



# **From a Traditional Publisher to a Producer of Stories**

The Current Situation, Possibilities and Considerations Surrounding  
Transmediality in the (Dutch) Publishing Industry

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## Abstract

In a response to developments in the media entertainment industry, the international publishing industry has started publishing transmedia narratives with a book as the tentpole experience. While such products are not actively produced in the Dutch publishing industry yet, they might become necessary for the industry's strategic position within the media industry, especially as this industry develops towards more immersive modes of storytelling. This thesis has aimed to evaluate the current situation surrounding transmediality in the Dutch publishing industry and to make a sketch of the opportunities for this development. The research question answered in this thesis is: 'What role does transmediality play in the international publishing industry, and what are the possibilities and considerations for Dutch publishing companies in using this storytelling technique in their products?'. This is done in four chapters. First, the academic debate surrounding transmediality is discussed. Then, to build a framework for transmediality with the book as a tentpole extension, three international cases of successful transmedia books are analysed. This analysis has functioned to understand the form and possibilities of a transmedia narrative within the publishing industry. Thirdly, this thesis applies the findings from previous chapters to the Dutch publishing industry, using an evaluation case from the Dutch publisher Meulenhoff Boekerij. This evaluation is based on two interviews and the Dutch translation of Lucy Foley's *The Hunting Party* which was used as a test, or thought experiment. Finally, applying the findings, a conclusion for the Dutch (commercial) publisher was drawn. This conclusion includes legal, commercial and creative considerations, as well as questions of authorship and concerns about the business model and structure which would arise when a Dutch commercial publisher implies transmediality into their core product.

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## Introduction

The days of simply enjoying a media product, discussing it with your friends and moving on with your life are long gone. When a movie really grasps the viewer, they will be on their phone looking for additional content even before the movie has ended. To name a few examples, *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) came accompanied by a website, several apps, merchandise and a tidal wave of memes based on the movie's cliffhanger. *Fortnite* fans create dance tutorials by the masses and discuss the game (and its narrative) online to such an extent that even many non-gamers are familiar with this franchise. Even the public image of boy band One Direction, which also sparked into a multiple platform franchise, is heavily influenced by m-rated fanfiction with one work even being published (*After*, 2014) and adapted into a film (*After*, 2018). But where does the reader go in search for additional content to their favourite novel? They can track their friends' reading activity on Goodreads, find fan art on Instagram or DeviantArt and discuss the novel's content on forums and other social media but as of yet, apart from user generated content, the experience of reading a novel has hardly transcended the physical (e-)book. That does not mean that the book does not lend itself to transmediality. Several transmedia books have been published, such as *Cathy's Book: If Found Call 650-266-8233* (2006). There are also several successful transmedia projects which are adaptations of literary works, like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012), a transmedia adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Still, the digital entertainment industry holds sway over transmediality, while the publishing industry has not been actively publishing transmedia products. The fact that books are still being read in great numbers despite the current developments in the digital entertainment industry, shows that they must be a highly valuable source of narrative. In fact, the publishing

industry might be holding onto an important transmedia extension. This thesis analyses three International, Anglophone transmedia publications to gain insight into current developments in the international publishing industry. Building onto the findings from these case studies, this thesis analyses a case by Meulenhoff Boekerij to determine whether the Dutch publishing industry has an interest in transmediality and, if they do, to what extent they are currently equipped to act on this interest. This thesis also discusses which steps the commercial publisher can take to make use of the opportunities at hand, both with regards to technological developments and the core product of their business, to include transmedia narratives in their publishing strategies.

## Chapter 1 – Towards a definition of transmedia

Before diving into the academic debate around transmedia, I want to clarify the terminology that is used to define the products on which transmediality is made possible. Both insiders and outsiders of the media industry can experience confusion from the terms ‘medium’ and ‘platform’, and other definitions surrounding the core business, as they are not always used coherently. The process of content delivery through a medium, in an extremely simplified explanation, is as follows: (digital) content is created, this content is (digitally) published on a specific platform, and then the content is received through a hardware system by the consumer. This thesis defines non-digital ‘content’ as such, and digital content specifically as ‘digital content’. The ‘medium’ points to the specific field of production to which the content belongs, such as a film, game or book (Göran Bolin 241; Davidson 180; Marc Ruppel 296; Jenkins 13). Grammar-technically, ‘media’ is the plural of ‘medium’ (Oxford English Dictionary, “media”). This thesis will regard ‘media’ as an indefinite plural of mediums through which content can be communicated, which altogether makes up an industry that focuses on delivering (digital) content through any medium: the media industry. The specific platform on which content is published and for which it is optimised is defined as the ‘platform’. The hardware system on which the content is delivered and manifests itself to the audience is referred to in this thesis as the ‘delivery technology’ (Jenkins 13). Thus, if I were to record a song to accompany this thesis and upload it on Spotify, the song would be the digital content, music would be the medium it belongs to, Spotify would be the platform and the laptop or phone you would use to listen to the song is the delivery technology. As



this thesis and the song both deliver content through a different medium, the entirety of this project could then be referred to as 'media'.

With the basic terminology cleared up, the transcendence of these concepts can be discussed. However, to understand what a transmedia narrative entails, it is important to recognise the landscape that calls for such a development. Henry Jenkins discusses a phenomenon called 'media convergence' which is "The flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (2). He discusses media convergence in light of the technological, cultural and social changes. Convergence is not just a media shift, it is a social shift, and requires the participation of the consumer (3). Bolin defines media (or digital) convergence as "the blending or merging of different media technologies into one another" (238). Through this process, the lines that separate mediums and types of media become blurred and delivery technologies start to adapt functionalities to cater to different types of media (237). According to Bolin, convergence is enabled by digital media's "unique capacity to break down all kinds of information into binary digits that makes it possible for technical functions and textual content to appear on different media technologies, as long as these are also digital" (239). In this quote, we can consider 'different media technologies' to mean different forms of media, different platforms and different delivery technologies. This means that all digital content is, in its essence, binary digits which can be recoded to a different extension of the transmedia narrative. So information given in, say, a video game, would have the same transposable meaning as information given in a video clip because it is all just binary in the end. Of course the book would be an exception to this rule, as a book is not a digital product made up of binary digits.

On a bigger scale, media convergence turns into market convergence, which means that industries that focus on a different medium such as the film industry and the music industry, are being integrated (Bolin 241). If a media company takes on an integrated product range, they can protect themselves from fragmented consumption as a result of media convergence. A loss in one sector of the media industry can be made up for a company with an increased profitability of another sector (242). As Bolin sketches: “When, for example, the music industry is facing a decline in record sales, and hence a loss of profit in this specific sector of the industry, they are compensated by the increased profitability of concerts, including various kinds of merchandise sold at these events” (242).

In describing what he calls the ‘Black Box Fallacy’, Jenkins argues that “sooner or later, (...) all media content is going to flow through a single black box into our living rooms” (Jenkins 14). Thus, the delivery technologies evolve to provide as many media types as possible. This development could be regarded as a way to prevent the delivery technology from lacking behind in a landscape of media convergence, and thus they take a step in the direction of complete market convergence. However at this point, what is happening is that a multitude of black boxes are evolving. There are home entertainment sets, laptops, and mobile phones which all provide access to a wide range of media. The black box fallacy means that the clear relation that existed between the medium and the delivery technology has faded. Music, television, film and games all used to have their own delivery technology, which is no longer the case. Every popular delivery technology has now become the shell for almost any type of media. On my laptop, I can write a thesis, read e-books to help me do so, listen to music, occasionally browse social media, watch an episode of my favourite series and much more.

This increase in media multitasking enables (or, arguably, forces) the audience to experience a transmedia narrative, which Jenkins defines as follows:

A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best - so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole. (Jenkins 97)

There is not yet a consensus on what makes up a 'perfect' transmedia narrative, but scholars continue to build their theory on Jenkins'. Considering terminology, the Latin prefix 'trans' means "beyond, through, transverse, conveying the idea of transcendence" (Renira Rampazzo Gambarato 81). So the product transcends a single form of media and the narrative extends over several platforms and delivery technologies. The value of a transmedia narrative, and what divides it from other types of cross- and intermedial narratives, is "the capability to exist not just by the juxtaposition of different devices and platforms, but to spread the common goal on the different platforms throughout an integrated production" (84). This means that the narrative does not repeat itself over a different extension but that each extension in itself adds to the narrative.

The definition of a transmedia narrative has remained the same over the years, and Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling is still fully relevant to the current practice,

however Jenkins' tendency to use the terms 'transmedia' and 'cross-media' as synonyms (124) has been challenged over the years. According to Gambarato, there is still an ongoing debate about whether the two terms can be used to mean the same thing (83). In this thesis, the two are seen as separate concepts. With a cross-media narrative, a story is being retold on a different medium. Basic book-to-film adaptations, such as Joe Wright's *Anna Karenina* (2012) or the *Harry Potter* franchise, are cross-media projects which do not expand their narrative over several self-containing platforms. Instead, the narrative is 'simply' transferred to film (*Anna Karenina*) or repeats itself in film, games and other media without having these platforms add original narrative of their own (*Harry Potter*) (Charles Davis 177; Gambarato 82). Thus, the major difference between transmedia and cross-media is that a transmedia project develops a storyworld over multiple platforms, whereas a cross-media project repeats a narrative over multiple platforms, although sometimes in an abbreviated form.

An example of a transmedia narrative is *The Blair Witch Project* (movie 1999), which used a website to draw attention to the project before the film was released. The audience could have been intrigued by the website but never watch the film, or watch the film and not even know about the existence of the website. As the attention for this project (especially the film) grew, it sparked comic books, a mockumentary, a fan community, spin-offs and videogames (Bolin 245; Gambarato 87). Most passive viewers still know this project only for its film. When a transmedia narrative evolves around one central extension of the project, such as a movie, this extension is called the 'tentpole'. As defined by Drew Davidson: "Tentpole is a term used to describe one big media experience that supports a lot of other related media experiences" (16). An example for a transmedia narrative with a tentpole experience is Twenty One Pilot's latest album called *Trench* (2018). Prior to the

release of this album, the website 'www.dmaorg.info' was found by fans, which sparked a heavy discussion about the metanarrative of the upcoming album. This discussion was enhanced with cryptic messages on the bands' social media channels. Through this content, fans learned that this album was to revolve around a fictional place called 'Dema', and awaited the album's release to understand this digital content which was riddled with mystery. The entire experience led up to the release of the album, which integrates the metanarrative surrounding Dema into the song lyrics. But, given that the entire experience was established to enhance the album's narrative and to promote the album, the album itself was the tentpole experience.

## 1.1 The audience

Transmedia narratives are, often, not designed to be experienced in full by the entire audience. The best audience type for an immersive transmedia experience is somebody who is a fan of the narrative, as argued by Davis:

A clear distinction may be drawn between on the one hand the fan and on the other hand the less involved media consumers: the passive television viewer, the convenience-seeking transient cross-media grazer, the media multitasker, the functionally illiterate media consumer, and the uninterested non-member of an audience. (Davis 180)

Loyalty and dedication are driving factors that direct the fan to other platforms (180).

