



The Performative Functions of Dramatic Communities: Conceptualizing Audience Engagement in Transmedia Fiction

SARAH ATKINSON¹
University of Brighton, UK

This article presents the analyses of audience interactions with *The Inside*, a fictional transmedia experience, in order to reveal insights into the multiple and often unexpected ways that audience members can translate, shape, and influence a transmedia text. The social media layering that binds a fictional transmedia experience together and the multiple pathways that the audience members create between its constituent elements can be the most compelling and fascinating aspect of the experience to study. This article seeks to conceptualize the audience activity around *The Inside* as the manifestation of a *dramatic community*. By identifying and presenting the dramatic community's emergent *performative functions*, this analysis examines how such functions collectively operate to uphold and perpetuate narrative congruence, coherence, and authenticity.

Introduction

This article draws upon an audience study examining the online transmedia experience of *The Inside*² (Dir: D. J. Caruso, 2011, Intel and Toshiba, USA). *The Inside* provoked great excitement and emotional investment from its audience, who were invited to contribute and get involved with the transmedia experience from the outset. The evolution of this involvement is conceptualized in this study as the formation of a dramatic community, a conceptualization that is indicative of a distinct shift from audience member to performative community member in transmedia fictional environments. Hitherto only limited investigations have been undertaken into the configuration of social media spaces as fictional narrative locations and as province for performance.

¹ The author thanks Billie Goldman (Intel), Robert Pratten (Conducttr), Corey Jay Leonard (founder of the "We're trying to save Christina Perasso" Facebook group), all members of the "We're trying to save Christina Perasso" Facebook group, Henry Arlander, and Molly Parsley (Pereira & O'Dell).

² There is no website in existence for this particular experience. It has been superseded by *The Power Inside* website: <http://www.insidefilms.com/en>.

Sarah Atkinson: S.A.Atkinson@brighton.ac.uk

Date submitted: 2014-01-03

Copyright © 2014 (Sarah Atkinson). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

I have defined the concept of a “dramatic community”³ in the context of online transmedia spaces⁴ as thus: A group of people who take on a range of different performative identities within the social media spaces of an online fictional arena. Their collective and primary function is to uphold narrative congruence, coherence, and authenticity, in which the activities of the community become embedded into the fictional space and are watched and enjoyed by other audience members as part of the overall narrative experience.

This notion of a dramatic community is distinct from that of a fan community, since the audience members in a dramatic community are primarily engaging at a fictional (or intradiegetic) level (although as will be revealed, dramatic community members also engage at multiple levels beyond that of the fictional diegesis). A fan community tends to operate predominantly at the level of the extratextual, although there are notable exceptions.⁵ Moreover, the textual interactions of a fan community are less likely to take on a performative dimension. A dramatic community is also distinct from a live action role-playing community, since the members of the dramatic community are not enacting different personas to those of their own in the text; instead they are fulfilling the various performative functions as themselves. In this sense, the dramatic community conceptualization could also be applied to Alternate Reality Game (ARG)⁶ communities, as well as to other transmedia and interactive audiences. As Henry Jenkins (2006) has previously acknowledged, “The interactive audience is more than a marketing concept and less than ‘semiotic democracy’” (p. 136). This article seeks to advance research into the nuances, particularities, and specificities of transmedia and interactive audience engagements. Although acknowledging that the formation of a dramatic community is just one particular manifestation of an interactive audience, I argue for a recognition and appreciation of the multiple and diverse performative functions that the constituent members can enact. Through the identification of the various social behaviors that were exhibited in the context of *The Inside* dramatic community, I seek to establish a number of core performative functions through analyses of the engagements that were recorded throughout the experience via the online social media platform Facebook, which could be conceived as the equivalent of Vladimir Propp’s (1968) broad character functions for the social media age.

³ This has emerged from a number of communications that the author has had with Christian Foncesbech, who originally used the phrase “dramatic community” in conversation by way of articulating the specific audience that exists in social media spaces around an online fictional environment in which “part of the pleasure is following the 1%, and watching their discoveries” (quoted from an interview between the author and Foncesbech on August 15, 2013). Foncesbech is the creative director behind the transmedia online mystery: *Cloud Chamber*. For fuller consideration of *Cloud Chamber*, see Atkinson, 2014.

⁴ Transmedia space has been referred to by Saldre and Torop (2012) as “the general way of storing knowledge in cultural memory and to the means of fixing its medium-specific traits” (p. 41).

⁵ For example, as highlighted by Bronwen Thomas’ (2011) study of fan fiction.

⁶ An ARG is a pervasive game genre, which the International Game Developers Association White Paper into Alternate Reality Games (Martin, Thompson, & Chatfield, 2006) has defined as “Alternate Reality Games take the substance of everyday life and weave it into narratives that layer additional meaning, depth, and interaction upon the real world. The contents of these narratives constantly intersect with actuality, but play fast and loose with fact, sometimes departing entirely from the actual or grossly warping it—yet remain inescapably interwoven.”

By building on previous research, including that of Ruth Page (2012) into online behaviors in “communities of tellers” (p. 18), whereby the readers have “co-constructive narrative power” (p. 118), this article seeks to explicate the collective performance that *The Inside* community participated in. As Page states, “We might ask what story-telling enabled by digital media (and in particular social media) allows us to see about the processes of narrative production and reception that offline forms of storytelling do not” (p. 118).

This article first expounds the advertainment transmedia category within which *The Inside* can be framed, before providing a specific overview of *The Inside* experience. The article then builds on the theories and analogies that have been previously generated through the interrogation of online collaborative environments. Since these theories are relative to the specificities of their study, they are therefore inadequate in accounting for the depth and breadth of the behaviors and of the experience exhibited in a transmedia fiction. The article then turns to the analysis of audience engagement with *The Inside* in order to propose a number of performative functions that collectively contribute to the manifestation and maintenance of a dramatic community whose key purpose is to maintain the narrative congruence, coherence, and authenticity of the fictional experience.

