JYX JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Koistinen, Aino-Kaisa; Koskimaa, Raine; Välisalo, Tanja

Title: Constructing a Transmedia Universe : The Case of Battlestar Galactica

Year: 2021

Version: Published version

Copyright: © Kirjoittaja, 2021

Rights: In Copyright

Rights url: http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/?language=en

Please cite the original version:

Koistinen, A.-K., Koskimaa, R., & Välisalo, T. (2021). Constructing a Transmedia Universe : The Case of Battlestar Galactica. WiderScreen, 15.6.2021. http://widerscreen.fi/numerot/ajankohtaista/constructing-a-transmedia-universe-the-case-of-battlestar-galactica/

Constructing a Transmedia Universe: The Case of Battlestar Galactica

15.6.2021

Battlestar Galactica transmedia storytelling transmedia universe transmedial world user-generated content

Aino-Kaisa Koistinen
aino-kaisa.koistinen[a]jyu.fi
PhD, Title of Docent in Media Culture (University of Turku)
Postdoctoral researcher, Contemporary Culture Studies
Department of Music, Art and Culture Studies
& The School for Resource Wisdom
University of Jyvaskyla

Raine Koskimaa
raine.koskimaa[a]jyu.fi
PhD, Professor of Contemporary Culture Studies
Department of Music, Art and Culture Studies
University of Jyvaskyla

Tanja Välisalo
tanja.valisalo[a]jyu.fi
MA, Doctoral Student in Contemporary Culture Studies
Department of Music, Art and Culture Studies
University of Jyvaskyla

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

In this article, we define a 'transmedia universe' as encompassing the complexity of transmedia storytelling, production and consumption. In doing so, we use the popular science fiction television series Battlestar Galactica as a case study, including both the original and reimagined versions of the series and their various intramedia and transmedia, narrative and non-narrative, and diegetic and non-diegetic expansions. Moreover, we look beyond the official productions of the Battlestar Galactica franchise and include, for example, user-generated content within its transmedia universe.

Introduction

The reimagined version of the American science fiction television series *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–2009, henceforth the reimagined *BSG*) has been cited as an example of the growing trend towards transmediality (e.g. Scott 2008; 2010; Jenkins 2011). The reimagined *BSG* franchise, indeed, offers a wide range of products and media platforms from which to access and enjoy its complex storyworld (understood here as a shared realm in which franchise-specific settings, characters, objects and actions exist; cf. Donald and Austin 2019). These include transmedia expansions that broaden the storyworld via the same medium (in this case, television) as well as expansions created for various mediums. In addition to these, the reimagined *BSG* is an intriguing example of building a complex storyworld, not only because the television series has spawned multiple transmedia productions but also because the series is in itself a remake of another series, the original *Battlestar Galactica* (1978–1979, henceforth the original *BSG*).

The present article tackles this vast range of expansions to investigate how *BSG*'s transmedia franchise is constructed. We also look beyond the commercial franchise and include, for example, user-generated content. Considering various transmedia expansions created around the original and reimagined *BSG* series, we suggest the use of the term *transmedia universe* to encompass the complexity of transmedia production and consumption. Doing so, we build on existing theories on transmedia storytelling and the creation of transmedia worlds and universes.

Transmedia evolution has been studied extensively from the perspective of media economics (Albarran 2013; Bennett et al. 2012; Clarke 2013; Davis 2013; Doyle 2010; Ibrus 2016; Rohn and Ibrus 2018) and political economy (Bolin 2007; Rodriguez-Amat and Sarikakis, 2012), and on the other hand, from the perspective of transmedia storytelling and engagement with fictional content. There are several attempts to conceptualise the fictional aspect of transmedia, such as Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca's (2004; 2011; 2014) notion of "transmedial worlds", arguing that one needs to approach transmedia not only as narratives but as "abstract content systems" and worlds. We claim, however, that the diversity of transmedial systems has not yet been adequately addressed, and more importantly, that the financial media production and branding aspects of transmediality have been too strictly separated from the fictional content of transmedia narratives. Therefore, we introduce a

definition of *transmedia universe* that encompasses the complexity of transmedia storytelling, production and consumption.

We are here reconciling the two aforementioned strands of branding or economics and fictional content with the concept of a *transmedia universe*, which is not limited to the narrative worlds and diegetic contents, but encompasses the production and marketing issues relevant for the franchising, as well as non-diegetic contents, such as toys and collectibles, and also transmedia expressions not controlled by the franchise, such as user-generated content (i.e. fan fiction, fan art or other fan-created materials).[1] Despite Jenkins' (2006) opening towards fan activity, and studies of fan engagement, fan activities and fan communities connected to transmedia (Vassallo de Lopes 2012; Tosca and Klastrup 2020), transmedia theorising has still not fully incorporated the insights that fandom research could provide. Our definition of transmedia universe provides a unique understanding of user-generated content in all its richness and its relationship to other transmedia contents.

In the following, we will, firstly, situate the *BSG* transmedia universe in the context of so-called transmedia television. Secondly, we will discuss the concept of transmedia universe in relation to existing transmedia theories, and thirdly, offer a more detailed analysis of the *BSG* transmedia universe.

Transmedia Television

The relationship between the original and reimagined *BSG* would be easy to categorise as adaptational rather than transmedial. We nevertheless claim that both series can be situated within the same transmedia universe, and as examples of transmedia television. The original *BSG* was initially launched in 1978. The narrative begins when robots called "the Cylons" attack human colonies and force the remaining human survivors to flee into space in search of the mythical planet called Earth, which is to be their new home. Their journey is led by a battlestar (i.e. a spaceship) called Galactica, and they continue to be followed by the Cylons who strive to eliminate all humans. In the beginning, the series attracted a fairly large audience, but this success did not last for long, and the series was cancelled just the next year in 1979.[2] However, a spin-off series called *Galactica 1980* (1980) saw daylight only a year later. This series takes place a generation later with Earth already found and the first "Galacticans" setting out to explore their new home planet. The series did not reach the

success of its predecessor and only ten episodes were made (Booker 2004, 89; Storm 2007, 3).

