FROM REGION V: 2030

TRANSMEDIA FICTION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

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MUNCIE, INDIANA

JULY 2017
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Chapter I: Introduction

Millions of people globally do not have access to drinking water. Man-made climate change alters hydrological patterns, causing large lakes and reservoirs to dry up, further affecting drinking water sources. Unsustainable energy practices leave surface and groundwater sources polluted throughout the world. The crisis in Flint, Michigan raised awareness of issues related to poor water quality and the crumbling infrastructure in America. Lakes turn green as toxic algae blooms choke the oxygen out of the water, killing fish and other aquatic life, and destroying ecosystems. The world is in a water crisis, one that is multifaceted, complex, and difficult to see in places where it isn’t as prevalent or visible on the surface. It is important for people living in spaces where the water crisis isn’t as visible to be aware that everyone on the planet is connected to the same complex, and flawed system, and the water crisis will continue to worsen if sustainable practices aren’t implemented. The first step in promoting awareness of a subject is the dissemination of information.

To answer this call, a number of organizations around the globe have focused attention on raising awareness about water quality, access to water, and improving infrastructure. One such organization is Circle of Blue, a collective of journalists and scientists that offer comprehensive and vital coverage of the world freshwater crisis. Circle of Blue focuses on the intersections of water, energy, and food. Through collaborating with data experts and scientists, Circle of Blue documents known and emerging crises, presenting stories that are rooted in hard data and science. These issues are then localized and connected to emerging global trends to illustrate the ways in which we are all affected by world water issues.
The data that Circle of Blue has collected continues to contextualize a breadth of information that individuals can use to gain understanding of the water crisis to make informed decisions. However, according to Circle of Blue editors, the core Circle of Blue audience—water experts, policymakers, and world leaders—possess a working knowledge of the water crisis and are most likely already engaged with the issues. However, Circle of Blue struggles to connect with a more general, younger, and diverse audience, which inherently limits the dissemination of information. This information is vital to helping people understand the issues related to the global water system, especially in places where the water crisis is not apparent or inherently visible.

As a journalistic organization, Circle of Blue provides neutral, unbiased, and comprehensive coverage of the freshwater crisis, without crossing into activism, or raising calls to action to combat the water crisis. This role is important and powerful; but Circle of Blue content can also be used to inform activism through raising awareness of the global water crisis. For example, the use of Circle of Blue content to inform a call-to-action for sustainable practices and implementing sustainable habits could provide a deeper level of credibility to social activism.

As such, this creative project explores how transmedia fiction can be used to increase awareness of the water crisis by connecting people at a local level to the global water system and connecting a younger audience to Circle of Blue content. To do so, this project includes a fictional story that draws on factual research and Circle of Blue content. Transmedia storytelling is a less traditional approach to engage audiences in innovative ways by distributing a narrative across different media platforms. This approach can provide multiple access points through
which people can encounter, or enter a story. Furthermore, a cross-platform approach that employs different mediums (i.e., a graphic novel, website, zines, essays, music, etc.) transmedia storytelling can also engage a more diverse audience by appealing to individuals with different media consumption interests. To explore these notions, a transmedia story titled *From Region V: 2030* set in Muncie, Indiana, focuses on the everyday lives of characters living with a catastrophic water crisis in the year 2030. The story intentionally unfolds in a single, specific community so that connections can be made between the global water crisis and how it might affect the lives of everyday people.

*From Region V: 2030* exists across five platforms: 1) an online graphic novel; 2) a series of personal, contextual essays; 3) an in-world zine distributed throughout Muncie and Indianapolis; 4) an in-world EP released through Bandcamp, and; 5) a project website that serves as a central hub for the experience by housing all of the narrative elements. These specific mediums were chosen for a variety of reasons. The graphic medium was selected because of its engaging, dynamic properties, as well as its accessibility. The essays were used to overtly contextualize the narrative by discussing the forming of the storyworld, focusing on the Circle of Blue content that was used to construct the creative project, and provide suggestions for how to combat the water crisis in one’s everyday life. The essays were selected because they provided a means for discussing the crisis openly and overtly. Zines have been employed for decades to quickly disseminate information in a subversive, accessible manner. They were created to provide an unconventional medium and a unique rabbit hole into the narrative. The music on the EP was additionally subversive and unconventional in its composition. It was created to add a
unique, unexpected perspective to the narrative and to offer additional depth in regard to the narrative storyworld.

There were three guiding questions that framed the construction of this project: 1) How can transmedia fiction be used to raise awareness of a global crisis at a local level? 2) How can transmedia fiction be used to draw younger audiences to Circle of Blue content? and 3) How can transmedia fiction be used to encourage social change? This project sought to answer these questions, which guided the development and creation of the story and heavily influenced the final result.

The first guiding question – “How can transmedia fiction be used to raise awareness of a global crisis at a local level?” – established the framework for addressing a larger, complex problem through smaller, more relevant perspectives. Although the water crisis isn’t overtly apparent in Muncie, Indiana, the citizens of the city are still connected to and affected by the global crisis, because hydrological cycles affect one another, and everyone is responsible for the health of the planet. As previously noted, Circle of Blue attempts to connect global threads to a local perspective. Following that framework, From Region V: 2030 was intentionally set in Muncie, Indiana in order to explore what the water crisis would look like from a local level. The goal for this narrative is to connect audience members with that global system and the issues that surround it. The water crisis isn’t visible in Muncie, Indiana, and this project sought to make it more visible by shifting some of the problems that others throughout the world experience to a local level.

It was important for this project to engage people at a local level because there is no silver bullet to combatting the water crisis, and every solution will vary from community to
community. While the project ultimately provided solutions that community members could implement into their everyday lives, it also focused more intensely on raising awareness and disseminating knowledge of the global system through a local setting and level. Furthermore, the project kept the narrative at the core of the experience and explicitly established the world within Muncie, Indiana, albeit in an alternate timeline. By keeping the narrative as the driving factor of the experience, this project was able to embed knowledge about the water crisis into the story without being heavy-handed.

The second guiding question—“How can transmedia fiction be used to draw younger audiences to Circle of Blue content?”—guided brainstorming about how to connect to younger audience members, which resulted in the employment of unconventional mediums. The storyworld for this narrative was informed entirely by Circle of Blue content. To accomplish this, information from hundreds of articles published by Circle of Blue were integrated into the transmedia narrative to create a realistic story rooted in hard data, and revealing a believable depiction of a bleak, but preventable future. Every part of this narrative connected directly to a series of “tentpoles,” which are the central themes within a transmedia storyworld. The tentpoles for this storyworld focused specifically on these intersections: water and energy, water and climate, water and food, water policy and politics, and water quality. Every narrative fragment connected to different facets of the water crisis, and in places they connected explicitly to Circle of Blue content. In this sense, this project sought to recontextualize Circle of Blue content and present it through unconventional mediums and in unexpected places to engage a diverse audience.
The third guiding question – “How can transmedia fiction be used to encourage social change?” – laid the foundation for experimentation with using transmedia fiction to promote social activism. *From Region V: 2030* contributes to a small body of transmedia stories that have employed fiction to raise awareness of social and ecological issues. The sections that follow provide context for this story through a review of relevant literature, chronicle the project design, and discuss the overall contribution of this creative project.

