedia storytelling that can benefit the conception, production, and distribution of transmedia narratives.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, V. Thiboutot.

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To all the stories I have loved and the ones to come.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction of the Problem Space

In recent years, advances in digital technologies have changed our media consumption habits. From streaming websites to online forums, video games, and social media, the dynamic between the world of entertainment and its audience has been significantly altered. This shift came as no surprise for media theorists Janet Murray, Henry Jenkins, Carlos Scolari, and Christy Dena, who, years before our highly digitalized era, had predicted the media and medium convergence we now experience, and who had early-on identified multimodal and digital narratives as the future of storytelling. Most entertainment experiences being released on our screens, from smartphones to the big screen and everything in-between, take advantage of digital technologies to spread their media through multiple platforms, either by design or as an attempt to reach and engage with a larger audience (Jenkins, 2006). With all these changes already integrated in our society, one is eager turn one's attention to the future of storytelling, and to the trends perceived and outlined in academia. Digital technology having already expanded the limits of artistic expression and enabled us to mix and combine artistic modes with greater fluency, many argue that the next step in media development will be the integrated cross-platform experience with heightened audience participation, as advocated by Henry Jenkin's concept of transmedia storytelling.

My interest in multimedia and transmedia narratives stems from the enormous level of audience engagement I have witnessed and experienced from independent content creators. My own first teenage steps into the digital world were accompanied by kindred spirits who wanted nothing more than to expand on beloved stories through

parodies, music, fan art, fan fiction, and all measures of enthusiasm and creative engagement. During my bachelor's degree in English literature, I would come to recognize the online "fan-girling," namely our in-depth analyses and debates of characters, themes, and plot, as exercising the methodology of close reading. Here we had been, fourteen-year-olds on online forums, applying the same amount of scrutiny to *Harry Potter* (Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., 2002) and *Twilight* (Summit Entertainment, 2008) as literary scholars did to works of literature, albeit with uneven methodology and "shipping" biases. This recognition of my instinct and that of my community of readers and media consumers validated what had been scoffed at by mainstream culture and dismissed as useless geek rants. Instead, in my literary studies, I found that analysis, critical thought, and a passion for storytelling were highly prized qualities. In the academic world, analyzing and understanding stories served the greater purpose of unravelling the ways in which humanity interacts with and rationalizes reality, and how those worldviews shape other people's outlook on life. Looking back on my early online activity, I remember both the sense of community we shared over our mutual interests, and the feeling of exhilaration that came from opening up stories to fan theories, fan art, and to the endless possibilities of the imagination.

Over time, the offline stories we so loved joined us on the platforms we were using. YouTube parodies gave way to more polished vlogs with their own narrative merits. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (Pemberley Digital, 2012) comes to mind as one of the first vlog series I followed that successfully used the social media presence of its characters as a storytelling device. From that point on, I was hooked on the possibilities of transmedia narratives. If multimedia storytelling enables creators to get the most out of each medium,

it follows that transmedia narratives can further exploit elements specific to each platform for a more integrated media experience. The avid reader and media consumer that I am shares Janet Murray's enthusiasm for the future of storytelling in her book *Hamlet on the Holodeck*. Indeed, transmedia narratives not only renegotiate the implicit contract between the audience and the creators but can also help develop non-traditional literacy skills as multimodal stories (Jenkins, 2006). In 1997, referring to digital storytelling, Murray claimed that our society is "engaged in establishing the building blocks of a procedural medium, the musical figures that may someday grow into a symphonic form" (Murray, 1997, p. 255). Six years later, Kress would contend that "the processes which are at work [in the changing media landscape] have not yet run their course" (Kress, 2003, p. 11). Whether or not media was ever static in time and space, it seems likely that our media will continue to change and evolve, morphing with advances in technology and in the social discourse. With multimedia franchises like *Star Wars* (Disney Entertainment Inc., 1977), *Harry Potter*, and *Doctor Who* (BBC, 1963) thriving on a large commercial scale, the rise of transmedia storytelling as a new media staple seems almost inevitable to one immersed in fan culture such as myself.

Yet, for all the potential for experimental and complex story-weaving the transmedia format inspires, I have yet to see a "pure" transmedia narrative boasting of significant commercial success and achieving mainstream status. In recent years, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, a YouTube vlog and book series with a large twitter presence, has amassed a modest but loyal following, while *Inanimate Alice*, an online multimedia story, comic book, and game, has generated a lot of enthusiasm amongst media and education scholars. For its part, although *Harry Potter's* pottermore.com—a website including an

interactive, illustrated retelling of the original books, as well as community elements such as fan art sharing and discussion forums—has made strides toward transmedia digital storytelling, there is still no touchstone of transmedia storytelling that enthusiasts can rally behind. Knowing the exciting possibilities of carefully crafted transmedia storytelling, it seems strange to me, as a media consumer, why so few large media producers invest in transmedia narratives that fully matches Jenkins' conception of the term, by producing original designs for transmedia stories to get ahead of their competition. Indeed, although multimedia narratives abound, few large-scale multimedia narratives answer Jenkins' criteria of the term as outlined in his 2003 article in the *MIT Technology Review*, which describes an interactive story told across multiple platforms, with independent yet interrelated instalments, and which must have been originally designed as such.

Instead, there seems to be a marked reticence from book publishers to fully invest in transmedia narrative experiences; they are widely underrepresented amongst new publishing endeavours, often emerging from expanding franchises rather than a cohesive artistic vision (Dowd, 2013, Taxel, 2002). Without an established market, a specialized team and distribution channels, large print publishing houses likely cannot justify the risk of investing in transmedia stories, especially when they have to compete with the digital media created by video game industry giants. Thus, although transmedia storytelling holds an immense potential in terms of revolutionizing the ways in which we tell stories, there have been few large investments by publishing houses to capitalize on this opportunity. More than fifteen years after the emergence of the term “transmedia storytelling,” we are still missing a seamless, high production transmedia story, as Jenkins predicted, to revolutionize our media consumption. Instead, and perhaps predictably, we

see franchises branching out into transmedia storytelling, rather than full commitments to the format as Jenkins articulated. Whether it be impatience on my part to wait for the natural evolution of media, or a conflict between the concept of transmedia storytelling and its real-life application, either in their production or distribution, I believe it is relevant to explore the factors hindering the production of such works.

1.2 Understanding Transmedia Storytelling Through Video Game Production

Limitations ranging from an unstable market to the increased amount of resources multimedia projects demand explain the reluctance of media publishers to invest in what is still considered a risky business investment. Yet video games represent a comparable financial risk to transmedia storytelling in terms of production value, the varied and specialized skills sets required, and the delay in obtaining a return on investment. To better understand the material challenges of hypothetical transmedia producers, I believe one can take a look at the financial risks incurred in the competitive video game industry to better understand the types of practical obstacles transmedia and multimedia works face. Although developers and publishers are hardly considered to be transparent in their difficulties, financial or otherwise, I have found that Yacht Club Games, the independent video game developer and publisher behind the popular game *Shovel Knight* (Yacht Club Games, 2014), showed a refreshing level of transparency in their financing, production process, and sales for *Shovel Knight*. Now boasting sales of over two million copies, *Shovel Knight* is a crowdfunded eight-bit platforming game originally designed for the Nintendo WiiU and 3DS, as well as PC. In blatant defiance of industry practices, Yacht Club Games disclosed and broke down the financial details of the game's production

costs and sales projection on their website. Through a Kickstarter campaign and donations, they managed to acquire a mere \$ 328,682 of their initial \$ 1,440,000 estimated budget (Yacht Club Games, 2014). After cutting down the costs and timeline, the final estimated budget was of \$ 600,000. With less than 55% of their financing, the project was forced to “operat[e] five months without money or payments to the team” (Yacht Club Games 2014). One of the main problems they encountered was the long work hours necessary to ensure the quality of *Shovel Knight* was on par with the releases of large video game publishers. The writing, programming, graphics, quality assessment, music, and scope of the game all had to individually compete with existing and new platforming games to secure a significant share of the market. In light of Yacht Club Gaming’s experience, the line between success and bankruptcy for self-financed creators and producers of video games appears to be thin.

Despite the fact that Yacht Club Games’ journey is uniquely tied to video games, its struggles in the face of a larger industry speaks volumes to the challenges independent transmedia creators predictably face in the current economic climate. Of course, one aggravating factor for transmedia narratives lies in the lack of established production and distribution channels. Whereas Yacht Club Games benefited from an enthusiastic fan base to crowdfund them, transmedia storytellers are faced with the added difficulty of having to sell not only the story, but also its format, to an uninitiated audience. The lack of visibility of transmedia narratives in the public discourse significantly complexifies its publicization and sale, as will be further discussed in the case study of *Inanimate Alice* (The Bradford Company, 2005) in Chapter 4.

1.3 Primary Enquiries

In light of the above challenges to the production of transmedia stories, it is important to examine in detail the reasons why so few transmedia narratives are produced on a large scale, despite the enthusiasm of academics for the format's storytelling potential.

My research will thus be guided by the following inquiries:

- I. What production challenges, human, material, and financial, do creators and of transmedia narratives for children face?
- II. How do those challenges hinder the production and distribution of transmedia content? Which strategies are employed to remedy those obstacles?
- III. Could cohesive, fictional transmedia narratives be successfully and profitably commercialized in the current entertainment industry? If not, what changes should occur in either our understanding of transmedia storytelling or in the media for the format to be employed on a larger scale?

For the first research question, I outline what is meant by "transmedia narrative" pulling from literature in media theory. I then select examples of transmedia narratives that correspond to the aforementioned definition and research the financing and early stages of the projects. Consequently, as there are few in-depth, academic case studies of the production process of a transmedia narrative, I rely on online journals and blog entries featuring interviews with the content creators.

Following this, I proceed to answer the second research question, using both the secondary sources used in the first phase of my research and the data obtained during the production of my transmedia narrative design. By combining my own notes on the hurdles encountered by the early stages of producing a transmedia narrative and the literature available on such established stories, I hope to offer a comprehensive look at how challenges, both material and creative, can be overcome, and may influence the finished product.

Regarding the third research question, I set out to explore possible answers using revenue projections and detailed spending charts for various iterations of the project, focusing on identifying the ideal circumstances under which a transmedia narrative can be a commercial success. The data used is a combination of financial and material estimates obtained from professionals and research into market prices for necessary materials and supplies as well as average employee salaries. Those numbers are then applied to the hypothetical production of my transmedia narrative blueprint to achieve a likely representation of the resources such a project would demand.

1.4 Goals and Implications of the Study

By the end of my study, I hope to have shed light on how material concerns and limitations influence transmedia narratives, their design, production and their commercial performance. Ideally, by exploring the exciting new trends in transmedia storytelling through an economic lens, this analysis should inform content creators and media scholars alike on the material realities and challenges of transmedia production. Although strongly enthused by the theoretical possibilities of digital technology in multimodal

narratives, the academic world seems to turn a blind eye to the harsh material realities that limit such artistic endeavors. Indeed, in the course of my research, I have had tremendous difficulty in finding any information on the financing and sale expectations for transmedia narratives. Noticing a gap in the literature, notably in the sources reviewed in the next chapter, I have found that transmedia narratives were understood as the future of media production, with little evidence as to the material feasibility of such stories in the current entertainment market. In truth, critically acclaimed multimedia narratives designed for children, such as *Inanimate Alice*, and *Time Tremors* (Tremors TV Productions Inc., 2013), often find themselves underperforming in sales, which hinders the development and financing of subsequent projects. Intrigued by the discrepancy between the academic conversation on transmedia storytelling and the trends and the lack of large-scale transmedia stories being released, I delved further into what transmedia storytelling encompasses, and the media and literacy theories that influences the medium. Accordingly, the next section offers a closer look at the academic discourse surrounding transmedia storytelling, as well as the different perspectives with which the topic is addressed, with an emphasis, on financing, production processes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The materials featured in this review have been selected from a wide range of voices across the academic world, with an emphasis on different intellectual approaches to transmedia storytelling. The sources selected emerged from the field of education, media studies, developmental psychology, information studies, and narratology, and will be analyzed for their specific contributions to the dialogue surrounding the analysis of transmedia storytelling, and for their individual attitudes towards it. Through the evaluation of these sources, I attempt to analyze the underlying themes and aims of the texts, as well as highlight the conflicting attitudes the authors may harbour towards transmedia storytelling. To this end, the sources will be divided into the following categories, according to their aim and targeted audience: creation of transmedia content, analysis and applications of transmedia texts, and challenges to transmedia storytelling. Although I will review some seminal texts on transmedia storytelling, including works by Kress, Murray, Jenkins, Scolari, and Dena, for the sake of brevity, the scope of this review will not include fundamental texts on multimodality, participatory culture, or the history of cross-media franchising and media convergence.

As shall become evident, the study of transmedia narratives and their pedagogical analysis would not only bring a new dimension to our understanding of storytelling, but also complement children's education by including new decoding skills to fit a multi-faceted medium. With the rise of digital and multimodal content around us, it is more pressing than ever to advocate for a revolution in how we view literacy (Kress, 2003,

Jenkins, 2006). The traditional, alphabet-centric definition of literacy is ill adapted to describe the saturation of visual, auditory, and written stimuli to which we are constantly subjected. Since our media world has undergone a revolution in form and tone, we must either adapt our decoding skills to better understand the multimodal communications that surround us, and thus apply our critical skills to each communication mode we encounter. Including multiple modes, including visual, audial, writing etc. in literacy development allows one to better understand the message that is being conveyed, and how it is being told by multimedia narratives, and thus to better decipher its motives.

2.2 Defining Transmedia Storytelling

The concept of transmedia is one that is both novel and familiar. Media franchises have long converged their brands and expanded their narratives across multiple platform. Existing multimedia stories often emerge more as organic expansion of economic and narrative possibilities rather than planning. The century-long franchise of *Peter Pan* (Disney Enterprises Inc., 2006) and its character of Tinker Bell, for example, perfectly exemplifies how a story's popularity can lead to its branching out in theatre, films, and subsequent games using the same characters as reference points (Meyers, Krabbenhoft & McKnight, 2014). Tinkerbelle's popularity and the franchise around her demonstrate how organically multimedia works have emerged, in the past.

With rapid changes in technology and media consumption, multimedia and cross-media stories abound on our screens, usually under the guise of promotion and marketing. As was briefly mentioned in the introduction, the term "transmedia storytelling" to describe carefully crafted, interactive, cross-platform multimedia stories was coined by

Henry Jenkins in 2003 in his article “Transmedia Storytelling.” Pulling from his experience in fan culture, Jenkins advocated for a new perspective on “redundant” sequel and adaptation-based media for a less merchantile approach to multimedia content. This new form of storytelling would enrich the audience’s experience by being a “more sophisticated [and] more rewarding mode of narrative [...] within the constraints of commercial entertainment” (Jenkins, 2003, p. 1). Jenkins would later expand on his definition of “transmedia storytelling,” and spark a worldwide discussion on the nature and place of such narratives in our media.

As such, Jenkins’ definition of transmedia storytelling will serve as the working definition of the term throughout this work, in part due to his having coined the word, but also due to how central his definition has become to the discussion on transmedia storytelling. Accordingly, this review will open with the premise that transmedia storytelling “represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story” (Jenkins, 2011, p. 1).

At its core, the term “transmedia storytelling” is one that is both fluid and open to discussion. The word is as prone to change as the emerging media it defines. Building on Jenkin’s original definition, Carlos Scolari describes transmedia as “a particular narrative structure that expands through both different languages (verbal, iconic etc.) and media (cinema, comics, television, video games etc.). [Transmedia storytelling] is not just an adaptation of one media to another, [but] contribute to the construction of the transmedia narrative world” (Scolari, 2009, p. 587). It is hence important to keep in mind that

transmedia storytelling being a relatively new academic and social concept, its definition and boundaries are prone to permeability and interpretation, both intentional and accidental. Jenkins himself warns his readers of this phenomenon in his blog post “Transmedia 202: Further Reflections” (Jenkins, 2011). In his analysis of *The Dark Crystal* (The Henson Company, 1982) and *Labyrinth* (The Henson Company, 1986), Geoffrey Long also makes a rather relevant distinction between several “types” of transmedia, based on their original design. He refers to transmedia franchises which have evolved from a single work into several others. On different mediums and platforms, as “soft transmedia”, as opposed to “hard transmedia,” which are designed to include multiple complimentary instalments on different mediums and platforms from the start (Long, 2007). Consequently, narratives constructed over several platforms, but whose broader release depends on the financial success of the previous extension, are dubbed “chewy transmedia” (Long, 2007). Those “chewy transmedia” stories thus refer to a more organic evolution of transmedia stories, one in which only a few instalments of the works are released, but with plans and narrative space to expand the story onto other platforms and mediums should the initially released instalments prove commercially successful.