Through their devotion, fans develop a lifestyle around their interest. Take somebody who is highly devoted to a series of fantasy books. They will purchase merchandise, post about it

on Instagram and discuss the book with others. Because of this sharing behaviour, the true fans of the content are grouped together and can easily be targeted by the transmedia producer. The passive audience is still valuable to the project as a whole, but less so to the project's transmedia nature. Davis divides fans into two categories: those who are psychologically involved and those who are socially involved (181). Fans who are psychologically involved are likely to be highly dedicated, but fans who are socially involved are the most valuable to the transmedia producer as they are influential and help spread the narrative – all aspects of it (181). Fans might also produce related narratives themselves. The acronym "VUP" is often used to describe the involved transmedia audience that transcends single-platform consumption, meaning "viewer, user and player" (Gambarato 93). This term will be used throughout this thesis to indicate those who experience the transmedia product on multiple platforms or who are engaged enough to do so when other media or platforms that contain content for the transmedia narrative, or 'extensions', are offered. The term 'audience' is used for the entire audience, including the VUP and those who may not be interested in exploring the narrative beyond a single extension.

A deciding factor in whether a member of the audience is willing and able to expand their experience to other extensions is their media literacy. Sonia Livingstone defines media literacy as "'reading' audiovisual material" (3). Especially members of the audience who have grown up with digital media will have this skill. They would quickly understand the transmedia nature of the project as they can 'read' the migratory cues and understand where to find the content they point to. Those who did not naturally evolve a media literacy as they grew up might have more difficulty understanding the possibilities presented in a transmedia project.

## 1.2 Pro-active and retro-active narratives

There are certain qualities to a transmedia narrative that need to be taken into account to understand the nature a transmedia project. Firstly, a transmedia narrative can be either a pro-active or retro-active project<sup>1</sup>, as Davidson argues (10) . It should be noted that Davidson's work focuses on cross-media narratives and tends to blur the lines between cross-mediality and transmediality. However, his definition of pro-active and retro-active narratives are just as valid for the academic debate surrounding transmediality. A pro-active project is created with the idea of trans- or cross-mediality from the start, and the narrative is immediately optimised to be expanded over multiple media (Davidson 10). A retro-active project starts from a narrative on a single medium, like for example a successful book which is later expanded into a transmedia experience (Gambarato 87). The transmedia experience is designed around the already existing content. Retro-active transmedia narratives can also be adaptations, often of (graphic) novels. An example of such an adaptation is *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012). The novel is not necessarily a part of the project's transmedia narrative, as the content is repeated in the tentpole extension through the project's adaptive nature. Still, the audience is expected to know the work in order to understand the references made to it.

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<sup>1</sup> Jenkins' definition of transmediality and Davidson's concept of pro-active and retro-active transmedia narratives were similarly defined in my pre-master thesis, but discussed in order to lay the foundation for a modern transmedia adaptation of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) which retains yet recontextualizes the social, thematic, and literary value of the story.

### 1.3 Open and closed narratives

The second quality to take into account is whether the narrative is open or closed. As Gambarato argues, stories that are at mostly based on one-way interaction from the audience are closed systems, whereas stories that allow the audience to actually interfere with the narrative are open systems (87). Interference, in a transmedia narrative, will mean that the audience can have an influence on what happens in the narrative. A recent example of an open narrative is the movie *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018), where the audience is faced with decisions they have to make, which decide the course of the film. Those who make different decisions will see the movie play out differently as well. Some forms of media are more suitable to open narratives than others. A book is always a closed narrative, as no matter how you read it or what you do with it, the story remains as it is (Davidson 69). Throwing a book away in frustration or discussing the book with others will not lead the narrative to have a more satisfactory ending. Thus, books are always a closed and essentially non-interactive product. Bear in mind that 'essentially' is a key word in this argument, as new technologies such as augmented reality can still add a dimension of interactivity to the product.

### 1.4 Negative capability and migratory cues

Transmedia narratives are propelled forwards by the use of hermeneutic codes. As defined by Geoffrey Long, hermeneutic codes in the (meta-)narrative function to "introduce, further, and conclude the mysterious elements running throughout the text" (61). In a transmedia narrative, hermeneutic codes manifest themselves as negative capability or, expanding on negative capability, as migratory cues. Long argues that "negative capability is the art of building strategic gaps into a narrative to evoke a delicious sense of 'uncertainty,



mystery, or doubt' in the audience" (53). The narrative contains purposefully placed gaps to spark interest in the VUP, which should cause them to create user-generated content and discuss the story with others in order to fill the gaps, provided that the negative capability sparks enough curiosity within the audience (Oscar Bastiaens and Hans Bouwknecht 1282)

Negative capability can also be used to induce (enforce) synergy into the project. Jenkins defines synergy in a media project as "the economic opportunities represented by industry insiders' ability to own and control all of those manifestations" (19). With "those manifestations", he means extensions. This flows into 'synergistic storytelling', in which the narrative on those different platforms controlled by the producing company is completely intertwined. Jenkins names *The Matrix* (1999) as a highly successful synergetic transmedia narrative, as the story was designed with such multi-extension synergy that sometimes the actors were not sure whether they were shooting a scene for the movie or for the game (104). It is good synergistic storytelling that will make a transmedia narrative immersive and successful. Negative capability is a complementing factor to synergy because it gives the VUP a reason to find other extensions, making the project not only synergetic in design and implementation but also in execution and result.

On its own, negative capability is an empty space that the audience needs to fill in, either with their own imagination or by searching for information in other extensions, given that they understand that these extensions are there and that they contain additional information. The transmedia storyteller can use what is called 'migratory cues' to help the audience understand that there are more extensions on which the story can be experienced. Ruppel coined and defined migratory cues as signs that point the attention towards other "sites" (296). They work as a signal to another extension of the transmedia narrative, intended to activate the VUP to act upon the signal and find the content it points

to on another medium or platform (Long 59). A migratory cue is written into the transmedia narrative by hinting towards additional content which is not provided in the current extension. This is meant to motivate the (potential) VUP to search for additional information and end up on a new extension. When the VUP picks up on a migratory cue and continues their experience on different extensions, it increases their understanding of the story, and thus their enjoyment (Long 60), as active engagement is rewarded with additional content (Davidson 30).

Bolin refers to the audience using multiple extensions in a transmedia experience as 'necessary', as the reader would otherwise not be able to 'comprehend' the story (246). However, Jenkins stresses that going deep needs to be optional (134). Otherwise, that part of the audience who either intends to passively consume the content, or those who do not have the degree of media literacy with which they can act on the migratory cue, will be scared away.

### 1.5 The meta-narrative

All of the texts together, or arguably the entire narrative in which the texts take place, make up the 'meta-story' (Emma Beddows 43) or 'meta-narrative' (Leigh Edwards 5). This narrative transcends any single platform. Beddows explains the meta-narrative to be the combination of all texts. However, since worldbuilding is an important aspect of a successful transmedia project, the meta-narrative is even bigger than that. It is the entire narrative that is developed to create the transmedia project to begin with, and every extension will make up a part of this meta-narrative, but so will aspects of negative capability and (arguably) user generated content. This means that before the extensions are written and produced, a meta-narrative must be established in order to create a successful transmedia

project. Who establishes this metanarrative would differ per project, but in the publishing industry, it is likely that the metanarrative is established by the author. Writing a metanarrative does differ greatly from writing a book, or a movie script, or a podcast. The metanarrative needs to be compatible for several storylines to evolve, and thus be planned with great precision. Most of the successful transmedia metanarratives, such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, were planned carefully to be able to support this storytelling technique. This also means that writing a transmedia narrative happens on two levels. First the metanarrative is established, and then come the different extensions which are interlinked within the metanarrative.

## 1.6 The perfect transmedia narrative

It can be concluded that, as of yet, it is impossible to define what would make for the 'perfect' or 'ideal' transmedia narrative. There are successful examples of open, closed, pro-active and retro-active transmedia projects. A project can have a clear tentpole or depend equally on each extension. Some are riddled with migratory cues, others are quite straightforward. Still, many transmedia projects have one thing in common: they are often adaptations of (graphic) novels. This trend suggests that books must own a certain value that enables a successful transmedia experience. Still, the literary industry seems to be a late adapter of transmedia developments. Where the movie industry is keen to push the boundaries of storytelling, the publishing industry has not published a great amount of products that use more immersive modes of storytelling, or used this narrative technique in their marketing communication. However, doing so might generate more interest in books despite the increasing range of entertainment options that are now available to us. The research question to be answered in this thesis is: 'What role does transmediality play in the

international publishing industry, and what are the possibilities and considerations for Dutch publishing companies in using this storytelling technique in their products?'. The answer to this question consists of many intertwining factors. Factors that need to be taken into account when answering this question include, but are not limited to commercial interest, law, authorship and the media literacy of both the Dutch audience and the publishers' employees.

## 1.7 Transmediality in the Dutch publishing industry

Despite the immense growth of the entertainment industry in the recent decades, 'the novel is dead' has proven to be an empty prophecy. The literary industry is adapting well to the rise of Jenkins' 'convergence culture', with e-readers, reading applications, social media channels based on the act of reading such as Goodreads, and the infiltration of book-based communities on other social media such as 'Bookstagram', 'Booktube', 'Bookler' and more. The publishing industry has adapted new digital marketing practices such as social media and SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) in their marketing communication strategies.

However, a truly successful media strategy is not about adapting and staying afloat on the tides of bigger developments. Instead of keeping up with the rapid changes in surrounding entertainment industries, the publishing industry might have opportunities that are exclusive to the industry and ready to be exploited. Transmedia has this potential. For now, this storytelling technique has been used mostly by digital media companies, mainly in the fields of movie production and media-related marketing. For the publishing industry, transmedia narratives have the potential to maximise brand awareness for the author and the publisher's customer experience. It also has the potential to increase interest in the publisher's core product: the book. This thesis focuses on the Dutch publishing industry, which means that transmedia narratives also still have an edge of 'newness' in this sector, and this is a unique chance for the Dutch publishing industry to be an early adapter of a new media strategy. Because the experience is relatively new to the Dutch audience, the publishing industry can use this immersive experience to draw the attention to the field of publishing again, and to raise awareness of the publishing industry's relevance within the wider entertainment and information industry. However, transmedia storytelling as a practice has by now matured so far that it is necessary for a company to go beyond playing

with these new storytelling techniques. To ensure a successful transmedia narrative, the storytelling conventions themselves need to be incorporated into the company's business model thoughtfully. Of course, adapting new techniques within a company is always a case of trial and error, but to reach the best result, adapting transmedia narratives must be a well-thought-out step for the publishing company, to avoid insufficient or incomplete narratives.

Even though the current (trans)media industry tends to focus on on-screen media, books are still a highly valuable asset to a transmedia project. As Davidson argues, "Books are a great way to establish continuity with a story. While it's often bemoaned that books are read less and less, they can serve as the touchstone for the rest of a cross-media experience" (46). Despite the misconceptions about the synonymous nature of cross- and transmedia, his argument is still valid when discussing it in light of a transmedia project. Because books are (often) a linear story, they can serve as a strong base or guide for a transmedia narrative. They can be used as a solid point of reference and transmedia producers can fall back onto the storyline as given in a book because it is unchangeable (47). He even mentions that books are "still one of our most well-developed media to use for relating stories" (47).

Cross- and transmedia projects which are based on books are often adaptations. Take, for example, *Harry Potter* (2001) or *The Lord of the Rings* (2001) and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. This may call for the common misconception that all multimedia projects based on books are adaptations. While this is an understandable take on the publishing industry's passive role in (trans)media developments surrounding their product, this is not always the case. An adaptation, as defined by Linda Hutcheon, is "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works" (8). A project that is designed to be transmedia from the

start, thus a pro-active transmedia project, is not an adaptation as it is not a transposition of the work: It is a single work that consists of several extensions. The entire experience has been designed to take place within the metanarrative, and the book is a part of that experience. That means that the traditional role of the fiction author would change within the transmedia project as well. On the other hand, if a book is brought out and the marketing would use transmedia components, then it could be argued that this marketing content is, in fact, an adaptation from the book. Still, this is only the case if the book was written without pre-existing inclinations towards transmediality.