Advertainment Transmedia

The Inside represents a specific example of transmedia identified as “advertainment transmedia.” Although it is important to note that *The Inside* was branded by its creators, Intel and Toshiba, as a “social film,” *The Inside* initiated this self-proclaimed genre in 2011, which has since been superseded by two further social films by the same creators: *The Beauty Inside* (2012) and *The Power Inside* (2013). Advertainment aligns to a commercial strategy known as “Native advertising” that

has emerged as the convergence between original brand video content and dramatically new approaches to distribution that ensure an ad matches the look and feel of a website and does not interrupt the viewing experience in the manner of a television commercial. (Forbes Media, 2012, p. 2)

The advertainment phenomena, which is driven by economic exigencies, is not transmedia specific but is one that is facilitated and expanded in online environments and has become a more prolific strategy in social media spaces. *The Inside* follows a historical lineage of advertainment manifestations, which were initially a televisual phenomena and include the dramatic serialization of advertisements based upon a fictional premise. The narrative is based on a brand or product that becomes an intrinsic facet of the fictionalized scenario. Conversely, the product placement paradigm inserts brands or products into a pre-existing fictional world. In advertainment, the inverse applies: A fictional world is built around the product that is centralized in the narrative. Examples include the Oxo brand of meat and vegetable stock cubes (UK, 1983-1999), which featured the same family members gathering around the dining room table over a 16-year period of time. In 2002, the washing-detergent company Daz (UK) created a parody of a mini soap opera of more than 30 episodes called *Cleaner Close*, starring recognizable celebrities from British soap operas that spanned media, including the “Daz Soap club” Facebook page.

In addition to the three *Inside* experiences, which are all fictional instances promoting and raising awareness of the Intel Toshiba brand, Intel is also currently sponsoring the *Scott Expedition*, a factual serialisation of the epic 1,800-mile, four-month unsupported return journey via daily updates of their progress in Antarctica on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Google Plus. Ben Saunders and Tarka L'Herpinier are aiming to become the first to retrace and complete Captain Robert Scott's original unsuccessful expedition. The connectivity of communication technologies, which is the basis of the online advertainment campaigns, was also the focus of a recent example, *@SummerBreak*, the premise of which was to "Experience a life-changing summer with a group of Los Angeles kids—telling their stories, their way." "The way" of these Los Angeles kids happened to be by using an array of AT&T devices with which to communicate and express themselves. AT&T was one of the companies behind the project, and the sole sponsor. David Christopher, chief marketing officer of the company, asserted an antiadvertising rhetoric: "This has to be authentic. This has to be very real and it has to be very subtle" (in Steinberg, 2013). Said Billy Parks, a production executive for Chernin Group, "I want it to feel *almost user-generated*" (in Fritz, 2013).

The approach taken by these advertainment campaigns embeds the commodity being advertised, be it food, detergent, smartphone, or computer, into the fabric of the fiction itself. In both *@SummerBreak* and *The Inside*, the products (smartphones and laptops) become instrumental narrative devices that are integral to the story and are facilitating agents in character communication. This inversion of advertising techniques signals an emerging predilection for advertisers to attempt to more meaningfully and increasingly seamlessly engage with their target audiences.

The conversational and sociality of the *@SummerBreak* and *The Inside* experiences are symptomatic of the influence of the connected technologies that they embed in which chat, talk, and comments are systematically encouraged throughout the experiences. These dialogic exchanges become the connective tissue that binds the narratives together and in which audience members become narrators, performers, and characters establishing, engendering, and engaging a dramatic community around the fiction.

The Inside Overview

The Inside experience took place for 11 days in 2011 between July 25 and August 4. It is an ideal object of study since it has a tight time frame and is a stand-alone entity. Successful participation was not reliant on audience members' prior knowledge of an associated and established fictional universe (it does not have one). All audience engagements took place via the social media platform Facebook in a number of distinct bounded groups, and, as such, data were visible and openly and easily accessible.

The narrative premise of *The Inside* was based upon the main protagonist (Christina Perasso) finding herself trapped in a room in an unknown location with an (Intel) laptop computer and an unreliable WiFi connection as her only means of communication with the outside world. It adopted cinematic style and thriller genre conventions, which were affirmed by the authorial presence of a recognized industry director and renowned Hollywood brand, D. J. Caruso (known for his film *Disturbia*). Combining elements of computer game, puzzle, and role-playing in addition to a real-world element at the

conclusion of the experience, it explicitly invited audience participation through the tag line "Her only way out is to bring you in." Taking Andrea Phillip's (2012) distinctions of West Coast and East Coast transmedia⁷ as a starting point in which to conceptualize *The Inside*, whereby according to Phillips, West Coast-style transmedia is "more commonly called Hollywood or franchise transmedia," (p. 13) which operates at major film-studio level, such as the *Star Wars* (1981-) franchise, in contrast to "East Coast transmedia," which Phillips states "tends to be more interactive, and much more web-centric. It overlaps heavily with the traditions of independent film, theater and interactive art. These projects make heavy use of social media, and are often run once over a set period of time rather than persisting forever" (pp. 13-14). The design, operational principles, and aesthetics of *The Inside* (and the other instances of advertainment transmedia that are cited herein) clearly originate from East Coast strategies and ideals of transmedia.

The frameworks for engagement and narrational agency in *The Inside* came in the form of established social networking tools that played to the target audience of 18-34 year-olds, who could be considered "Digital Natives" (according to Palfrey and Gasser's (2008) definition) "born after 1980, when social digital technologies, such as Usenet and bulletin board systems, came online. They all have access to networked digital technologies. And they all have the skills to use those technologies" (p. 1). Such a position (and such a marketing campaign) ignores the existence of a pronounced economic and social divide, in which the lack of access to technology experienced by certain demographics excludes and inhibits their engagement in such practices.