Albeit slightly humoristic, Long’s differentiation based on the intent behind transmedia narratives is crucial in the analysis of such works. Although this study focuses on “hard” transmedia and their economic challenges, the model for so-called “chewy” transmedia stories is a viable and interesting alternative to mitigate the financial risk of producing transmedia narratives discussed in this research. Marie-Laure Ryan’s “Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword or New Narrative Experience?” explores the history of transmedia storytelling throughout the ages and argues against the assumption

that transmedia narratives arose out of our digital age. Ryan advances that, rather than having evolved as transmedia stories, franchises we associate with this type of multiplatform storytelling had a strong fan base yearning to revisit the story, rather than experiencing it first-hand through multiple platforms. Ryan contrasts Jenkins' definition of transmedia narrative as being designed from the top down to the practical ways in which they often emerge, namely, as expansions of existing and lucrative franchises (Ryan, 2015). Ryan also challenges Jenkins' assertion that transmedia should aim towards audience participation, arguing that stories are inherently "interactive," and thus that Jenkins' criteria should be further broken down (Ryan, 2015).

2.3 Digital Texts and Multimodality: The Origins of Transmedia Storytelling

Although not strictly on transmedia, Murray's seminal book on digital narratives *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* examines the storytelling possibilities of future web-based narratives. With a specific focus on digital narratives manifested in science fiction, Murray was one of the first champions of the emerging medium, which she qualified as "capacious and broadly expressive, [...] capable of capturing both the hairbreadth movements of individual human consciousness and the colossal crosscurrents of global society" (Murray, 1997, p. 9). Arguing against critics of digitalized entertainment, she claimed that digital storytelling is not destructive of old media, but rather "reshape[d] the spectrum of narrative expression, not by replacing the novel and movie but by continuing their timeless bardic work within another framework" (Murray, 1997, p. 10). By those remarks, Murray shows herself a precursor of the conversation on transmedia stories, paving the way to a new narrative epistemology. In

Murray's vision of future storytelling, she predicts that "everyone who can master word processing will be able to design a simple Web page, complete with hyperlinks to other sites and colour graphics" (Murray, 1997, p. 251), leading to a democratisation of the medium. She also foretells that the new medium will be reshaped by prodigy authors, as was the case with influential playwrights, novelists and filmmakers. Jenkins echoes this sentiment in his seminal 2003 article for the *MIT Technology Review*. Citing Joss Whedon and Georges Lucas as examples of multimedia franchises spear-headed by a single producer, Jenkins leaned towards more centralized content control for successful transmedia story-weaving (Jenkins, 2003).

In response to these high expectations, I would argue that although the new narrative framework shows promise, it is also materially and financially daunting for Murray's anticipated single genius author. Expectations linked to websites, animation, and the quality of digital entertainment have evolved along with the available software and become increasingly specialized. As low-quality content may be an impediment to the appreciation of the story for a digitally literate generation, content creators are faced with several challenges. Jenkins' examples of *Star Wars* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2001) all necessitated a fair amount of resources, both human and financial, in addition to a skilled transmedia storyteller. For a well-rounded digital content single creator, skills such as music composition, animation, programming, writing, and community management are all essential. Even with amateur-friendly software, the creative process of digital stories is best understood as a partnership between creators and their skills. Ultimately, I would contend that, more than twenty years after the publication of her book, both digital and transmedia storytelling still

suffer from the growing pains of what Murray qualifies as the “juvenilia stage of electronic narrative” (Murray, 1997, p. 279).

With that being said, transmedia narratives benefit from but are not limited to digital technologies. In fact, the conversation about transmedia stories is often associated with the concept of multimodality, which explores the interaction of several mediums in a single work. As multimodal semiotics expert Gunther Kress expresses in his 2003 book *Literacy in the New Media Age*, literacy cannot be thought of in isolation. With our increasing reliance on image and the rise of screens in our media consumption, it is crucial to understand media and decoding skills as interconnected modes of meaning-making (Kress, 2003). Transmedia storytelling is entirely dependent on multimodal semiotics, which create the layered depth of the narrative through its cross-platform and cross-modal storytelling. However, where transmedia storytelling diverges from multimodality is in the addition of more than one platform of engagement, and the audience participation that is more often associated with digital storytelling. As such, Murray and Kress each advocated for complementary aspects of new trends in media, and which intersect and culminate in transmedia storytelling. What differentiates transmedia narratives from multimedia or multimodal narratives is the relationship between each medium and platform as well as the initial design of the experience. Thus, multimedia franchises such as *Harry Potter* or *Star Wars* do not constitute transmedia stories, although they incorporate several platforms and mediums in their broader storytelling. To go back to Long’s distinction of transmedia narratives, the latter would qualify these media franchises as “soft” transmedia. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, on the other hand, was designed from the start to incorporate different storytelling platforms and mediums. However, since the different

cross-platform features, such as the social media accounts, were dependent on the main vlog channel, and the two books were conceived after the end of the series, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* correspond more closely to Long's definition of a "chewy" transmedia story. Finally, *Inanimate Alice* operates over different mediums and platforms, and is entirely based on the initial story bible its creators devised, and thus answers more closely the requirements for a "hard" transmedia story, namely one which answers all of Jenkin's criteria for transmedia storytelling. If we follow Jenkins' conception of the future of media, stories should tend to be increasingly influenced by a conception of transmedia stories that most closely resembles his original definition. In short, although the word is often used as a digital marketing buzzword, the term "transmedia" must be understood as a narrative framework. In its barest form, transmedia stories must be designed as such from the start, unfold over multiple platforms with each extension bringing its own contribution to the overall experience, and preferably encourage audience participation.

2.4 Creating Transmedia Content

Texts attempting to detail the creation process of transmedia narratives are crucial to the proper understanding of how best to analyze the latter, and to better evaluate the value of transmedia texts on an individual basis, rather than for its complex format alone. Either from a theoretical or practical point of view, the creation process of transmedia stories is a multifaceted and fascinating topic that is at the forefront of contemporary experimental storytelling, and the discussion on media.

By revealing the inner workings and entertainment goals of transmedia narrative producers, one may begin to grapple with the polyphonous and multimodal nature of such

texts. In their chapter “Designing for Spreadability” in *Spreadable Media*, Jenkins et al. explore how “successful creators understand the strategic and technical aspects they need to master in order to create content more likely to spread” (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013, p. 196). They highlight the importance of being immersed in a culture to create interest and relevance by “striving to understand a person’s or a community’s motivation” (Jenkins & al., p. 198). Being thus attuned to communities’ modes, moods, and interests, especially in terms of online materials, allows producers to create content that is both relevant, and, more importantly, not risible in the eyes of its audience.

To further demonstrate the depth of meaning and wonder of a transmedia narrative, Geoffrey Long cleverly applies the concept of negative capability to explain the empty narrative spaces that must exist in transmedia narratives to offer the possibility for audience participation as well as new expansions to the story (Long, 2007). On top of having to demonstrate a flawless understanding of every medium and fan culture, as Jenkins advocates, Long proposes to create an illusion of narrative depth by purposefully leaving holes in the logic of the world or characters’ stories. By leaving open-ended questions, or holes in the story, transmedia narratives build upon the natural curiosity of the audience to seek out more information, be it in other extensions of the story, amongst their peers, or within themselves.

Jenkins expands on this line of thought with his extended syllabus and notes for his course “Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment”. This essay focuses on the creation of transmedia texts and on design strategies that make such texts successful. Pulling on interviews with media producers and case studies of transmedia franchises such as *24* (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2004), *Doctor Who*, and comic book

superheroes, Jenkins advocates for multiplicity and polyphony in storytelling to further complexify the overall narrative (Jenkins, 2010).

As such, Jenkins claims a more organic and less constrictive form of plot weaving, which allows for more perspectives and individual input to layer meanings on top of the overall plot and characterization (Jenkins, 2010). Since having such a varied production team is necessary for transmedia storytelling, one must allow for creative discussion amongst various specialists in different mediums to both avoid *faux-pas* with the audience, and to create a more integrated meaning with every transmedia iteration. In her design-centered book *Working with Multimodality: Rethinking Literacy in a Digital Age*, Rowsell similarly reflects on the level of interdependence each of the modes must abide to in the creative process. By dismantling the creative process of specialists from each field, Rowsell unpacks the “level of abstraction and universalization that crosses disciplines-specific practices” (Rowsell, 2013, p. 2).

In doing so, Rowsell concludes that several of the creators from different backgrounds and fields mention the relationship between the medium and the message, with a great emphasis on the type of narrative or meaning one is trying to convey. Like Jenkin’s reflection on the needs for expert knowledge in media and audience, the creators Rowsell interview all share a deep connection to their craft, which enables them to fully apply their skills in creative storytelling. Rowsell’s findings echo Jenkin’s call for more organic storytelling in media, as she cites how storytelling—rather than external or commercial pressures—factors in the creative process. Through all expressive modes, meaning-making and storytelling is the unifying force behind creation for Rowsell’s

content producers, which further demonstrates the possibility of transmedia storytelling with a highly skilled and single-minded team.

There are several guidebooks on the market on transmedia storytelling. Books such as Miller's *Digital Storytelling: a Creator's guide to Interactive Entertainment*, Phillips' *A Creator's Guide to Transmedia Storytelling: How to Captivate and Engage Audiences across Multiple Platforms*, or Bernardo's *The Producer's Guide to Transmedia: How to Develop, Fund, Produce and Distribute Compelling Stories Across Multiple Platforms*, and Davidson's *Cross-Media Communications: An Introduction to the Art of Creating Integrated Media Experiences* are all aimed at aspiring transmedia storytellers. Even though these books offer practical tools for what is more often multimedia storytelling than pure, theoretically sound transmedia, they nevertheless give an insider's perspective on the creation of multimedia storytelling. Davidson's book, while warning creators against the high demands of the "transmedia" label, nevertheless advises creators to "plan for all the media at once [to] create a more integrated experience, [allowing us] to take full advantage of all the media incorporated and the connections between them" (Davidson, 2010, p. 147), and thus to move away from the financially-motivated gradual expansion of multimedia franchises, and advocates for more holistic works.

As with Rowsell's findings on the importance of meaning-making in creation, Davidson also emphasizes how crucial content becomes in transmedia narratives as opposed to single-media ones, as the transition between media in the former often requires explicit intent and action from the viewer. Tom Dowd's *Storytelling Across Worlds: Transmedia for Creatives and Producers*, rather than addressing a student audience like the other guidebooks, details how the entertainment industry from all artistic

fields can alter their practices to create a new type of media. Offering an insider's view of multimedia and transmedia production like Rowsell's *Working with Multimodality*, the book lists the ways in which creatives and producers can and have used multimedia storytelling in an attempt to introduce the new media framework with a producer's lens. Dowd moreover comments on why he believes the current economic climate is not yet ready for these types of narratives: "the few [true transmedia] properties that do exist are not viable examples for our purposes, because none have reached sufficient maturity or complexity of expression to really warrant close analysis" (Dowd, 2013, p. 38). Nevertheless, Dowd does go on to explain the types of industry requirements such a narrative would have to answer to, namely, a cohesive bible for each medium, and an emphasis on the assembling of dedicated specialists. In this, Dowd's claims mirror very closely those of Henry Jenkins on creating transmedia stories. Both emphasize the need to fully exploit each team member to enrich the overall perspective and advocate the need for skilful media immersion as well as careful planning to create a cohesive and meaningful multilayered text.

2.4 Understanding Transmedia Texts

Transmedia narratives resist traditional analysis as they incorporate a wide range of mediums and modes, each with their own conventions. It is similarly hard to assess the impact of such narratives on their audience, either in terms of literacy or content. Indeed, transmedia stories are often defined by their audience's individual, and sometimes unique, relation to the "text." As such, it seems almost impossible to undertake a systematic critical analysis of a transmedia narrative in the traditional sense, or to obtain

quantitative and precise data on its benefits to readers. The epistemological challenges found in transmedia studies also hinder the academic discourse as authors are overwhelmed by necessary definitions of terminology and the ongoing debates surrounding these definitions, as well as the history of cross-disciplinary multimedia, multimodal, and technological context from which transmedia storytelling arises.

In her essay, “Capturing Polymorphic Creations: towards ontological heterogeneity and transmodiology” and in her subsequent thesis, “Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments,” Christy Dena addresses the challenges of having no cohesive language surrounding transmedia narrative (which she labels “polymorphic creations”) in academia. She highlights the importance of having a cohesive language for the study of “polymorphic creations.” Because creations emerge from a convergence of various mediums with their own vocabulary and methodology, it renders such an analysis difficult on an epistemological and theoretical level.

Far from deploring the “massive scope that renders the notion of shared ontology a seemingly impossible task” (Dena, 2007, p. 2) in transmedia narratives, Dena argues that “the study of polymorphic creations will facilitate the development of a discipline that is a synthesis of many disciplines” (Dena, 2007, p. 6), which will encompass and interact with all existing storytelling elements at once as part of a polyphonous, multi-faceted whole. Dena’s extensive work on multifaceted, multimedia, and multimodal stories, their creation and their analysis serve as an invaluable start to critically engage with the inherently polyphonous and multidisciplinary nature of transmedia storytelling, as well as its transformative potential on a cultural level. Carlos Alberto Scolari emphasizes

transmedia producers' need to craft compelling narratives by “constructing a sedimentary multilayer text that needs different cognitive skills to be interpreted” (Scolari, 2009, p. 592). Scolari's use of semiotic methodology manages to break down transmedia franchises such as *24* and the newspaper comic strip *Steve Canyon* (Guyton & Grant, 1948) to the bare bones of their interrelated narrative planes. By charting interconnected timelines, point of view, and medium, Scolari showcases the utility of systematic charting of transmedia narrative structures. Geoffrey Long uses a similar methodology in his analysis of world building, negative space, and hermeneutics in *Labyrinth* and *The Dark Crystal*, Long offers a new perspective on types of transmedia, and on the semiotic codes linking the transmedia extensions together. Before long, it is possible that Dena, Scolari, and Long's analyses of transmedia storytelling will constitute a new form of transmedia close-reading, altering media critical theory in the wake of multimedia studies.

2.5 Transmedia Narratives for Children

Transmedia narratives for children come with an explicit set of challenges and cultural norms. The types of content to be used, the pedagogical value of such works, and the ethics of transmedia for children further complicate the already difficult format of transmedia storytelling. Yet children are often the audience for commercialized and commodified transmedia worlds in which televised series become movies, books, and toys. One need only to think of the multimedia omnipresence of *Disney* franchises, with the pervasive media and promotional objects featuring characters from *Dora the Explorer* (Viacom International Inc., 2002), and *My Little Pony* (Hasbro Inc., 2011).

However, some educators have made the most of transmedia storytelling in educational settings to offer multimodal literacy skills to elementary school-aged children. Cheryl Cowdy, for example, presents a case study of a transmedia narrative, *Inanimate Alice*, presented to elementary school children. The exploratory research highlights the children's reactions to the story, as well as their insights on the medium of transmedia storytelling. Cowdy highlights the fluid and changing nature of this work, expressing difficulty in "pin[ning] down exactly what to call the primary text on which [their] research is based, [as] *Inanimate Alice* seems to reinvent itself each time [one] consult[s] the website" (Cowdy, 2016, p. 157). Cowdy's research also cites how the narrative's designers overestimated the market for transmedia stories for children, a topic which is further discussed in the case study of *Inanimate Alice* in Chapter 4.

2.6 Challenges to Transmedia Storytelling for Children

From negative, nostalgia-fuelled attitudes to legitimate concerns regarding how quickly some educators and parents have embraced transmedia storytelling targeted for children, challenges to the new medium are at the core of the discourse on the emergence of transmedia stories. After all, challenges and disputes over definitions, such as whether participatory culture is necessary to transmedia narratives or whether each component of such transmedia stories must be self-contained, are at the heart of what makes this field of studies dynamic and vibrant.

Anette Lamb's "Reading Redefined for a Transmedia Universe" brings some well-balanced criticism to transmedia by advocating for educators to screen transmedia stories and evaluate their inherent value as texts, rather than being drawn solely for the thrill of

the interactive experience. Although Lamb highlights the importance of transmedia texts and their often-multimodal nature, she also expresses skepticism with the ways in which digital media is integrated to the storytelling experience. Calling for librarians and educators to be critical of transmedia texts that are “added on” to the text rather than contributing to it in a unique and meaningful way. On the other side of the discourse, Ibrahim Belici’s “Transmedia Storytelling and Transforming Human Imagination” is a good example of how discussions of media for children can also be fraught with nostalgia and biases even in academic discourses. Contrarily to Lamb advocating for the inclusion of transmedia storytelling in pedagogical discourse as a potent tool for integrating reluctant readers, Ibrahim openly berates more visual mediums in contrast to reading, commenting on how “watching a film [or images] controls the viewers’ imagination almost completely [since] no space is left to complete the story by a passive viewer” (Belici, 2016, p. 34). This claim is problematic in that it sets aside other types of literacy and the importance of a multimodal education to decode media conventions and symbols surrounding children’s media experiences. Belici’s claims come in direct contrast to Kress’ repeated appeals for a more inclusive notion of literacy, especially in education (Kress, 2013). Belici also makes sweeping generalizations on younger generations with the three following claims: “Any check on a search engine reveals the fact that reading rates are decreasing year by year” (Belici, 2016, p. 32); “New consumers prefer watching film adaptations of a novel than actually reading it” (Belici, 2016, p. 32); and “Many years ago, kids used to make their toys themselves. They used to play outdoors” (Belici, 2016, p. 34). Although the author might be able to defend some of these arguments by citing external sources and factual evidence, they provide no context or adequate reasoning to justify their bold

assessments. These three claims also seem centered on a privileged and Western-centric form of childhood, which is far from being necessarily representative of the global experience of childhood, technology, and media. Belici's unmitigated biases are symptomatic of a type of highly emotional discourse present around transmedia storytelling for children.

