Transmedia Storytelling: A Growing Trend Of Commercial Theater

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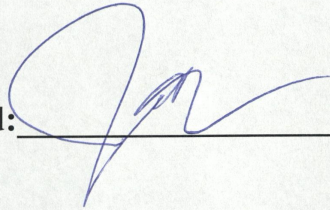
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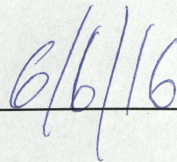May 2016

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# Abstract

This research capstone explored ways in which theater production serve as an example to narrate its story through multiple media and how audience plays a role in this transition. Through a study of commercial theater and the definations of transmedia storytelling, the reader will gain a background on concept and histrocial content to the field. I then explored one case study: *Les Misérables.* Through an explore on programming, branding and marketing, this study served to document trends, and the place of a transmedia theater in a wider culture of media-consumer interaction. This growing trend can give art administrators in the field a look into how to narrate storytelling through variety media, and can thus keep arts experiences relevant and audiences engaged in the future.

**Keywords**

➢ Transmedia Storytelling

➢ Transmedia

➢ Commercial Theater

➢ Multimedia

➢ Participate

➢ The *Les Misérables*

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# Introduction

## Statement of the problem

As media has become more interactive than ever before, easy access to multiple mediums diversify our technology life significantly and is constantly playing an increasing influence in our lives. This encourages "public not as simply consumers of preconstructed messages but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined" (Jenkins, 2013, p.2). The change allows information shared in several levels through multiple mediums at points of different depth, media producers have been therefore able to offer one story experience into alternative content, such as to adapt a novel into products like film, video game or even theme park.

However, this change of participatory culture is reflected in and adapted by many commercial entertainment productions, including Hollywood films, video games, comics and few theaters. There are few practical cases focused on such narration on theater production. Thus, in order to fill the gap of this art genre and to assimilate this new trend into commercial theater production, this research strives to document and explore the collaboration of interactive media and the consumer need of transmedia storytelling narrative through case study.

## Conceptual Framework

My research discovered ways transmedia storytelling could be practically applied within theater productions. The core concepts in this research are transmedia storytelling and theater production. Transmedia storytelling is "the technique of telling a single story or story experience across multiple platforms and formats including, but not limited to,

games, books, events, cinema and television" (Andrea, 2012, p.x). A theatrical

production "is any work of theatre, such as a staged play, musical, comedy or drama

produced from a written book or script" (Donald, 2006, p.1).

As a capstone research, my study is informed by my literature review and

capstone course which emphasize the importance of transmedia storytelling trend. The

literature review principally emphasized the significance of transmedia storytelling by

providing a history and past practiced examples. Information is collected in the field of

commercial theater production, in hope that this trend can be practical under the

assumption of sufficient budget to operate.

The research identifies the benefits and challenges of commercial theater

production utilizing transmedia storytelling narrative. In order to construct a model and

recommendations for theater institution, I then explored one case study that has utilized

the trend successfully.

Another topic of my research is to see public engagement as a participatory

culture. According to Jenkins, the term participatory culture "contrasts with older notions

of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers

as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with

each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands (Jenkins,

2007, p.3). It is therefore crucial to understanding public as participants rather than

spectators when utilizing multiple media. It is also best to examine the case by looking

into how media producers engaged their audiences. With the ultimate goal to offer

recommendations for utilizing transmedia storytelling in a theater production, the case

study explore the most effective practices by documenting how the musical *Les Misérables* program, market and brand their multimedia productions.

## Research Methodology

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study is to document and explore the merging trend of art productions that are incorporating transmedia storytelling into their productions as well the influence of this trend toward commercial theater productions. My research seeks to understand what practices might utilize multiple media in storytelling to keep diverse audiences and create a participatory culture. The ultimate goal is to offer recommendations by providing examined practices that have been used in a commercial theater production.

#### Methodological paradigm

For my research, I have decided to explore media platforms, strategies and audience participant through *Les Misérables* to utilizing a case study methodology. Since case studies are multi-perspectival analyses, thus when exploring a case, researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). This methodology fits perfectly as the research is not only looking for a growing trend, but as well exploring successful cultivated relations between public and theater productions. In the case of *Les Misérables*, public can be seen as relevant groups of actors whom might not even aware themselves as one of the voices.

#### Role of the researcher

As researcher of this capstone repetitive, my role is to explore the trend and to further conclude those studies into practical recommendations.

As an individual, I acknowledge my personal and professional experience as a film student graduated from one of the most influential film education institutions. I then enrolled in Art Management Program offered by University of Oregon, where I took several classes about performing art industry, and was then familiar with two major media that are mostly utilized in a transmedia storytelling theater production. I grew up in a country that is currently and potentially in need of such multimedia projects; unfortunately, most institutions consider this trend as a marketing method only. Because of this, I pursue myself to seek studies for this field in order to give recommendations for future institutions and producers who attempt to take the trend.

**Research Questions:**

For this research project, I wish to address the problem of lacking studies on transmedia utilizing on theater production. In order to fill the gap of this problem, the research is on purpose to offer recommendations for commercial theater producer by answering the following questions:

**Main Research Question:** How can commercial theater fit in the growing trend of transmedia storytelling?

**Sub questions:**

- How did the trend emerge historically?

- What mediums or content are included in a transmedia storytelling production?

- How did the producers cultivate a participatory culture through multiple mediums? It is intentionally or to approach the demand of audiences?

**Limitation**

As a capstone research, my study has the limitation of lacking actual surveys toward audiences needs for any specific transmedia storytelling production. Also since I specifically look into the commercial world of theater production, the research is thus not capable to give recommendations for most non-profit producers that lacking a sufficient budget to operate multiple media.

In my research, I only considered one case study of *Les Misérables*, which is a sung-through musical based on the novel by French novelist Victor Hugo. In this case, the research is then not capable to provide the best practices for other theater production genres without music and songs.

### Benefits of the Study

The purpose of the research is to explore transmedia storytelling trends within commercial theater production and to provide recommendations for practices to theater producers. The recommendations include suggestions for media suggestions, process strategy and methods to cultivate audiences. As transmedia utilize multiple media, the research benefits not only theater genre, but as well serves to recommend for other media productions that are incorporating transmedia to narrate its storytelling.