**Chapter II: Literature Review**

There exist differing definitions of transmedia storytelling proposed both by scholars and transmedia creators, so it is necessary to examine the differing viewpoints and establish the paradigm that this project falls within. As this project uses the graphic medium, it is also necessary to understand the role of graphic novels and comics within transmedia storytelling, as well as the different ways they are used in practice. Thus, the literature review that follows explores a number of fields, including how to construct transmedia fiction for social change, transmedia activism, and the ways this practice has been used to raise awareness and influence social change.

**Defining Transmedia Storytelling**

Although the concept of transmedia storytelling can be traced back centuries, transmedia storytelling in practice is a recent development. A transmedia story is one that is conceptualized from its beginning to evolve and be told across multiple mediums and delivery platforms. It is purposefully created so that it can’t be contained or experienced through a single medium and
must be experienced holistically through different mediums and via different platforms. By employing different mediums to tell a story, a transmedia producer creates different doorways into the storyworld, engaging a broader audience of people who might not engage with a single-medium story. But more importantly, transmedia storytelling can deepen the experience that the audience has with a story.

The concept was introduced and popularized by media theorist Henry Jenkins, author of *Convergence Culture*, who explained, “a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play” (2003, para. 10). Jenkins’ interpretation of transmedia storytelling focuses on the exploration of a storyworld through different mediums, with each piece of the story capable of being experienced individually. He explains that they are stories about the world in which they occur, existing in “compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 114).

In transmedia storytelling, each fragment or piece must make a valuable contribution to the experience (Jenkins, 2006). Beyond those boundaries, the definition is a contested matter of debate. For example, Jill Walker, a professor of digital culture, focuses on “distributed narratives,” in which different mediums are used to tell a singular narrative that is fragmented and distributed (Walker, 2004). In Jenkins’ definition, each of the fragments of a transmedia story can be experienced individually, representing an exploration of a storyworld, while in Walker’s definition, the fragments of the story can’t be experienced individually and can only be understood when experienced holistically.
Transmedia producer Andrea Phillips – author of *A Creator’s Guide to Transmedia Storytelling* – differentiates these two perspectives of transmedia storytelling as West Coast and East Coast transmedia (2012). West Coast, or franchise transmedia, consists of large media works, such as novels, feature films, and video games, which serve as complete, independent experiences. Although each component contributes to the larger world and consuming multiple components produces a richer experience, audience members come away feeling as though they have experienced a complete story. In this style of transmedia storytelling, each fragment is woven together in spite of the fact that each story can be experienced independently. An example of West Coast transmedia is *The Matrix*, which is composed of a trilogy of films, a video game, a series of anime shorts, comics, and an MMORPG. Although there are esoteric clues and references in each of these components to the larger storyworld, each can be consumed individually, and the audience does not feel as though they have experienced a partial story. This style of transmedia storytelling reflects Jenkins’ interpretation in which the components are used to explore the storyworld rather than a single story.

Phillips explains that East Coast transmedia is composed of tightly interwoven narratives that are often much more interactive and in which the pieces can’t be fully understood on their own (2012). For example, Lance Weiler’s *Pandemic 1.0*, which occurred at Sundance Film Festival, included a short film that was screened at the festival. However, the rest of the narrative was splintered and experienced through video clips on Youtube, online puzzles, and physical artifacts like water bottles, Nexus phones, and golden objects that correlated with characters. Each piece contributed a small portion to the story, with all of the elements working tangentially to create the full narrative experience. In *Getting Started With Transmedia Storytelling*,...
transmedia producer Robert Pratten calls these “portmanteau” stories, in which each piece is like that of a jigsaw puzzle, unable to complete the whole story and instead must be assembled to create a cohesive narrative. This creative project adheres to Jenkins’ definition, so discussion of transmedia storytelling through the rest of this document is envisioned to reflect his ideology.

Transmedia stories are developed in two distinct ways: 1) native transmedia includes a story that is developed to be transmedia from conception, purposefully crafted to be told through different mediums; and 2) additive transmedia occurs when a story begins in a single medium with transmedia elements developed later to expand parts of the storyworld. Narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan likens additive transmedia to a “snowball” effect, in which a story becomes so popular that it “generates a variety of either same-medium or cross-media prequels, sequels, fan fiction, and adaptations” (2013, p. 363).

Transmedia storytelling is often mistaken for transmedia branding. Transmedia branding occurs when a franchise is licensed to different products specifically to sell more of that franchise. Transmedia scholar Geoffrey Long highlights, “a box of Star Wars cereal isn’t an example of transmedia storytelling unless it somehow makes a distinct and valuable contribution to the story being told in Star Wars” (2007, p. 32). Currently, transmedia brands extend from a licensing system that spreads the brand onto ancillary products that are not intended to actually extend the narrative or the storyworld in which it resides, providing instead, “works that are redundant [...] watered down [...] or riddled with sloppy contradictions” (Jenkins, 2003, para 6). The main distinction between transmedia branding and transmedia storytelling is the canonical identity of the narrative fragments that compose a transmedia story. The disparate pieces that are contained within a transmedia branding do not progress any form of story.
Transmedia storytelling practices have often been employed within marketing, which has led to this correlation between the two. Despite the motivation behind a transmedia project, it can also be consumed as an independent creative project (Dena, 2009). Transmedia marketing is different than transmedia branding, in that it emphasizes canonical development from the beginning. While there is a distinction between transmedia branding and transmedia storytelling, transmedia employed for marketing purposes has the potential to be a creative, engaging experience. Transmedia marketing employs the practice of “co-creation,” which is when companies “collaborate from the beginning to create content they know plays well in each of their sectors, allowing each medium to generate new experiences for the consumer and expand points of entry into the franchise” (Jenkins 2006, p. 105).

Many popular transmedia experiences have been used for marketing and were rooted in economic motives (Jenkins, 2006). One such experience – the ARG Year Zero – accompanied the Nine Inch Nails album of the same name and garnered a lot of debate. Some claimed that the entire experience was intended entirely as a marketing gimmick to sell more records, while Trent Reznor defended that the ARG was a solely creative endeavor.

