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Red Branch Heroes - Writing With My Audiences

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Chapters

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RED BRANCH HEROES – WRITING WITH MY
AUDIENCES

ANNA MARIA EWA ZALUCZKOWSKA



Red Branch Heroes - Writing With My Audiences

- 1. Abstract

1. Abstract

The research presented here analyses the practices that a writer/designer needs to adopt to meet the challenges of active audience participation in new media platforms. The research does this through the construction of a working prototype that tests the writing practices used and plays out the resulting design with live audiences. The thesis underlying the research argues that visual storytelling is as important as the written word, that viewers expect greater involvement in the construction of stories and that improvisation is as important as scripted work. The study concludes that the techniques found in process drama are useful to writing in this medium but that these need to be supplemented with community-building gamification elements to build immersion. Writers working in these environments therefore need to work imaginatively with their viewers and co-creators to build stories. I suggest that the most effective way to do this is to construct a 'negotiated narrative', a narrative that is negotiated between makers, authors, and audiences.

The prototype has been primarily designed to take place within contemporary Northern Ireland. The reasons for this setting are many and relate as much to my experience of growing up in Northern Ireland as they do to the lack of a serialised drama that engages the interest, hopes and aspirations of all individuals and communities who live there. Therefore, the research also asks if interactive forms such as transmedia offer any new storytelling potentials to the people of Northern Ireland. What advantages do stories

that have been developed with the active participation of participants offer to post-conflict societies – societies that have experienced violent division and conflict. Evidence is presented in this study to suggest that the negotiated narratives formulated in this prototype offer further creative community-building possibilities, in neutral spaces that can facilitate discourses about the future.

2. Introduction

RED BRANCH HEROES – WRITING WITH MY
AUDIENCES

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Red Branch Heroes - Writing With My Audiences

- 2. Introduction

2. **Introduction**

The research began in 2011 and has developed in response to the changes in the media industries and Internet practices over this time. Its focus is to investigate the most effective ways to write with the active participation of audiences in an interactive transmedia context. Media scholar Henry Jenkins suggests that:

Transmedia storytelling is the art of world making. To fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience. (Jenkins, 2009a).

This practice-led research devises a prototype for an interactive transmedia production that is known as *Red Branch Heroes (RBH)*. Creating and analysing (using an action research methodology) the *RBH* prototype lays the basis for this research. This work is offered to writers working in transmedia and other interactive media environments, helping them to better understand the skills and practices they would need to adopt for the future. The research will also be of benefit to media industries, helping to establish the most effective ways to produce programmes for transmedia and interactive projects; programmes that offer a 'richer entertainment

experience' (Jenkins 2009a) for their audiences. The prototype was devised with the active participation of its audiences and was set in Northern Ireland. In general, my participants were not particularly interested in the mechanics of writing but most have expressed an interest in taking part in something that contributes to peace, prosperity and progress; to a shared future; to the development of a welcoming place; and to the development of socialism, the eradication of poverty, the pursuit of equality and the creation of a hub for creative work in Northern Ireland. These ambitions were generated by the participants themselves in questionnaires that I sent out but it is not the aim of the project that all these aspirations be met. While I worked with a wide range of people on the practice elements of the project and in its testing the research undertaken has been my sole responsibility. But nonetheless, it is my hope that in working collectively, mechanisms might be found that would help promote such ideas in the future. The main participants in the production are as follows but there has been a much broader consultation on the project.



Figure 1 – Diagram of contributors

The project was part performance and part game and it used websites, social media, game play and fictional video production to tell its story, along with songs, comic books, photostories and a host of other media. In this sense, it could be considered to be a transmedia project.

The utopian promise of the Internet and its attendant practices has been somewhat tarnished in recent times. Douglas Rushcoff suggests that this is our own fault – the fault of

those who create for the Internet. 'Back in the 1990s, we cyberpunks saw the law as the enemy' and 'what we didn't realise was that pushing government off the net made it entirely safe for corporations, and a new form of digital capitalism was born' (2017, p20). Therefore an investigation of writing practices also necessitates an analysis of the interests that are being served in developing such participation. Such questions suggest that participatory action research (PAR) is a useful methodology to adopt in this context. As with all research, participatory research starts with a problem to be solved, but the goal here is not to produce an objective body of knowledge that can then be generalised to large populations in societies that have faced conflict. Rather, the aim is to build 'collaboratively constructed descriptions and interpretations of events that enable people to formulate acceptable solutions' (Stringer, 2007, p.189) to an agreed problem. This research is oriented towards finding a mutually-agreed approach to the construction of a web-based drama that is democratic, equitable, engaging, participatory and life enhancing.

2.1 Research questions

The reasons for carrying out this research are, therefore, threefold:

1. to better understand the writing techniques that will work in an interactive or immersive transmedia environment,
2. to discover how writing for this environment may impact the work of the writer,
3. to shed light on the democratic practices necessary for such storytelling and the role that such storytelling could play in post-conflict societies (such as Northern Ireland) and examine what forms of storytelling may be most effective in this context.

The term transmedia production was first

coined by the American researcher Marsha Kinder in 1991 and refers to material presented on more than one medium, platform or environment for its expression. Henry Jenkins suggests that this form of production is something of a revolution in storytelling:

Transmedia storytelling refers to a new aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence – one that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities. (Jenkins, 2009b).

So, for example, a television programme can have an associated website, game, book or product over which the story is expanded and developed. It is a term that has been applied to large-scale Hollywood productions and small-scale self-funded arts projects (Dena, 2009, p.4). This project falls into the latter category. The prototype provides a useful model upon which to build a much larger drama-based web series that would be known as *The Eleven*, devised in association with its audiences and that would take place in a fictional space in Northern Ireland. While the prototype *RBH* uses a limited range of transmedia techniques, the number of techniques will be expanded in the proposed online series, *The Eleven*.

2.2 The issues being explored in this research

The first issue relates to the writing processes. The prototype suggests that writing for transmedia is a writing process that needs to have the interests of the reader/audience at the forefront and that the role of the author is akin to that of the designer, conductor or orchestrator.^[1] This is similar to Barthes' idea of an author as 'scriptor' a person who produces the work. However, in *RBH* readers make an active contribution to the scripting

and production process of the text through their own participation. As such I am suggesting that both readers and authors are scriptors and readers in this context, although the author bears more responsibility for the final text. The work here is drawn, as Barthes suggests, from 'innumerable centres of culture' (Barthes, 2001, p. 210), rather than from one individual experience. Although immersion is common to all forms of text, a different experience of immersion is achieved in this transmedia context by adopting a 'gamification' approach of fictional narratives (Alderman, 2015).^[2] Through what Jenkins terms 'convergence culture' (2006), and now more commonly through convergent technology such as mobile phones, people are able to enter the actual world of the story and take action. Improvisation plays a central role in this type of writing process (Millard, 2014), and forms of collaborative practice need to be developed to facilitate effective participation.

Secondly, the research explores the on-going requirement to respond to new technologies and the ways in which writing is redefined in the digital age, especially in relation to screen/visual modes. Barthes concludes that 'we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author' (Barthes, 2001, p. 213). While understanding that this reversal is more complex than it first appears and that Barthes is as sceptical of the reader as he is of the author, Barthes' work is a useful model here as it suggests that both reader and author have equal roles to play in relation to the text. I argue that the transmedia form necessitates 'liminality', an ambiguity where the reader/user is in a process of change or disorientation where the usual hierarchy of author and reader are reversed. A certain liminality across many different forms is also afforded by the mix of platforms and methods used in which the usual order of writing is disrupted. Northern Ireland is a society undergoing a particular, though not a unique, process of transition and stasis – often termed

‘post-conflict’ – and I argue that such liminality requires the adoption of a negotiated narrative, a narrative that is constructed from the many voices involved in its making and that actively includes discursive elements: in other words, a discourse. I use discourse here in the postmodern sense of the term, specifically that of Foucault (1977, 1980) who argues that power is always present in communication, producing ‘truths’ but also producing their limits and constraints.

Finally, my research contributes to existing debates about storytelling in the context of Northern Ireland, and the role that storytelling can have in the rebuilding and reimagining of that society, or in any other post-conflict society. The relationship between author and reader is critical in such a context given the collaborative nature of the project, and the trust and empathy that this kind of production requires. Transmedia production can offer writers the opportunity to engage with audiences from different communities by building safe fictional environments that audiences can populate to create ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983) which house opportunities for comment and collaboration, opening up possibilities for the future in the real world. While Anderson’s phrase was coined to refer specifically to nationalism, where he attributed the spread of nationalism to the development and rise of print media, I am using the term more broadly (by referring to a community of interest or Said’s 1978 concept of ‘imagined geographies’) and to emphasise utopian elements that can be created from an investigation of presumed agreed characteristics. Such a design builds and extends on Hugh O’Donnell’s idea of ‘soaps’ or continuing drama series as ‘sites of a complex on-going process of negotiation between producers and consumers itself taking place within a much larger framework’ (1990, p. 10). It is similar to the proponents of entertainment-education (EE) or educational soap operas that have adopted a social action approach, as soap operas have long been seen as a useful vehicle to promote social change.

In the 1950s, the BBC created *The Archers*, a programme that was established to educate farmers and increase food production after World War II. And in the early 1970s, Miguel Sabido created a new genre for Mexican television that was an entertainment-education soap opera, an educational programme promoting social development. His efforts have influenced many similar projects in other countries for both radio and television and now for the web. Sabido was influenced by practical and immediate concerns relating to the way in which the message is conveyed, the role of television in society and the available infrastructure, the composition of the audience, the composition of the production team and commitment of that team. The results were seen to be considerable in commercial and behavioural terms with many viewers positively altering their behaviour (Singhal 2006). Since the 1980s, many programme makers have used this strategy as one part of their communication campaign in Latin America, Africa and Asia (Singhal, 2006) to promote peace and conflict resolution. Singhal suggests that such entertainment-education could be heading towards socially engaged transmedia production. But I argue that a narrative that is composed and designed by all parties – a negotiated narrative – offers a greater opportunity for discourse than an educational soap opera that offers only the message of its makers or its authors.

2.3 The hypothesis being tested

In this research project I use the production of *Red Branch Heroes* as the hypothesis and the starting point for further investigation into my central questions. This practice, that brings together a new transmedia project situated in Northern Ireland, influenced by Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Dekalog* (1988) and forged by a particular participatory media practice developed in 1980s Britain within what was known as 'The Workshop Movement', attempts

to show how to write and create immersive experiences in a democratic context that could be useful to the citizenship building of post-conflict societies.^[3] As such, this hypothesis requires some explanation.

2.3.1 My work in context

My [previous work and experiences](#) (my CV) help set the project in a production and writing context and detail why I am interested in not only access and participation but in what Patemen refers to as ‘full participation’:

When pressing the red button to launch interactive television is labelled participation, or when minimalist forms of participation such as commenting upon unchangeable online newspaper articles is seen as the only possible form of participation, we lose part of the theoretical and analytical strength of the notion of participation and ignore the utopian nature of what Pateman (1970) called ‘full participation’ (Carpentier, 2016).

As a filmmaker, I have worked in the independent production sector in Britain, making documentaries and then dramas, as an editor, producer and writer.^[4] What distinguishes my films or filmmaking practices is the desire to give a voice to under-represented groups and to engage with audiences in discussions around controversial subjects and issues. As Couldry suggests:

Voice is one word for that capacity [the ability to narrate], but having a voice is never enough. I need to know that my voice matters; indeed, the offer of effective voice is crucial to the legitimacy of modern democracies (Couldry, 2010, p.1).

This remains a central concern of my artistic practice and I bring it to bear on this project showing that I am predisposed to the views of

‘critical utopians’ such as Jenkins who seek to ‘identify possibilities within our culture that might lead toward a better, more just society’ (Jenkins, 2006, p. 247).

2.3.2 Social change in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is a society at an interesting phase of social change – moving from a society in conflict from 1968-1998 to one of post-conflict after the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.^[5] The 2011 census indicates the growing use of a Northern Irish self-identified category of identity:

Two-fifths (40 per cent) of usual residents had a British Only national identity, a quarter (25 per cent) had Irish Only and just over a fifth (21 per cent) had Northern Irish Only (Census Publication, 2011).

However, I acknowledge, as Mary Hickman suggests, that:

How people ‘really’ see themselves is much more complex, changeable and nuanced, rooted in national origins, family and community life, changing social contexts and political exigencies. Ethnic identity in this latter sense is not amenable to analysis through censuses (Hickman, 2010, p. 22)

Taking into account such reservations, the census still suggests that a growing number of people are now comfortable in identifying themselves as primarily Northern Irish. Brexit has, of course, raised the issue of national identity once again. A recent survey commissioned by researchers at Queen’s University has found that support for ‘Remain’ has risen.

In 2016, the region voted 56% to remain and 44% to leave, but support for leaving the bloc has fallen 13 points to

31%, undermining the Democratic Unionist party's continued staunch backing for Brexit (O'Carroll, 2018).

Will Brexit result in hard borders and if so how will that impact people's perceptions? Could it mean a hardening of political positions, or result in an opportunism where each group is trying to grab a share of resources? Such occurrences illustrate the fragility of peace and progress in Northern Ireland, demonstrating that it is a good time to think about what it means to be Northern Irish and to investigate an approach to writing that will be appropriate to this endeavour.

Similarly, the filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski (1941–1996) was interested in his changing society – the period of the collapse of communism in Poland – and explored this in his television series *Dekalog* (1989). At this point it is important to note that he had stopped making documentaries when he realised that his work could be compromised by the state. This, in turn, led to his greater interest in feature films:

I'm frightened of [those] real tears. In fact, I don't know whether I've got the right to photograph them. At such times I feel like somebody who's found himself in a realm that is, in fact, out of bounds. That is the main reason I escaped from documentaries (Stok, 1993, p. 86).

His experience and his approach to making documentary films is mirrored in my own experiences and those of other filmmakers making films about the Northern Irish conflict (Pettitt, 2000). Kieslowski's style is open-ended and invites the viewer to interpret the actions of the characters and to follow their struggles rather than give a fixed view of that experience. He leaves room for the audience to interpret the story and such an approach is particularly appropriate to any story that is interactive and any story that might include the diverse and often antagonistic

communities such as is the case in Northern Ireland. Although Kieslowski was not religious he believed in change and that it is possible to build a better world for others and ourselves. Again, this desire to create hope is mirrored in this research project and is, as Katarzyna Jablonska (1997) suggests

a provocation directed against a certain religious infantilism, against treating religion as an escape from responsibility for your own life and for the life of others (Jablonska, 2004, p. 78).

In my project, I wanted the stories and their resulting structure to be a challenge and a provocation to the religious nature (not just Catholic or Protestant) of what has become known as the Troubles and their aftermath. I am not suggesting that religion has been the basis for the conflict, so the research project uses the commandments as a moral provocation and asks the audience if these are still the codes by which we should live our lives.

2.3.3 Changing media production patterns

In this postonflict and developing society there has been very limited media production although, more recently, there have been signs of development. As Tim Loane, a Northern Irish television-writer, suggests: 'There seems to be more activity in BBC Northern Ireland Drama than there has been in quite some time' (Barter, 2012). He is referring here to such programmes as *6 Degrees*, and Irish language series such as *Scup*. More recently the comedy series *Derry Girls* (2018) has had success both in and outside of Northern Ireland, but what Northern Ireland has always lacked is a continuing drama series that reflects life among its citizens. This is in part due to the lack of neutral terrain available within which such a series could be set. However, with its emphasis on 'world building'

(Jenkins, 2006, p. 57), transmedia production allows screenwriters/artists to build worlds that cannot be explored or exhausted within a single work. Transmedia has an ability to present drama from multiple perspectives (Giavagnoli, 2011, p. 98) and appears to offer new opportunities in this context.

In order to build an immersive world for participants, I used a reality television format within which the Ulster Cycle of myths was the starting point for the storylines in this project – the stories of Macha, Emain Macha and Cuchulainn. These are stories that most people in Northern Ireland are already familiar with, although Nationalist and Loyalist communities interpret these myths differently. We can see this very clearly in McGuinness' play *Observe the sons of Ulster marching towards the Somme* when Pyper says 'Fenians claim a Cuchullian [*sic*] as their ancestor, but he is ours, for they lay down for centuries and wept in their sorrow, but we took up arms and fought against an ocean' (McGuinness 1984, p10). The Ulster Cycle tells stories of the heroic exploits of the Red Branch Knights and Connor Mac Nessa. Cuchulainn is the best-known character in this cycle and most of the action takes place in Emain Macha and along the borders of Ulster. Red Branch Knights are supposed to have lived at around the same time as the birth of Christ and have been used to name anything from folk dancing troops, to hurling teams, to paramilitary organisations. I also used these myths because as in my research project they are a potent mix of fact and fiction. There is a real place known as Emain Macha, now known as Navan Fort, in Armagh and there were people living there, although the heroes of the stories associated with this place are – as far as we can tell – fictitious. In the same way, I have situated *RBH* in the real Northern Ireland but the heroes of the story are fictitious.

There is a practice of using myths in a popular format: W.B. Yeats used these myths to try to engage a broad audience in works that promoted a late nineteenth century and early

twentieth century Irish cultural nationalist movement. Stewart Parker, particularly in his television series *Lost Belongings* (1987), used these myths to talk about conflict in Northern Ireland. Parker had this to say about creating a version of the Deirdre myth, one of the stories of the Ulster Cycle:

Although a modern audience would be unaware of the source, I'm convinced that stories as timeless as this one contain a universal resonance, which lends them infinitely more value than a merely anecdotal narrative. (Wallace, 2008, p. 306).

In the same vein, *RBH* looks at how universal stories can be selectively presented across a variety of platforms. This model demonstrates that in digital storytelling the relationship between author, text and audience can be more dynamic and interactive.

2.4 A negotiated narrative

The central concept proposed and explored in this research is that of a negotiated narrative – a narrative produced by all of those involved in its creation. This thesis argues that the role of the writer is changing in the transmedia context and the *RBH* prototype demonstrates the need for the writer to be a leader, designer, collaborator and orchestrator. Immersion is promoted through encouraging real-audience agency by the use of greater improvisation, process theatre methods, the use of gamification techniques, and by creating a world that blends elements of fact and fiction. Such immersive environments provide opportunities to develop a storytelling method that has the ability to imagine and create new communities of diverse characters. This prototype opens up possibilities for involvement and participation in a post-conflict world, a world where a new Northern Ireland can be imagined and issues that are seldom explored publicly can be discussed.