Using YouTube and Twitter, but predominantly the Facebook platform described by Van Dijck (2013) as a "centripetal force in organizing people's social lives" (p. 51), *The Inside* acknowledged user familiarization with the grammar, language, and tools of Facebook and advanced levels of social media literacy among the audience, which is comparable to Thomas, Joseph et al.'s (2007) concept of "transliteracy"—"the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks" (para 1).

The Inside maintained a real-time aesthetic. All social interactions happened "live" within the 11-day temporal framework, which enhanced the potential for performativity among audience members. The audience was first called to action to audition for a part in the forthcoming experience through a direct address from the director. Other entrance points, or "rabbit holes," into the experience came in the form of a video entry posted by Christina asking for help. Posted on both YouTube and her personal Facebook page, this constituted one of the multiple entrance points through which users could enter without first accessing any of the surrounding contextual information. Throughout the experience, in addition to the direct camera addresses posted by Christina, there were eight videos released at different points as stand-alone webisodes. The webisodes are highly reflexive in nature as Christina is seen engaging in online

⁷ These helpfully distinguish the transmedia approach taken by *The Inside*, more so than Brian Clark's (2011) definitions that are based on the difference of the treatment of IP ownership in the geographic-based polarities. For Clark, West Coast "thinks more in terms of franchises, . . . and starts from the perspective that creators won't own the IP" and East Coast "starts from the perspective that creators own the IP."

activities, reflecting the pervading real-world practices of social networking and reminding the audience of the proximity between the actual representation of events and their mediation. It also serves as an inflection upon spectatorial identification whereby the audience members are similarly engaging and *performing* these activities as an intrinsic facet of the narrative experience. In addition to Christina's Facebook page, viewers could also access and post messages to her boyfriend, mother, and friends, all of whom are clearly identified as "Fictional Characters" in their Facebook profiles. Christina and the character of her father also have Twitter accounts. Christina would regularly post messages, photographs, and videos of herself on her Facebook pages to which viewers would respond and engage in dialogue with other users. These are the engagements from which the data for this study are drawn.

Models of Participation

Building on Pierre Lévy's (1997) and Henry Jenkins' (2006) theories into collective intelligence of fan communities whereby "Fans are motivated by epistemophilia—not simply a pleasure in knowing but a pleasure in exchanging knowledge" (p. 139), this article extends the identification of knowledge cultures and their navigatory principles (of searching and interpreting encyclopedic information) to acknowledge how the constituent members of such communities can also play an intrinsic theatrical and performative function in the fiction.

Broadly conceived, the notion of collective intelligence assumes that all audience members are operating at similar levels of epistemic generation and exchange, the analyses of *The Inside* reveals that different members inhabit different roles that perform different functions, and it is the existence of such roles that enable dramatic communities to flourish and function.

The discursive construction of the viewer in digitally networked spaces has often been reduced to the 90/9/1 rule, which is defined by Nielsen (2006) as thus: "In most online communities, 90% of users are lurkers who never contribute, 9% of users contribute a little, and 1% of users account for almost all the action" (para 1). The 90/9/1 measurement is limiting since it is a metric that is premised on *quantity* of interaction as opposed to type and *quality*. The analyses of *The Inside* offers nuanced understandings of the many and varied ways in which audience members can be engaged that advance beyond this simplified metric, building on the research of others into the nature and form of participatory fictional environments. Mason and Thomas (2008) draw upon the 90/9/1 conception and extend the often-used gardening analogy of wikis in their analysis of the collaborative wikinovel, *A Million Penguins*. They identify the 1% of the 90/9/1 equation as performers, subdividing them into a further three categories: Vandals (who destructively reworked narrative), Gardeners (who asserted order), and Gnomes (who enacted minor edits to the text). Ruth Page (2012) extends these analyses through her study of *A Million Penguins* and another collaborative fictional wiki environment—*Protagonize*. Page (2012) claimed that these environments of "multiple tellership involved in the creation of collaborative fiction gives rise to a range of *discourse identities* that rework and expand the roles involved in narrative interaction" (p. 138, my emphasis).

Page (2012) proposes a number of more nuanced discourse identities from her analysis of these collaborative writing environments. These identities are Reviewer, Editor, Collaborator, Creator, and

Convenor. These identities are all derived from the text-based interactions of the wikinovels that she studied. According to Page, a *Reviewer* makes retrospective evaluation of the narrative, usually through positive affirmation; an *Editor* is involved with checking and correction, rather than initiating new ideas; and a *Collaborator* is concerned with both narrative and commentary. A *Creator* is responsible for creating the most content, and a *Convenor* maintains the collaborative nature of the project (in the same way that a director would manage and oversee the production and creative continuity of a film). Similarly, Ivan Askwith (2006) has proposed four common types of participation as evidenced in his studies of ARG cultures, such as those surrounding the *Lost* experience. The ARG-specific roles of Organizers, Hunters, Detectives, and Lurkers that he identifies all relate to textual engagements, as opposed to audience interactions. Interrelations and interdependencies between the roles are not foregrounded in Askwith's theories.

In this article, I will expand the notions of discourse identities from their conception in textual coconstructive environments of wikinovels and of the ARG-specific roles that operate at the textual level as proposed by Askwith (2006) to the dramatic functions exhibited by audiences in a transmedia environment. I am specifically seeking to ascertain and identify the performative functions that are endemic of the co-constructive *dramatic* nature of transmedia environments, in particular in a social film conception, in which the performative dimensions become the defining aspect of the experience.