Although Belici is sometimes echoed in concerned parents and skeptical adults, his ideas remain in the margins of the transmedia discourse. Apart from Lamb's desire to systemically analyze transmedia texts before inferring their value, Daniel Pietschmann et al. offer other legitimate reasons to pause on the implications of creating transmedia narratives for children in their work "Limitations of Transmedia Storytelling for Children: A Cognitive Developmental Analysis." Although there is a noticeable trend of media convergence with transmedia and cross media narratives targeted at children, the authors interestingly point out that one must keep in mind the different cognitive realities of developing minds, and the strain that such multilayered narratives can have on children's meaning-making abilities. Self-proclaimed "devil's advocates" to a growing industry, the authors argue that "younger children in particular lack adults' ability to use, understand, and participate in transmedia franchises" (Pietschmann, Volkel & Ohler, 2014, p. 2260). The authors base their claims on three different cognitive ability scales according to age, namely the Piaget model (1953), the Perner model (1993), and the Potter model (2013), which indicate that, on average, children only become adept at understanding multiple viewpoint between seven and twelve years old, and that they start being able to critically assess abstract concepts between nine and twelve years old (Pietschmann et al., 2014).

The article advances that transmedia producers and creators should keep in mind children's cognitive abilities in the design of transmedia narratives, such as by creating more than one platform with age-appropriated content and design. The authors identify the multimedia franchise *Cars* (Disney Enterprises Inc., 2008) as being a good example of transmedia storytelling that caters well to multiple cognitive levels, and "consider[s] children's information-processing capabilities, memory capabilities, and attention spans of children in addition to children's language proficiency and knowledge of narrative and media conventions" (Pietschmann et al., 2014, p. 2260). On the other hand, the article recognizes that transmedia franchises offer multiple entry points into the narrative, making the children's individual storytelling preferences at the heart of their experience. Pietschmann, Volkel and Ohler's perspective thus sheds light on our bias towards the so-called "digital natives," comparing three different cognitive scales to the high cognitive demands that transmedia franchises require of their young audience. Ultimately, Lamb and Pietschmann et al. both advocate for a healthy skepticism in regard to transmedia storytelling for children. Although adults may enjoy the complex story-weaving transmedia stories have to offer, it remains to be seen whether the emerging format can live up to its perceived potential, both on the narrative and the educational front.

2.7 Selling Children's Literature

Seeing as this thesis focuses on the as of yet poorly documented economics of transmedia narratives for children, one must turn to the available literature on traditional media for children to gain some insight on the media market for the demographic at hand. Perry Nodelman's book *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* contends that

the market for children's literature is driven by adults, teachers, and parents who have the buying power, and who select books "on the basis of their ideas about what the children they purchase for like and need to read" (Nodelman, 2008, p. 5). This focus on what thoughts and values adults attribute to childhood demonstrate the irony of literature targeted to children, and the genre's emphasis on commercial success. Indeed, Nodelman's key characteristics of children's literature demonstrate a concern for conventionality, with "adherence to conventional story patterns, focalization from a childlike point of view [which] work[s] to make texts for children more like each other than not" (Nodelman, 2008, p. 279). As Nodelman argues, children's literature is in this way similar to popular literature, in that its merit is often defined by its sales.

With a more strictly economic perspective, Joel Taxel's insightful article, "Children's Literature at the Turn of the Century: Toward a Political Economy of the Publishing Industry," similarly deals with the commodification of children's literature. Presenting a view that children's literature is primarily political and commercial, Taxel offers a survey of the children's publishing industry through time. The article records how some lament the convergence of the publishing powers, and the subsequent loss of independent and more artistically-minded publishing houses (Taxel, 2002). This shift in the industry resulted in an "emphasis on earnings [where] instead of novels generating 4%, it was expected to make profits anywhere from 10%-20%" (Taxel, 2002, p. 160). By increasingly focusing on the "bottom line" of publishing, Taxel argues, modern novelists and editors "work in a volatile, rapidly changing socioeconomic and political environment," corresponding to the demands of "fast capitalism" (Taxel, 2002, p. 146-7). This is especially evident when one examines what we have come to expect of successful books.

Taxel rightly points out that, today, “the lack of a sequel to a popular book is likely to elicit surprise,” (Taxel, 2002, p. 170) as novels have come to be seen as stepping stones in multimedia franchises rather than holistic works.

Both Taxel and Nodelman express, to varying degrees, a certain scepticism regarding the motives and agenda of the so-called “hidden adults” behind children’s literature. From innocuous education and the transmission of values to pure monetary gain and propaganda, children’s literature is shaped by the economic and political contexts from which it originates. These concerns are only heightened in the introduction of a new framework for stories: transmedia narratives.

Amongst their extensive analysis of books such as *The Purple Jar*, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, and *Dr. Dolittle*, Nodelman identifies the importance of the concepts of the “home” and the “away” in most children’s narratives. According to him, “‘Home’ needs ‘away’ to define its meaning, and ‘away’ means nothing in particular if there is no ‘home’ to read it against” (Nodelman, 2008, p. 65). Although I agree that this concept is a popular feature of most children’s narratives, I would add that this concept is not reflective of most children’s lives. The stable concept of a singular “home” is complexified by modern circumstances. With migration, multicultural identities, split families, sexual identity, and moves between homes, children’s lives are rarely the stable, safe, and home-centric representations we often see in children’s literature. I personally believe that exploring the process of making what was once the “away” into a new concept of “home” would be a welcome addition to those established themes. Rather than trying to cater solely to adults’ conception of safety, and of home, the creative part of this work will try to complexify those concepts and add nuance to those established tropes.

2.7 Closing Thoughts

Discussions surrounding transmedia storytelling are multi-faceted and transdisciplinary, which reflects the nature of the storytelling itself. This convergence of multiple artistic and academic fields results in what Dena calls an ontological heterogeneity that significantly problematizes well-rounded academic discussions on the topic. This heterogeneity is evident in the sheer amount of time each scholar spends defining key terms surrounding transmedia storytelling, often embracing Jenkins' ideas while amending them to suit their own perspective and purposes. The very nature of transmedia narratives renders its systematic analysis daunting, although Scolari and Long's methodological approaches are akin to quantitative empirical research. However, most of the scholars that do not focus on theory present qualitative data, often obtained through very small samples, and based on exploratory research models. Even the practical manual for creators of transmedia content focuses on anecdotal evidence gathered in selected interviews with producers from the industry, with no mention of the validity of their sample selection.

Thus, the sources can boast of little concrete, empirical data on the habits of transmedia consumers, or on trends or motifs found across transmedia stories. Additionally, many of the texts chose to review the same transmedia franchises in their analyses, such as *24*, *The Matrix* (Warner Bros., 1999), *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, and *Heroes* (NBC Universal Television Distribution, 2006), citing each other in the process. Nevertheless, these sources all highlight the importance of transmedia storytelling as an emerging genre or mode of communication, and all stress the need for an inclusive yet

critical analysis of such formidable texts in all their potential and failings. Moving forward in my research, I would like to direct my attention to an area that has not been fully explored by the sources listed in this literature review, namely the ways in which the creation of transmedia content is influenced by traditional critical analysis, and how the creation process should in turn inform how to artistically assess such narratives.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a closer look at the methodology used in this research. Using a hybrid thesis format, this study is conducted using both orthodox and creative data to answer the research questions. Having to contend with an academic area with limited data, this study thus needs to create and then analyse its primary source. The following section will delve into the rationale behind this thesis' format and structure in light of the three research questions. Lastly, this chapter will explore the benefits of using prototypes in exploratory research, when the supply of first-hand account or data is scarce.

3.2 A Hybrid Protocol

The apparent discrepancy between the academic conversation on transmedia narratives and the latter's current production reveals a deeper gap between the literary and media theories surrounding transmedia storytelling and the economics of its production and marketing. The use of a hybrid thesis' format, with both creative and academic components, stems from a desire to bridge these two realities through an exploratory analysis of the resources needed in the production and promotion of a transmedia narrative designed for children. The rationale behind not merely conducting an in-depth case study of an existing transmedia narrative, but also to produce a design for one, arises from the difficulties in obtaining such information by privately owned companies, as well as the copyright issues such a study would entail. In addition to these challenges, there are only a limited number of stories that truly correspond to this project's understanding of a transmedia narrative, as has previously been established.

Instead, this project opts for data of a qualitative and exploratory nature in its analysis of the economy of transmedia storytelling. Answering the first and second research questions, “What material and financial challenges do transmedia narratives for children face?” and “How do those challenges hinder the production and distribution of transmedia content? Which strategies are employed to remedy those obstacles?”, requires a closer look at existing transmedia narratives and their production process. To this end, this analysis uses the ongoing and award-winning transmedia narrative *Inanimate Alice*, which, thanks to pedagogical applications, received a larger degree of academic and journalistic interest than most. Indeed, *Inanimate Alice* is set apart by the ambition of its creators and the continued evolution of the project throughout the years. Having faced financing challenges despite its renown amongst media scholars, the project’s creators have also been more transparent than most about the challenges they continue to face. By analyzing the literature available on *Inanimate Alice*, its development, and its financing, I will preliminarily identify and explain the challenges of a story that is born digital. To this end, I have consulted different journalistic sources featuring interviews with the creators of *Inanimate Alice* in newspaper articles and online blogs. Additionally, and with the permission of Ian Harper and of the University of British Columbia’s Research Ethics Board, I have reproduced in Appendix 1 a full email interview I have had with the *Inanimate Alice* producer in Winter 2018, which is referenced in Chapter 4. I have further extracted information from online interviews in scholarly articles as well as online blogs with the creators of *Inanimate Alice*, and systematically noted each obstacle, from financing to team management in different time zones, to better understand the challenges of such a complex project.

To fully answer the second and third research questions, “Could cohesive, fictional transmedia narratives be successfully and profitably commercialized in the current entertainment industry? If not, what changes should occur in either our understanding of transmedia storytelling or in the media for the format to be employed on a larger scale?”, it is unfortunately necessary to step into the unknown to shed some light on the limitations and possibilities of transmedia narratives. The creation of a prototype of a transmedia narrative enriches this study by providing first-hand information on the design process and iteration of such a product. There are well-documented advantages to the design and conceptualization of a prototype with unknown variables, as it allows one to wrestle “with both precise and vague ideas; call[ing] for systematic and chaotic thinking” (Lawson, 2005, p. 4). This type of intellectual process enables the designer of a prototype to get better acquainted with the specific requirements of the project, resulting in a learning process that is essential to the full understanding of the issues the prototype has to overcome, and traversing the design space (Yang, 2005; Lim, Stolterman & Tenenber, 2008). Since this project is more concerned with the financial and material aspects of producing transmedia narratives, it in fact reflects the economic principle of prototyping, which describes a prototype “that, in the simplest and the most efficient way, makes the possibilities and limitations of a design idea visible and measurable” (Lim et al. 2008, section 7.4).

I strongly believe the prototyping of an original transmedia narrative, called *If We Fall Here*, adds to my analysis by further informing it on the intellectual and material demands such a project necessitates. In the end, the creation of a transmedia prototype provides me with the tools to assess the material, human, and financial resources the

project would require and to evaluate of its projected commercial performance, but also to have a more insightful knowledge of the design process and subsequent analysis through this exploratory and creative aspect of this study.

To somewhat parry my own limited experience in creating a transmedia prototype, my design is informed by several guidebooks on authoring multimedia narratives available on the market, such as Miller's *Digital Storytelling*, Bernardo's *The Producer's Guide to Transmedia*, Phillips' *A Creator's Guide to Transmedia*, and Giovagnoli's *Transmedia Storytelling: Imagery, Shapes and Techniques*. As for the presentation of *If We Fall Here*, I have chosen to refer to Gary Hayes's *Producing a Transmedia Bible* for the story's introduction in Chapter 6. In the design process, I have tried to comply as much as possible to Henry Jenkins' definition and criteria for transmedia narratives to offer a point of comparison for my eventual findings to the academic discussion surrounding existing transmedia storytelling. My design for a transmedia storytelling experience incorporates several narrative modes, using a variety of resources such as animation, interactive games, audial and visual modes, as well as conventional first-person writing. Each mode, or part of the story, works on its own while adding to the audience's immersion in the story.

The subsequent phase of my research assesses the resources needed to produce, distribute and sell my design for a multimedia narrative. To this end, I have conducted informal interviews with animation, software development, and multimedia publicity professionals to gain a clearer understanding of the financial scope of my project. After discussing my project with the UBC Research Ethics Board, the latter concluded that the interviews, since they consisted of participants answering questions on their professional

opinions and were informal in nature, did not necessitate an ethical clearance from the university Ethics Board, as long as they did not include surveys, personal information, or company-specific information that would not be accessible to the public. The participants for the interview were acquaintances or colleagues of acquaintances working primarily in the video game industry. The questions were centered on the types of resources that my design for a transmedia narrative would require, particularly regarding software, hours of work, and human resources for each components of the project. The interviews were on a one-on-one basis and semistructured, so the participants could freely expand on topics where my ignorance surpassed my expectations.

The last phase of my analysis consists of a comparison between the practical and material challenges of a transmedia storytelling experience such as the one I designed and the theoretical analysis of such texts by the academic world, as well as those identified in my analysis of the literature on *Inanimate Alice*. Looking back on the writings of Jenkins, Lamb, Scolari, and Dena, this section questions the adequacy of the concept of transmedia storytelling as described by the academic world and offers possible outcomes for the viability of such narratives, both in their production and in our understanding of the format. Although my experience with creating a multimedia narrative is limited in nature, this analysis offers a new perspective on the study of transmedia narratives—one that is rooted in the material and economic constraints of contemporary media producers and creators.

3.3 Prototyping a Transmedia Narrative

As demonstrated in my literature review, academic writings surrounding multimedia narratives have so far steered clear of shedding too much light on the interaction of creative and economic concerns regarding their production process. My research questions thus steered me towards explorative methods, by means of a hybrid thesis. In order to have a point of reference from which to base my assessments of the commercial viability of multimedia narratives, it was necessary to obtain first-hand knowledge of such processes. Indeed, only through the production of such a narrative could I claim to understand its internal logic and draw conclusions as to their material and financial demands. With this in mind, I have built a prototype for a multimedia storytelling experience, which constitutes the creative part of my hybrid thesis, and the basis on which my market analysis is grounded.

The prototype of a multimedia narrative I designed is crafted from a single fictional storyline scattered over various mediums. The mediums each reveal part of the story, while being conceptually independent from the others. The story is to be told through music, drawings, animated scenes, as well as a comic book and “traditional” prose writing. Ideally, the story’s design demands a high level of engagements from its audience, by the use of implied storytelling and negative space to foster a more active reading. In doing so, my prototype for a multimedia storytelling experience will promote multimodal literacy in middle grade readers, by encouraging them to foster their close reading and analytical skills to understand all the elements of the story. Moreover, by integrating multiple narrative modes, such as linguistic, visual, audial, and symbolic, the narrative should

appeal to a wider audience of children, who may each find a medium, be it video game, text, or visual art, that they relate to more than others as an entry point to the experience.

As I do not have the skills, resources, or time to complete the project on my own, this work focuses on its blueprint, which includes the textual storytelling elements as well as the script and design for the comic book segment, the animated scenes, the illustrations, and the video game segment of the narrative. The prototype consists of a detailed account and artistic directions for the visual, audial, and interactive elements of the story, with illustrations of the character designs, the style of drawing to be used, and maps of the fictional universe, in addition to the actual written text of the story. This prototype should accurately emulate the creation process of one type of multimedia narrative, while offering a record of the challenges and limitations encountered.

3.4 Conclusion

Although the methodology of this paper is less orthodox than one might expect of a traditional research paper, I find that the information gathered by these methods will help further the discussion on transmedia storytelling from a fresh, and necessary, perspective. Regardless of the numerous limitations of this thesis, this project should provide a stepping-stone to further research and more systematic analyses of the economics of transmedia production.

