

9 *BioShock*

Rapture through Transmedia

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Toward the end of Irrational Games' *BioShock Infinite* (2013), Booker DeWitt and his sidekick Elizabeth discover the horrible truth of the floating city of Columbia: the bigoted mayor of the city, Comstock, is actually Booker from a different reality—a Booker that became “born again” through baptism. And by stealing Elizabeth as an infant from that different reality, Comstock has created ruptures in the space/time continuum that threaten to tear Columbia—and all the different realities unified there—apart. Before the game wraps up its narrative by having multiple Elizabeths murder Booker before he can be baptized, the player experiences a long cut scene detailing the concepts of multilinearity and alternate reality proposed by the game. In this cut scene, Elizabeth leads Booker through multiple realities, each housed within a lighthouse—including, relevantly, scenes from the iconic original *BioShock* game. “There’s always a lighthouse”, Elizabeth intones as you both move through the abandoned, undersea city of *BioShock*’s Rapture; “there’s always a man, there’s always a city”.

This multidimensionality heralds a new take on the traditional idea of sequels and franchisability (see Johnson 2013)—one discussed by Brooker (2009) in terms of the multiple meanings with *Blade Runner*’s many “final cuts” and articulated by Matt Hills’s discussion of *Star Trek* in his chapter for this book. If *BioShock Infinite* is taken at its (admittedly rather convoluted) face value, then it, as well as the two other *BioShocks* and scores of all the other first-person shooter games that invoke similar semantics, becomes an über-narrative, an ür-text extraordinaire. Each game in the franchise becomes less about the individual narrative within that game, and more about branding *BioShock* within a generic framework defined by location, character, and objective. Like the *Star Trek* universe described by Hills earlier in this book, the *BioShock* franchise has remade itself, creating alternate versions and parallel realities. This parallelism is echoed within each diegesis as well, as in each *BioShock* game, elements of transmediation are represented through the gameplay. Players collect clues presented in different mediated forms in order to construct a history of the diegesis. The collection of these clues mirrors the construction of transmedia narratives. Each clue can arrive as a different style of mediation, so the avatar through which the player views the history encounters a transmedia narrative within

the framework of the game. In addition, *BioShock Infinite* extends the idea of transmediation to encompass the franchise itself as a transtextual experience.

In this chapter, I'm going to investigate the way *BioShock Infinite* represents transtextuality as a pedagogical practice within the framework of the game. I've previously written about transmedia in terms of the film *Donnie Darko* as well as fan work on blogs and other social media sites (Booth 2008; see also Booth 2010 and 2015.) As Mélanie Bourdaa notes in an earlier chapter, strategies of augmented transmedia often reflect multiple media outlets to immerse audiences into the story world. In this chapter, I want to explore the way this transmedia reflects and focuses on additional issues of authorial control within and external to the *BioShock* franchise in order to argue that the ludonarrative dissonance of *BioShock Infinite* represents a form of transmedia that interpellates passivity into its players (Hocking 2007). This passivity contrasts with the more common (at least in the academic sphere) reading of audiences as "active" via mechanisms of productivity (Fiske 1992; Hills 2013; see also Laurichesse in this volume) and fandom (Booth 2010; Jenkins 1992). By harnessing the activity of video game players (and fans), *BioShock Infinite* acts reductively by teaching players that only one authorized way exists to "read" transmedia; but it does so by specifically highlighting moments of character action within the gameplay. *BioShock Infinite* brands transmedia to become a mechanism for passivity.

Examining the representation of transmedia, this chapter elucidates the underlying ideological values placed on transmedia by the game producers. As Henry Jenkins has defined, 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" (Jenkins 2006, 95–96). For Jenkins, transmedia is not just an adaptation of a conventional narrative style, but *a completely new way of telling stories*; stories are not singular entities but rather nodes in a narrative network. The protagonist in *BioShock* (and thus the player that controls that character) encounters these "integral elements of a fiction" across the landscape of Rapture (and, in *BioShock Infinite*, across the landscape of Columbia); these integral elements appear in different media forms. For Jenkins, transmedia most usually arrives through a singular author-figure: "the most successful transmedia franchises have emerged when a single creator or creative unit maintains control" (Jenkins 2006, 106). The figure of the author serves as a site for what the editors of this volume call the "text-brand" of *BioShock Infinite*, the practices of texts to purposefully foster engagement from the audience. Yet, as I will go on to show, *BioShock Infinite*'s conceptualization of transmediation through singular authorship serves to discipline player readings of transmediation as well, turning it into a marketable commodity.

