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The Wonderful Game of Oz and Tarzan Jigsaws: Commodifying Transmedia in Early Twentieth-Century Consumer Culture

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Abstract
This article will serve to provide a historicised examination of the configuration that have come to be known as transmedia storytelling, offering two interrelated examples of how transmedia storytelling was exploited in the 1920s and 1930s via the production practices of board games and jigsaw puzzles. The study will examine media practices developing during the early twentieth century, practices that were encouraged at this time by the increased commodification and branding of media texts and consumer products. The article's first example, *The Wonderful Game of Oz*, a board game released in 1921, demonstrates how transmedia storytelling became an industrialised means of branding consumer products across media during the early 1920s. The article's second example, a Tarzan jigsaw puzzle released in the 1930s to promote a Tarzan radio serial, will serve similarly to reveal how author Edgar Rice Burroughs exploited transmedia storytelling, expanding the fictional storyworld whilst continuing the fictional stories of its characters – as a model of commodification. Both branding and commodification accelerated practices of transmedia storytelling as a means of sustaining and reinforcing the commodity circulations of early twentieth-century consumer culture.

Keywords: Transmedia, Transmedia Storytelling, Board Games, Jigsaw Puzzles, The Wonderful Game of Oz, Tarzan Jigsaws, Commodification, Consumer Culture, Marketing, Branding, Historical Approach.

Introduction

Transmedia storytelling, branding, and franchising, each industrialised media phenomena, have come to occupy systems of production in and across the contemporary media landscape. Contextualised perhaps most prominently as a product of the contemporary media landscape, transmedia storytelling is typically understood in relation to digital media convergences and the horizontal integration of the media conglomerate. Explicitly theorised by Henry Jenkins (2006: 334), transmedia storytelling is itself the convergence of textual forms and involves the telling of 'stories that unfold across multiple platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the storyworld'. Transmedia storytelling is therefore the 'integrat[ion] of multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium' (Jenkins, 2006: 95). For Jenkins, indeed, this process of unfolding stories across multiple media platforms serves to make 'distinctive contributions to our understanding of the storyworld', a fictional space that is constructed in and across these multiple media sources (2006: 334). World-building, itself the art of transmedia storytelling, argues Jenkins, is thus 'the process of designing a fictional universe that will sustain franchise development, one that is sufficiently detailed to enable many different stories to emerge but coherent enough so that each story feels like it fits with the others' (2006: 335).

While it is tempting to regard such phenomena as implying revolutionary shifts in production practices, it is important to recognise the extent to which production models have remained bound to more traditional models. As transmedia continues to rise in prominence, both in industry and scholarly circles, it is becoming increasingly crucial to historicise the means by which phenomena such as

transmedia storytelling have evolved trans-historically. Doing so can serve as an example of how contemporary developments refocus the way we think about the past and indeed the ways that historical perspectives can in turn reframe current debates.

Critical debates around transmedia have been sprinkled with occasional references to earlier production practices since its scholarly inception, sometimes framed in contrast with the current media landscape, but sometimes seen as part of a larger continuity of media practices. We have seen this in Derek Johnson's indication of a transmedia history in his book on media franchising (2013a) as well as in his contribution to the *Spreadable Media* project (2013b). For Johnson, 'one of the newest dimensions of contemporary transmedia entertainment is our recognition of it as such' (2013b); he notes how 'the history of transmedia entertainment is a history of reorientations'. Henry Jenkins, too, has made occasional historical references to transmedia storytelling, most extensively in Denise Mann's 2014 edited collection *Wire TV: Laboring Over an Interactive Future*. Other scholars, such as Elizabeth Evans, have also hinted at the fundamental importance of at least recognising the 'historical precedence of these developments' (2011: 19), with Mark J. P. Wolf (2012) tying a history of telling stories across media to his study of imaginary worlds. Wolf, indeed, traces world-building in fiction to the fictional islands of Homer's *Odyssey*, and in this way implies that the storyworld and its related narratological concept of world-building are a possible link between the historical and the contemporary models of producing transmedia narratives (2012: 68).

