

The Expanded 'Verse:
Serialized Transmediality in *Firefly/Serenity*

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by

Frederick Blichert, BA (Hons.)

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We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.

Roland Barthes¹

ABSTRACT

Popular narratives often extend textual content across multiple media platforms, creating transmedia stories. Recent scholarship has stressed the permeability of "the text," suggesting that the framework of a text, made up of paratexts including trailers and DVD extras, must be included in textual analysis. Here, I propose that this notion may be productively coupled with a theory of seriality—we may frame this phenomenon in the filmic terms of a narrative being comprised of transmedia sequels and/or prequels, or in the televisual language of episodes in a series. Through a textual analysis of the multifaceted transmedia narrative *Firefly* (2002-2003), I argue for a theoretical framework that further destabilizes the traditional text by considering such paratextual works as comic books, web videos, and the feature film *Serenity* (Joss Whedon, 2005) as narrative continuations within a single metatext that eschews the centrality of any one text over the others in favour of seriality.

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Introduction

On 7 November 2013, Marvel Entertainment announced that it would be releasing four new series exclusively on the online streaming site Netflix in 2015. The series, each focusing on a different pre-existing superhero, will lead up to a fifth, crossover miniseries and will be Marvel's first foray into web-only programming. “This deal is unparalleled in its scope and size, and reinforces our commitment to deliver Marvel’s brand, content and characters across all platforms of storytelling,” said Alan Fine, president of Marvel Entertainment.ⁱⁱ While the deal may be unprecedented from an industrial standpoint, it fits nicely into Marvel's ongoing business model of telling stories across films as well as other platforms, as when Agent Coulson (Clark Gregg), having appeared in most of Marvel Studios' Avengers or "Phase One" films—*Iron Man* (Jon Favreau, 2008), *Thor*

(Kenneth Branagh, 2011), *The Avengers* (Joss Whedon, 2012), etc.—spearheaded *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013-present) on ABC, tying the television series to the company's cinematic universe. It remains to be seen whether these new Netflix properties will tie directly into the other Marvel films and series, but this appears to follow a pre-existing formula whereby Marvel operates across multiple platforms in creating a single narrative universe, a multi-faceted series of interlocking texts.

Increasingly, film and television productions challenge the traditional boundaries of "the text" and require an inclusive approach to the paratexts that surround, support, and, to a large extent, define the text. This thesis explores the relationship between medium and narrative, focusing on transmedia storytelling: the construction of narratives across different media platforms. My aim is to elucidate the narrative and textual implications of transmedia storytelling, where audiences adapt to various media to fully engage with narratives divided into multiple texts that form a single metatext, or extended, serialized story.

My focus on seriality seeks to differentiate between transmediality generally and "transmedia storytelling," a distinction that is rarely, if ever, made explicitly. Such a distinction is conveniently summed up by the word choices of Elizabeth Evans and Henry Jenkins respectively. For Evans, "the term 'transmediality' describes the increasingly popular industrial practice of using multiple media technologies to present information concerning a single fictional world through a range of textual forms."ⁱⁱⁱ Jenkins states that, "[a] transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole."^{iv} The important difference in these definitions is Evans's reference to the fictional world versus Jenkins's focus on the development of a single story. Thus, the serialization of a narrative, not necessarily

present in all transmediality, is of interest to me as an entry-point into discussing the effects of certain kinds of transmediation on narrative storytelling. I aim to engage more deeply with Jenkins's "single story" paradigm to theorize the specificity of serialization in transmedia storytelling. Further, the multiple sites of access and the resulting probability of the spectator's "incomplete" experience of the narrative work as a whole introduces a creative, authorial dimension to spectatorship. Equally important is the more active participatory role of spectators in the production of "fan fiction": unofficial (though sometimes industrially sanctioned) fan-produced texts.

My central case study is *Serenity* (Joss Whedon, 2005), a feature film born out of the short-lived television series *Firefly* (2002-2003). My focus is on the series and film, along with other transmedia continuations like comics and web shorts, putting *Firefly/Serenity*, a clear example of transmediated seriality, in conversation with other transmediated films and television series including the *Star Wars* trilogies (George Lucas, 1977; Irvin Kershner, 1980; Richard Marquand, 1983; Lucas, 1999; Lucas, 2002; and Lucas, 2005), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Southland Tales* (Richard Kelly, 2007), *Greendale* (Neil Young, 2003), and *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005-2008) along with each text's adjoining paratexts.

Firefly follows Malcolm "Mal" Reynolds (Nathan Fillion) and his crew aboard the ship *Serenity*, named for the final battle of a civil war lost by Mal and his compatriots, the Independents or "Browncoats." Having fought against the unification of planets under the Alliance, Mal now works odd jobs, sometimes illicitly, avoiding the controlling hand of the Alliance whenever possible. When he unknowingly takes on human cargo, he is once again put into direct conflict with the government. Simon Tam (Sean Maher) secretly smuggles his sister, River (Summer Glau), aboard *Serenity* after

rescuing her from the Alliance and the unknown experiments that have left her psychologically damaged and in possession of psychic abilities. Eventually, Mal and the crew become willing conspirators in helping the Tams evade the Alliance and discover exactly what they have done to her.

While the series was cancelled before this question could be answered, *Serenity* reveals that while the Alliance was experimenting on River, hoping to turn her into a living weapon, she discovered disturbing truths about humanity's central government. The crew, pursued by the mysterious Operative (Chiwetel Ejiofar), seeks out the truth, eventually discovering that, in attempting to pacify the population of a new settlement on the outskirts of the galaxy, the planet Miranda, the Alliance killed the majority of its subjects, infecting the rest with a pathological rage, turning them into vicious, cannibalistic monsters: Reavers.

Although cancelled after its brief run on broadcast television, *Firefly* has since been revived several times in other media formats outside of film, including syndication and the series' DVD release. And while the film provided closure to the series' main narrative threads, it was supplemented by further media incarnations: a comic book mini-series whose narrative connected the show to the film; a series of short web videos providing parts of River's back-story; and additional comic books and a graphic novel, developing the story further. These transmedia texts arguably create continuity within the overall storyline. The requisite information for accessing these texts is also readily available through DVD extras, web advertising, blogs, online communities, video hosting sites, etc., and points to an interactive relationship between these narrative webs and their audiences.

What stands out about *Firefly/Serenity* is the very clear narrative progression of its myriad texts/paratexts. While fan-produced texts exist, straying from the dominant narrative, *Firefly/Serenity* falls into a category of transmediation that remains coherent, at least on its "official" platforms. The series functions as a serial, with each episode building off of the last and leading into the next. But the subsequent material—the comics, film, web shorts, etc.—continue this same process, albeit via different formats. *Serenity* and its counterparts are not adaptations or re-imaginings of the series; rather, they are narrative continuations of it. *Firefly/Serenity*, in its cross-format entirety, is a transmedia serial. This places it in opposition to a metatext like *Star Wars*, where multiple authors operate simultaneously, some producing licensed novels, comics, video games, and TV series, while others participate in the production of derivative fan fiction, sometimes sanctioned, sometimes not. In most cases, both official and unofficial, however, independent stories exist alongside one another, not necessarily continuing any single, self-contained narrative. By examining *Firefly/Serenity* alongside *Star Wars* and other such texts, I distinguish between official and unofficial transmediation while also reinforcing the idea that seriality applies only in certain instances of transmediation. Seriality is inextricably linked to narrative coherence and exists on a spectrum according to how the different parts of the text or texts fit together.

While *Firefly* and *Serenity* have been discussed in relation to one another, most authors take for granted the fact that a shift in medium has occurred and use this fact to compare the thematic concerns and visual styles of the two (Telotte and Abbott, for example).⁹ No scholar has yet investigated the transmediation of the series, film, comics, and web shorts specifically. One model of study comparable to that which I will adopt in my third chapter on thematization is Steven Shaviro's discussion of *Southland Tales* and

that film's engagement with the hyper-mediation of post-9/11 America.^{vi} As part of a transmedia story, split across a film, three comic books, and online paratexts, *Southland Tales*, as Shaviro presents it, both serializes and thematizes its transmediation, providing a strong counterpart to my own focus.

Much literature already exists on the topic of transmedia storytelling and media convergence generally. Two theorists will underpin my research: Henry Jenkins and Jonathan Gray. Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* offers a number of transmedia case studies, the most applicable to my research being his analyses of *Star Wars* fan communities and *The Matrix* series (Andy and Lana Wachowski, 1999 and 2003). Jenkins frames the transmedia story as a series of self-contained but overlapping texts that together form a single, complete narrative; to reiterate, "A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text *making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole*" (emphasis added).^{vii} Gray's approach is in many ways quite similar. In *Show Sold Separately*, he argues that paratexts are very much a part of the texts that they "supplement," creating the text's meaning: they must be studied as a part of textual analysis. While hierarchies between texts and paratexts exist under Gray's model, they are industrially defined, as paratexts are commodities designed as supports for a central commodity. In short, the paratext cannot be subordinated to the text in our overall reading of it: "...paratexts are not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-rans: they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them."^{viii}

Both models are valuable and contribute to the structure and parameters of my research, as I tend to avoid hierarchies amongst transmedia texts and explore paratexts and other transmedia products in terms of their direct effects on the narrative of the

serialized metatext. I combine textual analysis with the study of the contexts of film and media production and reception along with an examination of and contribution to more theoretical work on the nature of the text. Literature on transmedia storytelling, paratexts, television studies, and theories of sequels and serialization are my primary sources for developing a framework of transmedia serialization. While my project pertains to the narrative implications of extending texts across media platforms in terms of narrative coherence, I am interested primarily in the notion of continuation of narratives rather than in narratology itself. This is not to say that narratology is unimportant to my analysis, but this focus allows me to engage with dominant transmedia discourses while also situating my case studies—and consequently other transmedia narratives—within a historical continuum of seriality. By focusing on a television series that expanded into a transmediated network of texts, always contributing to a single narrative, this thesis aims to bridge a gap between studies in transmediation and seriality, pointing to other texts to suggest a growing tradition of transmedia seriality based on narrative coherence across media.

In reviewing the different parts of several transmedia franchises alongside analogous sequential storytelling—i.e. television series, silent serials, and film series—I aim to analyse the relationships between individual parts or episodes of these serials. While, as I have stated, I avoid hierarchies between textual formats, I also consider paratextual material such as advertisements and DVD extras to distinguish between narrative continuations and the types of paratexts that, while indispensable to a consideration of the metatext, exist alongside other texts rather than continuing a narrative arc.

In Chapter 1 I develop my framework for considering the text in relation to narrative and medium. Here I connect studies of paratextuality and transmediation to seriality, suggesting that the disparate parts (or texts) comprising the metatext are not only constitutive of meaning, but are also continuations of a single narrative. They are only subordinate to the "core" text in that they function in much the same way as sequels or prequels. By beginning with the series, I argue that *Firefly's* origin on television predisposes it to such a reading by aligning it with an inherently serial medium. Exploring the other texts in the *Firefly* transmedia corpus, I argue that this approach is not predicated on *Firefly's* televised origin, but rather that all transmedia narrative continuations can be read as such. In the case of *Firefly*, the ostensible stability of *Serenity* as a feature film does not put an end to the seriality of the series. On the contrary, *Serenity* demonstrates that cinema—and individual films—can easily, and often do, break away from the self-enclosed status of a singular text, fitting into a network of serial texts. *Firefly/Serenity* is thus a convenient exemplar of my thesis and a manageable case study made up of a limited stable of texts.

Chapter 2 further contextualizes the seriality of *Firefly/Serenity*, providing counter-examples of non-serialized transmediated texts. One such example, fan creation, can be found within the *Firefly/Serenity* corpus itself. Because these stories are numerous, inconsistent, incompatible, and unofficial, it would be difficult to incorporate them into my conception of serialized transmediation. The main story, in other words, is not an ongoing whole when such texts are factored in. This does not mean that they cannot be reconciled with the broader metatext somehow, simply that they operate outside of its serial structure. This chapter thus leads me to a discussion of the differences between official and unofficial transmediation and, indeed, their similarities. Using *Star*

Wars as my central counterpoint to *Firefly/Serenity*, I argue that in many non-serial transmedia texts, fan fiction and other unofficial products operate on the same level, narratively and textually, as the main, official texts. *Star Wars* is such a text, where official novels, comics, video games, and television series function alongside the films and each other, all drawing from each other, supporting each other, and sometimes contradicting each other. *Star Wars* is a multi-authored metatext with forking, intersecting storylines that lack the order and coherence to be meaningfully situated within a framework of seriality. Adding to this confusion is fan fiction, some of which is entirely unofficial and some industrially sanctioned. This chapter thus demarcates some of the limits of a theory of seriality within transmedia storytelling.

In my final chapter, I bring together text and context, exploring the ways in which transmediation affects not only the distribution of texts across different formats, but also the narrative content of the texts themselves. I thus situate *Firefly/Serenity* within a growing tradition of platform-conscious texts. Building on the idea that science fiction tends toward self-reflexivity generally, espoused by Shaviro, Abbott, and Telotte, I demonstrate that *Serenity* engages thematically with specifically transmedial ideas, commenting on its own status as a continuation in a series of texts, promoting coherence of a different kind, where harmony exists between form (or format) and content. Specifically, I look at the character of Mr. Universe (David Krumholtz), perpetually in charge of broadcasting "the signal." The signal can carry anything, and it cannot be stopped. It finds its way to as many destinations as possible, transmuting itself to fit different receivers. This conception of "the signal" suggests that content can never die. Significantly, when Mr. Universe is killed, he has just enough time to record a message, delivered later by a humanoid robot. He remediates his own human existence, keeping

content (himself) alive in a new media format, just as *Firefly* lives on in a cinematic body. Similarly, the film's major narrative arc mirrors the importance of *The R. Tam Sessions* (Joss Whedon, 2005), web shorts advertising the film and providing backstory for River Tam. In *Serenity*, a seemingly benign advertisement activates River's latent memories, setting the story in motion—the advertisement within the film is crucial to the narrative, just as the extra-diegetic advertisement is part of the serialized story.

Beyond the specificity of case studies, my thesis is intended to contribute to the study of transmedia storytelling more broadly. *Firefly/Serenity* is exemplary of transmedia seriality, as I illustrate with various other examples throughout. It/they stand as clear indicators of a growing tradition in which media producers collapse textual boundaries and embrace seriality.

Chapter 1

Television Sequels and Film Episodes: *Firefly/Serenity* as Transmedia Serial

Henry Jenkins discusses a number of different forms of transmediation in *Convergence Culture*, largely organized according to the distinction between industrial and user-generated instances of transmediation. This is a useful and valuable method, and it acknowledges the variety of forms that transmediation can take. Jenkins does not, however, pay very close attention to the narrative implications of transmedia storytelling, or, more specifically, the narrative continuity that he explores is largely confined to discussions of viewer immersion, industrial motivation, and authorship.

In the spirit of contributing to this line of inquiry, I wish to focus on this area and situate transmedia storytelling within a broader context of narrative continuity, specifically seriality. Exploring narrative continuity specifically allows for an appealing

combination of textual and contextual analysis, looking not only at the narrative properties of transmedia stories, but also at technological, social, and industrial factors that allow for the transmediation of texts.

The language with which many of the transmedia serials—like *Firefly/Serenity*—are marketed reveals just how intentional such continuity is. Dark Horse, the publisher behind all of the *Firefly/Serenity* comics, along with numerous other transmedia franchises such as *Star Wars*, *The Terminator*, *Alien*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and others, very prominently advertises exactly the type of continuity that I am investigating. The online blurb for *Mass Effect: Redemption*, tied to a popular video game, announces authorial continuity between formats through a shared "lead writer." More importantly, the site offers narrative continuity, labelling the miniseries a "sequel" to the game.^{ix} The page advertising *Avatar: The Last Airbender - The Promise*, goes even further, celebrating Dark Horse's ongoing role in keeping stories alive, continuing stories where fans left off in new media formats:

The ending of a great story is always bittersweet, satisfying our craving for resolution to the conflicts that have tantalized us for so long, while simultaneously leaving us behind with a desire that may never be fulfilled—the wish for more time to explore the places that have become familiar to us, more time to spend with the characters we have come to adore. As fans, it is a feeling that we know well at Dark Horse, one that inspires every book we publish continuing a story once concluded elsewhere [...] This January, *Avatar: The Last Airbender: The Promise Part I* begins a trilogy of original graphic novels that reveal what happens next to the heroes and villains from the TV show after the final episode.^x

The language here opens broadly, proposing that readers can dwell in a familiar fictional world longer, working slowly towards a more specific focus on "continuing a story."

Certainly other forms of transmediality flirt with this question of continuity, and I provide

a framework that allows for clearer categorization and consideration of what is specifically linked to seriality in texts like *Firefly/Serenity* as well as those texts mentioned above.

