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Building Transmedia Universes and Transnational Audiences in the Kingdom Hearts Franchise

Dean Bowman et James McLean

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Charting the Kingdoms Between: Building Transmedia Universes and Transnational Audiences in the Kingdom Hearts *Franchise*

Editors: Dean Bowman and James McLean

Aims

As the title of this special issue suggests, the *Kingdom Hearts* franchise straddles worlds, existing between the expansive realms of Disney and Square Enix, with each entry evoking myriad characters and franchises from both companies. Since 2002, the franchise has collectively sold over 30 million units[1], with eight mainline instalments at the time of writing, as well as additional remasters, mobile and browser game spin-offs. Yet despite its success and reach, the series has yet to be fully interrogated by scholars as an important example of what Henry Jenkins (2008) has famously called convergence culture.[2] This term denotes a process by which multiple media forms (old and new) combine and co-exist in complex hybrid platforms. However, focusing too much on media platforms over consumer activities suggests a kind of technological determinism, in which the user cannot help but be moulded into a particular type of subject. Jenkins seems mindful of this, and so an often-neglected aspect of his theory makes the important point that there is also a strongly social dimension to convergence culture, since a major part of it exists "within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 4). Through this interactive, social dimension of consumption, Jenkins draws on his career-wide interest in fandom and transmedia studies, revealing how "convergence becomes a collective process" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 4). We hope to further illustrate this aspect of these processes here, hence the focus on active fandoms and production cultures through the papers.

This special *Kingdom Hearts* issue seeks to explore the relationship between new consumption practices and textual models that have been developing under the regimes of convergence and the closely aligned concept of transmediality. An additional aim in addressing this series in particular, is to attempt to place video games back into the heart of the debate, where they undoubtedly belong as the

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[1] This number is an estimate based on known combined sales data as of 2018 of 24 million units sold (Minotti, 2018) to which has been added the released sales data for Kingdom Hearts III, which sold five million copies in its first 2 weeks (Gill, 2020) making it the most successful launch of the franchise and a sure sign of the series' growing prestige. It is reasonable to assume that in the almost two years since its release it has sold an additional two-three million taking its total to over the 30-million-unit mark.

[2] Furthermore, until recent efforts (Fleury et al., 2019), video games as a medium were often neglected in writings about franchising, with Janet Wasko's (2001) classic work *Understanding Disney* a case in point, barely mentioning the by then already developed activities of Disney Interactive in her seemingly exhaustive account of Disney's holdings.

increasingly dominant entertainment industry of our age.[3] Being the result of such a peculiar collaboration, that lead to the collision of two iconic product portfolios, *Kingdom Hearts* provides an ideal case study through which to explore shifts in macro-industry relations, production practices, intellectual properties, and fan cultures within a rich transmedia environment. Because of its long-running nature, *Kingdom Hearts* also allows observation of changes to the franchise formula over time. In short, the series provides an ideal case study for the analysis of significant longitudinal shifts in fan cultures (Hills, 2002), as well as the general attitudes towards the production and consumption of narratives in the postmodern era.

Background of the project

The origins of this special edition can be traced back to 2019 at the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan. The theme of the conference was 'Game, Play and the Emerging Ludo-Mix', the latter being a term that alludes to the notion of the 'media mix', which is considered by many (Allison, 2006; Stenberg, 2012; Hartzheim, 2016) to be a specifically Japanese take on the idea of transmedia storytelling, a concept that Henry Jenkins helpfully summarises:

> Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story… Most often, transmedia stories are based not on individual characters or specific plots but rather complex fictional worlds which can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories. This process of world-building encourages an encyclopaedic impulse in both readers and writers. (Jenkins, 2007)

With transmedia storytelling, media texts can tell stories in far more complex and networked ways than traditional forms of franchising or seriality allow for. In the West, where this terminology developed, transmedia storytelling has become a vital narrative model for the long-term success of franchises, finding its apotheosis in the Marvel Cinematic Universe with its sprawling network of interrelated films, TV shows, comics, and video games.