It is therefore not to affirm that key thinkers on contemporary transmedia believe that this phenomenon is an exclusively new practice. Yet despite such acknowledgements to recognising the history of transmedia storytelling, there has been little concerted research into tracing its development as an industrialised phenomenon. This article, then, provides a more historicised intervention on the industrial configuration of what have come to be known more recently as transmedia storytelling, fictional storyworlds, and media branding during the early twentieth century. The study will examine particular media practices developing during these years, practices encouraged at this time by the increased commodification and branding of media texts and consumer products, which occurred through the broader turn towards industrialised consumption. Specifically, and grounded in such cultural factors as turn-of-the-century industrialisation and early mass consumer culture, I will offer two interrelated examples of how transmedia storytelling was exploited in the 1920s and 1930s via the production methods of affiliated board games and jigsaw puzzles. The focus here on games and puzzles will highlight the ways that these media have from the start been key means of tying together storyworlds and have contributed to the development of transmedia storytelling as an industrial practice. The first example is *The Wonderful Game of Oz*, a board game produced in 1921. The board game is an example of the promotional merchandise stemming from author L. Frank Baum's children's novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and its array of sequels and spin-offs. Examining the form and production of this board game in the context of other Land of Oz texts, each having propagated a multitude of media since the publication of the first novel in 1900, will highlight the relationship between the building of transmedia storyworlds in the early twentieth century and developments in media branding.

If this example demonstrates how transmedia storytelling became an industrialised means of branding consumer products such as board games across media during the early 1920s, then interlaced with this is the second example of author Edgar Rice Burroughs and the transmedia relationship between his Tarzan radio serials in the mid-1930s and their accompanying jigsaw puzzles. Examining the means by which Burroughs sold and exploited the merchandised tie-ins of Tarzan jigsaw puzzles will serve to reveal how the author developed a related model for developing the Tarzan radio serials as similarly commodified tie-ins, one founded upon an application of transmedia storytelling with the commodification of multiple Tarzan texts at this time likewise leading to the unfolding of Tarzan narratives as a transmedia adventure.

Stepping Stones of Entertainment

In an interview published in 1923, Edgar Rice Burroughs, author of *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914) and its

23 sequels, acknowledged, quite frankly, that his many Tarzan adventures were 'stories that fulfilled the purpose for which they were written – to sell' (Anon. 1923: 42). In assessing the pleasures to be found in the act of consuming fictional stories, moreover, Burroughs offered the following analogy:

> My youngest boy collects empty match boxes. The fact that they are all of the same kind makes no difference to him, but in that he shows the true spirit of the collector and of the reader. The really great purpose of fiction is, as I see it, that it is like stepping stones of entertainment. The reading of fiction motivates one's mind to flow to its next stepping stone, just like a collector of match boxes, and, lo, a new world will be opened to him (ibid.).

The 'world' to which Burroughs alluded emphasises two interrelated aspects of this period's cultural production. The first is the interlocking of its media texts, with the production of fictional stories operating, according to Burroughs, like entertainment stepping stones – one story leading to another and another, as components of a single brand. The second aspect, one which links to the first, is the commodification of a media text – those processes involved in packaging a media text as a product attractive to consumers. Burroughs hints at how a reader of fiction had become indistinguishable from a purchaser or collector of match boxes.