The reimagined version of *BSG* started as a miniseries in 2003. Like the original version, the reimagination was a success. It was followed by a continuous series that aired from 2004 to 2009 and received many awards and nominations, not to mention appraisal from critics (Storm 2007, 8; Stoy 2010). The basic premise follows the original series: the miniseries begins with the Cylons attacking human colonies, which forces the surviving humans to scatter into space in search of a new planet to call home—again, the mythical Earth. However, what differentiates the narratives is that in the reimagined version, there has already been a war with the Cylons 40 years before the events of the miniseries. While referring to this past war, the reimagined version portrays Cylons as very similar to those in the original series, and thus, visually situates the original version as the first Cylon war. These references to the original are one of the reasons why the relationship between the original and reimagined *BSG* can be considered transmedial instead of adaptational.[3]

Marsha Kinder (1991, 1) originally used the term "transmedia" referring to the "supersystem of entertainment, one marked by transmedia intertextuality", spread over a set of media platforms, like in the case of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. In 2006, Henry Jenkins (2013) developed the term "transmedia storytelling, which refers to the systematic unfolding of elements of a story world across multiple media platforms, with each platform making a unique and original contribution to the experience as a whole". For Jenkins (2011), transmedia storytelling is "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, transmedia worlds consist of different narratives that clearly impact each other and contribute to the overall story, and the production is controlled by a single creator or creative unit or distributed through licensing (Jenkins 2011).

Following Jenkins' definition, the relationship between the original and the reimagined *BSG* would not be transmedial, as the two series do not clearly contribute to the same overall story, nor are they set in the same storyworld (the reimagined franchise does not officially state that the narrative of the new series continues the original version, yet this is implied on occasion) or controlled by a single creative unit. Although we focus on the reimagined *BSG* and the transmedia expressions created around it, we nevertheless argue that the original *BSG* and its

expansions should not be overlooked when analysing the reimagined *BSG* as transmedia. Indeed, when one looks at not only these two series but also their various transmedia expressions, the relationship between the two *BSG* series becomes more complex—and transmedial.

Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling has been criticised in that the transmedia phenomenon seems to be more complex, and transmedia worlds often "fail" to be as unified and coordinated as he suggests they ideally be. For example, both Jason Mittell (2015, 303, 317–318) and Colin B. Harvey (2015, 85–87) note how it may be hard to sustain a coherent storyworld comprising ongoing narratives, such as in serialised television (see also Clarke 2009). Writing on "the phenomenon of transmedia television", Mittell (2015, 292, 295) argues that Jenkins' (2011) description of transmedia as a "unified and coordinated entertainment experience" does not fit television (cf. Evans 2011, 33–36). Commercial television's industrial demands—attracting audiences that are, then, sold to advertisers—dictate that the television show always has to be the core text, making the transmedia experience less "balanced" (Mittell 2015, 294–295). Transmedia extensions serve the function of supporting and strengthening "the core television experience" and sustaining "viewers' engagement and attention across these periodic gaps" between television episodes and seasons (Mittell 2015, 295; see also Evans 2011, 36–38).

For Mittell (2015, 303), "the constraints of the television industry and the norms of television consumption insist that *transmedia extensions from a serial franchise must reward those who partake in them but cannot punish those who do not*". In a similar vein, Suzanne Scott (2013, 46) notes that television series usually serve as the "motherships" that a transmedia story is built around. Furthermore, Carlos Scolari (2009, 598) acknowledges the centrality of television in the transmedia franchise created around the series *24*. In this sense, both the original and reimagined versions of the *BSG* television series are the core texts of their transmedia worlds, making them examples of transmedia television.

The reimagined *BSG*, especially, offers a wide range of products and media platforms from which to access and enjoy it, including official content (by which we mean those extensions that are officially included in the franchise), as well as unofficial content, such as user-generated transmedia expansions. There are, for instance, webisodes, comic books, novels, games and merchandise. The reimagined *BSG* also inspired user-generated content in the forms of fanfiction, fan art, fan-made games and blogs. It is noteworthy that the original *BSG*

also spawned an ample amount of transmedia expansions (see Image 1), such as novels, a "storybook" with pictures, a scrapbook, an encyclopaedia, games, comic books, toys and user-generated content. There is also an extensive fan-made online database called Battlestar Wiki that deals with both the original and the reimagined *BSG* franchise. We consider all of the aforementioned content as part of the *BSG* transmedia universe (for an overview of the universe, see Table 1).

Image 1. Transmedia extensions created around the original series (San Diego State University, Special Collections, Science Fiction). Picture by Aino-Kaisa Koistinen.

As the transmedia productions created around the original *BSG* illustrate, selling products related to a television series is not a new phenomenon (see Clarke 2013, 9). However, the 21st century has seen a significant transformation in television, leading to an increase in transmedia productions (Clarke 2013; Evans 2011, 1–8; Mittell 2015, 292–293). As Elizabeth Evans (2011, 1–2) writes, "television is now bigger than TV", meaning that due to developments in digital technologies, television has expanded onto the Internet and to mobile phones, new platforms on which to engage with televisual narratives. Simone Murray (2005, 417) uses "streamability" to refer to the way media brands "can be translated across formats to create a raft of interrelated products", thus strengthening the brand. Indeed, streamability has become a central economic strategy for television producers in a time when consumption of television is significantly changing (Clarke 2009, 435; 2013, 4).

The reimagined *BSG* with its transmedia expansions thus takes part in a larger change in the media landscape: one that is changing the television medium itself. Another thing that enables both *BSG* series to expand to different media is the science fiction genre, which can be described as building possible worlds that differ from our lived realities. This makes the genre suitable for creating complex transmedia universes that revolve around multiple worlds and are accessed via different platforms (see Harvey 2015, 38, 94–95; Mittell 2015, 311; Roine 2016, 209, 213). Moreover, according to Clarke (2013, 6–8), genre television usually has an active audience that is ready to purchase products related to a given television series. Fantasy and science fiction worlds also allow fans to imagine, for example, parallel worlds in which to situate their own stories (Harvey 2015, 94–97, 186). It is thus no surprise that science fiction and fantasy have established themselves "as dominant modes of transmedia storytelling" (Harvey 2015, 1; see also Mittell 2015, 311). *Star Wars*, *Doctor Who* and Marvel's Cinematic Universe can be given as well-known examples of this "fantastic transmedia" (Harvey 2015, 5, 79). Even though science fiction and fantasy seem to be suitable genres for creating transmedia expressions, series that do not belong to these genres, such as *24* (2001–2010) and *Sherlock* (2010–present), have also extended their stories on various mediums. That said, given the tendency of both science fiction and television to incorporate transmedial elements, a science fiction television series and the transmedia expansions created around it are together a suitable object of study when examining a transmedia universe.