This approach seeks to closely examine the relationship between the different parts of the transmedia story, outlining a clear, linear progression and manageable structure by which to understand each constituent part in narrative terms. The transmedia serial also destabilizes any kind of hierarchy amongst texts, making the distinction between "original" or "source" text and continuations unimportant. Instead, these bodies of texts are defined by the continuity across texts that makes individual parts only significant as segments of a whole. Like the serials of early cinema, *Firefly/Serenity* lays claim to seriality and narrative continuity through coherence, and indeed the degree to which a transmedia story may be said to be serialized is predicated on such coherence and on the nature of the relationship between individual texts.

Narrative and Transmediation

Transmedia seriality is not wholly new, and I will go into this in greater detail later in this chapter. More broadly, the relationships between media formats that I explore similarly fit into a complex history of cross-pollination among various media. Film and television, arguably the dominant formats in the *Firefly/Serenity* corpus, have had a rather permeable relationship for a long time. To borrow terminology from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, this has been a relationship of remediation, where recognisable markers or content of one media are reflected or reused in the other:

Throughout the 1950s, television programming increasingly came to remediate such film genres as drama, comedy, western, and mystery. In the 1960s, it became common to televise Hollywood films that had already

been released in theatres, and in the 1980s the VCR made private screening possible.^{xi}

The internet and the rise of streaming websites like Netflix have blurred these boundaries further. Here, film and television coexist as remediated content to be consumed at the viewer's leisure. With Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon's original programming, "television" series that bypass traditional broadcast altogether, at least one level of remediation is removed, linking such series to direct-to-video (or direct-to-internet) films that lack an "original" exhibition venue to which an ostensibly medium-specific context may be ascribed, and from which remediation is customarily achieved—theatrical release or televised broadcast, for example.

This permeability between formats, while related to transmedia seriality, is not my primary focus. With transmediated serials, I am more interested in the phenomenon whereby a single story moves across media. Here, different formats borrow from each other not only in a way that links them conceptually or thematically (though this link is certainly present) but rather in a way that stresses the narrative itself and the media format's role as a venue for only a part of the overall narrative content.

The word "convergence" or media convergence, as discussed by Henry Jenkins fits into my discussion of transmediation. For Jenkins, convergence is

the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.^{xii}

While seemingly interchangeable, perhaps the main distinction between convergence and transmedia stories is the nature of such "content." As I quoted in my introduction, Jenkins defines a transmedia story as unfolding across these multiple media platforms,^{xiii} whereas convergence is seemingly more inclusive about the content that crosses borders between

formats—a set of *Harry Potter* trading cards does not necessarily contribute to the story begun in J.K. Rowling's novels or their film adaptations per se, but they represent an instance of media convergence. The distinction is somewhat vague and potentially problematic—there are, after all, narrative implications to all transmedia texts.

Jonathan Gray stresses this point in *Show Sold Separately*, focusing on paratexts, those texts that surround the primary text (if such a hierarchy can be said to exist). For Gray, paratexts—commercials, posters, websites, video games, etc.—cannot be ignored when considering the text itself: "...paratexts are not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-rans: they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them."^{xiv} Indeed, paratexts fit into our readings of the text. They affect how we approach narrative content by providing entrypoints to that which they surround: "rather than simply serve as *extensions* of a text, many of these items are filters through which we must pass on our way to the film or program, our first and formative encounters with the text."^{xv}

Gray is building on the work of Gérard Genette, who looks at paratexts strictly in relation to books, the physical books themselves functioning as paratexts to that which is written within them. For Genette, paratexts can take the form of the binding, typeface, cover artwork, chapter layout, and so on of a book along with "epitextual" material such as author interviews.^{xvi} Like Gray after him, Genette sees the paratext as a filter of sorts, and the first step in the reader's (or viewer's) experience of the text: "More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, or [...] a "vestibule" that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back."^{xvii} For Gray, this paratextuality is an extension of intertextuality, where texts inform one another, cite one another, and participate in "the fundamental and inescapable

interdependence of all textual meaning upon the structures of meaning proposed by other texts."^{xviii} Just as intertexts must be taken into account when considering the text, paratexts both depend on the text and are crucial contributors to the meanings of the text.

Gray's focus is primarily on material that advertises the text, that quite directly leads into the text, whereas I am interested in the exchange between less containable or divisible categories of textuality. What is most useful to me is Gray's assertion that intertexts, along with the sub-category of paratexts, should not be considered as wholly separate from the text, and that the text must be read with an eye to these "supplements," as the text is itself a paratext. A film and its trailers, for example, are in a continual feedback loop of paratextuality: the trailer is a paratext of the film, and the film is a paratext of the trailer.

Importantly, the wide variety of products that may qualify as paratexts, as contextual material for any given text, are far more independent, narratively, than what Gray and Genette seem to have in mind—although Genette is happy to make room for the deviations from his own theory that may occur for reasons of changing media:

The ways and means of the paratext change continually, depending on period, culture, genre, author, work, and edition, with varying degrees of pressure, sometimes widely varying: it is an acknowledged fact that our "media" age has seen the proliferation of a type of discourse around texts that was unknown in the classical world and *a fortiori* in antiquity and the Middle Ages, when texts often circulated in an almost raw condition, in the form of manuscripts devoid of any formula of presentation.^{xix}

Here Genette points to the relatively minimal mediation involved in oral traditions and implies a need for his theory of paratextuality, justified by the addition of the printed word to narrative storytelling and the physical mediation process. It is worth stressing that Genette here acknowledges that his theory fits into the dominant preoccupations of his contemporaries without eschewing the existence of paratexts within oral storytelling

(tone of voice and physical demeanor of the orator, for example). This passage also makes room for a consideration of paratexts that function as narratively independent texts. More than intertexts, these self-contained narratives are directly linked to the text, and they filter it in much the same way as a film trailer does. *The R. Tam Sessions* and *Those Left Behind* are prime examples. Both of these paratexts/texts advertise *Serenity* and act as part of its context. To the viewers who seek out these texts before seeing the film, they shape expectations and the ultimate viewing experience while also telling their own side stories.

This conception of narrative is in fact not new, as it can quite comfortably fit into many of the basic definitions of narrative, which do not inherently demand a single text or "formula of presentation." Martin Wallace, in his overview of narratology, points to some of the different terminology for concepts that exist across many theories of narrative. As a rule, a clear distinction can be made between constituent narrative elements and the unfolding of the narrative itself. The former, alternately labelled "story" and "fabula" most commonly, is the raw material: characters, locations, events, etc. The latter ("discourse," "narration," or "plot") is made up of what is added by the author in the act of conveying such material. For example, a character's motivations may be expressed, or time may be collapsed or expanded, or entire elements of a character's biography may be omitted or revealed at a strategic moment. For Wallace,

abstractions such as syuzhet and story seem to imply that the same actions can be represented in various media. Again, this is in one sense obviously true, but when honed to a sharp edge by theorists, it leads to questionable dissections. It is useful if not essential to point out that characters can be presented differently—visually or verbally—and that what they say can be enacted/quoted ("scene" or "mimesis") or rephrased by a narrator ("summary" or "diegesis"—the latter words being those used by Plato and Aristotle). The gist is the same, despite changes in the manner.^{xx}

I see no reason why such changes in manner should be restricted to a single text. In the case of *Firefly/Serenity*, for example, it seems quite clear that the raw material remains the same whether we examine the series, web shorts, comics, or film. What changes is the mode of telling and most notably the medium. While Wallace discusses "various media" in terms of the different options that exist for narrating different story elements, he does not (nor do the theorists he discusses seem to) discount the possibility of using these various media in a single act of narration. Similarly, Mieke Bal proposes that "[a] narrative text is a story that is 'told,' conveyed to recipients, and this telling requires a medium; that is, it is conveyed into *signs*."^{xxi} This telling may require a singular medium, but does it disallow multiple media? Is there any reason to accept that a series of texts that narratively functions as a coherent narrative whole should be treated as something fundamentally different than other narrative texts? My consideration of paratexts, convergence, and seriality should ultimately prove that texts like *Firefly/Serenity*, if thought of not as core texts surrounded by secondary adaptations and promotions, fit quite neatly into existing models of narrative storytelling.

Jenkins is interested in destabilizing the core text and exploring the fluidity of a single story across borders in a way that is quite similar to my own study, as his chapter on the *Matrix* franchise illustrates: "*The Matrix* is entertainment for the age of media convergence, integrating multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium," Jenkins tells us.^{xxii} Like *Firefly/Serenity*, *The Matrix* is more than a single film; it is an ongoing narrative told across platforms that include sequels, animated shorts, a video game, and web comics. Each part of the *Matrix* franchise, Jenkins tells us, is "self-contained," and "any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole."^{xxiii} While I completely align myself with Jenkins's efforts

to eschew hierarchical relationships within this web of texts, I disagree with this last point. These texts are not self-contained, and I do not mean that in Gray's sense of all texts simultaneously functioning as paratexts, but rather on Jenkins's own narrative terms. What does it mean for a text (or in this case a story specifically) to be self-contained? Perhaps the wording is vague enough that Jenkins cannot be refuted outright. In short, he argues that one need not consume parts of the franchise to "enjoy" any other part of it. This idea, however, obscures the complexity of the relationships between some of the different parts of the *Matrix* franchise.

Some of the short films in *The Animatrix* (Various, 2003) build vaguely on narrative elements of the original film's backstory, such as in Mahiro Maeda's two-part *The Second Renaissance*, in which some of Morpheus's (Laurence Fishburne) dialogue from *The Matrix* is fleshed out. In contrast, *Final Flight of the Osiris* (Andy Jones) is a direct prequel to the second feature film in the series, *The Matrix Reloaded* (Lana and Andy Wachowski, 2003), introducing new characters and setting off the film series' main plotline. Similarly, the video game *Enter the Matrix* ties into the *Matrix Reloaded* narrative, which itself ends inconclusively, to be picked up in *The Matrix Revolutions* (Lana and Andy Wachowski, 2003). Jenkins acknowledges these narrative continuations and discusses them at length, yet there is little to suggest that the supposed self-containedness of all texts within the franchise may be troubled by this. Whether general "enjoyment" can be measured is beside the point that a difference does exist in the self-containedness of the texts in terms of narrative content.

While Jenkins successfully destabilizes media hierarchies, he does so without fully acknowledging the serial qualities of many of these texts—part two of a three-part film series is no less definitive or central than parts one or three, but it shares a different

connection to the other films than to a spinoff television series or comic book. Certainly one can "enjoy" *Final Flight of the Osiris* without prior knowledge of any of the *Matrix* franchise, but to what extent is the short film "self-contained"? Destabilizing supposedly core texts within a discourse of serialization may allow for a more nuanced discussion of these relationships.

Firefly/Serenity is an ideal case study for this kind of theory of destabilization and serialization. If the field of film studies is predisposed to favouring the film as core text (Jenkins describes *The Matrix* as "three movies and more"),^{xxiv} *Serenity's* status as continuation, sequel, or finale challenges its place within the hierarchy. Similarly, *Firefly* cannot be considered self-contained (at least not wholly so), as it lacks any kind of narrative conclusion. Having begun as a televised series, it is certainly predisposed to a discourse on seriality or continuity across texts, but before laying out the serial structure of its transmediation and its implications, let us turn to the ways in which transmediation and paratextuality function in the narrative world of *Firefly/Serenity*.

"They Tried to Kill Us": From Cancellation to Transmediation

There is a clearly discernable and practical reason for *Firefly/Serenity's* transmediation, namely the series' early cancellation and the lack of narrative closure that resulted from its demise. On 6 December 2002, the tenth episode of *Firefly*, "War Stories" (dir. James Contner), aired on Fox, concluding the series' original broadcast. Three unaired episodes remained, released later on DVD and in syndication. Despite their eventual availability, these episodes did not provide a conclusion to the series' main narrative threads. The reason for the show's cancellation is somewhat unclear and quite controversial. The most straightforward explanation is that Fox was unsatisfied with

Firefly's ratings. Ginjer Buchanan outlines the various ways in which fans have defended the show's poor performance, pointing to the fact that it was poorly scheduled and marketed, that it was broadcast out of chronological order, and that Fox neither interpreted ratings correctly nor gave the show room to breathe and develop a sizeable following.^{xxv} The reasons for *Firefly's* cancellation are not directly pertinent to this analysis, though I will touch on some of these later.

Importantly, *Firefly* survived, or at least the narrative was taken up elsewhere. After the airing of "War Stories" and the supposed end of *Firefly*, series creator Joss Whedon unsuccessfully tried to revive the show on other networks. Fans joined the fight to bring back their favourite show, framing themselves very explicitly as a resistance army, adopting the mantle of "Browncoats" after the ill-fated independence army from the series. The Browncoats participated in letter writing campaigns, signed petitions to other networks and film studios, and used "guerrilla marketing" to advertise a revived series and/or film that did not yet exist.^{xxvi} There is no definitive marker of how big of a role these fans played in swaying Universal to produce *Serenity*, but the appeal of a ready-made audience and "army" of unpaid advertisers surely did not go unnoticed. Credit certainly went to the Browncoats. This chapter's title refers to Joss Whedon's video speech, made to accompany preview screenings of *Serenity*, where he refers to the resurrection (and transmediation) of *Firefly*: "They tried to kill us. They did kill us. And here we are. We've done the impossible, and that makes us mighty."^{xxvii} I will return to the role of the fans in Chapter 2, but suffice it to say, their efforts were met with success: comics, a feature film, and more.

It may be impossible to determine exactly what the scope of *Firefly/Serenity's* transmediation is. Very visible are the series and film. Joining these are comics and a

graphic novel as well as *The R. Tam Sessions*. My own consideration of the ongoing narrative is largely limited to these in this chapter. There are two reasons for this: 1) these are the texts with the strongest claim to seriality, and 2) There is a potentially endless supply of unofficial, fan-made texts, available online and elsewhere, as well as other non-narrative content such as message boards, blogs, and merchandise, some of which I examine in Chapter 2.

Following the series and preceding the film was the three-issue comic book miniseries, *Those Left Behind*, written by Joss Whedon and Brett Matthews and illustrated by Will Conrad. Alongside this was *The R. Tam Sessions*, a series of straight-to-web, more or less unofficial videos directed by Joss Whedon providing background information and character development on River Tam and functioning as advertisements for *Serenity*. In the three-issue follow-up to *Serenity*, *Better Days*, Whedon, Matthews, and Conrad revisit a story set during the timeline of the series, a bank heist predating the events of the film. Similarly, *Float Out*, a single-issue story written by Whedon and Patton Oswalt and illustrated by Patric Reynolds, revisits events from before the series, dealing specifically with the character Wash (Played by Alan Tudyk in the series and film). As a group of unknown characters mourn the death of the pilot Wash (seen in *Serenity*), they tell stories of the time they spent with him in his prime. In the graphic novel *The Shepherd's Tale*, written by Joss and Zack Whedon and illustrated by Chris Samnee, The mysterious character Shepherd Book (played by Ron Glass in the series and film) is finally fleshed out: we learn of his dark history with the Alliance and how he came to find God and his way aboard the ship *Serenity*. Finally, in 2014, Dark Horse published a six-issue miniseries, *Leaves on the Wind*, a potentially ongoing comic that continues the story directly after *Serenity*. The crew is dispersed, the Alliance is regrouping, and a new civil

war is on the horizon. *Leaves on the Wind* is perhaps the closest thing to a second season of *Firefly* thus far, and it lends itself to further continuations or "seasons."

Whedon is not new to this kind of transmediation, or to the blending of television and feature filmmaking, having revived his *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Fran Rubel Kuzui, 1992), a feature that he had written, as a television series, something of a narrative sequel, on the WB. The series in turn became an ongoing comic, published as "Seasons" eight to ten, and counting. With *Firefly*, however, a framework of seriality is built in at the outset. The series comes first and sets the groundwork for narrative continuations. These are not merely afterthoughts or straightforward attempts to capitalize on a winning formula, but rather can be categorized according to the already established logic of episodes.

Narrative Continuity in *Firefly/Serenity*

The important distinction between *Serenity* and many other films based on television series is that it is a narrative continuation. The term "based on" is in fact problematic, but the film is perhaps the only text within the *Firefly/Serenity* corpus that does not, strictly speaking, require previous knowledge of the show. It is easy to see why Whedon et al. would make the film accessible to new audiences, considering the financial investment involved in producing a feature film—Whedon may indeed have been more

· Films like *The Addams Family* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1991), *Lost in Space* (Stephen Hopkins, 1998), *Charlie's Angels* (McG, 2000), *The Dukes of Hazzard* (Jay Chandrasekhar, 2005), or *The A-Team* (Joe Carnahan, 2010) stand out as examples of films that remediate a series without continuing it narratively; they start from the beginning, changing the source stories to varying degrees, and feature entirely new casts. In contrast, *Serenity* stands alongside such narrative continuations as *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (Robert Wise, 1979) and *The X-Files: Fight the Future* (Rob Bowman, 1998): feature films that fit within specific seasons of their respective series.

acutely aware of the risks of failure than the average filmmaker, having experienced the demise of *Firefly* a few years earlier. Thus, the film goes over some familiar ground even as it functions as an extended episode of *Firefly*. Significantly, we are reintroduced to the main characters as well as the history of "Earth that Was" and the war that led to unification under the Alliance. We are also shown Simon's rescue of River from the Alliance. Here, the film deviates slightly from the series, and some of the difficulties of transitioning from one medium to the other are made apparent.