### Research Design

My research is intended to answer the question: **How can commercial theater fit in the growing trend of Transmedia Storytelling?** Thus throughout this research I discovered recommendations for theater producer to cultivate audience participate through transmedia storytelling narration. The research involved a literature review, two research capstone courses and one case study. The literature review includes an overview history and characteristics of transmedia, transmedia storytelling and participatory culture.

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As transmedia is a relatively new trend in the art world, when looking into my literature review, I began my research to answer the question: How did the trend emerge historically? In order to give a fully introduction of the background, the research then defined to answer my sub question of "What is Transmedia Storytelling?" The two questions were then defined before exploring further case study to construct best practical.

Further, I participated myself in two capstone courses offered by Arts and Administration program. I started by taking an individual study to further explore history and concepts of transmedia. Then, In order to develop a model taking the example of one successful transmedia theater production, I then participated myself in AAD610 Comparative Technology class. During taking the class, I developed a website of *Les Misérables* as an outcome model of fan arts cultivation to encouraging transmedia participation.
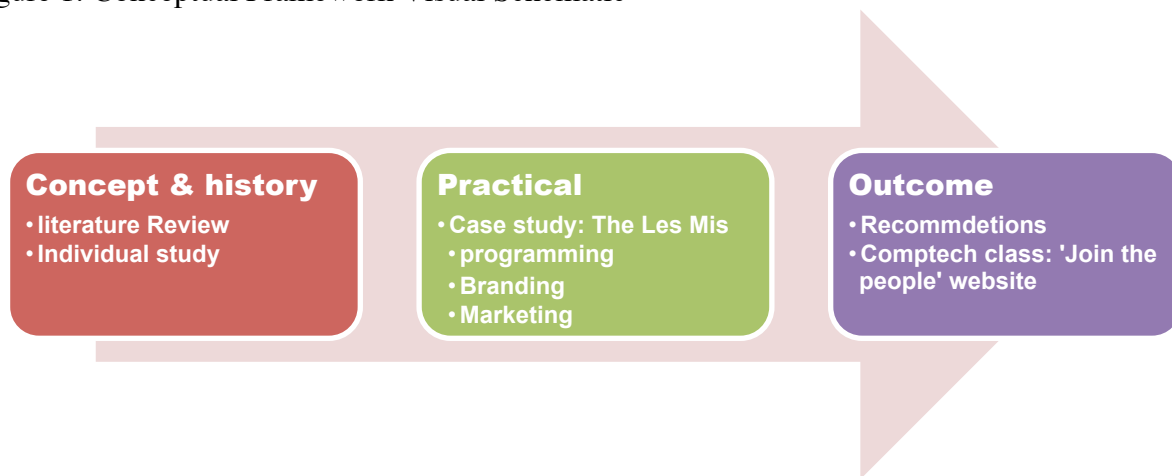
The research then looked into the case study of the sung-through musical *Les Misérables*, which had incorporated Transmedia Storytelling successfully, and focused on how these productions outreach and cultivate their audiences through multiple media. The case is a commercial theater production that has been performed worldwide and has won a certain reputation. Reputation can be measured as one of the world's most long last or award winning production. The *Les Misérables* fit quite sufficiently for being the second longest-running musical in the world and the longest-running musical in the West End.  The case study includes in-depth observations on history, programming, branding and marketing that are involved of each production. By looking at both external and internal contents, it is hopefully that the research can therefore give a fully background of

those productions in different level. The research then offered recommendations for commercial theater production in the final part.

Through the Capstone research, I took the following steps to accomplish my outcomes:

- I kept drawing from my literature review of the three fields relate to my study: transmedia history, transmedia storytelling and participatory culture. Main resources were acknowledged from professor of University of Southern California, Henry Jenkins's blog (http://spreadablemedia.org/) and published materials including the *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide* (2008) and *Rethinking media change: the aesthetics of transition* (2003).

- I then took two capstone courses that help to acknowledge my understanding of media in general. Since the research is about a relevantly new trend, there is not much course I could choose on campus, in that case, I signed up for Individual study course and used the course to read on the subject of Transmedia Storytelling. I then started to explore my case study.

- I defined my case study after giving definition to my first two questions and then started giving recommendations and model by designed a website utilizing multiple mediums of the *Les Misérables*. The website was designed in my second capstone course, the Comparative Technologies for Arts Administrators offered by Arts and Administration program in 2016 spring term, University of Oregon.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Visual Schematic

**Concept & history**
• literature Review
• Individual study

**Practical**
• Case study: The Les Mis
 • programming
 • Branding
 • Marketing

**Outcome**
• Recommdetions
• Comptech class: 'Join the people' website

# Literature Review

## Transmedia

### Transmedia History

As television set has became a commonplace in homes, businesses, and other community-based institutions since 1950s, new media emerged under thumbs of television consumers. According to William Boddy and Raymond Williams: "American television is not only significant as construed its role as a national identity, but also to create a 'moving-image culture' and a 'distinct cultural product' (Boddy, p.191).

 This technological invention innovated "new self-serving fantasies of the medium's nature and use will undoubtedly be offered to consumers and policy-makers" (Boddy, p.191). Thus, television serves more than a single medium, it changed ways Americans acknowledged and receive information through its immediacy and liveness. Television as well developed entertainment industry with vivid visual and sound.  Most significantly, it brings people together from great distance into one conversation, at the same time, under their own walls.

However, new invention took crisis to old media, such as broadcasting, newspaper, and mostly, as it is always paired up with television: cinemas. "The shifting boundaries between analogue and digital, cinema and television, and broadcasting and the Internet…as commercial television was consolidated within American economic and cultural life, a remarkably consistent and enduring set of ideas about the general nature and function of the television medium was also elaborated" (Boddy, p.191). The debates started from 1950s when in CBS's Annual Report made an argument around such networks "highjack the American public" and went throughout the industry for 20 years.