With an interest in transmedia, franchises, and video game research, the editors of this special edition organised a panel on *Kingdom Hearts* and a workshop on

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[3] It is now a commonplace claim at the start of any work of games scholarship that the games industry is worth more globally than the film and music industry combined (Cellan-Jones, 2019), with surveys conducted by trade bodies like the Entertainment Software Association (2018) now suggests that, rather than an outlier hobby, video games are a mainstream activity undertaken by 65% of American adults.

transmedia storytelling at the conference[4]. The *Kingdom Hearts* franchise provides a rich case study to explore the topic of transmedia storytelling from a variety of angles, including the modes of production, world-building, design, and fan reception. The results of this inquiry have been refined and expanded to include the additional voices of Rachel Hutchinson and Anh-Thu Nguyen and now make up this special issue.

The Franchise

The aim of this special edition is to interrogate some of the wider issues that relate to the industrial and cultural means of production of the *Kingdom Hearts* texts and how they shape its consumption and understanding. The papers in this special issue all approach the franchise from different theoretical and methodological perspectives, highlighting its complexity as a palimpsest of concepts and processes that are highly revealing of wider concerns. Although it is not the object of this issue to explain the serie's notoriously labyrinthine narrative, something the fandom is more than invested in doing, some explanation of the complex narrative of the series is necessary.[5] In the debut title *Kingdom Hearts* (Squaresoft, 2002) the player takes on the role of Sora, a young boy growing up on Destiny Islands, whose peaceful existence is broken by a storm of all-consuming darkness and the appearance of shadow-like creatures called the Heartless. He is separated from his companions Riku and Kairi and sucked through a portal, emerging in Traverse Town (a domain between light and dark realms that only appears to those who are lost) and here teams up with Donald and Goofy as they search for King Mickey, who has vanished whilst investigating reports that worlds are being consumed. After being briefed by Square Enix characters—including *Final Fantasy VIII*'s protagonist Squall Leonhart, now simply called Leon, and Aerith (or Aeris) Lockhart, the flower girl from *Final Fantasy VII*)—the unlikely trio travel to a variety of Disney worlds, each a remediation of a particular Disney film's narrative. In each they undertake quests to fix broken narratives in order to find clues to the location of King Mickey, Sora's childhood friends and the door to the titular McGuffin, *Kingdom Hearts*, that must be closed (or maybe opened?) to stop the darkness from snuffing out worlds.

The narrative justification for this peculiar melange of settings is the inciting incident in *Kingdom Heart* lore: the 'keyblade war', a surprisingly (for a Disney-involved project) brutal event which in the distant past shattered a coherent world of fairy tales into a heterogeneous array of spheres, each sealed off from the others and only

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[4] A report of this workshop is forthcoming in *Mechademia* Vol 16:1 (Spring 2023)
[5] For a more comprehensive (and confusing) overview see this blog post (Morrow, 2017), the facetious and sarcastic tone of which is characteristic of the ambivalent attitude many series fans have towards the narrative excesses of the series.

connected by 'the lanes between' (異空の回廊 Isora no Kairou, from which this issue takes its name). Whilst the first game seems to revolve around the Disney villain Maleficent kidnapping the 'princesses of heart', as the series progresses it becomes apparent that the true antagonist is the wizard Xehanort, who along with his villainous minions and his many clones and revisions is attempting to seize control of the power of *Kingdom Hearts* to rebuild the world with a balance of darkness and light more to his liking.

What makes *Kingdom Hearts* fascinating as a text, as clearly alluded to in the above synopsis, is its experimentation with Disney properties and their hybridisation with other franchise properties on video game media. This intermingling disrupts the famous sanctity of Disney texts as observed by Disney historian Janet Wasko (2001, p. 85). The synopsis of the first game also hardly touches upon the baffling absurdity of the series as it develops, and its reputation for impenetrability may explain some of the reluctance for game scholars to tackle this series. Indeed, it is perhaps far too easy to dismiss *Kingdom Hearts* as an oddity or an outlier, but its success proves otherwise, and this issue seeks to take this somewhat critically overlooked series as not only an important exemplar of transmedia convergence, but a crucial aspect of Disney's developing strategies over the last decade. We maintain that analysis of *Kingdom Hearts* helps to reveal new facets of transmediality, as well as giving us a crucial deeper insight into Disney as a studio that is increasingly becoming a major hegemonic media corporation of the emerging era of digital on demand product platforms.