There are certainly inconsistencies between *Firefly* and the series' story elements revisited in *Serenity*. These may range from unexplained regressions in character arcs to more major plot contradictions. It would be difficult—and perhaps not very useful—to chart all of these inconsistencies, but one in particular stands out, and that is this treatment of River's rescue. In Part 2 of *Firefly*'s pilot episode "Serenity" (dir. Joss Whedon, 20 December 2002), Simon explains his predicament to Mal and the crew after they have discovered River hidden in their loading bay. He explains how he came to rescue her from her captors:

I was contacted by some men, some underground movement. They said that she was in danger, that the government was playing with her brain. If I funded them, they could sneak her out in cryo, get her to Persephone, and from there I would take her wherever.

This description is in stark contrast to *Serenity*'s treatment of the rescue. It is clear from Simon's account that he was not present for the rescue, yet in the film's more direct depiction of events, Simon is the only individual seen not only present but actively removing her from the facility where she is held [Figures 1 & 2].

I point to this inconsistency as one possible instance when continuity is not wholly achieved between the different formats of *Firefly/Serenity*. We could quibble over the importance of such a scene, or suggest that Simon may have been lying to the crew

about his involvement (for whatever reason), but I prefer to set this scene and others like it aside. Contradictions, inconsistencies, and flaws exist to varying degrees in different texts, including within self-contained feature films or individual series episodes. Perhaps this example, in its extremity, illustrates some of the risks of transmediated long-form narratives more than anything else. With many texts interconnecting and reaching different if overlapping audiences, there comes a drive to keep audiences, old and new, engaged. There also comes difficulty in managing multiple, ongoing, transmediated storylines.

My focus is instead on the ways in which *Firefly/Serenity* broadly achieves continuity across platforms, regardless of the strength or consistency of such within the narrative. The series, comics, film, and other narrative texts all overarchingly work together to construct a single, ongoing story, which I align with the notion of seriality. Before exploring the precedents and theoretical frameworks of seriality that apply to these instances of transmediation, a bit of clarification as to how these texts relate to each other is in order. The relationship between texts (or paratexts or parts of the serial, depending on how we choose to theorize them) is key to understanding how they collaborate to achieve broad narrative coherence.

First, as I have mentioned, *Firefly* began as a serial narrative, predisposing later texts to a serial form. Unlike some more episodic television series, sitcoms, and police procedurals for example, *Firefly* made full narrative use of the serial format of broadcast television. Simon and River's story, one of the main narrative throughlines of the series that is developed to varying degrees in almost every single episode, was introduced in the pilot, an episode already split into two parts. The series thus started on an explicitly serial note. These episodes, played out of chronological order, would otherwise have been the

audience's first glimpse of the show, inviting them to stay tuned next week for more *Firefly*.

Individual episodes connect in less directly explicit ways, with minor characters returning in later episodes to continue secondary storylines, such as Saffron (Christina Hendricks), introduced in "Our Mrs. Reynolds" (dir. Vondie Curtis Hall, 4 October 2002), where she attempted to seduce the crew and steal *Serenity*. Saffron is reintroduced—and her duplicitous character is further explored and developed—in "Trash" (dir. Vern Gillum, originally unaired, syndicated 21 July 2003) [Figures 3 & 4]. These kinds of clear connections between individual episodes abound, along with the ongoing continuity of the series as a whole. And such examples of continuity appear not only between the series and film, but also in relation to the other texts, like the comics.

In *Those Left Behind*, the first of the *Firefly/Serenity* comic books, Whedon makes direct reference to narrative threads left open in the series. He also uses the comic to lead into *Serenity* with a cliffhanger that introduces the Operative for the first time. The Operative indeed replaces the mysterious blue-gloved Alliance agents who are still hunting River and Simon by the series' end but make no appearance in the film. Here, Whedon kills them off, providing both closure and an explanation for their later absence. Additionally, the character Lawrence Dobson (Carlos Jacott), presumed dead since the pilot, returns in the comic, having vowed to kill Mal for shooting him and leaving him for dead. His character's sudden reintroduction and the lack of any background information generally make *Those Left Behind* quite difficult to understand for a new audience. Whedon et al. seem to take for granted the fact that readers familiar with the show (and looking forward to the film) will make up the vast majority of those reading the print series, something that is presumably not the case within the film. *The R. Tam Sessions*

also jettisons any excess exposition in favour of a very clear objective: to present glimpses of River's psychological transformation at the hands of the Alliance. Again, seriality is at its most obvious in those texts forming a bridge between series and film, or else presented as a document that prefaces both the series and film, as with *The R. Tam Sessions*.

The later comics continue this trend, building on the existing story while pointing back to past events. Interestingly, those comics that function as flashbacks rather than propelling the story forwards do have a precedent within the televised series: "Out of Gas" (dir. David Solomon, 25 October 2002). While they stand out as interrupting the narrative continuity of the transmedia web (at least in terms of chronology), they are not alone in doing so. In "Out of Gas," a small but crucial engine part fails and leaves the crew of the *Serenity* stranded in space with a limited supply of oxygen. Mal, having stayed with the ship while the others took an escape vessel to find help, thinks back to the assembly of his crew over the years. As he fights to survive on limited air, the episode jumps back and forth between the present and various moments in the past. The closest analogy for this in the comics and other texts can be found in *Float Out*, where the action oscillates between the present and past, or in *The Shepherd's Tale*, where Book's death in *Serenity* is the narrative starting point for a story told in reverse chronological order. In short, the narrative continuity that I discuss, regardless of media format, is not one that relies on uninterrupted chronological order, but rather on an overall sense of unity and coherence within a broader story.

Sequels, Series, and Serials: *Firefly/Serenity* and the History of Continuity

The narrative continuity across these media formats is relatively straightforward, but how does this fit into existing conceptions of sequential storytelling? Perhaps the more pressing question is, how does this transmedia continuity affect our existing conceptions of sequential storytelling? If the term "sequential storytelling" seems overly broad, that is precisely my intent. While I prefer to categorize this mode of transmediation as seriality, as I elucidate below, I must contend with a rather complex landscape of sequels, prequels, threequels, trilogies, series, spinoffs, etc. that often intersect and challenge the very notion of categorization.

Carolyn Jess-Cooke points to some of the problems that come up when trying to define the film sequel specifically. She situates the cinematic sequel within a broader category that stresses "repetition and continuation."^{xxviii} Her definition for the sequel is quite brief and gets to the heart of sequential storytelling across texts: "...a sequel usually performs a linear narrative extension, designating the text from which it derives as an 'original' rooted in 'beforeness'."^{xxix} While a useful working definition, this wording elides some of the inconsistencies in Jess-Cooke's taxonomy. This linearity and sense of "beforeness" and "afterness" certainly applies to the other categories of sequential filmmaking that Jess-Cooke explores—and dismisses as non-sequels—such as remakes, trilogies and adaptations,^{xxx} and later serials,^{xxxi} "threequels," and series.^{xxxii} Jess-Cooke's aim is largely to rescue the sequel from its low cultural and academic status, and she does so in part by pointing to its historical resonance in literature, with examples like Shakespeare's sequel to *Love's Labour's Lost*,^{xxxiii} and in part by connecting sequels to other lines of academic inquiry; she in fact suggests that the sequel is, in and of itself, an example of paratextuality.^{xxxiv} Perhaps this investment in categorization allows for a more

nuanced look at sequential storytelling, rejecting the tendency to dismiss sequels and the like as derivative or purely box-office driven, pointing instead to markers of specificity for the sake of closer study.

Ina Rae Hark directly connects this line of inquiry to the relationship between film sequels and television: "Indeed, how do follow-ups to cancelled television shows relate to the concept of sequels at all because television series are just that, serial narratives expected optimally to provide sequels every week for one season and several seasons after that."^{xxxv} This question resonates with my own suggestion that *Firefly/Serenity* is predisposed to a framework that stresses continuity between texts, having been born on television. The language that is sometimes difficult to tie down with Jesse-Cooke is very much challenged when Hark considers the notion of the sequel in the realm of the television series:

Is renewal for another season the equivalent of a film gaining a sequel?
Are 'spin-offs' with at least some members of the original cast a sequel?
What about 'reunion' television movies many years after the program has
been cancelled, or one-shot television movies or miniseries made to wrap
up dangling storylines left by an abrupt cancellation."^{xxxvi}

Hark specifically looks at the genesis of *Serenity* to develop her thinking on this, labelling the film a "sequel to a dead television show" within her piece's title. She further acknowledges the role of other media in these sequel relationships, pointing out that such sequels can come in the form of tie-in novels or comics, as in the case of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* "Season 8" published by Dark Horse.^{xxxvii} Questions remain unanswered here: is *Float Out* a prequel, sequel, or episode? Does *The Shepherd's Tale* occupy an entirely different position within this discourse, starting during an event that occurred within the timeline of *Serenity* but that was not directly represented therein?

There certainly exists a lack of consistency, or at least a lack of any hard definitions, for the various forms of continuity across cinematic and televisual texts. This is, in my opinion, no problem at all. Jess-Cooke's work on sequels brings up important questions about the nuances in relationships that can exist between texts that may, on the surface, seem straightforward. The difference between a "threequel" and the third instalment in a trilogy, for example, may not be self-evident, unless we accept Jess-Cooke's definition of the trilogy as self-contained, and that of the "threequel" as leaving the series open to further instalments.^{xxxviii} Note that one could reject Jess-Cooke's definitions entirely without denying the distinction that exists between these two tentative categories.

What is most appealing about seriality as a model for exploring *Firefly/Serenity's* continuity and transmediation is the precedent that exists in early film serials not only for cross-overs into other media, but also in the audience participation that was often encouraged, similar to the Browncoat movement that ostensibly allowed for the production of *Serenity*. While it may be tempting to suggest that new media are responsible for entirely new modes of storytelling, this focus on early cinema allows for a more historically grounded look at how new media (along with some older media) are invoked to develop (and certainly in some ways transform) an existing storytelling tradition.

The distinctions between forms of continuity discussed above are in fact quite similar to discussions surrounding silent era serials and series. Seriality, in the context of early cinema, is difficult to define. The continuity from one film to another was not always obvious, in many cases for industrial reasons. Productions sometimes became serialized or lost their seriality upon exhibition, and it is not always clear from reviewing

old prints and trade journals which were originally made as serials.^{xxxix} After 1915, the term "serial" was more or less universally applied to cliffhanger productions: films with inconclusive endings that left the viewer needing to see the next instalment for closure. The other popular term, always a bit looser, was "series."^{xl} Ben Singer offers a useful distinction between serials and series: series instalments are narratively self-contained, repeating only characters, settings, and narrative tropes generally. They can run indefinitely, until their popularity wanes. Serials tell a story across multiple episodes, usually planned out in advance to run for about fifteen episodes in the early teens.^{xli} While a certain amount of overlap may exist between these two categories, it is clear that a television series like *Firefly*, or a transmediated story like *Firefly/Serenity* more inclusively, would align itself more with the serial than the series of the silent era.

Silent serials, besides maintaining continuity from one text to another, also shared in the intertextuality that is necessary to the transmediation of *Firefly/Serenity* and indeed all other transmedia narratives. Singer points out that serials are intrinsically intertextual, as each episode always implicitly or explicitly makes reference to the episode before and the episode after it. "Cliffhanger overlap" in certain silent serials actually meant that portions of a previous episode would reappear in its follow-up to ease the viewer back into the ongoing story.^{xlii} "Serial-queen melodramas", serial productions featuring strong-willed young women in peril, drew on texts outside of their own seriality as well: predominantly newspaper articles chronicling stunts as well as prominent social discourses surrounding the New Woman and feminism.^{xliii} Beyond this intertextuality, serials were an early filmic example of transmediation, where cross-media tie-ins functioned as an integral part of the stories being told.

Singer links this early transmediation to the rise of marketing more generally in the early 1900s: "By that time, no longer was capitalism just about the production of goods for sale; it was just as much about the production of appetites for goods."^{xliv} In order to foster such appetites, filmmakers made use of non-filmic media to promote as well as develop serial narratives. Serials were ideally suited to heavy marketing: with a returning fanbase, serials provided more opportunities for a return on such investments as expensive ad campaigns—the product being sold was, after all, a group of products to be consumed in its entirety over time. In other words, the box-office could justify the investment of large sums by producers.^{xlv}

Many of these advertisements, however, were not merely designed to direct audiences to narrative content; rather, they provided content in their own right. For example, newspaper tie-ins were integral to this marketing craze. By publishing stories that tied in with the film serials, film producers gained national publicity for their films, while newspapers were given content that would increase readership. The two media were mutually reinforcing.^{xlvi} Similarly, contests could function as advertisement, but also as market research. *What Happened to Mary* (Charles Brabin, 1912), often considered to be the first serial, was simultaneously published in short story form in *The Ladies' World* women's magazine. Each week, readers could write in, predicting the next week's events for the chance to win prizes—additionally, producers got a sense of what people wanted to see and incorporated plot points into future episodes in print and on film.^{xlvii} *What Happened to Mary*, in this way, is also an example of viewer participation, or, to use contemporary terminology, "user-generated content."

The rise of the star system similarly factors into these early examples of transmediation. Discussing the incredible feats of the serial queens, Jennifer Bean

suggests that, "It is not coincidental [...] that efforts to heighten the thrilling realism of the film image and the institutional framework of the star system emerged at approximately the same moment."^{xlvi} As the distinction between the actor and characters she plays is collapsed, new opportunities for marketing and transmediation present themselves. The technologies of stardom seek to increase the proximity between the actor and the characters through widely publicized live performance tie-ins, creating a two-way demand between the real-life star and the film itself.^{xlix} The "reality" of the stunts is stressed to solidify this link. Stars are presented as facing very real risk and are called upon to recount the dangers that they experienced in service to the films—the images onscreen cease to be enough but are bolstered by this live testimony, and vice-versa.¹ By elevating the film star in this way, new methods of publicity were implemented precisely to expand the narrative world of the films into transmediated webs of narrative content. And while Bean focuses on serial queens and the female body, obvious parallels exist elsewhere, as in the films of Harry Houdini, similarly bolstered by his magician persona and live acts.

Perhaps the strict distinctions between sequels, series, serials, etc. are not fundamentally important to this discussion; however, my focus on narrative continuity, and these rather strong parallels to the film serial tradition lend themselves to a discourse of seriality. It is often tempting to assume that syndication, DVDs, the internet, and Netflix may fundamentally alter our modes of storytelling, but situating *Firefly/Serenity* within this historical context troubles such a notion. Obvious differences exist, particularly with regards to the repetition that takes place across the silent serials and concurrent short stories. Here, the same story is presented twice, giving viewers/readers the chance to access the story in more ways than one or else to delve deeper into a

narrative that they have already consumed in one format. But a basis is clearly established for the transmediation of *Firefly/Serenity*, and indeed the live performances of serial stars very conveniently aligns itself with set photos found on film websites, or the flashbacks that develop the histories of River, Wash, and Book.

Conclusion

This subcategorization also provides a lens for considering other transmedia texts that do not necessarily fit with the seriality model. While examining the narrative implications of continuity within *Firefly/Serenity* is a useful entrypoint, it is also important to explore the ways in which seriality may be interrupted at times, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 2 with various forms of fan participation. Seriality may also provide a useful counterpoint to certain forms of transmedia storytelling.

Neil Young's *Greendale* is one example of a transmedia text that flirts with seriality at times, but is ultimately doing something different than *Firefly/Serenity*. Made up of a musical album, a film (2003), a website, and a graphic novel, *Greendale* is, in a certain sense, incomplete if experienced as any single one of these texts. But it would be unfair to describe it as narratively continuous across media. The film's entire soundtrack, including dialogue, *is* the very album that preceded it. The film thus enhances the album, or provides visual accompaniment to the songs describing a girl's struggle against corruption and corporate threats to the environment in the town of Greendale. The website extends the history of the town, providing character biographies and an interactive map. The graphic novel, written by Neil Young and Joshua Dysart and illustrated by Cliff Chiang, is an adaptation of the film, further developing a number of plot points. These further developments in each new medium (and the subtraction of

music in the case of the book) all align *Greendale* with certain elements of seriality, but this is a series of texts that is far more invested in repetition and translation (from one form of representation to another) than it is in narrative continuity or eventual completion.

Greendale is only one example of transmediation that might benefit from the specificity of this model of inquiry. How and why it operates, mostly, outside the realm of seriality is beyond the scope of my current analysis, but its contrast with *Firefly/Serenity* is notable and worthy of further thought. What is clear is that without distinct categories of transmediation—such as narrative continuity through seriality—the field of transmedia studies is overwhelmingly broad. *Firefly/Serenity* thus allows for a close examination of the mechanics of transmediation under this one conceptual model.