Such blurring must be understood as a result of the dominance of mass consumer culture emerging during the early twentieth century. The emergence of new industries during this time initiated a consumer culture of commodification that evolved alongside a booming economy. As sociologist Simon Patten wrote in 1907 (223), the nation had grown into an 'economy of abundance'. In the period of the late-nineteenth century along with the first two decades of the twentieth century, America had transformed from a rural-farming economy to an urban-manufacturing one, prompting, James Norris writes, 'a major transformation in the behaviour of American consumers' (1990: xiii). The concept of commodification had transformed the process of consumption into entertainment – the leisure of reading, for instance, fast becoming almost indistinguishable from the leisure of shopping, steering readers from the pages of periodicals to the stores of produce. Around the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Mizruchi notes, 'for the first time, advertisements, literature, and images from photographic to painterly became packaged together as mutually enhancing products' (2008: 139). Mizruchi reiterates that the idea of 'readers as consumers, together with heightened awareness of their own commercial prospects, preoccupied authors of the time in a way never before seen' (2008: 140). These decades were indeed turning points in the evolution of the production and consumption of culture, leading to a transition from an economics of industrial production to an economics of industrialised consumption (Lacey 2002: 21). 'Mass production has made mass distribution necessary', asserted Edward Filene (Anon. 1927: 34), a department store tycoon, who further noted that 'certain types of retailing are in effect dams in the stream of distribution – a stream which should be broad, deep, and swift flowing'. Such imagery of flowing streams of distribution evokes similar conceptions of stepping stones – notions of a culture defined by its multiplication of consumer goods, each connected together. Consumption was promoted through mass culture, one established at this time through mass media such as magazines, which in turn encouraged notions of a mass culture by pronouncing a media text as itself a commodity on account of this process – a consumer product designed to inspire the sustained consumption of that text.

Consider 'Tarzan of the Apes', a story first published in the October 1912 edition of *The All-Story*, a pulp magazine. From its inception, Tarzan was a product of the period's increased consumerism. 'The industrial revolution had enabled the manufacturing of more and more goods', James C. Davis reiterates, meaning that 'the long-term stability of the economy required that demand be manufactured as well' (2007: 1). Readers, as consumers, thus became accustomed to this multiplication, demanding more and more story from their media texts. Note one reader's response to 'Tarzan of the Apes', whose letter, published inside *The All-Story* in 1912, stressed:

> I did not lay down the magazine until I had finished "Tarzan of the Apes." The story is so

> engrossing that I am burning to know why it need end. What did Tarzan do next? Cannot you persuade the author to write a kind of sequel? I know many of the other readers feel as I do (A.J.J. 1912: 962).

Other reader letters echoed the sentiment: 'Have read The All-Story for about four years, and never in all that time have I read anything like "Tarzan of the Apes" in your magazine or any other. Give us more of that' (E. M. 1912: 968). This demand for sequels and 'more of that' reflected the increased commodity circulations of consumer culture. Individual media texts became dams in a stream of distribution – a stream of media, here circulated nationally inside magazines, which prioritised the knitting together of content so as to market itself, as Edward Filene would insist of chained retail outlets, broad and deep with all iterations flowing swiftly to the next. Many of these pulps continued to reflect and escalate this cultural commodification of the period by constructing their stories as that which interwove as interlocked products across numerous iterations, connecting the stories of one character with those of others. The assumption was that readers who responded favourably to one story or character would be more easily persuaded to read a different story featuring a different hero – and thus purchase further editions of the magazine – if both sets of characters were presented to be sharing the same fictional storyworld, thus braiding the exploits of one pulp hero with those of another.

For example, in a pulp serial called 'At the Earth's Core', also published in *The All-Story*, this time in 1914, author Edgar Rice Burroughs created a world called Pellucidar, a land inhabited by an intelligent species of pterodactyls called Mahars. Later entries in the series incorporated visits from Tarzan. The crossover narration was in turn reciprocated when Tarzan, in a later story titled 'Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar', published in 1916 in *The All-Story*, stumbled across the lost civilization discovered in 'At the Earth's Core'. *The All-Story*'s editor, Thomas Metcalf, had encouraged Burroughs to develop these crossover techniques for commercial purposes: 'The mystical appeal of all these rivers, valleys and seas, which you mentioned only casually in "Tarzan of the Apes"', Metcalf wrote in a letter to Burroughs, 'I believe would be very strong for sales' (1912). As such, Burroughs' intention for his first Tarzan sequel, titled *The Return of Tarzan* (1915), was for his hero to 'encounter a strange race living in the ruins of a former great city' (Burroughs 1912). Correspondingly, in another of Burroughs' stories called 'The Land That Time Forgot' – this time published in *Blue Book Magazine* in 1918 – readers were presented with a detailed narrativization of this former great city, here called Caspak, a place inhabited by dinosaurs. Caspak, as was revealed only at the end of the story, bordered the same jungle of Tarzan's continuing adventures. This bridging of the entirety of Burroughs' fictional works for commercial aims, exploiting the popularity of one creation to boost the readership of his others, is an example of one of the ways through which a media text became commodified during this period – the braiding of two fictional storyworlds as part of a single 'Burroughsian universe', as it became known, encouraged the desire to purchase via its narrative and authorial branding. Commodity braiding can be defined as the commercially designed interlocking of a range of commodities, be it media texts and/or consumer products, through strategies of narrative or authorship as exemplified by the interlocking of pulp-based storyworlds.[1] David Welky indicates that this commodity braiding denounced pulp magazines, noting that 'the literati complained that pulps threatened to turn the art of writing into just another product' (2008: 94). Yet it was the cultural impact of this commodification on a mass industrial scale that coincided with the era's consumer-audiences associating the reading of media texts as that which ensued synonymously as product consumption. For readers, the braided media texts of this era would expand into endless stepping stones of entertainment.