### 1.8 Reasons for transmediality

Because children's programs like *Pokémon* are shifting towards transmedial strategies which require interactive participation and depend on collective intelligence, children are "being prepared to contribute to a more sophisticated knowledge culture" (Jenkins 133). He even argues that "Young consumers have become information hunters and gatherers, taking pleasure in tracking down character backgrounds and plot points and making connections between different texts within the same franchise" (133). Thus, Jenkins predicts, they will expect entertainment that caters to their interests in their later life as well. By using transmedia narratives the publishing industry can achieve a higher product engagement for their future audience which will be "strategically and economically advantageous" (Charles Davis 181). Still, it is not only the future readers that will expect novelty in companies' media development. With the rise of transmedia narratives in other media industries, the publishing industry is has been rather inadvertent towards this development with which they can engage their existing audience as well. As the publishing industry is a part of the media landscape, it is important that they understand and appreciate the degree of media

literacy their audience has. Even though this concept might change, for now the core product of the publishing industry is the book, be that the physical product or an e-book or audio-book. In a transmedia narrative created by a publisher, that means that the book will be the tentpole of the transmedia experience.

Implementing a transmedia strategy is not an easy step for a business that did not start out on a concept of transmediality. As Davis argues:

While not new, transmedia product innovation is becoming an increasingly important management challenge to media companies, requiring not only new storytelling conventions and aesthetics but also complementary innovation in business models, production tools and processes, market feedback mechanisms and audience information systems, performance metrics, tactics to induce audience engagement and retention, and audience literacy. (176)

Thus, making the step towards a transmedia narrative within the core product of the company takes more effort than just changing the product itself. Many changes need to be made within the publishing company to ensure that the transmedia narrative runs coherently. This is not an easy task, however considering the market convergence that is happening within the media industry, it might be necessary for the publishing industry to consider their own role within the industry to avoid losses from falling behind. In contrast, by adapting transmedia strategies earlier than their competitors, the Dutch publisher can gain a competitive advantage.



## 1.9 Methodology

This thesis will focus specifically on Dutch publishers whose main product is literary or genre-fiction for either young adults or adults. Every week, [debesteller60.nl](http://debesteller60.nl) publishes a ranking with bestselling books. Several publishers who are always present in the top of this list and whom also have a strong media presence are De Bezige Bij, Prometheus, Meulenhoff Boekerij, Ambo|Anthos, and Luitingh-Sijthoff. These publishers are all more or less present on the same media platforms, being Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and traditional brand websites. It is likely that if a publisher is interested in transmediality, it would be one of the bigger, commercial publishers who already have a strong media presence. Besides the creative and strategic possibilities of transmedia products, this thesis will also discuss timing. A good transmedia narrative needs to be planned and timed well. An assessment of possible forms of transmedia communication will also show whether the industry is ready for a more immersive marketing strategy or which steps the publishers should undertake to get there. As mentioned before, several questions need to be answered in order to conclude whether and how the Dutch publishing industry can implement transmediality in their products: Does it fit within the business model?; What are the legal challenges when publishing a transmedia project?; Is the audience ready?; Are the employees ready?; and, of course, questions of authorship will arise.

This thesis will apply existing literature on three successful cases of transmedia narratives within the international publishing industry before examining whether and how this storytelling technique can be incorporated into publishing strategies within the Dutch industry. It will do so on in the form of an instrumental multiple case study. As the definition of what makes for a good transmedia narrative is not clear yet, applying the concept to a new industry might help in defining what is and isn't necessary in creating a transmedia

narrative. For now, this thesis will use two schemes of what makes up a transmedia narrative: Jenkins' seven principles of storytelling and Gambarato's ten aspects of a transmedia narrative. These schemes are used to analyse the three international cases of successful transmedia narratives with a book as the tentpole experience. This analysis provides a framework of possible transmedia narratives with the book as a tentpole experience, as well as the opportunities and challenges that come with creating such a narrative. This framework will be applied in an evaluation case from within the Dutch industry.

In his blog *The revenge of the origami unicorn*, which builds onto his earlier work on convergence and transmedia, Henry Jenkins names seven key principles to a transmedia narrative. As mentioned before, Jenkins' theory and definition of what makes a transmedia narrative still serves as the basis for other scholars, yet it is also challenged or expanded. Building onto Jenkins' seven principles of a transmedia narrative and theory developed by other scholars, Gambarato has developed a list of essential features to a transmedia design. Gambarato and Jenkins' key aspects for a transmedia narrative were combined into an analysing scheme through which this thesis evaluates the three international case studies in Chapter 2. This thesis focuses on the publishing industry and Jenkins' and Gambarato's aspects were not necessarily established to evaluate a transmedia narrative with a book as a tentpole experience. Thus, the aspects were incorporated into this list considering what could realistically be applied to the publishing industry. This thesis will analyse the three international case studies on the following aspects:

### 1. Spreadability and drillability

Spreadability as defined by Jenkins is “the capacity of the public to engage actively in the circulation of media content through social networks and in the process expand its economic value and cultural worth”. Drillability means that the audience can ‘drill’ into the narrative to find more than just what lies on the surface, by finding additional content in other platforms.

### 2. Continuity and multiplicity

Continuity, in a transmedia project, means that the meta-narrative is coherent (Jenkins). This is practiced on every level, from scriptwriting to editing to, in some cases, where and when you provide content. Multiplicity “allows fans to take pleasure in alternative retellings, seeing the characters and events from fresh perspectives” (Jenkins).

### 3. Immersion and extractability

When a narrative is immersive, the consumer enters into the world of the story. Through a combination of the transmedial nature of the narrative and a suspension of disbelief, the VUP becomes immersed into the storyworld as it evolves through different extensions. When a narrative is extractable, the fan takes aspects of the story away with them as resources they deploy in the spaces of their everyday life (Jenkins).

### 4. Worldbuilding

The involved audience will want to have deeper understanding of the world in which the narrative takes place. Therefore, it is important that the author and producer have a deeper understanding of the universe (Jenkins). Because the point of transmedia is to unfold a

storyworld over multiple platforms, it should be well thought-through and open for expansion. As Gambarato argues: “The world can be considered the primary character of the story of its own” (90).

### 5. Seriality

We can think of transmedia storytelling then as a hyperbolic version of the serial, where the chunks of meaningful and engaging story information have been dispersed not simply across multiple segments within the same medium, but rather across multiple media systems (Jenkins).

Even though he focused on the nonlinear nature of transmedia narratives in his own early work, Jenkins argues that it is becoming clear that linear narratives might work as well. In fact, media producers are experimenting with building up to the release of the “mother ship”, or tentpole experience, in a linear way (Jenkins). So, there is no consensus on what makes a perfect transmedial sequence. Within a transmedia narrative, seriality is not necessarily a serialised narrative which is published consecutively: it could also be the serialized delivery of the canonical narrative through different platforms which are all available at the same time, but for which migratory cues function as arrows into the right direction.

## 6. Subjectivity

As a transmedia narrative presents different aspect of the narrative on different platforms, it is also likely that the audience gets to understand the point of view of different characters or organisations within the story. The most important aspect of subjectivity is that it is written from the perspective of said character or organisation. For example, the movie *2012* was accompanied by a website that warned for the ending of the planet, which was written with such conviction that NASA even objected that this aspect of the fictional narrative might be too misleading to the public (Jenkins).

## 7. Performance

When discussing performance, Jenkins mostly targets fan performance and the dynamic relationship with producers. In a successful transmedia narrative, fans are likely to produce user generated content and to discuss negative capability, migratory cues and the overall content of the project and thus take on the role of both a performer and a producer.

Directors can choose to use this fan activity in their meta-narrative design.

## 8. Extensions

When designing a transmedia narrative, it needs to be decided how many extensions of the narrative there will be, and how these should be shaped within the story. An important question to answer when designing a transmedia project is which extensions are canonical (Gambarato 91) and which serve the function of additional content. Deciding this in the narrative design is important because you need the narrative to remain consistent and structured. Narrative techniques can be used to maximise the VUP engagement (93). It is important to match the right content to the right audience (92) and thus you need to do

research as to which platforms should contain what extension. The case study will also discuss the synergy of these extensions, both on the narrative level and the corporate level.

### 9. Audience and market

The audience of a transmedia narrative is more than just a passive viewer, reader or player. Instead, they take on all three of these roles, either simultaneously or by their journey through the provided transmedia content. In doing so, they (ideally) interact with the content (both the individual content and cross-content through migratory cues) and with other members of the audience (Gambarato 93).

To transfer the findings from the analysis of international success stories to the Dutch publishing industry, This thesis will build upon the findings from the international cases in an evaluation of the current state of affairs surrounding transmediality within Meulenhoff Boekerij. This evaluation will make clear whether the results derived from the international case studies are applicable to the Dutch market. Most importantly, the evaluation will show whether the creative endeavours of a transmedia project are doable within the Dutch publishing industry, given Davis' aforementioned argument of necessary changes in a company structure to ensure a successful transmedia product (176).

Meulenhoff Boekerij is going to publish a Dutch translation of *The Hunting Party* (2018) by Lucy Foley, and they want to create a game to attract readers to the book. Even though this game is a part of the marketing strategy, I will expand this idea and see if it would be possible for Meulenhoff Boekerij to create a transmedia narrative around this book and discuss the implications of such an effort on the publishing strategy of Meulenhoff Boekerij.

This thesis will discuss the possibilities and challenges of producing this transmedia

narrative according to the results of the international cases, and discuss whether the Dutch publishing industry is ready to implement transmediality in their core product.. With the conclusions derived from this evaluation, I will discuss whether a pro-active, immersive transmedia narrative with the book as a tentpole is possible and expedient within the Dutch publishing industry in the future.

The structure of this thesis is set to begin with what degree of transmediality has been achieved in the Anglophone publishing industry, in order to determine what can be achieved in the Dutch industry. In Chapter 2, I will analyse three cases of a successful transmedia narrative with a book as the tentpole experience. From this analysis I will conclude what the possibilities and challenges are for a publisher who wants to incorporate one or multiple transmedia narratives in their publishing strategy. The results from the case study will be the basis for the evaluation in Chapter 3, discussing Meulenhoff Boekerij's plans to expand the book *The Hunting Party* with a game and considering whether this publisher could (and should) implement transmediality in their core product. After evaluating this product and discussing the results in light of the organisational structure of the Dutch publishing industry, this thesis will conclude whether, and how, the Dutch publishing industry can develop transmedia narratives with the novel as the tentpole experience. Not unimportant, it also discusses whether the industry is even interested in transmediality to begin with. This thesis does not intend to advice Meulenhoff Boekerij on their proceedings with their products. Instead, it seeks to inform the reader about the current position and opportunities of the Dutch publishing industry with the results of an instrumental multiple case study in which Meulenhoff Boekerij's transmedia efforts serve as an evaluative case.

## Chapter 2 – International case studies

Before analysing the case from Meulenhoff Boekerij, it is important to understand what is currently being done in the international publishing industry with regards to transmedia products. Therefore, three international case studies are analysed in this Chapter. This analysis will be based upon the factors of transmediality as described in Chapter 1 to decide to what degree these cases are successful transmedia products. The results from these cases will serve as a foundation for Meulenhoff Boekerij's case to understand the possibilities and trends in transmediality within the publishing industry.