I'll first explore the nature of transmediated storytelling within *BioShock Infinite*, illustrating how the game depicts the assemblage of multimedia

narrative “clues” to construct a narrative whole. I’ll then describe aspects of transmediation as a concept, paying close attention to Jenkins’s initial description of transmediation as belonging to a single author-function. As Suzanne Scott asserts, “if we fail to interrogate transmedia story’s construction of the author ... we fail to exploit transmedia stories’ potential” (Scott 2013b, 50). This construction of the author formalizes the structure of a transmediated text, and in doing so disciplines a particular reading of the transmediated story. Finally, I’ll conclude the chapter by asserting that we can learn how to respond to forms of transmediation from the way *BioShock Infinite* represents transmediation within the game. Transmediation requires active appropriation of media content, not passive reception. But by deliberately illustrating transmediation within a singular narrative framework, *BioShock*’s narrative disciplines its players into a branded, authorized way to consume, engage with, and understand transmediation through its detailed immersive experiences.


Transmediated Storytelling in *BioShock*

Originally released in 2007, 2K Games’ *BioShock* led to a direct sequel *BioShock 2* (2010), and Irrational Games’ remake/revision of the series *BioShock Infinite* (2013). Felan Parker (2015, 1) calls *BioShock* a “prestige” series, as it “serve[s] an ... exemplifying function ... bringing legitimacy to the whole industry and culture of digital games through [its] (comparatively) high cultural status”. Each iteration of *BioShock* uses a combination of gameplay, audio recordings, short videos, images, and character interaction to tell two different stories. On the surface, each video game depicts a first-person POV of a (usually) male character as he explores an unusual city/environment to save a young girl—“there’s always a lighthouse; there’s always a man; there’s always a city”. While the details in each game might be different, the underlying structure is the same. The player/character explores the textured, 3D-rendered environment filled with numerous nooks and crannies, but also follows an overarching narrative theme that demands a near-linear experience of the gaming structure. Throughout the open and exploratory world, the *BioShock* franchise actually presents a relatively closed, linear structure. This makes the game narrative “somewhat in tension with free and open gameplay”, as Grant Tavinor (2009, 100) explains. Playing the game requires exploring an immense world, but *progressing narratively* in the game requires following a particular path within that world, restricting a player’s interactive freedom (Jenkins 2004). This tension is what causes Clint Hocking (2007) to criticize the game’s ludonarrative dissonance—the feeling that there is a disconnect between the narrative and ludic elements of the game. In contrast, Roger Travis (2010, 98) finds this dissonance “fundamentally constitutive of the game’s meaning and effect”. Both Hocking and Travis are speaking about the original *BioShock*; such a tension is reproduced in *BioShock Infinite* as well, but the added

dimensionality of the narrative complicates the reading of this opposition. I want to argue that this dialogue between interactivity and narrative is central to understanding how the *BioShock* franchise constructs a particular version and vision of transmediation *within* the games themselves.

This dimensionality focuses on the secondary narrative within each game. Scattered throughout the environment are clues that, when revealed, deepen the historical and societal structure of the city the player/character is exploring. The multimedia textuality of these clues, reveals in audio tracks, textual billboards, video clips, and NPC (non-player character) dialogue forms a transmedia history of the diegesis. This “hidden story” relies on players’ interactions with an unfolding narrative, deepening and extending that narrative through multiple channels of information. In a hidden story, “the spatial path of the reader’s investigation” constructs a “temporal sequence of events to be elucidated” (Ryan 2001, 253). This temporal sequencing necessarily comes out of order in narrative units, and the reader/player must reestablish a sequence by reordering those units into a chronological understanding of the hidden story. Such units in *BioShock Infinite* take many forms. While not unique to the *BioShock* series (indeed, *BioShock* is based on 1999’s *System Shock 2*, a game that used a similar clue delivery system [Weise 2008], and found clues have been used in the past in games like 2010’s *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* from Frictional Games), *BioShock* arguably enacts one of the more sophisticated and popular depictions of this mode of narrative knowledge (Parker 2015).