Kingdom Hearts emerges at the crucial moment Disney is attempting to move from a more linear franchising model previously pioneered by former CEO Michael Eisner (1984-2005), where the central film text acts as what Jenkins (2017) has called the 'mothership', a kind of primary template for the adaption of characters into a variety of other media, to a fully transmedia model where narrative is spread over a rhizomatic network of products. The launch of Disney+ as a competitor to on demand streaming platforms like Netflix and a proprietary portal for the company's myriad outputs, combined with the $4bn purchase of Marvel Comics in 2009 (Clark, 2009) and Lucasfilm for a similar amount in 2012 (Smith, 2012), which puts the studio behind the helm of two of the twenty first century's biggest transmedia entities, is indicative of this transition. These deals were all overseen by recent CEO Bob Iger, who is arguably steering Disney's shift to a transmedia platform-led company, just as Eisner once oversaw its transformation into a giant of synergistic marketing practices.

With these purchases Disney has begun shifting gears to reinvent itself as a key player alongside tech giants Amazon and Google, in what Nick Srnicek (2016) has argued presents a new form of dominant economic structure called platform capitalism. Such corporations develop and control data driven platforms which "became an efficient way to monopolise, extract, analyse, and use the increasingly large amounts of data that were being recorded" (Srnicek, 2016, pp. 42-43). Such companies position themselves "between users" in order to act as the "ground upon which their activities occur, which thus gives it privileged access to record them" (Srnicek, 2016, p. 44). Just so, as a 'product platform company' (one of Srnicek's subcategories), Disney seeks to develop full control of the delivery mechanism of its media through initiatives like Disney+. According to Srnicek such entities eschew the standard distinctions between vertical and horizontal marketplace integration in favour of becoming "more like rhizomatic connections driven by a permanent effort to place themselves in key platform positions" (Srnicek, 2016, pp. 103-104).

Things move fast in the media landscape, and it is hard to believe that when the panel that inspired this issue was held Disney+ was yet to launch, and in three short years has, at the time of writing, just surpassed the much more established service Netflix (Sweney, 2022). Understanding this new regime has become even more urgent in recent years as giant media corporations like Disney explore new ways to expand and exploit audiences through digital platform strategies. In *Understanding Disney* Janet Wasko positions Disney as a key node in a global shift in the entertainment industry from vertical economies of scale to horizontal economies of scope, and uses the rollout of *Hercules* in 1997 as a crucial shift in Disney's corporate strategy towards a greater emphasis on synergistic relations between product subdivisions and an aggressive licencing of a historic portfolio of brands (Wasko, 2001, p. 32). Through these papers we are effectively using *Kingdom Hearts* in a similar way—as a case study that illustrates Disney's more recent shifts, outlined above.

In so doing we maintain that the debates and questions operative within Western and Japanese theory and practice of transmedia franchises can be understood in potent ways through *Kingdom Hearts*, a game that itself shares and blends media, nationality, franchises, and cultural properties in sometimes reckless abandon. If, as Sweney maintains, the seeds for Disney's colossal gear-shift into its current form were laid 15 years ago, then we might see *Kingdom Hearts* as an important experimental space for the company to try out some of the riskier ideas associated with transmedia storytelling, which often involve a company opening the text up to participatory fan cultures far more than in previous modes, as argued by Jenkins (1992, p. 285), exchanging some control for the increased profits derived from these new practices.

The Papers

Drawing on recent work in Television Studies, including Mittell's (2015) work on forensic fandom and M. J. Clarke's (2012) exploration of reflexivity in serialised television narratives, Dean Bowman utilises a reading of *Kingdom Hearts* to explain crucial recent shifts in fandom, arguing that just as Hollywood has found itself adapting to the Japanese model of the media mix, global fandoms are more and more coming to represent the Japanese idea of the 'otaku' (Azuma, 2009), populated by a kind of hyper fan. His paper addresses the shift in Disney towards transmedia, platform dominance through an allegorical interpretation of the development of the *kingdom Hearts* series seen alongside the rising star of its creative director Tetsuya Nomura. Such an allegorical approach is not new, as for instance where Stephen Mandiberg and William Huber's (2009) insightful reading of the series explores the travels and travails of the heroes in their 'Gummi Ship' as an extended metaphor for globalisation. We might wonder how conscious such readings are in the minds of the creators themselves, wrapped up as they are in the day-to-day concerns of production, but as M. J. Clarke (2012) argues, media products are constructed in a way that cannot help but critically reflect upon the processes in which they are constructed. If we look hard enough these texts can also tell us something about the shifting priorities and realities of the companies behind them, as well as their place in the larger socio-cultural context.