This traditional opposition between television and public cinema has changed in the 1970s. It is "challenged both by the growing popularity of domestic home-theatre installations and by the prospect of the electronic distribution and projection of feature films in public cinemas" (Boddy, p.191). Home theater blurred the boundary of television and cinema, and therefore enabled the consumers to control their own preferences through multiple media: watch a film through a television rather than being "highjack" by commercial television.

Media scholar Henry Jenkins defines "convergence" as "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost everywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins 2008, p.5). He argues that convergence emerged in the 1990s alongside the development of the Internet. The assumption of a digital revolution about new media replacing old media is suggested. According to a revolutionary, George Glider, whose claim is documented in Jenkins' *Convergence Culture*:

> The computer industry is converging with the television industry in the same sense that the automobile converged with the horse, the TV converged with the nickelodeon, the word-processing program converged with the typewriter, the CAD program converged with the drafting board (Jenkins, 2008, p.5).

Indeed, the invention of Digital video recorder stepped a further threshold allowing customers to customize entertainment by their own experiences; Inventions such as CD, MP3, DVD and Play Station has gradually occupied our home, "The perpetual tangle of cords that stands between me and my 'home entertainment' center reflects the

degree of incompatibility and dysfunction that exist between various media technologies"
(Jenkins, 2008, p.14). However this incompatibility and dysfunction did not displace old
media, instead, it creates conversations between individual and machines. Most
significantly, "A medium content may shift, its audience may change and its social status
may rise or fall, but once a medium, establishes itself as satisfying some core human
demand, it continue to function with the larger system of communication options"
(Jenkins, 2008, p.14). Television did not replace cinema, instead, it helped magnificently
with the development of DVDs; movies did not replace theater, but to develop mutual
storytelling on stages; "as occurred when television displaced radio as a storytelling
media, freeing radio to become the primary showcase for rock and roll" (Jenkins, 2008,
p.14).

## Transmedia Storytelling

As convergence and culture change shift the relationship between people,
machines and culture, new media allows audiences to choose their own experiences to be
entertainment via multiple mediums. As Jenkins spotlights, "old media never die—and
they don't even necessarily fade away. What dies are simply the tools we use to access
media content", most importantly, the functions of old media "are shifted by the
introduction of new technologies"(Jenkins, 2008, p13). The invention of personal
computer and Internet allow conversations between individual devices and take place in
broader communities: in the "World wide web". Conversations interact when people
populate a Twitter feed from a movie instantly and portably through laptop and
smartphone. The new era then not only creates the opportunity for convergences of the
mediums, but to create a culture coming along it. In Henry Jenkins' book *Convergence*

*Culture,* the change of transmedia is discussed between three concepts " media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence" (Jenkins, 2008, p2).

According to Jenkins, "The term participatory culture contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship, rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understand" (Jenkins, 2008, p3).

Convergence culture, which has been defined presently, "occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others". These conversations happen portably and shift instantly, "In the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platform" (Jenkins, 2008, p3). And as Jenkins (2011) stated in his blog:

> Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes it own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story.

In order to construct the ideally multiple media productions, it is therefore a challenge task for media industries and policy makers to operate their content by customers' preferences. When considering one case that can highly benefit from transmedia extensions and exposure, the series entertainment production, *Matrix,* is an ideally example. After the first release of the original *Matrix* movie, its consumers were eager to understand the concept between reality and illusion in the story. "Something about the film leaves some filmgoers feeling inadequate and others empowered" (Jenkins,

2008, p96). Such demand allows the storyteller plant a cue in each medium across the entire storytelling:

> The filmmakers plant clues that won't make sense until we play the computer game. They draw on the backstory revealed through a series of animated shorts, which need to be downloaded off the Web or watched off a separate DVD. Fans raced, dazed and confused, from the theaters to plug into Internet discussion lists, where every detail would be dissected and every possible interpretation debated (Jenkins, 2008, p96).

Although the filmmakers planted the concept intentionally, it is the viewers who engage deeper communication after experiencing one clue and another. Thus, the engagement from consumers drives the demand to expand variety mediums when media producer stimulate this engagement. Very similar is Jenkins' view that " media audiences must not simply buy an isolated product or experience, but rather, must buy into a prolonged relationship with a particular narrative universe, which is rich enough and complex enough to sustain their interest over time and thus motivate a succession of consumer choices" (Jenkins, 2003, p.284). This approach encourages media producers to be more attentive to audience interests, and should be using suitable media to tell one single but rich story.

However, it is never easy to motivate such choices through media power, an filmgoer of the original *Matrix* film might feel so exhausted to read from a comic after watching such a confusing film. A game player, however, might be annoying with the concept if never seen the film. The collective intelligence of *Matrix* is to use "different media to attract different market inches" (Jenkins, 2008, p.98).

> "In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best…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. Reading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption. Redundancy burns up fan interest and causes franchises to fail. Offering new levels of insight and experience refreshes the franchise and sustains consumer loyalty" (Jenkins, 2008, p.98).

The *Matrix* failed to keep the films sufficiently self-contained and the game is, however, too independent to offer unique experiences for customers, the story experience was too Fragment. The fans were also disappointed because "their own theories about the world of The *Matrix* were more rich and nuanced than anything they ever saw on a screen" (Jenkins, 2008, p.98).

Flaws of The *Matrix* bring up another significant problem: What medium or content should included in a Transmedia Storytelling production?

The Matrix built its way by telling the story across film, comic, animation and game, The content including film, comic and game has became a standard method to narrate a popular transmedia story, which in this case of an entertainment production, "Films and television probably have the most diverse audiences; comics and games have the narrowest" (Jenkins, 2008, p.98). However, according to Phillip Andrea, transmedia storytelling refers to the process that "technique of telling a single story or story experience across multiple platforms and formats including, but not limited to, games, books, events, cinema and television" (Andrea, 2012, p.x).