Tony Watson (2001) used the term 'negotiated narrative' in relation to critical management education and learning – more specifically, ways to teach and build management practice. He uses the term to synthesise a range of 'stories' in the management process (the practitioner story, the academic research story and the theory story) to discover 'the story behind the story' (Watson, 2001, p. 388). I have adapted and used his concept to imply a synthesis of stories (stories proposed by people from Northern Ireland, my own stories, myths and re-workings of other writers) but, in my application, this synthesis results in the creation of a new and negotiated narrative. The narrative is constantly changing due to these negotiations, so my use of negotiated narrative implies an evolving concept rather than a fixed position. I use a negotiation process similar to that found in process theatre to create a new and transformed narrative. This narrative is the result of stories that have been offered by the audience, the author/writer, and the production personnel involved in making the project. The orchestration of these stories in this manner results in a narrative fusion that is dependent on a real agency on the part of the contributors.

I use the term narrative in a fluid way, not only to refer to the action that takes place in the project and the transformation that results from this action, but also to involve the interventions and interruptions that are caused in the negotiation stages of the project. This necessarily involves discursive and experimental elements that would not usually find themselves part of any narrative text but which are commonly used in installation art and digital arts projects. My definition more readily corresponds to Ryan's (1991) more open conception of narrativity, which is guided by three principles: the setting up of a world and those inhabiting it, the changes that occur in a temporal sequence along with the possibility of the identification of aims, motivations and causal relations that ensure coherence in the plot. The negotiated

narrative in *RBH* acknowledges that the process of creation and its emotional impact is as important to the creation of the online performance as are the fused stories that will contribute to the final product.

3. Background

[1] The term curator is another term that could be used in this context but I have not followed this route due to the lack of performability this term suggests.

[2] The term was coined in 2002 by Nick Pelling and gained popularity in 2010 when it became related to elements of social or reward aspects of games. It was often related to marketing or non-game like contests. In Digital Mix 03 Naomi Alderman was relating the term to storytelling practices.

[3] From its inception in 1983 Channel 4 had a remit to complement the other 3 channels and encourage 'innovation and experiment'. The Channel's department of Independent Film and Video under commissioning editor Alan Fountain was concerned to support 'the sort of work unlikely to be taken up elsewhere in the television system' and that would 'represent the alternative, oppositional voice' Fountain (1984, p18).

[4] The Independent Sector supplies a range of content to national broadcasters in the UK and its growth has been fostered in part by a requirement in 2003, as part of the Communications Act, for broadcasters to commission at least 10% of content by independent producers. In general it refers to

producers who are independent of broadcasters but is a term that can also apply to film production companies.

[\[5\]](#) While 'post conflict' implies the end of conflict I feel the term is misleading in the current context of Northern Ireland, where we find that various conflicts continue to play out. However, what it does imply is that the worst aspects of the conflict are past and agreements are in place to help try and build a pluralistic society.

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When this research was first proposed (2011) scholarly works relating to transmedia were dispersed across different disciplines and areas of practice. Some could be found in media and cultural studies (Jenkins, Rose, Couldry), some in literature studies relating to narratology (Murray, Ryan, Scolari), and some from practitioners who had either written guides or discussion pieces on the form (Dena, Handler- Miller, Philips, Pratten, Giovagnoli, Bernardo). All point to the primacy of the reader/audience relationship in digital forms. Since then, scholarly work has expanded and many technological developments and innovations have occurred. As such, the study of transmedia cannot be found under one discipline and many theories have influenced transmedia analysis. Indeed, other, older studies that relate to audiences (Abercrombie & Longhurst, Ranciere) for media and theatre (Freshwater, O'Neill) have suggested new roles for audiences and are useful in this current focus. This is why they are considered here, as are discussions on the role of soap operas in social development (Sabido, Singhal, Barker, Connolly and Angelone). Thus, I draw from a wide range of sources when referring to the background context of transmedia study.

Barthes' concentration on both the reader and the author is a useful starting point for understanding how writing can be approached for the transmedia and other immersive forms:

Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and

entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not as hitherto said, the Author (Barthes, 2001, p. 210).

I am adapting his ideas for this new environment, suggesting that greater emphasis should be given to the role of the reader/participant. The co-constructed nature of the narrative created is an essential aspect of the project and necessitates an examination of participatory production methods in media and drama (Carpentier, 2011; Shaughnessy, 2012; Jenkins, 2013; O'Neill, 1995) and the ambiguities of performance. This is necessary as the work is experiential (participants needed to have taken part to have experienced the full effect) and fleeting (the record is poly-directional and poly-vocal; it is a record made from many sources rather than one authorial voice). The record is postmodern (Lyotard) in the sense that it may be impossible to view a grand narrative but it is possible to build a clear and realistic picture from the variety of sources. So, this record accurately reflects and is analogous to the form of the piece itself.

As the project is set in Northern Ireland and is based around Northern Irish myths it is also important to consider the historical and cultural significance of participation culture in relation to Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is rich in social capital and has a vibrant civil society. This is evidenced through the many cultural, voluntary and sporting organisations that are currently found there. We can see this through involvement in religious groups (Northern Ireland has the largest proportion of church attendance in the UK although this is declining), a popular culture of marching protests, popular marching bands, the painting of murals and other public expressions of political life. Family and community continue to be of considerable importance. The relationship between this society and political institutions, however, is fraught with tensions. Understanding such

dynamics is crucial to an understanding of the nature of audiences, the role of collaboration, the importance of listening and patterns of unequal participation that exist before making any conclusions about the potential that interactive transmedia production can offer in this context. The research therefore considers existing scholarship on Irish and Northern Irish film, television, new media and drama studies and places my work in this context.

3.1 What is transmedia?

The term transmedia refers to material that uses more than one medium or platform or environment for its expression. There are other terms used to define such a production format (such as cross media, multi-platform and 360-degree storytelling) and often these terms are used interchangeably in the media industries to imply roughly the same form of practice. I therefore use the term transmedia to incorporate all such forms. Jenkins suggests that this form of production is something of a revolution in storytelling:

Transmedia storytelling refers to a new aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence – one that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities (Jenkins, 2009a, n.pag.).

So, for example, a television programme can have an associated website, game, book or product over which the story is expanded and developed. Such a structure can imply a greater sense of action or participation on behalf of the audience. Given the diversity of the form it is best to give a few examples of the range of work that falls into this category. One example is *Matrix* (1999), a project that consisted of three feature films, a series of animated films, a series of comics and a game.

To truly appreciate what we are

watching, we have to do our homework. The filmmakers plant clues that won't make sense until we play the computer game. [...] Fans raced, dazed and confused, from the theatres to plug into Internet discussion lists, where every detail would be dissected and every possible interpretation debated (Jenkins, 2006, p. 94).

A more recent example is *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012) created and produced by Hank Green. It is a low budget online transmedia (advertised as multiplatform) adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* that was available as a vlog (video version of a blog or diary) on YouTube and was accompanied by other spin-off stories by other characters, and social networking opportunities provided by Twitter and Tumblr. Much more recently, Russell T. Davis has created what he and Red Productions call a multiplatform drama. *Cucumber* (2015), *Banana* (2015) and *Tofu* (2015) are a set of interconnecting programmes about 'modern sex' set in Manchester. Each is related to the other through common characters but each tells a different aspect of the 'modern sex' story and illuminates different aspects of that world. Two are fictional productions and one (*Tofu*) is a documentary where members of the public and the cast of *Cucumber* and *Banana* are interviewed, so fact and fiction exist in the same virtual space. As these examples show, transmedia can refer to a wide range of practice by very diverse producers not all of whom put participation at its core.

Giovagnoli suggests that 'the four cardinal points of "doing transmedia"' (2011, p17) are 'to involve multiple media on different technological platforms, that tell different stories and give part of the authorship of the story to the audience and other storytellers'. Transmedia production, with its emphasis on world building, where screenwriters/artists build worlds that cannot be explored or exhausted within a single work and which offers to present drama from multiple perspectives (see polymorphic narratives

(Giavagnoli, 2011, p. 98) for examples), appears to offer new and untested opportunities in the context of Northern Ireland and post-conflict societies in general.

For the purposes of this thesis I use the term transmedia to describe interactive stories delivered across multiple platforms in a way that is expansive rather than repetitive and my project differs significantly to the examples quoted above as the project is intended to grow from participative action rather than from the pre-determined 'top-down' crafting recommended by Jeff Gomez and Tom Dowd (2013).

3.2 What is immersion and interactivity?

Ryan shows us that immersion works on a number of levels so:

if readers are caught up in a story, they turn the pages without paying too much attention to the letter of the text: what they want is to find out what happened next in the fictional world. (Ryan, 1994, n.pag.).

Here, she is describing the immersion into the story rather than the immersion into the medium. Digital formats can display the story in a variety of mediums, but as Ryan suggests, at times, the more interactive the text, the less immersive it can be because the story and the format are in conflict with each other. Her solution is to combine immersion and interactivity so that language is turned into performance whereby readers are asked to play the role of a character.

Rose also makes the same point, suggesting that having the audience lose themselves in a fictional world is not the same as asking them to engage within it (2015). Engagement comes when the audience is asked to take some form of action. But immersion is very powerful and necessary to engagement so the two need to be worked together, as Ryan suggests, if we are to create ever more immersive environments for storytelling. Fans of

franchises such as *Star Wars*, for example, show an increasing desire to step inside these artificial worlds and take action. Brian Boyd (2010) suggests that such behaviour is deeply rooted in the human psyche and our immersion in stories is an adaptive process that helps alter attitudes and beliefs. So, the link between the story and the process of engagement is clearly an element that warrants close attention in transmedia storytelling methods. Rose suggests, 'Storytelling is key, but as with any key it only gets you in the door. What people really want is to merge their identity with something larger. They want to enter the world the story lives in' (Rose, 2015, n.pag.). Immersion as a term is often associated with new technological development, such as virtual reality, augmented reality and 360-degree video. Assumptions are being made about the engagement possibilities of such technologies just because the reader is placed in the centre of the action. However, we are only in the early stages of understanding what implications such technologies will have on storytelling. In this project, I have tried to heighten the use of immersive techniques and marry immersion in the story to immersion in the medium so that in *RBH* the participants are the characters in the story and the story happens to those participants. I have not used the immersive technologies of VR, AR or 360-degree video.

Such immersion was encouraged through the use of the Ulster Cycle of myths, providing a potent mix of real life stories from Northern Ireland (ones that have featured in the media) along with fictional pre-texts or provocations to become a judge in a Reality television setting. The call to action, to decide on a new hero, was housed in 'an imagined community' for people to investigate. In this way, players were asked to enter into the world of the production and take part in a gamified experience, one in which they had to take action. However, these techniques alone would not provide the interactivity that I was seeking in order to ensure that my audiences

were an integral part of the storytelling process. Making the story/game convincing (more convincing than a television drama series) and, as with alternative reality games, being open about what the game involved, was a key learning element of the research project.

Interactivity is not an easy term to define and remains a much debated one (Jensen, 1999; Manovich, 2001; Ryan, 2001). It can often be attributed ideological potency as Aarseth suggests: 'to declare a system interactive is to endorse it with magic power' (1997, p48). As Lister et al. (2009) maintain, it can include the creative management of information, user engagement in media texts, the visual and sensual pleasures of spatial exploration, the ability to input to a text and person to person connection to a 'mutually reciprocal communication process' (Lister et.al 2009, p. 21-25). It is not my intention to contribute further to this debate here so much as to be aware of the term's different and often contradictory histories and to be clear about the ways in which I adopt this concept in the creative production context.

Often the only participation or interactivity that is available in a transmedia production is the very basic opportunity to comment on, or react to, a set of variables that have been presented by the writer/author/producer. So, for example, while the *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* offered the opportunity to comment on the material that was presented, there was no way that audiences could determine the direction that the drama would take. Even when the direction that the drama can take is encouraged, such as in the *Try Life* (2014) online educational project, in which the young audience is actively urged to take on the role of director, all the variables are predetermined, limiting the audience's ability to influence the world of the drama. Of course, it is very useful to have this feedback loop in any production and from time to time the suggestions made by fans are incorporated into future storylines as was the case with BBC's *Sherlock* series (2010 – 2014) and the

app that accompanied it *Sherlock: The Network* (2014). The creators and writers Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, kept an eye on social networking sites and Moffat revealed this connection in an interview for the *Radio Times*: 'I've been online and looked at all the theories' (Seale, 2012). This, of course, is reminiscent of the practices of Dickens when he serialised his stories and published them in weekly instalments that allowed him to evaluate his audiences' reactions, and he often modified his stories and characters based on such feedback (Lodge, 2002, p. 35).

In *RBH* the interactive component uses a similar feedback loop but it goes one step further and offers an opportunity for the audience members to collaborate with the writer and producers to make real changes in the content of the storyworld on an on-going basis and influence the direction that the drama takes. This is something new in the field and a key innovation of this project, as few have analysed how audience participation can be effectively promoted. The aim was to give the participants the feeling of being there. Participation was in part promoted by adopting an unreliable narrator, Sky Bradford, as the central character in the story. Her lack of experience and lack of intervention left the judges/audience unsure of their responsibilities. As a result, the judges filled in the gaps and took control of the programme themselves. So, for example, when Sky forgot to welcome the judges and explain their duties, other longer standing participants took this task on themselves. Other inaction on the part of the author resulted in judges interacting with each other by debating what it meant to be a judge and hero. Participants were also encouraged to empathise with those they were judging, and questioned about their feelings. They were asked to be detectives and burrow down to discover the essential nature of the contestants they were judging. The limited technology on offer in the experience suggested a real environment that was dependent on the participant's action. This feedback loop was a major aspect of the early

stage user experience design. Here, like Marie Laure Ryan, I made a distinction between choice and interactivity:

Not all objects that offer choices are themselves interactive. For instance, a sign at a crossroad that points in several directions offers many destinations to the traveler; or a printed menu in a restaurant offer many options to the customer. But I would not call the road sign and the menu interactive objects, because they lack the ability to modify themselves in response to the user's decisions. (Ryan, 2012, n.pag.)

The model of interactivity used in *RBH* straddles the layers of Ryan's theoretical analysis. In *Red Branch Heroes* one layer offers interactivity, that affects the 'narrative discourse and presentation' (Ryan, 2012, n.pag.), by using hyperlinks to a whole host of other media and text with which judges can form their views. Another layer offers interactivity by creating 'variations in a partly pre-defined story' (Ryan 2012, n.pag.) in that the participants – the judges – start by experiencing a story base or pre-text but quickly move to make suggestions and variations of their own that are incorporated into the drama. There is a theme and a small spine to the story that acts as an anchor to the narrative. But the research project also uses a further layer, the 'inner level' of story generation – something Ryan calls 'real time story generation' (Ryan, 2012, n.pag.). Here stories are not predetermined but 'generated on the fly out of data that comes in part from the system, and in part from the user' (Ryan, 2012, n.pag.). The system, in this instance, is not a computer but an author or range of authors: me and the team at Bellyfeel. The challenge became one of how to produce a wide variety of stories in relation to audience actions – improvised storytelling. In *RBH*, we relied on several layers of improvisation. In the first instance I, as the author, would take the suggestions of the judges and build those into character profiles for the actors who in

turn would interpret these using their own improvisational techniques and feed these back to audiences.

Ryan and many others (Phillips, 2012; Dowd, 2013) ask how the interests of the user (the users' interest to create in this way) may be reconciled with the need to produce good stories. I suggest that *Red Branch Heroes* used improvisatory techniques by actors, writers, producers, audiences and directors to attempt such a task and its success was in part due to the ability of the writers to orchestrate story ideas. The responsibility lay with the production team, who had to weave the ideas together in such a way that would satisfy the audience and result in a good story, but the resultant story was itself open to critique by the participants/audience and could change the direction if they felt it was lacking in some way. The aesthetic rules for such a production are more akin to those found in television documentary, games and world building games such as *The Sims* rather than in literature and film, as a wide range of views and actions can be built together to form the resultant narrative. Such narratives may not look like a piece of fiction, and indeed, this project resembled an activity or process with elements of game-play taking place. To be interactive on this project has meant the need to build a direct link between audience and creator; a communication that has the potential to inform or impact the process of creative development. In this way, we created a strong community of interest in the work.

3.3 Is this process drama?

The process that I have used seems to accord with elements of process drama as advocated by Cecily O'Neill (1995). Engaging in process drama is the same as engaging in most drama but, because it is an active and collaborative practice, participants are asked to make and shape and control significant aspects of what is taking place. They both experience the drama

and organise and contribute to it, while evaluating the experience. Initially the leader is in control of what is happening, especially the growth of dramatic tension, so that the encounter raises expectations, but as it progresses the participants are equally central to the narrative drive. Although it is most commonly associated with the teaching of drama or the use of drama in education:

Like theatre, it is possible for process drama at its best to provide a sustained, intensive, and profoundly satisfying encounter with the dramatic medium and for its participants to apprehend the world in a different way because of this encounter (O'Neill, 1995, p. 13).

I have developed *RBH* to be one such satisfying dramatic encounter and I have ensured that both the participants' views and my own views of our common world have been experienced so as to apprehend the world of Northern Ireland in new and interesting ways. The main elements that have ensured this participation have been the desire to create a dramatic 'elsewhere', 'a fictional world which will be inhabited for the insights, interpretations, and understandings it may yield' (O'Neill, 1995, p.12-13). The project did not start from a preritten text or script although it did originate from what O'Neill classes a pre-text. The pre-text was the initial '[application process](#)' that the judges saw when entering the site. Thereafter the project was built from a series of improvised episodes composed by audience, writer and production personnel. It took place over a limited timespan that allowed for a number of interactions by participants. It involved all participants who signed up to the project (although not all took an active part) so there was, at least, for the majority of the project, no external audience to this event. This changed towards the end of the project when it was thrown open to the public for a voting scenario. The purpose of throwing the site open to a broader public was to gain further interest and traction for the project and for the participants to engage with

a broader public for future 'episodes'.

The text that developed from this online improvisation involved a writing function and this function was clearly in the hands of the ensemble rather than the production team, although it was organised and designed by myself, most obviously at the start and end of the process. This experience is repeatable and therefore a form of dramatic performance although each iteration will be unique due to the participation of a different set of judges and could be presented in different ways just as any play would give rise to a number of productions. Few restrictions are imposed on how this pretext should be used. The project left behind a trace and a memory, something that Peter Brook calls a 'kernel engraved on the memory' (O'Neill, 1995, p. 27) and something that is characteristic of drama. Such techniques utilise the concept of liminality – a time and space between one meaning and another (Turner, 1982, p. 114). In this state, participants are on the threshold between what they have been and what they will become and are, by implication, in a process of transformation. In this state, O'Neill suggests people play with familiar situations and disarrange them (the basic activity of art) to force us to notice and to see anew (Shklovsky, 1965). By leading this activity, Peter McLaren (1988) would suggest I was acting as liminal servant. I led my participants into a dramatic world where they were free to alter their status, chose to adopt roles, play with elements of reality and explore alternative existences. Having done this, they return to the real world changed in some way or, as O'Neill suggests, 'at least not quite the same as when they began' (1995, p. 66). One of the best ways of learning about ourselves is through our encounters with others, both real and imagined. Such experiences give us what Boal calls 'a politics of the imagination' (quoted in O'Neill, 1995, p. 151) – a sense of reflection and distance from which we can consider our lives anew.