Analysis

The data collection process for all audience interactions generated throughout *The Inside* yielded more than 3,700 pages of data, which constituted more than 30,000 posts made on the fictional character Christina Perasso's wall throughout the 11-day experience. Subject to an initial analysis, which was published in my recent book chapter (Atkinson, 2013), the audience engagements evidenced from Christina Perasso's Facebook wall revealed a sophisticated and multilayered audience response, which was demonstrated by advanced levels of narrative comprehension. Upon examination of these viewer interactions using a grounded theory approach in order to identify recurrent and prevalent themes, the dialectical encounters between audience members revealed a number of key modes or "levels" of communication demonstrating a sophisticated and multilayered audience engagement. These included intradiegetic encounters (such as direct communication with Christina, in which audience members communicate with Christina in the first person responding directly to her plight), extradiegetic engagements (discussing and clarifying textual details, including solving the puzzles and hunting for clues), extratextual conversations (episodic information and confirmation of rules of engagement, community discussions), and omnidiegetic activities (such as the creation of maps, diagrams, and timelines). In many cases, audience members would seamlessly step from one "level" of communication to another in conversational streams. Moreover, the language that the audience members engaged in invoked the implicit role-playing parlance, such as "out-of-character" (which frequently appeared throughout the Facebook discourse), demonstrating a tacit agreement between participants and intuiting the arcane domain of the ARG. The emergent communities that sprang up around *The Inside* exhibited characteristics normally assigned to esoteric long-established fan communities whereby, according to Jenkins (1992), fans work "toward the construction of a metatext that is larger, richer, more complex and interesting (than the original series)" (p. 278). The equivalent of an established fan community that

evolves around a persistent brand took *The Inside* audience community only 11 days to formulate, thus exemplifying the accelerated velocity at which online communities can now be formed. This affirms Booth's (2010) observation that online groups can be conceived as "a means through which we can see how communities form and populate the Web Commons" (p. 192).

This article builds on these initial analyses through the further in-depth study of the audience interactions in a "walled-garden" space of a specific Facebook group (one of a number) that had formed as a result of the overwhelming amount of posts being made to Christina Perasso's wall. The We're Trying to Save Christina Perasso (WTTSCP) group was one of the most recognized and exclusive groups formed on the first day of *The Inside*, the administrators of which set the member limit to 200 people. The engagements within this walled-garden space demonstrated an active and sustained collaboration. It offered a far more structured and productive space than that of the open forum of Christina's Facebook page, which was constantly subject to random interjections, statements, and contributions from temporary and fleeting audience members. The engagements didn't evolve and deepen as they did on the WTTSCP pages, which revealed a highly collaborative, functional, and (most important) dramatic community operating in the fictional domain of *The Inside* universe.

The analysis focused on three specific days from the beginning, middle, and end of the experience. All 514 posts from July 26, July 31, and August 5 were gathered using one of the functions of a third-party Facebook plug-in known as Social Fixer, which served to automate the "reveal-post" command ensuring that all posts were accessed. The posts were then amalgamated into one document that was imported into qualitative analysis software for coding. Each of the 514 posts was individually coded to identify that they exhibited a specific behavior that pertained to one or more of the numerous performative functions. Those members posting in the WTTSCP group became embedded and established within these functions and tended to display the same function in each of their individual posts. I have chosen to use functions as opposed to identities, since the same person can exhibit a number of functions. The performative functions were identified as the following: *Solvers*, *Seekers*, *Facilitators*, *Suggesters*, and *Challengers*. These five functions were identified on the first day of the analysis. In the second phase (of the latter two days), further roles emerged: *Shepherds*, *Commentators*, *Conversationalists*, *Theorizers*, *Validators*, *Creators*, *Philosophers*, *Spammers*, and *Summarizers*.

The syntactical ordering of these functions is not to prioritize one role over another in order to imply that some roles were more productive than others, but the performative functions were identified and conceptualized in the order that they emerged in the analysis of the posts. In the first set of posts taken from July 26, the early adopters exhibited the following functions.

Audience members exhibiting characteristics of *Solvers* were seen to be offering answers and solutions to the various clues that were the feature of *The Inside*. These included photographic images that Christina had taken of her surroundings, such as of receipts, inscriptions found on walls, and highlighted text torn from books. These led to various cipher puzzles, concealed phone numbers (that held coded ansa-phone messages), and secret URLs that led to in-fiction websites such as those of the Jarrisk Brothers Plumbing company and Java Bird coffee shop. *Solvers* tended not to engage in an open dialogue with others. They focused on minutia of the situation at hand. Examples included:

We know where she is now! 424-235-1782 = the plumber's phone number, AAH.BCC = 118.233, if you add 118233 to 4242351782, you get 4242470015. I tried calling that number and it sounded as though it was from some old hotel, AND it was tapped. It existed however and wanted me to leave a message . . . so we may know where she is now. YES! (M101)⁸

The performative dimension of such exchanges is apparent in this case in the Solvers' open celebration of their findings.

Seekers, in contrast to solvers, focused their attention upon sourcing and presenting information to others, as opposed to dealing with and processing it themselves. These are akin to Askwith's (2006) ARG-classification of Hunters. Examples of Seeker behavior included, "Hey guys, I didn't want to post this on Christina's page as to ruin anything. BUT this guy claims that he will be involved later on in the week: <http://twitter.com/#!/MrJakeAbel>" (F102).

Facilitators were identified as those audience members who went about setting up documents and frameworks of engagement for others (for example, the host of the WTTSCP group is a facilitator and also a gatekeeper to the community). In the forum, the other users refer to the facilitator role as the "housekeeper." This role closely aligns to Page's (2012) Convenor and Askwith's (2006) conception of an organizer. What distinguishes the Facilitator from these conceptualizations is the ringmaster-style performance that the Facilitator engages in. Overt examples of this performative function included the direct address to potential members: "Hey! The group is closed at 200 members, but if you think you have something special to offer, send an email to . . . telling us why you should be part" (M103).