Chapter 2

Fans, Creators, Activists:

The Official and Unofficial Transmediation of *Firefly/Serenity*

In Chapter 1, I focused my attention primarily on official *Firefly/Serenity* texts. That is to say texts either produced by Joss Whedon himself or with his express permission and/or the industrial backing of Fox and Universal Pictures. But as with many popular texts like *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Dr. Who*, etc., *Firefly/Serenity* productions are not limited to official texts. Fan participation, and indeed fan-authored texts or fan fiction, are important (para)texts, worthy of analysis when considering the seriality of the whole.

This chapter leads me to a discussion of the differences and indeed similarities between official and unofficial transmediation. Here, I further contextualize the seriality

of *Firefly/Serenity*, providing counter-examples that test the limits of a theory of transmedia seriality, considering the role of such texts as fan creation, which can be found within the *Firefly/Serenity* corpus itself. Because these stories are numerous, inconsistent, incompatible, and unofficial, it would be difficult to incorporate them into my conception of serialized transmediation generally. The narrative's coherence and continuity, in other words, are threatened when all such texts are factored in. This does not mean that they cannot be reconciled with the broader metatext somehow, simply that they are prone to operating outside of its limited serial structure.

Fan fiction, in its myriad forms, appropriates existing texts. Viewers, users, or readers become creators, elaborating on already whole, authored works, whether through alteration, continuation, critique, parody, homage, or subversive reading (and writing) of unintended subtext. However, no simple binaries exist between the "original" authors or copyright owners—often distinct entities—and fan authors. "Original" works cannot be considered as either wholly original or separate from derivative texts. This leads to an important question: what is the nature of the distinction between official and unofficial texts?

While the distinction between official and unofficial is largely arbitrary, it is useful when considering seriality in the case of *Firefly/Serenity*, and other similar texts by extension. Using *Star Wars* as my central counterpoint to *Firefly/Serenity*, I will argue that in many non-serial transmedia texts, fan fiction and other unofficial products operate on the same level, narratively and textually, as the main, official texts. *Star Wars* is such a text, where official novels, comics, video games, and television series function alongside the films and each other, all drawing from each other, supporting each other,

but also often contradicting each other. *Star Wars* is a multi-authored metatext with forking, intersecting storylines that lack the order and coherence to be meaningfully situated within a framework of seriality. Adding to this confusion is fan fiction, some of which is entirely unofficial and some industrially sanctioned. With *Star Wars*, transmedia seriality largely does not apply in either the official or unofficial texts, whereas *Firefly/Serenity's* unofficial texts challenge the official corpus' seriality. This chapter will thus demarcate some of the limits of a theory of seriality within transmedia storytelling. While some fan fiction contributes to the overall seriality, those texts that do not, by virtue of their exclusion from official canon, are useful markers of the limitations of seriality in *Firefly/Serenity* as well as all other texts, infinitely open to interpretation and transformation through fan activity. Officialdom is here a designation that is not only legal or abstractly conceptual, but is narratively crucial to an understanding of any narrative's serial structure. In a multi-media era, the traditional distinctions between authorized and non-authorized texts cannot easily be maintained. As multiple authors work on a single multitextual property, their voices cannot be subjected to hierarchies without threatening the validity of any of the voices present. Authorship and authority clash when rights owners impose their will on would-be contributors. The end result is that texts are open. In the case of transmedia, texts are surrounded by other texts, all of them narratively and canonically equal. Authority or authorization cannot validate or invalidate authorship, but it does provide an important caveat to transmedia seriality.

Fandom: Participation, Activism, and Authorship

Fan participation is prevalent outside the world of fan fiction and in many instances can productively inform a consideration of the latter. As Heather Urbanski puts it: "In this growing cultural insistence on participatory entertainment, fans of all kinds expect to be actively involved, no longer content to passively receive messages."^{li} Urbanski's position echoes that of Maurizio Lazzarato regarding post-industrial immaterial labour and the relationship between production and consumption generally. For Lazzarato, consumption marks a point of communication with the producer—production and consumption functioning in tandem with each other, defining one another.^{lii} Both authors are pointing to what fan participation, and by extension fan fiction, rejects: a one-way flow of information. Says Lazzarato, "...the goal of our postindustrial society is to construct the consumer/communicator—and to construct it as 'active'. "^{liii}

In the letter column of one issue of the comic series *Batman: The Dark Knight*, Bruce Bauer, a fan, regretfully observes the lack of romantic pairings between Bruce Wayne (Batman) and powerful heroines like Wonder Woman or Black Canary. The editors' response is notably inviting, not only entertaining Bauer's suggestion, but soliciting more fan feedback: "[...] let's see what the other readers think...would you want Batman hooking up with some other superheroes? Write in and let us know...Bruce Wayne's libido is waiting!"^{liv} While certainly not an example of fan fiction, this participatory environment points to an expansive conception of authorship: the reader and, it appears, the editor, function as contributors to, if not veritable producers of, narrative content. The comic book is a doubly convenient example as the form already

often troubles notions of single authorship. This issue of *The Dark Knight*, while easily attributable to its writer/penciller David Finch, is inked by Scott Williams and Richard Friend, coloured by Alex Sinclair and Pete Pantazis, and lettered by Dave Sharpe—not to mention the fact that it belongs to a multi-faceted, multi-authored canon of Batman comics, films, and television series. In a similar vein, in the early nineties, J. Michael Straczynski interacted with fans online in developing the television series *Babylon 5* (1994-1998), eventually leading to the previously uncommon format of extended story arcs, stretching across all five seasons of the show. This arguably prefigured the reconceptualization of the serial form in the more recent production of complex televised narratives like *Carnivale* (2003-2005), *Lost* (2004-2010), and *Game of Thrones* (2011-ongoing).^{lv} In short, fan fiction exists within a spectrum of fan practices that, for decades, have challenged traditional notions of authorship.

The usefulness of interaction between producers and fans is undeniable, and, while Straczynski's use of online chat seems groundbreaking, it fits into a longer tradition of canvassing fans. As I mention in Chapter 1, *What Happened to Mary* made use of a print contest to gauge what fans wanted to see in future episodes. Today, Netflix compiles information on its subscribers' viewing habits to produce new content that is statistically likely to appeal to them, that is tailored to as wide an audience as possible.^{lvi} I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 3. In any case, these examples point to an exchange between media producers and consumers that exists in some form nearly at all times, either as traditional focus groups, Nielson ratings analysis, or these more direct forms of interaction. If *Firefly's* cancellation was largely due to low ratings, as stated by Fox, and the DVD sales led to renewed interest in producing the film, then Whedon et al.

had, on a very basic level, some access to viewer habits and desires. Additionally, some more direct industrial appeals to audiences shaped Universal's strategy regarding fan participation and creation, as I discuss below.

In the case of *Firefly/Serenity*, fans participate and interact in many ways. The website BrownCoats.com in fact aims to compile the many disparate sites and message boards available to fans in recognition of a glut of participation. With so many avenues open to fans, BrownCoats.com is an attempt to provide a comprehensive introduction to those many fans likely to be overwhelmed. It is equally important to the site's operators to keep the momentum up:

Another of the main reasons for creating this site is to join in with the other groups active in maintaining the fandom. There are many ways internet (and other) fandom has achieved this in the absence of new episodes. Some good examples of this are the creation of new and original *Firefly* based media including fan-fiction, filk (fan music), artwork, role-playing games, journals, fanzines, etc. By providing links to as much of these as possible we intend to provide Browncoats with new and interesting things to keep them excited about the show. Another attraction is the fandom itself and the community feeling it creates. The various message boards, Shindigs (fan meet-ups), etc are ways that fans meet, make new friends and keep in touch. We believe that campaigns organized this way have led not only to the release of the DVDs and helped persuade Universal to produce the Big Damn Movie, but have also helped several charities out by raising funds.^{lvii}

Indeed, the site points to countless other sites, catered to all different fandoms, illustrating not only the different ways in which fans can participate, but also the seemingly great demand for such spaces. It also reminds us that the film *Serenity* was itself produced in response to active demands by fans.

Fan participation, coupled with ancillary texts, also transforms discourses of canonicity.¹ Before touching on fan fiction, it is important to note that other texts (written, drawn, filmed, etc.), even when granted "official" status by rights holders, not only trouble the single author paradigm, but they also introduce significant obstacles in defining canonical texts. If the incoherence of fan fiction, brought about by the multiplicity of competing voices, somehow weakens its position within the canon because it cannot be neatly integrated into the official whole, then ancillary texts like "authorized" novels are equally problematic.

Star Wars offers a plethora of such texts. Will Brooker, in his book *Using the Force*, explores these disparate texts and concludes that the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe (EU), all of which is canonical to varying degrees according to different "authorities," frequently contradicts itself, presumably for similar reasons.^{lviii} The coherence that leads to a serial form in *Firefly/Serenity* is thus less central to the *Star Wars* EU. But such contradictions are further complicated by George Lucas's own engagement with elements of quasi-canonical material. Brooker notes that the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy borrows the name of the planet Coruscant from Timothy Zahn's *Heir to the Empire*, a novel continuing the *Star Wars* mythos after the original trilogy's final instalment, *Return of the Jedi*. Equally explicit is Lucas's inclusion of the spaceship the Outrider in a re-release of the original *Star Wars*, the Outrider having appeared in the *Shadows of the Empire* transmedia project comprised of a novel, comic books, toys, a

¹ I use the term "canon" as it is commonly used to describe different parts of the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe (EU) and other large bodies of interrelated texts. Canon refers to the hierarchical status of individual texts within a broader network of texts—an authorized *Star Wars* novel, for example, may not occupy the same canonical position as a film from the original trilogy.

videogame, and a soundtrack.^{lix} Brooker suggests that, "For fans who maintain that the EU is an essentially meaningless secondary mythos with no bearing on the official characters and narrative, this canonizing of a novelist's invention [is] a problem."^{lx}

These examples suggest that "official" canons are already problematized by arbitrary inconsistencies brought on by a philosophy that implicitly embraces the multi-author model epitomized by fan fiction communities. What is or is not official remains ill-defined even under a highly repressive and controlling top-down model like that of Lucasfilm—even when Lucasfilm encouraged the production of fan fiction in the late 70s, the company did so through a "no-fee licensing bureau," granting itself authority over all fan texts, and since the 1980s, Lucasfilm has cracked down on fans, explicitly laying out the terms of acceptable participation, stating that any publication related to the *Star Wars* mythos requires permission.^{lxi} Lucas undermines his own project of suppression by actively appropriating those multi-authored narrative elements that conform to his ideal canon, opening the door to a far more inclusive view of authorship than he presumably intends.

This appropriation of what we might call ancillary narratives on the part of Lucas/Lucasfilm is certainly not limited to authorized texts like *Heir to the Empire* or *Shadows of the Empire*. As mentioned above, Lucasfilm, along with other media producers, has actively engaged with fan fiction, soliciting "original" creative content. Henry Jenkins discusses this at length, noting that in 2000, Lucasfilm adopted an ethos of ostensible inclusivity, creating an official online fan fiction channel, AtomFilms.com, which "would provide a library of official sound effects and run periodic contests to recognize outstanding amateur accomplishment."^{lxii} The most prominent of these is the

Official *Star Wars* Fan Film Awards, started in 2002, which originally had strict codes of conduct, eventually negotiated down to terms more acceptable to fans.^{lxiii} This sharing of "official" material is echoed, years later, in the case of the rebooted television series *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009). With *Battlestar*, fans were similarly invited to create four-minute videos drawing from a pool of video clips and sound effects provided by the Syfy network, supplemented by material "created" by the fans. The "best" videos were then aired on television.^{lxiv} While, as I have already suggested, these initiatives appear to suggest shifting conceptions of authorship within the media industry, they in fact point to increased attempts to limit the core text and define the parameters of fan authorship, ultimately reinscribing a dominant author or authorial voice, chosen by the rights holder. Similarly, by using websites and interactive advertising, these media producers collapse the distinction between the text and its paratextual framework, a distinction that is already tenuous and that, when considered as permeable and symbiotic, expands the field of participation and reinforces the notion that the consumer is always a constituent part of the text's meaning. This attempt at controlling fan sub-cultures paradoxically implicates media producers in the process of delimiting the text through attempts at controlling it, allowing the creative collective of fandom to effectively displace the single author.

These examples of solicited participation point to fan fiction specifically. To my knowledge, Fox and Universal have yet to invite fans of *Firefly/Serenity* to participate in such a directly creative way to the transmedia project's narrative, but some similarities importantly align *Firefly/Serenity* with such a discourse of officialdom. Tanya R. Cochran catalogues a number of ways in which fans participate in the world of *Firefly/Serenity* unofficially: She discusses the weekly podcasts *The Signal* and *Firefly*

Talk, fan events like the Browncoats Backup Bash and the Browncoat Cruise, musical albums by Filk bands like the Bedlam Bards, parody films like *Mosquito* (Whisper, 2005), the fan-made documentary *Done the Impossible* (2006), countless examples of fan fiction, artwork, music videos, cosplay, as well as the scholarly work of which her own essay is an example.^{lxv} Her list is quite similar to that found in the BrownCoats.com mission statement, quoted above. Additionally, conventions function as meeting grounds for fans as well as the cast and crew [**Figures 5 & 6**].

This vibrant community of fans, operating largely outside of officialdom, were nevertheless noticed—and their labour harnessed—by Universal. As Cochran points out, "In the months leading up to *Serenity's* release, Universal Pictures capitalized on fan enthusiasm by constructing a members-only online community that awarded points and eventually products (t-shirts, hats, movie tickets, etc.) to those able to recruit more members."^{lxvi} While narrative content does not seem to be the contribution that Universal was seeking, the paratextual sphere of *Serenity* was conceived as a space where fans should have input early on. Universal did, however, seek to control just how much fans could participate, and issues of copyright became a point of contention quite quickly, as I discuss below. Regardless of legality, this engagement with fans certainly opens up the text via its paratextual website. Fans are directly implicated in the construction of *Firefly/Serenity's* own Expanded Universe (or "Expanded 'Verse," to borrow the series' terminology).

Copyright, or Who Owns *Serenity*?

Some of the legal obstacles that *Firefly/Serenity* fans have faced are quite common in the world of fandom, fan fiction, and copyright generally. Cochran and Jenkins both discuss the treatment of the fans by Universal and the official fan site. Cochran points to the company hired to design this word-of-mouth campaign, Affinitive, which claims to "democratize its clients," in this case Universal Pictures.^{lxvii} If this democratizing effect can be said to occur, and I am not convinced that it does, then Universal's next steps certainly pose a significant challenge to such an assertion. As Jenkins notes,

when the dust settled, the studio—Universal Pictures—sent cease-and-desist letters to some of the more enterprising amateur publicists, demanding retroactive licensing fees for the reproduction of series images on T-shirts and posters [...] The fans regrouped, counting all of the time and labor (not to mention their own money) put into supporting the film's release. They eventually sent Universal an "invoice" for more than \$2 million as represented by their 28,000 "billable hours," an attempt to translate their fan activities into the industry's language.^{lxviii}

Universal clearly intended fan participation to exist in a strictly controlled environment, not one in which they had a "democratic" voice. Fans could participate in advertising the film on the studio's terms. The fans perhaps had no legal right to demand compensation, but their gesture was meant to highlight that these fan activities and the studio's encouragement should all be part of a symbiotic process: fans are given a voice and outlet for their own creativity, while Universal gets free publicity.

While my focus here is on the authorship and officialdom of fan production, these legal questions are important. Intellectual property is frequently misunderstood and used as justification for entirely spurious cases against fans. This in turn creates a legal sense that authorship, authority, and copyright all function together to elevate certain texts

above others and define canonicity. Dismantling at least some of this structure allows for a more nuanced consideration of *Firefly/Serenity* fan fiction and its place within my model of seriality.

Until the Internet allowed fan creation to occur on a more visible, mass scale, questions of copyright infringement were largely irrelevant simply because policing was impossible, impractical, and/or economically unwarranted. With the Internet, alongside other technological developments, however, fan fiction has become impossible to ignore as its products are made widely available and feature, in some cases, production value of nearly professional quality. The potential for profit and/or competition with legitimate rights holders along with the possibility of monitoring fan activity online has led to major transformations in the media industry's relationships with its consumers/co-creators. The relatively new participatory landscape that I describe above—new in its Internet-age incarnation—raises important questions regarding the nature of the original text and its relationship to fan fiction, specifically when rights holders actively, "officially," engage with these paratextual products. What is the status of "the Author" or "the Text" when new authors are invited into the realm of officialdom and new texts are created, exhibited alongside their official counterparts online? How do we negotiate and define canons under this model? And, importantly, where do those fan authors who remain marginal fit into this discourse?