Table 1. *Battlestar Galactica*'s transmedia universe.

	Original *BSG*	**Re-imagined *BSG***
Official franchise		
TV series	• *Battlestar Galactica* (1978–1979) • *Galactica 1980* (1980)	• *Battlestar Galactica* (2003 miniseries) • *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–2009)
Films, spin-offs, webisodes	• *Battlestar Galactica* (1978 film)—theatrical release of the pilot episode of the TV series • *Mission Galactica: The Cylon Attack* (1979 film) –	• *Battlestar Galactica: Razor* (2007 television film) • *Battlestar Galactica: The Plan* (2009 DVD film) • *Caprica* (2009 DVD film)

	television film created by re-editing series episodes	
Novels, novelizations, comics etc.	• Larson, Glen A., *Battlestar Galactica: The Photostory* (1979) • *The Battlestar Galactica Storybook* (1979) • A series of novelizations published between 1978–1987 • A series of novels published between 1997–2005 • Several comics (1978–2019)	• Carver, Jeffrey A.: *Battlestar Galactica* (2006) • Gardner, Craig Shaw: *The Cylon's Secret* (2006) • David, Peter: *Sagittarius is Bleeding* (2007) • Harper, Steven: *Unity* (2007) • Several comics (2006–2019)
Non-diegetic materials	• DVD extras	• Podcasts • DVD extras
Books (non-fiction), magazines	• Neyland, James: *The Official Battlestar Galactica Scrapbook* (1978) • *Encyclopedia Galactica: From the Fleet Library aboard Galactica* (1979)	• Official companion books to the miniseries and seasons 1–3 by David Bassom (2005–2009) • Di Justo, Patrick & Grazier, Kevin S.: *The Science of Battlestar Galactica* (2010) • *Battlestar Galactica: The Official Magazine* (7 issues)
Games	• *Battlestar Galactica Space Alert* (1976 electronic game) • *Cylon Attack* (1984 BBC Micro game) • *Battlestar Galactica* (2003 PlayStation 2 / Xbox)	• *Battlestar Galactica* (2006 mobile game) • *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game* (2007 tabletop) • *Battlestar Galactica* (2007 Xbox Live Arcade / Microsoft Windows) • *Battlestar Galactica: The Board Game* (2008) • *Battlestar Galactica Online* (2011– browser-based MMO) • *Battlestar Galactica Deadlock* (2017)
Collectibles, toys, merchandise etc.	• *The Battle of Galactica*, a theme park ride at Universal Studios, Los Angeles, United States (1979–1992)	• Costumes, clothes • Accessories, jewelry • Models, action figures • Toys

	• Costumes, clothes, accessories • Models, action figures • Toys, e.g. Battlestar Galatica Lasermatc Pistol (Mattel 1978) Activity books • Jigsaw puzzles	• Other merchandise, e.g. trading cards
Unauthorized products		
Books (non-fiction), films, journal articles	• Several unauthorized books • Scholarly publications • *Battlestar Galactica: The Second Coming* (2009), short film	• Several unauthorized books • Scholarly publications
User-generated content		
Games		• Fan-made games, e.g. *Diaspora* • Fan-made game mods, e.g. *Battlestar Galactica Colonial Wars (*a *Star Wars: Empire at War: Forces of Corruption* mod) • Battlestar Galactica role-playing communities in *Second Life* virtual world • *Monitor Celestra* (Sweden 2013), a live action role-playing game
Creative fan content	• Fan fiction • Fan art • Fan videos	
Wikis, fan sites	• Battlestar Wiki: http://en.battlestarwiki.org/ • Several fan sites	

From Transmedia Worlds to Transmedia Universes

Harvey (2015, 87) acknowledges that not all elements of a transmedia franchise are equal, stressing the role of memory in transmedia storytelling. He describes how "transmedia expressions … 'remember' other elements in a given transmedia network" in different ways

(2015, 2). Thus, what is at play in creating transmedia worlds is how transmedia expressions remember each other, but also the memories of the storyworld they elicit in the audience (Harvey 2015, 3). For Harvey (2015, 91) memory is what discerns transmedia storytelling from adaptations. Linda Hutcheon has defined adaptation as "an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art" (2013, xiv). Although for Hutcheon (2013, 4), "[r]ecognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure … of adaptation," Harvey (2015, 91) argues that adaptations typically remember their so-called original versions vertically, meaning that memories travel only from the source material to the adaptation, whereas in transmedia, memories can travel both ways between different transmedia extensions. Reminiscent of Mittell's arguments on transmedia television, Harvey (2015, 91) nevertheless points out that despite the potential of transmedia storytelling to create horizontal memories that travel between different elements of a transmedia network, memories often tend to travel only from a core text to other transmedia productions.

As the reimagined *BSG* suggests, the possibility that the original series is the previous Cylon war mentioned in the narrative invites the viewer to consider that both series belong to the same storyworld—making the relationship between these series more complex than a "revisitation" of existing material. In doing so, the reimagined *BSG* can also be said to remember the original series. Moreover, this remembering evokes the memories of audiences that have seen the original version. The *BSG* console game (2003) provides an interesting case in bridging the gap between the original and reimagined *BSG* as it was released prior to the launch of the reimagined series, thus serving as a prequel to it, yet its visuals are based on the original series. This creates a sense of continuity between the two and enables the interpretation that both series represent the same fictional world in different historical phases, which would undermine the adaptation approach towards the reimagined series and its transmedia extensions. Harvey (2015, 9, 79–92) also notes that, in some cases, it can be hard to differentiate adaptations from transmedia, as storyworlds can include materials that are examples of both adaptations and transmedia storytelling.

Although the reimagined *BSG* series can be interpreted as an adaptation, when examining both the original and reimagined versions in relation to various other intra- and transmedial *BSG* expansions, we claim that it is more relevant to analyse these series as parts of a broader transmedia universe (cf. Roine 2016, 198–199, 208–213). As we started to map out the complex transmedia productions related to the two *BSG* series, we also noticed that the transmedia world, or universe, cannot be understood as a unified and coordinated experience.