The facilitators of the WTTSCP also actively engaged in the creation of documents to support their activities, which were indexed and accessible from a page within the domain of the Facebook group. These included a number of timelines that were regularly updated to keep track of events in the narrative, such as a timeline of clues and a timeline leading up to Christina's kidnapping. This collated the limited number of posts made by the project's producers on the associated social media sites prior to the launch of the experience, an annotated list of suspects, a list of group rules, a speculative psychological profile of the imagined captor, profiles and relationships between all of the main characters, collation and aggregation of data from all of the related social media sites linked to *The Inside* (such as Twitter), and links to morale booster videos uploaded to the Save Christina Perasso YouTube channel with a document that aggregated the comments that the videos received from Christina and a list all of the associated "in-fiction" websites.

The role of *Facilitator* is closely aligned to that of the *Suggester*, who is seen to make suggestions for others to take forward. In contrast to the assertive and authoritative approach of the Solvers, the Suggesters offer solutions posed as questions, and they are far less assertive than solvers. Examples of this behavior included: "More info: Jennifer Myer (character related to the movie) IS AN INTERIOR DECORATOR . . . why we don't ask her about the Jarinki's?" (M103).

⁸ All posts have been anonymized and coded according to gender; those prefixed with F are females and those as M are male.

Suggesters were seen to function on both intra- and extratextual levels. In all of the WTTSCP group posts, there were no direct addresses made to Christina—intradiegetic suggestions were far more prevalent in the posts made directly to Christina's wall such as "christina have you found out anything new on your end of this? any new clues you found in the last hour?" (M107).

In certain instances, there were direct conversations between audience members and Christina:

Christina, what was your relationship with Kirk like? (M108)

Reply: I don't want to get into it, but it was great, and then it was not so great. And I'm not even going to pass the buck here. I have to take some of the blame." (Christina Perasso)

Suggesters are similar to *Seekers*, but perform a more social and dialogic function in driving the narrative forward, in contrast to *seekers* who tend to present information but don't necessarily initiate a dialogue with others.

A *Challenger* tends to only reply to posts to question the opinion or promulgations of *Solvers* or *Suggesters*. An example of this was "sorry, don't think there's a connection. When we actually get something right it's pretty obvious. The javabird site, the acornwallpaper site, the plumbing company were all obviously part of the game" (M105).

In this particular instance, one of the audience members identified as exhibiting the characteristics of the *Facilitator* role immediately stepped in to mediate and to maintain the community spirit: "of course!—and don't forget it's a movie, so, will take like a few days to solve the entire case" (M103).

In the second timeframe of analysis, which was undertaken on the posts that were generated on July 31 by the WTTSCP group, a number of peripheral functions emerged in addition to those already listed.

Those in the role of *Shepherds* predominantly advised people where to go (or where not to) in terms of other online spaces, such as websites, links, and other posts on Facebook that were perceived to provide valid sources of information. An example of shepherding behavior is evidenced in this comment: "Guys . . . why do you keep going to that YouTube account. Most of them are fake. The kidnapper only has one and it's called your friends are my friends. You're wasting your time" (F105).

Those in the *Commentator* role routinely made observations about changes to the site, such as: "Looks like posts are opening up on Christina's page again" (M106). Observations made by those exhibiting *Commentator* characteristics were outside of the diegetic realm; therefore the commenting role is distinctive to that of the *Summarizer*, who is described below.

Conversationalists tended to respond to commentators by engaging in light-hearted chat and would seek out dialogue with others by asking direct questions and making observations. This was initiated by making comments with question marks to invoke responses. One example is the response made to the comment above, which elicited a string of comments: "Maybe she's going to be getting online soon?" (F106). This was followed by a remark from M106: "or the other characters are going to become a little more active."

Moments of lengthy internal monologue posted by certain audience members expressing ideas were attributed to the *Theorizer* role. These members tended to look at the bigger picture—they are the opposite of Solvers who focus on minute detail and instead seek to uncover reasons and conspiracies in the grand schema of the narrative world. Their posts tend to be in excess of 7/8 lines in length. One such example is this:

I noticed that someone said that the cipher text isn't lining up because of missing letters . . . granted, I'm a little behind today, but this is just a thought that popped into my head, so please bear with me if it's already been stated or disproved or even doesn't make sense in context: In translating some languages (for example, hieroglyphics) there aren't doubled letters, and the vowels are spelled how they SOUND. For example, my name is Melissa. In the case of the above, it would be spelled "MULISU." The E and the A both make "uh" sounds." (F107)

Validators performed a supportive function and engage in moments of self-proclamation and assertion by validating the activities of the community. Comments such as "wow so cool. we're a part of movie/social media history!" (F109) and "yeah! that's awesome" (M103) are indicative of this position.

Creators engaged in the active creation of original paratexts, such as user-created diagrams that present complex schemata of the interrelations between characters and the structure of the narrative and plot lines. These included a detailed visual mapping of the clues, as well as a timeline chronologically sequencing the story and plot events, which were specifically produced for audience members entering the narrative at a later stage. The facilitators of the WTTSCP group were also seen to exhibit Creator characteristics through their production of the various documents listed above.

Creators also manipulated existing images, and in certain cases were tactile puzzle solvers (through practices of analyzing imagery through computational means). The following comment is indicative of the presence of such activity:

This is a bigger version of the truck image. I compared it with the twitter pic in photoshop and they are identical other than size. This image recurs 40 times in a google image search so I think they just ripped a random picture off the Internet. (F110)

Creators also engaged in moments of pure aesthetic and intradiegetic productivity, which included the design and production of Save Christina t-shirts displayed through the community members' pictures and the creation of a standardized profile picture for all community members to use, which

superimposed a picture of Christina within a missing person poster graphic. One member had created "Inside Experience Evidence Locker" tape, which was an alternate rendering of police tape that seals a crime scene.

