All the News That's Fit to Push:
The New York Times Company and Transmedia Daily News

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This feature article identifies three types of transmedia storyworlds—native, emergent, and feral—in the daily journalism work of The New York Times Company (NYT). In doing so, this case study of the NYT reevaluates how a transmedia storyworld is conceptualized, clarifies the relationship between storyworld and reference world in documentary storytelling, and illustrates the evolving transmedia journalism work of this organization. Through analysis of the NYT's 1619 Project, New York taxi medallion economy, and COVID-19 coverage, the author defines native, emergent, and feral transmedia stories and how they can be understood across media industries.

Keywords: audience, distribution, journalism, documentary, media, The New York Times, storyworld, transmedia storytelling, media channel, cross-platform, platform neutral

A little box has appeared on the front page of the printed *New York Times* since 1896. "All the News That's Fit to Print" first glowed in lights over New York City's infamous Times Square shortly after Adolph Ochs bought the then-bankrupt paper. It persists on the printed U.S. editions and has since become a motto or leitmotif not only for *The New York Times* but also for American journalism (Campbell, 2012). However, with such a limiting last word, the slogan logically does not appear on any of the news organization's digital properties. As The New York Times Company (NYT) expands from a newspaper and other legacy journalism channels to push media like podcasts and e-mail newsletters to streaming television, the time-honored slogan is an anachronism. News rarely comes to us in print form in the 21st century. In a transmedia age, it comes to us from everywhere at once, arriving to our media feeds with a digital push rather than from a physical pull of paper from the newsstand or the end of the driveway. Now, the company could declare that it delivers "All the News That's Fit to Push."

As of this writing, the NYT still prints a daily newspaper and two magazines, but also publishes a prominent website and online archive, mobile applications available on various operating systems, and has

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curated its content on multiple e-mail newsletters and podcasts. The NYT produces one streaming television show, licenses intellectual property to a second, and produces feature-length documentary films. It publishes scores of books (some customizable); offers education curricula, materials, and workshops; produces regular public events; hosts travel experiences; sells merchandise in its online store; sponsors a wine club; and operates a marketing media production studio. It curates its own content through daily story recommendation lists, distributes its news content through social media and syndication, and enables its public to do the same.[2] The NYT sews these many channels together to expand stories rather than to merely repeat content across multiple access points. Equally importantly, the NYT—like other journalism organizations—encourages public discourse and engagement with its content and connects its work to innumerable external sources to build and contextualize a collective, public, first draft of history. As such, the NYT is a transmedia storytelling enterprise.

A transmedia story (Jenkins, 2006; Kinder, 1998; Scolari, 2009) unfolds across multiple media forms and media channels in an expansive, rather than redundant way. As Jenkins (2011) described:

> Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. (para. 4)

The fictions Jenkins (2006) described include complex story franchises like *The Matrix*, *Lost* (Rose, 2011, pp. 145–168), *Star Wars* (Proctor & McCulloch, 2019), or *The Walking Dead* (Freeman, 2019), among many others. However, transmedia storytelling has also been described in advertising and marketing (Naik & Peters, 2009), music (Rose, 2011, pp. 27–30), education (Raybourn, 2014), activism (Costanza-Chock, 2014), and journalism (Gambarato, 2018; Gambarato & Tárcia, 2016; Moloney, 2015).

Storyworlds and Reference Worlds

Central to the understanding of transmedia storytelling is the concept of a *storyworld*, or the often-complex array of characters in the story and the rich world in which they live, interact, love, and clash. Though it is now enormous and complex, the "galaxy far, far away" of *Star Wars* is an example, as are the bizarre island of *Lost,* the zombie-apocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead,* and the magical world of Frank L. Baum's Oz. As narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan (2014, pp. 33–43) describes, a fictional storyworld is the world that the characters and objects in a story inhabit, with its own physical laws, social rules, and physical and mental events that drive the plots of the stories that happen within it. Klastrup and Tosca (2014, p. 297) describe

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[2] Though most media channels currently in use by the NYT can be found in the table of contents at the bottom of the *New York Times* home page (https://www.nytimes.com/), others referenced on this list include at this writing the Amazon Prime series *Modern Love* (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8543390/), feature-length Netflix documentary *Father, Soldier, Son* (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12187586/), FX and Hulu series *The Weekly* (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8629150/), the New York Times Licensing Group (https://nytlicensing.com/), and social media feeds on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/nytimes/), Twitter (https://twitter.com/nytimes), and Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/nytimes/).

these imaginary worlds as informed by three dimensions: mythos, an origin story; topos, a setting; and ethos, a moral codex that drives the characters. It differs from the older idea of a textual world, Ryan argues (2014, p. 32). A textual world can be the imaginative product of one single story, whereas a storyworld is represented across multiple differing texts, from books to movies to video games, among myriad possibilities.