Such strategies of commodity braiding permeated far beyond the pages of pulp magazines. Branding and commodification was a language – a strikingly visual language – that was fast permeating across the borders of different platforms and alternate media, each blurring into the others in ways that begin to explain how and why the fictional characters and storyworlds of this period themselves began to permeate more freely across the borders of different platforms and alternate media. This example of

commodity braiding within the pulps, integrating texts as parts of a trans-fictional adventure across multiple editions so as to sell magazines, also hints at the impact of this era's economics of industrialised consumption upon the means by which media texts would be authored transmedially. Transmedia storytelling, as Marie-Laure Ryan has observed, 'can be regarded as a special case of trans-fictionality, [itself] the migration of fictional entities across different texts – a trans-fictionality that operates across many different media' (2008). This, along with how consuming media weaves together with other forms of product consumption as stepping stones of entertainment – foregrounding, as André Jansson notes, that 'in such a context, consuming goods and media texts becomes pretty much the same thing' (2002: 5) – leads us to highlight the central importance of both commodification and branding upon this historical period's industrial development of what would only later be termed transmedia storytelling. As we shall now see, these practices facilitated the production of a coherent product image, reproduced in different forms as braided and branded commodity extensions of that image.

Branding Transmedia

Celia Lury identifies branding as both a cultural and industrial phenomenon that can be traced to the 19th and early 20th centuries (2004: 18-19). As retailers began to emerge as brands in and of themselves, each producing and selling their own increasingly branded consumer products,[2] authors and companies, as we shall see, would similarly affirm their own statuses as suppliers of branded goods, standing as both the corporate brand itself and the creator of its media brand. Considerations of branding in this context work to evoke what Henry Jenkins also calls brand extension in relation to contemporary transmedia – 'the idea that successful brands are built by exploiting multiple contacts between the brand and the consumer' (2006: 69). For Jenkins, this too 'should not be contained within a single media platform, but should extend across as many media as possible. Brand extension builds on audience interest in particular content to bring them into contact again and again with an associated brand' (ibid.). Following this logic, it is crucial to emphasise the slippage between concepts such as brand extension and transmedia storytelling, with the latter similarly conceptualised according to its extension of content across as multiple media. Our ability to differentiate between these concepts typically relies upon the perceived demarcation of the latter's 'newness' in the contemporary context of media convergence. Yet as my own work reasserts (Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman 2014), rather than simply suggesting that new forms of transmedia storytelling have come to exist alongside older forms of merchandising, it is more useful to consider how transmedia storytelling operated within historical contexts as practices of achieving similar conceptions of what would later be understood as a transmedia storytelling.