### Case 1 – Cathy's Book

*Cathy's book, if found call (650) 266-8233* (2006) was written by Sean Stewart and Jordan Weissman and published by Running Press in the United States. This young adult novel follows the story of a teenage girl named Cathy who, after having been dumped by her boyfriend Victor, finds out about a strange organisation for which Victor completed secret tasks such as taking Cathy's blood. Cathy and her best friend Emma set out to find out exactly what is going on, but then Cathy disappears and leaves the book behind for Emma. This is a pro-active transmedia narrative.

### Case 2 – Two Left Feet

Over the last years, the publishing industry has been experimenting with Augmented Reality: an animation technique which portrays the animation over real-time scenes from real life through the use of a digital camera. Several companies have emerged that present



an augmented reality (AR) experience that revolves around children's books, such as Bookful, Books & Magic and BoookAPP. In collaboration with the latter, an animation company called Resin has created an immersive experience around the book *Two Left Feet* (2004), written by Adam Stower and published by Bloomsbury. *Two Left Feet* is a children's story about a monster who is terrible at dancing as he has two left feet. However, he finds a female monster who can help him learn to dance. This is a retro-active transmedia project, as the transmedia experience was the idea of one of the company owners of Resin, who had the book for his child and realised that the story would lend itself perfectly for an animation project. So Resin bought the rights from Bloomsbury (twoleftfeetapp.com). Now the story, targeted at children aged four to eight (Publishers Weekly), can be still bought as a traditional children's book and enhanced with an AR application. It could be rightfully argued that this experience classifies as cross-media instead of transmedia. However, because AR does have the potential of an extension in a fully developed transmedia experience, this project is worth analysing.

### Case 3 – Skeleton Creek

The *Skeleton Creek* (2009) series was written by Patrick Carman and published as a proactive transmedia narrative by CreateSpace Publishing. Carman has an oeuvre of YA transmedia books, amongst which are *The 39 Clues* (2008), *3:15* (2011) and *Towervale* (2019). *Skeleton Creek* is a mystery novel about two main characters, Ryan and Sarah. Ryan's narrative plays out in the books through a journal format and Sarah records video journals which can be viewed on the website when passwords from the books are used. In the narrative, Sarah e-mails her videos to Ryan.

## 2.1 Extensions

### ***Cathy's Book***

As the titles already gives away, the reader is prompted to reach to other media even before their reading experience begins. By using migratory cues, the VUP (viewer, user and player as discussed in Chapter 1) is pointed towards a multitude of extensions. When the phone number in the title is called, the VUP is directed to a voice mail in which you hear a teen girl saying “Hey this is Cathy, I can’t come to the phone right now”. On some editions, the title directs the VUP towards an e-mail address: [cathy@cathysbook.co.uk](mailto:cathy@cathysbook.co.uk). After the success of this transmedia story, Running Press created an app in 2009. They decided to create this app to make use of the quickly developing delivery technology of the iPhone and iPad (Calvin Reid for Publishers Weekly). The app scrolls through Cathy’s journal the same way the reader would flip the pages the book, but adds animations and voice snippets. It also contains a list of evidence and dials Cathy’s phone number when clicked. The app can also be used to visit other websites, see Cathy’s location, and call other characters. Besides Cathy’s phone number, the book includes phone numbers for several other characters for whom they can leave a voicemail message. There are also blogs and social media profiles which provide additional information about the main characters. The book itself contains a physical ‘evidence pack’. Some extensions are found through migratory cues from the book, some are left for the VUP to find through more extensive searching, but the first step towards a transmedia experience is definitely encouraged in the book itself. In their search for information in the transmedia landscape, fans have also created their own videos on YouTube in which they provide an overview of the content they have found, and an analysis of what this content should imply for the (meta)narrative. Given that this story was first

released thirteen years ago, this complex, multi-platform web of information is incredibly inventive.

### ***Two Left Feet***

The (parent of the) reader can choose to expand the experience of *Two Left Feet* by buying the AR application. This application was animated by Resin and realised with technology provided by BoooKAPP. If, within the application, the camera is pointed at certain parts of the book, the VUP can see visual scenes play out over the book. The app also provides a narration of the book. From the app, content can be shared on social media platforms. If the VUP does not own a copy of the book, they can also print out an image which triggers the same content within the application. This means that the book is not necessarily the tentpole experience, but it does comply to the 'transmedia rule' that the VUP should be able to enjoy different platforms separately from each other. Still, this product's marketing campaign does seem to point towards the book as an intended tentpole.

### ***Skeleton Creek***

From the book, the audience is pointed towards other extensions using migratory cues and negative capability. After the book, video messages are the most important extension. From the book, the VUP gains access to videos made by Sarah's character which interact with Ryan's journal. These videos, along with sound fragments, can be found on the website [www.sarahfincher.com](http://www.sarahfincher.com) which requires a password to be obtained from the book. A myriad of passwords all provide different content on the website. Because the information on the website can only be accessed through passwords in the book, the book is the tentpole experience. However this also means that the audience cannot enjoy each extension

separately. Reading only the book would not make much sense, and the online content cannot be accessed without the book. Besides the interlinked physical book and website, another website called [www.skeletoncreekisreal.com](http://www.skeletoncreekisreal.com) has been built by a 'fan' who claims to have exclusive information which proves that Skeleton Creek is a real place, and sets out to prove their case. However, given the title of the latest Skeleton Creek novel: *Skeleton Creek is Real: The Shocking truth*, it became clear that this website was a part of the narrative all along. The author of this book has mentioned that, because of the transmedia nature of the narrative, it took three years to finish this project (Patrick Carman's Skeleton Creek).

## 2.2 Spreadability and drillability

### ***Cathy's Book***

This story is, in the first place, drillable. Using the book as a tentpole, the VUP is pointed towards different media, but it is up to them to go on a journey across different extensions and to piece all the information together. As this narrative is based on solving mysteries, the clues provided on the different platforms are an instrument to understand the narrative provided in the book itself. Fans do also spread the content by creating YouTube videos, and possibly by attempting to interact with the characters' social media profiles. Thus, while the book is mostly drillable, the content also allows for a spreadable narrative.

### ***Two Left Feet***

This products' marketing campaign is quite focused on the fact that content can be shared on social media, and thus it would be 'spreadable' as far as this narrative could be so, considering that this method was designed to discuss narratives that actually extend multiple platforms already. Still, this aspect of the marketing campaign is interesting given

the fact that it is targeted to children aged four to eight. This means that either the producers have a high estimate of this age groups' media literacy and activity, or they expect the children's parents to share the content on social media. It is likely to be the latter. In any case, the producers expect the audience to share content to be spread across other digital platforms, which would then function as word-to-mouth marketing for other children and parents. The narrative is not drillable.

### ***Skeleton Creek***

The narrative creates a mystery, to be solved by the VUP. Thus, already from the level of the narrative, they are asked to dig deeper and find out what happened. When 'drilling' into the narrative, the VUP finds that each piece of content provides more information but also leads to more questions. The website created by a fictional fan can only be found by the VUP who digs beyond the migratory cues provided in the book. Fans of this project discuss their findings with each other, for example through YouTube videos disseminating the website's content looking for clues. There is also a Facebook community and a blog dedicated to the mysteries in this transmedia narrative (*Skeleton Creek News*), thus the narrative is spreadable as well. One could argue that, for both *Skeleton Creek* and *Cathy's Book*, the drillable nature of these mysterious narratives allow for the spreadable character. Fans want to know more about the story, and they seek out others to help each other drill further into the narrative.

## 2.3 Continuity and multiplicity

### ***Cathy's Book***

The timeframe of this story spans about a month of Cathy's life, and the narrative is relatively simple given that it targets a teen audience. Since the story is written as a 'detective', there are many loosely hanging clues which work as negative capability, either intended to steer the VUP to other platforms or to leave them with a sense of mystery. The narrative is fragmented, which could make continuity a tricky challenge, but thus far I have not found any complaints of continuity mistakes in *Cathy's Book* online. The VUP only gets Cathy's perspective, as they are trying to find more information about Victor, who remains an enigmatic character throughout the journey. This means that multiplicity is not a characteristic of this narrative.

### ***Two Left Feet***

The narrative is linear, and the metanarrative is as flat as one would expect from a children's story. For this format, continuity would not have been a challenge to maintain. The AR experience does not offer a new perspective, only a deepened one. Still, this could be considered multiplicity as it does add to the perspective that is provided in the physical book.

### ***Skeleton Creek***

This story utilizes a linear mosaic narrative, which spreads over different platforms. Still, the narrative is continuous throughout. As the fans are incredibly engaged with this narrative, continuity is of high importance in this transmedia project. The story is delivered by two

main characters and a fictional fan who created a website to provide exclusive information, thus the narratives utilises multiplicity.

## 2.4 Immersion and extractability

### ***Cathy's Book***

By calling the phone number, the VUP steps into Cathy's world and they will emerge deeper and deeper into the experience as they continue. Fans can interact with each other about possible clues and their meaning, but that is about the only factor of the narrative that would categorise as extractability. Other than that, this narrative is written to create an immersive reading experience.

### ***Two Left Feet***

At this point in media development, AR might be the highest form of immersion we can reach within a transmedia narrative, as the audience actually sees the product 'come to life' before their eyes. This would be the case more so with AR devices such as Google Glasses which create an AR 'layer' over the audience's visual reality. Still, an AR experience through an application on an iPad or smartphone is quite 'magical' as it is new technology. Despite being incredibly immersive, this narrative is not extractable. The book itself, one could argue, was extractable, as it inspired for an extension in itself.

### ***Skeleton Creek***

Several fan-made YouTube videos disseminating the content of different extensions in a search for clues have been published, which shows that the negative capability and migratory cues go hand in hand and successfully lead the VUP back and forth between the

different extensions in search of additional information. Thus, the VUP experiences a high level of immersion as they are encouraged and willing take an active role in the transmedia experience. However this narrative, like the others, did not employ a high level of extractability.

## 2.5 Worldbuilding

### ***Cathy's Book***

As *Cathy's Ring* targets teenage girls, the storyworld is not as complex as other successful transmedia narratives such as *The Matrix*, however the web of clues is tightly spun to create a coherent and mysterious YA novel. The story takes place in a world like ours, which is likely to be intended to give the audience a sense of recognition, and this also helps them in their transmedia search of information, given that such an experience for a teen is complex enough as it is.

### ***Two Left Feet***

Besides being incredibly immersive, AR also allows for the transmedia producer to rely on the VUP's suspension of disbelief as they see the world come to life before their eyes. This happens in *Two Left Feet*. In the physical book, the narrative is created with a combination of text and visual imagery. The AR extension repeats the content of the book, and expands the storyworld of *Two Left Feet* visually as this is what the app is optimised to do. Thus, the producers smartly bring together the visual nature of children's books and the digital technology that can enhance a visual experience.



### ***Skeleton Creek***

This story revolves around a fictional town called 'Skeleton Creek'. The VUP gets to discover the storyworld in their own pace as they browse through the narrative. With journal entries, e-mail snippets (within the book) and online videos, more and more of the storyworld unfolds as the VUP continues their search for clues or answers. This story can be classified as a horror story, as the narrative is based around an eerie mystery. Fans of the project actually take an active role in helping each other understand more and more about the storyworld.