Rather than inviting a multitude of voices, this industrial encroachment into fan cultures—through the use of the very technologies that have enabled more visible and professional fan production—has led to a consolidation of control and the codification of user-generated content. This kind of industrial appropriation dismisses certain forms of

artistic expression by extending industrial legitimacy to a privileged few. Rights holders expand their artistic properties in order to assert greater control over a corpus without set boundaries, resulting in a set of arbitrary "rules," incoherent and incapable of meaningfully encapsulating fan fiction. By controlling fan participation, the media industry has figured itself as a gatekeeper in a framework that is largely antithetical to official sanction. This industrial solicitation of fan fiction curtails fan authorship, reinscribing an "official" authorial and authoritative status onto the original author or rights holder. In so doing, these same industrial entities simultaneously, implicitly and paradoxically, affirm the permeability of both the text and the author, negating the claim attached to their own bids for authority in favour of a more inclusive conception of text and author.

In examining the role of new media in this equation, Julie Levin Russo argues that the tools of dissemination used by fan creators are equally useful for rights holders in asserting control over the types of creative content that circulates. For example, video sharing sites like YouTube, "face greater risks for hosting illegal content than for refusing to host content that is legal; they have every incentive to reduce these risks by complying with the industry's demands."^{lxix} Russo is pointing to a widespread practice of playing it safe, avoiding legal action through self-censorship, and in the case of YouTube, third-party censorship. I will return to the self-censorship of fan communities, but I will first elaborate on the perspective of the industry.

A 2010 TED talk by Margaret Gould Stewart, YouTube's head of user experience, provides an enlightening glimpse into the company's inner-workings *vis-à-vis* ownership. Stewart states that rights management is now enmeshed in a "complex web of

relationships," and she outlines YouTube's *modus operandi*: when copyrighted material, registered with YouTube by the rights holder, is detected by the company's recognition software, the rights holder is given authority to decide the video's fate—regardless of how much of the copyrighted material has been used or in what capacity.^{lxx} She states that, "[b]y empowering choice we can create a culture of opportunity, and all it took to change things around was to allow for choice through rights identification."^{lxxi} These vague notions of "choice" and "opportunity" occlude the fact that this process grants neither to the individuals who upload the videos in the first place. Looking past Stewart's salesmanship, a troubling conclusion can be drawn. The "culture of opportunity" that she describes is one in which rights holders selectively allow fan creativity by consenting to a reworking of the copyrighted material in question—as was done when Sony allowed the dissemination of a wedding video featuring a Chris Brown song for which it owned the copyright.^{lxxii} Stewart's position sounds utopian—as if tighter control leads to both increased creative expression and profit. Obviously one must not ignore the fact that she works for the video hosting site, but more can be gleaned from her statements than mere industrial rhetoric. The "choice" that Stewart is talking about is very real, but it is the choice of the rights holder, which means that the culture of opportunity, while also real, is being micromanaged by rights holders rather than created by them. It would be absurd to suggest that the makers of the Chris Brown wedding video were empowered by Sony. Rather, Sony was empowered by YouTube, given the privilege of allowing the video to remain online (and reaping the financial rewards of a reinvigorated hit climbing the charts).^{lxxiii} The couple who posted the video, on the other hand, were simply given permission to *not* remove the video from YouTube.

This utopian conflation of freedom and permission is fairly common; consider Jenkins's statement and tone in the following passage from *Convergence Culture*:

What gives me some hope, however, is the degree to which a collaborationist approach is beginning to gain some toehold within the media industries. These experiments [in consumer-generated content] suggest that media producers can garner greater loyalty and more compliance to legitimate concerns if they court the allegiance of fans; the best way to do this turns out to be giving them some stake in the survival of the franchise, ensuring that the provided content more fully reflects their interests, creating a space where they can make their own creative contributions, and recognizing the best work that emerges.^{lxxiv}

While a more nuanced proposition than Stewart's, Jenkins's attitude ignores the fact that whether or not a media producer's concerns are legitimate is a difficult question to answer, and he further ignores the power dynamics. The invoice prepared by *Firefly/Serenity* fans was clever precisely because it highlighted the disparity between fan "employees" and the studios taking advantage of free labour. Why is this form of collaboration a source of hope? If said media producers are granted the authority to demand loyalty and compliance, legitimate or not, those concerns will inevitably restrict some individuals' ability to creatively participate, publicly at least, within fan cultures, while disproportionately privileging others. Further, the distinction between the two groups of fans, those whose participation is sanctioned and those who participate on the margins, will be determined according to "compliance" to self-appointed authority.

Stewart discusses YouTube's internal policies, and Jenkins describes a potential for collaboration, but what are the legal obligations of fan authors and video hosting sites when dealing with potentially infringing content? Certainly rights holders cannot legally claim the final say simply because they registered content with YouTube. No American

case law currently exists to define the legal parameters of fan participation specifically,² but fair use laws reveal that fans are in a much more comfortable position than Universal, Lucasfilm, and other rights holders tend to admit. Fair use copyright exceptions have traditionally been applied to works that parody, comment on, or recontextualize a copyrighted text without infringing on its revenue.^{lxxv} Since 1990, the legal defence of fair use has increasingly been evaluated according to the extent to which an original work is transformed, moving away from questions of financial gain: Peter Decherney notes that "[c]ourts have consistently endorsed the transformative-use standard, finding that recontextualizing a work can make it a fair use even when the entire original work is used and it is used for a commercial purpose."^{lxxvi} Interestingly, fair use flies in the face of what Lucasfilm's vice president of marketing, Jim Ward, considers acceptable fandom: "...if in fact somebody is using our characters to create a story unto itself, that's not in the spirit of what we think fandom is about. Fandom is about celebrating the story the way it is."^{lxxvii} The company embraces parody and commentary, but certainly not transformation; for Lucasfilm, fandom is about "celebrating the story the way it is."

Specific examples of transformative fiction case law exist in America, such as with Alice Randall's 2001 novel *The Wind Done Gone*, a retelling of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* through an African-American lens. The court sided with Randall and Houghton Mifflin, her publisher, when the estate of Margaret Mitchell sued on the grounds of copyright violation.^{lxxviii} As Rebecca Tushnet notes, the main difference between the case of *The Wind Done Gone* and fan fiction is that the defendant was a major publisher with a financial investment in the novel's success, whereas fan authors

² While copyright law varies from country to country, my case studies are American, and I therefore look exclusively at American case law herein.

are less likely to try their luck against a company like Universal, preferring to acquiesce to cease-and-desist letters (even while voicing their displeasure outside the courts).^{lxxix}

Another major difference is the status of Randall's novel as a commercial product, sold in bookstores alongside other novels. The legal landscape for fans is thus seemingly not so grey. While no case law supports fans specifically, the authority granted to copyright owners is more a matter of scale than law. In other words, industrial monoliths like Universal and Lucasfilm have the freedom to flex their muscles. One can surmise that *The Wind Done Gone* case does set a rather important precedent: transformative fiction, similar to most subversive and industrially alienated fan fiction, can not only circulate, but it can also legally generate revenue for its creator. According to Brooker, *Star Wars* fan fiction authors generally operate under the assumption that Lucasfilm supports them as long as they do not profit from their derivative works, and this seems to be very much the case with Universal's cease-and-desist letters.^{lxxx} Where this assumption comes from is unclear, as the rules of the game are largely unofficial and based on hearsay. How many cease-and-desist letters Lucasfilm has sent out is unknown, but the company is notorious for legal threats, and, as Jenkins notes, self-censorship is widespread among fan authors who simply do not know what rights they have or how Lucasfilm may respond to their work.^{lxxxi} One can hardly blame them when Lucasfilm has so often laid out its expectations of fans and created an environment in which official participation is highly regulated. Lucasfilm does not need to sue its fans, as many fall into line as a response to the uncertainties attached to fair use—uncertainties that Lucasfilm is all too willing to cement with prescriptive proclamations about what "fandom is about." This is what Tushnet refers to as a "copyfight" mentality, promoted by rights holders, where a

discourse of rebellion and suppression scares those who wish to avoid being labelled rebels or pirates into willingly suppressing their own fair use.^{lxxxii}

This is the case with Universal's position of selective inclusivity. Fans actively participate, regardless of official sanction, producing shirts, cds, short stories, etc., but when they are invited and encouraged to do so, legal threats sting harder. Fans have a creative stake in the property, and the arbitrary distinctions between fans or between their contributions are enmeshed in an unclear legal conflict. The cease-and-desist letters and the fan invoice are strong markers of a "copyfight," one that scares some fan producers into silence, despite being based on largely bogus premises. This silence should not be read as creative or authorial illegitimacy, however. These texts exist, and they are consumed. They define one another as well as their referents.

The Text and its Author

In order to fully engage with the question of fan participation and authorship along these lines, it is important to investigate not only a framework of authorship but also, first, of the boundaries of the text. While I deal with various "texts" in Chapter 1, I wish to define my terms more carefully here as the boundaries of my object of study become less straightforward. The text's permeability is of great consequence when exploring the limits of officialdom.

Roland Barthes provides a useful distinction between "the work" and "the Text" [*sic*]. He suggests that the traditional notion of the work, a finite object of study, a physical book for example, has come to require a new (at the time of writing), supplementary object of study, the text, which demands that we explore the relationships

between writer, reader, and observer/critic.^{lxxxiii} The text is plural and lacks both closure and a structural centre, connected to its intertexts in a continuous exchange rather than a filial relationship.^{lxxxiv} The text is tied to a process of signification for Barthes, where production and consumption are one:

...the Text requires that one try to abolish (or at the very least to diminish) the distance between writing and reading, in no way by intensifying the projection of the reader into the work but by joining them in a single signifying practice.^{lxxxv}

The meaning of the text thus cannot be divorced from its consumption.

Jonathan Gray picks up this line of thought in his discussion of paratexts. Gray highlights the reader's role in validating intertextuality. Intertexts exist inasmuch as we define the text as we read it, projecting our reading histories onto it; whether or not these intertexts were intended by the author is irrelevant to their meaning-making role for readers.^{lxxxvi} Paratexts create "interpretive communities" that share a certain reading method that defines a facet of the "core" text.^{lxxxvii} The primacy of interpretation leads Gray to ponder what happens to textual analysis in-between parts of the text. Is the *Firefly/Serenity* text "closed" between viewings? Gray also discusses "paratexts in medias res," suggesting that "gaps" between textual readings—between novels in a series, episodes in a television program, etc.—are often filled with paratexts, whether websites, merchandise, or any other contextual material, which guide our "re-entry" into the text.^{lxxxviii} No text is complete without its context: "...there is never a point in time at which a text frees itself from the contextualizing powers of paratextuality."^{lxxxix} It is within this framework of malleable, permeable textuality that I now turn to the question of authorship, for within a discourse of shifting texts and contexts, how does one define the authorial voice behind the text?

In "What is an Author?" Michel Foucault offers a compelling interrogation of the author that can be productively applied to fan fiction. Foucault examines the importance of the author in relation to the works that he or she produces, concluding that a work is generally figured as secondary to its author "who is outside and precedes it."^{xc} This concept resonates with Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author":

The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*. The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child.^{xcii}

Like Barthes, Foucault is sceptical of the myth of the singular author and asks the important question, what is a work when detached from "the Author"?^{xciii} A central problem is distinguishing between objects that count as an author's "work" and those that do not, introducing the notion of official canons. The non-canonical ancillary works (notebooks, laundry bills, etc.) belong to the author's "framework," and Foucault ponders the difficult task of including or excluding such important texts in an author's oeuvre.^{xciii} The question of a framework is equally important in the consideration of the official versus unofficial canon. Moving away from the single author discourse, a framework of fandom may reveal that the term "work," or alternately "text," transcends even the author, or at least invites multiple co-authors; *Firefly* is arguably an incomplete text without its transmedia sequels or continuations. But can it be considered complete without the fan texts that suggest, or highlight, subtexts within the official story, new romantic pairings, for example? Can such a "framework" be relegated to the vague category of "unofficial" fandom? If the work or text truly is separate from its author, which it most definitely is, then it seems reasonable to assume that the text can be altered or at least expanded by

other authors. Whether a hierarchy exists amongst authors is a different question, and Foucault offers compelling tools to move away from any hierarchical structure.

He suggests that an author's name can serve to classify a body of work, differentiating one group of texts from all others, implying "relationships of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentication, or of common utilization."^{xciv} For Foucault, the regulation of status and reception within a culture of circulation defines the work of a named author. Here, Foucault is stressing the importance of a culture of readers in defining work through the figure of the known, named author, so that, while the author frames the text, it is the reader who constructs meaning out of this relationship, granting said reader agency in the defining of works.^{xcv} The reader is already, to some extent, a co-author; the naming process thus can be seen as a precursor to fan participation in the creation of canons: canons only exist because they are acknowledged as such.

Tied to this idea is Foucault's discussion of "transdiscursive" authorship, where authors function as "initiators of discursive practices."^{xcvi} Foucault refers specifically to authors of scientific rather than narrative discourses, but there is no reason to limit transdiscursive authorship in such a way. Significantly, Foucault proposes that this transdiscursive mechanism entails modifications and revisions to source works.^{xcvii} Again, the implication for fan fiction is that new meanings can be read into original texts based on material found in fan-authored transdiscursive texts. Under this model, the fan author has the same authority as the original author in contributing to multiple discourses. This is not to say that Foucault ignores the legal implications of transdiscursive authorship or that he accepts any derivative authorship on its own terms. Indeed, Foucault

stresses the functionality of the author, specifically the author's nameability, with reference to the regulative function of such.^{xcviii} Regulation aligns the function of the author with Barthes' and Gray's belief in the importance of the reader in the evaluation of texts. Much of this feature of authorship, Foucault tells us, is a product of texts becoming property, liable to legal control both against the author and against those who would steal from him or her, thus codifying distinctions between authors, texts, and readers.^{xcix} Between the notion of the permeable text and the transdiscursive author, it seems difficult to distinguish conceptually between the true author of an official text and the secondary author of a derivative product. Nameability gives credit to the source, so that a fan author may not claim to have "created" *Firefly*, even as he or she legitimately contributes to the ever-growing, transdiscursive body of texts.

This model of textuality and authorship is consistent with Lazzarato's conception of production in the age of immaterial labour, where cultural or informational commodities are not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather create the environment of the consumer as they grow and transform into something new, into the basis of a social relationship.^c The act of consumption is thus figured as a "realization" of the product in a process that is better defined as communication than consumption.^{ci}

The applications of these theories to fan fiction are fairly straightforward. Louisa Stein and Kristina Busse suggest that fan fiction, rather than signifying originality, celebrates "the stimulating limitations of intertextuality," as fans operate in a sphere dominated by repetition and reproduction, challenging concepts of original artistic creation as well as the notion of aesthetic ownership.^{cii} Their argument is thus one of creativity through limitation, be it legal, cultural, or canonical, where fan cultures and the

source canon conspire to predefine the types of participation available to fans. In keeping with Foucault's transdiscursive model of authorship, Stein and Busse point to the creative limits imposed by the source text. Here, the original author functions as a creative obstruction in some cases, or as a liberating point of departure in others.^{ciii} In either case, however, the source text defines fan engagement—even its complete rejection requires the source text as a discursive referent, along with the reader's recognition of the transgression. Stein and Busse refer to limitations entirely in keeping with my own reading of fan fiction and the Foucaultian transdiscursive author: "These fan communities constitute discursive contexts that join the official source text as intertextual referent."^{civ} While the source text does not appear out of nowhere, its permeability is in no way limited by its origin. The fan author requires a source text as intertextual referent, but his or her fan fiction is in no way subordinated to it. The authors stress the fact that advances in media reproducibility figure fan fiction as a threat to originality and idea ownership, allowing multiple transformations of "official" works while dislocating notions of artistic or creative value from notions of originality.^{cv} Returning to Barthes's notion of the death of the author, however, it is not at all clear that such originality was ever truly a part of authorship to begin with. In other words, how original is the original and how derivative is fan fiction?

This position provides context and support for my own argument that fan fiction expands the labels of "author" and "text" to incorporate discursive texts as parts of the source texts that they engage with; however, Stein and Busse maintain the boundary between source text and fan text, while I see the relationship as something far murkier. The two are in conversation with each other, no doubt, but their argument centres more

on the notion that repetition and reproduction had already prepared the media landscape for something like fan fiction. In the case of *Firefly/Serenity*, the active role of fans—and the attitudes of the original creators and rights owners—illustrates my point further, suggesting that even outside of fan creations, the fan was always figured as a co-creator, or at least a fellow Browncoat, part of the struggle to keep the series alive. My model of seriality is thus legitimately defined, delimited, and challenged by these texts and their authors.

Browncoats and Serialization

Moving away from the notion that official and unofficial texts have fundamentally different claims to authority, the question remains, how do fan-authored texts fit into the *Firefly/Serenity* transmedia serial? My focus on official texts in Chapter 1 is certainly more manageable than a more holistic discussion of *Firefly/Serenity* texts, but I do not wish to imply that this validates the industrial conception of the text that I discuss above. Rather, I propose that seriality is one model of inquiry that separates the official from the unofficial purely on the level of narrative continuity and coherence. This does not diminish fan fiction or elevate the official canon, but rather it demarcates the roles of each in contributing to a homogenous corpus of stories.