Wolf (2014) describes imaginary storyworlds, whether they are alternative visions of the one we inhabit or exist in a far-off galaxy, as "secondary worlds" created by authors and imagined by readers who inhabit the real, "primary world" of our physical, consequential space. They are connected, he argues:

> Secondary worlds are, to some degree, versions or variations of our own world. Likewise, the main character in stories set in secondary worlds is often a very ordinary sort of person with whom an audience can easily relate, seeing as they are experiencing the new world vicariously through the main character. (p. 63)

This connection is exemplified in the film *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming et al., 1939). Dorothy Gale is a typical child in whom we can see ourselves, whether she is in Kansas or the Land of Oz. However, at the beginning and end of the film, we see Dorothy's own primary and secondary worlds overlap. As Dorothy is transported from Kansas to Oz on the winds of a tornado, the dog-snatching Miss Gulch transforms outside Dorothy's window into the Wicked Witch of the West. After her adventures in Oz, Dorothy awakens in her Kansas bed, looks at Professor Marvel and farmhands Hunk, Zeke, and Hickory, and insists, "And you . . . and you . . . and you . . . and you were there. You couldn't have been, could you?" Dorothy, and the viewers in the audience, recognized the four as the Wizard, the Scarecrow, the Cowardly Lion, and the Tin Man from Oz, all sharing some physical and personal characteristics across both primary and secondary worlds.

To describe transmedia storytelling in journalism or other nonfiction communication, however, the idea of storyworld as a mental construct must be extended to real-world circumstances. Though the world we inhabit may be composed of facts and data, the stories we tell each other or ourselves about it can be as flawed and human as the characters in them. Ryan (2014) writes,

> Nonfictional stories are told as true of the real world, but they do not necessarily live up to this ideal. The storyteller can be lying, misinformed, or playing loosely with the facts. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the world as it is presented and shaped by a story from the world as it exists autonomously. The former is a storyworld, the latter is a reference world. Assessing the truth of a story means assessing to what extent the storyworld corresponds to the reference world. (p. 33)

Although journalism, like historical research, archiving, and other forms of documentation, are herculean efforts to tell stories that reflect empirical facts and data, they remain human endeavors. The facts and data of the reference world are inevitably filtered through the storyteller's internal mythos, topos, and, in particular, ethos. Likewise, in what Fisher (1987) described as the narrative paradigm, we as readers accept the truthfulness of a story based on how well its characters and their actions comport with our own understanding of the world. "Determining a character's motives is prerequisite to trust, and trust is the foundation of belief" (p. 47), he argued. Real-world storyworlds are as constructed as fictional storyworlds,

whether that construction is conscious, as in the case of politicized communication, or unconscious despite the endeavors of ethical reporters, historians, or their readers.

When we read a nonfiction story, we are transported into a different space than the one in which we sit at that moment. It is a subset of the real world. Though that transportation is not necessarily an escape as it is with fiction, we temporarily inhabit a different setting, engage with its characters, and evaluate its ethos. For example, when we read, hear, or watch news coverage of U.S. elections, we briefly inhabit the subset world of Washington politics and the U.S. government. We likely even argue back—to ourselves or in online comments and social media—at the characters involved in that storyworld. When the cathedral of Notre Dame caught fire, we might have been transported halfway around the world to Paris and felt the grief and anguish of the Parisians. Like fictional storyworlds, these subsets of the real world can also be hypothetical. When we engage with coverage of climate change, we might be transported to a probable future of greater famine, drought, and more extreme weather events. It is through these subset worlds that transmedia journalism has so far been examined.

In prior works (Moloney, 2011, 2015), I have argued that a journalistic transmedia storyworld could narratively describe a physical space like a neighborhood, a social space like a community, an issue space like immigration or climate change, or an ongoing beat topic like state government. Whereas developing a fictional transmedia storyworld is an act of creation with possibilities limited only by the imagination, a nonfiction storyworld is an act of delimitation. With everything in the real world inevitably connected to everything else, producers must draw a border around the subject scope. Failure to define the limits of a real-world storyworld can result in a sprawling and diffused subject that fails to take advantage of the interconnected power of transmedia storytelling and defy a reader's wish to master the subject (Moloney, 2015, p. 54). "Daily journalism," I argued, "with its time-constrained brevity, is not a viable option. Transmedia [journalism] must be designed carefully and developed with a lengthy lead time to be effective" (Moloney, 2011, p. 12).