Chapter 4: Exploring the Challenges of Transmedia Storytelling for Children Through *Inanimate Alice*

4.1 Introducing *Inanimate Alice* in a Digital World

To better understand the commercialization process of transmedia narratives, one naturally turns to existing narratives that can boast of the required criteria for such stories. As discussed in section 2.2, there are as of now very few narratives that correspond to the definition of “transmedia” as the term is understood by most media theorists. Indeed, although multimedia franchises and their omnipresent marketing give the impression that transmedia is flooding our screens and platforms, there are only a few examples of true transmedia narratives, and fewer yet that are commercially successful. This lack of content hinders the possibility of accessing first or second-hand information on the topic of transmedia production and distribution. Transmedia guidebook author Tom Dowd laments how there are too few “top-down” transmedia narratives, or stories solely designed as transmedia, to effectively deconstruct and analyze the latter’s creation process, leading to a broadening of the term “transmedia” in the entertainment industry (Dowd, 2013).

Nevertheless, this chapter presents a case study on the production process of *Inanimate Alice*, an ongoing transmedia narrative which, by design, introduces increasingly complex and interactive storytelling elements as the series progresses. In order to finance costlier, later instalments and complete the project, the team of *Inanimate Alice* depended on the success of the earlier instalments of the project (Boyd, 2014). This sporadic production process is consistent with what Geoffrey Long dubbed “chewy

transmedia,” as was introduced in section 2.4. Although the project is far from being over, the team’s unique experience and transparency singles out *Inanimate Alice* as the most appropriate subject for a case study of a transmedia story for children.

4.2 The Early Days Digital Storytelling

Inanimate Alice has undoubtedly garnered a large amount of interest amongst media and literacy scholars, as well as having been endorsed by the Australian Education Services, and used in classrooms across the globe. The series was also the subject of research all over the world in addition to being featured in more mainstream media outlets such as *The Guardian*, in their articles “Down with Alice” (2006) and “How to Engage the Disengaged” (2011), and *McLean’s* in “Welcome to the Future of Reading” (2015). Yet for all the unquestionable enthusiasm *Inanimate Alice* generates, its production spans more than a decade, and the project has had to constantly adjust its strategies to stay relevant in an ever-changing market. The history of the project is a fascinating journey from the early days of the digital age to our oversaturated contemporary media landscape. At the forefront of transmedia narrative production, the team of *Inanimate Alice* has had the unique experience of having ridden through the wave of Web 2.0 and a rare perspective on the various challenges the new online world threw at them.

Inanimate Alice is one of the more ambitious “born digital” web-based multimedia narratives. The project’s format spans over several medias, years, countries, and languages. First conceived in late 2005 by Ian Harper, Kate Pullinger, and Chris Joseph, the story follows the adventures of Alice, a migrant child, through interwoven mediums ranging from still images, sounds, text, video games, and virtual reality. The first episodes

mostly use still images, ambient music and text as Alice evolves in different environments. In Australia, Alice's adventures are related through the medium of a comic-book. In Russia, Alice and the viewer play a *matryoshka*-catching game. By episode 5, set in England, Alice finds herself lost in an abandoned industrial building and the viewer must help her find her way out. As the series advances, the audience's impact on the story increases, mirroring Alice's own agency and proficiency with the technology she uses in her narration. The increasingly ambitious chapters and their demanding production value require a correlating amount of economic and human investment from the creators. The side story *Perpetual Nomads*, which uses virtual reality, is but the latest installment in the series, which is designed to end at episode ten with a narrative modeled as a video game. The team behind *Inanimate Alice* is currently working on episode 7.

4.3 The "Hidden Adults" Behind Inanimate Alice

Finding first-hand accounts of transmedia design and production is an unquestionable challenge. If one is hard pressed to obtain insider information on sales, projections, and production proceedings in mainstream media, the added transmedia requirement further narrows the available data since the sample size significantly decreases since so few transmedia stories fully answer our criteria for the term. Thankfully, the team of *Inanimate Alice* has been consistently transparent throughout the series, as is evident in their multiple interviews and contributions with academics, journalists, and bloggers, allowing for a unique look into the emerging transmedia medium. To obtain more information on the production process of *Inanimate Alice*, I have supplemented my data with Bill Boyd's blog entry "Alice Through the Looking Glass"

(Boyd 2014), Ian Harper's "Alice Born Digital: How Transmedia Storytelling Becomes a Billion Dollar Business" (Harper, 2010) in *Publishing Perspectives*, as well as Porter Anderson's article "Australian-Canadian Funding Goes to Digital Storytelling Projects" (Anderson, 2016), which is also published in *Publishing Perspectives*. These sources all contribute to the information gathered on *Inanimate Alice*'s development as well as documenting the changing perspective of its creators at different points of the production.

Following the lead of literacy expert Jennifer Rowsell in her book on multimedia storytelling, I sought my information in the form of interviews to better understand the mental processes behind transmedia content creation from its authors. I have thus contacted Ian Harper, creator and co-writer of *Inanimate Alice*, who has been so kind as to answer my questions on his experience as a transmedia storyteller, and to express his opinion on the possible economic outcomes of the medium. The following case study is hence a composite of second-hand accounts from Ian Harper, Kate Pullinger, and Chris Joseph at different points in the project, as well as my recent email interview with Ian Harper, which is related in full in Appendix 1, with permission.

The interviews cited in this chapter all present information from the creators of *Inanimate Alice*, and cannot, as such, be seen as entirely objective due to their high personal and professional investment in the series' success. For all of its potential biases, however, I believe the information compiled in this chapter to be of significant use in better understanding the types of concerns with which the series had to contend. By looking closely at *Inanimate Alice*'s production and how it fared commercially, we can infer useful information as to the types of difficulties hindering the production of transmedia narratives.

4.4 Early Production in a Bygone Media Landscape

When *Inanimate Alice* began production in late 2005, the first steps of the project were financed by its creators. The main priority early on was “to develop a story bible that not only described the arc of the narrative but also delved into the multimedia guidance we needed to understand [Alice’s] circumstances at each juncture” (Boyd, 2014, section 1). With the plotlines and chronology of the series fully thought out, the team could thus move forward with the project with a clear idea of what was ahead, while allowing for “flexibility [...] to learn both from feedback gained and the improving technologies that help [the team] better present the story” (Boyd, 2014, section 1). The project is based on an original transmedia story bible, which guidebook author Davidson recommends creating to better exploit the various features of the different mediums (Davidson, 2010). Having secured funding only for the first episodes, the team of *Inanimate Alice* was quite conservative in their financial planning. Although the concept at the core of *Inanimate Alice* is incredibly ambitious, “address[ing] movie, game, on-line and print outcomes from the outset,” its survival did not depend on a viral success “on the scale of a *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings*” (Harper, 2010, section 1). Indeed, the timeline of the series allowed its producers to see if there was a market for *Inanimate Alice* before moving forward with more resource investment, either financial or human. Moreover, by both creating and releasing the series in several instalments, the team had the comparatively rare luxury of adapting to their audience’s reactions and demands as the project moved forward. This adaptability proved vital with the series’ shift in target demographic and with the rapidly changing digital landscape.

A true “born digital” narrative, *Inanimate Alice* “didn’t emerge from a printed book; it is not an adaptation of something that was once in print [but was rather], produced and directed as a YA chapter book for the screen” over several platforms and formats. This makes *Inanimate Alice* a good example of Jenkin’s brand of transmedia (Harper, 2010, section 1). Over the past decade, the possibilities and expectations linked to digital narratives have changed. In my interview with Ian Harper, he recalls being limited in the file sizes that could be uploaded online. In an informal chat, he also mentioned that even the early episodes of *Inanimate Alice* are subject to change; for example, Adobe Flash, on which several episodes are rendered, is scheduled to be removed in 2020. Online media consumers have also changed. Harper cites the short attention span of audiences, and the saturation of web-based media and all-encompassing platforms as further challenges to projects such as *Inanimate Alice*.

Furthermore, although the first episodes have aged well, and are especially suited for their audience’s immersion and relatability to Alice as a storyteller, children are exposed to increasing quality in terms of digital content, which is likely to affect their expectations of such media (Johns, 2006). Digital stories increasingly seek to incorporate interactive elements, videos, games, and other features of which *Inanimate Alice* was somewhat of a pioneer, at the time. Indeed, the digital media landscape evolved so quickly that it may have sounded highly unlikely to Harper, Pullinger, and Joseph that their story would branch out into virtual reality, as it is now the case with *Perpetual Nomads*. Yet, in 2014, Harper pronounced their plan for the ending of *Inanimate Alice*, which should “have the look and feel of an AAA computer game title” (Boyd, 2014, section

1), as is fitting with Alice's story arc as a game designer. Interestingly, the features and demands of producing an AAA video game have changed significantly since 2014, and will most likely continue to evolve and increase in production value by the time the series reaches the video game installment. Thus, the more The Bradford Company delays in ending their series, the more resources they will need to bring it to term. Indeed, to attract the attention of future video game players with the *Inanimate Alice* video game, its creators will have to conform to certain industry standards, or bring in their own audience to the medium. Although this specific challenge is still some way ahead, the team of *Inanimate Alice* continues to be defined by an enthusiasm for new technologies and digital literacy for children, in whichever form it evolves.

On the other hand, when speaking of media for children, it is important to consider the cognitive abilities of the target audience. Section 2.5 outlined the responsibility of new media content creators to heed cognitive development charts in their projects. The business model of *Inanimate Alice* has changed, putting less emphasis on the children growing with Alice, and more on the pedagogical applications of the story. With this in mind, one should also stop to think of the target demographic for the video game and the virtual reality experience, considering that the earlier instalments of the series feature Alice as an eight-year-old. Due to their delayed timeline, the series is now introduced to children in a pedagogical context, rather than through individual sales, thus removing some of the incentive to follow the story outside of class, or beyond the school year. This audience, which is fixed in time, reduces the possibility of exploring all the complexity of transmedia storytelling, at the risk of creating content that is not age-appropriate, cognitively speaking. In short, if the series goes forth in classroom settings with the

increasingly complex and embedded instalments of the story originally planned for, *Inanimate Alice* may lose its audience in its own narrative ambition.

Another challenge regarding the commercialization of *Inanimate Alice* upon its original release was the project's lack of publicity. Although the project generated interest around its innovative premise and format, the project did not attract its intended audience in large numbers. Indeed, identifying how and where to reach parents or children can be quite difficult, especially considering that the series' first instalments predate the precise web advertisement algorithms now in use. Had the series not had the benefit of using a new medium and of promoting digital literacy in new generations, it may not have caught the attention of media and academics. By Ian Harper's own admission, the same project, had it been conceived in 2018, would likely have suffered from a lack of visibility and its slow-paced format; "Now, audiences have no time. The stats tell us we have a few seconds to capture someone's attention. That doesn't work for our kind of storytelling" (Harper, 2018 section 1). As of 2010, the team was still hoping to obtain a distribution channel for *Inanimate Alice*, assessing that they were "at a pivotal point for the business model" (Harper, 2010, section 1). In their efforts to seek "a publisher/distributor that 'gets' the digital narrative," the team hoped to obtain a distribution channel to propel their narrative to a mainstream audience. However, as Ian Harper mentioned in our recent exchange, publishing companies are looking less to branch out than to survive and protect their own share of the market (Harper, 2010, section 1).

4.5 Adapting Transmedia Narratives to their Audience

Although *Inanimate Alice* could not boast of a *Harry Potter*-like audience, both in terms of scale and of personal consumption, the project attracted a wide number of educators across the world. As Ian Harper recollects in a 2014 interview, the team noticed, from the website statistics, that “most of the site users were teachers and, importantly, they represented almost all of those returning to the site time after time” (Boyd, 2014, section 1). Without necessarily intending to, *Inanimate Alice* had filled a niche need for a digital literacy tool for children, one that could be used both for digital reading comprehension skills and English second language classes. In fact, *Inanimate Alice* has been so closely linked to the field of education that most studies and conversations around the series, especially in academia, treat it less as an artistic and innovative example of a transmedia narrative for children, instead setting it in the rather utilitarian light of pedagogical possibilities.

In response to their surprising sales demographics, the creators of *Inanimate Alice* wisely decided to “switch tactics and actively support teachers in their endeavors,” (Boyd, 2014, section 1) by creating a teacher’s guide for the in-class analysis of the series as a digital story. They also began to sell the teacher’s guide and access to the story as classrooms-based licenses to hone in on that demographic. This allowed the project to reach a wide number of school-aged children through individual schools or teachers. It also attracted the interest of state educational agencies, such as Education Services Australia, which “has invested in both the development of new content and in the title’s discoverability across all of the nation’s education platforms and websites” (Boyd, 2014, section 1). In addition to seeking a macro distribution channel of their story through school

institutions, *Inanimate Alice* also gained recognition by the Canadian and Australian governments agencies Canadian Media Fund and Screen Australia, which both awarded the series CA\$ 269,754 (Anderson, 2016, section 1). Mez Breeze, lead interactive writer for *Inanimate Alice*, assesses that this government funding was “vital to the overall continuation of the *Inanimate Alice* franchise” (Anderson, 2016, section 1). Moreover, the focus on framing *Inanimate Alice* as educational material allows for an extended timeline: some much-needed breathing room between episodes to catch up with the new demands of each installation. By being part of the curriculum, *Inanimate Alice* circumvents the constant need for fresh materials to keep audiences—especially children—interested in the narrative. By the same principle, this business model also reduces the need for moderation commonly found in interactive, participatory media for children, as the audience participation and community management are moved to a classroom setting with teachers acting as forum moderators. As a drawback to the extended release timeline, however, *Inanimate Alice* is at a disadvantage with multimedia franchises such as *Harry Potter*, which thrived on their audience growing with the source material and having a vivid audience participation between the releases to foster enthusiasm and investment for the subsequent media instalments.

4.6 The Future of Inanimate Alice

Ultimately, this case study demonstrates that the market for transmedia narratives is, at the moment, either precarious or close to nonexistent. Despite its critical acclaim, its innovative and ambitious concept, and its presence in school curriculums in several countries, *Inanimate Alice* only has two reviews on the popular website Goodreads.com,

and only eight ratings. This may be related to how audiences categorize ‘texts’ as opposed to multimedia narratives, and to the types of literacies parents tend to prioritize in their children’s development. After all, there is yet no platform that specializes in either the broadcasting or reviewing of transmedia content. Audiences must seek out such narratives for themselves, in which case they must be made aware of the narrative’s existence in the first place. My research for this chapter and my conversation with Ian Harper have been especially interesting and rewarding. If I at first considered *Inanimate Alice* to be somewhat of an outlier, a success story amongst transmedia narratives for children, I soon realized that the challenges the series’ production faced instead encompassed all the difficulties with which transmedia storytellers must contend. In his 2010 article “Alice Born Digital: How Transmedia Storytelling Becomes a Billion Dollar Business,” Ian Harper comments on the human cost of the project, its production, and its promotion, declaring that “the team’s commitment to this project far exceeds the six-figure sum that has been spent thus far” (Harper, 2010, section 1).

In this regard, the *Inanimate Alice* team exemplifies the human passion and commitment Tom Dowd identifies as a necessary factor to transmedia storytelling. After years of planning, writing, and marketing *Inanimate Alice*, its producers are still fighting for the project, even in the face of the increasingly “bottom-line”-centric publishing industry Joel Taxel deplors, as discussed in section 2.1. Through all their considerable challenges, *Inanimate Alice*’s determined creators have demonstrated how transmedia storytelling can exist outside of the lucrative franchise-building and further independent authorship. Now in 2018, with the series’ ambitious final episodes still ahead, the numbers will likely go over Harper’s then estimate of the “north of a million dollars” budget

necessary to complete the project (Harper, 2010, section 1). Nevertheless, the team of *Inanimate Alice* continues to show an incredible adaptability both with their target audience and with their use of emerging storytelling mediums. Regardless of how or where the series evolves in the future, one can be assured that the team of *Inanimate Alice* will rise to the challenge. Above any concern the transmedia medium poses, they have a story to tell.

4.7 Conclusion: Identifying Production Challenges

As a last takeaway from this case study, I believe we can now attempt to answer our first research question, namely the identification of challenges to transmedia content creators.

- Finding financing or self-financing

Financing is a common obstacle for almost any endeavour, yet transmedia storytelling inherently demands investment in several fields at once to complete the project. According to Ian Harper, one of the main difficulties of *Inanimate Alice* was “accessing sufficient investment to be able to produce material to serve that audience” (Harper, 2018, section 1). The lack of funds paired with high production value of the design in turn extended the deadline and make it difficult to adhere to a close timeline and in turn to retain their audience.

- Publicizing the product

Another aspect of the lack of financing, having planned for no publicity for the release of *Inanimate Alice*, the team relied on the project’s innovative format

to ensure its popularization (Harper 2010, section 1). Although the transmedia format did attract attention from the educational and academic world, *Inanimate Alice* never obtained the individual-user audience it originally planned for.