## 2.6 Seriality

### ***Cathy's Book***

New episodes of this series have appeared, called *Cathy's key, if found call 650) 266-8233* (2008) and *Cathy's ring, if found call 650) 266-8233* (2009). These books are built upon the same concepts and use largely the same platforms to continue providing a transmedia experience. The new episodes use the same phone number or e-mail address which makes clear that it takes place as an extended narrative which is Cathy's life, and perhaps also to make it easier for first-time readers to explore the transmedia universe in their own pace. In this way, Jenkins' rule that the audience must also be able to enjoy each extension on its own is applied to different episodes in the series as well.

### ***Two Left Feet***

At this point there is only one book, but either Bloomsbury or Resin could very well serialise this project as the characters can lend themselves for more adventures. Serialising this project is also made easier by the extensions used in this story, as the existing application

can simply be updated to include content for the second part as well. It would, however, be a question of rights: who owns the rights to expand this narrative, and if one party expands, can the other join in?

### ***Skeleton Creek***

There are six books in this series: *Skeleton Creek*, *Skeleton Creek: Ghost in the Machine* (2009), *Skeleton Creek: The Crossbones* (2010), *Skeleton Creek: The Raven* (2011) and *Skeleton Creek: The Phantom Room* (2014). Another book has been released called *Skeleton Creek is Real: The shocking truth*. Most of the books were released in a rapid succession, which helped to keep the audience engaged. The website claiming that Skeleton Creek is real was utilized to keep the discussion and speculation alive throughout the entire series. The narrative is provided through a correspondence of two extensions which contain a part of the story. These extensions provide a form of serialised delivery of the canonical narrative.

## 2.7 Subjectivity

### ***Cathy's Book***

On the back cover of *Cathy's Book*, the main character directly addresses the reader: "If your name isn't Emma, put this down, BACK OFF, and nobody gets hurt!". This text also appears on the home screen of the app. Within the app, the repetition of this familiar line could also function as a reassurance to the teen who is diving into such a thing for the first time. The VUP can call different characters to leave a voice mail, but the narrative is not interactive, so they only experience Cathy's perspective.

***Two Left Feet***

This narrative does not provide a complex play with subjectivity.

***Skeleton Creek***

The story is told by the two main characters who interact with each other over different extensions. They are the reference point to the storyworld, but as their correspondence creates mysteries, it is really up to the VUP to interpret the narrative. With a fictional 'fan-made' website as a part of the narrative, the producers have included a new point of view exclusive to this extension.

**2.8 Performance*****Cathy's Book***

The VUP takes on an active role in this transmedia experience. So active, in fact, that one might say that they become a character in the narrative as well. They are directly addressed, and the reader or VUP is expected to help solve a mystery by collecting evidence.

Eventually, the VUP can end up knowing more about the narrative than the characters themselves through their digging into the narrative over multiple extensions.

***Two Left Feet***

The characters of this story are deepened with the AR extension, as they actually have mannerisms and move in their own specific way. Given that the story revolves around a monster who is bad at dancing, the VUP can watch it stumble and fall in the animation.

### ***Skeleton Creek***

The reader is expected to solve the mysteries that the main characters are facing. In doing so, they take on the role of the 'detective' as they closely follow the interaction of the characters but also inspect any clues this interaction might lead to. The VUP can find information on platforms that are not mentioned in the interaction between the characters in the story. Both *Cathy's Book* and *Skeleton Creek* show that the mysterious nature of their genre pave the path towards audience participation, in such a high degree that the VUP could be considered a character in the story themselves.

## 2.9 Audience and market

### ***Cathy's Book***

This YA mystery novel is written for teen girls. The transmedia narrative is received with open arms by the VUP, and it is even called "a gamer and a reader's treasure" (TeenReads). Which means that this story does not target only those who like to read, but also those who enjoy the game elements. A difficulty with the format of this story is that the phone number needs to be changed for every country it's in, to avoid this experience turning out to be incredibly expensive to the parents.

### ***Two Left Feet***

For the full experience, the reader needs to own the delivery technology required for an AR application, which would be a tablet or smartphone. If they do not own these devices, the audience can still enjoy the book. A degree of media literacy is required as well, as the VUP needs to understand that the camera should be pointed towards certain parts of the book in order to trigger an AR reaction within the application. The fact that the marketing for this

children's story now has a strong focus on the AR experience means that the producers have faith that these young children will be able to understand how this technology works. Before Resin, in collaboration with BoooKAPP, was able to create the AR extension, they needed to buy the rights from Bloomsbury. By creating this extension, the production process of this narrative has scattered over different companies, and the revenue streams of this story flow into different parties. At this point, it becomes nearly impossible to ascertain whether the book's sales can be attributed to marketing efforts by Bloomsbury or to users of this app deciding to buy the book as well. This might have been prevented if the application was officially published by Bloomsbury. It is also not clear how the author felt about this project. It is possible that Stower's opinion on the matter did not make any difference, depending on his creative rights in the contract with Bloomsbury.

### ***Skeleton Creek***

This transmedia narrative is aimed towards a young adult audience who can interpret migratory cues and negative capability as a prompt towards a different platforms. They must be able to browse these platforms to find content that helps them solve the mysteries in the book. Besides the books, the project utilized a website to provide the canonical narrative, which is easy to update and certainly cheaper than producing a novel.

Every one of these cases is either a YA-narrative or a children's narrative. These are some of the more successful transmedia narratives with the book as the tentpole experience, and which are appropriate to evaluate in academic research. It is possible that more transmedia narratives have been designed with a children's book as the tentpole experience because these narratives are fairly simplistic, which protects the producers from continuity mistakes.

Another attribute of children's –and YA books which is useful to the transmedia producer, is that they contain a lot of visual imagery which inspires for extension to more visual (screen-based) media. Still, character development and worldbuilding can also more difficult with a children's book, given that the characters are often flat and the metanarrative cannot be too extensive as the children must be able to understand the narrative and interpret migratory cues. The fact that younger children are exposed to transmedia experiences with extensions such as AR means that they are likely to expect this technology to develop around them as they grow up. Much like how the millennials grew up with an internet connection which they now consider a normalcy. It is as vital for the publishing industry as any other entertainment industry to understand what will be expected from them by this generation of future consumers.

It seems that the game element is quite important to the transmedia experience. Either in the form of an actual game, or turning the transmedia experience into a sort of game itself like *Cathy's Book* and *Skeleton Creek* did by asking the VUP to solve a mystery over multiple platforms. The game element keeps the VUP engaged, allows for drillability and makes the VUP a performer in the narrative. Mystery and detective novels lend themselves perfectly for this, and adult genre-fiction could also have this possibility for gamification. Still, if a game is an important extension, this might mean that there is a limitation to genres which allow for a transmedia narrative, as not all genres might lend themselves to engaging games.

In both *Cathy's Book* and *Skeleton Creek*, fans seek out to each other to help solve the mysteries. Even though *Skeleton Creek* does not offer any social media platform as an extension, the fans utilise it to build communities based on the narrative. This is achieved by

a smart implementation of negative capability, and certainly inspired by the fact that the VUP is appointed the role of an intermedial 'detective' character within the narrative.

A publisher can either keep the transmedia nature of the narrative in their own hands, or sell the rights to third parties who create extensions. This case study offers no hard proof that one is necessarily better than the other, however it might be logistically easier to keep the entire transmedia project 'under one roof'. This way, revenue streams, marketing efforts, audience monitoring and the creative input of the author will all be kept to the benefit of the publisher. In creating a transmedia narrative, seriality is a good way to ensure a drillable and immersive narrative. This means that, when creating a serial transmedia narrative, the product must be well thought-through and well-planned. As publishers also regularly produce book series, they understand how to successfully create and sell such a serial narrative.

It is noticeable that, even though there are a myriad of transmedia narratives targeting an adult audience, it is incredibly difficult to find a proper transmedia narrative with a novel as the tentpole experience for the same audience. Several adult novels with a wink towards different media have been published, such as *Without Rain There Can Be No Rainbows*, which has been published in e-book format with video clips that add to the narrative. However this is not a fully functioning transmedia experience either. Thus it can be concluded that, especially in comparison with children's- and YA narratives, there is a lack of adult transmedia narratives with a book as the tentpole. Whether this is the case because of obstacles that come with the adult age group is, as of yet, not clear.

## Chapter 3 – Transmediality in the Dutch publishing industry

### 3.1 The Dutch publishing industry

The Dutch literary company KVB Boekwerk does extensive research in the book market, and provides interesting insights into the current industry. Results of this research show that despite being a small country with quite a small industry the Dutch reader is quite active (again). In 2018 the total revenue of book sales was € 541 million, this includes the entire industry surrounding books, so for example also booksellers. Book sales have been on the rise again since 2015, after a slight depression (Kerncijfers boekenmarkt). However, this is not the case for all books in general. In 2017, almost sixteen percent of total book sales consisted of the 100 bestselling titles (Het belang van toptitels). KVB Boekwerk rightly calls this phenomenon a ‘bestseller market’ (Het belang van bestsellers in 2018). This may or may not correlate with the fact that, in 2017, thirty nine publishers are responsible for 75% of the total market revenue, and the remaining quarter belongs to the 4.066 other publishers in the Netherlands (Concurrentieverhoudingen). Thus, while the market is growing, it seems to be dominated by more commercial publishers.

### 3.2 Meulenhoff Boekerij

Out of those large Dutch Publishers with quite some bestsellers to their name, Meulenhoff Boekerij is an interesting company to consider when discussing opportunities for transmedia products within the Dutch publishing industry. Meulenhoff Boekerij is a part of LannooMeulenhoff BV, to which Unieboek | Het Spectrum and TerraLannoo also belong (Lannoo). Meulenhoff Boekerij consists of two publishing funds: Meulenhoff, which



publishes literary fiction and non-fiction, and Boekerij, which publishes genre-fiction and less literary non-fiction. Meulenhoff Boekerij also publishes e-books and audiobooks. They have never published a transmedia narrative with the novel as a tentpole experience before, and they have also never made cross-media productions of which they have complete ownership. However, Meulenhoff Boekerij has sold movie rights of their books and published books that were filmed or re-published them with special film covers, thus they are aware of the role their product plays in the wider media landscape. Meulenhoff Boekerij has a large online presence and several employees who monitor this. However, there is no knowledge in-house which can be used to emigrate the product towards other media. Endeavours such as marketing videos are often outsourced.

The target group of Meulenhoff is older than that of Boekerij, and the latter is more commercial in nature. This is because Meulenhoff focuses mostly on the literary quality of works, whereas Boekerij takes commercial opportunity in a higher regard as well. Because of the more commercial nature of this funds, a book from Boekerij was chosen to function as the evaluation case for this thesis: *De jachtpartij* (2019), which is the upcoming Dutch translation of *The Hunting Party* (2018) by Lucy Foley. In this detective, nine high school friends have their traditional new year's celebration in a holiday park in Scotland. During the trip, bonds are forged and broken and in the midst of it all, a murder takes place. This book targets an adult audience, as Meulenhoff Boekerij does not publish children's books or YA-novels.

In order to evaluate more deeply than only from an 'outside' perspective, interviews with an acquisitions editor and with the commercial director of Meulenhoff Boekerij are part of this evaluation. The acquisitions editor has played a role in acquiring the rights to publish *The Hunting Party* and her position within Meulenhoff Boekerij requires her to be

up-to-date in developments in the publishing industry. The commercial director's role is to understand and realise the book's full commercial potential. Within this evaluation, the interview with the acquisitions editor serves as a basis to understand the current developments of transmediality in the publishing industry. The interview with the commercial director is meant to understand the commercial considerations surrounding a transmedia project for Meulenhoff Boekerij, and the consequences of this product on the Dutch publisher's business model. Both interviews will shine a light on expected developments of transmediality within the Dutch publishing industry.