Transmedia storytelling creates narrative knowledge through articulate fragmentation. No one mediated narrative contains all the necessary narrative information, and all mediated texts contribute to a greater understanding of the transmediated whole. For players of the *BioShock* franchise, each game’s diegesis uncovers additional details of alternate realities. Through the avatars of the protagonists of the games, the player encounters multiple fragments in multiple media that must be reconstructed to form one multiple story.

Although only one “tie-in” paratext exists to extend the narrative (Gray 2010; Shirley 2011), the game diegesis *represents* transmedia, as the fragmentation of the hidden story becomes  exists told through different forms of mediation. In the process, *BioShock* teaches players particular reception practices through gameplay. This representation of transmediation affects what James Paul Gee (2007, 62) has termed the “projective identity”—that unique combination of player and character that exists through avatarism. The projective identity becomes pedagogical because the player experiences mediated learning opportunities via virtual identities. That is, when players “take on a projective identity, they want the [role] they are ‘playing’ to be a certain sort of person and to have a certain sort of history in the learning trajectory”. By interacting with the virtual world through the virtual character, players inscribe the frameworks presented by the virtual world.

The dialogue between player and character permeates the first two *BioShock* titles primarily, as moral choices presented to the *player* can affect

the ending of the narrative for the *character*—the character becomes narrativized through the player’s morality. In *BioShock Infinite*, the projective identity also encounters choices, but these choices do not end up affecting the outcome of the game. For example, at a key point, Booker must decide which symbol Elizabeth wears around her neck—a bird or a cage. The choice appears meaningful within the game system, but neither narrative nor gameplay is affected by the player’s decision. Any “learning” in *BioShock Infinite* arrives through less obvious interactions, including those with the transmediated transmission of the story. By relying on narrative instead of interaction, the game strengthens the author-function and delimits alternate readings. The pedagogical functions of the game instruct players in how to use transmedia, instead of allowing them to practice specific transmedia storytelling (or story-receiving) skills, specifically branding a particular type of transmediation. This type of pedagogy helps discipline players (and, by extension, fans of the franchise) into particular behaviors (Hills 2012b)—that is, in this case, understanding transmedia through authorial control.

The branded transmediated experience offered within the diegesis of *BioShock Infinite* relies on what Adam Arvidsson (2006, 136) calls the “capitalist response to the hypermediatization of the social that prevails in informational capitalism”. For Arvidsson, brands become a way of cohering groups of people through mutual identifiatory practices; he refers to the way that brand management technics can permit “an intensive control of user activity within a restricted space” (121). Indeed, as Jessica Aldred and Brian Greenspan (2011, 481) describe in their critique of *BioShock*, the game becomes “embedded in the very real, material conditions of media conglomeration and convergence that both allegorizes and operationalizes the ‘control’ logic of convergence”. In other words, finishing the game is not just about beating the boss, but also about how to “allegorically negotiate the access protocols to this spatially distributed database of *dead media forms*” (488; my emphasis). For Aldred and Greenspan, this means that *BioShock* has always already imbricated itself into the economic system of convergence that eschews, rather than develops, from individual player agency. This is relevant to transmedia studies because the game teaches passivity rather than activity, formalizing an authorized reading strategy that players may internalize.

Interactivity and Control in *BioShock*

Research on *BioShock* has tended to examine the game from a textual or authorial point of view, most saliently examining issues of control and interactivity in video game environments as an element of rupture between ludological and narratological game structures (Aldred and Greenspan 2011; Tavinor 2009; Travis 2010; van den Berg 2012; Wysocki and Schandler 2013). This rupture is most evident in the first *BioShock*. As protagonist Jack, the player is dropped (literally) into an undersea city named Rapture,

built by uber-libertarian Andrew Ryan (a thinly veiled reference to Ayn Rand). Ryan has built Rapture to be completely separate from mainstream society—he believes in individual progress through rational action, and the refutation of all things governmental. The key element for a ludological analysis is a cut scene between Jack and Ryan, during which the player loses control over the character and is forced to commit an act of atrocious violence. As symbolic of the way the video game format controls and delimits audience interactivity, the scene (and the entire *BioShock* franchise) illustrates Hocking's (2007, ¶4) dissonance “between what it is about as a game, and what it is about as a story”. For a *story* about individual agency, the *game* forces passivity at crucial moments (in fact, most narrative games do that to progress the story).