- Reaching a large audience

Perhaps as a result of the lack of advertisement for the project, Ian Harper also identified the “ability to address a wide enough audience for your production to be of consequence” as another key challenge to the project’s success (Harper, 2018, section 1). Of course, with the slow production timeline and the little visibility of the project, reaching and retaining *Inanimate Alice*’s audience would have been difficult for any project. I would also venture that 2005 audiences had no way of naturally stumbling on the *Inanimate Alice* website, regardless of its narrative merits. Moreover, the story’s then highly experimental format could also have hindered its commercialization. Should transmedia storytelling become a more accepted and sought-after medium, such as video games and movies, audiences could knowingly seek stories in this format through a platform dedicated to the transmedia medium.

- Keeping up with digital media standards

As was mentioned earlier, the longer timeline allowed for significant technological strides in animation, video game development and audience expectations of these mediums. The longer they wait until the final instalment, the harder *Inanimate Alice*’s plan of ending with an AAA video game will be.

Although *Inanimate Alice*'s structure specifically demanded increasingly technically difficult instalments, any transmedia story would struggle to compare with professional movie or video game production when those media do not consist 100% of the overall narrative.

Most of the aforementioned concerns relate to the embedded difficulties of financing the whole project and of reaching one's audience. In the end, had there been enough financial resources to publicize the project, *Inanimate Alice* may have reached its audience directly, as was their original plan, rather than through schools. Hence, with enough human and material resources, *Inanimate Alice* could have competed with large multimedia franchises, and ensured a tighter timeline to create a generational following as the series progressively increased their demands of the audience's participation and cognitive skills. Had the series benefited from these extra resources, it may have known a viral success, and have children grow alongside Alice and her digital adventures.

Chapter 5: Run-down of the Transmedia Narrative

5.1 Presenting a Transmedia Story

For the creative part of my project, I have designed a transmedia experience for children. The transmedia narrative will naturally involve different medias over different platforms while promoting audience participation. My creative process began, as transmedia writing guidebooks recommend, with a strong story bible (Hayes, 2011; Davidson 2010; Dowd 2013). Considering the commercial lens through which this thesis looks at transmedia storytelling, I have chosen to present the transmedia blueprint as if I were presenting the project to potential publishing houses. With this in mind, I have followed the recommendations of Gary P. Hayes in his aptly named work *How to Write a Transmedia Production Bible* for the structure of the next sections. In his text, Hayes presents a how-to guide for the presentation of transmedia materials that successfully links the creative and business aspects of the production. Although Hayes only briefly delves into theory and definitions, the clear, point-form text attempts to link the emerging media trend to its financing, proposing a transmedia bible format to be presented to potential publishers. This work clearly embodies the need for a more practical and systematic approach to transmedia storytelling, one that steps up from the self-financing, but does not fall into the more established practice of multimedia marketing, making it quite ideal for our current purposes.

5.2 Transmedia Production Bible

If We Fall Here

Lostness, friendship, and self-sustained survival: A feral coming of age

A unique transmedia narrative experience, *If We Fall Here* is at the forefront of new storytelling trends with its innovative design tailor-made for a digital world. In the footsteps of emerging media trends and theories, *If We Fall Here* makes the most out of each of its instalments and mediums to offer an immersive, complex, and captivating story world to its audience. The story offers a thorough, multimodal experience that promotes diverse literacy skills to children aged 10 to 12.

Story Synopsis

Having fled their respective homes, Owen and Torry bravely set out into the world to find a place where they belong. After weeks on the road, and far from any possible help, Owen is struck by pneumonia, and weakens by the hour. Following a mysterious cat deeper into the forest in which they were camping, Torry stumbles onto an abandoned house, where she sets up to nurse Owen back to health with their meagre resources. Isolated from the world, the two decide to live in the house and swear to each other to never go back to the society they escaped from. Cut off from society and modern conveniences, Torry and Owen rely on their wits and a strangely well-furnished library to face the consequences of being fully independent, while evolving in their identity and friendship. From finding sustenance to finding meaning in their lives, Owen and Torry face

the world with a vulnerable defiance, existing on the fringe of survival and of their humanity. With time, through their trials, mistakes, and hardships, the children learn as much from each other as from their environment, and grapple with the implications of their extreme self-imposed isolation. Ultimately, although the two protagonists have to contend with very real material concerns, the forest's supernatural influence creeps up on the characters, eventually posing a real threat to the children's life and sanity.

The story's title, *If We Fall Here* is in reference to Berkeley's old adage "If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" Being intentionally lost in a sea of trees, the two protagonists often reflect on the meaning of their lives, should they fail to survive on their own. Most of the story is confined to the house, the yard, and the forest, making the setting more or less limited in space. Where the narrative leaves a lot of what Geoffrey Long calls "negative space" is in the timeline of the story, which evolves over several years (Long, 2007, p. 70). The story is presented from three points of view, from that of Owen, Torry, and that of a third omniscient entity. *If We Fall Here* stands apart from a specific era or location, instead focusing on the alienating nature of their environment. By distancing the children from a historical or geographical context, they are further isolated from society and chained to their unorthodox lifestyle, creating a dream-like, slightly claustrophobic atmosphere to the story until its conclusion.

Story's Main Plot Points

- The children decide to run away
- Owen becomes sick
- The children meet the cat and arrive at the house
- Owen is nursed back to health
- Torry begin to forage for food in the surrounding woods
- Owen learns to fish in the river
- The children prepare the house for winter
- Torry writes a comic book for Owen's birthday
- Owen makes a swing for the two of them
- Owen builds a cricket farm
- Owen begins his radio broadcasting with an old, battery-powered AM broadcasting system
- Owen discovers the identity of the house's former owner
- Owen and Torry fight
- A mysterious woman appears in the night
- Owen is transformed into a garden gnome and Torry is mind controlled
- Owen frees Torry from the woman's control
- The two defeat the woman and resolve to venture into the outside world once more

The different instalments of *If We Fall Here* are designed to showcase different characteristics and points of view of the two main characters. Torry, an introverted and highly talented artist, thrives in her new surroundings, spending her days outside with the cat, Hleo, drawing and foraging as she explores the ethereal forest that beckons her. The audience's main insight into Torry's psyche is through her multiple drawings, which span over the entire story. Through her drawings and the comic book she makes, the audience will come to see Torry as a deeply troubled character, who loses herself in an imaginary world in which she explores her ideals of womanhood and is immersed in the forest's supernatural lore. The recurring figure of a woman Torry draws further demonstrates her vulnerability, and her desire for a mother figure in her life, a sentiment in stark contrast with her need for independence.

Owen, for his part, struggles with the lack of society the abandoned house has to offer, and prefers to stay safely indoors, writing, and thinking up stories in between the necessary cooking, mending, and house upkeep. Owen's propensity to romanticize his own life and sufferings makes him a far more outspoken character than Torry. Owen writes, reads, and often seeks to escape his circumstances through fiction. Resourceful and practically-minded, Owen often has a more pragmatic outlook to their life as compared with Torry. Through his writing and especially his radio broadcastings, Owen is constantly reaching outwards for validation, often begrudging Torry for her reserved nature, and blaming her for his loneliness.

The story explores themes of isolation, self-reliance, puberty, and personal growth. Each character experiences different challenges based on their personalities and upbringing. Whereas Owen struggles to come to term with his desire for external

validation, and often strays from his truth to achieve a dramatized image of himself, Torry has difficulty expressing herself, and is in danger of losing her voice as an independent being. In the end, the two's core difference boils down to this: whereas Torry needs to find her voice as a mature young woman, Owen needs to be true to his voice to grow into an earnest young man. This conflict is reflected in the specific challenges the characters face. The isolated, abandoned house in which the children make their home also holds a strong symbolism in the story. Set apart from the dark, ethereal forest, the house represents hope of warmth and safety for the characters. The black cat, who adopts the children and leads them to the house, is also a meaningful presence in the narrative. The cat's name, Hleo, is an Old English word for 'protector,' which is the role the cat plays in the story, overlooking and facilitating the children's journey.

Samples of the script: Video Game Animated Segments

1. Introduction: 5 minutes

[From the forest]

We see the pond, slowly bubbling, and the house in the distance, light in some windows. A shadow emerges from the pond, walking towards the house.

Knock on the door, the children open the door. View of the children's puzzlement. Torry starts smiling, recognizing the woman.

Close-up of the woman's face, gentle and smiling.

The children let her in.

The woman walks in the dining room, beaming. She opens her arms.

A feast appears on the dining room table. The children excitedly start eating.

Soon, the Owen's vision becomes dark. In a flash, we see the woman in her ending form, contorted and vile.

Owen, submerged by darkness, shrinks and becomes his playable avatar.

He is thrown into the garden, immobile as a statue. (Long shot) The seasons change around him.

2. (Optional): 30 seconds

[From a distance]

Two children walk along a forlorn dirt road. On either side of them, trees are bending, rocking back and forth under strong winds and dark clouds.

The children are huddled together for warmth and protection against the elements, each carrying a small bag.

[view from the side]

They advance slowly but steadily, their thin coats whirling around them, relying on each other for balance.

A branch falls near them, startling the two figures.

[we see their faces from below, Torry glancing up, Owen looking to the side, increasingly worried]

A flash of lightning splits the sky, accompanied by a deafening sound.

[view from the front]

It starts to rain, slowly, at first, and then heavily. The two children are soaked and trembling. The sky is getting dark.

[the pov shifts back, as though following the road, showing how far they've come and how far they still have to go]

3. (Optional): 3 minutes

[view of the children from the front]

Along the dirt road, Torry stops walking and looks at Owen, a tired look on her face. She fumbles to get her hand out of her clothing and points to the forest, giving him an inquisitive look. He nods.

We see them in a camp for the night. Torry tries to light a fire as Owen creates a makeshift shelter out of canvas, tying two ends to small trees. The fire won't start, Torry is frustrated, she sits under the canvas, visibly upset. Owen keeps on trying but stops when Torry gives him an annoyed look. He sits next to her, eyes on the ground. He reaches in his pocket, takes out and opens a granola bar, giving half to his companion. They both eat quietly.

Pan out the heavy rain drops hitting the canvas, going up above the trees, moving back to show a tile roof and the shadow of the house, some distance from the children.

4. (Optional): 45 seconds

Drawing of the forest (see sketchbook) Pan out from the drawing, over Torry's shoulder.

She turns her head and notices a black cat rubbing its side against her leg.

She smiles and pets his head. She looks back behind her

We see the long, winding road behind her.

Back to Torry's face, a worried expression on her face.

"Why isn't he here, yet?"

5. (Optional): 30 seconds

Long shot of Torry carrying Owen over her shoulders with the black cat leading the way some 5 yards in front of them

Close-up on Owen's flushed face

6. (Optional): 1 minute

Torry is walking in the forest. She stops to collect fallen branches for firewood, putting them in a basket. Occasionally, she digs for roots and puts them in a sack. The forest floor is covered with dead leaves, the trees are bare.

Her breath forms small clouds in the cold air

Her cheeks are red

Medium shot of her face looking up, then down, following a snowflake falling with her eyes. The snowflake lands in her hands and melts

Her facial expression changes from one of wonder to one of worry

7. (Optional): 45 seconds

Owen and Torry make preserves in the kitchen. They heat up some rhubarb, fill it in jars, and seal the jars with candlewax. They are preparing for winter. We see their pantry being increasingly full. Through the window, we see the cold, blue-ish forest ready for winter, compared to the warm kitchen fire.

Samples of the Script: Survival Journal Segment

Day 4

There's some good news and some bad news. I made a full recovery, thanks to Torry literally breaking and entering an abandoned house, but, on the other hand, we are now officially out of food. There were a few cans of ham and peaches in the pantry, but we ran out pretty quickly. We looked everywhere, Torry and I. There's nothing else.

Neither of us spoke about it, but it's clear that if we can't find a way to survive this on our own, it's the end, for us.

If we ask for help, only once, they'll force us to go back. And as we already agreed, that's not happening.

So if you find our bodies in a few months, dried and emaciated, don't be alarmed. This isn't one of those murdered children cases like you hear on TV. We refused the alternative. It is no one's fault but our own, really.

We're really sorry you had to see such a sight, though, we truly are. But it's also why we're writing this (Torry is standing next to me as I write this) to show you that there's no foul play involved and that you can sleep easy tonight, knowing we were happy here, despite the hunger, despite how briefly it lasted, that we finally got to know some joy and peacefulness.

Torry did some research and found that since we have plenty of water, we should last for at least a few weeks, still. Without water, it would have been a matter of days, so we have that to be thankful for.

Day 5

We realized that we got a bit ahead of ourselves, yesterday.

My name is Owen and I mentioned my friend, Torry. I think I should explain that, due to circumstances outside of our control, we have nowhere to go. Well, we had nowhere to go.

I guess I should start from the beginning. That's how stories usually go. Here it goes:

Once upon a time, there was a little boy named Owen who had no parents. What he did have was a set of two grandparents who were very, very old. His grandmother was slowly starting to forget things, especially recent memories, like her grandson's existence. Then, one day, his kind grandfather, tired and weary of his cares, had a stroke that left him an empty shell. He died a few months later, in the hospital. Meanwhile, the boy did his best to take care of his grandmother, who

still mistook him for her late son. A few months in, social services got involved and took the grandmother away to a home for forgetful elderly folks, I assume.

I assume because I don't actually know. See, I wasn't there, when they came. When they asked my grandmother about how she had been getting along, she was confused. She mentioned my grandfather, and her son taking care of her. Somehow, the social workers didn't think two ghosts were good primary caretakers for her and took her with them after a few days.

So I don't exist anymore. I have to say it's both a weight off my shoulders and incredibly scary. I'm off the grid. I'm no one, I'm anyone.

I'm not allowed to tell you why Torry can't go back home.

I know parts of it, but it's not something she wants the whole world to know, you see. You could probably track down her mother and find out, if you need it for the police report, but please don't pry if you don't have to. It's painful to her.

Let's just say that she ran away of her own free will and that no one is likely to be looking for her (her words, not mine).

Day 6

I was the first to bring up the idea to leave.

When we first met, Torry and I were just keeping each other company, chatting the night away with stories. Torry would give me a subject, like the sea, and I'd go on and on about a lost sailor who was desperate to flee cold, wet England and find a place under the sun that was his own. After almost dying in an unsuccessful mutiny, the poor sailor escaped the ship in the middle of the night on a bark. After drifting for days, he is eventually saved by a dwarf whale and together they embark on a mission to find the lost coral scepter. They would eventually figure out that the coral scepter had the power to order the waves.

Anyways, that's how we would spend our time.

But as time went on, we started talking about personal things to each other, and one day, I suggested we run away. It was not a very practical idea, I'll admit, and I didn't really mean it. It was a nice idea, a fun story we could comfort ourselves with when times get tough. I couldn't imagine leaving my poor confused grandma on her own, like that.

But the idea stuck with Torry.

She kept thinking of ways we could disappear for good, how we could build a shelter in the woods, live a Peter-pan-like existence and bring other children with us. Honestly, I sometimes think she just wanted to bring children in a cave and force them to be her forever friends.

She's had a lonely childhood.

And then, my grandmother was taken away, they put a 'for sale: furnished' sign in front of the house to pay for her lodgings, I imagine. They took care of it all. Well, almost.

When I went to meet Torry at the park, that day, she told me she had already hidden a bag up a tree weeks ago.

I forgot to bring food. Our pantry didn't have much to offer, but we had a few things that would have been essential, here. And just, like that, we started our vagrant existence.

Day 7

There was a storm, that first night. We didn't have any coats, or umbrellas. Just two backpacks and hours of walking in our feet.

At first, we were just walking on a street we had never been before, looking for shelter.

It was raining so heavily it was hard to see in front of us. The wind was sweeping leaves and raindrops in our faces as we held onto one another for balance.

Out of nowhere, we saw a black cat jump in front of us. It had clearly been surprised by the sudden outpour too, because it kept running across the street until it disappeared under the front porch of an old brick house.

The house looked empty, all the windows were dark, and the garden was overgrown with weeds. We followed the cat to the house and took refuge in an old shed adjacent to it. It was full of spider webs and rusted gardening tools. The rain still found its way to us and was dripping on our scalps, drop by drop.

There was something different about that house. After a while, the rain had slowed down, and we tried to see if it was really empty. We thought maybe we could borrow some food and spend the night there.

Believe us or not, the door was open. We didn't damage anything, nor do we intend to. We spent our first night in the library, next to the fireplace. Since then, we've been living along with the ghosts in this place. We haven't seen any, but we can tell, at night. From the creaking of the floorboards, the silent whisper of the wind, we know that we're not quite alone, here.

And we aren't. We're not sure how it happened, but the cat got into the house. It probably came in from a crack in the basement, or something. We haven't explored the basement, that much, it's too dark. It has no collar and likes to sleep next to Torry. During the day, it's either sleeping for hours in a sunbeam or disappearing on unknown adventures, like most cats, I would assume.