With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that the narrative of *Kingdom Hearts* is so convoluted and its worldbuilding so complex, as it can be seen as a product of the extensive rhizomatic networks of platform capitalism and transmedia storytelling that it, in turn, further enriches. By looking at the series' more conspiratorial leanings, Bowman explores the engine by which the developers, including Nomura—as an example of what Clarke calls a 'mastermind narrator'—attempts to translate ambiguity into profitable hype, seeking at all costs to avoid closing down fan speculation by fuelling an ongoing uncertainty. This process is baked into the very narrative core of the series, and thus he uses *Kingdom Hearts* as a key exemplar of the new transmedia narrative regime that is helping to reshape our media landscape and create a dominant mode of fandom. The paper also provides a sustained theoretical discussion of the key concepts of transmediality and participatory culture, which provides a useful starting point to the topics addressed in all the papers.

Professor Rayna Denison's contribution tackles the series through the lens of production via an analysis of the promotional campaigns surrounding *Kingdom Hearts III* (Square Enix, 2019) and particularly the tie-in of the film *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (Moore & Johnston, 2018), which is helpful in providing the larger historical context of the corporation in which *Kingdom Hearts* needs to be understood. Disney is no stranger to transmediality, although this is often framed under the logic of brand-based synergy (Wasko, 2001; Grainge, 2007). Synergy was once a major

concept in political economic studies, but has now been overshadowed or replaced by newer terms like transmedia or franchising. Denison's paper seeks to interrogate the subtle differences between these key terms, critically revisiting the idea of synergy to examine the extent to which concepts of commingling and coordination in business practices drive game production, and ultimately investigating the challenges presented by creating a 'global' games franchise. Her piece fuses a top-down political economic analysis and a more bottom-up reception study methodology in order to focus on the tensions and synergies afforded by Square Enix and Disney's long-term collaborative creative practices.

Moving on from pieces with textual and production perspectives, James McLean's article shifts the focus to the series' hugely active fandom. Specifically, it explores the transformative, dynamic and playfully disruptive aspect of *Kingdom Hearts* through the lens of fan discourses, as they grapple with the famously ambiguous Cloud-Aeris-Tifa love triangle in *Final Fantasy VII* (Square, 1997), using *Kingdom Hearts* as paratextual evidence for one coupling over another. Indeed, this can be seen as a particularly vibrant example of the arguments laid out by Bowman above regarding textual ambiguity feeding fan speculation. McLean crucially develops and critiques Henry Jenkins' (1992) famous notion of fans as 'textual poachers', in which fans appropriate elements from official texts to make their own folk texts, by coining the term 'textual barristers'. He argues that this alternative term more accurately captures the actual practices of a large cohort of highly engaged fans who, rather than creating their own 'folk texts' by 'shipping' characters in fanfiction, are more interested in establishing the fundamental 'truth' of the text through courtroom-like arguments on fan forums where evidence is carefully sifted.

This alternative understanding of fan activity strongly counters Hiroki Azuma's (2009) famous claims that under postmodernism fan consumers (although he uses the more derogatory term, *otaku*) act as database animals, grazing over the surface of the text and reconfiguring elements within a database, rather than being interested in what Eiji Ōtsuka (2010) calls the 'grand narrative', the larger world behind the fictional world that each work in a transmedia franchise grants partial access to. Indeed, it would suggest that such fans are obsessively interested in getting at the grand narrative as they attempt to demonstrate their particular reading as correct by aligning it to a verifiable authorial intent, once again most often seen in the statements of creative director Nomura. It also has serious implications for Fan Studies, suggesting that the field has a perhaps idealistic tendency to overemphasise the emotive, appropriative, and subversive activities of fans over the structured address, granular research, and rigorous case-building described here.