The display of these activities invokes John Fiske's (1992) observation that "fans create a fan culture with its own systems of production and distribution that forms what I shall call a 'shadow cultural economy'" (p. 30). In the latter pages that were analyzed from Friday, July 5, one of the group attributed to the Creator role initiated discussions around the making of the "thank you" video, which was later to be produced and picked up by the producers of the experience.

In the final pages of Christina's wall on Friday August 5, a number of other functions became apparent. These included the *Philosopher*, exemplified by comments such as,

This experience is one that I'll never forget. Not only has it changed my summer, but it's changed my life. I think everyone can learn something from this. I know I have. I think—no, I KNOW we all have. Never again will I take friendships for granted. (M110)

The role of *Spammers* (or trolls) was evidenced throughout. A fake Christina account was created toward the end of the experience, and comments indicate that audience members quickly identify this as such: "Anyone else wondering why the trolls didn't just make fake Christina accounts like the one who's posting now?" (M110).

The role of *Summarizer* tended to emerge toward the conclusion of the experience. These moments evolved as a result of *The Inside* concluding with a live experience in which audience members who attended Union Square station (the destination and time was revealed through the various clues revealed during the experience) witnessed staged police activity and then became part of a police interrogation exercise (the videos of which were then uploaded to the associated YouTube channels). The fans who were able to play a part and to feature in one of the interrogation videos, some of whom were WTTSCP group members, then expressed their experiences via detailed accounts in the Facebook group discussions. One particular member was awarded with the additional prize of the music box prop that featured heavily in the narrative. This then became the focus of much of the group's speculation in later discussions:

Ok team. My agenda for today: find any invisible messages on the music box. take it apart without completely destroying it. take the flash drive to my friend that works for geek squad to check for invisible messages etc. take the pill to the ER and figure out what kind of a pill this is. I will try to have this all done asap. (F115)

Summarizers were perceived within the community as authoritative narrators. This open display of cultural capital and the notable cachet achieved by those fans who featured in the interrogation videos is intrinsic to the Facebook self-publishing culture, and *The Inside* facilitates an extension of these practices. As Matt Hills (2009) observed of previous fan-based activities: "Posting this type of content reflects on the user's online identity and bears future imagined audience's approval in mind" (p. 120).

Each of the 13 functions that were identified can be broadly attributed to either the social or epistemic dimension. The functions are hierarchically ordered to denote the order in which they manifested in the group: (1) denotes Day 1, (2) denotes Day 2 (see Figure 1). Spammers have not been included in the table since their function was unproductive and unperformative in relation to the activities of the community, aside from the fact that it further united other members of the community in their collective condemnation.

Social	Epistemic
Facilitators (1)	Solvers (1)
Suggesters (1)	Seekers (1)
Challengers (1)	Commentators (2)
Shepherds (2)	Theorizers (2)
Conversationalists (2)	Creators (2)
Validators (2)	Philosophers (2)
Summarizers (2)	Summarizers (2)

Figure 1. The different performative functions are attributed to either social or epistemic dimensions. The role of summarizer was seen to bridge both social and epistemic dimensions.

Those performative functions attributed to the social dimension can be seen to maintain the community by facilitating links and dialogue between the different epistemic outputs and by cohering the findings and prompting further observations that were being made by those inhabiting the epistemic roles. The interplay and importance of the roles is illustrated in one particular instance in the narrative where Christina's captor dictates that in order for Christina to earn food, she must amass a large number of "likes" from her friends ("likes" are achieved by pressing the thumbs up icon that appears next to different elements in the Facebook interface). As Van Dijck (2013) asserts, "The massive adoption of the Like button has turned personal data sharing by third parties into an accepted practice in the online universe; hence, the Like button epitomizes the profound modification of a social norm" (p. 49). This activity functions on two levels: first, on a diegetic level, this device of virtual affirmation provides narrational agency to the audience members who draw more people's attention to Christina's plight and by doing so are provided with a sense of advancing the diegesis. Second, it raises awareness of the experience for other viewers who will see the "like" in their friends' status stream, which will encourage them to engage, thus meeting marketing ends where more "eyeballs" are drawn to the sites of the project. This strategy presents a complex interplay between the distinctions posited by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green (2013) whereby "audiences play an active role in 'spreading' content rather than serving as passive carriers of viral media" (p. 21). *The Inside* signals a sophisticated hybrid of the two methodologies of active and passive "spreading." The performative nature of the audience exchange in this particular example, in which the audience performs social media, distinguishes the nature of a dramatic community beyond that of a fan community. This activity is encouraged and facilitated by different members of the community inhabiting performative functions within the social dimension: "Hey guys! Let's get this video trending with the hashtag #saveChristinaPerasso. The day that was trending on twitter, her likes on her page grew 5 times over."

And it is also encouraged by the producers (via the character of Christina):
 People have been asking whether to Like the FB post or the video at YouTube - answer:
 I don't know for sure . . . if you guys can Like them both . . . that would be great . . .
 thank you guys, really counting on you. (Christina Perasso)

This diegetic emphasis upon the urgent need to generate friends in *The Inside* in order to escape is endemic of the cultural importance placed upon the affirmation of securing "friends," which is the central conceit upon which the Facebook culture is premised.