Apart from the obvious problem that food is running out, this is a paradise. There's everything we need, here. The house is old and sturdy. Torry is working on a drawing of it, right now. She said she wanted to capture the peacefulness and refuge it represents for us.

Day 8

It's really starting to hurt. Our stomachs were grumblings, before, but now it's like we're eating ourselves from the inside.

I told Torry that if I die first, she can eat anything but my face. I told her she'd have to cook my meat first, though, or she might get sick from it. Boiling it would be easier. It makes the meat chewier, but I won't look like human meat as much, that way, and it's hard to mess up. She's not very good at

cooking and cleaning, or so she told me. I've had more practice than her, so I'm the one tidying up. I would teach her all those things, but there wouldn't be much of a point, now, would there?

We spend our time here in different ways. She mostly reads and draws while I walk around, listen to music and write. It's so nice to be here. This place really feels like a miracle. There's something in the way the sun shines in, in the late afternoon, something in the sound of rain on the roof that feels so right.

We were really lucky to find this place when we did. I don't know who it belongs to, but it hasn't been lived in in quite a while, from the date of the latest newspaper I found. It was from 6 years ago.

I don't think I explained how we came to live here. You'll notice that I'm not saying "squatting" because, as far as we know, the house is abandoned.

Sample of the Script: Sketchbook List of Illustrations (Appendix 2)

User-centric Scenarios

I envision the user experience to be quite diverse. There are four main points of entry to *If We Fall Here*, namely the survival journal, the comic book, the audio broadcast, and the video game. The preferred entry point to the story will depend on the user's own media preferences. I have here described four young possible audience members, their favored point of entry, and which aspects of the story resonates most with them.

Dylan, Albertan boy of eleven years old, is an avid gamer but reluctant reader. Hoping to get him to diversify his interests, his mother, a librarian, bought the video game for his birthday, with an online key giving him access to the rest of the narrative. Dylan eventually played the video game and loved the basement sequence with the grasshopper invasion. A collector at heart, Dylan makes sure to replay the game and get every optional cutscene and achievements. However, even after finishing the game four times on the highest difficulty, he was still slightly confused by the animated flash backs which hinted at a larger story. He read the comic book and listened to the podcast on his

way to school on the bus, that week. He would click to see the corresponding images in the sketchbook during the podcast and the comic book but is less interested in going through all of Torry's drawings. At the end of the week, he skims through the survival journal to get every piece of information that was not in the other instalments.

Agnes is nine years old and has already read every book in her classroom's limited bookshelf. The next time she goes to the library with her older sister, she sees *If We Fall Here* on one of the library's electronic tablets. She gets to page fifteen of the survival journal before her sister asks her to leave. She rents the tablet from the library and continues reading at home. Having finished the text and the comic book, Agnes is eager to follow the story, and listens to the podcast before she falls asleep. After she has finished every piece of the story but the video game, she reluctantly asks her sister to install it on the latter's school laptop and begins playing on the easiest difficulty. She loves the animated cutscenes and seeing her beloved characters come to life on the screen. They looked different in her head. More than anything, she likes to pick up on the references to the survival narrative and the comic book, knowing that only readers like her will fully understand the lore implications of some of the details.

Victor, fourteen, had never heard of *If We Fall Here* before the contest. His best friend Chloe told him about it when she saw the call for a fan-made creation on her favorite social media. Victor always liked to write, and Chloe thinks this may be his chance to co-author a transmedia narrative! Although Chloe thinks of how this would look on a future college application, Victor likes the idea of being recognized as a prodigy writer. To understand how his story would fit in the universe, Victor starts from the beginning, reading in turn the survival journal, the comic book, and a transcript of the podcast (so he

can take notes). He goes on forums to get acquainted with fan theories and begins to write his own interpretation of what happened after the podcast. Being a writer at heart, he chooses to type out his text, but with instructions for animated GIFS as illustrations throughout the text. Fame awaits!

Heather and her friends are obsessed with *If We Fall Here*. Heather is ten years old and loves to read, especially if she can talk about it with her friends during recess. It was she who introduced the story to the group by lending her tablet to Vivian, and the rest was history. “Assum[ing] the role of hunters and gatherers,” Heather and her friends forage for each new piece of information on the series to support their analysis and rich discussions (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison & Weigel, 2006, p. 129). Each young person in the friend group has a favorite theory about what exactly lurks in the woods, and whatever happened to Torry’s mother. They have looked at each illustration for clues and cannot wait until the video game installment finally comes out!

5.3 Multiplatform Format

The various instalments of *If We Fall Here* are divided according to the chart below.

Type of narrative	Medium	Platform
Survival journal	40 pages of written text, dated.	Web, amazon books, kindle etc.
	Edible plant illustrations, in pencil	
Sketchbook	50 illustrations, watercolors, pencil, charcoal, crayon	Web, Instagram, image-sharing platform
	Animated time lapse of the antagonist, dated	
Comic book	40 pages of mixed dialogue and illustrations	Web, amazon books, kindle etc.
Podcast	4:30 hours of audio recordings in nine episodes	Web, Audible, iTunes etc.
Videogame	3D characters and level design	Steam and other video game digital distribution platforms
	2 hours of animation	

Survival Journal

The first instalment of the story is from Owen’s perspective, under the form of an expedition journal. Although Torry interjects through side notes she manually adds to the journal, Owen is the primary narrator during this part of the story. Having a natural tendency for melodrama, Owen is particularly poignant in his description of their trials and woes. The fatalist style of the journal resembles the last journal entries of Sir Walter “Falcon” Scott before his death in Antarctica. Having run away, the children find an abandoned house in a secluded area, where they choose to establish themselves. One of the first problems they face is the lack of food. In Owen’s mind, the audience for these writings is the team of detective investigating their deaths, once their bodies are found in

the old house. Wanting to facilitate the police's process, Owen describes their slow march to starvation and death, as the pair becomes weaker with hunger. Although the children are, at this point, homeless, isolated, and running out of food, they must eventually contend with their own share of responsibility for their situation. Although Owen's voice is seeped with both victimization and heroic resignation, Torry interjects at several points to remind them of the particular care they took to shun society and the safety net of their community. Indeed, at any point in the narrative, the two children could presumably seek the help of adults, but instead decide to part ways with mainstream society.

Sketchbook

Torry's book of illustrations span for the duration of the entire narrative, with some drawings even predating the events of the story. The book is a standalone implement to the story that both completes the narrative and functions well as a wordless (except for the titles) picture book. Due to my own artistic limitations, my blueprint merely describes the illustrations, their style, and their titles. In my transmedia narrative blueprint, the illustrations would be commissioned by an artist, who would, of course, have input into the creative process. Although there is a clear sequence of events to be followed, the illustrator's expertise at conveying emotion through visual arts would highly influence the directions and allow for a more integrated creative progress. It is important that the artist be versatile in their illustrative style, as the drawings also follow Torry's artistic journey as a young woman. Being a reserved person, Torry's drawings are intimate in nature. Drawing is her preferred form of expression, as opposed to Owen's love of words. The drawings start with snap-shot-like drawings of Torry's life in the house, expressing Torry's

deep attachment to the house on an emotional and conceptual level. Eventually, the drawings move away from her everyday life with Owen, instead focusing on the natural world depicted in a surrealist manner. Progressively, Torry focuses on drawing the figure of a woman. Vague at first, the woman becomes increasingly defined and corporeal. She is Torry's ideal woman, representing both her ideal self and her ideal figure of motherhood. Eventually, Torry finishes her sketches of the woman. The finished drawing is repeated 150 times, one drawing per day, with subtle changes showing the woman in an increasingly monstrous light (this is shown as an animated time lapse, with dates on each drawing). The last drawing of the woman is covered with splashes of red paint, representing Torry's relationship to her female identity. Through events that are fleshed out in the video game, the monster is vanquished as Torry comes to term with her conflicting desire for motherhood. The last few drawings show older versions of Terry and Owen in happy, sunny settings. This hints at either a happy resolution, or hopefulness for the future of the two protagonists.

Comic Book

The second installment in the story is an online comic book presented as one of Torry's creations for Owen's twelfth birthday. The comic book is around 40 pages, told from the perspective of Hleo, a black cat who brought the children to the house. Torry fleshes out a rich inner life for Hleo, exploring the latter's presumed thoughts on the children. Through Hleo's adventures in the woods, we come to better understand the dynamic between Torry and Owen, as well as the two's isolation from society. The story follows Hleo in his daily rounds around the house and in the forest, getting the reader

acquainted with the layout and setting of the video game installment. The comic book offers a surprising amount of information on the forest's lore to which Torry is mysteriously attuned. Readers of the comic book will have an advantage in playing the video game.

Podcast

Apart from the survival narrative, Owen's voice is also represented in a radio broadcast series. In the nine thirty-minute episodes, now twelve-year old Owen speaks of his thoughts on life, the books he likes, and his impressions on society. These episodes are presented as radio transmissions, which Owen broadcasts from the house's attic using an old battery-powered broadcasting system. The radio being their only link to the outside world, isolation becomes increasingly consuming for extroverted Owen. The radio-show being his sole way to feel seen and heard by others, Owen is particularly concerned with boosting his audience as much as possible, often to the detriment of the truth. The episodes begin under a loose format, demonstrating Owen's experimentation with the medium. Owen begins by speaking of his daily life, and of his and Torry's circumstances. By the third episode, Owen receives messages on the same frequency he uses by people commenting on his radio show or attempting to find out more about the children's whereabouts. Owen tries to keep his listeners entertained by sharing his detective work on the previous owner of the house, and by forcing Torry to appear as a "guest star" on the broadcast.

Videogame

The final installment of *If We Fall Here* is a videogame. It is also the only part of the story in which neither of the children are the supposed narrators or creators of the content. The game begins one rainy autumn night, overlooking the deep pond behind the house. A figure emerges from the pond and walks toward the house, knocking at the door. When the children open the door, they see a woman dressed like an Edwardian governess, with dark hair, a wide smile, and high cheekbones. The woman is identical to Torry's idealized drawings of a motherly figure. Torry invites the woman in, awestruck. Owen stays slightly behind, suspicious. The woman conjures up a magnificent feast, which the children eat without a second thought. Both fall into a deep slumber. Overnight, Owen is transformed into a garden gnome and thrown out of the house. He awakens several months later, in spring. The player gains control of a gnome-sized Owen in the garden. After climbing on ivy, the player observes the two women having dinner. Torry has a blank expression and acts as the woman's puppet. Owen concludes that he must break the woman's influence over his friend at all costs. During the game, the player will obtain flashbacks of the children's life, which contain clues to help the player along the way. Players who are acquainted with the journal, the sketchbook, the comic book, and the podcast will however have certain advantages in the playthrough, making the videogame rewarding for the transmedia audience while remaining self-contained. The first level is in the garden, where Owen has to find weapons to access the house from underneath the porch. The area will also include various items, such a bit of rope, which allow the player to interact with the provided game space. In the garden, the player can collect several memories, as well as enlisting Hleo's help. Having acquired the necessary

items, the players will move on to level two. The second level consists of the basement and serves to acquaint the player with the combat system, and to solve some puzzles based on player movement and items.

When the player arrives to the ground floor, the third level begins. This portion of the game will be based on simple stealth mechanics. The player hears the woman notice the garden gnome's disappearance and sends her 'spiders' to look for him. The objective of this level is to try to communicate with Torry, eventually finding her mindlessly knitting a scarf that takes up half the room. Speaking to her triggers a combat sequence. After some time, if the player manages to survive the encounter and bring Torry to half her health points, Torry will stagger. When she gets up, she realizes that there is blood on the floor, where she was sitting. She has had her first menstruation. The shock of this realization makes her aware of herself once more, and she resolves to defeat the intruder herself. Torry will take a sword from the library wall and set off to defeat the woman, who has gone looking for Owen in the forest. From that point on, the player controls Torry. The two have to fight increasingly large spiders on the way, and eventually find the woman in a clearing. The woman, who has the same monstrous features as Torry's last drawing in her sketchbook, transforms the pans of her clothing into tentacle-like weapons, which Torry must tear through with her sword. After defeating the woman, Owen regains his normal size. The epilogue features the children returning to their normal life, only Owen fixes up a tandem bicycle, and him and Torry head to a town we can perceive far in distance, above the tree line.

5.4 Timeline and Key Events

Although the story can be entered through any instalment except perhaps the sketchbook, the story is to be released according to a fixed schedule to promote the story being experienced as chronologically as possible. The first instalment to be released will be the survival journal, as well as the corresponding drawings in Torry's sketchbook. As the comic book and the audio recordings of Owen's broadcast are subsequently released, the drawings of the sketchbook will be added in parallel, following the events of the story. The last instalment to be released will be the video game, as it not only demands more time to be produced, and is the most immersive format, but it will also tie in the different instalments together with the optional animated flashbacks.

Before the video game is released, however, *If We Fall Here* will encourage audience participation by hosting a contest on the main website. The contest will entail encouraging the audience to create their own instalments of the story, which would fill in gaps in the timeline. The fan fictions selected will also need to be consistent with the story of the video game, thus promoting the spread of fan theories through which fan instalments will be selected to be part of the story's canon.

5.5 Interface and Branding

The main interface of *If We Fall Here* should include links to the various instalments, news of the latest releases, links to approved fan art, as well as information on the project and its timeline. The interface should be user-friendly, and its style should

reflect the dark, mysterious tone of the story itself. The website should serve as both a uniting interface to the story world and as a moderated meeting point for the community.

The story is meant to appeal to a large audience. While the format of the story can appeal more to technophiles, the story's themes and natural setting will likely attract another type of audience. In publicizing the story, there should be a clear focus on the story's exploration of independence and self-determination, urges which are often relatable for a middle-grade audience. The two main characters, with their contrasting personalities and worldviews, contribute to attracting readers of different genders and backgrounds. Moreover, juxtaposing the unnerving, surreal presence of the forest to the children's domestic life has the potential to attract fantasy and realism lovers alike. Targeted online advertising with a transmedia version of children's book trailers would be most effective to introduce the story to the intended audience and their parents. Showcasing the narrative and its innovative format before and after the release of the first instalments should generate an interest amongst the potential audience, especially if the eventual video game is marketed more aggressively prior to the final release.

Chapter 6: Identifying the Foreseeable Economic Variables and their Implications

6.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to identify the production needs of the transmedia narrative outlined in the previous chapter. By identifying the variables and artistic decisions that most influence the production cost, we will be able to estimate a high and low financial investment scenario to assess the range of economic requirements for a transmedia narrative such as the one my project is centered on. By the end of the chapter, having identified and isolated the costlier aspects of the production, we should be able to tease out possible alternatives to alleviate the production costs of transmedia narratives. In accordance to this objective, we will thus begin the chapter by assessing the types of human and financial resources that the above transmedia narrative necessitates; the two subsequent sections will explore two drastically different scenarios for the production of the narrative, centered on investment scope. The following section will focus on exploring ways to alter the outcome of the two scenarios by addressing specifically the more resource-driven parts of the narrative.

6.2 Assessing Production Needs

I have chosen to organize the possible production needs of my transmedia narrative by media type. This section specifically explores the production possibilities of each medium as well as my reasoning for the various choices behind the design of *If We Fall Here*. The variables of the production needs can diverge widely depending on the

types of medium used or the investment available for the project. By looking into the necessities of each parts of the project, we should gain insight into its budgeting iterations.

The first variable that needs to be addressed is the context in which the transmedia narrative sees the light of day. From a publishing company mandate to an independent, self-financed business like *Inanimate Alice*, the circumstances of transmedia narrative production influence its projected expenses. In the case of a new independent media-production company built for a single project, the aggregate cost will also include insurance, rent, utilities, office supplies, equipment, software, and licenses, costs which all add to the financial risk of the emerging company. Of course, one may start a company without having a set office and hire contract workers, but that scenario may entail more problems such as communication issues, or a less cohesive and integrated creative process. Planning for an office space and setting with key content creators at hand allows for more input from the other team members on the overall story, adding to the level of complexity and embeddedness of the various parts and artistic iterations of the narrative. Additionally, it allows the team to have fewer problems communicating, and hopefully shorten the timeline of the project.

Survival Journal and Comic Book

Producing a novella for a middle grade audience comes with its own set of challenges. To begin with, one must consider whether the text will be distributed in print form, digitally, or both. The survival journal's length is akin to that of a novella and would be less expensive to produce as an eBook. On the other hand, selling print copies of the journal and the comic book, with a key for the rest of the multimodal experience, opens

the transmedia narrative to the world of physical commodification, which adds other distribution channels, such as bookstores. It also enables technology-skeptic buyers to not only find the product, but to facilitate their relationship to the product.