On the contrary, different productions overlap and create conflicting narrative threads that are not necessarily remembered in the core text, not to mention user-generated content spreading outside the corporate-controlled franchise. It is, therefore, relevant to move beyond the concept of transmedia storytelling or franchises to a broader consideration of transmedia universes.

Many scholars have opted for new terms, such as fictional world (Dena 2009), narrative world (Scolari 2009), storyworld and transmedia network (Harvey 2015) to analyse the complexity of the transmedia phenomenon. For instance, Scolari (2009, 586) has analysed "how … new multimodal narrative structures … construct a narrative world". Scolari is, in a sense, mediating the positions privileging storytelling (emphasising narrative structures) and those promoting transmedia worlds (acknowledging the worlds constructed through narratives). As mentioned above, Klastrup and Tosca (2004, 410) have coined the concept "transmedial world" to encompass the non-narrative aspects of transmediality. We suggest, however, that it is important to also take into account the non-diegetic aspects of transmediality, such as toys, different kinds of user-generated content, deleted scenes, podcasts and documentaries. To include this wider and more heterogeneous spectrum of elements, we use the term transmedia universe.

Louisa Ellen Stein (2016, 65) also draws attention to audiences' perception of narrative content by describing how official and fan-created texts together form complex transmedia landscapes, "multi-authored transtexts," but her approach excludes non-narrative content. Jan-Noël Thon (2015) uses the term *transmedial universe* to describe complex transmedial storyworlds, but his definition excludes user-generated content. Hanna-Riikka Roine (2016, 191–198) acknowledges the role of fan-created content in constructing "the *Battlestar Galactica* universe", but her approach differs from ours as it focuses on "the rhetoric of worldbuilding". Roine's analysis also centres on audiovisual instalments, leaving out parts of the *BSG* transmedia universe. Our definition of transmedia universe thus aims to offer a broader understanding of transmedia.

Transmedia expansions have also been understood as paratexts. Booth (2015, 5), when writing about board games based on media texts, prefers to call them "paratexts", and emphasises paratexts' importance in helping us to understand the "larger connections between elements of the contemporary media environment". Mittell (2015, 261) calls non-diegetic materials "orienting paratexts" that orient us towards a storyworld but place us

outside the actual core text, making them "distinct from transmedia paratexts that explicitly continue storyworlds across platforms." We, however, claim that it is necessary to acknowledge non-diegetic content as their own transmedia expansions—thus including them in the concept of transmedia universe. To put it simply, our definition of transmedia universe, therefore, incorporates all the different productions created around the original and reimagined *BSG* series, both by the official franchises as well as by fans and other users. In this inclusive approach, there is no need to categorise some of the transmedia expressions as paratexts. All expressions, however, may function in a paratextual way, leading the audience from one part of the universe to another.

Transmedia universe is a concept particularly suited for *BSG* as the series is a reimagination of another series, linking it to the transmedial world of the original. Harvey (2015, 86) suggests that a transmedia storyworld can consist of multiple distinct infra storyworlds, together forming a broader supra storyworld. These infra storyworlds are not necessarily consistent with each other, despite being parts of the same supra storyworld. Building on Harvey, we consider the original *BSG* and the reimagined version as both constructing their own supra storyworlds, each including their own sets of infra storyworlds (cf. Evans 2011, 27). These two supra storyworlds, together, construct the broader *BSG* universe (see Figure 1). The concept of transmedia universe is also useful in cases like popular superhero franchises with their several re-launches and mutual fusions, where quite distinct supra storyworlds are brought together (cf. Harvey 2015, 79–92).[4]

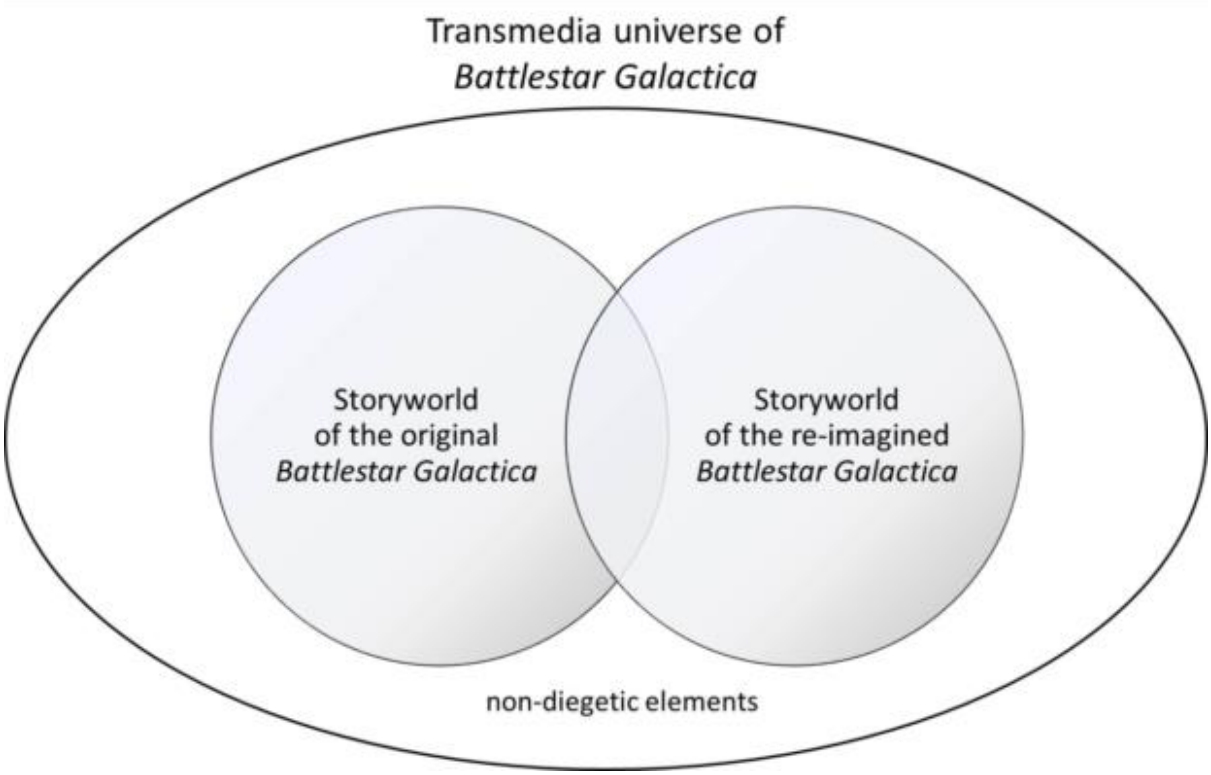

Figure 1. The BSG transmedia universe includes expressions created around both the original and the reimagined BSG series, including non-diegetic content.