The last two papers shift the focus to the larger cultural context, particularly regarding globalisation. With most large game publishers now operating studios around the world and relying heavily on the outsourcing of work and services, many have noted the intensely globalised nature of the industry (Dyer Witheford & de

Peuter, 2009). A case in point is Ubisoft, a French publisher headquartered in Paris, but with significant global reach given its 19,000 strong international workforce (Ubisoft, 2021a). Ubisoft's webpage 'Welcome to Ubisoft Worldwide HQ' (Ubisoft, 2021b) houses an interactive map that boasts either a 'studio' or 'business office' presence in no less than 48 cities—9 in the Americas, 17 in Europe, 11 across Asia and 1 in Australia. This includes some of the most important game development centres in the world (Paris, Montreal, Leamington Spa, Guildford, Osaka) as well as emerging consumer markets in Latin America and Asia—for instance, the Mexican Ubisoft information page reads: "Ubisoft opened its office in Mexico in 2006 to get closer to the local market. We were one of the first publishers to do so, and it has been a great and inspiring experience" (Ubisoft, 2021c). As well as market penetration the studio leverages its global presence to outsource production and mitigate the massive costs of producing a commercial video game.[6]

As Western companies negotiate the pathways of the globalised games industry for growth opportunities, Japan, as one of the birthplaces of the global games industry (Donovan, 2012), simultaneously seeks to extend its influence to the West, resulting in Square Enix's purchasing of the iconic but struggling UK publisher Eidos Interactive in 2009.[7] These shifting priorities of the Japanese games industry towards international audiences can be framed in response to increasing production costs and the social crisis of an aging population (the so-called 'greying of Japan') leading to a contracting domestic market.[8] In this context Mia Consalvo has argued that the 'opportunities' presented by globalisation and convergence "help to shore up a games market that has started to contract due to the shifting demographics of Japanese society" (Consalvo, 2009, p. 138). It is within this context that the emergence of a transnational text like *Kingdom Hearts* can be seen less as a risky gamble and more as part of a larger strategic reorientation towards global markets.

Rachael Hutchinson, author of the recent book 'Japanese Culture Through Videogames' (2019) utilises her cultural studies approach to explore the impact and implications of *Kingdom Hearts* within the wider social context. By performing a close

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[6] For example, the team for *Assassin's Creed II* in 2009 reportedly tripled that of the original game released in 2006 (Anon, 2009), the success of which was largely responsible for elevating Ubisoft to the status of a top-tier publisher. A few years later and the workforce had reached over 1000 (Makuch, 2013), composed of multiple teams (Makuch, 2014), located at sites around the world (Totilo, 2018), which makes Ubisoft one of the most successfully globalised of the industry's major players.

[7] The fact that Square Enix are now selling off many of their Western holdings (including what was once Eidos) in an effort to streamline after several unprofitable years and amidst rumours that they are preparing themselves for acquisition, demonstrates that such strategies are not guaranteed to succeed.

[8] This has been compounded by increased competition from a now dominant Western games market. Whilst popular histories of the video game industry like Tristan Donovan's Replay (2010) illustrate how dominant the Japanese games industry was throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in line with the nation's economic boom, the Western games industry has grown massively in prestige and influence in the last two decades.

textual analysis of protagonist Sora in relation to Japanese *shōnen* (boys) media characteristics, she examines how these *shōnen* traits resonate with wider cultural shifts as both America and Japan enter periods of social instability and cultural anxiety following the events of 9/11, the Hanshin earthquake and Aum Shinrikyo attacks of 1995.

Rather than simply another instance of translation or flow in globalised networks, *Kingdom Hearts* demonstrates a genuinely interesting example of co-creation—or what in business literature is sometimes referred to by the portmanteau term *coopetition* (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996) and is described in the *Wiley Encyclopedia of Management* thus:

> Coopetition transcends competition and cooperation, drawing synergies from these opposing forces. It fosters a win–win scenario in which a firm attempts to increase its revenue, not through the cannibalization of competitor's market share but through the creation of larger, more secure markets. (Sammut-Bonnici, 2015)

Such coopetition is a result of the "increasing interdependence of firms in complex markets" (Sammut-Bonnici, 2015), which would certainly apply to the highly complex and globalised games industry. *Kingdom Hearts* must be read as a complex negotiation between a Japanese and an American corporation, rather than as an example of the tendency in cultural criticism to see such works merely as an example of the Americanisation or Disneyfication of world culture. This is a position taken by Anh-Thu Nguyen in her piece, where she uses spatial understandings of theme parks and video games to make the case for the franchise being a site of not only convergence but transformation. She argues that the series has evolved beyond a simple East/West dialectic by forging its own identity through visual, ludic, and diegetic transformations. Indeed, its commercial success over the past two decades suggests that it has become something closer to an autonomous transcorporate franchise, rather than just an extended arm of the Disney conglomerate tapping into the global video game market.