However, an advantage of selling the survival journal and comic book as eBooks is that it will reduce the production costs by foregoing the manufacturing and distribution fees. Moreover, whereas selling physical copies opens a certain demographic of buyers, having the texts be available online broadens the targeted market, making it purchasable across the English-speaking world. Additionally, it is uncertain that the relationship between parents and digital media for children will remain the same in the near future. As the next generation of parents will have been raised in conjunction with digital technologies, the stigma surrounding children and digital storytelling is likely to diminish in time. Furthermore, having the survival journal and the comic book exist as digital copies allow for a greater use of illustrations in the two texts. Indeed, making physical copies would limit certain features of the text, especially in regard to illustrations and colours. Whereas printing the comic book in colour instead of in black and white would increase the production cost, producing only a digital copy would circumvent that variable.

Sketchbook

The sketchbook presents another set of challenges, due to the importance of the last few illustrations in relation to the narrative. Although one could conceive of a print sketchbook, the varied nature of the illustrations, the required page size and its length would in all certainty be extremely costly. To do the illustrations justice, the print form would need to be similar to a photography book. In addition, since the last drawings are

meant to represent a time lapse in the story, the images are planned to be shown as a two-dimensional animation showing the transformation between each drawings of the antagonist, leading to its monstrous reveal.

Instead, it would be useful to pair the drawings and the text as digital copies. In doing so, we could have the drawings exist in an independent sketchbook but link certain events in the survival journal or the podcast to specific illustrations, and thus facilitate the transitions between the different medias and platforms. This solution would add more cohesion to the timeline while still keeping the different medias independent.

Video game

The necessary investment linked to video game production is influenced by a wide category of factors. From the type of game, the length of the game, the graphics, the complexity of the game mechanics, and the platforms on which it runs, AAA games can easily cost above ten million dollars to produce (Johns, 2006). These costs, which rival those of movie blockbusters, are the result of the cut-throat competition between PlayStation, Xbox, and Nintendo. In Jennifer Johns' article, "Video Games Production Networks: Value Capture, Power Relations and Embeddedness" we are presented with the complex internal and market-wide power dynamic between the various players in the video game industry. The increasing competition in the industry has led, according to Johns, to the need for "larger amounts of financing and human capital [...] internally and strong[er] relationships with suppliers" (Johns, 2006, p. 159). The larger expense has resulted in an exponential growth in video games' production value, visible in AAA games' increasing length, graphics quality, speed, replayability, and the addition of multiplayer

features. The competition between the large video game companies such as Nintendo, Xbox, and PlayStation poses “significant barriers to new entrants on the market” (Johns 2006, p. 159), and often results in exploitative relationships between publishers and their contractual developers in the former’s efforts to cut down on costs. Indeed, as publishers shoulder most of the financial risk, they usually retain power over the intellectual property of what the developers produce, creating an uneven power relationship. Johns however mentions the ability of online games to circumvent part of the market pressure by avoiding console licensing and releasing games through streaming platforms.

This competition has significantly increased the audience’s expectation of video games, both in terms of the quality of the graphics, and of the complexity of the world and its mechanics. Although independent video game companies have made a name for themselves online rather than through consoles, the fact remains that the moderate financial success of these companies often depends on enormous sales numbers, and a dedicated fan-base (Yacht Club Games, 2014).

Regarding the video game segment of the transmedia narrative, I have conducted informal interviews with animators and programmers working on video games to inform the types of decision an artistic director would have to face in the early production stages. The primary decisions to make were the broad type of video game that would be produced, its server, its number of players, the type of universe (platform, open-world), how the player could interact with the world, the size of the world, and its artistic style. All of these factors would have a large influence on the production team, the necessary timeline, and, of course, the financing.

One of the most influential variables, cost-wise, is the number, quality, and level of detail of the animations. First, one has to decide whether the animation will be two or three-dimensional. Since 2D animation involves moving parts of the image manually and is, if cost-effective, time consuming, I have opted for 3D animation, especially considering that the video game contains optional animated sequences as bonus material that ties in the other parts of the narrative. 3D animation first requires modelling of characters, enemies, and any object liable to movement in the story. From that point on, the animators may move the characters at will with the animation software. These two tasks are both achievable with the animation software Autodesk Maya.

6.3 Expense Projection: Two Scenarios

The numbers in the charts below come from different sources. Prices of rent, equipment, and materials are informed estimates I have made by comparing prices from different sources such as Craigslist, Staples, Best Buy, and Amazon to achieve realistic estimates of market prices in British Columbia. All the estimates are conservative, in that they refer to the prices of a mid-range quality of equipment plus a 15% tax. In regard to the salary section of the chart, I have used the median hourly wages for various positions as detailed in the Government of Canada's Labour Market Information data, specifically concerning the Vancouver metropolitan area. The estimation of the number of hours required are taken from the informal interviews I have conducted with a video game animator and a programmer, which also included their software recommendations. In addition, I have also researched the prices of business registration and licensing in British Columbia, all of which are available on provincial and federal websites. Due to the nature

of the information on display below, I have chosen not to clutter the chart with all the reference details. Instead, I have identified with a star all the estimated prices, namely, the prices that were not directly taken from public government records and resources but were instead calculated from available market prices through several distributors. I have included a fuller account breaking down these charts and how the numbers were obtained for each expense category in Appendix 4.

Lastly, these scenarios suppose complete financing from the start of the production, rather than having the project contingent on early revenues. Since the project includes time-consuming features such as animation, audio recordings, and illustrations, we will assume that the financial risk will remain the same until the completion of the project. This will offer a realistic view of the type of investment required for the project regardless of its projected revenues, which are significantly less predictable for transmedia narratives than for traditional media.

High Investment Scenario

The first chart explores a high investment scenario, in which our fictitious transmedia production company rents an office space of four to five workers, in Richmond, British Columbia. As this is a fictional business plan, there is, theoretically, no limit to supposed expenses as the project is hypothetical in nature. However, the scenario at hand is by no means voluntarily extravagant. The chief investment featured in the expense projection is linked to salaries and marketing, both of which are essential to the quality of the transmedia narrative, as well as its visibility. By employing seven full-time workers, this scenario necessitates a meeting place to facilitate the internal

communications, and hopefully hasten the production timeline. Of course, having a centralized office generates more expenses, but it can also improve the overall coherence of the transmedia narrative. As multimedia narratives necessitate collaboration from specialists in different fields, this scenario considers that, at any moment, one may find the artistic director, the lead animator, the lead programmer, and the illustrator working in close proximity to ensure that the narrative evolves smoothly and coherently. The story bible in Chapter 5 would also undergo several changes with the creative input of each party. The large amount of investment in hiring two animators, two video game programmers, and one web programmer will ensure that the graphics, the interface and the game engine used in the project will run smoothly and are on par with independent developer standards. The marketing budget is twofold: television and online ads. I am proposing to market the transmedia narrative through a book trailer using written text, voice overs, illustrations, animation, and a demonstration of gameplay. This book trailer will serve to intrigue its viewers in addition to introducing them to the story's format. The advertisement's target audience will be children aged ten to twelve and their parents. The online ads will run on platforms on which part of the story will be available for free, such as YouTube and Facebook. The televised advertisement will focus on family-themed shows and will run the full 30 second trailer. The number used for the marketing campaign is of course idealized, but not inconsistent with a high-risk, high-reward mentality.

High Investment Expense Chart (see Appendix 4)

Position	Median hourly wage	Time	Annual total
Programmer- Website	34	50 hours	1 700
Lead video game programmer	34	year	57 120
Assistant video game programmer	29	year	48 720
Video game music and audio effects	28,84	three months	12 112
3D modeling	23,92	three months	10 046,00
Lead animator	25,5	year	42 840
Animation	23,5	year	39 480
Illustrations	25,5	year	42 840
Artistic director/ screenwriter	25,5	year	72 694
Community management	22,5	year	37 800
Voice actor Torry	15,75	8 hours	126
Voice actor Owen	15,75	70 hours	1 102,00
Voice actor nurse	15,75	8 hours	126
BC work insurance	1.21% rate	year	4 074
EI employer contribution	1.4 of employees'	year	8 522
CPP employer contribution	1.0 of employees'	year	16 439
Subtotal			395 741
Materials and licenses			
	Prices		
Autodesk Maya	4421,25	yearly	4 421,25
*Photoshop	150	fixed	150
Microsoft Office	60,5	monthly	726
*2 Mac book pro retina (animation)	5000	fixed	5 000
*3 portable computers	2500	fixed	2 500
*Printer	110	fixed	110
*Scanner	170	fixed	170
*Hardrives	150	fixed	150
Domain name	15	yearly	15
Virtual Private Server	29,99	monthly	359,88
*Recording studio	385	10 days	3 850
Copyright	65	fixed	65
Trademark	250	fixed	250
Name approval	30	fixed	30
Business registration	40	fixed	40
Insurance	2 330	yearly	2 330
Subtotal			20 167
Office			
*Rent and utilities	1 600	monthly	19 200
Sign Permit	93	fixed	93
*Office supplies	150	monthly	1 800
Subtotal			21 093
Marketing			
*Online ad			100 000
*Television ad			75 000
Subtotal			175 000
Total			612 001

Low Investment Scenario

The second chart details the types of investment necessary in a low investment scenario. As with the above scenario, there are few absolute limits to how little one could invest into the production of a transmedia narrative. In its bare form, a transmedia narrative can be rather simple, and does not necessitate a digital component. In theory, a low budget transmedia narrative could consist a story woven through any different platforms and mediums, such as a book and a YouTube channel each exploring complementary parts of the same story. However, by cutting into the number and breadth of the transmedia narrative, one also loses the complexity of the interdependent whole, and thus loses some of the appeal of transmedia, namely the interactive aspect, and the layered narrative. The core concept of the narrative for *If We Fall Here* remains the same for the low-investment scenarios. Where it will diverge from the above chart is in the human investment. Indeed, the team described below is smaller, and more services have been cut from the overall design.

By hiring fewer people, paying them a reduced salary and not investing in a common office space, this scenario may reduce the project's financial risk, but it jeopardizes the cohesiveness and quality of the end result. By paying the employees less, one can expect that the team's experience and devotion to the project will inevitably suffer. As we saw in section 2.3, assembling a strong, passionate team is one of the first recommendation for producers in *Dowd's Storytelling Across Worlds: Transmedia for Creatives and Producers*. Without the appropriate financial compensation, it may be difficult to hire people of talent and experience. Moreover, by foregoing the office space, we increase the risk of miscommunication amongst the team, as well inducing further

delays and time wasting without the possibility for daily direct communication. The budget also cut the rent of a professional recording studio, investing instead in medium-range recording equipment for the character voiceovers.

In the low-investment scenario, I have reduced but kept a certain budget for marketing and advertisement. As was the case of *Inanimate Alice*, not publicizing a transmedia narrative in any way would make its survival exceedingly difficult. Without a specialized online space devoted to transmedia narratives, in the way YouTube is for videos and Twitter is to short texts, one has no choice but to lure the audience to the website, or risk being lost in a web limbo. In the end, not investing enough resources in the base project is a risk of its own, opening the door to delays, a lack of visibility, and a diminished quality of the final product.

Low Investment Expense Chart (See Appendix 4)

Position	Low hourly wage	Time	Annual total
Programmer- Website	21,25	35 hours	744
Lead video game programmer	21,25	year	35 700
Video game music and audio effects	21,94	one month	3 072
3D modeling	15,38	one month	2 153,20
Lead animator	15,38	year	25 838
Illustrations	15,38	six months	12 919
Screenwriter/project manager	26,44	year	44 419
Voice actor Torry	11	8 hours	88
Voice actor Owen	11	70 hours	770,00
Voice actor nurse	11	8 hours	88
BC work insurance	1.21% rate	year	1 522
EI employer contribution	1.4 of employees'	year	2 923
CPP employer contribution	1.0 of employees'	year	5 189
Subtotal			135 425
Materials and licenses		Prices	
Autodesk Maya	1473,75	yearly	1 473,75
*Photoshop	150	fixed	150
*Printer and scanner (colour)	350	fixed	350
*Hard drives	150	fixed	150
Domain name	15	yearly	15
Virtual Private Server	29,99	monthly	359,88
*Recording equipment	350	fixed	350
Copyright	65	fixed	65
Trademark	250	fixed	250
Name approval	30	fixed	30
Business registration	40	fixed	40
Subtotal			3 234
Marketing			
*Online ad			5 000
*Television ad			2 000
Subtotal			7 000
Total			145 659

6.4 Financial Difficulties and Possible Solutions

As we can see from the two charts, the cost of producing a transmedia narrative significantly increases with the degree of complexity of the mediums used. The video game component is especially time and resource-consuming. Every time a new member is added to the assembled team, the overall text benefits from their added input and expertise in creating a thought-out, layered narrative, but at a large financial cost.

One difficulty the above scenarios create is that I have presumed the project and its company will start from scratch, which adds its own set of difficulties. If the transmedia production team was already assembled and established in a publishing house, the cost of starting the project would of course be lesser, with human capital and equipment already at hand. Unfortunately, traditional print publishing houses often lack the expertise and human resources to complete such multimodal projects. Such a varied team is almost only found amongst video game developers, who, as we have already established, suffer from the industry's highly competitive atmosphere. With such a razor thin margin for error, few video game developers and publishers can take on the financial risk of producing an emerging storytelling format such as transmedia narratives.

Indeed, the current entertainment industry is so segregated and competitive that few transmedia stories have been produced as for now, and fewer yet thriving off the medium. One solution to this conundrum would be to shift the way the print and video game industries view each other. By collaborating and sharing the material and human resources they already have in house, the two industries could not only diversify their media production and create quality innovative content, but they would also share the financial risk of the endeavor. Such a partnership would redefine the consumer's

relationship to our media as foreshadowed by media scholars in section 2.1 and 2.2, and further promote a more holistic comprehension of media.

Additionally, I believe more transmedia producers should advocate for hybrid or so-called “chewy” transmedia, which demand the same amount of planning, but has the considerable advantage of diminishing the financial risk of the project by waiting for the first sales before producing the entire product, allowing for adjustments and early revenues which can be re-invested in the project accordingly.

Lastly, once the format of transmedia is more firmly established in the public consciousness, I believe that it will be easier for independent producers to obtain funding through more regular channels, either through loans, financing from larger publishing houses, or the increasingly popular crowdfunding. With a clear market, one could easily envision that new platforms would emerge to cater to those transmedia stories and offer a tribune to emerging and established creators as well as their audiences. Although those are but predictions, I believe that the above scenarios clearly demonstrate what hinders the viability of transmedia narratives in the current entertainment industry, and how the large media content producers could adapt to overcome those difficulties. Should they wish to, I believe producers have the ability to revolutionize our entertainment world while being mindful of their all-important bottom line.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Making Sense of Transmedia Trends

Looking back to the original research questions, I have used a case study of *Inanimate Alice* as well as the hypothetical transmedia project *If We Fall Here* to try and identify the challenges faced by such projects. Using the case study of *Inanimate Alice*, we have attempted to answer the first research question, namely: “What material and financial challenges do transmedia narratives for children face?”

As was discussed in Chapter 4, since transmedia narratives encompass and layer other types of storytelling, it is unsurprising to discover the amount of resources needed to create a successful project. Obtaining sufficient financing to both produce and promote the project is arguably the most important challenge faced by transmedia stories in their early development, which was certainly the case with *Inanimate Alice*. One challenge that is perhaps more closely tied to our current entertainment environment is the lack of a clear market or distribution channels for transmedia stories, which hinders a successful marketing of the product. In the case of *Inanimate Alice*, the series had to adapt to their sparse audience and sell their product to schools by emphasizing the project’s educational merits. Although commendable in their display of adaptability and resilience, the team of *Inanimate Alice* championed their project against all possible odds and business sense. It is likely that, had the project not been self-financed early on and produced by a passionate team, it would have ended after the first few instalments.

Succeeding as a fictional transmedia narrative for individual consumers, as *Inanimate Alice* initially planned, necessarily demands a large investment in marketing and advertising to compensate for the story's unusual format. Hence, emerging transmedia projects not only face the production difficulties of having to finance a large team of specialists in various creative fields, but also to teach the public about the transmedia format's possibilities, and how it differs from popular multimedia franchises.

Having identified some of the challenges that hinder transmedia storytelling, I turn to the second research question: "How do those challenges hinder the production and distribution of transmedia content? Which strategies are employed to remedy those obstacles?" As we have seen with our case study, the lack of financing, popularity of the medium and the lack distribution channels all work to slow the production of transmedia materials. Contrarily to established mediums like books, cinema, music, and video games, there is as of now no community devoted to the appreciation, critique, promotion, or distribution of transmedia content. *Inanimate Alice* relied on its unorthodox medium to create a buzz around their project, rather than working to publicize it. In fact, although the project received a moderate amount of media attention for its format, it had the double burden of having to both promote its content and its form.