This is not to say that fan fiction can never be reconciled with seriality. Consider, for instance, this synopsis of the novel *The Firefly in the War*, written by yesimadramaqueen, available on fanfiction.net:

Three years after Miranda, Serenity suddenly finds herself in the middle of a war...the one they created. It's worse than anyone could have imagined. Both militaries will do anything to secure a victory, and the crew is caught in the crossfire. Between battles, relationships grow and stakes are raised.

Many things have happened in three years, and tragedy has forged strong bonds. However, it is the captain and his pilot who have become the closest of friends. When the Verse and their family are on the line, could it be that Mal and River hold the key to salvation? Will light come from darkness? Can they end the war and hold onto one another?^{cv1}

This could easily be a Dark Horse blurb advertising an official *Firefly/Serenity* comic, set three years after the film and continuing the same narrative in a chronologically coherent manner. But it is not. And, as may be expected, contradictions exist between *The Firefly in the War* and other official texts. In *Leaves on the Wind*, for example, Zoe and Wash are parents; Zoe gives birth to a daughter, Emma, after Wash's death in *Serenity*. Emma is conspicuously absent from yesimadramaqueen's story. Despite being published after *Leaves on the Wind*, *The Firefly in the War* is nine chapters long and was presumably conceived long before yesimadramaqueen would have read the comic (if he or she in fact read it at all).

The attempt to keep this story in line with the film and other texts—by explicitly situating it in relation to previous events—is very much in line with my discussion of seriality. An early example of continuity between yesimadramaqueen's novel and *Serenity* comes when Zoe gives one of Wash's shirts to River, now the pilot of *Serenity*. This scene picks up narrative threads from the film, referencing Wash's death, River's new role on the ship, and Zoe's ability to move on while honouring Wash's memory. But the potential for inconsistencies ranging from minor and insignificant to fundamentally irreconcilable with official texts cannot be ignored in this or other fan-authored texts.

Conclusion

Official and unofficial texts exist alongside each other as part of the transmedia whole, but they occupy different positions on the level of seriality. The possibility for seriality exists in fan fiction, either in the form of self-contained fan-authored serials, or in the unlikely event that the coherence that I discuss in Chapter 1 carries over into unofficial texts, but this is not the norm. Nor is seriality the norm in official transmedia stories. As I illustrate in Chapter 1, *Firefly/Serenity* is one example of a transmedia serial, exemplifying the structure of such.

As the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe exemplifies, in contrast, official texts do not always necessarily conform to the coherence of the *Firefly/Serenity* serial; they exist in a shared fictional universe, with a shared history, lacking the more specific continuity that might qualify as seriality, but, more than this, they are not internally consistent. They contradict one another even before unofficial texts are added to the fray. Thus, pointing to narrative coherence as a way to separate the official texts from the unofficial ones is not altogether satisfying or productive. This coherence does nothing to validate claims like that of Universal's against fan authors. It does not elevate *Leaves on the Wind* above *The Firefly in the War*. It merely helps to categorize texts according to seriality, eliminating fan fiction from the realm of transmedia seriality.

This chapter seeks to provide an introduction to some of the questions that arise when exploring fandom. Transmedia stories are told in a variety of forms—as exemplified in *Convergence Culture*'s six chapters, each aiming to explore one distinct type of convergence or transmediation. While various instances of transmediation contribute to *Firefly/Serenity*'s serialization across formats, I chose to devote a chapter to

transmedia fandom above any other. Quite simply, fan fiction is the one instance of transmediation in narrative storytelling that does not conform to my model of seriality. Conveniently, it also invites an important discussion that is often ignored and taken for granted *vis-à-vis* officialdom. While Chapter 1 lays out the parameters of seriality within *Firefly/Serenity* and other transmedia stories, it is far from complete. While fan fiction seems to threaten the coherence of these texts in relation to one another, it instead solidifies my argument by more precisely defining the parameters of my object of study. Texts are fundamentally open, and authorship can come from anywhere. Distinctions and stratification arise on the level of legality and self-appointed authority, but these should not affect our object of study in and of itself. Rather, they are important facets of the act of distributing, controlling, owning, and reading texts, and they should be theorized as such.

Official and unofficial transmedia texts exist alongside one another, sharing their referents in a joint act of intertextuality, but a division occurs when seriality and coherent narrative continuity are involved. Seriality is but one iteration of official transmediation.

Chapter 3

(Con)Text: The Thematization of Transmedia Storytelling in *Serenity*

So far, I have explored the ways in which *Serenity* functions as an extension of *Firefly* by means of narrative continuity achieved across media. The transmediation of *Firefly/Serenity* occurs on many levels, inviting viewers to follow a single narrative on various platforms, and, as I have illustrated in Chapter 2, this process has indeed been enabled by active participation on the part of fans who contribute to transmediation, indirectly building on the narrative via interactive media.

If, as Charles Acland suggests, viewers increasingly exercise "platform consciousness," a deep awareness of the formats through which they consume narratives,^{cvii} then it is no coincidence that many texts that experiment with varying distribution or exhibition formats would also engage with the idea of platform delivery

diegetically: a narrative built on issues of transmediality can appeal to audiences already engaging with such processes. *Serenity* belongs to a growing tradition, not limited to transmedia storytelling, in which texts thematize their role within industries that increasingly rely on disparate platforms. As the culmination (or *a* culmination) of the process of transmediation, it comments narratively on its own industrial genesis, discussed in the previous chapters, on numerous levels.

This chapter investigates the convergence of such textual analysis and the study of media platforms, situating *Serenity* within a framework that stresses "platform consciousness" both narratively and industrially. More than just an elongated episode, or a moving-image comic, *Serenity* occupies its own distinct place within the *Firefly/Serenity* transmedia serial. This approach is meant to acknowledge the intersections between text and context, or form and content, and lead to a consideration of *Serenity* and other transmedia texts on their own peculiar terms, as products that are wholly invested in transmediation rather than being easily divisible, analysed either according to modes of production and distribution or to narrative, formal, and stylistic content.

Self-Reflexive Textuality: The Case of Science Fiction

It is important to separate the narrativization or thematization of transmedia storytelling in *Serenity* from other forms of self-reflexivity in the cinema, namely in other examples of science fiction (sf). While sf film has a tendency to investigate its own filmic status through a self-reflexive look at moving images and telecommunications, I am proposing that *Serenity*, along with many other transmedia texts, goes further, certainly

accomplishing something similar to the self-reflexivity of sf but also distinct from it: a diagetically integrated exploration of the implications of transmediation.

J.P. Telotte situates *Serenity* within this tradition of sf self-reflexivity, but he does so in order to differentiate it from its televised origin, suggesting that the two platforms, television and film, have different, perhaps platform-specific, foci. My interjection is not that such differentiation does not occur, but rather that the transition from television to film is indeed the driving force behind such differences and that media convergence itself rather than merely audiovisual representation is what this self-reflexivity represents and comments upon. As Telotte frames it,

...what is arguably most interesting about the film version is something that hardly surfaces in *Firefly's* relatively brief existence. For *Serenity* seems pointedly mindful of its medium, after a fashion that we do not typically see in most television series, but that has always marked some of the best cinematic sf.^{civiii}

This statement is entirely fair and serves as an ideal starting point for my investigation, questioning the differences between *Serenity* and *Firefly* and the role that the platform plays in the definition of such. Indeed, *Serenity* is full of allusions to technologies of audiovisual representation, the central plot dealing with the proliferation of a video/media file. But Telotte misses an opportunity to investigate the peculiar nature of *Serenity* as a filmic sequel to *Firefly* and the effect of this peculiarity on the film's use of such a familiar sf trope. Drawing on the work of Garrett Stewart, Telotte situates *Serenity* within a tradition of sf that, through "omnipresent video screens, holograms and other media images" reflect "the mechanics of apparition that permit these films in [...] the first place."^{cix} Telotte further concludes that such a move towards a more cinematic sf is likely the reason for *Serenity's* success as an "adaptation" (i.e. concluding the series

cinematically required a specifically cinematic transformation of *Firefly*, achieved through this recognisable self-reflexivity).^{cx}

Telotte's line of thought weakens when he suggests that *Serenity*'s focus on its own sf status supplants, or at least overshadows, its generically hybrid origin as a space western in *Firefly*. He claims that the film is "intent on establishing a primary generic lineage in sf."^{cx} This statement ignores much of what *Serenity* achieves generically. Most notably, the film introduces a villain (perhaps "foil" is a more apt label), the Operative, who is very much tied to western cinema traditions; even superficially, his use of what appears to be a katana sword loosely points to the frequent stylistic exchanges that occurred between westerns and samurai films of the 1950s and 60s. For example, Japanese director Akira Kurasawa freely admits to borrowing from the Western genre: "Westerns have been done over and over again and in the process a kind of grammar has evolved. I have learned from this grammar of the Western."^{cxii} In turn, Westerns have borrowed back, as with *The Magnificent Seven* (John Sturges, 1960) or *A Fistfull of Dollars* (Sergio Leone, 1964), remakes of Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954) and *Yojimbo* (1961) respectively.

Like the western anti-hero, the Operative is ostensibly a civilizing force, bringing about a "better world." Importantly, this better world is meant for others. When Malcolm Reynolds presses him, asking, "So me and mine gotta lay down and die so you can live in your better world?," the Operative responds, "I'm not going to live there. There's no place for me there any more than there is for you. Malcolm, I'm a monster. What I do is evil—I have no illusions about it—but it must be done." Like John Wayne's Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956), along with many other western protagonists, the

Operative's function is limited to the taming of the wild west, or in this case the outer reaches of inhabited space. He is a liminal figure, a representative of civilization who is too rugged and violent to actually fit into the world he ushers in. The iconic final shot of *The Searchers*, of Edwards framed in a door, standing outside of the domestic sphere after having restored order to it, is indeed echoed at the end of *Serenity*. Here, the Operative, having been defeated (unlike Edwards), stands outside the open cargo bay door of the ship *Serenity*. The important difference here is that *Serenity* represents exactly the kind of lawless savagery that the Operative was fighting against, here refigured as the ideal; the Operative thus functions as a dark reflection of the John Wayne-style western hero, highlighting the problematic nature of American settlement narratives by collapsing the clear distinction between the savage and the civilized. One almost expects Mal to invite him to join the crew of the *Serenity*, but there is no place for him there either, and indeed Mal instead warns that he will kill him if they ever cross paths again [**Figure 7**].

If the western elements of *Firefly* are in fact reduced—perhaps slightly—in *Serenity*, it is also significant that entirely new, non-sf generic markers are introduced in the feature film, previously absent from the series. Horror tropes are present in *Firefly*, particularly in the episode "Bushwhacked" (Tim Minear, 2002), where the crew of the *Serenity* come into contact with a ship that has been ransacked by Reavers, the crew's corpses left behind, arranged into a grotesque, gory sculpture for our heroes to find. Mysterious and unseen throughout *Firefly*, the Reavers are sadistic cannibals, standing in most obviously for the "savage Indian" of the western film. This nod to horror cinema is brief, the Reavers taking up a very small portion of the overall narrative arc of the series.

The Reavers of *Serenity* have a new and visually more clearly articulated referent: the post-*Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968) zombie.⁷ Through the conceit of River's telepathic visions, Whedon first introduces the Reavers in quickly edited bursts, creating an abrupt and shocking change of pace and tone in a mostly comical bank heist scene. Suddenly, the film is marked by suspense and terror. Here even an audience familiar with *Firefly* gets its first glimpse of the Reavers: disfigured, mutilated humans who advance quickly and chaotically on anyone in their path, devouring their victims violently. On a thematic level, the Reavers are similar to zombies in that they seem to act primarily on an animalistic impulse to eat people. Formally, they fit into a tradition of gory makeup and effects and an acting style showcased in zombie films released roughly contemporaneous to *Serenity*, namely *28 Days Later* and *Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, 2004). Notably, the Reavers of the film are crucial to the narrative and are prominently featured in the film's climax.

Serenity is far more than a continuation of sf self-reflexivity or a concentration of the sf tropes of the series on which it is based. Not only does the film continue to engage with and challenge the boundaries of genre, but it also participates in a different form of self-reflexivity predicated on transmediation in an age of convergence. While Telotte successfully situates *Serenity* within an sf tradition, the film is hardly reduced to this

⁷ I point to Romero's influence here in recognition of the multitude of zombies that exist within film history. It is worth noting, however, that despite their visual and tonal debt to films like *Night of the Living Dead* or, more directly, *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002), the origin of the Reavers within the film—the government's attempt to pacify and better control its citizens—also aligns them with the classical voodoo zombies, mystically enslaved peoples, of *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932), *King of the Zombies* (Jean Yarbough, 1941), or *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Tourneur, 1943).

single genre and is indeed part of another tradition of self-reflexivity that is not limited to any one genre but rather to a multi-platform mode of delivery.

Transmedia and the Platform Conscious Audience

Charles Acland's notion of "platform consciousness" provides a useful entry-point into a consideration of the trend towards narrative depictions of transmediation separate from sf's self-reflexivity generally. Acland positions audiences as highly attuned to the various media incarnations (or platforms) of the narratives that they consume; film viewers do not blindly consume texts in any format—the platform on which a film or other media product is delivered affects the act of spectatorship, or at the very least is consciously recognized by said spectators. We may surmise that the presence of transmediation *within* the text functions as a self-aware reflection of this multifaceted process of transmedia spectatorship, where only platform conscious audiences could ever be equipped to appreciate the diegetic inclusion of such thematic material.

Acland's position is, in part, a response to David Denby's claim in *The New Yorker* magazine that, from the perspective of "home-entertainment specialists," younger viewers, exposed to a plethora of screens, do not differentiate between viewing experiences—a 35mm film screened in theatres, for example, would offer nothing more or less to these viewers than a digital copy played on an iPod. This generation, for Denby, is "platform agnostic," substituting at will one platform for virtually any other.^{cxiii} Acland troubles this reading of the situation by suggesting that filmmakers, producers, and advertisers actively appeal to the audiences' complex understanding of and appreciation for the variety of screens and other platforms available. He proposes that the increase in

formats has led to a concurrent heightened "platform consciousness," where media products are indeed sold through platform-specific marketing to savvy consumers who are anything but "agnostic."^{cxiv}

Acland focuses primarily on *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) in his discussion of platform consciousness. He points specifically to *Avatar's* "Everywhere & Everyway" advertising campaign, newspaper promos emphasising the novel idea of seeing a film in multiple "ways": in 2D, IMAX 3D, Digital 3D, and realD 3D. Advertisers used these multiple platforms not only to promote novelty (though novelty is certainly important), but also as a selling point for audiences who were obviously conscious of and invested in platforms.^{cxv} The only way for such a campaign to work is if audiences have some interest in experiencing different platforms, or if such an interest can be instilled in them. In other words, Denby's platform agnostic youth are entirely incompatible with such an advertizing strategy. If all platforms are equal, then something other than the platform itself must be invoked to sell a film like *Avatar*, which, as Acland illustrates, was not strictly the case. For Acland, then, the multiplication and diversification of platforms leads to an increase in modes of viewing, but there is no reason to assume that these modes are conflated (or their differences ignored) by viewers/users.

Acland's discussion of *Avatar* extends beyond his paratextual consideration of platforms and, important to my argument, also situates platform consciousness within the film's diegesis:

The varieties of media materiality have ample representation in Cameron's vision of the future. The film is replete with screens on screen: 3-D screens, topographical screens, video screens, computer screens, touch screens, hand-held digital tablets, and curved screens. Even the thematic center-point of the film—the conversion of our human characters into their respective avatars as giant blue extraterrestrial creatures, the Na'vi—

appears as a form of transportation, with abstract blazing lights moving through a tube to some distant material body, like a cross between teleportation and long distance communication.^{cxvi}

Here Telotte's notion of sf reflexivity appears to converge with ideas of platform consciousness. I would add to this last point that *Avatar* constructs a narrative centred around new technology that allows for the ultimate immersive experience of embodiment—the transposition of a human's consciousness into a cloned avatar, part human and part Na'vi—while the film itself is marketed as a new and sophisticated, immersive, three-dimensional experience, arguably transporting the viewer deeper (spatially) into the film world. But *Avatar* illustrates Acland's point not as an exceptional media product; rather, it thematizes mediation and platform consciousness in a familiar, increasingly common way. It is indeed not the first film of its kind, having been prefigured by such texts as *Serenity*. In short, this feature of *Avatar* and its counterparts fits into Acland's broader conception of platform consciousness by reinforcing the notion that viewers recognize the importance of the platform, medium, or format. The thematic concerns of these texts requires at least a limited appreciation of such variety on the part of the viewer, and in the case of *Avatar*, the very marketing of the film relies on it.

Diegetic Transmediation: The Case of *Southland Tales*

While platform consciousness is an important element in the production and consumption of thematized transmediation, the diegetic function of such storytelling is my primary focus here. Steven Shaviro provides an appealing example of this kind of theorizing in his analysis of *Southland Tales*. Here, it is the convergence of form and

content that is paramount, and this convergence is repeated elsewhere frequently, namely in *Serenity's* engagement with its own conception as transmediated continuation.