I would suggest that this participative project

owes as much to theatre and drama as it does to new technological innovation. The use of process drama techniques also gave the judges the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and consider them in new contexts. A good example of this is when we introduced controversial information about the applicants to encourage the judges to dig deeper. The judges analysed the information received and asked: was Leo a bad man because he tried to abduct his child from its mother? The judges debated his actions and when we asked them to prepare a campaign for him they debated whether they should include this information in the publicity material as it showed a certain commitment from him towards his child. What could have been a condemnation of the character turned into empathy and understanding from the participants.

Susan Bennett's *Theatre Audiences* (1997) emphasises the creative involvement that spectators bring to theatrical productions. Both she and Jacques Ranciere (2009) talk of 'the emancipated spectator' – an audience member who is an active participant in the creation of an artwork. While Bennett talks about 'a common determination to increase the spectator's activity to their mutual benefit' (Bennett, 1997, p. 212), Ranciere in a further publication (2011) dismisses the myths of audience transformation:

...to know that words are merely words and spectacles are merely spectacles, can help us arrive at a better understanding of how words and images, stories and performances, can change something of the world we live in (2011, p. 55)

But his views do not reject the idea that theatre, and maybe in this case transmedia production, has some agency. He suggests that we do not come to any work of art without complex patterns of interaction. The idea of the audience as people who are able to sense and think in a very real way is at the core of

processes that were at work in *RBH*. Wadsworth argues that PAR, 'Involves an imaginative leap from a world of "as it is" to a glimpse of the world "as it could be"' (1998, p. 6). In this project, participants made such a leap while all the while being aware that the project was a false construct, that images were manipulated and constructed and words were indeed 'merely words' as Ranciere writes. O'Neill writes, 'Leaders of process drama are also guides to new worlds, traveling with incomplete maps to the terrain, taking risks, and not knowing what lies ahead' (1995, p67). So, while the participants and makers were hugely immersed they never lost sight of the fact that the project was a creation – *their* creation.

In this way, Barthes' investigation into the reader is very key to the role that the audience play in transmedia work that is interactive. In this project, the readers/participants were constantly trying to evaluate what the purpose and meaning of pre-text and information presented implied. However, Barthes' assertion that the Author is dead is slightly problematic. In this instance, at the outset it was important that the audience was aware who the author was and what was motivating their practice. Without this knowledge the negotiation that was taking place would be based on suspicion and could result in conflict. For this reason, all the producers in the story felt it was important to reveal their [past work and approaches](#). However, in the gameplay that transpired, the identity of the author was frequently forgotten or overlooked and the author was replaced by a scriptor or producer/orchestrator, whom participants were aware of as occupying this role. In this way, the author would become born and then die, as would the reader at regular intervals throughout the production. As such, this renders neither the author nor the reader as the authority in this production.

Where this project differs from that of process drama or drama in general is the way in which it is applied to new technologies. Bronwin

Patrickson (2016) suggests a process-drama approach can be applied to computer mediated multi-user environments and she has developed a six phase preliminary poetics for such practice (2011, p. 201). I would dispute the significance of some of her assertions but I support her view that process drama methods can be found in many multi-media projects. However, the sense of agency that is found working in the same physical space is missing in the online experience. With a smartphone a user can take pictures, add text to those pictures through applications and post the resulting content to social networking sites where the content can be discussed. Such technologies also let us work and talk to each other in new and interesting ways but we do not sit in any physical relationship to each other and such techniques do not necessarily produce a sense of joint endeavour. This makes the online experience very different to the traditional drama scenario even when real live events are added to the transmedia experience. While the use of process drama techniques and participative and performative opportunities contributed to a sense of engagement, the design of *RBH* also acknowledges some of the design techniques found in games.

3.4 Is this a game?

Naomi Alderman suggests that games are ‘the fastest growing medium of our age. Your experimental technological literature is already here’ (2015, p. 46). The game-like techniques we used in *RBH* involved setting up a competition that required judges. We offered a £100 reward for the best judge but did not specify what being a good judge would entail. The judges were asked to speculate about the candidates and although not rewarded for their contributions we saw such contributions reflected in the emerging profiles of the candidates. This is commonly known as ‘bread crumbing’, a technique where clues are left to lead the player through the

game spine: it is a technique that can be used to direct players to narrative elements. We left story clues around in the judging arena, some of which were picked up and some of which were not. Judges were able to interview heroes online and the production company made short films that responded to their questions. The production team provided real time Skype interviews with the actors/candidates and finally asked judges to align themselves with just one character that they would promote to the general public. The production team helped the judges build campaigns based on their suggestions. These creations were then reflected back to their creators (the judges) in video and mobile phone posts. In this way we were 'funnelling' (Bateman, 2007) our judges to take certain forms of action and discouraging them from wandering off. However, as the story progressed, it became clear that the writing team did not have overall control of what the feedback loop would produce, so that, for instance, one judge wondered if it might be a good idea to have an amalgamation of contestants to make the perfect hero, whilst another wondered if Sky herself would make the best hero. Each decision provoked a story change:

Since the beginning I have thought this is a fun game. We sometimes did not know what would happen next. I was not even sure if the heroes are real people or actors. The same goes with the judges, however, it did not matter. It was fun. [\[1\]](#)

This gamification technique – the application of game design elements and game principles – was used as a writing process. The link between storytelling and game playing is a developing and interesting avenue of exploration as Alderman (2015), Ryan (2012), Jenkins (2013) and Murray (2012) suggest. Alderman takes issue with what she sees as the artificial divide that has developed between digital literature and games. I would suggest the same divide can be found between cinema/television and games and would

support the idea that such divisions are not productive for understanding the forces that are at play in such new production formats. 'There is a sullen arrogance on both sides, with some people in both camps denying that the other knows anything worth listening to' (Alderman, 2015, p. 47). My research project places itself firmly in between such camps, suggesting that games, film, TV, digital literature and now, increasingly VR, all use some form of agency; 'Agency is the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices' (Murray, 1998, p. 126), to create immersion in their storyworlds. As Gomez suggests in an interview with Giovagnoli, 'A truly interactive transmedia experience is signified by the participant's ability not simply to choose between two threads of narrative but to impact the narrative itself' (Giavagnoli, 2011, p.134). This was the process adopted by the *RBH* prototype and an element that was at the core of its design.

3.5 Is this multi-modal practice?

Such complex story construction is often referred to as a multimodal practice. Douglas Kellner says that 'we need to learn to think dialectically, to read text and image, to decipher sight and sound ... to develop forms of computer literacy' (2010, quoted in Millard 2014, p. 42). As Murray suggests:

if users are unreliable, legacy conventions are inappropriate or conflicting, and existing digital conventions are often inadequate to the task at hand, how can designers make good choices? How do we know what is worth making?' (Murray, 2012, p. 12).

Murray has no easy answers; rather, her book is a provocation and suggests design explorations. This project is therefore an exploration for the digital medium, a contribution to this discussion, and is a fundamental reason for deciding to carry out my research through creative practice.

Kathryn Millard (2014) suggests that our understanding of what it is to write is shifting and changing, and that more interesting or pertinent ways can be found to express our ideas that use images and sound in addition to text. She suggests that there could be more useful ways to create a template for a film/or digital work – that of a design prototype rather than a literary document. A prototype could perhaps better embody the dynamic processes that she suggests (Nelmes, 2011, pp. 142-157).

Another reason for using a multi-modal practice is that such practices can equalise relationships 'between the literate and illiterate, between the marginalised and the self-confident' (Mikkelsen, 2001, p. 118), and the findings from participants can help contribute to a large body of knowledge that can be used to effect change in relation to productions of this nature. The participants of *RBH* did not need to understand story construction or have any particular writing experience as the author and the crew supplied these skills. The participants on this project brought with them their knowledge about Northern Ireland, about digital media, along with their good humour and inquisitive natures. Not everyone felt comfortable with the multi-modal nature of the writing and construction of the project and therefore posted text rather than images or sounds but as the project developed some participants began to use images and sounds to influence decisions and discussions.

3.6 Is this a Northern Irish project?

Since the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998 much has changed in Northern Ireland in terms of cultural and economic development. It is a society that is in an interesting phase of social change – moving from a society in conflict from 1968 – 1998 to one of 'post conflict'.^[2] Alison Jeffers maintains when writing about participation:

Despite the success of the GFA in setting up a power-sharing government based on an understanding of the legitimacy of both unionist and nationalist views, many issues remain unresolved. These include '[t]he question of how to deal with the legacy of the past' and the fact that 'division remain[s] an unfortunate fact of life (McKittrick and McVea, 2012, p. 305)

The work of writers for film, television and new media products since that time, is, in part, defined by the fact that such writers grew up during the Troubles and that their work is therefore influenced by that period. It could be argued, as Heidemann does when talking about post-Agreement literature, that their work

concerns itself with subject identities suspended between a 'repressive' past and a 'progressive' future' and that the resultant work 'neither attempts to 'heal' not 'resolve' the political conundrum of Northern Ireland (2016, p. 251).

Instead she suggests that post-Agreement literature (novels, poetry and drama) concerns itself with,

restructuring, recasting and, more importantly, diagnosing the passive absorption of the country's violent past into an 'agreed upon future', and that the 'violent past does not necessarily configure as a dominant trope of their writings' (2016, p. 251).

The design and writing of *RBH* shows similar traits and therefore fits such an analysis.

It is important to recognise that as John Hill (2006) shows us, filmmaking as an art form is a relatively new practice in Northern Ireland (2006, p.162). In the 1960s such practice as there was, he suggests, was inevitably caught up with the imagery of the Troubles. Many (including John Hill) have been critical of the

films that resulted during that period. But Martin McLoone sees the resulting Troubles films as the development of an indigenous cinema which, he said, 'demonstrated a critical engagement with the legacy of Irish cultural nationalism' (McLoone, 2008, p. 165). The failings that McLoone sees in these films, such as the lack of a developed loyalist dimension, are due, he suggests, to the conventions of mainstream cinema rather than a nationalist filmmaking conspiracy: 'the contradictory, historical and multi-layered complexities of politics are poorly served by such structure ['political thriller'] to the detriment of both' (McLoone, 2008, p.196). This is something Ruth Barton agrees with when she argues that mainstream filmmaking practices are unable to analyse political issues in any depth:

The very specific challenge that now faces filmmaking in and about Northern Ireland is to move beyond the tired paradigms of Troubles cinema and invent a new set of narratives that correspond to the wider experience of the inhabitants of that geographical space. (Barton, 2004, p. 178)

I would argue that the films of the 1990s and thereafter (post-conflict/Agreement films) were often a result of a desire by filmmakers from both loyalist and nationalist communities to set their stories straight and to reach as large an audience as possible: something that the popular Hollywood form is very suited to. Writing about Ireland in general, rather than Northern Ireland in particular, McLoone very clearly points out that Irish emigration to United Kingdom and the States has resulted in a very special interplay between the cultures, and this is reflected in the filmmaking that has resulted: 'The Ireland of the new millennium [he suggests] is caught between its nationalist past, its European future and its American imagination' (2008, p. 6). It is no surprise then that by 1997 Northern Ireland Screen had placed a high importance on the commercial viability of its film. Subsequent productions

such as *Mad about Mambo* (2000), *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* (2000) and *With or Without You* (1999), reflected the general revival of interest in romantic comedies, as seen in the success of films such as *Sliding Doors* (1998) and *Notting Hill* (1999). I would suggest that, at this time, the filmmaking community in Northern Ireland was keen to put the past behind them to show that it was engaged with global filmmaking practice and trends. Having begun the dialogue of how to talk about the controversial political and cultural issues facing Northern Ireland, it appeared that filmmakers were in danger of throwing away such understanding in order to placate an international marketplace that had had enough of the Troubles. This is understandable if you have hitched your cart to the film-as-economic-development horse. So, Northern Irish filmmaking in the late 1990s and early 2000s tended to demonstrate the downside of engaging with the popular form.

Nonetheless, many of the writers and directors from the 1990s were able to go on to write about conflict in other countries and contribute to a range of popular films that continue to engage audiences in these issues. Ronan Bennett, a northern Irish screenwriter and novelist, wrote *Hamburg Cell* (2004); Neil Jordan, Irish writer/director, subsequently engaged in a number of different genres; Paul Greengrass, an English writer/director, made *Bloody Sunday* (2002) and *Omagh* (2004) and then went on to make his name in action films; Terry George, Irish writer and director of *Some Mother's Son* (1996), has gone on to make other award-winning films such as *Hotel Rwanda* (2004); and Colin Bateman has gone on to contribute an Irish perspective to British television through his creation of *Murphy's Law* (2003). Their contribution to what has become known as Northern Irish cinema and television is significant. These writers, producers and directors helped give that small area called Northern Ireland a global voice, a voice that is offering new insights into urban conflicts, which continue to feature in our modern world. What has proved to be even

more successful is the use of Northern Ireland as background to a range of television and long form productions such as *Game of Thrones* (2010 – present) and *The Fall* (2013 – 2016). While these programmes do not deal with any historical issues of Northern Ireland they do contribute to a sense of its production culture.

However if we are to look at films and television about Northern Ireland in a broader context, there has also been a desire, to include filmmakers from outside Northern Ireland (from Ireland, from the UK, from Europe, from USA) from the 1970's onwards, to engage in a vibrant experimentation with notions of identity: Pat Murphy, Bob Quinn, Alan Clarke, John T. Davis, Neil Jordan, and, more recently Steve McQueen, Oliver Hirschbiegel, Abbie Spallen, Paul Greengrass, Yann Demange and Mark Cousins. Such filmmakers help us to ask what it means to be Northern Irish in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. It is within this context that I would place the *RBH* project.

Heidemann talks of theorists (Nordin and Holmsten 2009) who read Ireland as a postcolonial society and apply the concept of liminality as 'a site of negotiation and re-identification' (2016, p.8) and as an enabling state. She takes issue with such a position, suggesting that what characterises Northern Ireland is a state of 'negative liminality' (2016, p.10), a disabling condition which resists closure and resolution. However, she does not see this as a negative concern or one that is a pathological condition of post-Agreement Northern Ireland. Rather, she suggests that 'post-Agreement' writers are predominantly concerned with the private predicaments of their literary characters as opposed to discursive reading of the political structures themselves' (2016, p. 51). My concerns have also been driven by trying to gain an understanding of how people have been influenced by these experiences. Finding a form (transmedia) that has been able to accommodate a range of views has been

instrumental in facilitating such a project. Therefore, the project design became a mix of popular forms that are able to bring difficult ideas to larger audiences alongside the development of complex characters, which better exemplify the current concerns of people living in Northern Ireland. In part, Heidemann's analysis may explain some of the immersive properties of the project given that authors and audiences have been working in a liminal form, across liminal boundaries and in a society that finds itself in a liminal situation. Playing in this space has meant that we have all been able not only to critique and investigate characters but also to look anew at some of what it means to be Northern Irish.

Production companies in Northern Ireland have investigated the transmedia form but as Gawain Morrison from Sensum explains:

to be honest there's not a lot of transmedia in Northern Ireland as it's been very difficult to finance & develop, and on the most part it's now settled to be the domain of marketing support and educational engagement (Morrison, email discussion, May 2013).

I am more interested in the impact such methods could have in helping storytellers to understand cultural experiences in Northern Ireland (Cronin, Crosson & Eastlake 2009; Lloyd, 2011; Hackett & Rolston, 2009). In Northern Ireland where 'ethnonationalist and sectarian constructs of society ...reify an essentialist identity in which an individual is defined by the community into which he or she is born' (Graham & Whelan, 2007, p. 467) methods of participation can be very problematic and loaded concepts.

It is therefore particularly important that a participatory action research approach enables a layered analysis of voices (writers, users, and theorists) that will provide a dialogue on my work. With this in mind I am also mindful of Jeffers' introductory comments that 'participation alone is no guarantor of the

necessary redistribution of authority that may lead to positive social change' (Jefferies in Harpin and Nicholson 2016, p. 210). For this reason I have also investigated a range of participatory drama work that can be found in Northern Ireland in theatre such as the work of Accidental Theatre and Tinderbox, new media entertainment projects such as *The Beat Generation* (2010) by Crosstown Media and archival and database projects such as *Prisons Memory Archive* (2006 – present); as well as recent film and television productions from Northern Ireland including the independent film and video production sectors. Each of these projects uses new media techniques to try to convey the complex issues at play in contemporary Northern Ireland. They all made a contribution to the eventual design of *RBH*.

3.7 Is this community practice?

I have found that many of the companies interviewed expressed concerns that artistic endeavours in Northern Ireland were beginning to be 'relegated' and 'designated' as community development. This is no doubt testimony to investigations such as Matarasso's (1998) who identified the power of participatory arts in his research in Belfast. He noted fifty social impacts of participation in the arts and aimed his report at policy makers in local governments so that such impacts could become a tool for harnessing the forces of art for social democratic purposes. However, many of the theatre companies I spoke to wanted to distance their work from such well-intentioned notions. As Fiona Coffey suggests:

a growing sense among Northern theatre practitioners that social realism, long-embraced in Ireland, can no longer adequately express the fractured identities, complex political status, economic upheaval, and uncertainty about the future that embodies the post-Agreement North. (Coffey, 2015, p.

I have also faced pressure to describe my work as community oriented and educationally useful. While I am not denying that there is a desire for the work to be socially useful this is not primarily a community production that is designed to bring people together nor is it an educational project that attempts to teach any particular skills.

Heidemann suggests that it was not until the 1970's that the 'aesthetic collusion between art and politics has emerged as the defining feature of contemporary Northern Irish drama' (2016, p.192). However more recent productions such as Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl* (2006) and Daragh Carville's *This Other City* (2010) adopt Stewart Parker's 'working model of wholeness' (quoted in Heidemann, 2016, p. 192) and apply it to a new political situation: the pitfalls of neoliberal politics in Northern Ireland. As such, the plays she examines 'provide a provocative commentary on the 'progressive' neoliberal nation-state building' (2016, p. 193).