**Storyworld Development and Documentation**

Transmedia stories are contained within a storyworld that can support multiple characters, stories, and has rich potential for the development of future stories. Jenkins discusses how a solidly developed character is capable of upholding sequels and multiple narratives, and potentially a successful franchise, while a well-developed storyworld has the ability to sustain multiple characters and many more narratives (2003). The storyworld is the shared universe
which houses the settings, characters, events, myths, cultures, societies, wars, planets, and stories that occur in a transmedia story. Long and others explain that in many cases the storyworld becomes a character, and although it lacks agency, it still has a personality, and it has its own histories, and emotions (Jenkins, 2003; Long, 2007). The storyworld must attract audiences, but it shouldn’t be so exhaustively thorough that there is no room for exploration. When these worlds are built with compelling texture, character, and opportunity for development, they will attract audiences regardless of what mediums are employed in future development (Long, 2007).

The storyworld is developed before any production begins on a transmedia story, and it is contained in a storyworld bible, which is a living document largely used in-house by writers, producers, developers, etc. to retain continuity and ensure that the cohesion of the storyworld is preserved and presented in a uniform fashion. Pratten, et al. (2015), emphasize that documentation is a vital component of transmedia storytelling and must be organized, cohesive, fluid, consistent, and possess the ability to be iteratively developed to reflect the changing shape of a composition (Phillips, 2012; Miller, 2014). In their article “Transmedial Worlds — Rethinking Cyberworld Design,” Klastrup and Tosca (2004) explain that storyworlds are composed of three main sections: *mythos*, which are the myths, stories, and history of a world; *topos*, which is the physical setting of a world; and *ethos*, which is the ethics of the societies and cultures represented in the world. This is in alignment with Pratten’s production bible design, although he condenses these three sections into the singular entity “mythos” (2015).

The storyworld bible encapsulates all of the components of the storyworld and details the production and logistical components of a transmedia story, in addition to audience engagement and participation. The storyworld bible will be different for every single project, which is
emphasized by Carolyn Handler Miller, author of *Digital Storytelling* (2014). For example, the bible for the computer game *Age of Empires* might contain lists of buildings, environments, and characters, while the bible for *Star Wars* might detail films, video games, novels, comics, and graphic novels. In addition to the storyworld itself, the storyworld bible contains the entirety of the story and production. As written, this content will vary with each project; but consistent elements include: the platform chart, participation guide, user journey, audience engagement chart, and mythos (Hayes, 2011; Miller, 2014; Pratten, 2015; Phillips, 2012).

The user journey details the path that the audience will traverse through the transmedia story. Transmedia stories by nature require the audience to move from fragment to fragment, with the fragments being distributed through different mediums. As a result, it is necessary for there to be a call-to-action (CTA) which leads audience members from one fragment to another (Miller, 2014; Pratten, 2015). The user journey is vital in understanding all of the different paths that the audience can take through the various fragments of the experience. Transmedia producer Nuno Bernardo explains that typical media moves in a somewhat linear fashion, while transmedia storytelling is more similar to a jigsaw puzzle, with different audience members entering the story through different pieces, and there is a path from each fragment to enough of the other fragments so audience members are able to find a cohesive path through the story. In the user journey, all of the story fragments are laid out on a chronological timeline, with the definite or intended paths illustrated through the experience (Miller, 2014; Pratten, 2015). The user journey details all of CTA’s at each moment when the audience is required to move from one fragment to another. Additionally, this chart details the rabbit holes, which are entry points that lead new audience members into the experience.
Gary Hayes, author of *How to Write a Transmedia Production Bible* (2011) and Pratten (2015) emphasize the importance of a platform chart, in which the producer details how all of the story fragments will be distributed, and through which platforms. Platforms are delivery methods through which story content is distributed to the audience. They include (but are not limited to) the Internet, mobile phones and tablets, agent-based modeling, locative journalism, interactive and second-screen TV, VR, electronic kiosks, interactive documentaries, museum installations, wikis, books, comic books, magazines, and newspapers (Miller, 2014). In Hayes’s model of a storyworld bible, he uses a Service Build Overview, through which the producer details the intention and use of every single platform they are using for a project. The platforms that the creator uses depends entirely upon the current project, and it will change depending on what is necessary and which platform is felt to be the best way to deliver a certain fragment of the narrative. The platform chart details chronologically the distribution of story fragments across the platforms employed for the story, and it is essential for tracking how technology is utilized in the distribution of the narrative.

The participation guide is used to detail all of the built-in participation within a transmedia story. Transmedia storytelling in its nature is more interactive than single-medium compositions, and since these compositions are presented across different platforms and through different technology it is vital to understand how the intended audience consumes technology, and how they are able to consume technology. Pratten discusses transmedia storytelling as a more audience-centric approach to storytelling, criticizing the traditional sense of transmedia storytelling for focusing too much on the how rather than the why. When designing a transmedia experience, there are major areas that the creator needs to consider about the audience:
socio-economic factors (i.e., age and gender), average income, places they live, brands they like, social goals they have for themselves, media consumption (i.e., any blogs, magazines, television shows, movies, books, or music the audience might enjoy), and technological factors (i.e., what type of cell phone they use and what social media they frequent) (Pratten, 2015).

It is also important to note the different ways in which audience members engage with an experience, as well as the motivations that drive them to do so. Richard Bartle pioneered the research of engagement through his study of MUDs (multi-user dungeons), which were old network computer games. He identified four different player types, which he labeled as *achievers, explorers, socializers, and killers*. Achievers work well in games that have a blatant hierarchy, and they can achieve a formal status. Explorers are interested in discovering the nuances of a world through its environment. Socializers are interested in interacting with other players and experiencing an environment with other people. Killers are interested in destruction, and competing with other players. Nick Yee is another central researcher in motivation, and he furthered Bartle’s findings, diving into the motivations that drive people to engage with games rather than merely identifying the ways in which they interact with spaces and experiences. Yee identifies six areas of motivation: *action*, which is motivated by a constant adrenaline rush; *social*, which is motivated by collaborating with other people; *mastery*, which is identified through careful planning and decision making; *achievement*, which is identified through the exploration of every facet that the game has to offer; *immersion*, which is motivated by elaborate storylines and becoming lost in the story; and *creativity*, who is motivated by expressing individuality. In a participation guide, a transmedia producer details which elements of a transmedia story appeal to the different player-types as established by Bartle. While it is not
necessary to design an experience that appeals to each individual player-type or motivation, it is vital that these different levels and types of engagement are taken into consideration during design and production.