Both the acquisitions editor and the commercial director understood what transmedia was without the need for the researcher to explain, however the borders between transmediality and cross –or intermediality seem to be a bit unclear at times.

### 3.3 Transmediality in the Dutch industry

The acquisitions editor seems very aware of what is happening in the current field, to begin with the publishing industry's core product: the book. She mentions that the book "does not have a very high sales value on its own" because it has a small reach, and that this makes it commercially a more difficult product than other media (2). However, it might be worth considering that this statement can be somewhat nuanced when considering the power of the bestseller in the Dutch market, as discussed by the KVB. There are some products with a reasonably high sales value, which in a way 'pay' for books with a lower sales volume, which is often the case with publishers (John B. Thompson 230). Still, when compared to other products in the media industry, books are indeed sold in a relatively low volume.

Currently, endeavours towards transmediality from the international publishing industry target areas with a wide reach within the industry. As the acquisitions editor

mentions, many cross-or transmedia products are designed to be used by different publishers internationally, in order to reach a big audience (2).

As was derived from the international case studies, most of the current transmedia narratives with a book as the tentpole experience target a younger audience, either children or YA. This was independently confirmed by the acquisitions editor. As she describes her current view on transmediality from her position within Meulenhoff Boekerij: “From what I see at international fairs, transmediality is focused more towards a younger audience. So I am not as concerned with it right now” (2). Looking purely at the age group, this lack of concern seems justified. However, in the Dutch market, children’s books make up only slightly more than ten percent of the market, while fiction dominates with over fifty percent (KVB Boekwerk). Thus, while at this point Meulenhoff Boekerij might not feel the urge to meddle with a development that does not target their age group, they do cater to the larger part of the publisher’s market, which means that such developments should be watched closely in case they turn out to be significant after all.

The acquisitions editor realizes this, as she mentions that she does see that transmediality is gaining momentum at international fairs. At this point, nods towards transmediality for adult novels are made within the international industry. The acquisitions editor mentions Rosie Walsh’s *Zeven perfecte dagen* (2018) as an example, as the German publisher of this book decided to create social media profiles for the main characters. Still, she has never seen an entire transmedia experience with a book as the tentpole, designed for an adult audience (4).

The acquisitions editor mentions that picture books for children have a characteristic that is particularly useful to create a transmedia narrative. As they already contain images, you can point an iPad to it, on which an animation can start (4). As she argues, “I think it is

nice if the starting point is already visual. That makes it easier” (4). This idea of a retrospective transmedia narrative which involves animation is more or less case two of this thesis. As mentioned within this case, it is studied for its technological and creative significance, however *Two Left Feet* is not considered a fully functioning transmedia narrative. The acquisitions editor seemed to grasp the reasoning that led to that decision, as she mentions later in the interview that a transmedia extension needs to work as a narrative on its own as well (31). Still, the requirement of not only a bordered, but also an independent narrative within each extension seems to come and go in the acquisitions editor’s notion of transmediality.

### 3.4 Expected developments in the Dutch industry

After discussing the case study of *Two Left Feet*, the acquisitions editor mentions that the aspect of ‘playing’ is important in the development of this extension. Active participation in books has been around for longer than one might imagine, for example in ‘make your own adventure’ books. In Chapter 1.3, it was stated that books are inherently closed narratives as the reader cannot interfere with the narrative. ‘Make your own adventure’ books would be an exception to this, as these are open narratives, especially if they are a part of a larger, open transmedia metanarrative. The acquisitions editor states that the way in which we participate is evolving (18), which means that more books with open narratives might emerge.

When asked about her expectations for transmedia narratives with a book as an extension, the acquisitions editor came up with the idea of a transmedia narrative that starts with a tv series or movie, and then spawns a book: “In which a book would, for example, be of great significance to a character, and then that book is actually published.

That way you can transfer a part of a movie to the book, and the other way around” (12). In such a case, the book would not necessarily be the tentpole experience.

When asked whether she could see Meulenhoff Boekerij produce transmedia narrative within the next two years, the acquisitions editor was quite sceptic about this timeframe, which she considered to be too short considering corporate planning. However, in five years, she could see it happening and even came up with an idea right off the bat: “Jackie van Laren would be a good author for that, because she is already used to writing for different media. And also because her writing style is suitable. I think that is possible” (53). Jackie van Laren is a Dutch author, contracted by Boekerij. She has written numerous feel-good novels, amongst which the *Q*-series and the *Eilandliefde*-series. Van Laren is a popular, commercial author who has a large readership in the Netherlands. Readers on Boekerij’s ‘Best of Romance’ social media channels are highly involved and interactive with Van Laren. This commercial power and interactivity make Van Laren a suitable author for a transmedia product. In Chapter 2, it was concluded that many transmedia narratives with a book as the tentpole experience are detective genre-fiction because this genre allows for a form of gamification which is auspicious to the design of well-functioning and interesting extensions. As Van Laren writes feel-good (romance) novels, the compatibility of the genre in which she writes should be carefully considered beforehand.

### 3.5 Considerations and obstacles

In the international case studies, several commercial and legal issues were discussed. The acquisitions editor, however, did not see many complications for Meulenhoff Boekerij if they were to publish a transmedia narrative. As she explains:

The rights to publish a book are bought from an agent, and for the visuals, in the case of *The Hunting Party*, the publisher needs to deal with the original publisher. So if you want to have your way with the characters [or narrative], you would have to get back to the agent, and if you want to use the visuals creatively, you'd have to discuss with the original publisher (37)

Still, as Meulenhoff Boekerij has never done this before, she is not entirely sure which complications they might face. But in any case, she does think it would be legally possible (37). This legal aspect of the transmedia product has been discussed with Meulenhoff Boekerij's legal department, the results of which are revealed later in this Chapter. The biggest obstacle, according to the acquisitions editor, could be the budget (24), which is quite an obstacle to say the least, because for a transmedia narrative to be successful it is imperative that it is produced well. The acquisitions editor understands this as well (53).

### 3.6 Turning *The Hunting Party* transmedia

*The Hunting Party* is used as an evaluation case because the concept of a murder detective would lend itself to transmediality. At this point, however, Meulenhoff Boekerij does not intend to publish this story as a transmedia concept. They will publish a traditional book, but they will create an online jigsaw puzzle which serves as a marketing tool. The acquisitions editor understands that this does not categorise as a transmedia narrative (20).

When asked how she would turn this book into a transmedia narrative, the acquisitions editor had plenty of ideas. The first thing she mentioned was to create an application. She specifically said not to create a website, as we have the habit to multitask daily activities with the use of our phone, since it is easy to access and provides a multitude

of services (22, 81). This corresponds with Jenkins' theory of convergence, in which he argues that many products cater to different media types, and different delivery technologies are merged into a single 'black box' (2), which calls for a transmedia narrative.

The acquisitions editor could also see the main characters of the book having social media profiles which provides background information of the characters, the characters would also post their whereabouts (20). The latter should, then, be set up before the book sales begin, as the book is a rather quick read. It could take only two days to finish, in which case real-time updates do not add much value unless they come in a rapid tempo in the first week after publishing. Still, this could be a valuable contribution to the narrative and to the quality of the project. As became evident in the cases of *Cathy's Book* and *Skeleton Creek*, the drillable nature of a mysterious transmedia narrative leads to spreadability as well.

Not surprisingly, the potential to translate or broaden the narrative with a film or series extension was mentioned by the acquisitions editor as well, mostly with the intention to make the characters come to life (20). However, for *The Hunting Party*, a video format could also add to the style in which the book was written. Within *The Hunting Party*, Emma addresses the reader directly (180, 181), and so does Katie (235) and other characters throughout the book. This form of storytelling makes it seem like they are in an interrogation, however they are not interrogated by anyone or anything but their own conscience. This storytelling technique can be broadened by a video extension, for example by creating YouTube clips in which the characters are interrogated. These clips would then continue from the book, as the murder is solved for the reader, but in the narrative from the book the police is still to solve the case.

The 'gaming' concept of this book is very strong from the beginning, as the back of the book lists nine type of characters: the quiet one, the golden couple, the beautiful one,

the volatile one etc. It is up to the reader to find out which one has committed a murder and which one was the victim. The acquisitions editor mentioned the possibility to have readers create top 10 lists for suspects (20). She also mentioned a website on which the VUP can find clues and additional content, after unlocking them using information from the book (22). Within the book Heather, one of the vacation park employees finds incriminating articles about her colleague, discussing his attempted manslaughter (203). These articles could be actually written and published on that website to create more insight into Heather's reaction. They could, however, also be published prior to the publishing date of the book on a more public platform, as a marketing stunt. This tactic was employed with great success by the creators of *The Blair Witch Project*, when they published articles of teens who went missing when they went into a nature reservoir in order to shoot a documentary about the Blair Witch. For *The Hunting Party*, Meulenhoff Boekerij could even employ a similar narrative, as within the book Katie tells the reader "So this is the truth. The one I could never have told in that game" (282). She talks about a game of truth or dare here, and her affair with Julien, her best friend's boyfriend. She is directly speaking to the reader this way, as she obviously knew the truth herself. Katie's truth could be expanded as a letter on the website, or as a 'home-made' YouTube clip in which she explains her side of the story with more detail. Given the power of YouTube videos to go viral, especially those with an edge of mystery and darkness, Meulenhoff Boekerij could decide to release this extension before the book to create a buzz before the tentpole experience is released.

By creating a website that provides clues and additional content, the book would use the same genre-specific type of gamification as *Cathy's Book* and *Skeleton Creek* did, but targeted at adults. Which comes to show that the value of a transmedia narrative lies not only in the age group, but also in the genre. The acquisitions editor also mentioned that *The*



*Hunting Party* is visually strong (22), as it has a bright yellow cover which is very recognisable. Thus, the visual aspect is also not exclusive to children's books, however the images have a less straightforward influence on the narrative with adult novels.

The acquisitions editor stepped outside of the digital world in her ideas of what *The Hunting Party* as a transmedia narrative could entail. She mentioned a Cluedo-type of game which readers could play in a holiday park which has similar surroundings as the book does (20). This extension, however, would serve more as a marketing tool than as a fully functioning extension of the book itself. The marketing of this book, as well as its back cover, advertises the setting of this story to be highly important to the narrative. This is indeed the case, however within the book, the scenic descriptions tend to be less magical and imaginative as one might expect. In this case, transmediality could add to the narratological value of the book which is so prominently marketed: besides actually visiting the location, Meulenhoff Boekerij could decide to create an AR animation application with which the landscape really comes to life. This would be done in a similar manner as *Two Left Feet*. If they were to create such an application, Meulenhoff Boekerij could make use of their sister-company Unieboek | Het Spectrum, who have published a VR application to celebrate Kinderboekenweek in 2016. It is highly likely that this project was outsourced, however the process knowledge itself can already be highly useful. This is, again, an advantage that LannooMeulenhoff and other multi-company publishers have over smaller, independent publishers.