In contrast, *Prisons Memory Archive* aims to preserve footage of the past, and the present related to the past, with the goal of making it accessible through digital innovation. It can be seen as one of a proliferation of storytelling projects within Northern Ireland that have adopted storytelling techniques, such as visiting places of memory and talking about objects to trigger memories. I have used many similar techniques, using news items and visual material that call up experiences from the past to provoke discussion but am aware that as Mairs and McLaughlin point out 'people remember differently, not only over time, but also depending on the psychic and physical places that are inhabited' (quoted in Aguiar, 2015, p. 228). Any further work on *The Eleven* would include work that has a physical or spatial component because, as Aguiar suggests in her article about the archive, 'bringing the women back to the site of memory enabled the prison to 'come alive', as corridors were

occupied' (2015, p. 238). The inclusion of events at specific locations could become an important and potent story-generating technique that could be used to fuse past and present and hopefully inspire ideas for the future. At the same time we must be cognisant of the limitations of such techniques.

McLaughlin acknowledges the element of 'performance' in the stories told but he does not address whether the recalled memories are a 'victim-subject' and are doing this for the camera. However, in these days where 'fake' news is regularly discussed, I suggest audiences are very much aware of how constructed such real-life performances can be, and that by including them within a fictional story that uses documentary techniques is a useful way to develop a discussion about these issues.

Although *Prisons Memory Archive* is primarily an archive and documentary project that offers a shared ownership of material and resources, it also features strong storytelling aspects that can be mixed and remixed to tell different versions of a story and offers to reveal the prison situation from many perspectives. This proliferation of material usage can show the performativity of the films produced and demonstrates that database forms can facilitate a multifaceted enquiry. Such techniques are important to any transmedia experience in Northern Ireland.

In contrast *The Beat Generation* (2010) was an entertainment format and web series that aimed to use new marketing techniques in storytelling. Stephen O'Reilly, a marketing executive, was part of a team who brought the first ever web series to Ireland and he later developed *The Beat Generation* that involved web, social media and the mobile platforms. Its remit was to entertain and to move beyond a broadcast format to incorporate other platforms and appeal to much younger audiences. Whilst *The Belfast Telegraph* and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland supported it, the series only lasted a very short time with some four episodes being created and

although it achieved levels of publicity it was viewed only by a very small audience: 'in an era where newspapers are looking to charge for on-line content and are selling advertising on their on-line websites it is also the first of a new type of business model' (BeActive, 2010, n.pag.). Such business models are not yet commonplace and newspapers are only beginning to move into the pay per view broadcast scenario. It is still a possibility that a Northern Irish soap could be supported by a local newspaper with funding also attached from other sources, especially if it featured local news stories as part of the mix.

RBH has similarities to all these projects that aim to make a contribution to a future Northern Ireland. From my research I understand that it is important that any web series should incorporate the transgressive aims of Northern Irish theatre along with the available versions of the past that database forms can feature. It can further develop the visual elements of film and television and house these within a transmedia world. More importantly, an interactive web series offers a system of decision making that allows for a very public negotiation and promotion of a new and publicly-engaged media form.

4. Research Methods

[1] Quoted from an email response from player A

[2] While 'post conflict' implies the end of conflict I feel the term is misleading in the current context of Northern Ireland where we find that various conflicts continue to burn.

However, what it does imply is that the worst aspects of the conflict are past and agreements are in place to help try and build a pluralistic society.

RED BRANCH HEROES – WRITING WITH MY
AUDIENCES

ANNA MARIA EWA ZALUCZKOWSKA



Red Branch Heroes - Writing With My Audiences

- 4. Research Methods

4. Research Methods

Because my project and study were designed in association with other producers and active participants, action research seemed an appropriate methodology to apply. Reason and Bradbury suggest that action research is 'an orientation to inquiry that seeks to create participative communities of inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity and question posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues' (2008, p.1). I am also concerned with ideas of democratic ownership and control of the work generated and I am particularly interested in the participatory nature of the study and so used Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology towards my inquiry. Such methods of research have a long history of cooperative inquiry, involving what Greenwood and Levin have suggested as 'broad cadres of participants' (2007, p. 34) in dealing with 'pertinent and highly conflictive social problems' (2007, p. 34). This seems particularly important to my study in that I work with audiences in general throughout Northern Ireland (in a phase of post-conflict and post-2016 Referendum) along with a broad range of media practitioners.

As such, my work shares the common themes of PAR. The research is collaborative and democratic and as many voices as can be solicited are included. I have conducted questionnaires with a wide range of people. I have met with many organisations to plan my activities and to encourage participation. I have worked with producers and a wide range of media practitioners. I prioritise the well-being of the other in my work (Buber, 1937;

MacMurray, 1957 and 1961) and understand my position of being an insider in this situation, while also by virtue of my birth being an outsider in the context of Northern Ireland.

Although I initially planned to work with a production company based in Belfast, I actually collaborated with a Manchester-based production team for most of the project, most of whose members were unfamiliar with the Northern Ireland context. However, what resulted was a plurality of views and values from a range of participants who were both insiders and outsiders in the research. Three iterations were undertaken as we moved through the project creating designs and prototypes that were influenced by the participants. This work was self-reflective, something that Ghaye (2010) suggests is a criterion for judging the value of action research.

Somekh (2006) argues for agency in organisational and social change but in this project, we are arguing for agency in media practice and audience participation. As such the practice engaged in could be linked to social change in relation to the audience members taking greater control of the work and then, by implication, offering new versions of a new Northern Ireland for consumption by others. My conclusions are open ended and evolutionary, suggesting that writing practices are changing and that new practices will emerge over time that will adapt to specific conditions of new technologies where place becomes a crucial consideration (Flood, 2001). The research draws on some of the key issues in critical theory in order to break down the power structures that exist between researcher and research subjects (Davis 2008). My aim is to empower my audiences to take control of the project and use that project to improve their situation (Reason and Bradbury 2006). My production crew brought distance and additional new media skills and we have worked together to evaluate what implications the prototype has for further versions of the project. Although I have completed the prototype testing, the research will continue

beyond the submission of this thesis to inform any future production projects.

As PAR analysis can lead to forms of representation that deepen our ability to empathise with people who are different from us (Boucher, 2000) it would appear to be a fruitful methodology in a divided society. PAR seems to be able to put creative endeavours into context with recent histories and experiences of other Northern Irish people. But as Alice McIntyre points out, there is no fixed formula for PAR projects, nor an overriding theoretical framework. Instead 'there is malleability in how PAR processes are framed and carried out' (2008, p. 2). My approach is based on action research that explores the processes by which participants collaborate, take part and design online fictional narratives, and the ways in which such activity can be used to reflect their knowledge and mobilise their desires. I therefore base my approach on the work of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (1985), who was dedicated to the democratic dialectical unification of theory and practice and the power of critical reflection for individual and social change. My ideas are also informed by elements of critical theory as I attend to how power (and digital authorial power in particular) informs the situations that I will analyse (Barthes, Habermas, Foucault, Ranciere). As such my co-researchers and I are not just interested in finding the best way to write for transmedia productions but we also seek to discover a form of transmedia that can contribute to the investigation of a better, more inclusive future for all people in Northern Ireland.

The research followed a cyclical form where each cycle of study has four steps: planning, acting, observing and reflecting; or, more specifically, as Gerald Susman (1983) suggests, a more elaborate process which begins with the identification of a problem. My starting point was to ask how to write effectively for transmedia and then I began the process of collecting more detailed information in order to identify potential avenues of action. Several

ideas were considered before opting for a particular course of action: a web-based series set in Northern Ireland. Each plan of action was implemented and then the data was collected and analysed to find out how successful the action had been. At this point the problem was re-assessed and the process began again with another cycle. In this research there have been three cycles or iterations of the project that have resulted in the findings of the project.

These diagrams describe the process used:

Iteration 1



Figure 2 – Development cycle in iteration 1

Iteration 2

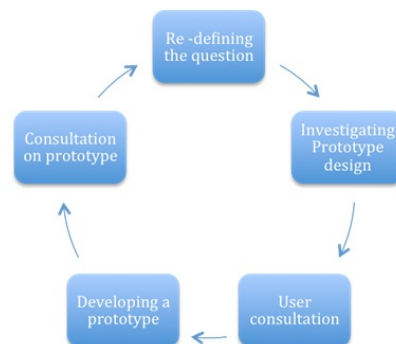


Figure 3 – Development cycle in iteration 2

Iteration 3



4.1 The design process and action research methodology

Millard (2011, pp. 148-150) describes many film and television projects where prototypes of different types have been used to sell, or raise funding for an idea. These include mapping ideas, creating proof of concept videos, presenting the story in different forms such as comic books and digital video prototypes; one example being a prototype made for *Time in the City* (2008) by Terence Davies and Liza Ryan Carter. In much the same way, I wanted my research project to adopt similar design practices. Dominic Mitchell in his series *In the Flesh* (2012) often designed aspects of his series, such as a leaflet on the effects of medication for Zombies, as part of his writing work to give a fuller picture of the world of the series. In *RBH* we have gone much further with this approach and designed a world and events that have been suggested and discussed extensively with our audiences.

Murray suggests that many of the conventions associated with older media have been disrupted, leaving us confused about which conventions to employ. Our work in devising this prototype contributes to the designer's task:

It is the designer's task to work at all three levels of media making – inscription, transmission, and especially representation – to accelerate the collective project of inventing a new medium by creating and refining the conventions that will bring coherence to new artefacts and enhance their expressive power. (Murray, 2012, p. 15).

The design of, and the processes inherent in, our prototype are an attempt to contribute to the development of writing for the interactive transmedia form.

Schrage suggests that 'Prototypes tend to be physical models of a product' (2000, p7) and our prototype is a physical manifestation of part of the product that we intend to develop. We followed established design practices, as suggested by Donald Norman in *The Design of Everyday Things* (1988), and we altered our work as a result of feedback to ensure that players could understand the navigation of our stories and that all story actions had immediate results for audiences. We introduced some constraints so that audiences did not become frustrated by following any wrong paths. But we also wanted to give control to the user by letting them decide where to put their focus. Laurel argues that human-computer interfaces and activities are about 'creating imaginary worlds that have a special relationship to reality – worlds in which we can extend, amplify and enrich our capacities to think, feel and act' (2013, p33). This was at the heart of our intentions.

At the same time, I am also aware of developments in participatory design. Madden, Cadet-James, Atkinson and Watkin Lui (2014) write about probes and prototypes that aim to obtain culturally appropriate design for individual wellbeing. Gaver, Dunne and Pacenti (1999) developed the idea of using cultural probes to explore design for the elderly. Probes are simple, flexible tools that allow designers to learn about potential users. Since then, probes have been used to inspire design, to increase participation and to build and facilitate dialogue. Technology probes have also been used in this context (Mattelmaki, 2005) and are low-fi applications that are used to garner information relating to ITC use and the environment of the participants in order to inspire further design. Problems have been identified:

Increasingly, we see technology probes used not in an inspirational sense, but as a way of generating functionality requirements to determine the one best way forward. Indeed, we see this as one of the ways that technology probes veer

away from the standard cultural probe design (Madden, Cadet-James, Atkinson and Watkin Lui, 2014, p. 42).

RBH as a prototype can be seen as a low-fi technological test that developed simple tools to explore the idea of a future and idealised Northern Ireland. In this way it can be seen as a probe. In devising such a probe, the aim has not been to find the answer to any particular problem or question but to test and react to local circumstances in a continued loop of exploration and improvisation. In this way the research avoids the identified dangers of functionality by using a combination of participative design and participatory action research to create a negotiated narrative.

The creation site has been studied for audience activity and engagement through qualitative and quantitative methods. It has been evaluated by a range of players, including myself as the main writer/designer, the production crew that I worked with from Bellyfeel productions, the actors, community, theatre and media agencies from Northern Ireland, members of the general public and players of the prototype. This practical, practitioner/user approach based on a cross disciplinary analysis, aims to make recommendations for future practice and has necessitated an appropriate methodology that:

seeks to create participative communities of inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity and question posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues' (Reason and Bradbury 2008, p1)

4.2 Who controls the project?

The Frankfurt School critique (that emerged principally in the Interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s but became transplanted to the US academy in the 1940s) expressed

dissatisfaction with the cultural and political implications of mass media during the twentieth century. Jürgen Habermas (1991) suggested that twentieth century industries had sophisticated methods of persuasion that had displaced dialogue among equals. However, he also proposed a critique of the public as a mass audience, one manipulated by mass communication methods. I recognise that many of the theorists working within this critique were writing in the shadow of the Third Reich so were concerned about the powerful deployment of propaganda in print, radio and cinema. I understand how transmedia methods could be used effectively for propaganda purposes but I have always been uncomfortable with the idea of audiences as uninformed or passive participants. Indeed much of such passive behaviour is now contested in fan culture and audience studies (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998; Jenkins, 2012). While some audiences are content to watch and consume, there is an increasing number who aim to perform. This observation has been upheld by my research, not only in the way people were willing to perform on the project but also in the way people were keen to volunteer information that aided the project's construction. Such behaviour and action on behalf of the audience and the author could suggest Habermas' definition of communicative rationality and action, in that the players taking part in this project could be seen to have been taking part in something democratic, communal and non-hierarchical (Habermas, 1981, p. 1984). The storytelling was the subject of discourse and debate and the project was situated in a deliberately contentious form of programme-making – that of Reality television – which the makers further applied a critical take upon. The traditional hierarchy of television production was replaced by offering the power to make decisions to the judges. However, at the same time, the project could also be seen as an activity that reaffirms instrumental rationalities and actions of global media

industries, in that it was presented as a business operation that had to be sold to a television company, and rewards and prizes were offered for participation. As such, the project was governed by instrumental rationalities associated with media businesses even though it was critical of these. The study of this work could be seen as an interesting contribution to the study of leisure and its relation to civic society in that, as Spracklen suggests:

leisure is important for the construction and maintenance of civic society (Habermas 1981:1984), which is built on communicative rationality, democracy and freedom of reason; but at the same time leisure has become a place where individuals are persuaded through instrumental rationalities (associated with globalized capitalism and the state) to consume only what is suitable for the survival of those instruments. (Spracklen, 2006, p. 42)

The project could be perceived as useful for developing a neo-liberal consensus in relation to civic life. For this reason, I argue that the author role is as important as the role of the reader in this transmedia form. The author has the responsibility for setting the pretext to the idea and the context within which the debate occurs. It is incumbent upon the author to be cognisant of the implications of this dynamic and for readers to be aware of the views and intentions of that author if the element of discourse is to be fully maintained throughout the project. In this case, the author is not dead, as is discussed earlier in relation to Barthes, but is continually reborn only to die again. The reader in this transmedia context is in a similar position, sharing as they do part of the scriptor role. What was achieved was a greater parity or power between author and reader. My practice, to share some of the creation of the work with my intended audiences, is intended to directly address the issue of power in representational terms. In addition, audiences are able to 'interact' with

my writing behaviour in the project as much as I can observe theirs. In many respects we are on an equal footing.

4.3 About the researcher and the focus of enquiry

Contributors to this research have provided ideas for the stories. Some have read and critiqued the work in progress; some have helped me make the material that featured in the prototype; and some have given me their views and feelings about the end result. I have collected and analysed these contributions always aware of the many different perspectives that I have been working from. For the purposes of this thesis I use the first person to indicate the work that has been brought together in the research: so, for example, I discover aspects of the writer's practice that are changing. I use the term 'we' when talking about the production work as we have worked together flexibly and fluidly as a team to make this project happen. People who came to the project as producers often ended up writing and the writers often ended up directing, producing or carrying out a whole range of tasks that would not usually be associated with a writer. The project is, therefore, not about me personally but about me as a writer and my role as a writer, and about my learning as I worked through the devising, building and execution of the project, and addresses issues that will enhance and further the skills and learning of others. This is another good reason for the project to have been undertaken under the umbrella of PAR. I have a 'strong commitment to the democratisation of knowledge, learning and self-managed social change' as Greenwood and Levin suggest is essential for action research (2007, p. 9). In addition to testing out new methods of storytelling, I am interested in the impact such methods have in helping storytellers to understand cultural experiences in Northern Ireland. As Rutherford suggests in the conclusion to his book *After Identity*

(2007), 'dialogue and mutual recognition are the preconditions of justice and these require identities that face the open, and whose narratives can accommodate the presence of more than one voice' (Rutherford, 2007, p. 155). A PAR approach enables me to include a layered analysis of voices (writers, users and theorists) that provide a dialogue on my work, which can be situated within the work of other cultural producers in contemporary Northern Ireland. Such an approach also emphasises and facilitates knowledge-gathering with others and the discovery of knowledge that is useful to others:

Action research has been seen as a means of adding to knowledge generated in the academy via traditional methods, but it has also been seen as a distinctive way of knowing (Noffke and Somekh, 2009, p. 20).

In Northern Ireland where notions of territory are often disputed, the idea of a negotiated project – one that is constructed by a range of people (writers, artists, actors, producers, directors, enthusiasts and audiences), both professional and non-professional – opens up possibilities for the transgression of established boundaries. At a time when political activity is in stasis at Stormont, a negotiated narrative could prove useful to opening up dialogue once again.

The results and findings are presented by analysing quantitative online data and online analytics but also by using qualitative data provided by questionnaires and interviews with participants. The work has been evaluated by peer practitioners and has tested and analysed user engagement.

5. Red Branch Heroes Project, Process and Development

RED BRANCH HEROES – WRITING WITH MY
AUDIENCES

ANNA MARIA EWA ZALUCKOWSKA



Red Branch Heroes - Writing With My Audiences

- 5. Red Branch Heroes Project, Process And 

5. Red Branch Heroes Project, Process and Development

There were three iterations of the project in the process of development. The first iteration demonstrates how I came to realise that creating a design and prototype would be more effective than writing a script. The second iteration demonstrates how various methods were used to arrive at a useful prototype that could be trialled with a group of participants. Finally, the third iteration shows what issues were uncovered by a trial of that prototype and how these have been formulated into lessons learnt for other projects of this type.

5.1 First Iteration – writing a script?

From 2011 to 2013, I researched both the background to transmedia production and the background to the situation of Northern Ireland. While some of this was done in relation to scholarly works described in the previous section, I also visited Northern Ireland and interviewed around fifty people, visited organisations, and attended a number of academic conferences and film-making events. The questions I devised for these preliminary enquiries are available as [Questionnaire One](#).

Initially, I had planned to write a script for a transmedia project making the assumption that a script was needed to begin the process of development. Transmedia practitioners such as Gomez, Dowd and Handler-Miller further bolstered this assumption. I discussed my intentions to develop a story based on the

ten commandments and explained how this concept was influenced heavily by the Polish film director Kieslowski and his series *Dekalog* (1989). In one consultation, a Northern Irish television producer suggested that:

contending that Northern Ireland conflict is basically Christian needs to be revised – no serious student of conflict or peace here accepts the religious labels except as short hand. And I wonder whether there isn't a more fundamental problem with trying to migrate Kieslowski's method to an NI scenario. The Polish Catholicism in which he was operating and reflecting was essentially, I think you can argue, a unitary community. Obviously one with differences of opinion and tensions but essentially unitary – it is forcing the scenario to claim NI is.