For all the scholarly research on *BioShock*, little has analyzed the way that it represents transmediation within the game. Yet this is one of the most important aspects of the narrative—Aldred and Greenspan (2011, 491) quote the *GameStop* review when describing the transmediated aspect of the plot:

Even game reviewers conceded that the very experience and understanding of gameplay relies heavily upon an exhaustive consumption of *BioShock*'s various media objects, which, according to one, “should be considered mandatory if you intend to play the game”.

Indeed, the only way information about the larger narrative about individualism arrives is through transmedia storytelling mechanics, as player-controlled Jack uncovers the history of the world through audio, visual, and tangible clues. These clues include audio diaries left by characters, billboards advertising products and services, short historicized instructional videos, and voice-over radio announcements. In his discussion of horror video games, Kirkland (2009, 116) describes these types of in-game media as “remediations” of old technology, which “serve various narrative and ludological functions, providing atmosphere, context, and information, facilitating the scenario, aiding players' solution of puzzles and action sequences”. To augment his analysis, I argue that these remediations reveal the characteristics and functionality of transmediation as well.

Piecing together the narrative from these different elements, the projective identity between Jack and the player experiences the form of a transmedia narrative through a singular text. While traditional narratologists like Kirkland might argue that reconstructing these remediating clues become instead a question of textual analysis, I argue that the game plays on and relies on an audience's understanding of transmediation to create narrative cohesion between elements within the games as well as between the *BioShock* franchise elements as well. In the second title, *BioShock 2*, a similar delivery system offers further exploration of the narrative of *BioShock*, extending the narrative into the future while delving more deeply into the past of this

city. In *BioShock 2* the player controls a different character than Jack, but the same style of transmedia mechanics relays the underlying story, which ideologically focuses on fatherhood, family, and the relationship between evolutionary nature and environmental nurturing. Throughout *BioShock 2*, the player's exploration of the undersea city Rapture develops the narrative through the deployment of individual recordings, billboards, and videos.

The deployment of transmediated elements within the *BioShock* world of Rapture in both games captures a story of the city's history. There are really two stories going on simultaneously in *BioShock* and in *BioShock 2*: the story of the protagonist exploring the undersea world, and the story of how that world became deteriorated in the first place. The first story (the main storyline) occurs in game-play time, as the player controls the protagonist to investigate the world. The second story (the one I am calling a representation of transmediation) occurs throughout the game as different media reveal different aspects of this underlying story. The key to the first two games is that these two different stories *matter to each other*. The first story hinges on elements from the past, which affect how the player plays. The representation of transmediation has an effect on *BioShock*.

In *BioShock Infinite*, it is revealed that all *BioShocks* exist within an infinite multi-verse of possibilities. The third in the series takes a different storyline, but ties the other two into the narrative at the end by connecting the *essence* of *BioShock* into multiple realities. In all three games, the underlying story is presented through (re)mediated clues, each providing a sense of the real within fictional dystopian realities. As in the previous titles in the series, *BioShock Infinite* provides audio diaries (here, called voxophones, or miniature tape recorders), billboards, and historical movies scattered around the city. Collecting them rewards the player with extra nuggets of narrative information. For example, Elizabeth is missing the tip of her pinkie finger throughout the game. A cut scene at the end of the game (for me, coming approximately after 30 hours of gameplay over three weeks of time) reveals that she lost it while being transferred from one reality to another. But only by finding and listening to the voxophone recording "The Source of Her Power" found toward the *beginning* of the game (after about four hours of gameplay, the first sitting I had) could the connection between the finger and Elizabeth's power to reset realities become clear. "The Source of Her Power" states:

What makes the girl different? I suspect it has less to do with what she is, and rather more with what she is not. A small part of her remains from where she came. It would seem the universe does not like its peas mixed with its porridge.

When first encountered, this recording would mean very little to the audience—at this point, Booker has just met Elizabeth and only just learned about the tears in the universe's reality she can generate. It's not until the end

of the game that this recording's context becomes meaningful. Thus, audiences have to refer back to the beginning of the game in order to understand the larger narrative focus, making connections between transmediated elements within the world of *BioShock Infinite* in order to cohere the narrative.