Branding would indeed complicate distinctions between media texts and consumer products, with the language of advertising and branding permeating across the borders of different platforms and media in ways that facilitated the transmedia propagation of fictional storyworlds. The promotional language of advertising, such as consistent colour branding, had emerged; a language of promotional branding that informed the construction of author L. Frank Baum's The Land of Oz as a fictional storyworld, with entire cornerstones divided according to colour. L. Frank Baum, author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* along with another 13 published sequels, was in many respects at the cultural forefront of many of this era's most innovative practices of branding and promotion, having forged himself an early career in the art of exploiting shop windows as forms of advertising prior to establishing himself as a successful author of children's literature.[3] For *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* novel, Baum and his illustrator W. W. Denslow created 24 colour plates and 100 two-colour illustrations. Colour, in this sense, had established the geography of the storyworld: the North of Oz was called the Gillikin Country, and its colour was purple; the Munchkins in the East of Oz, meanwhile, occupied a space of blue; the Winkies in the West were yellow; the Quadlings in the South were red; and the denizens of the Emerald City were green. As Dorothy journeyed through the fairyland in the story of the novel, the book's colours changed, signifying her entrance into another of the land's mystical countries. The author's innovative use of

colour was the first of Baum's many strategies for forming his Oz works as trans-textual – if not yet transmedial – works. Each region of Oz had been branded in line with the strategies of advertising. According to Anne M. Cronin (2010: 55), the better advertising campaigns of this era often incorporated set colour schemes, which provided for consistent branding of products. The application of consistently selected colours to a product had, by this time, become understood by advertisers as a means of branding products across platforms. Such devices of brand-building were thus components of the same brand devices exploited as world-building, itself the art of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins 2006: 116).

In the case of The Land of Oz, central to this model of brand-building as transmedial world-building was its first board game, produced in 1921. *The Wonderful Game of Oz* was a piece of promotional merchandise released to tie-in with the release of *The Royal Book of Oz*, the 15th Oz novel. In 1921 Parker Brothers manufactured and issued the game. It remained on the market, somewhat ironically, until the release of MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* film in 1939. The playing board was a large map of The Land of Oz, 'beautifully lithographed in colours', with the yellow brick road passing through its center (Greene and Martin 1977: 174). Playing as different characters from the storyworld – Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman – players moved along the road according to the throw of a dice. Having acquired copyright from the Baum estate, the Parker Brothers reproduced particular art designs from the novels, preserving the game with a strong sense of visual consistency with existing Oz texts. As indicated above, the role of brand-building during this period often bled into forms of world-building for other media products, providing audiences with new narrative content about a storyworld and its fictional inhabitants across multiple media and consumer products. That the players of *The Wonderful Game of Oz* had been presented with a board that had also served as a detailed map of The Land of Oz was significant to this transmedia process of consumption. Those who had already consumed Baum's Oz novels could use this map as a detailed colour-coding apparatus – a transmedia tool for learning about new and previously unexplored spaces and cornerstones of The Land of Oz storyworld.

In much the same way as transmedia storytelling is understood by scholars to construct a coherent storyworld, with the geographical realm of the fictional world serving to unify multiple texts together as threads of a much larger transmedia tapestry, *The Wonderful Game of Oz* had a similar effect on the construction of The Land of Oz storyworld in the early 1920s. The map displayed on the game's playing board essentially unified the series of Oz novels, featuring fictional spaces from all of the different books to have appeared since *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900. In addition to illustrating locations from each of the twenty-one Oz novels to have been published at that time, *The Wonderful Game of Oz* board map also presented players with a number of fictional spaces that had not been previously narrated within any of the previous novels. The product can hereby be discussed in terms of its function in expanding the audience's knowledge of the storyworld. For example, the map presented on the board game served to reveal the Tin Woodman's castle, a locale that had been mentioned – though not actually seen or visited – in 1909's *The Road to Oz* novel. Furthermore, the board game illustrated the castle of the Glinda character, the Good Witch of the South that had appeared throughout the Oz series. It was Glinda in *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (1905) that found and restored Princess Oz, the rightful heir to the throne of Oz. Only on the map display as part of *The Wonderful Game of Oz* had Princess Ozma's lake house been presented to audiences. As with the Tin Woodman's castle, Ozma's lake house had been mentioned in an earlier novel – this time in 1917's *The Lost Princess of Oz* – but it had likewise not played a major part in any of the novels thus far.