Clearly, using Kieslowski could be a contentious decision, possibly causing offence, and so I clarified my use of his work. I made it clear that my intention was never to suggest that the conflict was religious in nature; rather, I was simply stating a fact – that the main religious denominations in Northern Ireland are Christian and share similar Christian values. While it is true that Kieslowski was reflecting on a mainly homogenous society, it is also true that he was primarily interested in the moral and ethical questions facing a society in transition, and it was this comparison that I found to be most suggestive:

During martial law, I realised that politics aren't important. In a way, of course they define where we are and what we're allowed or aren't allowed to do, but they don't solve the really important human questions (Kieslowski interview in Stok, 1993, p. 144).

So, my intentions were similar to Kieslowski's in that, while the Troubles defined what we were allowed and not allowed to do in the

sense of where to live, who to associate with, vote for and how to think, they did not solve the important human questions that face the people of Northern Ireland. My visits to Northern Ireland involved meeting many people from differing backgrounds: employed and unemployed, students, migrants, male and female, nationalist and loyalist, old and young. The intention was to develop ideas for stories and characters, and to build a flexible, kaleidoscopic structure capable of sustaining a multi-layered story.

The producer's comments on the use of Kieslowski's *Dekalog* also set me looking for local stories and myths that I could use to engage Northern Irish audiences. This quest led me to the dramatic work of Stewart Parker, and in particular, his television plays, such as *I'm a Dreamer Montreal* (1979) and *Joyce in June* (1982). Parker was foremost a playwright but also wrote for television and radio. He was a working-class Belfast Protestant who was a member of a group of young writers, that included Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon and Bernard MacLaverty, in the early-to mid-1960s at Queens University Belfast. Parker revels in television's and film's

volatility, its flux, the multifarious elements which constantly qualify and alter one another – and the script, far from being Holy Writ, is one of those elements, shifting and changing in response to others' (quoted in Wallace 2008, p. 8).

Parker's enthusiasm for these media echoed mine for new media and transmedia in particular, and so I began to build on aspects of the myths of the Ulster Cycle that Parker had used in his series, *Lost Belongings* (1987). Wallace points out that some viewers questioned the 'effectiveness of the transposition of a mythic narrative onto a contemporary situation' (Wallace, 2008, p. 19). The central difficulty as Carins and Richards suggest, is that 'the very oppressive nature of an "inherited" narrative carries with it

intimations of inevitability' (Carins and Richards, 1991, p. 136). Wallace notes that in *Lost Belongings*, while the Deirdre narrative is pivotal, it is only one element of a multi-layered plot. In this way, I planned to use the opening story of the Ulster Cycle, rather than the Deirdre narrative, as just one element of a multi-layered plot that also featured aspects of Kieslowski's *Dekalog* in addition to news narratives from Northern Ireland; all with the aim of encouraging the audience to engage with the metaphors/issues generated by this intertextuality.

I also wanted to visit different parts of Northern Ireland to assess the most beneficial place to locate the story. My decision at the time to situate the project at a peace wall was, in part due, to the events that were working to 'open' the walls to promote better communication and to try and remove these walls in the future.

Politicians in Northern Ireland say they plan to tear down the so-called "peace walls" between Catholic and Protestant communities within a decade. Peter Robinson said the plan to remove almost 60 barriers would help the province move forward as a united society. (Miller, 2013, n.pag.)

But later my plans changed due to further feedback from a television producer who wrote:

I'm puzzled by the decision to locate the fictional community close to a peace wall: if the idea of transmedia is to escape the purely binary and offer multi-perspectives then the problem with a wall is that there are only two sides to it. What side of the wall are you on is all that matters. It doesn't seem possible to move beyond the binary and so the "story world" is stunted, stillborn.

Of course, it was not my intention to set up a binary situation but rather to use the opening

of the peace wall in a similar manner to the tearing down of the Berlin wall in 1989, as a symbol. However, in the end it was important to acknowledge that my approach was flawed in this instance as the peace walls have yet to come down. Instead I decided to create a project that took place within an 'imagined community'. This tactic has been echoed and used successfully more recently in Mark Cousins' film *I am Belfast* (2015). Trevor Johnston comments that Cousins' decision

to shape the film around an imagined identity rooted in a sense of place, rather than in the conflicting affiliations of its citizens, is both a canny tactic and a defiant statement that there is indeed a way to look at the city that doesn't involve orange or green-tinted glasses (Johnston, 2016, p. 62).

It was while visiting Downpatrick, a place considered to be unique in some ways, in that it houses a mixed community, that I came across what was to become known as a 'ghost estate', a new-build private development that had not succeeded in selling its properties to private owners. A couple of the properties had been sold and those owners were then living in an empty estate that was falling into disrepair. This fired my imagination and became the basis for a large transmedia idea that is detailed in this [prezi presentation](#). My idea mixed ghostly gaming stories with transmedia versions of Kieslowski's *Dekalog* set in a Northern Irish context with the stories adapted to the local concerns and issues. It also contained spin-off stories by some of the main characters, that would veer away from the main story spine: this included one that would feature an academic who would present her thesis on transmedia production as part of an online learning opportunity. I thought this would be an interesting way to present my thesis and to make available its findings to a wide body of people in an engaging fashion. While this did not happen, it was one of the influences that resulted in my thesis submission using online technology. At that

point, the project was known as *The Community* and the ideas developed can be found in this short [storyworld bible](#). Such developments were informed by the work of Jeff Gomez and might be described as what Tom Dowd et al. (2013) refer to as ‘top-down’ crafting. Such a procedure adopts the practice of large media companies who have begun crafting the ‘big picture’ from the very first steps. As Jenkins (2006) maintains, storytelling is increasingly becoming the art of world building, where writers can explore a world in more than one work:

When I first started, (in the business) you would pitch a story because without a good story, you didn't really have a film. Later once sequels started to take off, you pitched a character because a good character could support multiple stories. And now you pitch a world because a world can support multiple characters and multiple stories across multiple media (Anonymous screenwriter, quoted in Jenkins, 2006, p. 57)

As with *Silmarillion* (1977), the storyworld for *Lord of the Rings* (1954) book and film adaptations (2001 – 2003), the writer creates a world that can sustain many stories that are spun out over a range of formats. In such instances the creator needs to think about multiple points of access and styles of audience engagement:

Crafting a transmedia property involves building the universe of the intellectual property [...] It also involves determining how and when the audience is going to first experience the new property, and what their subsequent exposure will be, and on what timetable (Dowd, 2013, p. 38).

Jenkins suggests that all transmedia ideas should have ‘spreadability’ or ‘drillability’ – that there should be factors which motivate people to share and explore the idea in depth

so that the project truly captures their attention. Either the project presents a coherent narrative or it rewards engagement and knowledge of the world. The viewer should become immersed in the story or take away story aspects to use in their own way in their everyday lives. Jenkins further suggests that material should be supplied in discrete chunks or installments, thus allowing them to be incorporated across multiple platforms in a cohesive form that can feature real world and digital experiences. Finally, a project should offer a diversity of perspectives and the opportunity for performance (Jenkins, 2009b, n.pag.).

This is also the process that Jeff Gomez advocates (2011) when he suggests that the principles of transmedia should include a person or a small number of visionaries who are responsible for protecting and originating the content. He suggests that the cross-platform element of the project should be planned for early in the development of the idea. Further, he argues that the work should feature on at least three platforms and that each platform should expand the world and introduces new elements of a single vision storyworld. He stresses the need for continuity and for vertical decision making that, nonetheless, includes elements of audience participation: something he calls pulling on the ear of the audience (Gomez, 2011, n.pag.).

My ideas at this point had been created with these principles in mind and I duly followed many of these approaches in developing my project. As I moved towards developing an idea as an interactive project that offered agency to the audience, the less likely it became that one person or a small number of visionaries could control it. In this way I began to realise that what I needed was a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down one.

My previous practice research projects ([Zaluczkowska & Robinson 2014](#)) demonstrated that mixing reality and fiction

results in strong immersion, where participants would suspend disbelief and enthusiastically enter the world of the story. The world of this project was both the real Northern Ireland and a fictional construct in the form of a Reality programme; a world where true news stories could be mixed with fictional stories. I chose a Reality genre because it is a form that is seen to mix reality with constructed fiction. I also chose it so that it would have popular appeal, in that it was a format that was easy to replicate and is a contemporary form. There is a further reason that I chose to develop the idea and this relates to how the form is currently perceived. Reality divides audiences and makers alike in that some love it for its entertainment values while others hate what they consider its exploitative and voyeuristic features. It is true that some of the popularity of *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here* (2002 – present) is related to taking pleasure in other people's discomfort, but as Lindsey Winship also points out in her *Guardian* (2017) article, we also need to consider the audiences will for a character, where they are shouting 'come on, just get through this' (Whinship, 2017, p. 14). As Carol Martin suggests in the same article such behavior is reminiscent of the dance marathons of the 1930s; 'dance marathons presented life as theatre. Spectators simultaneously believed and disbelieved' (Whinship, 2017, p. 14). The Reality setting offered the potential to discuss the ways in which Northern Ireland has been represented in the media.

As with all new media ideas, this was the point at which it was usual and important to send ideas out for consultation. I presented the project to the *Ireland Astray* (2011) at St Mary's University and at *New Voices Conference* (2014) in Galway. I also sent the ideas to be tested by Bellyfeel, a transmedia company based in Manchester and Tinderbox, a theatre company based in Belfast. As part of the action-research methodology, my plan was to subject these ideas to critical and informed feedback. This, as Alice McIntyre suggests, is a

standard procedure with PAR.

This process of questioning, reflecting, dialoguing, and decision making resists linearity. Instead, PAR is a recursive process that involves a spiral of adaptable steps that include the following:

- *Questioning a particular issue*
- *Reflecting upon and investigating the issue*
- *Developing an action plan*
- *Implementing and refining said plan*

(McIntyre, 2008, p. 6).

McTaggart highlights the difference between involvement and participation. He suggests that real participation means that the participants share 'in the way research is conceptualised, practiced and brought to bear on the life-world' (McTaggart, 1997, p. 28). In this research, while not all those consulted had real ownership of the project, all had a strong influence over how the project would be conceptualised and practiced. As McIntyre points out, 'it is unlikely that each party, individually or collectively, can or will participate equally in a PAR process' (2008, p31). I received a wide range of feedback, the first instance of which came from a producer working in television in Northern Ireland:

I think the quality of the characterisation here falls short of industry standard meaning both radio and television.

Most characters are underdeveloped as credible people in an overdeveloped or over-elaborate situation.

Contemporary media audiences are adept at sensing whether a character is plausible or is a cipher for something else i.e. two dimensional or three dimensional.

(March 2014)

I also received a range of advice and questions from a Bellyfeel producer who asked me to

clarify the following questions:

- *Could I identify the flow of the project and how it would play out?*
- *Could I present the project from a user POV?*
- *What technology would I use and how?*
- *What was the importance of doing this project in this way?*

(April 2014)

Finally, from Tinderbox and *New Voices Conference* (2014) the following questions were raised:

- *Would participants know who I was and what my experience of Northern Ireland has been?*
- *Would I disclose which community I was brought up in?*
- *Was I going to consider how these issues would affect my authorship?*
- *Was my plan not overambitious?*

(Aug 2014)

All were useful questions that influenced the research brief and are part of the 'spiral of adaptable steps' (McIntyre, 2008, p. 6) that have been taken to ensure reflection, investigation and action. These questions were an integral part of the redesign of the project and the decision to use a prototype instead of a script to test my ideas.

The transmedia producer encouraged me not

to build a top-down storyworld but to use the storyworld to try to engage the audience so that I could work more effectively with them to define a story. His suggestion to see the project from the point of view of its users, and to consider ways of working that would allow the audience to work with me to build the storyworld, opened up new avenues that would allow the project to become much more interactive. This thinking eventually led to the idea of developing a negotiated narrative.

5.2 Second iteration – the prototype development

I began to build a game-type scenario that would place the story and character development firmly in the hands of the audience. This turned my previous script ideas on their head, and led directly to the idea of a continually negotiated narrative rather than a pre-planned and organised top-down, fully integrated, interactive narrative experience. This way of working also fitted better with my chosen methodology and desire to democratise research practices in the context of Northern Ireland:

The act of observing and reflecting on our own practices can be an enlightening experience, enabling us to see ourselves more clearly and to formulate ways of working that are more effective and that enhance the lives of the people with whom we work (Stringer, 2007, p. 190).

I found that [Prezi presentations](#) were useful for explaining the content and could be easily viewed online. The game structure and visual nature of the project could be better presented and digested in the Prezi form, given its three-dimensional opportunities that could accommodate multiple media formats. This method of presentation was much more effective than traditional film or performance related formats, such as writing treatments or

production documents, and I have noticed that it has subsequently been adopted by many multimedia and transmedia projects. Kathryn Millard (2014) suggests that our understanding of what it is to write, is shifting and changing, and that more interesting or pertinent ways can be found to express our ideas that use images and sound in addition to text. Each presentation was discussed with a number of people (possible participants, Bellyfeel producers and fellow writers) to assess its impact and I eventually came to work with the [following format](#) which was used in the final play-out of the idea. Of course, things changed during the course of this play-out that altered the narrative further.

I realised that if my intention was to involve the audience in the creation of characters then my initial instinct to provide character sketches that were not fully developed was a good one rather than a problematic one, as suggested by the television-producer and this led eventually to those 'underdeveloped', 'two dimensional' characters being portrayed through applicant [artefacts](#). These proved to be a very useful way to engage audiences in the investigation of character and to contribute towards fleshing out character traits.

Given the negotiated aspect of the project, it was crucial to introduce myself to my potential participants so they could know about my previous work and understand my relationship to Northern Ireland. It would have been counterproductive to be an anonymous producer or faceless writer in this context. This led to the creation of a fictional production company known as 'The Eleven Productions' that housed all of the real producers and writers on the project: a place where people could discover who we were. This site presented [my work and a history of my activity](#) so that audiences could see who I was. This had the added benefit of allowing me to explain my research and show how audience contributions would add to its value. This mechanism was also used to explain who

would [benefit from the project](#) and that the project would be 'a not for profit production' that would be, should it go into production, communally owned. It also acted as a mechanism to gather [permissions and fulfil ethical requirements](#) for my research gathering.

In this way, the project became situated across three different websites: *Eleven Productions*, a website for the production company; *Red Branch Heroes*, a website that held information on the project and a locked website (a website that could only be accessed by judges rather than the general public); and the NING site that was used to house the judges' area. The production company also had a Facebook page that could be used to push out information. Each of these was a different point of entry to the project and could be used to send material to participants. I would have liked to develop further less obvious points of entry but finance did not allow for this. So, for example, I would have liked to have had a local cake shop make a controversial cake for a particular candidate and use that to gain local publicity and new members but as a small team of researchers we were keen to keep the project contained and easy to operate.

Having reassessed ideas and having formulated solutions to the problems encountered, I decided it was time to ask a selection of people who were either from Northern Ireland or with some connection to Northern Ireland what they felt they would like to see in terms of online films, television or interactive products. It was also important to find out what forms of technology people would be comfortable using or were currently familiar with. As a result, in September 2013 I sent out a [short questionnaire](#). A total of forty individuals answered the questionnaire ([summarised results are available](#)) and as such it could not be considered as a representative analysis relating to the desires/aspirations of the majority of Northern Irish people in relation to cultural production. However, the

survey does provide some interesting observations for the writer or maker of programme material. In the survey, people (with a fairly equal balance of people who identified themselves as coming from either the Loyalist or Nationalist community – although most did not define themselves in this way) talked about the sorts of programmes they would like to see and the ways in which they would prefer to experience them. The results tend to support a recent Communications Market Report by OFCOM (2013) that shows Northern Ireland has one of the highest take-ups of tablet ownership in the UK. This report also shows that social media continues to be popular, with 53% of Northern Ireland's population accessing Facebook, Twitter and other similar online services.^[1] Northern Ireland has a higher take up of pay television, with 66% of homes having paid for top-up services from Sky or Virgin Media. Although the major reason to set the project in Northern Ireland was related to the legacy of the Troubles, the levels of tablet ownership and smartphone usage suggested that Northern Ireland was a useful place to carry out an online experiment. We designed our websites to work primarily on mobile phones and tablets but sadly some of the participants reported problems with being able to access all of the information in this way. This could have been as a result of different types of phone or tablet but it could also have related to the availability or reliability of Internet access.

In addition, my survey also suggested dissatisfaction with the ways in which Northern Irish people have been portrayed in the media in Northern Ireland. Most participants answered the question about the limitations they saw in stories about Northern Ireland (only three abstained) and of those 37 who did answer it, 26 made reference to negative or limited portrayals of Northern Ireland. Media scholars such as Butler (1995) and Pettitt suggest that both fictional and factual media portrayals have played 'a major role in the maintenance and reshaping of

perceptions about the Troubles and to this extent they have performed a political function' (Pettitt, 2000, p. 320). There are conflicting views as to the political nature of these analyses. As Bairner demonstrates:

there are two rival schools of thought. The first of these has concentrated on what is regarded as the manipulation of the media by successive British and, to a lesser extent, Irish governments. [...] The second, rival, school of thought has emphasized the use made of the media by the perpetrators and supporters of paramilitary violence (Bairner in Aughey and Morrow, 1996, p. 247).

The respondents to my questionnaire were clearly aware of such debates and wanted stories that moved away from such political functions. They specified that they wanted comedies, thrillers, historical dramas, sitcoms and sci-fi. They wanted programmes that featured portrayals of hope and peace, diversity and different communities; and programmes that were based on modern and challenging stories. They wanted stories that featured the beauty of the Northern Irish countryside and that featured the people of the province and popular local activities. This desire is echoed in a fairly recent publication by Greg McLaughlin and Stephen Baker (2012) who suggest that

if we are to consider new, alternative visions of the kind of place we want Northern Ireland to be, then we need a vibrant, publicly engaged media to project them for us (2012, p. 297).

This distrust of the media expressed by participants confirmed my intention to use a reality television format as the basis for my project. As a writer I did not want to overlook these clearly expressed desires for a more public and positive affirmation. But I have not taken this to mean that my job as writer is to show a particular rose-tinted view of Northern Ireland or Northern Irish people, as

Heidemann suggests has been the case with the promotion of Belfast.^[2] My aim was to develop a system of decision-making that allowed for a very public negotiation to promote a new and publicly engaged media form. I was also reluctant to take on the sole responsibility of creating a new piece of work that would match the aspirations of my questionnaire sample. On the contrary, my real purpose should be to help people themselves explore ways in which Northern Ireland might be represented.