The world of *Southland Tales* is one of hypermediation, where everyone is surveilled, captured onscreen even as they participate in the mass consumption of other mediated images. The year is 2008 (two years after the film's actual release). America has been rocked by a terrorist attack, a nuclear explosion in Abilene, Texas, which has led to a collective state of fear hyperbolizing the state of the nation post-9/11. The film's plot is complex and often convoluted, though this is not particularly important to the present discussion. It is no coincidence, however, that the story unfolds across different media, and much—though not all—of the confusion within the film plot is made clear when the viewer reads the *Southland Tales* "Prequel Saga," three short graphic novels: *Two Roads Diverge*, *Fingerprints*, and *The Mechanicals*, written by Richard Kelly and illustrated by Brett Weldele.

Shaviro's central focus is *Southland Tales'* narrative reflection of contemporary American politics, namely the rise of the surveillance state enabled by a seeming surplus of new media. He explains that, "the conceit of an alternative timeline allows Kelly to explore, in exacerbated and hyperbolic fashion, our actual current condition of ubiquitous surveillance, restricted civil liberties, and permanent warfare."^{cxvii} Additionally, the film serves as a similarly reflexive formal exercise in remediation: "*Southland Tales* is an ironically cinematic *remediation* of the post-cinematic mediasphere that we actually live in."^{cxviii} What is perhaps most important about Shaviro's analysis is his insistence on multiplicity. Just as *Serenity's* self-reflexivity transcends sf's obsession with visual

representation, *Southland Tales* is interested in the varied and ubiquitous nature of hypmermediated culture:

Southland Tales surveys and maps—and mirrors back to us in fictive form—the excessive, overgrown post-cinematic mediasphere. The film bathes us in an incessant flow of images and sounds; it foregrounds the multimedia feed that we take so much for granted, and ponders what it feels like to live our lives within it. Video surveillance cameras are ubiquitous, of course, in the world of the film as well as in the world that we inhabit; but so are many other sorts of recording, broadcasting, and communications devices^{cxix}

The media feeds that Shaviro talks about take many forms within the film, whether they be closed-circuit surveillance, public broadcast, advertising, two-way communication, etc., but all share a malleability on the level of hardware, where media signals can travel via any number of devices and networks. Admittedly, these representations do not stray significantly from Telotte's conception of sf self-reflexivity.

What separates *Southland Tales'* thematized transmediation from something like *Avatar*, aligning it instead with *Serenity*, is the film's use of transmedia storytelling for the purpose of serialization. *Avatar's* marketing campaign promises that the film can be screened in various "ways," suggesting that the film text itself is still always the same. It is, in other words, not divided into separate parts of a whole but rather into different versions of a single thing. The film fetishizes new technologies that foster a more immersive experience, thematizing the technological improvements that allow the state-of-the-art motion-capture and digital 3D experience that are arguably *Avatar's* main appeal. *Southland Tales*, however, thematizes its own media convergence in a slightly different way. The film is certainly available in multiple versions (on cinema screens, DVD and Bluray, via computers, tablets, and iPods, etc.), but more importantly it can only be accessed in its entirety via different platforms. The Prequel Saga is the strongest

parallel between *Southland Tales* and *Serenity*. Indeed, Thomas Rogers, in his *Salon* article "Everything You Were Afraid to Ask About *Southland Tales*," treats the comics as entirely crucial to deciphering the film's meaning, providing much-needed narrative content.^{cxv} The film is thus incomplete without its paratextual material. But the Prequel Saga is not my primary focus; to avoid redundancy,^{*} I will point instead to the film's interest in media permeability.

Kelly's engagement with paratexts is crucial to an understanding of *Southland Tales* as transmedia storytelling, but particularly as thematized transmediation. When looking at some of the film's ancillary products, a pattern of playful reflexivity emerges in Kelly's treatment of *Southland Tales*' characters/actors. The notion of the star as an ever-present and fluid media personality is important here, and indeed Kelly's casting already hints at the ways in which his engagement with media converges with his modes of production and narrative storytelling. With a cast including Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Mandy Moore, and Justin Timberlake, the film takes advantage of a pre-sold notion of permeable, malleable stardom. Johnson, Moore, and Timberlake have all come to acting via other careers in entertainment (professional wrestling and pop music). With World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) video games, music videos, live performances, etc., all three were deeply enmeshed in what Shaviro calls the "frenzied media economy" that *Southland Tales* depicts.^{cxvi} Gellar is similarly associated with a television series that was highly transmediated from the outset: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). As already discussed, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* started as a 1992 feature film directed by Fran Rubel Kuzui and was revived as a narrative sequel

^{*} My discussion of the *Serenity* comic books in Chapter 1 can quite suitably be applied to the serialization achieved by the *Southland Tales* Prequel Saga.

of sorts on television. It was also consistently remediated in comic books, novels, and soundtracks during its broadcast and, in 2007, was revived yet again by Dark Horse Comics.^{cxxii}

On the surface, the film's casting is entirely non-diegetic, yet these particular stars become enmeshed in the process of transmediation through their non-diegetic links to the film's paratextuality. Among *Southland Tales'* paratexts were a number of online resources meant to blur the lines between diegetic and non-diegetic material. Shaviro discusses the now-defunct MySpace profiles created for characters of the film along with a website for the fictional Treer Corporation.^{cxxiii} Along with this conflation of fiction and reality, the recognizability of stars like Johnson, Moore, Timberlake, and Gellar, along with Sean William Scott, adds a layer of confusion, or convergence, to the film's project of thematizing the process by which individuals are hypermediated.

Not only do we see multiple, heterogenous screens within the movie screen; we also see the characters in the movie appearing on these screens, creating content for them, and watching them—often all at the same time [...] Your mediated image is what defines you. If you aren't already an actor or a celebrity—as most of the characters in *Southland Tales* are—then you probably have a business plan to become one.^{cxxiv}

This convergence reaches its apotheosis with the recording of "Teen Horniness is Not a Crime," a song diegetically ascribed to the character Krysta Now (Sarah Michelle Gellar) but made available on the film soundtrack and iTunes as a song by Gellar, the actress. As Shaviro notes, the film's intertexts and tools of multimedia distribution are reflected within the narrative, as Krysta Now "...seeks to leverage her semi-celebrity as a porn starlet not only by recording songs and making a music video, but also by starring in her own talk-show-cum-reality-television series, and by selling her own energy drink."^{cxxv}

The interplay between Now and Gellar only reinforces this thematization, hinting that such leveraging extends even beyond the film's diegesis.

Shaviro's exploration of transmedia storytelling on the level of narrative is easily transposed to other texts. His methodology's central appeal lies in its recognition of certain diegetic material as microcosmic of what he calls the "post-cinematic," in this case applied to transmediation. This model is not ideally suited to *Southland Tales* when applied to serialization specifically, but it need not be. The film's transmedia serialization is more of a symptom of its exploration of hypermediation in contemporary America than a focal point. The presence of a stand-in for serialized transmediation in *Serenity*, however, is motivated by that film's very genesis, and it points to Shaviro's usefulness in pinpointing the nature of reflexivity in any given film or media product.

Can't Stop the Signal: Diegetic Transmediation in *Serenity*

Exploring the diegetic thematization of transmediation can allow for a post-hoc consideration of the importance of specific forms of transmediation. Just as *Southland Tales'* engagement with a celebrity mediascape, and hypermediation more broadly, is reflected in its own production and marketing, *Serenity's* treatment of remediation points back to its status as one part of a transmediated serial. But its narrative engagement with paratextuality and a particular form of grassroots resistance also highlights the usefulness of transmediation in ensuring the longevity of media properties.

Serenity's origin is important in highlighting spectator agency. The nature of participation and interactivity in *Serenity's* genesis goes beyond that of most films and, while not entirely unique, is important when considering certain narrative elements. The

fan efforts discussed in Chapter 2 are reflected within the film in ways that forcefully acknowledge the need for such platforms of dissent and online activism. The most direct stand-in for the Browncoats within the film is Mr. Universe (David Krumholtz), who not only symbolizes the Browncoats, but also articulates the very essence of transmediation multiple times within the film.

When Mal and his crew discover the fate of the inhabitants of Miranda, they turn to Mr. Universe to help them broadcast the video/hologram exposing the Alliance's treachery. He is an ideal ally because he answers to no one, functioning as a kind of pirate broadcaster and information aggregator who filters through the "news" to find truth in "the signal." Mr. Universe represents an alternative form of spectatorship, one that refuses top-down broadcasting in favour of transmedia participation. The signal can be anywhere and anything, and Mr. Universe goes "everywhere." As he puts it, "There is no news, there's the truth of the signal, what I see. And there's the puppet theatre, the parliament jester's voice, the somnambolic public."

This last line about the somnambolic public points, indirectly, to the active participation of Browncoats in reviving *Firefly* as *Serenity*, in opposition to a hypothetical, figurative somnambolic public that consumes passively, but it also points to the literal somnambulism of the Alliance's victims on Miranda. The resistance offered by fans of *Firefly* is a response to what may be seen as Fox Television's reliance on complacency. If Mr. Universe is a diegetic surrogate for the Browncoats, the Alliance, aiming to limit his control of "the signal," is that of Fox. Here the events on Miranda are of great importance. The Alliance's wish for complete control of its citizens through "the Pax" is very much in line with the notion of a passive audience. After the *Serenity* crew

discovers that a mysterious catastrophe left nearly everyone on Miranda dead, they find the fateful recording, later to be broadcast across the galaxy. One of the first responders, long dead, explains that the Pax, the Alliance manufactured drug, is responsible for the near-complete eradication of the population of Miranda:

It was supposed to calm the population, weed out aggression. Well it works. The people here stopped fighting, and then they stopped everything else. They stopped going to work, they stopped breathing, talking, eating. There's 30 million people here, and they all just let themselves die.

The ideal civilization, according to the Alliance, is thus one in which the population is "calm." The assertion that "it works" is significant, in that indeed the goal is control through inertia. The Alliance aims at curbing a specific active impulse, aggression, we are told, but the effect is to force passivity more broadly, to ensure a productive but also complacent populace. What Mal and his crew resist, with the help of Mr. Universe, is this attempt to co-opt human agency. Their first step is to make the crimes of the Alliance known. As Mal says, "There's a whole universe of folk who are gonna know too. They're gonna see it. Somebody has to speak for these people." Indeed, these people have lost the ability to speak for themselves, as communication and control have been made entirely one-directional. It is not enough to be outraged—Mal intends to forcibly right the wrongs of the oppressive government. Similarly, *Firefly* was not allowed to die silently. Its fans cried foul, exposing the world (or at least non-viewers) to their favourite show, resisting cancellation and the supremacy of the network until the series was given a second life.

Stacey Abbott astutely links Mr. Universe to the film's, and presumably

Whedon's, sense of fighting a monolithic power, the television industry:

Here *Serenity* is unusual in its depiction of a future in which television remains a primary form of communication among the masses and appears to exist in part beyond the control of the government; instead it is in the

hands of a media "fan." The relevance of this message, however, applies to not only the film's narrative but also the meta-narrative of the film's production and in particular the role played by fans in resurrecting *Serenity* [...] What is particularly interesting is, therefore, how the film seems to engage directly with this position of the fans within the text of the film by recasting the war between the Alliance and the Browncoats as an attempt on the part of the *Serenity* crew to share a hidden truth withheld from the public by the Alliance.^{cxxvi}

Abbott here touches on Mr. Universe's role as "fan" as well as his role in re-activating content that might otherwise die in its original form. Just as Whedon and *Firefly*'s most dedicated fans took it upon themselves to transmediate the series and wrest control of its fate from television executives and the realm of television itself, Mr. Universe rejects the Alliance's control over the signal and grants himself the authority to keep broadcasting it. *Serenity* makes no definitive claims about a single, overarching form of spectatorship, active or passive, participatory or purely receptive; rather, it represents a spectrum of spectator activity, acknowledging the importance of spectators unsatisfied by network politics and control over their viewing choices. What is more, the film glorifies such efforts. For Abbott, "The tagline 'Can't Stop the Signal' refers both to the truth about the Alliance and the truth about *Firefly*, and also serves to vindicate the Browncoats—on and off screen—for their persistence in fighting a seemingly 'unwinnable' war."^{cxxvii} Indeed, Mr. Universe, the champion of spectator agency, does just this.

The transmediation of such a second life is similarly represented within the film. Mr. Universe's notion that you "can't stop the signal" suggests malleability within a transmedia network; once the signal is sent out, it is unstoppable, taking many forms, and it is always accessible to someone: "You can't stop the signal, Mal. Everything goes somewhere, and I go everywhere." Beyond keeping the signal alive, Mr. Universe transforms the signal by making it available on new platforms. The "news" becomes

something else when it is displaced from its original platform, "news" functioning as a category of exhibition rather than an objective signifier of content. The core signal is the only constant, transferred potentially endlessly through transmediation. Here *Serenity's* function as part of a single serialized narrative importantly aligns it with this idea, suggesting that "the signal," in this case narrative content, continues to circulate in new forms: as a comic, a film, a series of web shorts, etc. We can no longer call it television or even an episode, but "the signal" remains intact, projected onto a cinema screen in the case of *Serenity* instead of being broadcast on network television.

This reproducibility and malleability is perhaps most succinctly manifested within the film in the form of Mr. Universe's robot bride, Lenore. When Mal goes to Mr. Universe's home/broadcasting station, he finds his friend dead, murdered by the Operative and curled up in Lenore's arms. Thinking himself defeated, Mal prepares to leave, but the robot speaks to him, repeating Mr. Universe's final words, instructions on how to get the signal out. Notably, this is not an audio recording. She speaks Mr. Universe's words in her own voice, transforming his original message, later transforming its purpose when it is accidentally recited again to the Operative. She not only allows the recording to be broadcast, but also functions as a mediated broadcast herself, keeping the message safe from destruction. The robot bride functions much as *Serenity* itself does; when Mr. Universe dies, Lenore allows him to live on in a new body or media format, completing his task of broadcasting the signal [**Figure 8**].

The role of the paratext is similarly present both within the film's diegesis and in its online marketing campaigns. As discussed in Chapter 1, *The R. Tam Sessions* provide important narrative content within the *Firefly/Serenity* corpus. In these web shorts, we see

not only part of the process by which River was conditioned by the Alliance, but also the character of River before she was transformed, left psychologically crippled by her tormenters. The fact that these videos function as online marketing for the film supports what I have argued about the complex narrative interactions between texts and paratexts and the transmedia serialization of *Firefly/Serenity*. This complexity, and the importance of paratexts, is reflected, like the fan activism and transmedia resurrection of *Firefly*, within the central storyline of the film. River's memory of Miranda and of reading the minds of "key members of parliament" is activated by a subliminal message embedded in a television commercial for "Fruity Oaty Bars" [Figures 9 and 10]. This memory, revealed early on in the film, is the catalyst for virtually everything that happens thereafter. It is this memory that the Alliance and the Operative are intent on controlling, and it is this memory that leads the crew of the *Serenity* to Miranda and to the discovery of the Alliance's dirty secret.

The scene in question takes place in a seedy bar where Mal deals with his most recent clients. River, seeing the Oaty Bar commercial, whispers the word "Miranda" and proceeds to attack the bar patrons around her, demonstrating her incredible combat skills. The video activates not only River's memories of Miranda, but also her training under the Alliance: she was meant to be used as a subservient weapon, hypnotized into working for the Alliance. The purpose of activating such memories is to draw River and Simon out, forcing her to make a scene so that the Operative may better track her. When Mal and his crew review the footage of the bar, they look for clues as to what set River off. Mr. Universe replays the feed, and Mal asks him if he sees anyone speaking to her before the violence breaks out. "Oh, Mal, you're very smart. Someone *is* talking to her," he

responds, focusing in on the commercial. "The Oaty Bar?" Wash asks in disbelief. This sequence of events points to the seeming innocuousness of the paratext while revealing its importance. First, no one thinks to look closely at the advertisement, then the realization that the advertisement is key is met with scepticism until, finally, everyone accepts the reality of subliminal messages. Notably, it is Mr. Universe who sees the truth first and accepts it right away. It is only natural that a character so closely tied to transmediation should recognize the importance of paratexts unquestioningly. Once the reality is accepted, the film's story may progress, leading to the conclusion (or one partial conclusion) of the transmediated material.

The importance of the paratext within the film resonates with the ways in which *The R. Tam Sessions* reveal important facts about River. More than advertisements, these web shorts are indispensable to any viewer intent on experiencing the full narrative of *Serenity*, just as the Oaty Bar commercial is crucial to the development of the film's plot.