The definition indicates the process a wide option to create experiences with no boundary of platform or format. Media scholar Pierre Levy suggested the process is "distinction between authors and readers, producers and spectators, creators and interpreters will blend" to form a "circuit". He describes transmedia storytelling a "cultural attractor drawing together and creating common ground between diverse

communities " (Malone, Atlee, & Lévy, 2007). While Jenkins consider the process as "cultural activator", one thing is for sure: the process is developed within certain but diverse communities. A filmgoer living outside New York or London might not have a quick access to go for a musical, but with the same story told between film and musical, a certain conversation take place in two communities, and is able to merge different conversations into one when sharing a same experience. The process might be able to simulate the filmgoer to book a ticket, fly to the city where a musical is taking place. And no matter which medium did the story build upon, whether it is a film, comic or play, or which platforms joined later on, the process has become wildly imaginative and engaged between diverse communities through combinations of all kinds of mediums. More significantly, the process grows the story a popularity based on "fans responding to this situation of an increasingly privatized culture by applying the traditional practices of a folk culture to mass culture, treating film or television as if it offered them raw materials for telling their own stories and resources for forging their own communities" (Jenkins, 2003, p.288).

The mission to populate one story in different platforms, however, is different from marketing or branding. In his weblog, Jenkins discussed this differentiation, " I would rather argue that branding is one thing you can do with transmedia, but when I speak about transmedia storytelling, that is not the central focus of my interest. I am focusing on emergent forms of storytelling which tap into the flow of content across media and the networking of fan response" (Jenkins, 2011).

The shifts between media mean that we have "new experiences and learn new things. To translate *Harry Potter* from a book to a movie series means thinking through

much more deeply what Hogwarts looks like and thus the art director/production designer has significantly expanded and extended the story in the process" (Jenkins, 2011). A computer game provides another unique experience when "stresses interactivity and thus preprogramed entertainment experiences. Fan culture is high on participation, where fans take the resources offered by a text and push it in a range of directions which are neither preprogrammed nor authorized by the producers" (Jenkins, 2011). A participatory culture is cultivated when fans create their own arts to interact with each other, during thess interactions, new contents in different media are introduced by themselves and in order to experience the whole story, a motivation to consume all story might occur: the motivation that encourge them to participate themselves in other platfroms the story narrate on.

Thus, Tweeting a video of a film actor singing the song adapted from the musical is different than populating the video of fans who made a flashmob in city center singing for coming film.  Fans' arts not only create new content based on the original idea but keep the story going and alive for others to consume. Consumer participation is probably the most important aspect of transmedia and transmedia extensions because without them the story does not move from person to person and expand into multiple communities. It it important for brands and content creators to keep an open communication between themselves and the consumers of their products or creations.

The major difference between transmedia storytelling and branding is the fact that multiple mediums develop a participatory culture when their consumers interact each other by tracing the story-mediums piece by piece.

**Theater**

**Trends of commercial theater**

"Oedipus in Greek is a beautiful example of the accomplishments of the ancient poets, but in English it is stupid, tedious, and utterly wanting in picturesqueness, two absolute essentials in modern play writing" (Hartigan, 1995, p.7). The review came from a reviewer of the *New York Mirror* in 1882, a react to the first commercial production of the Greek tragedy in the United States. Historically, theater is an art form based on the reflection of tradition and social commentary of ancient Greek. Aristotle initially recorded the elements of theater in *Poetics*: "Every Tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality—namely, Plot, Characters, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, Melody" (Aristotle et al., 1995).  Even centuries ago, the content and language is under demand to shift to fit in the new need for modern consumer, such as our reviewer of the *New York Mirror*, the nature of theater is a combination of variety art genres. The way six elements merges to create and enhance storytelling is very similar to a transmedia production strives multiple mediums telling one or a seris story, even they are naturally different severing two experiences. With old media collided into new media, contemporary play encouraged new expectation, technologies  invovled new experiences, commerical theaters are therefore under risk and challenge, where transmedia storytelling can take place.

**Technology & Play**

According to Aristotle, elements of cooperating technologies to create unique experiences had already been an essential part of a play since his time of 300BC.  "The element of spectacle involves using technical elements to enhance storytelling, elicit

emotions, and add to the general awe of the experience" (Aristotle et al., 1995). Most interesting, as Jenkins argued, old media did not fade away with new inventions, what dies are simply the tools we use to access media content. Tools are developed with technology to better access old media and it is believed that "technology is an agent of social change" (Murphie & Potts, 2003, p.11).

Theater producers never stopped playing Shakespeare, what they did is to infuse the ancient art from with new technologies and new content (advenced story telling and language) to create resonate and connection between modern audiences. Especially when observing art world, techology not only shifted the society we live in, but as well adjusted our expectation and experiences toward arts.

Advanced technology is nonetheless crucial to provide new experiences when facing such challenge of changing expectation, however it is as well noticing the same story was told completely in ancient theater without modern technology:

> Stage technology, machinery and special effects have always been a part of the experience of theater and performance…technology has served as an externally presented representation and celebration of human skill and ingenuity (Baugh, 2014, p.1).

> This ingenuity is therefore what advanced technology and made it as a tool to enhance creativity, technology and effects are always welcome in entertainment productions, such as films and video games, however when modern stage technology creates too much than the original story is needed, a lead to separate between this creativity work and the art itself. This situation reflects journalist Victoria Looseleaf's view that within some recent theater productions there are "two shows going on: the artists' and the technology behind the scene" (Looseleaf, 2007, p.49).

In a cultural shifting society driven by changing technology, art producer should consider depth and level of development in technology to blend into one story. This consideration is not only essential to keep the storytelling original, but as well a response for both artists and audiences. Thus, when taking the trend of transmedia storytelling, media producers should be particularly awareness the risk when adapting the story in other platforms as well.

## Case study of L*es Miserables*

### Introduction

During managing transmedia production, there are gaps in telling a story through different medias. The *Matrix* is always considered a representative example of Transmedia Storytelling, but according to Jenkins, we cannot understand the key clue of the story if missing the stories taken place in the comic books, short animation and video game of *Matrix* (Jenkins, 2008, p.98). It might be exciting for fans to track a complete story in different media, however, as for a normal audience who is facing one production of the series, it may occur a hesitate to participate due to not consume all.

For the purposes of this research capstone, a specific case study of theater production that has successfully employed transmedia programming is essential. Case study allowed the research to build upon present practice on the foundational elements of transmedia development, interactive media uses, commercial theater and consumers interactive. With this foundation, the case study document current trends of transmedia commercial theater production through observing history of these productions, transmedia platforms used in programming, how these mediums programmed and how audience reacted toward the transmedia narrative of the productions.