According to Ian Gordon, by 1908 the promotional importance of brand names was recognised and implemented into business practices (1998: 53). 'Oz' had become one such brand name, highly effective in a commercial sense for its ability to produce and market fictions in and across media. Much of this argumentation has been positioned in scholarly transmedia discourse within the area of online advertising. Johnathan Gray observes how the promotional apparatus exploited by contemporary television series are not simply about selling but 'advancing

and developing [the] narrative' (2010: 5). According to Gray, in what he terms paratexts, the meaning of a series is not only located in the text, but extends across multiple platforms – such as online materials. These paratexts serve to aid the audience's 'speculative consumption' of the text as 'entryway paratexts', extending the storyworld by providing new narrative content (2010: 25). *The Wonderful Game of Oz*, a piece of tie-in promotional merchandise, had functioned as that which promoted the presence of all surrounding Oz texts simultaneously, unifying their fictional storyworld. Each Oz text and consumer product was synchronised commercially and narratively as components of a branded whole, with the story threads and fictional terrains of The Land of Oz storyworld extending and expanding across the borders of texts and products. Each of these Oz-branded products became interlocked as branded commodities important to the process of consuming The Land of Oz as a fictional storyworld . Each product, as André Jansson has also observed of this period's branded mediatisation of culture, 'generated surplus value and contributed to the marketing of other products within the concept' (2002: 21).

Commodifying Transmedia

The Wonderful Game of Oz had been one part of a chain of branded commodity products, and thus intertwined with this particular aspect of cultural production was the commodification of media texts as consumer products; further accelerating the transmedial connections between media texts and consumer products such as board games and, as we shall see, jigsaw puzzles. As Burroughs hinted in his earlier match box analogy for the process of consuming fiction, the 1920s and 1930s witnessed a complex industrialised alignment of consumer product and media text, enabling the latter to be re-positioned culturally as an interlocked network of the former's commodification. By the mid-1930s, *Business Screen* magazine was publishing features on ways to 'use films in business', offering tips for how motion pictures could be integrated as part of the interiors of shops so as to increase sales (Anon. 1936b: 29-36). Films were even produced as a means of advertising consumer products. Coolerator, for example – a company specialising in ice refrigerators – produced a 'Coolerator consumer picture' called *Husbands Are Good For Something* in order to market their product to the masses. The film was 'intended to close the gap between consumers being *aware* of our product and them becoming *specifically interested* in it and thus eventually *sold* on Coolerator advantages [emphasis in original]' (Anon. 1936a: 45-46). Such conceptual slippage between media text and consumer product – the former exploited as an affiliate of the latter, blurring any distinction between the two – had indeed guided an accumulative perception amongst consumers that, as one article stated, 'a good film is known by the merchandise it sells' (Anon. 1936c: 9). Industrialised consumption 'consumed' media texts, as it were, as parts of a flow of braided consumerism composed of media texts and consumer products alike. The stories, characters, and storyworlds of the former essentially became commodified as integrated, transmedial consumer products of the latter.

In the case of Tarzan, then, central to this commodification was its radio serial, which Edgar Rice Burroughs exploited to develop Tarzan as a transmedia narrative. Burroughs, like Baum, had developed himself a successful career in literature whilst building a business empire, with both authors considered businessmen as often as they were authors.[4] In 1931, Burroughs entered negotiations with American Radio Features Syndicate to adapt Tarzan into a thrice-weekly radio serial. In 1932 Signal Oil and Gas Company signed as its sponsor. Consumers purchased Tarzan gasoline, a mediatised consumer item, in return receiving a mock 'Signal Tarzan Radio Premier' stub, a receipt issuing a ticket to tune in to the Tarzan radio serial, itself commodified as part of Tarzan-branded stepping stones of consumer transactions. It was this commodification process that saw transmedia storytelling intensify once again as an increasingly significant practice of extending Tarzan across the borders of multiple media.