**Comics and Transmedia Storytelling**

Comic books have been a hub of transmedia storytelling, and pioneered distributed storytelling across different mediums. They have a long history with transmedia storytelling, albeit the early examples of this took the form of adaptations. Jenkins notes that from their origin in popular culture, “comics content has moved into other media sectors … [spilling] over from the daily newspaper into live action films, stage shows, popular songs, toys, and advertising” (2006c, para 3). Transmedia scholar Tyler Weaver and Jenkins explain that transmediality has been inherent to the comics medium since its origin. The first Superman comic (*Action Comics* #1) was released in 1938, which was then adapted to a 15-minute, daily radio drama in 1940. The story was then adapted to a television series, movie serials, radio dramas, computer games, and animated shorts (Jenkins, 2006c; Weaver, 2013) in addition to all of the merchandise and advertisements to feature the character. So in this light, the franchise crossed over into transmedia branding, but it still explored distributed storytelling. Additionally, the theme of superhero comics being used in transmediality is still a constant establishment in today’s culture. This is seen in the development of both the Marvel and DC universes, which are told across comics, television, and film.

Comics were an immensely popular medium during the Great Depression, and throughout the 1940s and 1950s, when they began to fall away from a mainstream medium.
While the origin of comics is often attached to the late 19th century, Scott McCloud, author of the seminal work *Understanding Comics*, places it further back, examining images painted on the side of the tomb of an Egyptian scribe 32 centuries ago (1993). Although comics were once a mainstream medium, they have become “a fringe (even an avant garde) form of entertainment” (Jenkins, 2006b), and they remain on the fringes of entertainment. McCloud defines comics as pictorial images juxtaposed with “other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (1993, p. 9). This definition does not rule out any style, genre or content, and while comics can support many different genres, superheroes are largely ingrained into the cultural image of comics.

The comics medium lends itself well to transmedia storytelling through its fragmented nature and the complete freedom from budget and supplies, in addition to its juxtaposition of images and words. Comics are inherently fragmented narratives that are serialized from week to week, or month to month; so in that respect, they align with the fragmentation found in transmedia storytelling (Weaver, 2013). These elements of the comics medium add to their compatibility with transmedia storytelling. Additionally, due to the relatively low cost to produce comics, they function as a means to develop new ideas that would otherwise be too expensive to develop for film or television. Jenkins points out that “many dimensions of convergence are felt first in comics” (2006b, para 5).
Transmedia Storyworlds

A visceral example of transmedia and comics is the adaptation of the comics series *The Walking Dead*, a show which first aired in 2010 based on an ongoing comics series begun in 2003. Since the show first aired, the storyworld has been explored through novels, board games, and video games, in addition to transmedia branding materials and merchandise. This model has been described as a wheel, with the comics serving as the hub, and the television show, the novels, and the board games, and video games representing spokes running away from the hub (Proctor, 2014). While all of these entities exist within the same world, the television show is a projection of the comic series, remaining canonical while still adding and removing elements from the story. This provides an example in which the world is created by the comics, while the transmedial elements extend that world through adaptation. Another unique example of transmedia and comics is *The Amory Wars*, which detail the story of Coheed and Cambria and their ploy to save their children from a horrible disease called Mon-star. The comics parallel the story that is told in several albums by the band Coheed and Cambria, and they are written by the lead singer and lyricist. In this instance, the albums serve as the hub while the comic books and subsequent graphic novel are the spokes on the wheel.

Licensed and Additive Comics

A prominent facet of comics and graphic novels in transmedia storytelling is found in licensed comics, which often present predictable comforts in a franchise, while being unable to alter the mother content. Licensed comics are comics produced for an already established franchise, and they’re often seen as watered down versions of the franchise, while still being able
to “move their franchises beyond the limitations of a single, coordinated narrative” (Pillai 2013, p. 116). Early examples of this are found in Star Trek, in which stories are told through the comics medium, which are ultimately ancillary, apocryphal stories.

The licensed Heroes webcomics, however, presents a case where licensed comics provided distinct and valuable content. The webcomics were released in concurrence with weekly episodes, and provided additional context for the show, providing a deeper understanding of the story for fans who read the comics, in addition to providing comics that were more fully integrated into the flow of the series narrative (Jenkins, 2007). The comics found in Heroes functioned to flesh out secondary characters, fill in backstory, and provide missing scenes not covered in the show (Jenkins, 2007). Jason Mittel writes about the process that Heroes producers Jesse Alexander and Mark Warshaw took in the development of the franchise, explaining, “the commitment to transmedia storytelling runs throughout the entire creative team, leading to an unprecedented cooperation & coordinated vision across media platforms, much more successfully than other innovators like Lost and The Office” (2007, para 4).

There have been many television series and film series that have employed comics to flesh out story between seasons or to explore characters’ backstories, such as Battlestar Galactica and Supernatural. With Buffy the Vampire Slayer, creator Joss Whedon used comics in a slightly different way. While he filled in gaps between episodes and seasons, he also used the medium to develop the eighth season of the show, releasing it entirely in comics. This eventually led to the creation of the ninth, and potentially tenth season on television (Pillai, 2013; Weaver, 2013). Additionally, he used comics to explore adventures of previous vampire slayers in Tales of the Slayers, both in the distant past, but also in the future in a science-fiction esque
world (Jenkins, 2006c). While the *Star Trek* comics of the past were ancillary, sharing characters, the stories in the comics didn’t necessarily impact the show, the graphic novel *Countdown* served as an official prequel to the 2009 *Star Trek* film. This indicates a shift to using the comics medium to explore the canon of the storyworld, rather than using it as fluff or filler content. Although many licensed comics simply reiterate stories that were told in the parent-media, the first iteration of the *X-Files* comic series presented original and unique narratives (Pillai). Although these didn’t affect the canon of the television show, the comics still provided substantive and unique content.

**Review of Comics Technology**

Technology has vastly changed the ways media is consumed, and comics are no exception. The most notable development in the consumption of comics is the ability to read comics on a tablet or smartphone, an avenue that was pioneered by Comixology. Comixology is a comics store and reading app that enables readers to read comics directly on their smartphone or tablet. The comics are adapted from print comics, and they progress the story panel by panel. In a similar vein, Mark Waid co-developed the website Thrillbent, a free comics site on which the comics are written with the purpose of being read on a tablet. In the comics on Thrillbent, motion is written into the experience from origin. As readers scroll through panels, subtle changes occur, which simulates motion. Line Webtoon is another great example of an app-based comics reader, although it features comics that are meant to be read in a scrolling, horizontal feed that is greatly different than comics read in print form, in which there is a definite boundary to the space. There have also been developments in digital platforms for independent comics.
creators, such as Tapastic. Tapastic is an online comic website that provides a social platform that allows independent creators to post original comics, in addition to reading others’ comics.

**Transmedia Activism**

Transmedia storytelling is also used to raise awareness of certain issues, influence social change, and promote activism. This practice uses a transmedia activism framework to engage as many different people as possible, and to foster a deep sense of collaboration to spark social change.