Closer Look at the *Battlestar Galactica* Universe

Even though we acknowledge the role of the original *BSG* franchise in constructing the broader *BSG* universe, it is not possible to analyse all of these transmedial expressions in one article. Our close analysis, therefore, focuses on the transmedia expansions created around the reimagined version. During the first running of the reimagined *BSG* series in 2004–2009 (starting with the miniseries of 2003), there were several diegetic transmedia expansions published, including webisodes distributed through the series' website. *The Resistance* (2006, series of ten short webisodes) aired between seasons two and three and its events fill in the gap between the narratives of these seasons. It is a "classic" example of a transmedia expansion as defined by Jenkins, with an airing schedule coordinated with the television series and content that provides a "unique and original contribution to the experience as a whole" (Jenkins 2013). Despite this, drawing on Mittell (2015, 316), these webisodes can also be seen only as an example of keeping the viewers engaged with the television series during the break between seasons, and as such, an example of unbalanced transmedia instead of the ideal and balanced transmedia described by Jenkins (2011).

Scolari (2009) is one of the few researchers who has attempted to offer a detailed analysis of how transmedia expansions are used with a specific television series. Scolari (2009, 598, 601) identifies "four strategies for narrative world expansion". His first strategy, that of "interstitial microstories", alludes to creating stories that enrich the diegetic world by expanding the period between the seasons, and have a close relationship with the macrostory. The second strategy introduces "parallel stories", which unfold simultaneously to the macrostory and "may evolve and transform into spin-offs". The third strategy, "peripheral stories", consists of stories that can be considered distant satellites of the macrostory and that have a weak relationship to it. Fourth, Scolari identifies the creation of user-generated content platforms like blogs and wikis as the final strategy of expanding a narrative world.

Applying Scolari's strategies to the narrative transmedia expansions of the reimagined *BSG*, we noticed that all of these strategies are present in the *BSG* transmedia universe, but they exclude non-diegetic content as well as a variety of diegetic expansions such as, what we would call, alternative stories. For example, in the reimagined *BSG* episodes 11 and 12 of season 2, "Resurrection Ship" parts one and two are about destroying a Cylon ship that serves as a station at which killed Cylons are reanimated. The comic series volume one (*Ship*), on the other hand, describes how the Galactica finds a destroyed colonial battlestar on which dead human characters are miraculously resurrected back to life—thus giving a wholly different meaning to the concept of the "resurrection ship". The unbalanced nature of the *BSG* transmedia universe is evident in the way these events are not remembered in the core television series (cf. Harvey 2015, 91). Thus, these expansions provide what are essentially alternative stories, uniquely broadening the transmedia universe in comparison to Scolari's strategies. The alternative stories are not necessarily contradictory with the series, but they are clearly incompatible with it, in that it is unlikely that events as miraculous as the resurrection of humans in the comic series would not be referred to in the television series. The *BSG Board Game* (see Image 3) is, in fact, created around the idea of alternative stories. The game proceeds through various crises (water shortage, fuel shortage, explosion in the fleet, etc.) with successive rounds of the game occasionally producing relatively coherent "episodes". In a sense, the *BSG Board Game* is a permutational generator of alternative episodes in the *BSG* universe.

Image 2. Playing the BSG Board Game. Picture by Raine Koskimaa.

Another type of expansion left out of Scolari's strategies is one introducing new themes to the transmedia universe. For example, *The Face of the Enemy* webisodes, as well as the spin-off TV film *Razor*, include homosexuality, previously all but absent from the *BSG* transmedia universe. Transmedia productions may thus enable the inclusion of themes that the producers are somehow unable to incorporate in the core text. However, it is important to note that the homosexuality of the characters that are "outed" in *Razor* and *The Face of the Enemy* is not remembered in the reimagined *BSG* (see also Scott 2011, 187). In this sense, these thematic expansions are irrelevant to the core text. Regardless, for LGBTQI+ audiences (or any audiences who wish to see non-heteronormative sexualities represented on television), these transmedia expressions may be important for engagement with the core text as well.[5] In unofficial transmedia products, thematic expansions are typical of fanfiction stories. While this user-generated content does not "officially" expand the narrative of *BSG* in the sense that it would be accepted as part of the franchise, it can be meaningful for fans and their interpretation of the *BSG* transmedia universe (see also Hellekson and Busse 2006, 7).

New, alternative events, characters and themes are not uncommon for transmedia. Harvey (2015, 86) acknowledges the possibility of incoherence between infra storyworlds. Similarly, we see transmedia universes as flexible and contradictory. Mittell (2015, 314–315) has divided transmedia storytelling into "What If?" transmedia—that allow incompatible elements alongside those that are canonical, that is, broadly accepted by fans or audiences as

being part of the narrative world (cf. Jenkins 1992, 94–98)— and “What Is” transmedia, which is about filling in the gaps. Mittell nevertheless notes that the lines between these two are fluid (2015, 315). We argue that beyond the narrative construction of a specific story or storyworld, both “What If?” and “What Is” transmedia fit within the same transmedia universe.

Alternative events, stories and themes can be a result of the dispersal of creativity between different producers and platforms. Scholars have noted that such dispersal affects the content of transmedia texts, making it hard to create a coherent and unified transmedia storyworld (e.g. Clarke 2013; Harvey 2015, 188; Johnson 2013, 111). This is evident, for instance, in tie-in novels often diverging from the core text (Clarke 2009, 441; Mittell 2015, 297). The *BSG* transmedia universe includes cases of this, for example, in the novels *The Cylon’s Secret* (2006) by Craig Shaw Gardner and *Unity* (2007) by Steven Harper. The writers of the tie-in novels are faced with specific restrictions and constraints from the series’ producers, and so the novels tend to be distanced from the program (Clarke 2009, 435). Clarke (2009, 443–444) has noted how a lack of communication between the authors of tie-in novels and the official franchise production team has led to authors seeking information on the fictional world from fandom, such as fan-created wikis—many of the writers of which are fans of the franchises themselves. How users engage with and interpret a transmedia universe can thus influence the construction of the official franchise. This is an example of why the transmedia universe concept needs to include myriad aspects of storytelling, production and consumption.