So far, description and analysis of transmedia journalism projects shows close attention to projects that document a subset storyworld. Here, multiple stories on a single complex subject are published in an interconnected network or series over a defined time period. Examples of subset storyworlds like this include *National Geographic'*s The Future of Food project (Godulla & Wolf, 2018; Moloney, 2015), BBC Channel Four's Fish Fight (Gambarato & Medvedev, 2015), and The Sochi Project (Gambarato, 2016). Contemporary NYT projects that explore subset transmedia storyworlds include The 1619 Project (Hannah-Jones, 2019a) on the history and ongoing aftermath of slavery in North America, the underground economy of the New York taxi medallion system (Rosenthal, 2019), and the COVID-19 pandemic, among others. Though all news coverage interconnects with every other aspect of the reference world in incredibly complex ways, the authors of these projects point to subsets of it as if to say, immerse yourself in this particularly powerful story, spend time with it, and know it deeply.

In an ongoing process of redefining itself for the 21st-century mediascape, the NYT demonstrates a new transmedia storytelling paradigm for the relentless flow of daily news journalism. Through an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995), I examine three ways the NYT delineates subset storyworlds from the relentless flow of news, then examine the NYT's array of media channels that define a massive storyworld of all the news that's fit to produce, print, podcast, publish, and push.

Method of Analysis

As a case study, the particulars of this analysis apply only to the individual case of the NYT. However, understanding of it is scalable, applicable, and adaptable across a spectrum of news organizations that are either experimenting with similar techniques and tools, or others. This case also serves to expand our understanding of how transmedia storytelling works in rapidly evolving journalism contexts. I examine three ongoing subset storyworlds at the NYT: the native transmedia storyworld of the 1619 Project, in which its transmedia nature is designed from the start; the emergent storyworld of New York taxi medallions, in which a transmedia story has emerged from traditional beat reporting; and the enormous, fast-changing, and complex feral transmedia storyworld of the COVID-19 pandemic, the transmedia nature of which forms through the life-or-death interest among the public rather than exclusively from the design of the producers. Central to most frameworks of transmedia storytelling design and analysis (Gambarato & Tárcia, 2016; Jenkins, 2009, 2016; Moloney, 2015, pp. 99–100) is the concept of worldbuilding, as discussed above. Though transmedia storytelling is a complex subject and analysis of it can be approached from multiple of perspectives, I look at the NYT's worldbuilding work through the following qualities:

1. Storyworld Definition—How is the storyworld scope defined and delimited? What subjects are included in the project and (if applicable) what are not? Does the storyworld present logical but porous borders in which—optionally—characters persist and a narrative structure forms across the project's media?

2. Serialization—For how long and how regularly do the stories publish? Does the serialization pace and time frame allow for modest mastery of the subject?

3. Entry Points—Through which stories does the public enter the storyworld, and how do they fuel further exploration of the subject?

4. Internal Connection—Are the stories within the project overtly connected to each other (i.e., through hot links and direct references), or does finding them require some luck or effort? How often are prior or related stories referenced or linked to expand the storyworld within NYT media?

5. Additive Comprehension—By engaging with multiple stories in the storyworld, could the public develop a complex understanding of the subject? Do the stories demonstrate an effective balance of repetition and expansion of subjects? (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 123–130).

6. External Connection—How might the storyworld extend beyond NYT media to other publishers or public life, allowing engaged publics to build upon this content?

Taken together, these qualities present a detailed look at how the NYT defines subset storyworlds within the reference world, allowing scalable engagement and the potential for some subject mastery by readers. Mastery of the storyworld is enabled by a manageable scope: The number, frequency, and serialization time frame of stories can either encourage or discourage the public's dilettante mastery of the content defined within a storyworld.

"Platform Neutral" Journalism

Transmedia storytelling is not a common term among working journalists, even if its logic is becoming as native to the industry as it is in others. Whether or not a news organization is aware of or understands the term and works to engage its advantages, it might deploy transmedia logics intuitively as a response to the current mediascape. The NYT is no different. Jodi Rudoren, the company's first-ever assistant managing editor for audience, identified the NYT logic as "cross-platform or multiplatform, generally." "They also talk about being 'platform neutral,'" Rudoren added. "As in, sometimes the right thing might be to break a news story on *The Daily* or *The Weekly* rather than online (or in print; [they] almost never break anything in print anymore)" (personal communication, January 24, 2020). I use transmedia as the adjective here for clarity. Platform is a broad definition under which journalists often conflate the roles of media form and media channel, and the differing structures of multimedia, cross-media, and transmedia stories (Moloney, 2019). Additionally, the fueling of public discourse, engagement, and spreadability, and the enabling of action upon news content—important transmedia storytelling principles—are seen by journalists as fundamental to the role of the fourth-estate press. Among journalists they are neither new nor special efforts. Although Rudoren and the NYT might use "platform neutral" as the internal term for their practice, their actions model transmedia storytelling well.