Performative Function	Frequency of Contribution Over Entire Sample Period	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Facilitators	11%	44.5%	11%	3.5%
Solvers	5%	7.5%	5%	-
Suggesters	13%	26%	14%	6%
Seekers	8%	15%	8.5%	5%
Challengers	1%	7%	-	1%
Commentators	4%	-	4.5%	5%
Shepherds	7.5%	-	6.5%	13%
Theorizers	3%	-	3%	2%
Conversationalists	38%	-	40%	43%
Creators	3%	-	2%	9%
Validators	5%	-	5%	7%
Philosophers	0.5%	-	-	2%
Summarizers	1%	-	0.5%	3.5%

Figure 2. Frequency of contribution from the different performative functions over entire three days of sample period.

Figure 2 presents the frequency at which the different performative functions were exhibited by the community through the coding of each of the posts. Conversational input was the most prolific of all of the functions (38% of the contributions that were made in the overall period was attributed to this activity). Roles such as Facilitator, Suggester, Seeker, and Shepherd account for a further 39.5% of the activity. All but the Seeker role are attributed to the social dimensions of the community, which indicates that almost 70% of all of the activity takes place in the social and, I would argue, performative dimensions.

The activity of the Creator role is low and accounts for only 3% of the overall activity, and as such could be conceptualized as being consistent with the active 1% demographic of the 90/9/1 rule stratification. At face value, this interpretation would then imply that the activities of the other 99% of the *Inside* community were limited to minimal contributions in comparison, though this is definitely not the case in the observations made, especially since it has been acknowledged that those in the Facilitator role (which make up 11% of the community) were actively creating and maintaining summary documentation,

and more important, in ensuring the cohesion and continuity of the narrative. These findings demonstrate the existence of nuanced levels of participatory stratification in the 90/9 sections of the audience.

The levels of conversational input that were measured and increased across the 11 days of the experience warrant further analysis. The types of engagements that were attributed to this category varied. These contributions have been subdivided into a number of additional categories (see Figure 3). *Wit* and *Flippancy* refer to instances in which some members reverted to making jokes or comedic interventions to make light of the situation (the performative status of their comments were imbricated through the use of smiling and winking emoticons). *Situational statements* related to the geographical, social, or technical status of the audience member—for example, comments were made that related to WiFi/computer connections or lack thereof, to the time differences between participants, and to the various social situations of the community members, such as whether they were out at dinner or at a family reunion.

Type of Conversation	Frequency Over Entire Sample Period
Direct question	19%
Direct response	12%
Observation	23.5%
Comment	16.5%
Wit/flippancy	15%
Situational statement	14%

Figure 3. Breakdown of conversationalist activity over entire three days of sample period.

It is important to note that in the context of *The Inside*, conversational interjections were perceived to be predominantly proactive interventions, which enabled epistemic progress through the prompting of discussion and considerations of the relevance of certain clues, as well as the social cohesion of the community, through support, encouragement, and affirmation. In contrast to collaborative wikis of *A Million Penguins* and *Protagonize* (which were cited earlier in this article), where fresh and original content was produced and maintained by the community of writers, in an environment such as *The Inside*, it can be seen through the level of conversational and social input that the audience members turned and prioritized their attentions to activities of fixing and maintaining performative cohesion through a process of suture. *Suture* as defined by Stephen Heath (1981) are “the relations a film sustains and is constructed to sustain with its spectator” (p. 76), and as Jonathan Culler (1975) describes, “The strange, the formal, the fictional, must be recuperated or naturalized, brought within our ken, if we do not want to remain gaping before monumental inscriptions” (p. 134). In the transmedia domain, this practice of suture fixing has been referred to as “cross-stitching” (Harvey, 2012), whereby audience members actively fill gaps and account for narrative inconsistencies in their discussions. As Michael J. Clarke (2013) notes “secrets, lies, and speculative hypotheses often act as the communicative glue that holds together the disparate narrative elements of [tentpole TV] and their hyperdiegetic worlds” (p. 210). The aesthetics of suture, which is seen to be a core transmedia function of a dramatic community in this study, serve to uphold narrative unity and congruence and to maintain the suspension of disbelief. The predominantly socially led

audience engagements of *The Inside* provided the connective tissue with which to viscerally cohere the narrative and the community and to actively close and account for any loopholes. An illustrative example of this (one of many) is taken from dialogue between audience members on August 5:

Here's a thought, she cut power out then next episode, he comes in with wheelchair. How did he know she was down if he couldn't see her? (M109) Reply: Hidden passage to watch her. Explains how he got in/out while she slept, was able to know she was 'passed out,' and escaped afterward. (M110)
 Second reply: we prob had wireless cameras or something. (F111)

In these instances, the audience members displayed one of the social performative functions as a mechanism through which to uphold the suspension of disbelief by actively collaborating to the storyline, and to both the texture and text of the dramatic environment. In online discursive spaces such as those presented by *The Inside*, the dramatic community engaged in a process of what I would identify as "performative suture," a characteristic that is explicit to such a community in their quest for resolution, narrative coherency, and congruency.

The 13 functions that have been identified and discussed constitute the conception of a dramatic community. Collectively, all functions proved to be crucial elements in the advancement of narrative discovery and in upholding the sustained verisimilitude and authenticity of the transmedia experience. It is important to note that performative functions as conceived in this article primarily account for interactional behaviors, which illuminate the way that audience members respond and engage with one another as opposed to the way that they individually respond to the text. Performative functions of dramatic community in the studied social film context are therefore distinctive to the textual interactions endemic in fan communities.

Conclusions

Despite the ontology of *The Inside* as an overt instance of commercialized "advertainment," the communities involved demonstrated extended levels of emotional engagement and a sustained temporal investment highlighting that commercial imperatives remain an accepted and quiescent feature of transmedia forms and their subsequent audience engagements. This research demonstrates that sociality or "hypersociability" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 112) combined with advertising and commercialism is engendering new types of narrative experience and therefore new viewing behaviors, which are proving to be compelling objects of study. The coterminous existence of a transmedia text such as *The Inside* with the accompanying social media layering also enshrines the importance of interconnectedness and networking as a germane function within the narrative, where social media activity is literally *performed* simultaneously by both actors and audiences.