*De jachtpartij* is a translation, which means that Meulenhoff Boekerij would not be entirely free to create whatever they want, as they would be with a pro-active Dutch transmedia narrative, given that they find an author who agrees to such terms. However in the case of *The Hunting Party*, a retro-active transmedia translation would also come with

its perks. The main one being that the author and original publisher of this novel seem to be aware of the (digital) landscape into which they are publishing already. Within the book, the use of the abbreviation FOMO (fear of missing out) implies pop culture knowledge from the reader (272). This word is used in other media such as television and social media, so the author already assumed that the reader has a media literacy beyond the novel. On the back cover of the English book you can find hashtags, which is a move by the publisher to actively ask for user generated content or, at least, engagement on social media platforms.

### 3.7 Organisational consequences for Meulenhoff Boekerij

When asked how a transmedia narrative could come to life in the current industry, the acquisitions editor discusses that the idea should come from the publisher: "I think the publisher needs to initiate it, because it has not really been done before. Even making an author video is still a big happening" (41). However, if making an author video is already considered a novelty, one could wonder what needs to happen within Meulenhoff Boekerij if they are to publish a transmedia narrative within the next five years. Currently, according to public records and considering what is currently being published, transmediality as a part of the core product is not incorporated into the business model of the Dutch publisher (4).

The content, according to the acquisitions editor, would not be the problem. It is the company structure that needs to be adjusted (59). And, as Meulenhoff Boekerij is a part of LannooMeulenhoff, the acquisitions editor argues that it would be more fruitful to create a (trans)media department that works for every publisher within LannooMeulenhoff (61). It is commercially unwise to undertake this process independently for the few transmedia products Boekerij would publish (65). Even better than creating transmedia narratives for Lannoo would be to create a transmedia narrative for authors that work internationally. This

way, development costs are kept low (4). In this respect, Meulenhoff Boekerij, Unieboek | Het Spectrum and Terra are quite lucky to be a part of a large mother company, as this creates a safer opportunity to experiment with transmedia. The Dutch industry works mainly with publisher groups, as another example is Nieuw Amsterdam, which is the mother company of four Dutch publishers (Nieuw Amsterdam). This industry structure creates a disadvantage for independent publishers such as Prometheus or the smaller Uitgeverij Chaos, as they would expose themselves to more of a commercial risk when they decide to publish a transmedia narrative. That is, if they were interested in this type of product to begin with.

When discussing ideas to turn *The Hunting Party* into a transmedia narrative, it became evident that the acquisitions editor does understand the creative possibilities. However, these ideas need to be profitable in the first place. As she argues, “A lot is possible, but a publisher is a commercial company, so the project should break even, and if possible even be profitable” (8).

The acquisitions editor stresses that it is important that the publisher is the center of the project if the book is the tentpole experience (43). She also mentions that Meulenhoff Boekerij is already starting to consider how this would influence the structure of the company:

We are thinking about that a lot. About what qualities we need to have in-house, and what we can outsource. And, most importantly, there needs to be a certain vision, and there is the question of investment. Do we feel like we have enough content to do such a thing, to tell such a grand story? (45)

Understanding that these are issues at hand means that Meulenhoff Boekerij must have put a considerable amount of thought into transmedia developments. This does not necessarily mean that they plan to produce transmedia stories in the coming years. It does mean that they understand that the landscape is shifting and they are preparing to move with it, despite the appearance that the publishing industry is not concerned with transmediality. Currently, Meulenhoff Boekerij is not equipped for transmediality just yet. However, the acquisitions editor was positive about the possibilities:

I think we are not there yet, but we can work towards it with a couple of projects. And it would be of value, an extra experience you give to the reader. I really believe that the way you tell a story will go beyond the paper book. But the titles you will do that with, that will be a percentage. That will really depend on the genre and age group (8)

Even though she knows a lot about transmedia in the field and has considered it for Meulenhoff Boekerij as well, she does not think that a lot of people within the publisher share the same interest for transmedia (69). Her enthusiasm, she thinks, is shared on the management level, but not necessarily on employee level. She does think this should be the case (73), especially as Meulenhoff Boekerij is a commercial publisher (75).

### 3.8 The role of the author

If Meulenhoff Boekerij would start publishing transmedia narratives, this could have an impact on their relationship with the author that writes the narrative. This relationship would express itself mostly legally, as according to Meulenhoff Boekerij's rights department a transmedia product is currently not covered in the author contracts. The standard

contract, which is based on a model contract by Auteursbond, is already being altered by the publisher to include audiobooks. However these alterations also include strict measures against dramatization (within the audiobooks). Currently, the contract used by Meulenhoff Boekerij does grant them the exclusive right to produce extensions to other media (radio, television, film, plays or other audiovisual products), if permission is granted by the author in writing. This would mean that they need the author completely on board for any transmedia extension.

If an author is to sign a contract in which they collaborate with Boekerij to produce a transmedia narrative, the author is no longer just an author of books. They are now the creators of both a meta-narrative for the entire transmedia project, and the co-creators of the published extensions within the project, including the book. This might influence the author's writing process as well, on several levels. Firstly, if transmediality were to become inherent in the Dutch publishing industry, authors might consider this product form already when designing their narratives, if they want to go along with this development. Secondly, not only would the expectations of the publisher change, but also those of the author: they might come to expect certain extensions, such as a game or a YouTube-series, to be a part of their published narrative.

As mentioned in Chapter 1.5, writing a transmedia narrative happens on two levels: the metanarrative and the separate extensions which are interlinked within the metanarrative. This might alter the creative process of an author who is used to writing books, as transmediality requires a different type of narratological planning. Not every author might be interested in changing their writing process in order to create a transmedia narrative. This should not be a problem, at least in the earlier stages of transmedia development within the publisher, as they would start by publishing a few transmedia

products alongside their wide scope of books in their traditional form. If the author is interested in writing such a narrative, it is also important to take the scope of such a project into consideration. As mentioned in Chapter 2.1, *Skeleton Creek* took three years to finish due to the transmedial nature of the project. Meulenhoff Boekerij has contracted several commercial Dutch authors who publish a book yearly, or even more frequently, such as Nathalie Pagie or Jackie van Laren. If one of those authors wants to publish a transmedia narrative, they might need to consider whether they are willing to change their publishing pace in order to create a more complicated product.

### 3.9 Commercial considerations

For a commercial publisher such as Meulenhoff Boekerij, publishing a transmedia narrative needs to be worth the investment. To gain insight into the business model of Meulenhoff Boekerij and whether publishing *De jachtpartij* (or other books) in a transmedia form would impact that business model, I have interviewed the publisher's commercial director. The commercial director confirmed that, from a commercial perspective, a publishers' business model evolves around the book, and now also the e-book and the audiobook. The e-book and audiobook are the same content delivered on a different delivery technology (2), which means that these products have not had an immense impact on the publisher's business model. Still, as the commercial director acknowledged, Meulenhoff Boekerij is already implementing digital products in their range by selling e-books and audiobooks, which is on itself a big step sideways from solely selling the physical book (22).

One of the biggest commercial considerations when publishing a transmedia narrative would be the channels through which this product will be sold. A transmedia narrative contains multiple elements that are not necessarily all sold available in the same

(online) store. For example, if *De jachtpartij* were to come with a game extension, the publisher needs to consider where and how this game is going to be sold or made available. According to the commercial director, dispersion of products creates complications with traditional bookstores as they have different representatives and buyers for different categories of products. In e-commerce, this is easier because the entire catalogue of Meulenhoff Boekeriej can be offered online and it is all categorised under 'entertainment' (4). Of course, traditional bookstores are not able to sell the entire Meulenhoff Boekeriej catalogue (28). Considering this, transmedia products would be the easiest to sell online. So if, say, a game would be made to accompany *De jachtpartij*, it would be the easiest, commercially, to make this into an online game instead of a board game. However, this could have an impact on the collaboration with book stores and, if done more often, the profit structure of the book industry. Producing a game with a paywall from which book-owners have free access would be commercially interesting and possible, especially if the content provided online is made into a part of the canonical narrative, as was the case with *Skeleton Creek*. However, according to the Dutch fixed book price ('Wet vaste boekenprijs') this might be considered a combined product which requires a combination price (10). This is not necessarily an issue, but it is a consideration to keep in mind when calculating the prices and commercial prognosis for a transmedia product in the Dutch industry.

Besides complicating the way the transmedia product would reach the consumer through the publishers' traditional sales channels, a transmedia product might suffer another loss from complicating the relationship between the publisher and the traditional bookstore. As the commercial director mentioned: "At this point, a book is oftentimes made into a bestseller from within the traditional book store, because they present a big pile of the books" (24). This might mean that a product that is not in its entirety sold in a traditional

bookstore, might lose from this effect. However, this powerful role of the bookstore might remain as the book is the tentpole experience of the product. Besides, careful planning of extension release might also increase the bookstores' commercial interest in the product. For example, the publisher could choose to publish an online game first and publish the book later, thus creating commercial interest for the product (if the game is successful) (24). Still, in any case, the traditional bookstores need to be willing to purchase a sizeable amount of the extension, while they might not be able to gain profit from other extensions of the transmedia product, such as a game or vlogs. Thus it would be wise to discuss transmediality with the booksellers as well.

While the acquisitions editor was sceptic about publishing a transmedia narrative in the next two years, the commercial director does believe that this would be possible. She thinks that the audience is ready to consume a transmedia narrative from Meulenhoff Boekerij (12). However the marketing plan needs to be reconsidered from the traditional one marketing a book. Besides, a shift needs to take place within Meulenhoff Boekerij itself before producing such a narrative (14). With this, the commercial director confirms the same argument made by the acquisitions editor. Meulenhoff Boekerij, or even the publishing industry, is still very focused on the traditional bookstore and constantly keeps in mind that they do not want to risk their existence with the publisher's actions. Meulenhoff Boekerij's marketing strategy is still very much focused on selling the physical book in the physical bookstore (14). And the employees are mostly not too keen on online activities either. At this point digital endeavours such as using Google AdWords still gets quite some resistance (20). But it would help to teach those that actually use transmediality in their job within the publisher, or to hire a transmedia expert within the company (18). The



commercial director was suggested educating the employees to help them evolve their understanding of online media.

Overall, the commercial director had a positive attitude towards transmediality. She mentions that it would still be commercially interesting for Meulenhoff Boekerij if the narrative they sell is sold over a range of different extensions (32). She thinks transmediality is mostly possible and necessary for the commercial fiction in a commercial sense, as publishers need to be more and more creative in putting such works onto the market (26). This is because literary works become big through press and author interviews, whereas the press is not as interested in commercial fiction (28). And as a part of the entertainment industry, the publisher is competing with other sectors in the entertainment industry for the free time of the consumer (38).

### 3.10 Impact of transmediality on the field of publishing

The acquisitions editor mentions that, if a publisher is to publish transmedia narratives and actually create (a part of) those narratives in-house, they are no longer a traditional publisher. Instead, the company becomes a “producer of stories”, and the way in which those stories are delivered can differentiate immensely (55). The commercial director mentioned the same thing:

I think publishers are going to become more of a content factory, and that they will present their content in increasingly different ways. At this point this has happened with an audiobook and an e-book, but perhaps it will also happen in the form of a game (30).