Native Transmedia Journalism: The 1619 Project

On August 14, 2019, four hundred years after the first enslaved Africans were sold into what is now the United States, *The New York Times Magazine* launched on the Web a transmedia project on how that event was the start of a system that has since defined the culture, economy, and struggle of the country. "This is sometimes referred to as the country's original sin, but it is more than that: It is the country's very origin," wrote editor Jake Silverstein (2019b). Initiated and led by reporter Nikole Hannah-Jones, the Pulitzer-Prize-winning (Canedy, 2020) native transmedia 1619 Project has unfolded on a special interactive website section, across three issues of the magazine, a special print section of the broadsheet *New York Times* newspaper, an article in the Sports section, a page in the print-only *New York Times for Kids,* a five-episode podcast, live symposia at the Smithsonian Institution, TheTimesCenter, and in online presentations, and a primary education curriculum matched to Common Core Standards. The NYT will publish a book series that includes an expanded version of existing project content, a graphic nonfiction book, and four other books for young readers ("Series of Books Planned," 2019). In addition to these project-specific media channels, the NYT advertised the 1619 Project on the 2020 Academy Awards broadcast. Their television production *The Weekly* and podcast *The Daily* aired connected stories about ongoing race issues, and the weekly e-mail newsletter *Race/Related* contributes to the project scope with both directly and indirectly related stories and commentary. The project also fueled an intense and ongoing conversation, with 4,828 moderated reader comments made on project stories in the two weeks after publication, and a firehose of politically polarized praise and vitriol on social media. In the first seven months following the project's launch—August 1, 2019, through February 28, 2020—326,827 Twitter tweets used the #1619project hashtag. These tweets peaked five days after first publication, August 19, 2019, with 62,569.[3]

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[3] #1619project tweet data were generated through Twitter's Premium Consumer API, and provided courtesy of Dr. Jennings Anderson and Professor Leysia Palen at the University of Colorado Boulder.

This is a sample of only one hashtag on a single social media channel and does not include similar political conversations on Facebook, Reddit, and other platforms. The 1619 Project is a fascinating example of native transmedia journalism, in which a complex transmedia publication strategy is planned and designed from the start. It embraces the contemporary publication philosophy of the NYT. The project is defined as a special project through its distinct interactive website, special print sections, and design aesthetics. This analysis of the 1619 Project is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of project details; as an ongoing project, the inventory will likely change after this writing is finished.

Storyworld Definition

A quality of the best journalism is to describe complex subjects through the experience of compelling characters, making underlying issues relatable and digestible. The 1619 Project accomplishes this goal. Although the overarching topic of slavery's influence on U.S. culture and economics seems like it would inevitably be huge, sprawling, and difficult to contain, the content is tightly scoped. The 12 core stories from the project's website and dedicated printed magazine issue select historical moments and issues resulting from slavery. In an editor's note in the magazine, Silverstein (2019a) wrote of the project's scope,

> Out of slavery—and the anti-black racism it required—grew nearly everything that has truly made America exceptional: its economic might, its industrial power, its electoral system, its diet and popular music, the inequities of its public health and education, its astonishing penchant for violence, its income inequality, the example it sets for the world as a land of freedom and equality, its slang, its legal system and the endemic racial fears and hatreds that continue to plague it to this day. The seeds of all that were planted long before our official birth date, in 1776, when the men known as our founders formally declared independence from Britain. (p. 4)

Rather than explore every possibility with encyclopedic goals, the project's authors elaborate this approachable number of topics with an eye for readers to extrapolate to other issues what they learn here. When possible, anecdotal stories of people who have experienced these issues put a human face on history, statistics, and elements of life that are otherwise invisible to privileged White Americans.

Though the magazine stories are often long—the first just short of 8,000 words—additive elements of the storyworld are more approachable. The *1619* podcast (Hannah-Jones, 2019b) both compresses the magazine content into episodes that run between 30 and 44 minutes and uses the advantages of audio storytelling to humanize and develop key characters in the stories. For example, project originator Hannah-Jones appears in every episode, either describing her own lived experience with the issues or introducing content in the episodes that follow. She has appeared on multiple television news and interview programs, and through her presence the project is humanized, personalized, and more transparent than traditional journalism. Likewise, on the podcast NYT music critic Wesley Morris's personality emerges in his discussion of the Black influence on popular music in a way not as evident as in the formal magazine piece. And though they were minor characters in the magazine content, sugar cane farmers June and Angie Provost carry the final two-part podcast episode and humanize the issues of banking, economy, and land ownership. Content

in *The New York Times for Kids* further condenses the subject into short digestible bites before the educational curriculum drives the young readers back to the full content.