Activism is a fluid concept that is open for interpretation. Brian Martin, who is a professor of Social Sciences, defines activism as “action on behalf of a cause, action that goes beyond what is conventional or routine [and] action that goes beyond conventional politics” (2007, para 1). Transmedia activism is a framework for social storytelling that was developed by Lina Srivastava in 2009. The goal of transmedia activism is to enact social change. Transmedia activist storytellers only act as proxies or work in collaboration with a community, rather than tell the story. This is done through co-creation, co-design, co-evolution, and co-production.

Co-creation occurs when a network of people is developed. This network is made of people across disciplines, and sometimes across borders who come together to create assets and discussion around a particular issue. Co-design occurs after co-creation, and it is the development of the platform based on the assets identified in the network created in co-creation. Co-production is the actual production of materials, narrative fragments, and any other element
of the story. In co-evolution, the collective network moves forward because of their work through this process (Critical Thought TV, 2012a).

The first step in developing the transmedia activist framework is to establish the narrative. This core story mirrors the issue, or the goal that the creator is aiming for. Most importantly, these stories need to be: respectful, relevant, and have resonance. The basic framework for transmedia activism begins first by exploring these foundational areas: social change (what are you trying to change?); storytelling (what is the narrative thread?); and resources (what do you have to work with?).

After establishing these elements of the experience, the creator(s) fill out the remainder of the framework: A) Audience Segmentation- who are you engaging?; B) Resources- what do you need?; C) Story Universe Strategy- how do you define the story?; D) Content Strategy- how will you craft and distribute content?; E) Partners and Stakeholders- who will participate?; F) Engagement- how do you engage toward change?

In transmedia activism, the user journey is intended for social change. Therefore, it is one that creates social impact, influences perception, and builds community, by telling the story of a system by looking at it from multiple perspectives. Lina Srivastava explains, “when one thinks about, say, water issues, you may have to think about infrastructure, climate change, safety and security for those getting the water, privatization vs. public access, or sanitation and health, etc” (Jenkins, 2016a, para 13). Even if the storyteller only works on one aspect of a system she still must understand the cause and effect of the system, and if one element changes in one area it affects the entire system. This system needs to be represented in the story. A good example of this is the transmedia story *Who is Dayani Cristal?*, which is about the dangers of migrating
from central Mexico to the United States. This project explores all the factors that make this journey so dangerous and problematic, examining issues on both sides of the border.

While fiction has not played a prominent role in transmedia activism, instances of it still exist. Srivastava says that although she is wary of the employment of fiction, she thinks that “fictional content is underused in social impact” (Jenkins, 2016a). *Priya’s Shakti* was an augmented reality comic book that raised awareness of gender-based sexual violence in India and around the world. Similarly, *LowLifes* by Simon Wood and Robert Pratten focuses on homelessness in San Francisco through a crime-murder narrative distributed through a web series, serialized novella, and in-world blog. Another example is *World Without Oil*, which was an ARG that simulated an oil shock, in which the price of oil skyrocketed, and the supplies became virtually non-existent. This was used to make audience members more conscious of the ways in which they consume oil, and ways that they can reduce their oil consumption.

When creating a fictional narrative with the intent of transmedia activism, an area of interest to understand is narrative empathy. Suzanne Keen highlights that there are different means of enacting empathy through fiction and storytelling: strategic empathy, in which authors use a fictional work to direct a specific emotional transaction aimed at a particular audience; bounded strategic empathy occurs within an in-group that stems from experiences of mutuality and leads to feeling with others; and ambassadorial strategic empathy is aimed at specific others with the intent of cultivating their empathy for the in-group (Keen, 2006). In crafting fictional narratives, it is important to understand how people engage with fiction on an emotional level.
Through learning about the state of transmedia storytelling, comics and graphic novels in transmedia storytelling and transmedia activism, a well-informed transmedia narrative was able to be constructed. The transmedia storytelling research influenced the construction and design of the project, while the comics and graphic novel research informed an understanding of the relationship between comics and transmedia, and the transmedia activism research informed the ways in which transmedia projects can be constructed to spark social change. The following chapter details the development of the project that was informed by this literature review.
Chapter III: Project Design

There were three distinct phases in the development and construction of *From Region V: 2030*: 1) research, 2) documentation and development, and 3) production. The research phase was informed by Circle of Blue content, while the documentation and development included the creation of the storyworld. The production phase details the actual construction of the different components of the transmedia story. This chapter describes these different phases in greater detail.

Research

In order to construct the universe of the future, it was important to gain an understanding of the current state of the water crisis. This understanding was developed using Circle of Blue content as part of a collaborative partnership with Circle of Blue editors. A content analysis was conducted of the content from January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2016. As Circle of Blue has been publishing articles since 2000, they have accumulated a tremendous amount of content.

Circle of Blue content is divided into six distinct intersections, which are identified as being the most salient pressure points within the water crisis, offering the most holistic view. The intersections are as follows: 1) water and climate, 2) water and energy, 3) water and food, 4) water management, 5) water policy and politics, and 6) water quality. After the articles were read, salient information was noted in a bulleted list beneath each article title. Salient data was identified as topics that either directly correlated with the article’s title, or were repeated multiple times. The salient data was then reassessed as a whole after all of the articles were read. This data was organized by relevance and subject. From this, a narrative report was written for each
intersection, discussing the pressure points that needed the most discussion. When combined these reports provided a holistic view of the water crisis, and informed the storyworld of *From Region V: 2030*.

**2. Development and Documentation in *From Region V: 2030***

As there is no single framework for which to construct transmedia storyworlds, the storyworld for this project was constructed by analyzing existing frameworks created by Robert Pratten, Carolyn Handler-Miller, and Gary Hayes. Two distinct sections comprised the development of the storyworld bible: the storyworld setting, or mythos, and distribution/engagement.

The first component of the storyworld is the concept document, which gives a one-page overview of the entire project, contextualizing the intents and purposes of the project. This was then followed by the mythos section, which details the major events caused by negligence of the water crisis, and important locations and main characters within the story. Following the mythos section, the storyworld contains the narrative body of the story, which is composed of the story outline, graphic novel script, storyboards, text written for the zine and essays, and lyrics and other content written for the EP. This is followed by the distribution and engagement charts, including the participation guide, platform distribution chart, user journey guide, and engagement metrics. Through this documentation, the story was constructed and the ways in which the narrative fragments were distributed across the specified platforms was designed. Additionally, this allowed for the construction of different levels and types of engagement to be built into the experience.
3. Production

Graphic Novel

*From Region V: 2030* was told through five different mediums: a serialized online graphic novel, an in-world zine, a series of essays, an in-world music EP, and a central website. The first step in creating the graphic novel was to outline the story. This narrative was informed by the setting and content analysis detailed in the mythos section of the storyworld. Following the story outline, a script was written for the graphic novel. While the process of writing a script for the graphic medium bears similarity to screenwriting, there is no set structure to writing scripts for the former. There is a vast variety of ways to write these scripts. It is important that the script conveys the story and the physical progression of the story, in addition to the visual composition of the story. Each page of the script was then storyboardsed in order to layout the pages of the final graphic novel.