This intensification began with Signal Oil and Gas launching a range of 'merchandise tie-ins' as part of a campaign to promote Tarzan on radio, one of which was a Tarzan jigsaw puzzle. 'A new puzzle section will be given away each week for six weeks', announced Signal Dealer News, 'and when the completed puzzle is assembled it will unfold one of the most thrilling of all Tarzan's adventures, brightly

illustrated in four colors' (Anon. 1932). As defined by Jenkins already in this article, transmedia storytelling is itself the process of 'integrating multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium' (2006: 95). Defined as such, the practice has clear structural similarities with the consumer product of a jigsaw puzzle, which speaks similarly of assembling multiple pieces of content to unfold one adventure, each piece chopped into multiple fragments of a cohesive product. As Ryan writes of transmedia storytelling, 'here we imagine various media eagerly reaching toward a fixed content to grab a piece of it' (2008). Merchandise tie-ins, as embodied by the consumer product of a jigsaw puzzle, would provide Burroughs with a model for developing the multiple media Tarzan stories as commodified tie-ins, a model founded upon transmedia storytelling. According to Signal Dealer News, Burroughs 'has become so excited over the potential of this new cross marketing phenomenon that he starts to think of ways he himself can adapt it to the marketing of his books' (Anon. 1932). The Depression, after all, witnessed radio emerging as the nation's dominant medium, with 40% of all households carrying radios by 1930 (Lacey 2002: 23). Its popularity had a steadily negative impact upon the sales of other media iteration of the Tarzan character, such as books. In 1935 Burroughs wrote:

> There is one factor that may have more effect on reducing book sales than any number of depressions, and that is radio, to which we are looking at far greater returns than our book royalties. Already, with two programs, we are netting more than we do from the sale of all our books, which, taken in connection with the fact that there are hundreds of similar programs on the air, suggests that people are taking their fiction this way instead of through books (in Hillman n.d.).

In 1938 Tarzan returned to radio in a serial titled *Tarzan and the Diamond of Asher*, a serial that exemplified Burroughs' adoption of the 'cross marketing' afforded by the tie-in jigsaw as a response to falling book sales. The serial, its narrator declared at the beginning of its first episode 'Mistaken Identity', 'brings to radio and to Tarzan's many thousands of friends an entirely new story of strange and thrilling adventure' (ERB, Inc. and American Radio Syndicate 1938a). Given that the serial was based on a pulp story called 'The Red Star of Tarzan', the pronounced newness of this story was deceptive – though promoting it as such was crucial to increasing book sales. 'The Red Star of Tarzan' was published as a pulp story in *Argosy Weekly* between March 19 and April 23, 1938. Yet Burroughs wrote another story stemming from this for the Tarzan comic strip, titled 'Tarzan and the Forbidden City', published in newspapers from May 9 to October 8, 1938. Its story was soon reused as the basis of the above *Tarzan and the Diamond of Asher* radio serial, broadcast between May 31 and early September 1938. Finally, Burroughs published the story as a novel titled *Tarzan and the Forbidden City* on September 15, 1938. The story of each was ostensibly the same, one that followed an expedition to the city of Asher in search of a lost treasure known as the Father of Diamonds. Despite all versions of the story sharing the same basic plot, each would present different perspectives on the unfolding of the story in ways that connected each version as dispersed fragments of a whole. Transmedia storytelling would afford a means of commodifying each media version as product-pieces of a transmedia narrative puzzle that – spawned from the same fundamental model behind the production of the Tarzan jigsaw commodity – would, once completed, likewise serve to unfold one of the most thrilling of all Tarzan adventures.

This unfolding began with the 'red star' of the pulp title being mentioned in the prologue to the novel, connecting the latter's adventure with the former: '... the red star will lead him to a world long dead and forgotten' (Burroughs 1938: 1). The novel provided readers with insight into how the plot of the pulp's story took place as it did. The novel incorporated a new kidnap sequence, for example, which explained how the map of Asher had been attained by particular characters in the pulp story, whose own narrative had begun after the map had been stolen. New characters were also added into the novel – characters that were revealed to have kidnapped Magra, who was rescued by Tarzan in the pulp version. This narrative braiding would also continue across into both the newspaper comic strip and the radio version, which, crucially, were published and broadcast almost concurrently. In the comic strip,

readers were informed that Tarzan 'travelled fast and far' to hold a meeting on the 'outskirts of Bobolo, a town on the Congo River hundreds of miles inland' (Burroughs 1938: 12). Readers were not told where Tarzan had travelled from – until the radio serial, that is, when four weeks later listeners were informed that he journeyed 'the village of Loango, a town 100 miles downstream the Congo River from Bobolo' (ERB, Inc and American Radio Syndicate 1938b).