Serialization

Though it is still described as ongoing at this writing, the 1619 Project is top heavy; the core content was published on a single day, August 14, 2019. By itself, this fact would have robbed the project of a key advantage of transmedia journalism: to engage readers over time with an issue of importance. Additive content, however, continued with *The New York Times for Kids* content a week later, the serialized podcast running from August 22 through October 11, a symposium at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture on October 30, new magazine content on February 16 (Bowman & Bailey, 2020) and June 28 (Hannah-Jones, 2020), and live conversations with historians at TheTimesCenter in New York on March 6, and with NYT reporters online on June 18 (Silverstein, 2020). Additionally, public debate and conversation has continued on social media throughout the project's life. Pending additions such as the book series will extend the serialized life of the project at least through 2020.

Entry Points

Although the interactive website and printed magazine and broadsheet stories launched the project, they now form the central, evergreen content for the story. Key entry points for diverse, non-NYT publics include the freely available educational curriculum; the podcast, which is likely to reach commuters who do not regularly read NYT content; the advertisement that played to more than 23 million viewers watching the Academy Awards broadcast (Koblin, 2020); content linked on multiple NYT e-mail newsletters; and—whether praising it or damning it—the public fueling the social media conversation surrounding the project. Additionally, competitor news organizations reported on the publication of The 1619 Project when it debuted (Johnson, 2019; Sreenivasan, 2019; Tharoor, 2019) and afterward when it was criticized (Barone, 2020; Harris, 2020; Kaufman, 2019). This coverage inevitably makes new publics aware of the project. For example, a caller to NPR's *1A* radio talk show (Johnson, 2019) identified only as "Carol," said,

> I'm very sad to say that the only time that I heard about this project was on the *1A* VoxPop [mobile application]. And after I looked up the information and read *The New York Times* PDF, I was quite impressed with the extensive amount of research that was done, and how far back it was that Africans first came to what is now called America. Hopefully this will continue to grow, and be shared, and be talked about in history for years to come. (06:14)

Internal Connection

Once they have entered the storyworld, readers find the core of the project within easy reach. Whereas in fiction the "drillability" of transmedia projects is an asset (Jenkins, 2009), purposefully obscuring journalism content is counterproductive. Exploring the project requires little effort: The project's interactive

website puts links to the project home at the top of every page, links closely related stories within text, and links to the 1619 podcast.

Internal connections also come though NYT coverage of related issues that are explicitly linked to a storyworlds like the 1619 Project. For example, the editor of *The New York Times Magazine* and three 1619 Project contributors held an online public conversation on June 18 connecting the COVID-19 pandemic to issues of endemic racism in health care and infection risk (Silverstein, 2020). The acceleration of the Black Lives Matter movement, fueled by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25 (Furst & Sawyer, 2020), extends the context of the 1619 Project, further bringing readers through exploration of related issues of racial justice. Hannah-Jones explicitly connected the expansively related storyworlds of American slavery and contemporary discrimination, police violence against Blacks, and the removal of monuments around the country in an article on June 28 (Hannah-Jones, 2020).

Additive Comprehension

The 1619 Project is constructed so that a reader engaging with the content on a single platform has a concise perspective of the issues presented. If the reader were to stop there and engage with no more of the content, she would have improved knowledge of the issues. However, if she engaged with more of the content on other channels, I argue, knowledge would improve due to the additive time spent exploring the issues, context and detail would deepen, and additive comprehension built. For example, readers of Khalil Gibran Muhammad's (2019) piece on the sugar industry's role in slavery would find much additive content in the podcast version of the story through the very character-driven story of June and Angie Provost (Hannah-Jones, 2019c). The two were only minor characters in the magazine story. Where the magazine work is contextually detailed, extensive, and features multiple sidebar stories, the podcast is personal and conversational, and contextualizes the storytelling with historic audio. Through their voices we develop a sense of the personal connection reporters have to the content and their rigor in reporting it.