The central narrative was told through the graphic novel. The graphic medium was chosen because of its engaging nature, and it served as an unconventional storytelling medium for the subject matter. Instead of illustrating the graphic novel, the story was told through photographs. This was done for several reasons, the first of which was time constraint. It was also a stylistic choice, as it was felt that it presented a more visceral, life-like quality.

Zine

The second delivery platform is an in-world zine. Zines are small, DIY paper magazines that emerged from the punk culture of the 1970s. In-world means that the zine comes from the
storyworld of the narrative, as it was created by the central character. The zine is used to explore the larger society of 2030, analyzing tensions and issues directly related to the water crisis by looking at it through different perspectives. As with comics, there is no one or correct way to create a zine, although they are often hand designed and feature a mixture of images and text. While the zine served as a rabbit hole into the storyworld, it also engaged audience members with a tangible artifact.

The zine written for this project followed a cut-and-paste, handmade aesthetic, in which the elements written on the pages were all cut out by hand and taped to the page. First the images were taped to serve as a background. This was followed by the text, which was printed, cut out, and taped atop the background images. After collecting all of the background images and materials, a master copy of the zine was created, which was then scanned to create the master flat, from which all subsequent copies of the zine are created. Zines were distributed on Ball State’s campus, and throughout Muncie. They were left at local coffee shops, bookstores, and bars, and other public places in order to reach the widest audience possible. The zines were free to make the barrier-to-entry as low as possible, and to encourage more people to engage with the content.

Music EP

The in-world music EP was recorded using the music softwares Ableton Live, and Reason by Propellerhead. It was recorded on a Macbook Pro laptop with the standard built-in microphone. Similar to the zine, the EP serves as a central in-world artifact, and it provided
deeper immersion to the narrative by providing music from the world of 2028. The sound of the music reflects the mood of the world, and the lyrics reflect the anxieties that a central character has about energy’s impact on water sources. The lyrics are important because they provide accessibility to some of the complex concepts and language that is found within the water crisis, and the EP as a whole serves as a subversive doorway into the storyworld.

Contextual Essays

The three essays written for the website were intended to overtly contextualize the content found within the graphic novel, zine and music EP. The first addresses specifically the producer’s understanding of the water crisis from the perspective of living in Muncie, IN before discussing the genesis of the project. The second essay details how Circle of Blue content informed the creation of the storyworld, explicitly linking to articles published on circleofblue.org. The third essay discusses ways in which to reduce that amount of water that one consumes, focusing specifically on things that can be done in one’s everyday life. The purpose of these essays is to tie the storyworld of 2030 to the current state of the water crisis.

Project Website

The final delivery platform is a central project website that provided a hub for all of the disparate pieces of the narrative. It is composed of a single, scrolling page that presented a timeline of global events that lead up to the year 2030. It was made to be one page to enhance the scrolling motion of moving through the timeline and encountering the various narrative fragments. The essays, graphic novel parts, zine and music EP were embedded into the website,
dispersed between timeline entries. The timeline serves as contextualization of important global events within the storyworld.

There were several analytics set in place to measure engagement with this project. Within the zines and essays, there were several custom URLs that linked to specific articles on circleofblue.org. These URLs were made using the Google URL Shortener, and therefore it was possible to measure how many times they were clicked. Additionally, Google Analytics were set up on the website to measure the number of people who visited the site.
Chapter IV: Body of the Project

*From Region V: 2030* is a story told through seven distinct narrative fragments and across five mediums. There are two 15-page installments of a graphic novel, three contextual essays, a music EP, and a zine, the latter two of which were from the storyworld of the narrative. This chapter details the completed story of *From Region V: 2030*, discussing the synopsis of each individual narrative fragment found within the five mediums before detailing the ways in which the water crisis is presented through each medium.

**Narrative Fragments and Platform Distribution**

**Story Synopsis**

There are several characters whose perspectives are explored through the different narrative fragments. The main character, Jared Lynch, lives in the represented alternate reality of 2030. He is a graduate student pursuing an M.A. in creative writing at Ball State University. However, his thesis begins to fall by the wayside as the world grows darker, becoming more unraveled. The state of the world is seen in the super storms plaguing the coasts, the almost-constant drought that plagues all corners of the globe, the energy and food riots, and the quickly growing population of inland communities as people flock away from the sinking coasts.

Jared finds himself spending more time on his zine, which he feels has a more direct and actionable impact on the world by allowing him to disseminate information into the community. The current volume of the zine focuses on the water crisis, which has become more apparent around the world. The narrative moves forward to a world that has succumbed to the water crisis. Muncie suffered food and water riots. Food has to be obtained from distribution centers. A
mandatory curfew is implemented. The narrative ends by hinting at hope for the future, but ultimately it remained uncertain and disheartening.

**Project Website**

1. **Narrative Content.** The website serves as the central hub of the disparate mediums, hosting each of the subsequent narrative fragments. The website is hosted at the address regionv.net. The main page of the website is contained within a single, scrolling column of content. It intersperses narrative content with links to the other mediums hosted on the website, such as the graphic novel parts, the music EP, essays, and zine, as can be seen in Figure 1.

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1:** Each narrative fragment is divided by a timeline date that details major events that shaped the state of the storyworld. The narrative fragments contained in this image are the first part of the graphic novel, the zine, and the second contextual essay.

The website is prefaced with a contextual paragraph that sets the tone for the narrative. The main narrative content that was housed solely on the website took the form of a timeline of
main events that occurred within the storyworld. This timeline begins in 2018, moving chronologically until the year 2030. It is intended to show the progression of the water crisis within the storyworld, revealing the major events that occurred that were discussed within the remaining narrative fragments. The contextual paragraph and beginning of the timeline can be seen in Figure 2.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 2: The project website was arranged in a single column. As audience members scrolled down the website they encountered more narrative fragments, which they could then click on and interact with. The narrative fragments contained in this image are the first contextual essay and music EP.

The website is constructed in a purposeful manner, with the narrative fragments arranged to best make sense of the storyworld. The narrative fragments are distributed to maintain the internal chronological order of the story. For instance, the first essay contextualizes the genesis and construction of the project, so it is the first fragment encountered by audience members. This is followed by the EP, which was released in November 2028, then Part One of the graphic novel, which occurs in January 2029, and then subsequently the zine, which is released in
February 2029. The second contextual essay follows because it explicitly discusses the presentation of the water crisis in the previous three fragments. The last two fragments are Part Two of the graphic novel, which occurs in September 2030, and the final contextual essay, which discusses the crisis as a whole in addition to presenting ways to combat the crisis in everyday life.