Although I spoke to a wide range of people in the run-up to the project, those people who took an active part are primarily from arts and community groups, or people known to these groups, or people who I know personally: in the main, students and co-workers and people from my past. From [such groups](#), I received a range of advice that can be summarized as follows:

- That I should target young people who would be more interested in this form of media.
- That I should work to primarily engage with audiences from urban areas who would be more open to my ideas than people from rural areas who they considered would not be open to the use of new technology.
- That it would be beneficial to engage with professional media practices rather than situate the project in a community context.

My findings suggest that most of this advice was not appropriate. [Such groups](#) also offered a wealth of local information and offered to assist me in any workshops or activities that I proposed to offer. I am aware that, in the context of Northern Ireland, such groups are often organized around territorial and sectarian lines, and so there is the necessity to be inclusive in deciding what these would be. The problem with arts and community groups was the perceived notion by many people in the community that they were the

representatives and, as such, were involved in mediating the experience. This second iteration of the project was significantly different to the first and offered suggestions for use rather than being purely a blueprint for production. It was more a background or a pre-text from which the story ideas could spring forth. This iteration was no longer a script but the [design](#) of a prototype that formed the basis of the eventual project known as *Red Branch Heroes*.

5.3 Third iteration – the prototype

Digital storytelling brings its own additional challenges to the project. Janet Murray (2012) suggests there are four properties or affordances to the digital medium, its encyclopaedic, spatial, procedural and participatory properties.^[3] Murray is describing the ability of computers to manage large amounts of information so that writers can tell stories from multiple vantage points, or offer links that will help build dense and complex worlds. She is also referring to the computer's ability to create environments that allow us to move through time and space, and urges us to marshal the computer's procedural properties to write rules that offer us an interpretation of the world. Finally, she suggests that it should be possible to capture a wide range of human behaviour. I searched for an approach that could include all these affordances along with the storytelling methods suggested by Jenkins and Gomez. Lance Weiler, talking about his own project, provides some explanation of the approach that I finally developed:

I'm thinking about narrative in a wider context. Within my work I'm fascinated by how emergent tech and shifts in media creation and consumption is disrupting the notion of story and to me this feels like an opportunity to shape collective narratives (an evolution of co-creation) while also exploring the

physicality of the narrative in terms of space time and context (Weiler, 2015, n.pag.).

Along with Bronwin Patrickson (2016), at the Storymaking conference in Liverpool I suggested that this statement describes what is essentially a process drama methodology. As in Lance Weiler's productions, the drama of *RBH* unfolds spontaneously in response to structured prompts that are encased within a gamified structure that is discourse-driven rather than plot-driven. This is because within such a structure the power relations between writer and reader can be acknowledged, discussed argued against and negotiated with the authors. The project encompasses the personal in that it encourages people to follow their instincts and to contribute, but it advocates a multi-perspective approach. The resulting work adopts a multi-layered approach that is readily accessible and is based on popular texts and offers episodic reflexive storytelling that requires a minimal degree of performance.

The building of the project was carried out in the following way.

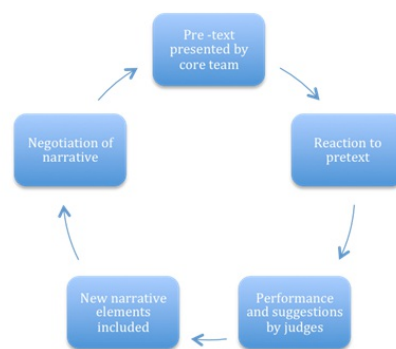


Figure 5 – Story development cycle

The game-like construction introduced a procedural element to the project helping divide people into groups which then undertook tasks so that the project would survive; it was a game that participants were encouraged to test and to comment on, and to promote or sabotage as they saw fit. The agency that was accorded to participants was

tested via the developing profiles for characters and the way in which the storyline took new twists and turns as it was played out. One example of how the story changed in relation to judges' suggestions was when the judges decided that Sky the presenter would make the best hero even though she wasn't an applicant. In a recent PhD submission, Eric Newsom (2013) senses

that the type of storytelling that happens in that [digital] place recalls oral traditional, not mass media, models. By looking at three qualities of traditional storytelling – variability, performance, and collectivity – I demonstrate that the relationship between author, text, and audience is becoming more fluid and dynamic (Newsom, 2013, p. 1).

Such oral traditions have been used to further support the process-drama and gamification methods used in this project by the decision to use a chat interface (NING) for communication and to adopt a call and response feedback loop between the presenter, Sky, who would ask a question and the judges who would then debate and chat about each question in turn. This practice provided performance opportunities for the judges, who acted collectively to come to decisions, and were able to make suggestions and diversions to any story pre-text suggested. The prototype testing can be seen in the [video of its execution](#) and in the [annotated treatment](#) that describes the action that took place.

6. Results and Findings

[1] Base: Adults aged 16+ who use the internet at home or elsewhere (n= 376 Northern Ireland 2013)

[2] She gives the example of posters that feature a heart shaped B and a website that encourages us to 'Like it, pin it, tweet it and share it' but where Northern Ireland's conflictual past remains conspicuously absent.

[3] 'A concept used in the field of human computer interaction to describe the functional properties of objects or environments – the properties that allow particular uses. For example, a blackboard affords writing and erasing, a low, flat, supported surface 30 inches square affords sitting'. The term was first used by James J. Gibson ("A Theory of Affordances" 1977) to mean the "action possibilities" of a material object in relationship to a potential user, and was adopted by Donald Norman in *The Design of Everyday Things* where it is defined as "the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used."

(Murray, n.d.)

RED BRANCH HEROES – WRITING WITH MY
AUDIENCES

ANNA MARIA EWA ZALUCZKOWSKA



Red Branch Heroes - Writing With My Audiences

- 6. Results and Findings

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The practice of writing for a particular transmedia project has helped inform my research into writing for transmedia generally as has the experience of taking part in it (Nelson 2013). As such, the findings provide a complex analysis of results relating to the writing practices undertaken, the effective participation of audiences, the methods that have promoted engagement and the value of such work in a post-conflict context. These results and findings help me answer the questions that have been posed at the start of this thesis. I have used both quantitative and qualitative methods of research. The quantitative data originates from online analytics and questionnaires. The qualitative data comes from interviews and questionnaires but here the evidence presented is anecdotal and experiential and requires an analysis that is related to practice and associated theoretical concerns.

6.1 Quantitative findings

From the analysis of the NING software used for the online conversation and [Google analytics](#) we can see that 2,242 people came to the *RBH* website with the intention of viewing the project. We introduced a questionnaire at the threshold of the project so that we could collect data on participants. This significantly deterred large numbers of players; 82.73% of those people moved swiftly on to something else and did not sign up, despite the incentives we offered to take part (win £100). While not uncommon for web-browsing this also

revealed that most viewers/players were reluctant to overcome the questionnaire threshold. In other words, only those dedicated to the project enlisted, thus making them suitable prototype testers.

If we look at the Google analytics for the Judges' site, we can see a much higher rate of usage and engagement. Forty people joined the project over the space of a month, with a few coming to it towards the end of its run. Of those forty who signed up twenty-seven were over thirty years of age and thirteen were under thirty years of age. Twenty-two were female and eighteen were male. The majority of these were from large cities, such as Belfast or Derry, but a surprising (we had been advised by many community groups that only urban dwellers would be likely to become involved) number were from small towns and country areas. The information on this is hard to ascertain, as I did not ask any questions about where people were living. However, answers to other questions often indicate where people were from. Very few identified themselves as religious but, of those that did, five were from a Catholic background and three were from a Protestant background. Twenty were born and bred or have lived in Northern Ireland most of their lives while six had no connection to the place and fourteen had tangential connections, such as being married to someone from there. In online projects that are not connected to large and popular franchises this number can be considered to be a healthy sample. Lance Weiler has used groups of twelve participants to test his Sherlock prototype (2015) and asserts that small groups of five to six people are ideal for granting agency. More importantly for me, it was a sample that represented a wide range of people: male and female; from different age groups; from migrant communities (a small number were of Asian, Turkish and Polish origin); employed and unemployed; and people who related to Northern Ireland in various ways (nationalist, loyalist, or preferred not to comment, politically involved). Of those forty people, ten

people contributed regular posts although there was a core group of about six who were constantly engaged. Perhaps it is important to detail here what is often referred to as the 1:9:90 Rule where out of every 100 users of the internet, only 10% will interact with it, while the other 90% will simply view the material (McConnell & Huba, 2006). Of those 10%, only 1% is likely to be a content creator. Charles Arthur argues that 'you shouldn't expect too much online. Certainly, to echo *Field of Dreams*, if you build it, they will come. The trouble, as in real life, is finding the builders' (Arthur, 2006, n.pag.). This project found the builders in these ten people, meaning 25% of the test group were prepared to become the builders and, of those people the majority were over forty years of age; a real surprise! A further important discovery is that those builders were more likely to promote and enliven the project for those who are viewing. Young people did participate but they tended to engage with activities such as voting rather than by making comments on the chat threads of the project. I can only guess at why this was the case as none of the young people were willing to share their experiences, but I would guess that confidence and experience played a large part in those who were prepared to comment. The reason for so many of the contributions coming from the over forties age group was also probably due to some of the participants being people I knew, and the discussion format being more comfortable for that age group.

Further analysis shows that 2,008 visits were made to the site, although many of these were repeat visits. The bounce rate was 66.27%, suggesting that over 34% were engaging on a regular basis. These users were accessing a greater number of pages – 3.66 per session – and spending an average of 3.47 minutes at the site. For an online project this represents a very good engagement rate. FanBridge Blog (2015) suggests that Facebook engagement rates are in the realm of 0.5 -1% while Instagram rates are closer to 3 – 6%, with email still offering the highest with an

engagement rate of 20%. *RBH* offered a 34% engagement rate which at some points peaked at a 100% participation rate. Also, over this period there was a higher engagement rate than was expected with [The Eleven Production](#) site. 2,463 users visited more than one page (1.48 pages) with a bounce rate of 89.30% and staying for around 22 seconds. It was never expected that people would take an interest in this site given that it was seen as a gateway resource for information and information distribution rather than engagement purposes. This suggests that people were indeed quickly checking us out and that this was an important aspect of our consultation process.

Of those 34% who made up the regular contributors, 60% of those were able to make in-depth responses to follow up [questionnaires](#) and [telephone conversations](#) or Skype interviews about the project. It is from these responses, and others gained from the personnel who worked on the project, that the following evaluations have been made.

6.2 Qualitative findings

Janet Murray, in *Inventing the Medium* (2012), suggests that creating for digital media is a design task where one is designing something for an evolving medium. While there are Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, webisodes, games and feedback opportunities, all of which are associated with new films and television dramas that create audience experiences, these practices are still emerging. As such they remain messy or haphazard, are often limited and cannot always be described as interactive in the way that I have previously defined this term. Similarly, in *RBH* I have had to invent some of the building blocks of a design in order to create a successful product in this new medium. I have taken note of many previous and current projects in relation to constructing this project. As Dowd et al. suggest,

what producers and creatives can do is give themselves a better chance to develop, produce and manage a property in a way that is informed by the past successes, by the present culture and by emerging technologies. That's the real challenge of transmedia storytelling; it's like juggling chainsaws, really exciting but really dangerous (2013, p. 283).

To do this, I have had to set aside my usual writing practices and assumptions (which have been for screenplays, theatre and short film) in order to engage with my potential audience. But more than that because, in the end, my desire is not to create any story, but to create a good story; this means I needed to introduce new possibilities to my audiences and ways to challenge their assumptions of what they may expect of screened drama.^[1] It is true that many of my participants found the form confusing and not easy to access from their telephones at all times but the gamified content helped participants to understand what was required of the form and the use of the reality television format made the project accessible. Not all transmedia producers and writers agree that gamification helps promote story. As Andrea Philips suggests in an interview:

when you're talking about a story, a narrative experience, then overlaying a game interface on top of that distracts from the experience. It breaks your flow and disrupts your suspension of disbelief (Phillips, 2012)

We did not find this in our prototype, and I suggest that this is due to laying a very loose story structure over the project and asking our participants to decide its direction. The story complicated the narrative but did not distract from it although at times the judges chose to ignore it and engage with one of their own. From time to time we injected story pre-texts to see if the judges would pick them up; one

such example was the introduction of another character, Media Prodigy. However, the judges ignored this character for quite some time until his actions resulted in something they didn't agree with.

Performance opportunities crucial to the transmedia form were generated through the technique of creating judges. People adopted differing performance-related identities; some played themselves whilst others adopted a persona:

I thought it was some sort of game...I don't go online and I don't get involved in those kind of things and so I had no idea what to expect ... I thought I had to be myself but disguise my name.

The judges were given a joint pre-text/ task to explore: to pick a hero for Northern Ireland. Related activities demanded collaboration and promoted collectivity: these took the form of talking to other judges about the candidates, voting and later interviewing candidates. These activities were building blocks that the audience used to influence the design and at times take over editorial content of the project. This participation can be seen in the video of the discussion thread. The discussion forum shows how judges began to question the applicants and how they began to ask each other what would make a good hero. Such activities helped promote greater collectivity and variability. But the contributions had a more pressing aim in that I used their discussions and ideas and views to develop the character profiles. Once we had enough material to suggest a character, these were then given to actors to cast. Each actor improvised around the suggested attributes providing further character insights and depth. Only one participant suggested that he thought these people were actors rather than real people.

RBH and the proposed, subsequent *The Eleven* are, therefore elements within a process; the feedback loops created in the gamified story

were a means of arriving at a narrative that will form the basis of an on-going negotiated online web series. My role as a leader has been to bring together the various and disparate elements and to fashion these through a process of orchestration. Such an approach to storytelling is contrary to current perceived wisdom on transmedia where Dowd et al. maintain:

when dealing with sprawling transmedia storytelling properties, continuity, canon and consistency are all vitally important, and failure to acknowledge and respect each of them can lead to disaster (Dowd et al., 2013, p. 69).

But, as the Google analytics, questionnaires and interviews show, there was no loss in the number of players due to a lack of an established franchise or the interruptions in story due to its improvised nature. On the contrary, the prototype has been an engaging experience for the participants. One participant commented that she

was curious to see what was happening but I'm not someone who gets involved on Facebook or Twitter. Well I did like the videos, that made me feel more compelled. I was never sure what the end game was and what the hero was supposed to do. Voting was engaging for me and having a personal connection to something was important so having you behind it was important.

Some participants enjoyed finding out about the fifteen initial candidates – trying to guess from minimal information – while for others the discussion forum was the most engaging aspect:

flat out the forums. I enjoyed listening to the comments of other people and listening to those comments. The key thing for me was engaging with a group of people that I didn't necessarily know and finding that I could have a dialogue

with them and feeling confident in what I had to say. We ended up judging the judges as much as the candidates.

It was when the groups were split into teams that fragmentation occurred and people later complained about being separated from people they had grown to like. Those who were assigned to Leo's group were the most active and engaged:

I thought it was a game ...but I had no idea what to expect. I thought it was quite interesting when Leo revealed his dubious past. I found the thing about the way people present themselves interesting – I was surprised I chose Leo but he seemed more real.

Such engagement was even more surprising as it came from people who suggested that they didn't usually get involved in such projects or spend much time online. This engagement however tailed off towards the end of the project, largely due to our inexperience as orchestrators. Our lack of clarity in how we should take the story forward could have been avoided if we had in place a system that could better respond to material that was being suggested. By dividing a small close-knit contributing team into smaller subgroups we destroyed the impetus we had created and the judges became much more aware of the artifice of the project.

Having said that, participants were not, on the whole, too aware of the storylines being played out or the disrupters we used to generate more story and contributions. The judges knew this was not 'real' and that all characters were constructed in a fictional environment but they seemed willing to overlook this as they immersed themselves in the judging process. People believed in the company and the people working for it. They approved of our occasional interventions although they didn't always agree with them. They seemed to feel they were in safe hands. They often believed in the dilemmas

experienced by the fledgling production company. For example, many thought that there was interest from broadcasters to fund the development of the idea as a possible franchise.

I really didn't pick up on any of the story. I thought that we were identifying characters to be in a soap or reality television show and that the other people online were participants like me, except Sky who was clearly a co-ordinator.

I guessed when Media Prodigy started the campaign for Sky as Hero that this was probably a set-up. His outbursts added a taste of spice. I couldn't work out whether Sky was a judge or a spokesman for Eleven Productions.

This suggests that this mix of fact and fiction is indeed highly immersive but this also places a great burden of responsibility with the producers/orchestrators to ensure ethical practice is carried out. In a larger franchise production it could be important to keep reminding contributors that the content is a mix of fact and fiction.

Kathryn Millard (2014) suggests that there is a need to acquire multiple literacies for the digital age and urges us to use the innovative writing practices of writer/directors who mix fact and fiction in their work. She suggests these are the practices of recording, re-enactment and remixing. For some of our judges this didn't really work:

I think that the on-line forum can really work but it takes a lot more time for people like me to feel comfortable with it and engage. I think the goals, timescales and purpose of the project would need to be clearer for me.

The way the project slipped between drama and documentary in its style and its storytelling methods was engaging but could

also be confusing to some participants and if the project was to be scaled up careful consideration would have to be given to the audiences targeted. Performance and enactment was not for everyone although people were fairly happy to watch and vote and for some this was enough:

Not very [involved], I only tend to get involved in forums if I have something invested or knowledge to bring. Arguing with others etc. Someone had a little go at me on the forum, prompting a reply.

If *Red Branch Heroes* were to be further developed into *The Eleven* then greater use of re-enactment would be useful. The role of orchestrators mediates against any slide into abuse that Internet and social media chains can fall into. The production team used interventions to help participants navigate through difficult issues such as infidelity, abortion and child abduction and we were surprised by their humanity and understanding. When a difficult backstory was released about each applicant rather than criticise, the judges attempted to empathise with their characters. They also 'voiced' their concerns about character actions but wanted these portrayed in a sympathetic light. Our intervention to show how bad practice would not be acceptable, was derided by the judges, but also had the effect of making the judges feel safe about expressing their views. As one participant observed 'I enjoyed the banter from several of the other judges, and the gradual unveiling of the various potential heroes.'

We found that the following key, newly-discovered practical attributes of transmedia from this trial were:

1. When auditioning the actors ask for permission to use audition material: the improvisation process begins at the very start of production planning.
2. Actors/writers/producers can generate story material at low cost and this material

- is useful to the dramatic storylines.
3. Bottom up crafting promotes engagement and participation.
 4. The relationship between the use of reality and fiction needs further research but its impact on immersion is crucial to the form.
 5. Gamification of narrative promotes a much more immersive experience across formats.
 6. Methods of process drama are a particularly effective approach to storytelling for transmedia.
 7. Common ownership promotes participation.
 8. Non-linear loosely plotted narratives do not deter people.