The term 'transcorporate', used above and in many of the papers, also speaks to another intervention of this issue, namely that current theories of transmedia and franchise theory do not adequately account for corporate collaboration and elements of intellectual property that not only leave the bounds of their media of origin but also the portfolio of their owners. The issue thus ends with an important reminder that Japan is not merely a passive victim of American cultural imperialism but an active agent of complex international flows of culture, as exemplified by Henry Jenkins' famous argument that modern Hollywood transmedia storytelling is as much driven by the importing of the Japanese media mix, most obviously in the model presented in *The Matrix* (Jenkins, 2008, p. 101), than by Disney's unilateral efforts. Understanding that Disney is merely an actor (albeit a powerful one) in these more

complex international networks of relations suggests too that its power might not be absolute, and points to ways that it might be resisted or redirected.

Conclusion

If Disney was once celebrated as the pioneer of synergistic business practices that defined an era of horizontal integration (Wasko, 2001), it is now undoubtedly a key player in the new rhizomatic media ecology of platform capitalism. The remaining question, then, is why not look at the recent phenomenonof the Marvel Cinematic Universe that Disney is leveraging so effectively as a transmedia megalith instead? Does this not represent a more substantial success than some weird video game co-production with an obsessive if somewhat niche fandom? It surely does, but there is much value in tracing concepts to their protean beginnings to inform our understanding of how later more complex structures were formed from them. *Kingdom Hearts* in some ways can be considered the primordial soup from which these new transmedial strategies emerged, which, like the keyblade War at the heart of its own mythos, exploded a unified world of product IPs into a complex web of interrelated characters and worlds. These worlds are bound together by a further complex of reciprocal links between producers and consumers that go even further than Henry Jenkins' (1992) concept of participatory culture or Alvin Toffler's (1999) infamous notion of the empowered 'prosumer'. After all, before the company wielded the might of Disney+, Star Wars and the Marvel Cinematic Universe, they partook in a modest experiment with an upstart game designer named Tetsuya Nomura at the Japanese publisher Square Enix, and the resulting journey was longer, more convoluted and stranger than either company could ever have foretold. Indeed, in many ways it epitomizes the story of the media industry's transition to new forms of production, distribution and consumption.

We are immensely thankful to the collaborators who managed to struggle through to the finish line in these difficult and precarious times. However, the global pandemic that rendered this project so uniquely challenging also unequivocally demonstrated to us the importance of digital media ecologies based around online, on demand streaming services and digital distribution platforms. The extent of the uptake of such platforms is illustrated by the fact that Netflix, YouTube and others were forced to throttle their stream quality because (much like Disney's own Wreck it Ralph) they threatened to break the internet due to the sheer amount of people seeking solace and escapism from a terrible year (Thorbecke, 2020). These highly flexible and increasingly pervasive digital platforms share with video games (an industry that has already been hugely disrupted by digital storefronts like Steam) an ephemerality and immateriality that fits well within what Manuel Castells (2009) has famously called the 'network society'. Major changes in economic production structures and modes of accessing media are often coupled with changes to the nature of the text itself and its consumption.

If our physical lives became a lot more insular and solitary under severe global lockdowns and travel restrictions, our imaginations arguably travelled farther than ever, as home workers and furloughed populations started to take advantage of these media platforms and the global media flows they tapped into. As the world starts returning to something resembling business as usual, these changes in consumption habits may ebb to some degree but are unlikely to disappear any time soon. To use another Disney metaphor, the genie is now thoroughly out of the bottle. We hope that these pieces go some way towards helping to understand these new consumer processes, unleashed by material shifts in the digital entertainment content streaming platforms—evidenced by Disney +, but also demonstrated by Twitch in the context of video games communities—that have undoubtedly been accelerated to the nth degree by the effects of Covid-19. This makes our intervention, unexpectedly, even more pertinent to understanding trends in modern media.

Acknowledgement

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