In order to outcome the best practices for transmedia storytelling production, the research looked into the case study of the sung-through musical *Les Miserables*, which had incorporated transmedia storytelling successfully, and focused on how these productions outreach and cultivate their audiences through creating a participatory culture. The *Les Miserables* is also a commercial theater production that has been performed worldwide and has won a certain reputation. Reputation can be defined as one of the

world's most long last or award winning production. *Les Miserable* fit quite sufficiently

for being the second longest-running musical in the world and the longest-running

musical in the West End.  The case study includes in-depth observations on official

website, media and social media that are involved of each production. By looking at both

external and internal contents, it is hopefully that the research can therefore give a fully

background of those productions in different level.

## Overview of the *Les Misérables*

The musical theater production *Les Misérables* provided a well interactive series

productions using multiple medias. Colloquially known as *Les Mis,* the production is a

sung-through musical based on the novel *Les Misérables* by French poet and novelist

Victor Hugo. The music made by Claude-Michel Schönberg, original French lyrics by

Alain Boublil and Jean-Marc Natel, with an English-language libretto by Herbert

Kretzmer. The London production has run continuously since October 1985 and was the

longest-running musical in the West End and the second longest-running musical in the

world after The *Fantasticks* original Off-Broadway run. The story is well adapted and

adheres closely to the masterpiece by Victor Hugo:

> Set against the backdrop of 19th-century France, *Les Misérables* tells an
> enthralling story of broken dreams and unrequited love, passion, sacrifice and
> redemption – a timeless testament to the survival of the human spirit.
> Ex-convict Jean Valjean is hunted for decades by the ruthless policeman Javert after
> he breaks parole. When Valjean agrees to care for factory worker Fantine's young
> daughter, Cosette, their lives change forever. (http://www.lesmis.com/uk/)

Originally released as a concept album, the first musical-stage adaptation of the *Les Misérables* was presented at the Palais des Sports in 1980 and was then adapted into two theater productions, concerts, film, motion picture soundtracks, DVDs and CDs.

Not like an original entertainment production such as the *Matrix* to leave traces in each media, a same story is told all over again in each production, but different on casting, songs and visual experiences. The way *Les Misérables* narrating its story provided the best example for transmedia storytelling musical: for casual audience, new productions did not keep them away by have to watch a prior story in another media; For a fan, with each production providing unique experience, the products are capable to keep their interests to consume all.

The productions kept supporting one another through considerable programming, branding and marketing.

## Programming

When looking into the case of *Les Mis*, one factor that helped largely is how the play seized the opportunities to program the shows alongside with other media productions. The three major adaptions, which took the play to France, British and America, were successfully programmed through co-production and continuous improvement. And before moving into other media productions, it is also important to explore the three adaptions even they share a same media platform.

### The Original French production

 The first adaption idea came up to a French songwriter Alain Boublil while he was at a performance at the musical *Oliver!* in London:

As soon as the Artful Dodger came onstage, Gavroche came to mind. It was like a blow to the solar plexus. I started seeing all the characters of Victor Hugo's Les Misérables—Valjean, Javert, Gavroche, Cosette, Marius, and Éponine—in my mind's eye, laughing, crying, and singing onstage. (Behr, 1989, p.50)

Boublil and French composer Schönberg developed a rough synopsis, and within two year, they came out with a two-hour demo tape with Schönberg accompanying himself on the piano and singing every role. The concept album of this collaboration was recorded at CTS Studios in Wembley and was released in 1980, selling 260,000 copies. In September of the same year, a stage version directed by veteran French film director Robert Hossein was produced at the Palais des Sports in Paris. The show was a success, with 100 performances seen by over 500,000 people. The French adaption has led a success by attempting to sale a concept ablum before moving into a stage version. The concept ablum had nontheless created a reputation even before the opening and played essentially in coming programs.

**The Original West End production**

In 1983, after the play closed for two years once the booking contract expired, Peter Farago sent a copy of the French concept ablum to producer Cameron Mackintosh of *Cats*. Farago had been impressed by the *Cats* and asked Mackintosh to produce an English-language version of the show.

The first production in English, produced by Cameron Mackintosh, opened in London after the original production closed five years later. It was billed in the Royal Shakespeare Company's Barbican Theatre programme as "The Royal Shakespeare Company presentation of the RSC/Cameron Mackintosh production", and played to preview performances began on 28 September 1985. The storytelling reached further: the

lyrics written by Herbert Kretzmer was substantially expanded and reworked from a literal translation by Siobhan Bracke of the original Paris version, in particular adding a prologue to tell Jean Valjean's backstory. It is noticeable that Kretzmer's work was not only a direct translation of the French, the writter even barely spoke French:

> We all knew our English version of *Les Miserables* would be one third longer than the French original — British audiences weren't familiar enough with Hugo's story for the curtailed two-hour Paris version to make sense — which meant my writing a new prologue, half a dozen new songs and 'reconstructing' those that survived from the original.  I don't believe a song can be translated: it is what is and means what it means in the language it was written in. But you can reconstruct it for a new culture and that's what I did with Les Miserables. I barely speak French so had been provided with a literal translation of the French songs, but far more important to me was Hugo's original novel and listening to Claude-Michel Schonberg's score (Kretzmer, 2013).

Even though it is clear that RSC was using Mackintosh's reputation to market the play while the writter attempted to complete a much independent English verision, some elements were largerly saved: The Musical supervision and orchestrations, John Cameron, who has been involved in the show since Boublil and Schönberg hired him to orchestrate the original French concept album. He as well participated all most the entire music from the original french adaption. It is considered that the co-production between French and English artists has generated valuable income for the Royal Shakespeare Company (The Committee Office, 2010).

The show transffered to the Palace Theatre on 4 December 1985, and moved again to a much more intimate Queen's theater, which with revisions of staging and where, as of today, it is still playing. Accordding to the official website of the play, the play will be lasting until match 2017 every nights from Monday to Saturday. In order to

give an imperssion on how much value this vision has made, a simply number

documented in the Les Mis UK website can show the credit: The play celebrated its ten-

thousandth performance in 2010. (http://www.lesmis.com/uk/)

**The Original Broadway production**

The success of the English adaption led the musical to a Broadway production.