In addition to official diegetic expansions in the *BSG* transmedia universe, there is an even more diverse collection of unofficial diegetic expressions created by fans. Thousands of stories based on the reimagined *BSG* alone are published in online fan fiction archives.[6] Suzanne Scott (2008; 2010; 2013) has argued that as different transmedia productions—such as webisodes, or podcasts by the series producer—are created to fill the narrative gaps, the fans of *Battlestar Galactica* may find it hard to create fan fiction—at least, if they wish their fiction to fit into the canonical, accepted storyworld of the series. This does not seem to be the case for *BSG* fan fiction, which ranges from stories that add details to the events of the television series to stories that are described by the authors themselves as set in an “alternate universe”, and to crossover fan fiction that mixes elements from *BSG* with elements from other stories, such as other science fiction television.

Fan-created expansions can, similarly to the ones included in the official franchise, be described as either “What If?” or “What Is” transmedia depending on the content. This user-generated content is usually published free of charge, beyond the control of the official franchise, but sometimes it is directed and controlled by the franchise (Harvey 2015, 135). As Derek Johnson (2013, 227, 229) notes, using the fan-created *Battlestar Galactica* game *Diaspora* as an example, user-generated content, despite being created beyond franchise control, can also be purposefully distanced from the core television series, similarly to official transmedia expansions. However, much of the user-generated content features the major events and characters of the core television series.

Games provide intriguing examples of transmedia expansions by introducing non-narrative elements to the transmedia universe. In the *BSG* video game (2003), the main character is young Adama (also a main character in the reimagined series), still a Viper pilot at this point. There is not much story content in the game, as it consists of a series of Cylon attacks posing various challenges to the Viper fleet, and the action mainly consists of flying and shooting. It is the nature of games as part of transmedia universes that they do not primarily tell stories about the world but “let the user of the world *become* and act as a character *in* the world” (Klastrup and Tosca 2004, 5). The aforementioned *BSG Board Game* also includes a strong non-narrative element. The game manages to recreate the paranoid feeling of the Colonials in the players, as they do not know which of them are Cylons in disguise, and a player might find oneself a Cylon only after a lengthy gaming period (see also Booth 2015, 107). Here, the emphasis is not on the story content, but rather, on the users’ engagement with the fictional world and its characters, which underlines the need for a wider perspective on the transmedia experience. In our experience from playing the game, most of its enjoyment comes from playing with characters familiar from the reimagined *BSG*, as well as recognising situations typical in the narrative of the series.

Even though productions such as podcasts, commentaries and behind-the-scenes documentaries are situated in non-diegetic relation to the storyworld, they still provide a way for the users to engage with the transmedia universe, and may provide information that affects the way they understand the broader transmedia universe. For example, simultaneously with the first airing of the reimagined *BSG* series, podcasts by the series creator, Ronald D. Moore, were released. These podcasts provided commentary to each episode and were later made available as DVD extras, including background information and interpretations of the characters and events, along with information about the making of the

series, such as explanations for certain creative decisions. For instance, the commentary for episode 2 of season 2 reveals that a coat worn by a main character, Starbuck, belonged to her father, information that is not revealed in the episode itself. This detail hints at Starbuck's emotions towards her father, not previously discussed in the series.

The significance of these non-diegetic expansions for audiences is visible in, for example, the Battlestar Wiki. The wiki includes detailed documentation of the *BSG* transmedia universe (both the original and reimagined series). Each series episode, for example, is listed with the exact time of its first airing, the plot synopsis, characters appearing in it, actors and guest actors and an analysis of the events in relation to the story continuum. Returning to Scolari's (2009, 598) strategies, his "user-generated content platform" reduces the content and its role as a transmedia expansion to the platform alone, but in fact, the wiki collects, creates and structures fans' knowledge and interpretations of the series (cf. Booth 2010). Battlestar Wiki is a tremendous fan effort in many ways, underlining the appetite of media users for various additional and supporting information (see also Mittell 2013). The engagement with the *BSG* transmedia universe is not only about immersing oneself in the fictional world but also revelling in the related trivia. This trivia concerns both the fictional world and non-diegetic aspects of the *BSG*, such as the actors and scene-shooting instances—typical content of behind-the-scenes extras and commentary tracks.

The role of non-diegetic content is one of the key differences between the concepts of transmedia storytelling and our conceptualisation of transmedia universe. These non-diegetic transmedia expansions include material objects such as action figures (see also Evans 2011, 21–23). Harvey (2015, 137–162) acknowledges that toys and other merchandise emphasise how transmedia worlds are a wider concept than just stories since they can be used as props in stories that users enact themselves or may serve as entrances to fictional storyworlds. Similarly, we argue that non-diegetic content should not only be seen as commercial attempts to attract more users but also part of the way in which audiences engage with transmedia universes, even though the non-diegetic content does not expand the diegetic world as such.[7] In brief, with transmedia universe, we are not only referring to a diegetic storyworld or a universe comprising of various storyworlds but our universe is a construction that encompasses all materials related to the core text, one that is not limited to specific media.

Image 3. Examples of the BSG universe, including both official and non-official content. Lego characters by Ochre Jelly. Source: Flickr, license: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0. Top-left photo by Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, top-right by Raine Koskimaa.

Outside the *BSG* transmedia universe, an example of this type of construction can be seen in how audiences engage with *The Hobbit* film trilogy, based on J.R.R. Tolkien's book. Even though the book and the films are not transmedia in that they would create a coherent storyworld (cf. Jenkins 2006; 2011), audiences' experiences with the book and the films are often expressed as engagement with a broader "Tolkien universe" that also includes various transmedia productions, like user-generated content, visits to filming locations, or events such as queuing for the films (Koistinen, Ruotsalainen and Välisalo 2016, 361–366). Shifting the focus to transmedia users thus brings new perspectives to analysing how transmediality is as much a construction created by audiences as it is a creation of the official franchise.

We have demonstrated how diegetic and non-diegetic, narrative and non-narrative content produced by both official and unofficial content creators should all be considered as part of the transmedia universe of *BSG*. Even though different parts of the transmedia universe are not equal in that the television series tends to dominate the creation of official content and originate the user-generated content, they all have the potential of adding layers of meaning to *BSG*. The same can certainly be said for other complex transmedia universes as well. Indeed, research needs to go beyond narratives, storyworlds and franchises to analyse the vastness of transmedia universes.