Death and rebirth recur within *Serenity* and *Firefly*, as Ina Rae Hark demonstrates. As discussed in Chapter 1, she proposes that the film *Serenity* is both a resurrection and burial for the series. This notion of *Serenity* as a funeral for *Firefly* is appealing and, again, finds resonance within the text, further "giving viewers a sense of closure after the show's midseason demise."^{cxviii} The film ends with a funeral for the characters who have died along the way. The camera makes its way, moving backwards, through a series of gravestones, stopping in front of the central stone, similar to the others but lacking the holographic portrait of the deceased and the accompanying engraved attribution. Instead, a small rocket sits atop the stone, soon to be lit by Zoe, who has lost more than any other member of the crew in her husband Wash, killed by the Reavers during the film's climax.

The scene is important as a narrative connector between the series and film: having tied up the loose ends of *Firefly*, *Serenity* now lays the series to rest, the rocket standing in for the ship and the show [Figure 11]. This is the final self-reflexive moment in the film, pointing to the ways in which Whedon et al. have serialized and concluded this narrative across platforms.

Diegetic Transmediation and Platform Consciousness Outside of SF

Serenity belongs to a growing tradition of thematized platform consciousness. I have already shown how *Southland Tales* engages with questions of transmediation thematically, but it is important to situate both of these texts within a much broader context that encompasses diegetic engagement with platform consciousness outside of both transmediation and sf. While Telotte successfully ascribes some of *Serenity's* self-reflexivity to its generic markers, this more inclusive analysis reveals parallels that are neither genre-specific, nor limited to transmediation of/or seriality. My chief examples are the web-disseminated series *House of Cards* (2013-2014), *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (2008), and *The Guild* (2007-2013). While *Dr. Horrible* is in fact an example of sf, its thematic engagement with its own format is neither genre-specific nor transmedial.

House of Cards provides a compelling example of thematized platform consciousness in terms of online television. A Netflix "original series," *Cards* was touted as the first such original series for the streaming website, and critics primarily noted the importance of its platform. Responses generally focused on three features of the series: 1) it is only available online, through Netflix's streaming service;^{cxxix} 2) it was developed using algorithmic research on Netflix subscriber habits (i.e. the platform itself was used

to gauge whether the series was worth developing at all);^{cxix} and 3) perhaps most frequently highlighted in the popular press, all thirteen episodes of the first season were released simultaneously, allowing viewers to choose the pace at which they watched the show, free from set television schedules.^{cxix} What is most notable about these critical foci is the fact that most of the dialogue surrounding the series strove to establish a disjunction between *Cards* and the forms of television that viewers have grown accustomed to through traditional broadcasting.

While *House of Cards* strays from conventional channels of distribution, it retains mainstream status through high budgets and production value along with big name directors and stars including David Fincher, Joel Schumacher, Kevin Spacey, and Robin Wright. There is a tension between its role as industrial maverick and mainstream product. The way in which platforms are represented within the series' diegesis is thus significant, as one central character, Zoe Barnes (Kate Mara), serves to suggest the supremacy of new media within the news industry. We see online platforms become the new mainstream as print media dwindles.

The conflict between Zoe and her editor at *The Washington Herald*, Tom Hammerschmidt (Boris McGiver), is indicative of the show's broader engagement with platform consciousness and the tension between print and web media, standing in for traditional television and online streaming respectively. The fifth episode, "Chapter 5," of *House of Cards*, directed by Joel Schumacher, brings this tension to the fore, as the series appears to take a definitive stand on the matter, at least diegetically, predictably mirroring its non-diegetic status as a Netflix-only series. After Zoe is fired from the *Herald*, the paper's owner, Margaret Tilden (Kathleen Chalfant) calls Hammerschmidt to her home to

fire him. She first gives him the chance to explain himself, and the exchange that follows—Hammerschmidt's failed attempt to convince her of his value to the paper and Zoe's lack thereof—perfectly allegorizes Netflix's project:

Tilden: We've been through this, Tom. The paper's operating at a loss—we need people like Zoe.

Hammerschmidt: I'm very aware of how much we're hurting, Margaret: staff reductions, dip in circulation—each one of those faces and every subscriber we lose, they keep me awake at night. Now, I won't argue the business side of things...it's neither my place nor my area of expertise. But know this: Zoe Barnes, Twitter, blogs, enriched media...they're all surface. They're fads. They aren't the foundation this paper was built on, and they aren't what will keep it alive. We have a core readership that thirsts for hard news. Those are the people I work eighty hours a week for. I won't be distracted by what's fashionable.

Importantly, this is the last time that we see Hammerschmidt in the entire season, whereas Zoe remains a central character. In a sense, Hammerschmidt is right: Zoe Barnes will not keep *The Herald* alive, she will move on to better things. But he is suggesting something far more consequential during this exchange, namely that the future of journalism depends on a return to something traditional. What that something might be is not entirely clear, but it is not to be found primarily online. After being fired, Zoe accepts a job at *Slugline*, a popular online news outlet. She is the future of the show, and, by extension, *Slugline* is the future of journalism, says *House of Cards*. Hammerschmidt's attempts to save the paper are a response to growing competition on new platforms. Television has been similarly affected by the advent of DVDs and online streaming as alternatives to traditional broadcast. While *Cards* tells us that online journalism will win out in the end, Netflix and the show's reviewers tell us that a new age of television production and exhibition is beginning.

House of Cards is by no means even an early example of web-only programming. *The Guild* (2007-2013) and *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (2008) are two other straight-to-web series that provide interesting counter-points to the representation of *Slugline* in *Cards*. When *House of Cards*, a big-budget, star-studded web series, presents online journalism as a viable, indeed preferable, alternative to traditional print media, and does so as a parallel to its own production and distribution via Netflix, it implicitly suggests the potential for Netflix as a mainstream media producer, capable of existing alongside and competing with traditional television networks—perhaps someday eclipsing said networks. Thus, its thematization points to mainstream legitimacy. Conversely, smaller productions like *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* and *The Guild* align themselves explicitly, diegetically, with the non-professional, alternative platform of blogging while focusing on marginal characters, foregoing any predictions about the future of television or the potential for web-programming to replace what already exists.

Both *The Guild* and *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* exist outside of traditional production and distribution networks. *The Guild* was initially conceived as a network series, but television executives reportedly thought the concept was "too niche" for broadcast,^{cxxxii} while *Dr. Horrible* was never meant for network television and was in fact born out of the 2007 Writers Guild of America strike.^{cxxxiii} Both web series thus operate outside of the mainstream, and both make use of their protagonists' blogs for narrative exposition. Notably, these characters also operate outside of the mainstream. In *The Guild*, Cyd/Codex (Felicia Day) loses her therapist because she is unwilling to deal with her central "problem": gaming. *Dr. Horrible's* eponymous "supervillain" (Neil Patrick Harris) fights against Captain Hammer (Nathan Fillion), a superhero adored by the

general public. By the end of both series, the mainstream is entirely disavowed: Cyd/Codex finds fulfilling relationships and even employment through "The Game," and Captain Hammer is revealed to be a self-serving, incompetent jock who only does good when it serves his needs. The DIY blog aesthetic, highlighting the two series' use of an independent online platform, fittingly accompanies such anti-mainstream narratives, where supposed outcasts and villains are made relatable and ultimately succeed in their ambitions. *The Guild* and *Dr. Horrible's Sing Along Blog* make no predictions regarding the future of television. Rather, they carve out a niche where previously unrealistic projects can exist. And they reflect this ethos within their narratives.

These contemporary examples should not be taken as evidence of some kind of radical newness. Questions of film style and form as socially or technologically reflexive apply to the entire history of the medium. Ben Singer explicitly links modernity to the cinematic form of the early silent period or "cinema of attractions." If cinema came about at a time of industrialization and urbanization, its narrative and stylistic content is perhaps no coincidence. Singer draws parallels between cinema as "a medium of strong impressions, spatiotemporal fragmentation, abruptness, [and] mobility" and the metropolitan experience itself, stating that cinema is in fact "like" modernity.^{cxxxiv} What is markedly different in the above-cited examples is perhaps the specificity with which these texts construct their own reflexivity. If early cinema mimicked the experience of modernity and science fiction represents screen spectatorship, these new media texts offer a more direct, and in some cases politicized vision of representation.

While none of these examples are directly related to the thematized transmediation or transmediated seriality of *Serenity*, they do reflect a similar narrative

engagement with their own distribution platforms. In all cases, including *Southland Tales*, the diegesis is in conversation with platform consciousness, asking the viewer to consider questions of distribution that, while not explicitly linked to their own production, nonetheless invite consideration of such.

Conclusion

Self-reflexivity presents us with an appealing convergence of form and content. *Serenity* exemplifies the tradition of thematizing modes of production and distribution within its own diegesis, reflecting on its own transmediated status implicitly.

One way to account for this, as J.P. Telotte has done, is to consider *Serenity's* generic markers of sf, a genre typically associated with self-reflexivity, at least on the level of representations of audiovisual technology. This is a valid approach, but it leaves out important elements that tie the film to a separate if related tradition. By combining Telotte's vision of *Serenity* to Charles Acland's theory of platform consciousness and Steven Shaviro's review of *Southland Tales*, I have chosen to consider *Serenity* in the context of transmedia storytelling within and outside of sf, along with other forms and examples of self-reflexivity not necessarily tied to transmedia storytelling but rather to issues of platform consciousness more broadly. This approach thus focuses more on the marriage of text and context illustrating the ways in which a film like *Serenity* narratively enacts the extra-diegetic issues that I have discussed in chapters 1 and 2.

Examples of this reflexivity abound within the film, which, building on the narrative of the series, is heavily invested in issues of mediation, specifically transmediation. Where other sf films like *Forbidden Planet* (Fred M. Wilcox, 1956),

Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, 1982), *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995), or *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002) exhibit the kind of broad self-reflexivity that Telotte discusses, centred around moving images, *Serenity* concerns itself with the distribution of images and the effects of platforms on the text and its reception. From the unstoppable, transmediated "signal" to the surrogate fandom of Mr. Universe to the narratively important paratextual "Fruity Oaty Bar" commercial to the symbolic funeral for the televised *Firefly*, *Serenity* enacts a platform-dependent self-reflexivity based on its own specific industrial engagement with these issues.

Bringing together form and content in this way reveals not only that *Serenity* transcends its sf reflexivity, but also that Acland's notion of platform consciousness is frequently translated into sophisticated diegetic explorations of platform studies, where films, television series, and other media products engage with their own modes of production and distribution. *Serenity*, then, belongs to tradition that highlights the role of the platform in delivering narrative content. I have compared this phenomenon to *House of Cards* and other web-disseminated series, but parallels exist elsewhere: *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) and *Greendale*, discussed earlier, for example, are interesting case studies. *The Blair Witch Project's* amateur aesthetic and half-serious, non-diegetic claims of authenticity mutually reinforce each other, while *Greendale* the film, something of a prolonged music video, links its narrative content to its transmediated form through diegetic music, also found on a standalone album. While these examples seemingly share little in common with one another, they are in fact, like *Serenity*, emblematic of growing platform consciousness and a concurrent thematization of transmediation and other cross-platform experimentation.

Conclusion

It may seem redundant to say that transmediation takes many forms, as it is indeed defined by its transgression of the limits between formats of representation. It is, however, important to note that not all transmediation occurs in the same way or for the same reasons. While transmedia storytelling stretches narratives across media platforms, important distinctions must be made between something like the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe and the narrative continuations of Dark Horse Comics. The former makes use of transmediation to create an expansive fictional universe where characters and events co-exist, while the latter is invested in narrative coherence and continuity. Some texts transcend even those boundaries, creating sequential storylines across texts within a

broader shared universe, as with the Marvel films, shows, and comics, or as with the blending of exposition and continuation in Neil Young's *Greendale*.

The increasing usage and types of transmediation are compounded by the fluidity of formats themselves. The distinction between film and television blurs when *Firefly* and *Serenity* are both available on DVD or can be streamed on Netflix. Or, similarly, the transmediation of Marvel properties is intensified by online programming. In considering the Marvel Universe as a collection of films, television series, and comic books, we must also contend with the upcoming Netflix original series as well as the multiple versions or editions or modes of access of each of these texts (theatrical release, television broadcast, online streaming, iTunes download, DVD, Blu-ray, single comics, trade paperbacks, ebooks, etc.).

Within this broad field of study, certain distinguishable patterns emerge. Jenkins and Gray provide basic frameworks for considering some of the nuances that exist between transmedia texts, but equally important are the predecessors for what I have termed transmedia seriality. Texts have widely varying relationships to one another within discourses of transmediation. A McDonalds Happy Meal toy based on *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* (Marc Webb, 2014) does not participate in narrative storytelling in the same way as a comic book lead-in to *Guardians of the Galaxy* (James Gunn, 2014) or an *Avatar: The Last Airbender* videogame. *Firefly/Serenity* is thus aligned not only with transmedia storytelling, but also with seriality, dating as far back, cinematically, as the silent period. Equally important are examples of proto-transmediation in the early 20th Century and far more basic discussions of what constitutes narrative. The coherence present within a single story, when stretched across texts, is very much tied to seriality,

and in this case to *Firefly's* weekly broadcast and subsequent, narratively chronological and consistent transmediation. Perhaps the main difference here is a matter of scale and intensity, with the internet providing new and accelerated avenues for transmediation.

My aim has been to illustrate the serial qualities of *Firefly/Serenity* while also delimiting this theory within the wider study of media convergence. Equally important is the narrative content of *Firefly/Serenity*—*Serenity* in particular. As one text narratively following other transmedia iterations, *Serenity* engages with these very questions diegetically, pointing to intentionality in the filmmaking process as well as an understanding or appreciation of transmediation from audiences.

This thesis is only one step in refining the study of transmedia storytelling and seriality. The very term "serial" may prove problematic despite its use value here. Singer's distinction between the series and the serial is one relatively blunt tool that I use to differentiate between a shared universe and a continuous, coherent story. While pointing to some of the distinctions available in Jess-Cooke's *Film Sequels*, I simplified my task by limiting my focus to narrative continuity, consistency, and coherence, but further sub-categorization will be useful to refine this theory and apply it to a rapidly increasing body of texts. My goal has been to conceptualize *Firefly/Serenity* not as something unique or groundbreaking, but rather as an entrypoint into these questions of transmediation, narration, continuity, and coherence. Transmedia seriality proves useful and quite well suited to this task, and it is my hope that it invites further refinement and analysis of texts that grow increasingly complex as media formats and strategies of delivery multiply.

NOTES

ⁱ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, Trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 146.

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ⁱⁱ Todd Spangler, "Netflix Orders Four Marvel Live-Action Series," *Variety*, 7 November 2103. <http://variety.com/2013/digital/news/netflix-orders-four-marvel-live-action-series-1200804887/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Daily Life* (New York & London: Routledge, 2011), 1.

^{iv} Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 97-98.

^v Stacey Abbott, "'Can't Stop the Signal': The Resurrection/Regeneration of *Serenity*," *Investigating Firefly and Serenity: Science Fiction on the Frontier*, edited by Rhonda V. Wilcox and Tanya R. Cochran (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 227-238 and J.P. Telotte, "*Serenity*, Cinematisation and the Perils of Adaptation," *Science Fiction Film and Television* 1.1 (2008): 67-80.

^{vi} Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Washington: Zero Books, 2010).

^{vii} Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 97-98.

^{viii} Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2010), 6.

Chapter 1

^{ix} "Mass Effect: Redemption," Dark Horse, no date. <http://www.darkhorse.com/Comics/16-421/Mass-Effect-Redemption-1>.

^x "Avatar: The Last Airbender - The Promise Part 1," Dark Horse, no date. <http://www.darkhorse.com/Blog/563/avatar-last-airbender-promise-part-1>.

^{xi} Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 187.

^{xii} Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 2.

^{xiii} *Ibid.*, 97-98.

^{xiv} Gray, 6.

^{xv} *Ibid.*, 3.

^{xvi} Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, translated by Jane E. Lewin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.

^{xvii} *Ibid.*, 1-2.

^{xviii} Gray, 117.

^{xix} Genette, 3.

^{xx} Martin Wallace, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 109.

^{xxi} Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* 3rd Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 9.

^{xxii} Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 97.

^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, 98.

^{xxiv} Ibid., 103.

^{xxv} Ginjer Buchanan, "Who Killed *Firefly*?" in *Finding Serenity: Anti-heroes, Lost Shepherds and Space Hookers in Joss Whedon's Firefly*, edited by Jane Espenson (Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, 2004), 47-53.

^{xxvi} *Done the Impossible: The Fans' Tale of Firefly and Serenity*, directed by Tony Hadlock, Jason Heppler, Jeremy Neish, Jared Nelson, and Brian Wiser (Done the Impossible [DTI], 2006), Netflix.

^{xxvii} Qtd. in Stacey Abbott, "'Good Myth': Joss Whedon's Further Worlds" in *Investigating Firefly and Serenity: Science Fiction on the Frontier*, edited by Rhonda V. Wilcox and Tanya R. Cochran (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 227.

^{xxviii} Carolyn Jess-Cooke, *Film Sequels: Theory and Practice from Hollywood to Bollywood* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2009), 1.

^{xxix} Ibid., 3.

^{xxx} Ibid., 1.

^{xxxi} Ibid., 2.

^{xxxii} Ibid., 5.

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