We also found the following key, newly-discovered writing attributes of interactive transmedia:

1. Prototype design is more effective than writing a script or a treatment. Such designs should form the basis for negotiation with audiences.
2. Create pretexts rather than fully formed scripts to promote audience participation.
3. Chose technology carefully especially if you are working to a limited budget. Using already available technology platforms and apps can have the additional advantage of engaging people in familiar ways.
4. Think about the phone as the main vehicle of transmission.
5. Reveal yourself as a writer and let audiences know who you are so they are aware who they are negotiating with.
6. Participants as performers rather than as writers.
7. Work with participants in small groups of five to twelve.
8. The author as orchestrator negotiating narratives.
9. Create a safe place to play.
10. Don't underestimate the place that text can still play in the process of transmedia writing.

McTaggart (1997) highlights the distinction that needs to be made between involvement and participation, as does Alison Jeffers (2016) when writing about participation in community plays in Belfast. She is particularly keen to raise the issue of authority and power: 'The value of thinking about authority is that it allows us to identify and examine different types of power and the role of knowledge and relationships in developing these' (Harpin and Nicholson, 2016, p. 218). My aims therefore go beyond the idea of 'widening participation' for audiences and are related to ideas of 'cultural democracy' (Kelly, Locke and Merkel, 1986, n.pag.) that emphasise a shift in power between artist/author and participant (Webster and Buglass, 2005, p. 21). The participants of *Red Branch Heroes* had real ownership over what was created in the project.

This form of writing and participation also acknowledges, as Helen Freshwater suggests in *Theatre and Audiences* (2009), that 'participation can be profoundly disturbing; that it may involve making ourselves vulnerable as we open ourselves to unexpected experiences and outcomes' (Freshwater, 2008, p. 76). This places great ethical responsibilities in the hands of the producers. However, in *RBH* the writers and actors were as vulnerable as the audiences who participated as we were just as subject to those unexpected experiences and outcomes. Freshwater further suggests in a subsequent article relating to Tim Crouch's play *The Author* (2009) that:

despite my scepticism about some of the claims made about the liberating effects of participatory performance, I also think that there are hopeful signs that contemporary theatre is now providing opportunities for more meaningful forms of audience participation (Freshwater, 2011, p. 409).

I think the same sentiments apply to interactive transmedia. Much of what has

been promised by producers has not really involved meaningful participation or interaction. In *RBH*, while the production personnel are in possession of a greater control and understanding of the processes at play, they are in a similar position to the audience members in that they were

accepting that genuine participation has risks as well as potentials: that it involves vulnerability on the part of the performers and participants, as both parties open themselves up to unexpected experiences and outcomes (Freshwater, 2011, p. 409).

Setting that task in a polarized society further complicates that process and a discourse was necessary in order to establish how this task was to be undertaken. Some judges wanted more direction in this task:

I think the constituency has to be properly engaged with the story/context/issues.

and

the phase where we were supposed to 'help our chosen hero to develop their story' was confusing. I didn't really know what we were supposed to do.

However, at times this lack of involvement on the part of the orchestrators provoked the judges to fill the gaps and move the story along and make it their own. While the discussion about Northern Ireland on the site was low-level and very tentative the eventual successful characters seem to embody the negotiated characteristics of that discussion. Leo, initially an unpopular choice of hero, became a complex character to whom people could relate and who was able to overcome his rather dubious past to become the overall hero. I was surprised by this outcome, especially as the majority of participants were woman over thirty years of age and Leo was

not a character that I would have thought that they would have empathy for.

I received very little feedback on how this type of project could be 'useful' in the context of Northern Ireland. This, in part, was due to the poor way the question was framed but on the whole all participants avoided answering it and some even deleted it from their forms. It is difficult to speculate why this would be except to suppose that people did not want to think about the implications of what they were doing and how it could be used to imagine or reimagine the situation in Northern Ireland. Perhaps this is due to the ways in which film and television have been used in relation to the Troubles. Lance Pettitt's (2000) research into the drama documentary suggests, that although such films are based on journalistic research they use the conventions of fiction films to tell their stories and mediate the real world. Using the Reality format has had a similar effect. People have felt more able to speak in the fictional environment. Jimmy McGovern's film, *Sunday* (2003), makes no attempt to mimic the style of documentary and is clearly presented as a fictionalized version. Nonetheless, it is based on the stories and talks that he had with many people and in some aspects is the culmination of such activity. He mediates the truth of what has happened through a story he creates himself. As Sarah Edge suggests, he sees his role as a crusader; 'A rule I stick to: you don't write drama docs to further your career: you write them because the victims or their families have asked you to write them' (McGovern, 2004, quoted in Edge, 2009, p. 187). This is not dissimilar to the process that I am proposing here, except that my approach goes one step further and asks that the victims and families not only provide the stories but respond to the mediated truth produced in a public forum. Although more drama than documentary, the programme asks the audience to play with these concepts. As Sarah Edge suggests 'the docudrama is an especially powerful genre in which the signs of realism and fiction have become conflated' (2009, p. 185). The work of

RBH not only conflates the real and the fictional world to represent the current climate of Northern Ireland, but by also utilises the more contested forms of semi-real or semi-fake worlds in Reality television, a genre usually associated with attributing derogatory characteristics to ordinary working people. In this instance, the intention was to use the genre conventions for more positive ends. The voyeuristic elements associated with Reality television are brought to bear on a study to elect a contemporary hero and were used to motivate investigative approaches to story design. This meant ordinary people could inhabit a world of their own making and attribute the types of characteristics to their creations as they saw fit. In short, I wasn't creating an educational project with hidden positive messages that could be discovered by participants and applied to their lives but asking people what was important to their lives as we played a story game that would embody these ideas. As Christine Gledhill suggests, media representations

enable us to rethink the real and representation in a way which avoids the model of a fixed reality or fixed sets of codes for representing it. [...] Rather, media forms and representations constitute major sites for conflict and negotiation, a central goal of which is the definition of what is to be taken as 'real' (quoted in Edge, 2009, p. 185)

In this way, we can reimagine what it means to be Northern Irish while building an entertaining environment. It would have helped the project considerably if it had been produced in Northern Ireland. Although no one was particularly aware that it was produced elsewhere, a sense of belonging to Northern Ireland would have helped promote its purposes. Some groups offered to host the project in their workspaces but sadly this proved to be unfeasible in the end. If I were to run this project again I would approach this consultation in a different way. Instead of working with community/arts groups I would

look for other places where people congregate around activities, such as caravan clubs, hobbyist groups, sports groups and such like – in other words, places where people congregate around a shared activity and try to build my project around their interests. Had we been able to house the project within a neutral but local environment then I suspect people would have felt more confident in being able to take part. Having said that, its lack of affinity with any particular community or place could have been the very thing that allowed people to get involved.

7. Critical Refections and Interpretations

[1] There is an assumption by some that if one is to involve non-writers in the creation of a story that the resulting story will not have quality at its heart – rather that it will forsake quality for the sake of participation. I wish to clarify here that this has not be the case with this production.

RED BRANCH HEROES – WRITING WITH MY
AUDIENCES

ANNA MARIA EWA ZALUCZKOWSKA



- 7. Critical Reflections and Interpretations ▼

7. Critical Reflections and Interpretations

7.1 Research questions revisited

Over the course of writing this exegesis it has become clear that although the research questions – *what is the role of the writer in transmedia productions? and can transmedia offer new opportunities to writers working in post-conflict societies?* – have remained the focus of the research, the investigation has been sharpened so that the enquiry has now become more succinct. Rather than the discoveries being related to writing for transmedia in general, the focus of this thesis is more related to the discoveries in writing for immersive, interactive transmedia web-series. The implications of these writing discoveries when writing for post-conflict societies have also been considered with particular attention being paid to the control and participation offered to audiences in online drama productions.

7.2 Reflections on transmedia and web-series

As has been demonstrated transmedia production is a relatively new practice, one that has been defined by the Producer's Guild of America in 2012 as a production that 'must consist of three or more narrative storylines existing within the same fictional universe' (PGA 2012). Many authors have already written transmedia narratives and books by writers such as Phillips (2012), Handler Millar (2014) and Bernardo (2011) suggest new writing strategies. But there is still much to discover

particularly in relation to the interactive nature of the format. Much of what is currently produced does not allow the audience to affect the narrative or engage in the story construction of such productions. A recent BBC (2017) list of immersive productions <http://www.bbc.co.uk/taster/> shows us examples where audiences are able to input pieces of information, make choices about what they watch and when, but not really interact or determine the shape of any of the stories. In this new environment, as Kathryn Millard suggests,

studios increasingly purchase not scripts, but intellectual property in the form of television series, comics, books, games, blogs, graphic novels and toys.... In this environment, a single high-profile author is seen as a guarantee of quality across the various elements of a transmedia project.
(Millard 2014, p179)

Millard goes on to suggest that 'This method of writing and producing scripts is unsustainable' (Millard, 2014, p. 180) and that new methods will have to be unearthed to meet these new needs. This thesis unearths new methods of writing and production that meet the needs of writing across platforms with audiences' active participation.

Scolari and Ibrus point out, in relation to the pioneering work of Henry Jenkins and other authors on transmedia:

Our analyses of transmedia practices should therefore take a new step [...] toward the analyses of historical and social circumstances that either enable or limit specific new practices, relationships, settings, and forms (2104, p. 2193).

With this in mind, I have investigated *RBH*, not just in relation to industry practice and the creative opportunities that it offers, but also to what it means to use such techniques in a

post-conflict society.

Storytelling is a way for people to understand their world and to represent it; to take it apart, and to reconstruct it (Berger, 1979; Zipes, 2011). Other scholars have gone further to suggest that stories have a broader effect and can transform societies (Arendt, (1958); McGonigal, (2011); Gomez, (2012). Le Hunte and Golembiewski suggest in their abstract that

humans place themselves in stories, as both observer and participant, to create a 'neural balance' or sweet spot that allows them to be immersed in a story without being entirely threatened by it – and this involvement in story leads to the formation of empathy – an empathy that is integral to forging a future humanity. It is through empathy, we argue, that stories have the power to save us (2014, p. 1).

While I do not maintain that storytelling in Northern Ireland has the power to radically change the society or to save it, it is my contention that transmedia practices offer us a way to reimagine our world together through old and new tales, and to engage in jointly telling these tales in new immersive ways that help us learn and understand our hopes and aspirations for the future. The strange mix of fact and fiction employed on this project has indeed promoted that immersion, so that, as Hunte and Golembiewski say, 'But here's what's interesting: we don't only learn from 'truth' that is verifiable. We learn equally, and potentially even more, from fiction' (2014, p. 3).

Working with people to develop and test a prototype meant that PAR methodology proved to be the most appropriate, as at all levels of this project participants were asked to reflect and evaluate. As Freire suggests, 'To be a good [action researcher] means above all to have faith in people; to believe in the

possibility that they can create and change things' (1971, p. 62). Providing a safe environment for people to imagine, reflect and explore their world can lead to change and can

create circumstances in which people can search together collaboratively for more comprehensible, true, authentic, and morally right and appropriate ways of understanding and acting in the world (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 578).

However, as I argue in relation to Habermas, the form of the project and its associated structure is not the aspect that necessarily promotes discourse and democratic participation. Instead, it is the intention of the author and the context within which the author and reader find themselves that is key to the success of the project. The liminality of both the form and the political situation in Northern Ireland and the centrality given to the author's intentions to provoke and unearth some of the instrumental rationalities associated with media practice in Northern Ireland, were all central to creating a productive discourse on power and ownership:

We can have (wonderful irony) extreme-right-wing discussion forums [...] But at the same time, these forums are highly exclusionary at the level of rhetoric and access, which pushes them outside the realm of the democratic (Carpentier, 2014, p. 1139)

This thesis suggests that democratic practices are best served by the concept of a negotiated narrative. The term implies that the work has been a negotiation between collaborators and makers and is a negotiation between audience and authors. The term suggests that the narrative produced as a result of such negotiations is multi-layered and polymorphic and that the stories produced shapeshift across different platforms. It also suggests that [ethical considerations](#) have been given due

thought in the construction and development of the project and have been publicly debated.

Transmedia offers creators undeniable creative and artistic possibilities (Rosenthal 2011). The many avenues of storytelling that can be developed across a range of ever increasing digital platforms demands ever more co-ordination and the understanding of how nuances can be explored. As a result, stories need to be rich and complex: as Miller suggests, transmedia storytelling has a 'unique ability [...] to import a rich dimensionality to a property and to tell a story in a deeper and more lifelike, immersive way than could be possible via a single medium' (2008, p. 153). While I accept that the concept of immersion is a contentious one, deeper immersion demands the need for collaboration between professionals trained in very different forms and includes audience suggestions that imply that creators have a constant flow of feedback on the programme they are making. At times, these various tensions can be problematic for the author, as all participants need to be considered and decisions weighed up before authorial decisions are made. As Sousa et al. warn:

the author's personal creative effort might be over-shadowed and restrained by the public participation, [...] Questions of authorship in this new age are very pungent and there is still very little conversation on the matter, mostly, possibly, because the answers are extremely complex and hard to devise with any certainty. (2016, p. 15)

They suggest that these new relationships between organisations, creatives and the public need to better understand how the form works so that

the shared participation and the convergence of efforts between all the partakers in the process may be a way to create a better, more informed, skilled, participative, equalitarian and

Rather than suggest this is a means to change society, I would suggest that shared participation and study by all users is also a way to create a more informed, participative and creative project.

RBH worked with a core group of media producers who had experience of, and an interest in, working in the transmedia form. Bellyfeel Productions were aware of the need to work experimentally and across traditional skill boundaries. As such, all parties were open to new ways of working and had skills that crossed the boundaries of producing, directing and writing. The team also had a little experience of performing online which helped with the improvisatory nature of the project although none had traditional acting or performing skills. This perhaps shows in the production values of the work. The central character and unreliable narrator, Sky, was not an actor and her ability to perform in the ways that were required was limited. We chose her over an actor because she had an understanding of transmedia and its practices but she still felt like a

puppet master who was not in full control of what was happening, there were times when I did get it but there were times when I was a bit lost. At times I thought that Krish [producer] had set me up and there would be some sort of twist that comes back on me (Interview 2015).

To try to overcome such issues and problems we deployed daily Skype meetings, group phone calls to plan and agree progress and contributions along with a multiple flowchart of scripted work for performance. These plans suggested that we had overcome problems of communication but in such a fast-moving environment it would have been more effective if we could all have been in one physical space for some of the production experience.

However, due to the more improvisational elements of the project, where each contribution was considered and debated on a daily basis, there was less concern about issues of ownership and authorship. It seemed clear to people that I as author/ orchestrator would have any final say in relation to story elements and how they were to be played out although that contribution would have to be negotiated with all concerned. It was also clear that Krishna Stott and Lee Robinson, as the producer/directors, could influence these in relation to the audience experience. The audience clearly understood that they were involved in the content of the story but were not responsible for ensuring its delivery. The audience suggested, asked, interrogated, made decisions and changed direction of the stories but we as the production team had to make their wishes happen. The same process applied to the actors who made their own contributions but had to do so within a context of audience suggestion and producer involvement. As producer/writers we did not always do as instructed by our audiences but added our own ideas into this process; sometimes dropping in controversial storylines to see what audiences would do. In this way the process was an ongoing negotiation. We did this because, although audience suggestions were very useful to the writing process, they did not always have storytelling as their priority. It is crucial that such negotiations have to be visible so that the audience is aware of what is happening. Devising ways to make negotiations open and obvious while at the same time providing a storytelling experience is a big challenge for this form of interactive transmedia production. Our way of doing this was to build them into a game/story. Therefore, an understanding of games and design is as important to this type of programme-making as is an understanding of how film is made, and an appreciation of social media and new applications is as important as a broad approach to storytelling in all its forms. Flexibility is the key ingredient: 'No, you cannot plan everything. And the

planning of production will change, even if you set it up in detail,' says Esther Lim (2012) Executive Director of Digital Experience at George P. Johnson, a global experience marketing agency. This was very much the case on *RBH*. Although, currently, cross skill practice is in evidence in documentary and journalistic practice and in some forms of experimental and independent filmmaking, it has yet to be adopted wholeheartedly by fictional film and television production. This has implications for writers who want to work in this medium. As Richard Davis from Bellyfeel has suggested in their blog:

Transmedia writers need a basic knowledge of game and UX [user experience] design, social and interaction, and will no doubt have to contribute content to each of these areas at various stages of the writing process (Davis 2013).

Any member of the production team or audience can make story decisions without losing quality or coherence, as long as such decisions are negotiated through a central production team. This negotiation had to appear seamless and unobtrusive so as not to break the story drive, and we achieved this by appearing in the drama ourselves. As such, the production team were not supervising the project so much as engaged in combining and orchestrating the efforts of many contributors, in real time as part of the project, into a mutually agreed and convincing story. Jeff Gomez (2013), like Tom Dowd et al., maintains that:

It is imperative that the management of the transmedia property is handled by a single individual or a group of individuals who are in sync with the universe and the franchise goals of the property (2014, p. 256).

It is true that we were a small group of individuals, all with the same vision but we did not have a unified universe or franchise.

However, the lack of author or producer intervention did not spell disaster for this particular production; in fact, it was beneficial to the storytelling elements. When Sky mistakenly gave herself a wrong name in a broadcast, the judges began to speculate about her identity and we were able to use this to build more of a conspiracy feel to the storyline.

It could be argued that such a practice is easier to organise and deal with in small groups rather than in a large and wide-ranging franchise, but I would argue that the same practices could be maintained if the story-making groups are kept to a small size and each contributes to the larger whole. Large-scale stories such as the *Dr Who* franchise have been able to continue telling *Dr Who* stories without a fracture in the narrative and without any coordination, even though the BBC was no longer interested in pursuing the franchise. These stories have become part of the storyworld of the franchise: 'The fans, writers, and actors behind the series' popularity all share a voice in explaining how and why the Doctor is an important icon in popular culture' (Porter, 2012, p. 1). Ideas about control, vertical responsibility, continuity and variability have been somewhat overstated by those who advise about and engage in transmedia production.

The other elements that Gomez, Jenkins and Dowd have suggested are essential to transmedia production have all been borne out and supported by our research project. These can be summarised thus:

1. The cross-platform element should be planned for early on in the project.
2. The project should take place across more than three platforms.
3. Each platform should introduce the audience to new elements of the story and expand the world.
4. It is important that the story can spread across social networks.
5. Subjectivity is achieved by the characters

- taking on real life personas.
6. A serial structure is required.
 7. There should be many performance opportunities for audiences.