With a quest narrative comprising of a large number of supporting characters, Burroughs had braided multiple media texts – each operating as a chain of cooperating consumer outlets – as puzzle pieces of the unfolding adventure. This narrative braiding sustained the readerships of his novels even once radio readership began to decline. Each of these products had become interlocked as commodities essential to the process of consuming Tarzan and his storyworld. As André Jansson (2002: 21) observes of this mediatisation of culture, each 'generated surplus value and contributed to the marketing of other products within the concept'. In an unpublished biography, Burroughs would acknowledge this slippage between consumer product and media text explicitly when referring to his opted 'brand of advertising' as 'the all-fiction variety' (Burroughs n.d.: 55). As Matt Cohen has discussed, 'Burroughs rejected the discourses of high literature and made literal, or at least legal, his status of author as a producer of goods for the marketplace of incorporation' (2005: 46-47). Underscoring this era's expansion of a cultural product such as Tarzan as a transmedia product had been this transitional reciprocation between authors of stories and producers of goods. Be it the media text of a Tarzan radio serial, itself a commodity, or Tarzan-branded merchandise such as jigsaw puzzles, all became increasingly devised as 'all-fiction advertising' for the others – and it was transmedia storytelling, moreover, which most prominently ascertained the means of such commodity braiding. The fact that each of these products, to paraphrase Burroughs' earlier analogy, were all of the same kind – that is to say, each branded coherently as authorially and narratively interlocked goods – was both a commercially-driven and an artistically-minded expansion of a consumer culture, defined by the interconnectivity of its mass commodities. These Tarzan jigsaw puzzles, produced as extensions of the Tarzan brand as manifested across multiple media, all became just another match box to be collected.

Conclusion

Transmedia storytelling has been defined as 'a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple [media] channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience' (Jenkins 2011). If transmedia storytelling has become a means of branding media texts alongside consumer products as a commodity flow, as demonstrated in *The Wonderful Game of Oz* in 1921, then its escalation in the case of Tarzan jigsaw puzzles in the mid-1930s, which had included the braiding of additional media texts with this preceding media text – itself braided with branded consumer Tarzan products – was a reciprocal process of commodifying media texts as consumer products. Only together, as both – braided across the industrialised commodity circulations of early mass culture – had transmedia storytelling developed into a corporate practice of entertainment production, contributing to the creation of a unified and coordinated entertainment experience.

If media convergence, as Jenkins has argued, 'makes the flow of content across multiple media platforms inevitable' (2006: 106), then so too did the emergence of early mass consumer culture and its affiliated industrialised phenomena of modern advertising, commodification, and branding during the early twentieth century. Modeled on the same production systems of consumer products such as board games and jigsaw puzzles, both Baum's and Burroughs' fictional storyworlds of Oz and Tarzan in the 1920s and 1930s respectively had been branded as transmedial consumer products – as stepping stones of entertainment. This focus on games and puzzles has suggested the ways in which media products were developed so as to connect storyworlds together, as processes of promotion and commodification. Together, industrial developments in branding and commodification fortified transmedia storytelling as a means of sustaining and reinforcing the branded and braided commodity circulations of early 20th mass consumer culture.

Notes

[1] This term 'commodity braiding' builds on the work of Mark J. P. Wolf in more industrialised terms. See Wolf, M. J. P. (2012) *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*, New York: Routledge.

[2] For a more detailed look at the historical role and development of branding since the mid-nineteenth century, see pp. 18-19 in Lury, C. (2004) *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy*, London: Routledge.

[3] See Baum, L. F. (1900) *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors*, Chicago: Show Window.

[4] Building upon Baum's business practices of advertising and branding, Edgar Rice Burroughs took this even further, incorporating himself in 1923 as Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc.

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