As we have seen in Chapter 6, the financial and human challenges of producing transmedia narratives are significant, and likely to intimidate mainstream publishers, due to the high financial risk such an investment poses. For publishers, rather than planning for an entire transmedia experience, it may seem more natural to reinvest in successful works to expand their universe and scope. However, having a fully fleshed out plan of an

intricate and ambitious transmedia story can considerably enhance the viewer's experience and set the narrative apart from franchises built on adaptations and spin-offs.

Looking back to our third research question, "Could cohesive, fictional transmedia narratives be successfully and profitably commercialized in the current entertainment industry?", I believe we can safely conclude that it is rather unlikely. The franchises that profit from the so-called "transmedia" craze do not comply with Jenkin's top-down definition of the term. It is more likely that transmedia storytelling will thrive under another definition that would be more consistent with current media production and financing. If one assumes that media evolution is more organic than media theory, it is probable that top-down transmedia storytelling will become the norm once a market and distribution channels are developed for the format. I personally look forward to it.

Nevertheless, I believe there are ways to diminish the financial risks, which seem to be the main production problem for transmedia narratives. Speculatively speaking, certain shifts in the current entertainment industry could significantly facilitate the production of transmedia stories. Since the stories span across mediums and forms, it would only be fitting that publishers collaborate in a trans-industry partnership, where employees and resources could be shared on one or several projects, thus lowering the production cost and splitting the initial investment. Although transmedia storytelling is still in its early stages, with most projects being self-financed and smaller in scale, it is time for large publishers to look back on fan fiction, independent media creators, and crowd-funded projects to better understand the complex and multi-faceted media modern audiences will soon come to expect as the new norm in entertainment.

7.2 Limitations

Of course, this analysis does not pretend to give an exact recipe for transmedia narrative success. There are so few first-hand accounts of true, “hard” transmedia production processes that my analysis had to be partly based on a fictional project, therefore severely limiting the scope of my conclusions. As was mentioned above, not all transmedia projects need to be as financially demanding or ambitious as *Inanimate Alice* or *If We Fall Here*, but by stripping away more costly aspects of the narratives, the story may lose its complexity and appeal to a younger audience. Nevertheless, one should remember that the scenarios and analysis of this thesis are only meant to reflect the contemporary North American entertainment market.

It would be misguided to claim that the conclusions of my project can be applied to all attempts at producing multimedia narratives. My project limits its analysis to my prototype and to the current state of selling interactive, multimodal media. My analysis unfortunately does not account for a change in economic models for either the publishing industry nor the world of digital entertainment. Moreover, this project’s conclusions do not make provisions for different multimedia narratives that exploit resources and funding in different ways than my prototype. In the end, as no two creative processes are identical, and multimedia stories in themselves vary widely in terms of length, breadth and scope, my project does not pretend to offer a universal cost to profit ratio for multimedia narratives. What can be expected, considering the limitations of my use of a creative prototype and the exploratory nature of my research, is that my project brings forward a more comprehensive portrayal of the challenges specific to the production of transmedia narratives. In this sense, I believe that this project has the potential to bring a breath of

fresh air in the conversation surrounding transmedia narratives, by combining the academic discourse on transmedia storytelling to the concrete world of creation, production and marketing that goes into its making.

7.3 Tomorrow's Stories

I believe this analysis has important implications for both media academics and content producers. In my research, I have often found that the discourse between the two spheres was often disjointed, and that few academics focused on the barriers to the creation of transmedia narratives, which producers witness first-hand. Transmedia stories, through their multimodal and interpretative nature, have the potential to further expand our understanding of multimodal literacy for children and young people, and to promote a more integrative set of decoding skills in youths who already live in a multimedia world. Although I echo the academic world's enthusiasm for a revolution in storytelling, I am also aware, as a media consumer and as an observer of the entertainment industry, that the reality of proto transmedia stories is not up to par with media theories. As such, this study attempts to bridge different epistemologies, and to help future academics and creators delve further into the implications and repercussions of transmedia narrative construction and production to have a more holistic understanding of such a fascinating media framework. Moving forward with the conversation on transmedia storytelling, I hope this work serves as a stepping stone to future literary analyses of transmedia stories, as well as a starting point in the discussion on the influence of transmedia storytelling in our media consumption and interpretation.

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24

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Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Trademarks and copyright property of Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. 2001.

Cars

Trademarks and copyright property of Disney Enterprises Inc. 2008.

Doctor Who

Trademarks and copyright property of BBC. 1963.

Dora the Explorer

Trademarks and copyright property of Viacom International Inc. 2002.

Harry Potter

Trademarks and copyright property of Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 2002.

Heroes

Trademarks and copyright property of NBC Universal Television Distribution. 2006.

Inanimate Alice

Trademarks and copyright property of The Bradford Company. 2005.

Labyrinth

Trademarks and copyright property of The Henson Company Inc. 2017.

My Little Pony

Trademarks and copyright property of Hasbro Inc. 2011.

Peter Pan

Trademarks and copyright property of Disney Enterprises Inc. 2006.

Shovel Knight

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Star Wars

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The Dark Crystal

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The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

Trademarks and copyright property of Pemberley Digital. 2012.

The Matrix

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Twilight

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Appendix 1: Interview with Ian Harper

What would you say are the greatest challenges in creating multimedia content for children on the internet?

IH - The greatest challenges appear to be the ability to address a wide enough audience for your production to be of consequence and accessing sufficient investment to be able to produce material to serve that audience. These days, it is technology companies and their platforms that drive the internet market forward with producers adjusting their focus in order to suit the platform they are addressing. This "silo" mentality challenges creativity, the all-embracing "app" being a clear example. Simplicity, functionality, speed are drivers in internet usage, each one stifling meaningful expression. Sitting outside of those ecosystems and without clear routes to market makes attracting investment all the harder.

In your opinion, has the online community or media consumption habits changed since you began the series? In what ways do you believe your experience as a digital storyteller might have differed if you had released the first episode of *Inanimate Alice* in 2018?

IH- The digital world has fundamentally changed since we began in late 2005. Those were the days of dial-up modems and by today's standards, tiny file sizes. Before social media, before widespread usage of video, audiences were eager to experience something new, something very different. To make a start in 2018 would be a totally different challenge. The internet is awash with storytelling both fiction and factual. It is awash in advertising which commands big budgets and is powerfully distracting. Now, audiences have no time. The stats tell us we have a few seconds to capture someone's attention. That doesn't work for our kind of storytelling. We aim to encourage young people to get lost in a world, like getting lost in a book. We would have to take an entirely different approach. We would need to establish a substantial budget upfront and build to a tight timeline. The most likely outcome is that it would not get built.

Would you say that the current market of digital storytelling for children is favorable to content creators?

IH- No I would not. In the end, it always comes down to money, to investment. The traditional publishers fight tooth-and-nail to protect their print and ebook business streams and are not investors in exploring "what comes next." Those that are investing on-line are highly focused on games which are routinely profitable. Largely for adolescent males, the "girls and technology" segment is much neglected. Such is the differential, we are seeing narrative adventures being termed narrative games in order to make them saleable. While this is encouraging in some respects, it leaves the creators of what we might think of as digital storybooks (as opposed to storygames or gamebooks) somewhat out in the cold.

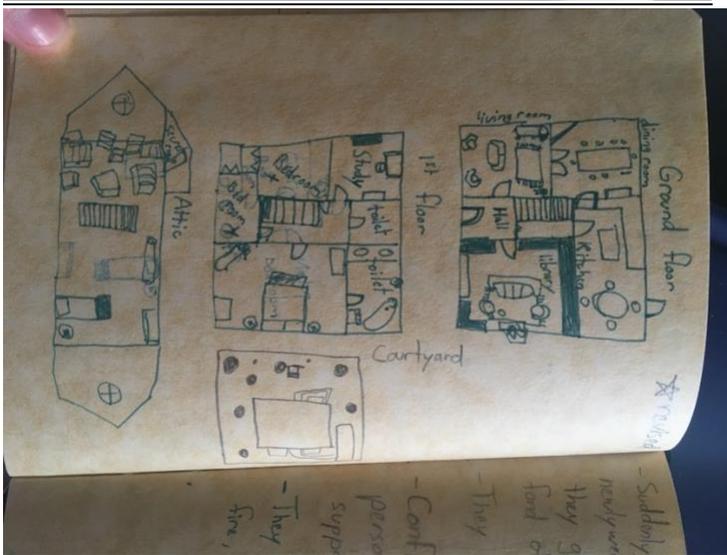
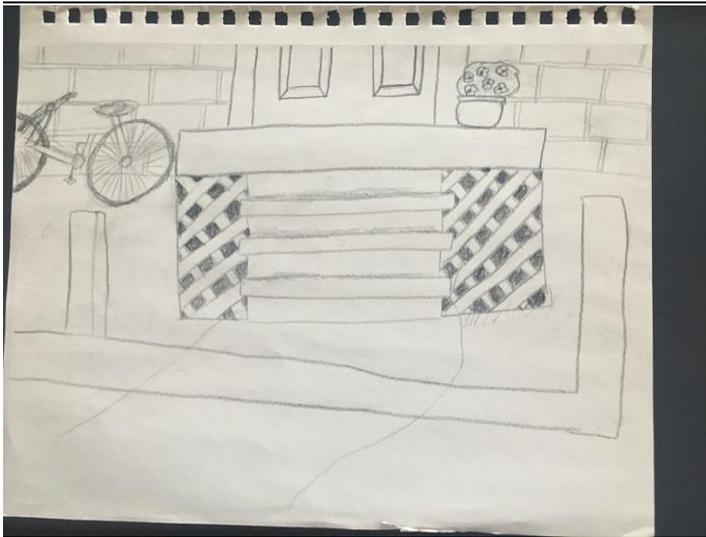
How did you balance the need for investment to create a multimedia narrative with the uncertain revenue streams of the internet, in the early days of *Inanimate Alice*? Would you say that the production process was limited by concerns on the profitability of this emerging medium?

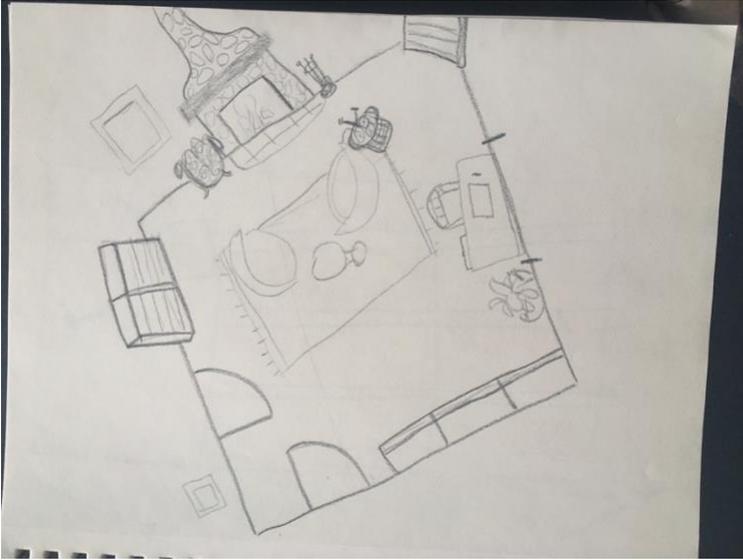
IH- The first episodes were internally funded, so that got the work off to a good start. Once the story was under way we realised the progressive complexity of the narrative would call for bigger and bigger investments...and so at that point, we started to look around for potential investors. It is one possible conclusion that lack of profitability has restricted our ability to progress as far and as fast as we would like. An alternative view would be that the (dubious) luxury of having sufficient time to reflect on the production and consider next steps has added value to what we continue to create.

Appendix 2: Illustration List (Sample)

- Illustrations
1. Still life, pencil. Kitchen (trailer) cluttered counter, cigarette bunds on the kitchen table.
 2. Mother asleep under the covers. Clothes on the floor. Tangled sheets.
 3. Autoportrait. Pencil. Scar on the left side of her face. Long black hair.
 4. Parc. Crayon. Trees in the summer. Swings. Dandelions. Powerlines in the background.
 5. (Traced from a picture) child and mother. Look nothing alike. No scar. The frame is also drawn.
 6. Pile of laundry. Teddy bear on top, ruling over the few other toys.
 7. (more abstract) mother-like figure stalked by shadows. Seen as if from a lens.
 8. (abstract) mother in darkness, cooler colours, violent strokes. Charcoal and crayon.
 9. Covered figure, two blue hearts. larger stomach. loneliness.
 10. Kitchen. Cold colours. Mother from the back. focus on the iron.
 11. Winter landscape. Parc.
 12. Autoportrait. Torry looking more resolved. Short hair.
 13. Abandoned building, at night.
 21. Black cat sitting in front of an old brick house. The house is half covered in ivy, and surrounded by a forest.
 22. Owen, in bed, feverish. Black cat at his side.
 23. Library. Messy.
 24. Bare kitchen, empty cupboards, broken window. Mold.
 25. Abstract drawing. Children prey to hunger, eaten from inside.
 26. Cat eating a mouse outside.
 27. Two autoportraits, signed and dated. The two children look hallow and emacillated.
 28. Owen and the cat, sleeping by a weak fire. Books scattered around them.
 29. Sketches of edible plants
 30. Ibid
 31. Ibid
 32. Ibid
 33. Ibid
 34. Ibid
 35. Ibid
 36. Owen, looking more well-fed, cooking over an open fire, plants prepped for boiling next to his cauldron
 37. Winter landscape forest with deer
 38. Owen, winter fishing with a net.

Appendix 3: Video Game Concept Art







Easy
HP 2000

Normal
HP 4000

Hard
HP 8000

Attacks:
skirt slash
screams
minions
wooden nails

Appendix 4: Detailed Expense Charts

The numbers of the high and low investment expense charts in Chapter 6 are derived from a variety of sources, including official government websites and online market research.

In both charts, the first section detailing salaries, British Columbia work insurance, the Canadian Employment Insurance (EI) and the Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) contain information from the Government of Canada's official website.

The salaries in the high investment scenarios are all median salaries in the Vancouver areas for the respective work fields according to the Labour Market Information section of the Government of Canada's Website (<https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/explorecareers>). For its part, the low investment expense chart shows the low-end of the salaries reported for the Vancouver area according to the above governmental resource. The information obtained from this online source dates from March 2018. To estimate the time allotted to each professional for the project, I have consulted 3D video game animator John Constantineau and video game artistic director Martin Trudeau for the project's necessary timeline and human resources.

The BC work insurance rate is a base estimate according to the cost of employee coverage under British Columbia law. While these numbers are speculative and are often industry-dependant, according to Work Safe BC's guidelines for media production industries, the 2018 base rate of insurance is 1.21% of the employee's salary (worksafebc.com).

The EI and CPP rates were calculated according to Canada's Revenue Agency guidelines as detailed on their website (<https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/businesses/topics/payroll/payroll-deductions-online-calculator-pdoc-payroll-tables-td1s.html>).

In the following section "Materials and Licenses", the charts explore the various business expenses that are crucial to the production of the transmedia production scenario. The prices concerning the specific material purchases as well as the software licensing are market prices obtained through estimates from websites such as staples.ca, bestbuy.ca, amazon.ca, adobe.com, and autodesk.ca. I obtained the price of name registration and server services from several website-building websites such as websitebuilderexpert.com, websitesetup.org, and lawyerist.com to assess expenditures linked to domain names, hosting, and web design.

For the price of the recording studio, I have gone through Vancouver studio reviews, and selected Blue Light Studios and Vertical Studios as potential contractors for the recording. The price listed in the high investment chart refers to the location of such as studio. The low-investment chart, on the other hand, proposes to buy recording equipment from sites such as amazon.ca or bestbuy.ca to lower the production cost of the podcast.

In the last part of the section, I obtained the costs associated to trademark, sign permit, business registration, and copyright from the British Columbia and Government of Canada official websites:

(<http://www.bcbusinessregistry.ca/availableregistrations.htm>)

(<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/business/ip/copyright.html>).

For the cost of office insurance, rent, and utilities in the high-investment scenario, I consulted several office rental spaces in the Vancouver area such as craigslist.com, kijiji.ca, regus.ca, and collierscanada.com. Looking at 5-people office spaces in Richmond, I have obtained a monthly estimate including utilities.

Lastly, the marketing section of both charts details an estimate of the costs of television and web ads. I have inspired myself from several online recommendations of what budget percentage should be allotted to marketing. Having little information on the topic, I have surveyed business blogs and websites dedicated to such issues. In the process, I have found that business sites such as webstrategiesinc.com, bigcommerce.ca, legalzoom.ca, and smallbusiness.chron.com all consistently advocated an approximate 7 to 12 % of the budget to be dedicated to advertisement and marketing.

Of course, the two charts reflect both my limitations as a hypothetical business owner, and the lack of information available on the potential revenues for transmedia storytelling. I have willingly chosen to exclude loan interest in the charts, and assumed the project would be self-financed. If one expects large profits from transmedia storytelling, financing would likely be more established to reflect the market. The uncertainties and high level of variability surrounding transmedia narratives hinder both the financing, the development, and the sale of such stories.