There are very clear indications from the research project that engaging with audiences can have very positive benefits for producers and audiences alike. The audience felt connected and engaged, surprised by new ideas and able to articulate its views.

Producers, nervous, at first, of the unpredictability of the production process entailed, were excited by the ways in which the stories developed and by the opening up of further possibilities.

7.3 Reflections on interactivity and immersion

Following his experimental collaborative project, *Sherlock Holmes & the Internet of Things*, something that he terms a decentralised MOOC (Massive online/offline collaboration), Lance Weiler identifies four emergent design principles for collaborative projects: trace, agency, theme and social movement. In *RBH*, we also found the same principles applied and discovered these at around the same time and in a similar way. For us, it was important for our audiences to be able to see or sense their contributions to what was being created, and, while our judges were not always aware that their contributions were being fed back to them, both we, and they, could trace that recognition through the choices being made. The conceit of selecting a hero for a new Northern Ireland ensured everyone was able to participate as they already had some experience of what Northern Ireland was and ideas about what it should become. In this way the theme was constantly being debated and was clear to all. Social movement was orchestrated through small moments of activity online where people had to work together to make something happen. Like Weiler we also found that

working in small groups of five to six people best facilitated this form of collaborative experience:

Engagement levels and most importantly the FUN factor greatly increased as we relinquished control and let those formerly known as the “audience” become collaborators with us (Weiler, 2015).

Talking about Weiler’s work, Bronwin Patrickson suggests that ‘the best practice principles imply this sort of event is not simply storytelling – but a social, playful, skilful drama with its own developing distinct poetics’ (2016, n.pag.). Likewise, *RBH* created an immersive context that was discursive and where personal contribution was valued within multi-perspectival views. This participation was easy to access, encouraged people to challenge their views, and required minimal performance skills. In these ways we were able to work together to create a meaningful story that was negotiated through the process of production. The audiences who were particularly immersed and performed most fully were the older audiences (over forty). Possibly because of that, their contributions were more text-based, suggesting that while writers may be moving from text to using images to tell stories there is still a very strong place for text-based work.

Immersion and interactivity as concepts suggest very different things. Immersion is not necessarily confined to digital technologies. Immersion in story-telling has been evident throughout writing history, but what is important to note here is what practices promote immersion in online projects. Providing an opportunity to interact is certainly one of those practices in that once a person has invested in the idea and contributed to it, the idea becomes harder to turn off or leave:

Audiences today are assuming the role

they had before the advent of mass media in the 19th century: They are becoming active participants in the storytelling process rather than passive consumers (Rose 2015, p. 10).

However, social engagement is not enough if it does not offer something deeper, some way to merge identity into something larger. In *RBH* the audience becomes a judge and not only joins the story, creates the story but becomes part of what it means to decide what a country needs or desires for its future success. This is not just a simulated experience as decisions impact on the world that is being created in the story.

It is, therefore, important to note that in immersive or interactive transmedia, the writer's role is changing to involve expanded literacies related to image, sound, performance and text, and this change demands new work practices that necessitate new ways to engage and respond to audiences who want to belong to the worlds we are creating. To be a writer in this context is to be multimodal in approach, to embrace suggestion, to think on ones' feet and to be able to synthesise a complex range of suggestions into an on-going narrative. This requires not just writing skills that cross different media but performance skills. The performance skills needed are the ability to embody characters and the ability to improvise and orchestrate a wide body of contribution.

The challenge for writers of transmedia is to find ways to engage and offer audiences agency, but – more importantly – if we are to transpose this into the world of post conflict societies, this challenge becomes even more pertinent. How can the fantasy created not only survive and thrive, but also play a role in reality? When the storytelling spell is broken, the audience will snap back into reality. How will the storytelling experience impact on our perceptions of reality?

7.4 Reflections on writing for post-conflict societies

When writing about entertainment-education programmes, Singhal suggests that the production-centred design approach should now be moving to a more audience-centred design approach so that such productions have less of a top down relationship to their audiences. I argue that if audiences are the co-writers and designers of such programmes this will more readily promote an audience-centred approach. Real live events can be mixed with online and other platforms giving power to further immerse audiences, as *RBH* shows. Singhal argues that

The future of the entertainment-education strategy is very bright [...] Social change practitioners are increasingly grasping that entertainment-education is one of those rare social change approaches that can be both commercially viable and socially responsible (2006, p. 268).

Entertainment-education in Northern Ireland has taken many forms and is possibly more evident in theatre productions than in broadcasting. But it has never resulted in a soap-opera type programme aimed at both communities that has tried to promote empathy and understanding between communities. Such projects have been tried elsewhere for example a radio show in Rwanda has been broadcasting *Musekeweya* (2004) twice weekly which has been listened to by 90% of the population.

No ordinary radio drama, it contains carefully embedded psychological and communication messages intended to support healing in a population traumatized by the 1994 genocide' (Zeigler, 2010, p.16).

This programme – the title of which means *New Dawn* – is a fictional soap opera that aims

to empower and strengthen the population to resist incitement to violence. Its central messages are based on the research of Ervin Staub (1989), an academic who has worked extensively in peace and conflict studies. The main goal of the programme is to explain the escalating stages in group violence and how to take measures to prevent them.

In Northern Ireland, funding for television drama and film productions has been directed to both loyalist and nationalist communities. The writing/productions produced have sought to offer illumination of those differing positions. There has been considerable investment in community and arts projects such as *Draw Down the Walls*, a north Belfast cross-interface community relations initiative that has the explicit vision of ‘creating the conditions to imagine a city without barriers’ (Golden Thread, 2011). This project has collaborated with the [Golden Thread Gallery](#) to produce a series of films in unusual sites across Belfast, encouraging audiences to imagine a city without barriers. Such developments have also given rise to the launch of the Community Relations Council Media Grant Scheme ‘to support a range of media projects that promote peace, civil society, and safe, diverse communities’ (CRC, 2017). Such approaches are useful but what is most evident within this work is the lack of broadcasting space given to imagine what a different and less-divided Northern Ireland could look like. It is also difficult to make a direct comparison to Rwanda in that Northern Ireland is not a country in its own right but an area under British governance that has developed a level of self-government but is also heavily influenced by the Republic of Ireland. Initiatives to address such a complex situation would necessarily be more complex to negotiate. But as Barker, Connolly and Angelone’s article about radio in Rwanda concludes:

Umurage Urukwiye, [...], seemed to have influenced listeners to think and act differently about family size,

environmental conservation, the protection of gorillas, and HIV/AIDS prevention. While these challenges are like mountains, long-running radio serial dramas can make a small contributory step in addressing them (2013, p. 89).

RBH promises an opportunity to encourage the people of Northern Ireland to think and act differently about an imagined future community. However, I would propose some additional methods to promote an audience-centred approach. Game designer Jane McGonigal, suggests that adopting a gaming approach is useful as game players are versed in collaboration and problem solving. She has designed a transmedia programme called *EVOKE* (2010), a ten-week crash course to tackle world problems such as hunger and poverty. Sanglang, Johnson and Ciano suggest that there are problems with the analysis of such gamified stories due to their complexity and audience requirements that makes them difficult to quantify but that:

as EE [entertainment-education] scholars seek to explore the influence of integrating transmedia storytelling techniques into their campaigns, it is essential to consider the strengths and weaknesses of various digital storytelling formats (2013, p. 143).

In *RBH*, we were not specifically setting out to devise an education-entertainment product and all that involves, although the project does seem to fall into that form rather easily. It is worth noting that in order for such a programme to work it needs to be as entertaining and engaging as possible. We not only had to develop complex characters and storylines but had to spin them out in inclusive ways as we moved through the project. As with other education-entertainment experiments in transmedia, the successes are measured in engagement terms: in other words, the numbers of people using the platform, the repetition of that usage and engagement with it. As such, a programme of

this nature could be useful in an education-entertainment capacity in Northern Ireland so that people could work together to build a mutually useful space to discuss the future of the country. In such a way, our study could support Wang and Singhal's conclusion that:

pioneering transmedia edutainment interventions such as East Los High are tremendously promising for health promoters and educators, and more rigorous research design and empirical testing with future interventions are needed to validate this further (2016, p. 1009).

It is easy to show that participation in terms of interactivity is possible and that participation, which is democratic and negotiated, is useful. But as Carpentier points out, the real issue is that of control:

Struggles about the distribution of power in society in fields such as media, the arts, and development, and the attempts to make that distribution more equal, are what participation is about (2014, p. 1132).

A recent discussion by Moya Bailey in the *International Journal of Communication* suggests that gender marginalized people of colour use digital media to create representations of themselves that challenge mainstream media depictions offering more diverse narratives; and Ramesh Srinivasan suggests that working in the Arab world it is clear that 'networks of communication are circumscribed by your social status' (2014, p. 1131). Mikro Tobias Schafer suggests a difference between different modes of participation – between those we are aware we are contributing to and those we are not aware of: 'examples of explicit participation shape the narrative of new media as enabling, implicit participation constitutes its commodification' (2014, p. 1132). In *RBH* we used both implicit and explicit participation

methods ensuring that those that were explicit made clear that implicit methods were also at work in the programme. Such implicit techniques were to serve the storytelling drive rather than to promote commodification and business models. Such a public declaration and acknowledgement of our methods seems to have gone a long way to promote trust and additional participation. If such an idea were to be developed and to be used for an education-entertainment purpose it would need to be clear who was intending to use this information and for what purposes. Without such declared interests, it is difficult for audiences to know why they should engage in such work and what the effect of their participation will be. Jack Linchuan Qui, who has extensively researched Chinese internet usership, sees no correlation between bottom-up inclusive frameworks and the flattening of political structures of control and suggests that 'instead, the structures of control seem to have gained from the new wealth of user-generated content, which benefits the powers that be more than anyone else' (2014, p. 1133). There would be no point in engaging in the construction of a participative online negotiated webseries if the purpose behind it is to

breed a different kind of 'conflict', one that is certainly less violent but gestures towards new forms of violence exerted by the Agreement's rhetorical negation of the sectarian past and its aggressive neoliberal campaign (Heidemann, 2016, p. 4).

Such a process would be participation without control, participation for participation's sake. This is not what this research is recommending.

What has been demonstrated is that the negotiated aspects of the writing elements used on the project have promoted a sense of community, have promoted a strong sense of engagement and have contributed to a new and interesting narrative about the sort of

stories people in Northern Ireland would like to tell. Further studies would need to be completed into audience behaviour to ascertain if *RBH* could be used in its larger manifestation *The Eleven* to promote education-entertainment in Northern Ireland.

8. Conclusions

RED BRANCH HEROES – WRITING WITH MY
AUDIENCES

ANNA MARIA EWA ZALUCZKOWSKA



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- 8. Conclusions

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I started out by asking what writing techniques would be useful for interactive transmedia programmes and have discovered that working with audiences requires a negotiation of the narrative. This leads me to propose that the writer in these circumstances is more of an orchestrator and designer of the work. Such a change in emphasis requires a different skillset from the writer and suggests that the writer is a performer and collaborator in the production process. Should such a writer choose to work in post-conflict societies then the negotiation and co-writing aspects become even more important in this context.

There are very clear indications from my study that engaging with audiences can have very positive benefits for writers, producers, and audiences alike. Writing for interactive transmedia and other new forms of technological transformation owes as much to drama/performance techniques as it does to the possibilities that are afforded by technological innovation. The game-like structure allowed for a high degree of immersion and a blurring of reality and fiction that most judges experienced as fun. The strong agency derived from this game structure opened up possibilities for less plot-driven, non-linear storylines, although this was not an intended outcome of the project. Improvisation techniques added to the emotional charge of the production, facilitated immersion and opened up a space for non-linear storytelling methods. Less was often more in terms of production personnel input, and leaving space for things to happen generated greater action.

In terms of how to write for transmedia and the future role of the writer, we learnt that, while writing may be moving from text to image, there is still a very strong place for text-based work. The role of writer in this context has changed from writing scripts to designing projects, and the importance of prototyping highlights the need for a production-centred approach. The writer as designer, performer and orchestrator came to the fore along with notions of directors and producers as performers and writers. In transmedia, the writer's role is changing to involve expanded literacies related to image, sound, performance and text, and demands new work practices that relate to these.

This interactive trial will need to be developed further if it is to eventually realise the ambitions of the serial drama, *The Eleven*. If the lessons learnt from the prototype are to be applied to any further development of *The Eleven* project through further funded research then it would be important to consider the criteria set out below if we are to ensure that any participation is not to be tokenistic or lacking in agency.

The dynamic relationship that exists between 'author and reader' in this project could be developed further, to a point where the reader takes control and enters the realm of the author. To do this fully would necessitate the creation of a wiki or database around the programme that would facilitate the opportunity for fans to create their own versions of the drama. Readers who do take over would have to adopt the same negotiated design and, therefore, some type of format or application would be required to facilitate this. Lev Manovich's observations in his book, *The Language of New Media*, reveal new media's capacity 'for representing the real' (Manovich, 2001, p. 211). He points out that many of the attributes of new media can be found in older forms. He concludes that new media's vast storage capacity and its database structure allow all aspects of a situation to be recorded, stored and categorized, and that this

is what is 'new' in this context. In a more recent article he speculates on the uses that Big Data could be put to so that 'we can see differently – not only the world around us... but also our new data reality' (Manovich, 2015, n.pag.). Such a development, where some of the mountain of data and surveillance material available in Northern Ireland could be used in a fictional capacity, may more fully address the emancipatory elements of the project. Building links to the past as well as to the future could facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the world of the project. However, it is a vast undertaking and would require further prototype developments to test such possibilities.

The dynamic relationship between author and audience did create a sense of belonging in this project and ensured that people from both communities were able to take an active part. There was a surprising consensus about what kind of hero was needed for the modern world and what attributes such a hero should have, as the conversation thread in the project shows. There was a desire to understand the complexity of human behaviour rather than to take sides. When faced with difficult information the judges tried to find positives and move past stereotypical character portrayals and into a process where deep character is revealed. Such a successful outcome would suggest that the performative and game-playing elements were crucial to building a convincing narrative and that the narrative created was not negatively impacted by such participative elements. The use of process drama methods, combined with gamified tasks helped to provide a forum for a publicly-negotiated project.

For these reasons, I have found the term 'negotiated narrative' useful in this context as it recognises that the process is a consultative one that results in a synthesis of stories produced by all parties in the project; one that produces a new, entertaining and innovative narrative. Due to the primacy that is given to such negotiations between audiences, creators

and author, ownership patterns should reflect the same ethos. This would necessitate a not-for-profit or collective ownership of the franchise, *The Eleven*, and this should be clearly established at its inception. This would be more easily established if the project had research aims and community applications as all funding, profits made or generated could be fed back into the programme. Such practices would have to be well worked out in advance so that all participants are clear about how such rewards would work.

As the programme was a negotiated one, and all stories were negotiated along the development route, it was hard to ensure that the Ulster Cycle of myths was fully utilised through the production. Using the reality genre was a much more successful pre-text than the use of the myth of Macha. The Macha story was a good starting and ending point for the drama, acting as a container, if you like, within which to hold the activity. It gave Sky as the modern Macha a deeper character and made her more interesting. I suspect that some reference to these myths on the Eleven Productions website would have helped participants understand Sky's story better and some reference should have been made to these.

The next stage for the project would be to turn the prototype design not only to the creation of character but also to the creation of on-going story. Before that could be achieved additional attention would need to be given to the concept of place. A fictional space would need to be created within the real Northern Ireland where the story could unfold. Further iterations of similar prototypes would be needed to assess how this would work.

Having played the project, participants also made a number of suggestions on how the process could be improved. They suggested that characters could be created in a shorter period of time. Taking a month to run the project was, in hindsight, probably too long a period of concentrated involvement. Some

participants asked for more time to be given over to the consideration of candidates, but I think this aspect could be overcome by dividing people into teams who consider a smaller number of candidates together. With such organisation, the tasks could be accomplished more quickly and time would be lessened. Groups could be encouraged to compete with each other from the start rather than splitting and fracturing a cohesive community part-way through the process. A very clear message from both the interview feedback and from the NING conversation thread related to how disappointed the cohesive group were with becoming fragmented. Such action damaged the communality of the project.

As producers and writers, we were trying to expand access to cultural production in much the same way as Bertolt Brecht imagined that radio production technology could support collective active participation in the 1930s. This demonstrates that participatory production and culture has a much longer history than the recent digital era; however, it could be argued, as Jenkins does, that

Contemporary culture is becoming more participatory, especially compared with earlier media ecologies primarily reliant on traditional mass media. ... The word 'participation' has a history in both political and cultural discourse, and the overlap between the two begs closer consideration' (Jenkins, 2013, p. 160).

In the analysis of my work I am aware of the historical and cultural significance of participation-culture in relation to Northern Ireland. It is a large and complex area of study that I cannot fully explore here. Understanding such dynamics is crucial to my understanding of the nature of audiences, the role of collaboration, the importance of listening and the patterns of unequal participation that exist. My conclusions about the potential that interactive transmedia production can have in such societies are therefore modest at this

stage as much more work needs to be done before we can generalise about such storytelling techniques. What can be said however is that the ability to imagine and create new communities helps build participation in issues that are seldom publicly expressed in Northern Ireland. The liminality in the Northern Irish context, married to the liminality of the forms used in this project, helped participants stand on the threshold between their previous idea of their identity in Northern Ireland and a new communal, negotiated identity. As such the prototype of the web-series shows us that there is potential here for hierarchies to be challenged, and for traditions to be overturned so that new customs and new ways of thinking can be established. In such liminal states, it is perhaps crucial to recognise the importance that a guide or orchestrator can bring as is the practice in process theatre.

All of these discoveries are useful to producer, writers, and directors working in an ever-changing digital world. My investigation shows that the relationship between reader and writer is still a crucial one, and is one worthy of investigation. I would argue that, far from the author being dead, current developments demand the recognition of a sophisticated relationship between reader/user and author. Such investigations become ever more important as we begin to investigate and produce for more participant-centred experiences, such as Virtual Reality or Artificial Intelligence. John Bucher, when discussing VR maintains,

The immersive experience will always be a dance between the creator and the audience. Recognizing the subtleties of the dance will come with time and experience on the part of both parties. It will be the role of the creators, however, to lead the dance and not to step on the toes of their partners (2018, p. 190).

As such, the concept of a negotiated narrative is a crucial one in these settings. This research

has contributed to the development of more participative writing practices for transmedia production, and the discoveries made would form a useful basis for further postdoctoral work that examines the relationships between different digital forms of production and the audiences that they serve.

9. Bibliography

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See also the PDF's:

- Intro & Appendices
- Story/ Practice