Yet, the voxophones are ultimately unnecessary for the play of *BioShock Infinite*; instead, they are essential for the narrative. This focus on story disciplines players into following an authorized narrative rather than exploring the narrative world's possibilities. While developing the *narrative* of the game, the voxophones of *BioShock Infinite* do not affect the play of the game. This is not necessarily the case in the original *BioShock* or *BioShock 2*—in those games, the choices you make throughout the game affect the ending and produce different “play” effects, and your choices may be affected by what you hear on the audio diaries. An audio diary in the first *BioShock* may reveal that Sander Cohen, a character who we thought was evil, was actually driven insane and emotionally damaged from a number of failed relationships. This information, provided in an audio diary, may or may not be enough to convince the player not to kill Cohen. Cohen's death has both a narrative and gameplay effect in that game. Transmediated narrative information in *BioShock* is seen as an important part of the game's narrative landscape.

In contrast, while the voxophones in *BioShock Infinite* may affect or change the player's understanding of the *narrative*, they do not affect the *gameplay*—there are no different endings, and the choices players make in the game (including some obvious moments which seem intended to provoke moral choices) provide no difference in terms of play. As a text, a video game sits in a nebulous region of media studies as it both constructs a narrative but also relies on player interactivity to change the outcome. Yet, *BioShock Infinite*'s seeming reliance on narrative means that the “single author-function” as described by Jenkins (2006) plays a meaningful part in the interpretation of the game. What the game lacks in interactivity it retains in narrative coherence. One may or may not learn how racist Comstock is (answer: very), or how violent Daisy Fitzroy is (answer: very), but the knowledge doesn't change the way one plays the game or the choices one makes. Instead, the voxophones reinforce the narrative information we've already been given. For example, an emotional voxophone details how a civilian fighting in a battle lay out a bear trap—and ended up catching a child instead of a warrior. Although this information creates affect in the player, it does not affect his or her gameplay—we still fight, we still kill. In a larger narrative sense, this focus on story reinforces a hegemonic text-brand.

Disciplinary Transmediation

As the narrative experience of *BioShock Infinite* creates a singular experience, I argue the use of transmedia within *BioShock Infinite* functions to discipline fans into particular reception practices. On the one hand, transmedia always teaches viewership. As Carlos Scolari (2009, 597) demonstrates in an

analysis of the transmediated franchise *24*, the show “proposes a complex semiotic device for generating multiple implicit (trans)media consumers”. The use of different media within a transmedia franchise encourages multiple avenues for consumption, and ultimately teaches individuals how to consume texts “properly”. Transmediation in general encourages consumption.

On the other hand, Matt Hills (2012b, 117) differentiates between two ways transmedia is used to discipline fandom into particular behaviors in a chapter discussing *Twilight* fandom. The first is fandom as pedagogy—that is, mediated representations of fans that “teach” other fans the “proper” way to act like a fan. As seen on special features on DVDs and in paratextual material, pedagogical representations of fandom “reinforce pre-release marketing strategies” and conform to the traditional “reception” model of fandom. Hills also discusses the inter-fan pathologization of *Twilight* fans, in which sections of fandom use transmedia to “define... itself against and negatively stereotypes another” (121). By negatively depicting and describing *Twilight* fans, inter-fandoms like *Star Trek*’s and *Star Wars*’s fan audiences portray the *Twilight* fans in a particular light, promoting their own fan-brand through transmediated comparison (see Booth 2015).

The use of transmediation within *BioShock Infinite* disciplines the audience-players in a different way. Instead of representing *fandom* in a particular way, *BioShock Infinite* represents a particular framework of understanding transmedia storytelling that undercuts and elides fannish voices. Players of *BioShock Infinite*, for example, do not *need* to collect the voxophone audio recordings spread throughout the city; nor do they *need* to watch the videos that describe the history of Columbia. *BioShock* appears to be asserting that ancillary products, especially those considered by alternate voices, are unnecessary in the larger schema of understanding a story. In his discussion of transmedia on television, Jason Mittell (2015, 315) differentiates between “What Is” and “What If” transmedia: “‘What Is’ transmedia seeks to extend the fiction canonically, explaining the universe with coordinated precision and hopefully expanding viewers’ understanding and appreciation of the storyworld” while “‘What If’ transmedia ‘poses hypothetical possibilities rather than canonical certainties, inviting viewers to imagine alternative stories and approaches to storytelling that are distinctly not to be treated as potential canon’”. In both senses of transmedia, Mittell discusses the centrality of serialized storytelling within the discourses of television, and “we can see important precedents for both of these transmedia modes in the realm of fan productions and consumption practices” (315). While “What Is” transmedia tends to orient around expansive narrative worlds, “What If” transmedia more often models a type of fan productivity, where alternate forms of “hypothetical narrative possibilities” exist (315). These possibilities include fan fiction, vidding, alternate takes on canonical narratives, and other forms of fan production.