External Connection

Because the 1619 Project content is selective, focusing on a handful of issues rather than attempting an encyclopedic analysis of the legacy of slavery, deeply engaged readers are likely to drill into the subject further. Within the NYT stories, valuable external sources are linked not only for further reader exploration but also for information source transparency. For example, in the second story in the series, on the roots of U.S. capitalism on the plantation, links to *Miami Herald* (Rodriguez, 2018) and *HuffPost* (Beckert & Rockman, 2014) stories, and data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2020) support the reporting.

Stories and sources outside of NYT media on slavery's impact on American culture and economics are innumerable. They extend from primary source documents on the landing of the ship San Juan Bautista in 1619, through Alex Haley's (1976) *Roots* (a book later made into multiple television miniseries), to more recent films like *12 Years a Slave* (McQueen, 2013), *Selma* (DuVernay, 2015), and others. *National Geographic* published a February 2020 cover story not on the first slave ship to unload human cargo, but the last in 1860 (Bourne, Diouf, & Brasted, 2020). The expansion this story provides to the NYT storyworld

is most likely serendipitous. *National Geographic* magazine articles typically have multiyear development and production time lines (Moloney, 2015). The choice of content, if not publication timing, were likely planned well before the publication of the 1619 Project. Nonetheless, by using the links to external sources and content provided by the NYT, then by searching for oneself, and finally by extrapolating content to one's own lived experience, the subset storyworld of the 1619 Project extends to the reference world.

Emergent Transmedia Beat Reporting: Taxi Medallions

In addition to native (pre-planned, scoped, and serialized) transmedia projects like the 1619 Project, subset storyworlds frequently emerge from the work of NYT beat reporters. Here, what starts as a single story escalates to a richer transmedia project when investigation of an issue or a topic reveals unseen complexity. Though examples of this are many, reporter Brian Rosenthal's Pulitzer-Prize- and Polk-Award-winning (Canedy, 2020; Tracy, 2020a) serialized investigation of the troubling, feudal economy of New York City taxi medallions is illustrative. The investigation began as many do, with a seed from other reporting. Rosenthal discovered that Donald Trump's former fixer, Michael Cohen, as part of his complex business enterprises, owned 30 taxi medallions—a century-old form of license required to operate a cab in the city. Depending on timing, each medallion could be valued at up to $1 million, leaving low-income, often-immigrant taxi drivers struggling to pay million-dollar loans. *The Times* had earlier reported on a spate of suicides possibly influenced by that debt (Fitzsimmons, 2018). From those seeds, Rosenthal's wider transportation beat refocused on the financial complexities of the medallion economy through more than 20 stories in *The Times* online and print news editions. This beat reporting has become a networked transmedia storyworld without the initial planning involved in something like the 1619 Project. The story began with classic fourth-estate beat reporting, but as editors serialized more stories across multiple NYT media channels, it became an emergent transmedia storyworld: Though it was not designed this way at the start, the public traction of the stories encouraged later transmedia publication.

Storyworld Definition

The stories thread connections between characters like taxi driver Mohammed Hoque and his family with wealthy loan holders such as Cohen, and "bankers, brokers, lawyers, investors, fleet owners and debt collectors" (Rosenthal, 2019, para. 7). These stories focus specifically on the economics of taxi licensing, and the border of this storyworld is clearly defined.

Serialization

For nine months beginning May 19, 2019, and continuing with follow-up reporting through February 20, 2020, more than 20 stories by Rosenthal and other reporters across the nytimes.com website, *The New York Times* newspaper, *The Daily* podcast, *The Weekly* television show, *Daily Briefing* newsletters, an article in the Times Insider Web section, and letters to the editor serialized the complex investigation as results surfaced.

Entry Points

Readers could encounter the story through *Daily Briefing* newsletters, any one of the online or print investigative stories, through *The Daily* podcast (Barbaro, 2019) or *The Weekly* streaming television show (Hillinger, 2019). Additionally, coverage of the issue and the NYT's reporting on it was covered by other news media (Berger, 2020; Drum, 2019; Gyarkye, Green, & Craig, 2019), allowing otherwise unaware publics to find and enter the story. Social media links, shares, and conversation also place the story in front of publics who might not otherwise discover it. Rosenthal's own Twitter account, @brianmrosenthal, serves to promote the stories he publishes and, in doing so, adds small snippets of context.

Internal Connection

Direct links to earlier stories in the series appear in each story, allowing for readers to explore the issue further. The podcast and television streams also reference the prior stories, building bidirectional additive content. The taxi industry and medallion economy are stories that have long been covered by *The New York Times,* and many of the NYT stories provide links and references to much earlier stories on the issue.