2. Water Crisis Content. Each medium addresses the water crisis in unique and explicit ways. The following table details the distribution of content that directly relates to the water crisis. It is divided into six columns, which corresponds with the six storyworld tentpoles established during the content analysis. Contained on the chart are narrative points and specific Circle of Blue articles that are referenced within the medium. This chart emphasizes the importance and purposefulness of the construction of the project, and the necessity for each individual medium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Climate</th>
<th>Energy</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Policy &amp; Politics</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In 2018 Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and South Africa have all declared drought emergencies.</td>
<td>In 2025 India becomes the second largest burner of coal, surpassing China, but residing behind the U.S., which increased its coal production during Donald Trump’s presidency.</td>
<td>In 2030 while most food production was centralized to a handful of select corporations, regional, government-regulated and controlled gardens are harvested regionally.</td>
<td>In 2018, the U.S. removes itself from the Paris Agreement.</td>
<td>In 2021 Sao Paolo’s work week has been Monday-Tuesday for two consecutive years. Venezuela as well.</td>
<td>In 2026 the sanitary conditions of rural Alabama are declared to be inhumane, as countless cases of hookworm are reported. It is declared an “epidemic.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In 2021 El Nino strikes, leaving in its wake food scarcity, drought, and destruction. As people are</td>
<td>In 2026 construction is finished on the Keystone XL pipeline, despite the horrifying and violent</td>
<td>In 2018, the EPA is effectively gutted.</td>
<td>In 2028 Washington D.C., and New York City both declare infrastructure emergencies, as</td>
<td>In 2029 America’s water bodies are determined to have regressed to a quality pre-Clean Water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>In 2021 the Mekong river in China finally runs dry.</td>
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<td>2025</td>
<td>In 2025, protests at the site of the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline grew violent, as police are ordered to physically remove the protesters. Several protesters were killed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2030</td>
<td>In 2030 energy and food reform are implemented. Companies and governments work together to maintain a sustainable temperature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2026</td>
<td>In 2026 Enbridge Line 5 ruptures in the Straits of Mackinac, destroying ecosystems, and coating hundreds of square miles of open water and shoreline.</td>
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<td>2028</td>
<td>In 2028 the Alberta tar sands have doubled in size since 2017, causing massive tracks of deforestation and copious amounts of pollution. This oil is transported by several Enbridge land pipelines, as the company was barred from developing underwater pipelines after the Line 5 rupture.</td>
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<td>2028</td>
<td>In 2028 in Africa, it is common for farmers to be killed when their lands stand in the way of developing coal companies.</td>
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<td>2030</td>
<td>In 2030 to combat the inherent lack of federal regulation within food, water, and energy, the government works alongside corporate megaliths as a means to control and regulate food, water, and energy. In vehicles can only be driven if one has a specific permit. Food is obtained via vouchers.</td>
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<td>In 2026 large parts of Florida are sunk, and uninhabitable.</td>
<td>In 2028 the Hoover Dam ceases productivity.</td>
<td>In 2029 the murder of environmental activists finally garners international news, as more than 2000 activists were murdered in 2028. This has been occurring for decades.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In 2028 Muncie experiences its second consecutive winter without snow.</td>
<td>In 2029 electricity begins to grow patchy. Food supplies within urban areas begin to strain.</td>
<td>In 2029 globally, farmer suicides gain attention. It is found in places affected by drought, such as India, Syria, Ethiopia, and California.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>In 2029 electricity begins to grow patchy. Food supplies within urban areas begin to strain.</td>
<td>In 2030 the U.S. declares national martial law amidst belligerent food and energy riots.</td>
<td>In 2030 a national water crisis is declared. The U.S. shuts its borders.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 details the specific mentions of the water crisis within the project website.

The website addresses water policy and politics more than the other storyworld tentpole, but it still presents a rounded perspective of the water crisis. The website allows the project to look at a more global perspective, revealing events happening throughout the world, and exploring many facets of the complex crisis. The content found within the website is experienced
in sections, divided by other mediums, so audience members slowly read the global viewpoint of
the world, while experiencing it at a local level.

**Graphic novel**

1. **Narrative Content.** While the website is the central hub of the project, the graphic
novel is the main narrative platform. It was divided into two parts, each of which are 15 pages
long. Part One occurs in January 2029, while Part Two occurs in September 2030. Each chapter
provides a vastly different perspective of the water crisis, with Part One occurring before the
crisis has taken over Muncie, while Part Two occurs several months after it has, and the world
has returned to a somewhat stable state. The graphic novel served as an engaging medium, and a
way to visualize the storyworld of the narrative.

*Part One: Pre-Void Music (2029).* This chapter begins with Jared listening to NPR while
creating the zine “Voices From Region V, Volume Three: The Blue Volume.” The NPR
narrative thread serves as a quick way of contextualizing the state of the world by discussing
several global issues directly related to the water crisis. Topics of discussion include the
migration of the farming industry inland from California, the sinking of Mexico City and Jakarta
due to subsidence, mass inland migration from steadily sinking coasts, and the pollution of
groundwater sources from the farming industry. Figure 3 illustrates the different narrative
threads presented in the graphic novel. On this page, the circular bubbles represent the NPR
narrative thread, while the rectangular boxes are Jared’s internal monologue. This page reveals
the interconnected weavings of the narrative, as the audience sees Jared creating a zine that they
can then read.
Figure 3: Jared listens to NPR while compiling the zine. This scene shows a narrative thread that is carried across platforms. Audience members were able to then read the zine that Jared is creating, providing a tangible connection into the storyworld of *From Region V: 2030*.

While working on the zine, Jared receives a text message from Colin Bay, whom he recently met and requested to interview about an EP titled *Smart Pigs* that Colin recently released. He walks to Colin’s, where they discuss the intent behind the EP, and the anxieties that Colin addressed by creating it. *Smart Pigs* dealt largely with the intersection of water and energy, and the disastrous effects that energy has had on water. The first part of the graphic novel concludes with the two of them speculating what will happen when the water crisis finally reaches Muncie. They conclude that it’s incredibly difficult to actualize a crisis until it has personally affected one’s everyday life. Figure 4 shows Jared talking with Colin, and some of the
differentiation found within the style of the graphic novel. Within the medium, there were several text-heavy pages, but these were juxtaposed with pages with less text, and more panels. This image also provides another example of a narrative thread that traversed multiple mediums. Audience members can also encounter the EP by listening to it, or by reading the album review found within the zine.

Figure 5: Jared and Colin discuss the EP Smart Pigs.