The original Broadway musical premiered on March 12, 1987 at The Broadway Theatre.

Colm Wilkinson and Frances Ruffelle reprised their roles from the London production

and the technical improvement were developed for the new version:

> The moving barricades and the revovling stage action were computerised.
> Hersey also improved on the lighting (in the sewer and Javert suicide scenes) and
> the original New York company benefited from two of the London production's
> stars –Frances Ruffelle as Éponine and Clom Wikinson himself. When America's
> Equity (actor's union) balked at using Wilkinson, Mackintosh, who had held
> extensive auditioing sessions in the States, let it be know that he would be
> prepared not to open at all in America if he couldn't get premission to bring the
> British Valjean over (Behr, 1993, p.144).

The show underwent further tightening and an improved sewer lighting and Javert

suicide scene effect was incorporated. According to a report from the *New York*

*Time*, Boublil once explained: "The transfer from London to the United States has

prompted further modifications.We are taking this opportunity to rethink and perfect, to

rewrite some details which probably no one else will see, but which for us are still long

nights of work. There are things that nobody had time to do in London, and here we have

a wonderful opportunity to fix a few things. No one will notice, perhaps, but for us, it will

make us so happy if we can better this show. We would like this to be the final version"

(Bennetts, 1986).

The report also documented the $4.5 million production had a more than

$4 million advance sale prior to its New York opening (Bennetts, 1986). The musical ran

at the Broadway Theatre through October 10, 1990, when it moved to the Imperial

Theatre and was scheduled to close on March 15, 2003, but the closing was postponed by

"a surge in public interest" (Kwiatkowski, 2003). According to an article in The

Scotsman, "Sales picked up last October, when Sir Cameron made the announcement that

the show would be closing on March 15th... its closure postponed to May 18th because of

an unexpected increase in business" (Cox, 2003).  After 6,680 performances in sixteen

years, when it closed on May 18, 2003,  it was the second-longest-running Broadway

musical after *Cats* and went surpassed *The Phantom of the Opera*.

### *Les Misérables in Concert: The 25th Anniversary*

After the remarkable achievement those productions aciheved, the story expanded

its liveness in other geners of art and were told through multiple mediums. The first

attemping is to play the musics in concert. A concert performance was given in 2010, *Les

Misérables in Concert: The 25th Anniversary*,  at The O2 in North Greenwich London to

mark the anniversary of the West End production musical.  Casts of the current London,

international tour, and original 1985 London productions took part, comprising an

ensemble of three hundred performers and musicians. The orchestra was conducted

by David Charles Abell, who also conducted tenth Anniversary performance in Royal

Albert Hall in 1995.

The evening concert was shown live in cinemas across the UK, Ireland and

around the world. A Blu-ray and DVD version of the O2 broadcast was released on 29

November 2010 in the UK (PAL DVD (Region 2) and Blu-ray). It was released in North

America on DVD and Blu-ray on 22 February 2011.

Most noticing, the end credits of the concert confirmed an adaptation of the stage

musical for 2012 release. The release DVD/Blu-ray of the concert as well included an

announcement of revised plans for a film adaptation (*Les Misérables in Concert, 2010* ).

**The Film adaption**

A musical drama film was adapted and produced by Working Title Films

Universal Pictures in 2012. Oscar winning director Tom Hooper signed on in March 2011

to direct the Mackintosh-produced film from a screenplay by William Nicholson.  In June

2011,  Hooper and Mackintosh started filming the film as director and producer, and the

main characters were cast later that year: The film ensembled casts led by Hugh Jackman

as Jean Valjean, Russell Crowe as Javert, Anne Hathaway as Fantine, Amanda

Seyfried as Cosette. The casts also included Eddie Redmayne , Helena Bonham

Carter and Sacha Baron Cohen (Houx, 2011).

Beside the celebrated leading actors, Mackintosh also made an interesting casting

choice. At a special appearance during the curtain call of the *Oliver!* UK tour at

the Palace Theatre in Manchester*,* he announced that the tour's Nancy, Samantha Barks,

who had played Éponine in the West End production and in the *25th Anniversary concert*,

would reprise the role in the film. Having previously played the role, Barks said "there

was similarities in playing the role—they're the same character—but Éponine in the

novel and Éponine in the musical are two kind of different girls, so to me it was the thrill

of merging those two together, to get something that still had that heart and soul that we

all connect to in the musical, but also the awkward, self-loathing teenager that we see in the novel, trying to merge those two together" (Zakarin, 2012).

The film contain every song from the original stage musical with the exception of 'I Saw Him Once' and 'Dog Eats Dog', although many songs have been partially or extensively cut. The lyrics of some songs were also modified to suit the changes in setting or narrative to the stage musical. In addition to the cuts, a new song, 'Suddenly' was added, new music was composed for the battle scenes, and the order of several songs changed from the stage musical. Several major pieces, primarily as 'Who Am I?', 'Stars', and the two 'Soliloquy' pieces are performed in a different key than most recordings.

During producing, the film's vocals were recorded live on set using live piano accompaniments played through earpieces as a guide, with the orchestral accompaniment recorded in post-production, rather than the traditional method where the film's musical soundtracks are usually pre-recorded and played back on set to which actors lip-sync.

An extended first look was released on the film's official Facebook page in September 2012. This short introduced and explained Hooper's method of recording vocals live on set, comparing it to the traditional method of pre-recording the vocals in a studio months in advance. Both Hooper and the actors believed that this choice of production method was making the film feel much more emotional, raw, and real. The actors praised Hooper for his method and provided brief interviews throughout the video. Hooper mentioned, "I thought it was an amazing opportunity to do something genuinely groundbreaking." Mackintosh, as the producer of the film, futher explained this choice of making the film live:"we have found an amazing group of actors who completely at hope

to sing through the music, the only way you can make that work is to catch the moment"
(Regal, 2011).