This notion seems to spread throughout the book industry, as Marius van Campen, business director for Gottmer, told Bea Ros for KVB Boekwerk the same thing. According to research carried out by FutureConsult for KVB Boekwerk, a majority of industry experts expect the book industry to change drastically in terms of organisation in the next five years (Ros). If these changes turn traditional publishers into trans –or multimedia story producers, they will migrate sideways within the entertainment industry to incorporate other media into their business model as well. The acquisitions editor is rather positive about this development. She even argues that Meulenhoff Boekerij has already moved beyond being a traditional publisher. Not necessarily because they publish e-books and audiobooks, as these still have the ‘book’-format, but because promotional merchandise is slowly becoming a part of the product range as well. She mentions, as an example, the beach balls which customers receive when they pre-order Hendrik Groen’s *Een kleine verrassing* (2019) (57). It is noticeable that she mentions that, as long as products are sold in a book-format, be that a traditional book, an e-book or an audiobook, the company is still a ‘traditional’ publisher, despite the fact that these are three different delivery technologies. It is only when the business model deviates to other products that it moves beyond the notion of what is considered traditional in the field. Publishing stories on different media is accepted as a future path for the publisher because “as a publisher, you want to tell a story. But the way that story is told, and the medium used, that will change” (81). The commercial director acknowledges this as well, as she argues that in the end, , a publisher distinguishes themselves from other sectors or other publishers with the story that they represent: “You distinguish yourself with the story, with content. That is how you distinguish. The unique story that you have” (40). This goes for any type of product, also within a transmedia

narrative. If *De jachtpartij* had a game, it would separate itself from other games through the narrative.

That does not mean that the entire market will shift, as one segment might shift faster than the other. There are, and will be, people who simply want to buy a bound hardcopy of a literary work in a bookstore (83).

## Chapter 4 - Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the current developments of transmedia narratives with a book as the tentpole experience in the international publishing industry, specifically the cases of *Cathy's Book*, *Two Left Feet* and *Skeleton Creek*. With the help of insights from this analysis and interviews with an acquisitions editor and commercial director from Meulenhoff Boekerij, the industry's current situation and possibilities to evolve towards transmediality were evaluated. This was done using the Dutch translation of Lucy Foley's *The Hunting Party* by Meulenhoff Boekerij as a test (or thought experiment) for transmedia possibilities. The research question to be answered with this method was 'What role does transmediality play in the international publishing industry, and what are the possibilities and considerations for Dutch publishing companies in using this storytelling technique in their products?'.

The media industry is experiencing a phenomenon called 'media convergence', in which multiple media (industries) come together through a migratory behaviour in their delivery of digital content to the audience (Jenkins 2). In a reaction to media convergence, a new storytelling technique has emerged: transmedia narratives. The discussion about what makes up a perfect transmedia narrative is still ongoing, but several defining factors of transmediality have been deducted from the academic debate as consensual in nature, or at least dominant. Most importantly, what separates a transmedia narrative from a cross-media narrative, is that a transmedia narrative tells a story over several different and independent extensions which all have their own independent function within the story (Jenkins 97), whereas a cross-media narrative repeats itself over different media. A transmedia narrative can have several characteristics which decide the nature of the project. It can be and a pro-active or a retro-active, and have an open or a closed narrative.

From this foundation, a transmedia project within the publishing industry would desirably be designed with a functioning, interesting incorporation of the nine aspects of transmediality as defined in Chapter 1.9 and evaluated in Chapter 2. While cross-media is already rather common in the literary world through adaptations, transmedia projects with the book as a tentpole extension are not as common, especially for an adult audience.

In the international field, fully functioning transmedia narratives with the book as a tentpole experience have been developed mostly for children's books and YA novels. This is partly because the narratives are straightforward and rather simplistic, and because books for these age groups have lots of visual characteristics. The gaming aspect which often comes with any transmedia narrative is easily understood by a younger audience, who also wilfully participate. The publisher might experience more reluctance from an older age group. Still, it is not only the age group that lends itself for a transmedia narrative. As the cases of *Cathy's Book* and *Skeleton Creek* show, the detective and mystery of the books play a big role as well, and this genre is not exclusive to a younger audience. The fact that the acquisitions editor from Meulenhoff Boekerij was able to come up with several transmedia extensions which enhance the mystery of the thriller *De jachtpartij* shows that the detective or thriller as a genre lends itself well to transmediality, regardless of age group. This confirms the argument that arose in Chapter 2, stating that the detective genre is specifically suitable to create well-functioning transmedia extensions which include many or all of the aspects of transmediality as discussed in chapter 2. Drillability, for example, comes naturally to the detective genre, as does audience participation through their role as a detective within the experience.

In general, the Dutch industry has not published fully functioning transmedia narratives as described in the international cases studies, partially because it is still

considered as a way to expand children's books and YA novels. It is also likely that transmediality has not been fully realised due to the novelty of this storytelling technique and the organisational complications that come with this product. Still, both the acquisitions editor and the commercial director from Meulenhoff Boekerij understand that transmediality is a development to keep an eye on, or even to anticipate. Meulenhoff Boekerij is carefully starting to consider shifts in their business structure, such as the implementation of trans –or at least multimedia narratives, and the allocation of (trans)media experts to oversee this process. Meulenhoff Boekerij has several commercial competitors, and it is likely that these other publishers are making the same considerations. Thus, it is likely that transmedia products, or at least products which expand over different media, will be published by the Dutch commercial publisher in the near future. Within Meulenhoff Boekerij, the near future is considered by the interviewed employees to be in two to five years.

This considered change in the industry's core product partially comes from the realisation that the children who are currently exposed to transmediality will also grow up to expect a different, more immersive product than what the Dutch publisher offers right now. In order to cater to this demand, the commercial publisher might feel a need to re-evaluate their core product in the future. At this point, the 'traditional' publisher provides physical books and, in some cases, e-books and audiobooks. Despite this inclusion of different delivery technologies, the product (or content) is still a book. However, if the narrative techniques on these delivery technologies expand to other media, as is done with a transmedia narrative, the commercial publisher widens its product range beyond the book. They then also provide video, websites, applications and many more products which together form a narrative that transcends the traditional format of the book.

Because the product of the international publishing industry is already changing to incorporate multiple extensions, legal hurdles are becoming more and more solvable, especially when large-scale productions in multiple languages are considered. But on a local Dutch level, the legal aspect is manageable as well, if the author is completely compliant with the transmedia nature of the product. The biggest hurdle would be the business model and company structure, which could change drastically due to alterations in the company's core product and the way in which this product is delivered to the audience. This change would not only impact publishers, but also booksellers. If a commercial Dutch publishers start publishing large-scale transmedia products, their relationship with the traditional bookseller might need to be renegotiated.

The role of the author is also an important consideration. If a publisher decides to integrate transmediality into their core product, the author will be more deeply involved with the product as the designing process becomes more complicated. The author will design the narrative on two levels: the metanarrative and the extensions, provided that the author is willing and able to write transmedia extensions. If different authors are involved for the project to create different extensions, this might complicate the legal situation after all. An author could also come to expect the publisher to publish their work in a transmedia form. They might write their narrative to be compatible with this type of production from the start, presenting a pro-active transmedia (meta)narrative already in their manuscript.

When discussing possible transmedia extensions for *De jachtpartij*, both interviewees were enthusiastic and came up with ideas and propositions which reflected that they have already put careful thought into the implementation multimedia narratives by Meulenhoff Boekerij. Ideas such as film material, video games and social media profiles were brought to the table, which all have the potential to be a functional extension for a

transmedia project with *De jachtpartij* as the tentpole experience. However, sometimes the borders between different types of multimedia narratives, such as cross-media and transmedia, were unclear to the interviewees. This is not necessarily problematic, however a well-produced transmedia narrative takes knowledgeability and precision: on the level of the metanarrative, the extensions and the marketing of such a product. To ensure the production of successful transmedia narratives, the publisher should consider allocating an expert or educating the involved employees to understand how a well-functioning transmedia product is designed.

If the commercial Dutch publisher is indeed going to incorporate transmediality into their core product, the publisher will shift from being a single-media industry to become a producer of stories, or a 'content factory'. These stories will still be presented in the traditional book-form, but also in different forms on different media and platforms. Thus, the 'traditional' publisher would migrate sideways to incorporate other sectors of the entertainment industry in their own business model. It is important to note that this would be the case only for the (commercial) publisher who decides to incorporate transmediality in their core product, as not all publishers might take this path. This changing nature of the Dutch commercial publishers' role in the entertainment industry as a result from media convergence is not a new concept, as the academic discussion surrounding media convergence has also named market convergence as a logical consequence (Bolin 241). It is then left to the question how the publishing industry can differentiate itself from other media industries which also evolve to offer a multi-media product range, or what stops them from merging altogether. If this merging does place, these 'story producers' will differentiate mostly with the narrative (or content) itself, and no longer with the medium, platform or delivery technology on which it is presented.



For the commercial publisher, it could be wise to consider timing as an important factor when implementing transmediality within a market that might be shifting towards market convergence. The commercial Dutch publisher is already aware of the demand which will be created by the children growing up with narratives such as *Cathy's Book*, *Two Left Feet* and *Skeleton Creek*. If they act on this demand timely, they could position themselves not merely as a producer of stories, but as an authoritative producer of trans- or at least multimedia narratives with the book as the tentpole experience, thus protecting the importance of their current core product while establishing authority over how this product is used in other media.

In Chapter 1, Bolin's theory of digital content being in its essence binary digits (239) was discussed. He argues that all digital content is essentially just binary digits which need to be recoded into a different medium. While in Chapter 1 I mentioned that the book would be an exception to this rule, it might not be after all, if instead of considering the content to be nothing but binary digits, we consider that these 'binary digits' are the transposable narrative. The would book then function a medium to which a narrative can be transposed just as well. If, in the end, the publishers' product is just all about the narrative, it might no longer matter what medium or platform the narrative is presented on. Like Bolin's binary digits, the (meta)narrative can be 'recoded' to manifest itself in different forms of media, different platforms or on different delivery technology.

#### 4.1 Limitations

This thesis analyses (Anglophone) international developments and then focuses its results on the Dutch industry. The case of Meulenhoff Boekerij was chosen because they are a commercial publisher with a wide product range. However, in such a small industry, each

publisher has its own products, values and goals. Thus, while this thesis has drawn conclusions with regards to opportunities for the commercial Dutch publisher to publish transmedia narratives, this does not mean that every publisher has these opportunities, or would want to use these opportunities. The same goes for employees within Meulenhoff Boekerij. The interviewed employees hold key positions within Meulenhoff Boekerij in which they are expected to be up-to-date with the developments in the industry and to implement this knowledge in their tactical decisions. While several of their statements come forth from a company-wide consensus, other statements might be personal and are not to be confused with company-wide sentiments within Meulenhoff Boekerij or the Dutch publishing industry.

This thesis attempts to include the consumer perspective in the analysis. This is not done directly, but the wants and needs of the reader and VUP are taken into account throughout in Chapter 2, as opposed to focussing only on commercial potential for the publisher. Still, the publisher is considered to be the leading factor in transmedia developments within their own field. This notion could be challenged, as one could wonder who really shape the market: the consumers or the companies?

#### 4.2 Recommendations for further research

As mentioned in the limitations, this thesis draws conclusions with regards to opportunities and possibilities within the Dutch publishing industry based on Meulenhoff Boekerij's current situation and foresight. In order to significantly conclude whether the Dutch publishing industry as a whole is willing and ready to produce transmedia narratives, a more empirical research needs to be done. For the publisher who wishes to produce transmedia

narratives, it is considerably important to do research within the organisation of the entire book industry, and to understand the impact of this product on the industry's profit flow.

This thesis has shown that, within the coming years, some endeavours towards transmediality can –and might- take place within the Dutch publishing industry. Before taking this road, it would be wise to do research concerning the media literacy of the target audience. It is incredibly important to know whether the readers are ready to become a VUP, especially because a transmedia narrative is commercially risky in the beginning.

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