Both “What Is” and “What If” transmedia tell the story of an ongoing television narrative, either deepening the mysteries (as in Mittell’s example

of the fan-created ARG for *Alias*) or developing a more developed sense of the characters and their relationships (as in his example of *Breaking Bad's Team S.C.I.E.N.C.E.*). Focusing on the television form itself, Mittell's forms of transmedia have the capacity to integrate fannish work within the narrative possibilities offered through the single-author model. Although singular-authored texts may represent a more formal sense of transmediation, the fannish development of Mittell's (2011, 317) interpretation of transmedia allows for "a more productive avenue for serial television to develop". In other words, if, as Jenkins (2006, 96) describes, there has not yet been fully a successful transmedia campaign, then Mittell's fan-included version may be a way to create one.

The text-brand created by *BioShock Infinite* represents a third kind of transmedia, one that deliberately closes off fan interpretation and depends on a canonical interpretation of the text: a "What Was" transmedia. In *BioShock Infinite*, this type of transmediated "hidden story", the *elements* of transmedia are presented in such a way as to answer any questions and close off alternate interpretations of the history of Columbia. Thus, drawing on a particular industrial interpretation of fandom, wherein fan efforts to construct a coherent narrative "whole" is seen as integral to the fan experience (Booth 2015, 16–17)—whether that is actually representative of the fan experience—becomes paramount to the style of transmediation represented in *BioShock Infinite*. As Robert Kozinets (2014, 162) persuasively argues, today's "business managers, strategists, and particularly marketers have hit upon the notion that consumers should be courted as more than mere consumers; they need to become 'fans'". *BioShock Infinite* uses the transmediation in the game to turn its players into fans, but in doing so it assumes a particular *type* of fandom. This fandom is seen as a masculinized experience of the collection of narrative information and collation of trivia (rather than, say, a more feminized transformative experience). The closing-off of narrative possibilities can be interpreted as a proverbial "shout-out" to a particular, industrial view of fandom and fan activities.

This type of transmediation creates a single author-function that represents an authorial (re: authorized) version of the story. The clues are "What Was" because they do not articulate an on-going or expanding narrative, but narrow the narrative possibilities by closing off, rather than opening up, the narrative storyworld. In the aforementioned example of Elizabeth's finger, the player-character learns how this injury allows her to tear open the fabric of reality. This authorized and canonical reading then closes off other interpretations of this event—even those hinted at in the text. For example, throughout the game images of menarche and representations of female development abound—the link to Elizabeth's power is marked by a particularly female-oriented power. This gynocentric narrative is echoed in the formal elements of the narrative: the image of the tear itself takes on a vaginal appearance, especially during the crucial Memorial Gardens sequence when fighting another powerful female character, Lady Comstock.

The point here is that an alternate, fannish reading of Elizabeth's power could be interpreted through her unique sexed traits. Discovering the voxophone—and finding out that Elizabeth's power *actually* stems from a (passive) injury that mirrors a symbol of castration (missing the tip of her pinkie finger) instead of her (active) feminine traits, serves to close off and delimit different fan interpretations of the narrative. In this case, *more* information, when not useful to the gameplay, only undercuts alternate readings (see Scott 2013a). The “What Was” transmedia appears to offer an open-ended textuality, but instead presents a canonized view of the narrative.

This representation of a type of disciplinary transmediation has previously been articulated as “trans-transmedia” by Matt Hills (2012a, 425). In an article about the use of media (tie-in) ancillary texts, he defines “trans-transmedia” as not only the way media corporations use multiple media channels to “transform ... production contingencies into hyperdiegetic continuity”, but also to “protect ... brand value by responding to fan criticism regarding continuity errors ... anticipating possible fan critiques ... [and engaging] in retro-storytelling fan service by addressing fans who have vocally opposed brand developments”. In other words, media corporations (like Hills' example of BBC-Wales and the *Torchwood* franchise) use transmedia as a way to appropriate fan discourses to protect the TV brand from “unauthorized” transmedia extensions—the “What Ifs” of Mittell discussion. Yet, trans-transmedia only works if fan audiences are already predisposed to act a certain way; a way, I am arguing, that *BioShock Infinite* evokes.