Conclusion

In this article, we have suggested a novel definition for the transmedia universe concept to encompass the complexity of transmedia production and consumption. In our understanding, a transmedia universe thus includes not only additions to the official storyworld but also non-diegetic, non-narrative, non-fictional, unauthorised and user-generated content. Indeed, we argue that is not sufficient to study only narrative world expansion strategies; to grasp the vastness of the transmedia phenomenon, we need to move beyond narratives to the analysis of transmedia universes with all their diegetic and non-diegetic, narrative and non-narrative contents. Non-diegetic products such as merchandise are an integral part of the transmedia universe and affect how users understand it; the same can be said for user-generated content. Transmedia universe as a concept thus discards the demand for "a unified and coordinated" (Jenkins 2011) experience and allows incoherence and conflicting elements between different products of the same universe. In other words, the expressions forming a given transmedia universe do not need to establish a coherent canon.

We also do not expect all users to accept the varying expansions in the canon of, for example, their favourite television series. A transmedia universe is more like a set of elements, expansions and stories that users utilise according to their preferences. Transmedia universes are not merely created by commercial entities but comprise various heterogeneous elements forming a complex whole. For the engaged audience, the transmedia universe in all its complexity is significant in how they approach and experience productions such as *BSG*, and this audience perspective specifically motivates the need for the concept of transmedia universe in the way delineated in this article.

Enabled by the developments of digital technologies, transmediality has generated a significant change in the media landscape, and for television specifically. Even though these changes are emphasised in the science fiction and fantasy genres, in particular, they are part of a wider phenomenon. Applying our definition of the concept of transmedia universe to this phenomenon will take us closer to the lived reality of transmedia consumers and the different ways they are navigating and experiencing the current media landscape, not just through narrative expansions but other content as well. Our definition of transmedia universe, therefore, opens up new perspectives on reception and media use. Further analysis is needed of user-generated content and what it can tell us about how fans, users and consumers interpret and use media. Indeed, future research on transmedia should develop the concept of transmedia universe and redirect focus towards actual transmedia audiences.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the EU Horizon 2020 funding (Transmedia Literacy. Exploiting transmedia skills and informal learning strategies to improve formal education. RIA 645238).

References

All links verified 14.6.2021.

Websites

Jenkins, Henry. 2011. “Transmedia 202: Further Reflections.” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan. The Official Web-Blog of Henry Jenkins*, August 1, 2011. http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.

Jenkins, Henry. 2013. “T is for Transmedia…” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan. The Official Web-Blog of Henry Jenkins*, March 18, 2013. http://henryjenkins.org/2013/03/t-is-for-transmedia.html.

Literature

Albarran, Alan B., ed. 2013. *Media Management and Economics Research in a Transmedia Environment*. Routledge.

Bennett, James, Strange, Niki, Kerr, Paul, and Andrea Medrado, eds. 2012. *Multiplatforming Public Service Broadcasting: The economic and cultural role of UK Digital and TV Independents.* London: Royal Holloway, University of London. http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/21021/1/bennett-strange-kerr-medrado-2012-multiplatforming-psb-industry-report.pdf.

Bolin, Göran. 2007. "Media Technologies, Transmedia Storytelling and Commodification." *Ambivalence Towards Convergence. Digitalization and Media Change*, edited by Tanja Storsul, and Dagny Stuedahl, 237–248. Göteborg: Nordicom.

Booker, M. Keith. 2004. *Science Fiction Television.* Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.

Booth, Paul. 2010. *Digital Fandom. New Media Studies*. New York: Peter Lang.

Booth, Paul. 2015. *Game Play. Paratextuality in Contemporary Board Games*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Clarke, M. J. 2009. "The Strict Maze of Media Tie-In Novels." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2 (4): 434–456.

Clarke M. J. 2013. *Transmedia Television. New Trends in Network Serial Production.* New York: Bloomsbury.

Davis, Charles H. 2013. "Audience Value and Transmedia Products." In *Media Innovations: A Multidisciplinary Study of Change*, edited by Tanja Storsul, and Arne H. Krumsvik, 175–190. Göteborg: Nordicom.

Dena, Christy. 2009. "Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments." Doctoral Dissertation Thesis, University of Sydney. http://www.scribd.com/doc/35951341/Transmedia-Practice.

Donald, Iain, and Austin, Hailey J. 2019. "Playing With the Dead: Transmedia Narratives and the Walking Dead Games." In *Handbook of Research on Transmedia Storytelling and Narrative Strategies,* edited by Recep Yılmaz, M. Nur Erdem, and Filiz Resuloğlu, 50-71. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Doyle, Gillian. 2010. "From Television to Multi-Platform: Less from More or More for Less?" *Convergence* 16 (4): 431–449. *SAGE Premier*, doi.org/10.1177/1354856510375145.

Evans, Elizabeth. 2011. *Transmedia Television. Audiences, New Media and Daily Life.* New York: Routledge.

Harvey, Colin B. 2015. *Fantastic Transmedia. Narrative, Play and Memory across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Hellekson, Karen, and Busse, Kristina (eds.). 2006. *Fan fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Jefferson: McFarland.

Hutcheon, Linda. 2013. *A Theory of Adaptation.* 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Ibrus, Indrek. 2016. “Micro-studios meet convergence culture: crossmedia, clustering, dialogues, auto-communication.” In *Media Convergence Handbook. Vol 2*, edited by Artur Lugmayr, and Cinzia Dal Zotto, 155–173. Heidelberg: Springer.

Jenkins, Henry. 1992. *Textual Poachers. Television Fans and Participatory Culture.* New York & London: Routledge.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Meet*. New York: New York University Press.

Johnson, Derek. 2013. *Media Franchising. Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries.* New York: New York University Press.

Kinder, Marsha. 1991. *Playing With Power In Movies, Television, And Video Games: From Muppet Babies To Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Berkeley: University of California.

Klastrup, Lisbeth, and Susana Tosca. 2004. “Transmedial Worlds – Rethinking Cyberworld Design.” *Cyberworlds, 2004 International Conference on*, IEEE Computer Society, 409–416. Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE Computer Society. DOI: 10.1109/CW.2004.67. https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/1366205.