Additive Comprehension

Each story provides enough context to understand the issue without requiring other stories in the series. The podcast and television episodes not only bring new content and interviews to the subject but also add an inside view to the journalistic process and reporting by Rosenthal and others. This added transparency humanizes the story subjects in ways that the written reporting does not. By demonstrating the reporters' rigor and concern for accuracy, these audio and video stories might also offset superficial judgement of the NYT and its reporters by bringing the listener or viewer into the interviews.

External Connection

Like the 1619 Project stories, the taxi medallion investigation links to external source data and reporting in non-NYT media where appropriate. By also exploring other sources through search engines, through personal conversations, and, arguably, through the lived experience of hailing a New York cab, the storyworld connects to and overlaps with the reference world.

Feral Transmedia Crisis Coverage: COVID-19

The novel coronavirus disease now labeled COVID-19 first appeared on NYT Web pages on January 8, 2020. This socially, politically, and economically disruptive pandemic has, as of this writing, subsumed most other news coverage around the world. If a story is not directly about the virus and its spread, it is likely to be about the effects of its presence. It is the largest, global, continually breaking news story so far in this century. Although feral transmedia storyworlds exist in every taxonomic family of storytelling, they are particularly evident in journalism. When breaking news that could directly affect our own lives strikes, we dive into an array of media that includes legacy journalism organizations like the NYT, broadcast television news, radio, social media, blogs, government information websites, live conversation, and lived

experience to assemble a network of information and build our own storyworld around the news (Moloney, 2013). Unlike the two storyworlds already discussed, COVID-19 is not a story defined by any one media brand. It does not natively originate as a transmedia conception of the NYT as the 1619 Project did, nor does it emerge from NYT beat reporting as the taxi medallions investigation did. Despite their extensive coverage, it is not an NYT-branded story. The NYT's work on the subject, however, illustrates the storyworld-building actions many media publishers take to put the formidably complex subject into a manageable scope.

Storyworld Definition

As early as January 23, 2020, NYT editors defined the outbreak as a "momentous event" deserving of a special live-updated briefing. "The rhythms of *The Times* used to be very tied to print," Russell Goldman, a senior International editor based in Hong Kong, noted in an NYT interview. "Increasingly, we're telling a story to a global audience in multiple time zones that wants the most up-to-date news as quickly as possible" (Aridi, 2020, para. 5). At this writing, the NYT dedicates a section of the website and newspaper to the outbreak and related issues, updates the live briefing, and offers a dedicated e-mail newsletter and an e-book on the virus and its pandemic. The storyworld is arguably defined by both media producers and members of the public as anything related to this particular virus. Though this storyworld is massive, it is defined clearly and simply.

Serialization

During this momentous event, most readers in the U.S. begin and end their days, whether under government stay-at-home orders or not, by checking in on the day's events through various legacy and social media channels. Breaking news is a minute-by-minute serial story seen on the cable news scroll, one's social feeds, and the home pages of news media channels.

Entry Points

No defined entry points are required to inhabit this subset storyworld. It is a lived experience for the current global population. Entry particularly to the NYT's work on this subject reflects those in the two projects described above: Readers arrive through push media, like e-mail newsletters, links, and shares on social media; through independent searches; and through coverage that cites or refers to the NYT's reporting (Shammas et al., 2020). COVID-19 has also brought the public-service mission of journalism to the forefront. Many news organizations, including the NYT, locate coverage of the pandemic outside of website paywalls to provide free and open access to crisis information. This allows broader sharing of coverage, opening myriad entry points to journalistic representation of the storyworld.

Internal Connection

Linking internally to related coverage is a journalism industry standard, seen on news sites from the NYT to Buzzfeed. This standard practice continues as journalistic, government, and public service sources connect new information in their pages to older, still-relevant content. However, a feral transmedia story has no borders defined by a single producer, either from the start (native) or after the fact (emergent).

What is internal or external to the storyworld is defined by readers as they navigate available information on a particular nonfiction subject or ad hoc stories of a fictional world. Like other publishers, however, the NYT curates content to better scope the vast story for their readers. In March 2020, the NYT launched a special Web section, "At Home" (Sifton, n.d.), to curate information from multiple sections on how to live during pandemic stay-at-home orders. Though the Web section was obscure among NYT content, they extended it with a standalone Sunday print newspaper section on April 26 and put the Travel section on hiatus during the outbreak. "It's also a way of saying that our print paper can be as innovative and fresh as our digital report," executive editor Dean Baquet is quoted as saying (Balsamo, 2020, p. 2).