Leading actor Hugh Jackman revealed his experience making the film in the short:

The idea of singing live was daunting at first, but it gave me so much
freedom. It was like being on stage. Instead of lipsyncing I could slow the tempo
down, or speed it up, and do what I liked. I just had to worry about acting (Regal,
2011).

After one year, the film was premiered in London on December 2012 and was
then released two weeks later worldwide. The film received generally favourable reviews,
with many critics praising the cast, and Jackman, Hathaway, Eddie

Redmayne and Samantha Barks being the most often singled out for praise. The film

received eight Academy Award (The Oscar) nominations and won three of the awards,

including Best Sound Mixing.

### *Les Misérables: Highlights from the Motion Picture Soundtrack*

On December 2012, the Soundtrack of the motion picture: *Les Misérables:
Highlights from the Motion Picture Soundtrack* was released via Universal Republic.
According to Nielsen SoundScan, sold 43,000 copies in less than three full days of
release, Les Misérables debuted at number thirty-three on the Billboard 200 and at
number one on the Billboard Soundtracks chart upon its release (C, Keith, 2012). On
March 19, 2013, a 2-Disc Deluxe Edition soundtrack to *Les Misérables* was released
featuring a total of forty-two tracks. Unlike most soundtrack albums from stage
adaptations, this album doesn't contain all musical numbers in the film, with traditional
show highlights such as 'Who am I?' and 'A Little Fall of Rain' being omitted. The
famous anthem 'Do You Hear the People Sing?' does not appear on the album, however

it does feature in 'Epilogue'. Songs included on the album are also incomplete in comparison with the movie itself, for example, 'At the End of the Day' on the album is missing Fantine's explanation.

**2014 Broadway revival**

Three years after The Broadway production closed and one year after the release of the film, the show returned to Broadway in March 2014 at the Imperial Theatre with previews beginning March 1, 2014 and had an official opening on March 23, 2014. The creative team includes the direction of Laurence Connor and James Powell, the set design by Matt Kinley, costumes by Andreane Neofitou and Christine Rowlands, lighting by Paule Constable, sound by Mick Potter and projections by Fifty-Nine Productions. Cameron Mackintosh once again produced the show. The 2014 Broadway revival was nominated for 3 Tony Awards: Best Revival of a Musical, Best Leading Actor in a Musical for Karimloo, and Best Sound Design for Potter.

Fully productions list under timeline is provided in Table 1 to offer a further understanding on how the Les Mis incorporating its production one after another:

| Productions | 1980 Paris & Concept Album |
| --- | --- |
| | **1985 West End** |
| | **1987 Broadway** |
| | 1987 First US Tour |
| | 1987 Japan |
| | 1988 Second US Tour |
| | 1988 Third US Tour |
| | 1989 Poland |
| | 1991 Paris |
| | 1991 Netherlands |
| | 1992 UK Tour |
| | 1992 Madrid |

|  |  |
|---|---|
|  | **1995 10th Anniversary Concert** |
|  | 2000 Argentina |
|  | 2002 Mexico |
|  | 2006 Broadway Revival |
|  | 2008 Netherlands |
|  | 2008 Quebec |
|  | 2009 25th Anniversary UK Tour |
|  | **2010 25th Anniversary Concert** |
|  | 2010 Spain |
|  | 2010 Poland |
|  | 2010 Fourth US Tour |
|  | **2012 Working Title Film adaptation** |
|  | **2012 Film Highlights Soundtrack** |
|  | 2012 South Korea |
|  | 2013 Toronto |
|  | 2013 Spain |
|  | 2013 Puerto Rico |
|  | **2014 Broadway Revival** |
|  | 2016 Asian Tour |
|  | Multiple productions worldwide |

**Branding**

The musical's emblem is a picture of waif Cosette sweeping the Thénardiers' inn ,which occurs in the musical during singing 'Castle on a Cloud', usually shown cropped to a head-and-shoulders portrait superimposed on the French flag. The image is based on an etching by Gustave Brion based on the drawing by Émile Bayard. It appeared in several of the novel's earliest French-language editions. The emblem kept serving as logo of the West End production and was colored for the Broadway musical. The Working Title Film as well made a poster very similiarity to the emblem.
The emble of different productions is offered in Figure 2:
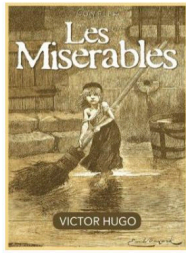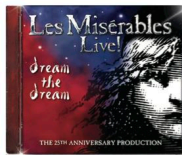
1862
French novel by Victor Hugo

1980 Paris
Original French production
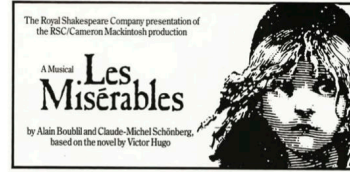
1985 London
West End production

1986 Washington DC
Broadway production

2010 The 25th Anniversary Concert

2012 Working Title film
Les Misérables: Highlights from the
Motion Picture Soundtrack

Figure 2: Embles of each productions

**Marketing**

When looking at the case of Les Mis, how they encourage fan's creation to

market the productions is especially unique and worth deep observing. On May 13th 2013,

Passengers at the Kings Cross St Pancras in London got a shock when hearing nearly

1000 people sang "Do You Hear the People Sing?" from the *Les Miserables*, the

flashmob was made into a video which includes singer Laura Wright singing solo in the

middle of the station, then twenty singers joined her shortly holding a flag saying: Les

Miserables Blu-ray & DVD with two hashtags #singyourday and #LesMis. And of the

sudden, the whole crowd passenger in that area stop what they were doing and joined the

singing. The video is inspiring and was uploaded in the official Facebook page of the film and Youtube Channel. Descriptions of the video stated clearly the flashmob is a commercial for the blue-ray: In January 2013, the world's longest-running musical brings its power to the big screen in Tom Hooper's sweeping and spectacular interpretation of Victor Hugo's epic tale. With international superstars and beloved songs—including "I Dreamed a Dream" , "Bring Him Home", "One Day More" and "On My Own"—Les Misérables, the show of shows, is now reborn as the cinematic musical experience of a lifetime (Universal UK, 2013).