Klastrup, Lisbeth, and Susana Tosca. 2011. “When Fans Become Players: LOTRO in a Transmedial World Perspective.” In *Ringbearers. The Lord of the Rings Online as Intertextual Narrative*, edited by Tanya Krzywinska, Esther MacCallum-Stewart, and Justin Parsler, 46–69. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Klastrup, Lisbeth, and Susana Tosca. 2014. “*Game of Thrones*: Transmedial Worlds, Fandom, and Social Gaming.” In *Storyworlds across Media. Toward a Media-conscious Narratology*, edited by Marie-Laure Ryan, and Jan-Noël Thon, 295–314. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.

Koistinen, Aino-Kaisa, Maria Ruotsalainen, and Tanja Välisalo. 2016. The World Hobbit Project in Finland: Audience responses and Transmedial User Practices. *P@rticipations* 13 (2): 356–379. https://www.participations.org/Volume%2013/Issue%202/s1/10.pdf.

Koistinen, Aino-Kaisa. 2015. *The Human Question in Science Fiction Television: (Re)Imagining Humanity in Battlestar Galactica, Bionic Woman and V.* PhD diss., University of Jyväskylä. http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-6147-3.

Mittell, Jason. 2013. “Wikis and Participatory Fandom.” *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, edited by Aaron Delwiche, and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson, 35–42. New York and London: Routledge.

Mittell, Jason. 2015. *Complex TV. The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling.* New York and London: New York University Press.

Murray, Simone. 2005. “Brand loyalties: Rethinking content within global corporate media.” *Media, Culture & Society* 27 (3): 415–435. doi.org/10.1177/0163443705053973.

Rodriguez-Amat, Joan R, and Sarikakis, Katharine. 2012. “The fandom menace or the phantom author? On sharecropping, crossmedia and copyright.” *Crossmedia Innovations: Texts, Markets, Institutions,* edited by Indrek Ibrus, and Carlos A. Scolari, 129–145. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Rohn, Ulrike, and Indrek Ibrus. 2018. “”A Management Approach to Transmedia Enterprise.” *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies*, edited by Matthew Freeman, and Renira Rampazzo Gambarato. New York: Routledge.

Roine, Hanna-Riikka. 2016. “Imaginative, Immersive and Interactive Engagements. The rhetoric of worldbuilding in contemporary speculative fiction.” PhD diss., University of Tampere. urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-03-0195-8.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. 1991. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. 2013. “Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality.” *Poetics Today* 34 (3): 361–388. doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2325250.

Scolari, Carlos A. 2009. “Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production.” *International Journal of Communication* 3: 586–606.

Scott, Suzanne. 2008. “Authorized Resistance: Is Fan Production Frakked?” In *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica,* edited by Tiffany Potter, and C. W. Marshall, 210–223. New York: Continuum.

Scott, Suzanne. 2010. “The Trouble with Transmediation: Fandom’s Negotiation of Transmedia Storytelling Systems.” *Spectator* 30 (1): 30–34.

Scott, Suzanne. 2011. “Revenge of the fanboy: convergence culture and the politics of incorporation.” PhD diss., University of Southern California. http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll127/id/439159.

Scott, Suzanne. 2013. ”’Whose Steering the Mothership?’ The Role of the Fanboy Auteur in Transmedia Storytelling.” In *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, edited by Aaron Delwiche, and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson, 42–52. New York and London: Routledge.

Stein, Louisa Ellen. 2016. “Fandom and the Transtext.” In *The Rise of Transtexts. Challenges and Opportunities*, edited by Benjamin W.L. Derhy Kurtz, and Mélanie Bourdaa, 65–78. New York: Routledge.

Storm, Jo. 2007. *Frak You! The Ultimate Unauthorized Guide to Battlestar Galactica.* Toronto, Ontario: ECW Press.

Stoy, Jennifer. 2010. “Of great zeitgeist and bad faith: An introduction to *Battlestar Galactica*.” *Battlestar Galactica: Investigating Flesh, Spirit and Steel,* edited by Roz Kaveney, and Jennifer Stoy, 1–36. London: I. B. Tauris.

Telotte, J. P. 2008. “Introduction: The trajectory of science fiction television.” In *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader,* edited by J. P. Telotte, 1–34. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky.

Telotte, J. P. 2014. *Science Fiction TV*. New York & London: Routledge.

Thon, Jan-Noël. 2015. “Converging Worlds. From Transmedial Storyworlds to Transmedial Universes.” *Storyworlds – A Journal of Narrative Studies* 7 (2): 21–53. doi.org/10.5250/storyworlds.7.2.0021.

Tosca, Susana and Klastrup, Lisbeth. 2020. *Transmedial Worlds in Everyday Life. Networked Reception, Social Media and Fictional Worlds.* New York & Oxon: Routledge.

Vassallo de Lopes, Maria Immacolata. 2012. “A case study on transmedia reception: Fandom on Facebook and social issues in the brazilian telenovela *Passione*.” *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, Special: 111–132. https://doi.org/10.7238/a.v0iM.1505.

Notes

[1] We prefer to use “expansions” or “expressions” when referring to the instalments of the *BSG* universe instead of, for example, “extensions” or “products” since the preferred terms better encompass the diverse materials in the universe, including user-generated content.

[2] For more on *BSG* of 1978–1979, see Booker (2004, 89), Storm (2007, 1–10) and Telotte (2008, 18; 2014, 32–33).

[3] For more on the differences and similarities of the original and reimagined *BSG* series, see Koistinen 2015.

[4] When addressing diegetic content specifically, the theoretical framework of possible worlds might prove useful in describing the various ontological zones found there (Ryan 1991). Ryan has applied the notion of storyworlds to transmedia storytelling (2013), but the approach is less suited to the wider scope adopted in this paper, covering the franchise and user-generated aspects in addition to diegetic content.

[5] Suzanne Scott (2010, 32) uses *The Face of the Enemy* webisodes as an example of how transmedia stories are “pushing queer readings or queer characters to the periphery of the narrative”. In this sense, transmedia expansions may be used for both including and excluding queer characters and viewers.

[6] More than 5,700 fan fiction stories were published on Archive of Our Own and 5,400 stories on Fanfiction.net, the two largest fan fiction archives, by 21 May 2021.

[7] Toys can even be the origin or core of a transmedia universe, as is the case with *My Little Pony* and *Transformers*.

This article will be re-published on WiderScreen extra issue, December 2021.