Ultimately, *BioShock Infinite*'s form of narrative construction highlights a tension within some transmediated narratives—that between author and audience. Abba (2000, 739) describes how the contemporary media environment has destabilized authority, resulting in the responsibility “for building worlds being shared between author and audience”. The transmediation implicit within his description of alternate reality games is indicative of this approach. Yet, authorship is never easy to ascribe—even less so with transmedia storytelling. Although usually the product of many people, a transmediated text, as Suzanne Scott (2013b) describes, can often operate intertextually as the work of one author-function instead (see also Jenkins 2006, 106). This industrial strategy positions the unique creator as the key figure leading the guiding narrative structure. In the case of *BioShock*, this figure is Ken Levine, who not only led the team behind the original *BioShock*, but also developed the game from which it emerged, *System Shock 2*, as well as *BioShock Infinite* (only *BioShock 2* did not have his authorial stamp on it). Of course, no one person constructs *BioShock Infinite*—it is the product of multiple voices housed together. Foucault addresses this title as the “author-function”, a fictional construction that helps categorize and inscribe commercial discourse about authorship (Foucault 1977). It's easier to sell a game under a single creator's name rather than from a team, and although “transmedia storytelling's consolidation of authorial control may be symbolic ... the image of the author it crafts is powerful” (Scott 2013b, 45).

In Scott's (2013b, 45) estimation, the role of the author-function in transmedia storytelling is often taken up by the fanboy auteur—the:

creator/figurehead of a transmedia franchise who attempts to navigate and break the conventional boundaries between producers and consumers. Fanboy auteurs are relatable because of their fan credentials, which are narrativized and (self) promoted as an integral part of their appeal as transmedia interpreter for audiences.

In a response to Scott's assessment, Jenkins (2013, 57) argues that the role of the auteur is necessary for coherent storytelling: "to achieve a story of emotional depth we need to have a shared sense of the characters and, without a founding myth and some basic ground rules, a shared mythology is going to be difficult to achieve or maintain". The polarities of author-centric and audience-centric modes of transmediation, however, are not necessarily ontologically (or sociologically) incompatible. As Leigh Edwards (2012) describes, the more corporate synergy comes to define particular types of transmedia, the more audience-generated participatory culture will flourish as well. Here is where the brand dichotomy articulated by Arvidsson (2006, 121) becomes most relevant. Just as brand initiatives create "intensive control" over user activity, so too does Arvidsson indicate that brand "strategies [can] ... aim at a high degree of universality, but where user activity is difficult to steer". Brands as social constructs can have both authorial control over user activity and also generate unique user activity at the same time (Arvidsson gives the example of Coca-Cola that is both a bounded entity and also "creates feedback into the brand elaboration process" [122]). When transmediation becomes branded as an aspect of a franchise, like with *BioShock*, the opportunities for additional user activity become multiplied rather than divided. In the original *BioShock*, for example, the transmediation of the audio recorders, NPC conversations, textual ads, and short videos allowed for unique fan interaction to develop around the hidden story.

For *BioShock Infinite*, however, being wedded to one particular authorial mode limits the game's representational abilities, and this is indicated through the representation of transmedia. The role of the fanboy auteur, and the necessity for an author-function to cohere the narrative, displaces alternate narrative techniques. This fanboy/authorial mode of transmediation is echoed in the voices of *BioShock Infinite's* voxophones. As discussed by video game critic Matt Lees, in an online critique of the game, the majority of the voxophone recordings, those transmediated elements that help construct the "What Was" narrative, are spoken by the main characters in the game—the key people that run Columbia the city. They "all tell stories that relate to a very very small quantity of key characters, rather than just painting a picture of the world" (Lees 2013). Symbolically, this resonates with the authorial control throughout the game—the voices players hear are

the major actors in Columbia—the “authors” of its destiny, not the everyday people, the “fans” on the ground. In contrast, the audio diaries of the original two *BioShock* games were generally spoken by minor characters—people that were just living in the world, creating amateur media themselves (audio diaries).