This research has enabled advancement of theory beyond the gardening analogy of wiki maintenance and beyond the roles previously identified in ARG communities, to conceptualizations and categorizations of active creation and performance that have complexified and challenged the 90/9/1 assumption. Through the enactment of narrational agency, audience members of *The Inside*, via their

immersion in the narrative, were unconsciously spreading the message as if bees in the pollination cycle. Audience members followed the clues, seamlessly shifting from one social media provider to another, leaving a trail of their activities on their Facebook feeds for others to follow (and occasionally for others to misinterpret the reality status of these exchanges). This strategy upon which social media and viral marketing initiatives are predicated is here seamlessly integrated into the fabric of the narrative experience. This raises an intrinsic issue of the use of social media in narrative experiences, where audience members may not be fully aware that their behavior can be recorded, mapped, and traced by advertisers via a social media engine that is essentially used as a data collection and exploitation device.

The ascendant feature of these communications is one of social networking, linked to the audience desire of reformation and resolution. The audience members are not only reconfigured as a narrator, performer, and character in these environments but also as editor, director, and dramaturg. Dramatic communities predominantly communicate on a fictional level in a performative modality to collectively maintain a narrative environment and to uphold fictionality in their exchanges, which is sustained over the entire period rendition of an online transmedia fiction. Audience members take on performative and narrative roles and the community is sustained through the social activity and contributions from an active contribution and collaboration between all of the performative functions.

This article sought to identify and recognize the different audience behaviors and relations of social transmedia spaces and to ascertain their contribution to the formation and maintenance of a dramatic community. These insights can be used to both inform and stimulate future studies. The findings of this particular study are limited to the fact that this was only an 11-day experience; prolonged experiences could engender and assimilate further types of performative functions and more nuanced analyses of their activities. Such research has the potential to influence and stimulate transmedia creators to facilitate and further embed audience engagement into the narrative fabric of transmedia performance and storytelling.

References

- Askwith, I. (2006). *This is not (just) an advertisement: Understanding alternate reality games*. (White paper.) Cambridge, MA: MIT Convergence Culture Consortium.
- Atkinson, S. (2013). The view from the fourth wall window: Crossmedia fictions. In I. Ibrus & C. Scolari (Eds.), *Crossmedia innovations: Texts, markets, institutions* (pp. 77–91). Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang.
- Atkinson, S. (2014). *Beyond the screen: Emerging cinema and engaging audiences*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
- Booth, P. (2010). *Digital fandom: New media studies*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Clark, B. (2011). *Reclaiming transmedia storyteller*. Retrieved from <http://www.facebook.com/notes/brian-clark/reclaiming-transmedia-storyteller/10150246236508993>
- Clarke, M. J. (2013). *Transmedia television: New trends in network serial production*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
- Culler, J. (1975). *Structuralist poetics. Structuralism, linguistics and the study of literature*. London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Fiske, J. (1992). The cultural economy of fandom. In L.A. Lewis (Ed.), *Adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media* (pp. 30–49). London, UK: Routledge.
- Forbes Media. (2012). Going native: How marketers are reinventing the online video advertising experience. In *Forbes Insights* [industry report]. New York, NY: Forbes Media.
- Fritz, B. (2013, June 11). A reality TV show, minus the TV: "Summer break" follows nine teenagers, but only through social media like Twitter, Instagram. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324904004578537762775119412.html>
- Harvey, C. B. (2012). Crossmedia cross-stitch: Spinoff stories as transmedial and intramedial suture. In I. Ibrus & C. Scolari (Eds.), *Crossmedia innovations: Texts, markets, institutions* (pp. 61–75). Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang.
- Heath, S. (1981). *Questions of cinema*. London, UK: Macmillan.
- Hills, M. (2009). Participatory culture: mobility, interactivity and identity. In G. Creeber & R. Martin (Eds.), *Digital cultures: Understanding new media* (pp. 107–116). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*. London, UK: Routledge.

- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*, New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Lévy, P. (1997). *Collective intelligence: Mankind's emerging world in cyberspace*. New York, NY: Plenum Trade.
- Martin, A., Thompson, B., & Chatfield, T. (2006). Alternate Reality Games White Paper. International Game Developers Association (IGDA). Retrieved from igda.org/arg/resources/IGDA-AlternateRealityGames-Whitepaper-2006.pdf
- Mason, B., & Thomas, S. (2008). *A million penguins research report*. Leicester, UK: Institute of Creative Technologies, De Montfort University.
- Nielsen, J. (2006, October 9). *Participation inequality: Encouraging more users to contribute*. Retrieved from <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/participation-inequality>
- Page, R. E. (2012). *Stories and social media: Identities and interaction*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Palfrey, J. G., & Gasser, U. (2008). *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Phillips, A. (2012). *A creator's guide to transmedia storytelling: How to captivate and engage audiences across multiple platforms*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Propp, V. (1968). *Morphology of the folktale*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Saldre, M., & Torop, P. (2012). Transmedia space. In I. Ibrus & C. Scolari (Eds.), *Crossmedia innovations: Texts, markets, institutions* (pp. 25–44). Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang.
- Steinberg, B. (2013, June 20). AT&T makes quiet push for “@Summer Lovin.” *Variety*. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2013/biz/news/att-makes-quiet-push-for-summer-lovin-1200500188>
- Thomas, B. (2011). What is fanfiction and why are people saying such nice things about it? *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 3, 1–24.
- Thomas, S., Joseph, C., Laccetti, J., Mason, B., Mills, S., Perril, S., & Pullinger, K. (2007, December 12). Transliteracy: Crossing divides. *First Monday*, 12(12). Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/2k8oqj>
- Van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.