Additive Comprehension

In any story, whether fiction or nonfiction, additive comprehension extends from the defined storyworld to the reference world. As noted above, we understand and embrace fictional worlds because of some degree of familiarity with our own reference world. Recognition fuels plausibility in fiction. With nonfiction storyworlds, however, the connections between defined storyworld content and the reference world are seamless, so long as the information is trusted by the reader (Fisher, 1987; Klayman, 1995). For example, readers of both the NYT's 1619 Project and *National Geographic*'s story of the last slave ship would seamlessly integrate the two despite their origins with different publishers. They would additively comprehend elements of the history and influence of slavery so long as they trusted both the NYT and *National Geographic*. In a feral transmedia storyworld such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the storyworld is defined individually by each of us. It is assembled with information from trusted sources that extend from family through social media connections, search engine results, to legacy and alternative media publishers. We each assemble a subset storyworld of our own that likely overlaps well with those of the people we trust, and less so with those we do not.

External Connection

Having no borders defined by a single producer, a feral transmedia story such as this pandemic has no native external connections, as described in the analysis of the 1619 Project and Taxi Medallion investigative series. Each of us processes incoming information on the subject, consciously or unconsciously evaluates its trustworthiness, and assumes it into an individual storyworld. When we find value in information, we spread it through our own personal publication channels (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).

Conclusion

For many people in 2020, engaging with coverage and conversation about the COVID-19 pandemic might have begun with a far-away subset world, but landed just outside the front door. At this writing, nearly the entire planet is swirling between the storyworld and reference world as Dorothy did on the winds of her transformative tornado. This massive storyworld of life and death, and economic and social disruption, illustrates how readers assemble breaking news coverage into a feral transmedia storyworld that freely evolves through the engagement of the public alone. An emergent transmedia storyworld, such as the NYT's taxi medallion investigation, likely starts from a single engaging story, but grows through intentional design by a publisher. A native transmedia storyworld is designed as such from the start. This analysis examined this

spectrum of transmedia story origins through the journalism work of the NYT, in which all three are easily observed; however, these patterns also apply to other organizations, industries, and genres of storytelling.

The development of transmedia storytelling in daily journalism—whether by that term or a related one—is only at the beginning of a long process of iteration. The innumerable disruptions faced by news media around the globe, even before the as-yet-unforeseen impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, are likely to require multiple iterations of process and delivery before a new era of journalism settles for any length of time. We may soon realize that the relative stability of 20th-century journalism delivery style, delivery method, and economics was a singular exception. In addition to these transmedia storytelling efforts, the work of the NYT also illustrates intriguing and arguably successful adjustment to the contemporary media environment. Though the causes of economic and readership success are complex, these tactics by the NYT correlate with their recent market success ("The New York Times Company Reports," 2020). NYT performance contrasts with journalism market failures, such as the bankruptcy of the McClatchy Company (Hall, 2020) and Tribune Company management reductions (Tracy, 2020b). Both of these troubled organizations also work to respond to the contemporary media environment.

"The new business model is about subscription, but it's also about being a consumer-first/reader-first business," former NYT assistant managing editor for audience Jodi Rudoren explained (personal communication, January 24, 2020). "It's about reaching readers where they are, understanding their needs and filling them." When asked about how journalism competes and succeeds in an age of media ubiquity, she responded with the following:

1. Understand reader needs and meet them.

2. Think in advance about the audience for each piece and use that to decide framing of piece, headline, timing of publication.

3. Learn to differentiate "tradition" from "habit." Tradition is the core of who you are and what you do. [It] should never really change. Habits are how you express the traditions. [We used to write] 750-word OpEds because of the size of the broadsheet rail, not because that's the best way to make an argument, [or an] inverted pyramid news story because all copy landed at once. Now the first question we should ask ourselves with any new idea is, "what's the best way to tell this story?"

4. Experiment. Test. Repeat.

5. Everything you publish needs to be distinctive.

This description of the NYT's evolving philosophy and analysis of its results align well with the goals of transmedia storytelling: To tell complex stories in multiple media forms and across multiple media channels in an expansive rather than redundant way.

In prior analyses, transmedia journalism has only been conceptualized through discrete projects exhibiting the characteristics of native transmedia stories. In them a storyworld is defined by the producers

through the narratives and media they include or enable in their project design. There has been little discussion in transmedia studies of how the reader builds upon those real-world stories through exploration of external media, or how independent engagement with multiple sources of information creates a transmedia story for the reader even in the absence of intentional design. Journalism presents an interesting lens to define native, emergent, and feral transmedia stories in all genres, and how our own associations between primary and secondary (or storyworld and reference world) operate. From the primary world in which we live, the NYT and its public define multiple interlocking storyworlds from the relentless flow of all news that's fit to produce, print, podcast, publish, and push.

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