Rather than embracing the multiplicity of voices engaged within the original *BioShock* games, *BioShock Infinite* focuses on representations of an established, authorized minority. This mechanism is disciplinary, in that it teaches individuals “the proper way” to interpret transmediated stories, a way of reading *BioShock* as a key representation of transmediation. However, this is a different type of pedagogy than, say, the formal type of education we are more accustomed to in classrooms. The transmediation within *BioShock* functions ideologically, interpellating audiences into particular frameworks of understanding. This transmediation isn’t a path to learning; it’s the end result of a formulation of expectant knowledge.


As Scott (2013b, 43) has described, transmedia stories are paradoxical—they are at once “defined by their ability to expand” but are also products “of industrial consolidation and conglomeration”. Furthermore, transmedia stories tend to “produce a consolidated canon of ‘official’ texts that frequently discourage or discredit unauthorized expansion or speculation by fans” (43). Canonicity, even of some transmedia texts, can be problematized by fans and creators alike. Video games themselves have often been touted as a key node in transmedia narratives (Aldred and Greenspan 2011; Jenkins 2006), although as elements of convergence they often do not fulfill that promise (O’Donnell 2011). Aldred and Greenspan (2011, 482) note that “for all these much-publicized celebrations of gamer agency and choice within highly participatory ‘convergence culture’ ... [*BioShock*] tends to elide the extent to which hardware and software manufacturers increasingly curtail, rather than enable, user agency”. What they indicate is that, for *BioShock*, the use of transmediated objects perpetuates a system of designed obsolescence, forces players into the particular control of the game creator, and “reinforces the game industry’s utopian view of technological and content convergence” (488). For all its utopian promise, the idea of various media systems “converging” with other systems has failed to materialize within the realm of digital games (O’Donnell 2011). *BioShock Infinite* represents this failure writ large, as its representation of transmedia encourages passivity within its audience, despite the interactivity touted of digital gaming in general—yet, its interactive failure becomes a success within transmedia branding, as it presents a coherent narrative that incorporates traditionally consumer-centric practices.

***BioShock Infinite*: Learning Transmediation**

The contextual “What Was” understanding of transmediation represented within *BioShock Infinite* becomes an authorial method of introducing

the process of transmediation to players. By seemingly demonstrating user-generated content, the game implies a fan-centric mode of narrative appreciation. But through the superfluous nature of the transmedia, as well as its ultimately condoned authorial function, *BioShock Infinite* reveals a tension at the heart of all transmediation between brands and storytelling.

And this is why this particular case study is relevant for larger analyses of transmediation. By *teaching* transmediation through implicit interpellation, *BioShock*, ultimately, engages the projective identity of the player/character through immersion. As video games become more integrated into the larger media environment, they will become part and parcel of transmediation, as Evans (2011) notes. In her analysis of the BBC television series *Spooks* and the interactive games created for the fans, Evans shows that each particular medium offers the viewer/player a different kind of engagement, one predicated on different levels of audience motivation and knowledge. Each level, however, is controlled by the authorial power of the BBC. As Leigh Edwards (2012) elaborates, these power relationships at the heart of transmediated storytelling vary depending on the contextual understanding of the media products. The crowdsourcing capabilities of participatory culture, elided in *BioShock Infinite's* gameplay, provide a more open context for engaging in contemporary transmedia storytelling.

Ultimately, *BioShock* is a franchise based on  storytelling. Although Travis (2010, 92) argues that the interactive potential of the game, its “ludic aspect”, augments the game’s ability for disruption of staid norms, *BioShock's* transmedia power hinges on the rupture between the game’s mimesis and its interactivity. The stronger storytelling at the heart of the franchise, far from creating ludonarrative dissonance, rather invests the franchise with “an ethical education” in its players, a chance for them to take home, implicitly or explicitly, the lessons explicated by the gameplay (97).

In this chapter, I’ve shown how this ludonarrative dissonance in *BioShock Infinite* resonates with an inherently pedagogical understanding of transmedia branding *as authorial*. Players of *BioShock Infinite* are encouraged to consume the transtextual content within the game as ancillary, unnecessary, and largely filler. At the same time, all the transmediated content in the game is produced by the major characters, fully authorizing a particular view of the narrative, and closing off other views. As a pedagogical tool, *BioShock Infinite* offers players a chance to explore the multiplicity inherent in transmedia storytelling, but ultimately limits players to one experience. There may be many lighthouses, many men, and many cities—but there is only one authorized narrative.

Note

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