The flashmob is actually announced ahead in the official website of London by picking 13 May 2013 as a national 'Sing Your Day' to celebrate the musical phenomenon of Les Miserables as the box-office sensation comes to Blu-ray and DVD (Lesmis.com/UK). In the announcement, musical groups and fans from around the UK are invited to take part in this spectacular rendition of 'Do You Hear the People Sing?' at St Pancras train station.

Beside the event in London, the *Les Mis* did not forget those who are living outside the city, they are encouraged to set up and film their own flashmob performing in their local area. Songs from either the film or musical are encouraged. They were as well given the opportunity to message the official Facebook page (www.facebook.com/LesMiserablesMovieUK) and request a post to recruit new participants. They were also invited to join coming Flashmobs that were already confirmed to take place in major cities around the country.

The event was also creative for fans to film or photograph themselves singing at any particular time in their day, in an effort to make even the most mundane daily tasks more musical.

Fans and groups could then easily make their own arts sending a link of the performance video to the official Les Misérables Facebook page or tweet a link using #singyourday or #LesMis.

Even though there were arguments about whether it was approraite printing a commercial on a French flag, the song was so powerful and the video was clicked more than 50 thousands times so far on Youtube.  However this is not the first or last flashmob of the LesMis, the first flashbmob was given by the Polish casts descended on Warsaw's most popular shopping center, Zlote Tarasy (Golden Terraces), which is located five minutes walk from the Musical Theatre ROMA on April 15th 2011 to commerice the Polish production.

Five months later, another flashmob took place in University of Tornoto by student organization on campus performed a song 'One Test more' based on *'One day more'*. The flashmob was to help relieve the stress during an exam for the incoming first-year students at engineering program. The perform was prepared nicely with an adapted lyrics and to even involve the supervisor singing the song as 'Javert'. The video received lots of attention on the Internet viewed over one million times and it was made independtly by students themselves.

Although it is not known whether the flashmob performed by university students inspired encrougement of fans' art, the musical did a well engagement to cultivate fans' creation, flashmobs given by local casts took place all around the world such as Orlando, Cardiff, Bristol, Manchester and Tokyo while fans' creations happened around the world on campus, shopping malls and weddings.

One of these flashmobs that was performed by local theatre organization in New Port reported on how the offical film reacted to their art: The official Les Mis film

Facebook and Twitter pages posted about us as well as responses from some of the film cast. We've even had e-mails from Cameron Mackintosh's company and even a comment from Universal Pictures (BTScompanies, 2013).

According to the orgnizer of the performance, the flashmob is to promote the coming film as the perfomers are fans' of the musical, and their work has been shared thousands of times all over Facebook and Twitter. And it was featured in local newspaper and TV show.

## Recommendations & Conclusion

Through this research, I explored patterns and trends in regarding to theater productions narrating stories using transmedia storytelling. I discovered three trends and one website to offer recommendations from those patterns for future producers of this field.

### Recommendations

#### Hiring previous staffs for coming productions

Hiring old staffs of old media to produce coming productions has been a common pattern in entertainment industry, even if that person might has have to step in a new field.

Taking the case of Cameron Mackintosh, it is interesting to know that a musical producer can be a great film producer as well.  While looking into the programming process of *Les Mis* productions, it is not hard to realize the importance of Cameron Mackintosh. Mackintosh has not only participated in both the West End and Broadway musicals, but as well serves as the producer of the motion picture. The reason for *Working Title* to have Mackintosh doing the job is obvious, it is not necessary being a film producer to make an adapted film from a reputed musical, his past participation and experience, as well the fame being the musical producer can no doubt create a brand awareness. The attempt to create brand productions is also shown by casting same actors, using all most exact music and marketing live record when filming the film.

The most crucial value of old staff is that they have a deep understanding to program the story before, in Mackintosh's case, he has ran the story over one decade. Thus, even if that person might not be familiar with the new platfrom, the entire

crews who understand the media can help him out, but his or her's understanding of the story might be unique and crucial.

**Keep developing new things but not abandon what's best**

When looking at the three main productions of the Les Mis, the plays were kept developing, when making the film, the production company was serious to outreach and cast star movies for larger audiences. However the beauty of musical was left when filming the film's vocals live.

And one thing should be espically paying attention to: audiences' interest may shift when narrating the story on another media, film goers want to see movie stars and effect can not be seen on stage, concert audiences want to hear more songs, people on Youtube want to see pumping video. Thus it is crucial for the producer to understand what is leading the story and what can be expand to meet the interests of new audiences. That is reason why we should keep hiring old staffs whom understand the story as their kids.

**Encourage fans' creation via social media integration**

The Les Mis did a well engagement to cultivate fans' creation by messaging their vedios through official Facebook page. A several flashmob given by casts also encourages fans' creation by setting up examples.

Fans need audiences and are those people who can create word of mouth and positive reviews, thus it is crucial to encourage them sing the songs and to help letting these voices heard by more people.

**"*Join The People*" website**

In order to develop a model taking the example of one successful transmedia theater production, I participated myself in AAD610 Comparative Technology class, offered by University of Oregon. My final project for this course was to develop a website of *Les Misérables*.

My purposed is to develop a website for the series Transmedia storytelling productions of The *Les Miserable*. The website served as a place to encourage the fans to interact the story via multiple media and to create their own arts. The website was designed not only for engagement, but as well the hub of information includes: Links to the original book, the adapted film by universal studio, the original soundtrack, past and coming plays. The goal was to set a model for media producers who will seek to cultivate a participate cultural with fans when storytelling transmedia productions.

Address of the website is: http://www.jointhepeople.net/ and has a password (jointhepeople) protected due to copyright issues.

**Conclusion**

Recent technologies advance a changing habit to consume one story experience through variety mediums. This allows commercial theater production to incorporate interactive media into its programming. This interact media may range from, but not limited to, novel, theater play, CD album, film and event. These productions should be engaged properly through programming, branding and marketing, and should not be taken as a marketing method only. The engagement can therefore ultimately encourage consumers back to the theater and lead their interests in other media platforms. And can then be capable to interact audiences beyond watching the play and to create a participatory cultural.

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