**Part Two: Void Music (2030).** The energy crisis finally has reached Muncie, and people fell into rioting and looting amidst the chaos. By the time the audience comes back into the storyworld, things are relatively stable. Jared works at the G.I. Community Garden that covers the closed Ball State campus, where workers are paid in food and water vouchers. Part Two begins with him leaving for work, and he wears a knife and a canteen on his belt, as is common in the new world after the tumultuous riots. The streets are patrolled by the National Guard, and
there is a mandatory curfew. Figure 5 depicts Jared leaving for work. A majority of the dialogue is presented through Jared’s internal monologue.

Figure 5: This scene illustrates the subtle but definitive differences between the everyday life before and after the water crisis reached Muncie. Jared wears a knife on his belt, and old ripped pants.

After returning home from his shift at the G.I. Community Garden, Jared walks to his sister’s house to drop off extra rations that her husband earned by working an extra shift at the Garden. They talk about the state of the world, and how different everyday life is. Their discussion ends with Jess telling Jared that she and her family are moving to their father’s, who has a small farm elsewhere in Region V. The graphic novel concludes with the narrator contemplating the nature of hope in the new world. Figure 6 depicts Jared speaking with his
sister. This scene presented another subtle narrative thread that is also expressed in the zine, in
the essay about permaculture, which Jared learns about from her husband.

Figure 6: Jared Lynch and Jess Oldfield discuss the state of the world. They are worried that future
riots are inevitable, and Jess is worried that the world won’t be safe for her children.

2. Water Crisis Content. Each medium addresses the water crisis in unique and explicit
ways. The following table details the distribution of content that directly relates to the water
crisis. It is divided into six columns, which corresponds with the six storyworld tentpoles
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An NPR story discusses refugees from coastal cities that flooded when the tides rose.</td>
<td>An NPR story discusses the pollution of groundwater from oil drilling and fracking.</td>
<td>An NPR story discusses the migration of the farming industry inland.</td>
<td>An NPR story discusses how the EPA was effectively gutted.</td>
<td>An NPR story discusses 01 water, a cyberterrorist group that has shut down a dam providing water to wealthy neighborhoods.</td>
<td>The narrator mentions toxic algae blooms that cover the Great Lakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin Bay discusses the impact of black carbon on the environment, and its contribution to shifting hydrological cycles.</td>
<td>Colin Bay discusses failing oil pipelines that lead to underwater and inland spills, ruining ecosystems.</td>
<td>As people migrate inland, it strains food and water supplies in inland states.</td>
<td>An NPR story discusses the recurring theme of environmental activists being assassinated.</td>
<td>An NPR story discusses the steadily degrading water infrastructure.</td>
<td>In the wake of the farming migration, poor farmers and communities were left with depleted or polluted groundwater sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin Bay discusses how the world is plagued by superstorms, which are caused by shifting hydrological cycles.</td>
<td>In 2030, Muncie is plagued by food and water shortages.</td>
<td>In 2030, there are few work days, and few people have jobs, leading to civil unrest.</td>
<td>An NPR story discusses the sinking of Mexico City and Jakarta due to land subsidence.</td>
<td>Colin Bay discusses the byproduct of oil drilling and fracking called “produced water,” which pollutes aquifers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In 2030, Ball State University has shut down its campus due to the water crisis.</td>
<td>Jared Lynch and Jessica Oldfield discuss ownership of water, and how that space isn’t clearly defined. This is due somewhat to a lack of federal regulation.</td>
<td>In 2030, toxic algae blooms have consumed copious amounts of fresh water sources.</td>
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</table>
Table 2 details the specific mentions of the water crisis within the graphic novel.

The graphic discusses the water crisis equally through the storyworld tentpoles of water policy and politics, water management, and water quality, while still presenting a balanced coverage of the water crisis. In Part One, the water crisis is largely explored through the NPR narrative threads, and through the conversation Jared and Colin have. Part Two shows the crisis through a more visceral lens by presenting Muncie in the midst of the crisis itself, with its citizens experiencing a reality that millions of people throughout the world experience in their everyday lives.

**Zine**

1. **Narrative Content.** The in-world zine is titled “Voices From Region V, Volume Three: The Blue Volume.” It is composed of an album review, two essays, three poems, and two cooking recipes. It is twenty pages long, and it serves as an unexpected rabbit hole into the storyworld, in addition to creating a tangible artifact from the storyworld itself. Each narrative fragment found within the medium discusses the water crisis in a unique and valuable way, providing multiple perspectives in a central medium.

   *Smart Pigs Album Review by Jared Lynch.* This album review provides further insight into the Smart Pigs EP, supplementing the knowledge the audience received in the graphic novel. By providing different information through each of the mediums, it allows for different levels of meaning-making and engagement. The review explores the intersection of energy’s negative impacts on water in more depth than was discussed in the graphic novel. Figure 7 shows the page
that includes the URL to the EP’s bandcamp page, which serves as an additional rabbit hole, in order to place as many doorways into the storyworld as possible.

Figure 7: This image shows the conclusion of the album review. It features an image of the album cover, and a link to the EP’s Bandcamp URL.

Red Tiller, an Essay by Jared Lynch. This essay discusses the farming practice of permaculture, which is a more sustainable way of growing food that reinvigorates the land. This practice mirrors nature by consciously building an ecosystem in the land. It presents a sustainable alternative to monoculture, which is responsible for water pollution through fertilizer runoff. This essay also contains a narrative fragment that is subtly carried through multiple mediums, as it discussed Jared learning about permaculture outside of Jess and Codi’s house, which the audience sees in Part Two of the graphic novel.
Three Poems by Catherine Hertz. These poems deal with a range of topics, such as salinization, land subsidence, and sinking coastlines. They are reflective of anxieties experienced by the character Catherine Hertz, and it looks at the broader water crisis through a specific perspective.

Fighting Mono-Thought, an Essay by Rachel Enman. This essay discusses what the character Rachel Enman terms “Mono-Thought,” which is the apathetic and destructive mindset that Rachel feels has consumed her society. Other subjects include the migration of wealthy farmers from coastal states to inland farms, while poorer communities are left with polluted water sources, in addition to the rise of farmer suicides, something that is currently being experienced in Syria, and other places throughout the world.

Two Recipes by Rachel Enman. These vegetarian recipes provide easy-to-make, accessible meals that use less water than typical American diets. Vegetarianism is a way in which Rachel fights mono-thought, and these recipes provide a doorway through which to begin reducing water consumption, albeit in a slight way.

2. Water Crisis Content. Each medium addresses the water crisis in unique and explicit ways. The following table details the distribution of content that directly relates to the water crisis. It is divided into six columns, which corresponds with the six storyworld tentpoles established during the content analysis. Contained on the chart are narrative points and specific Circle of Blue articles that are referenced within the medium. This chart emphasizes the importance and purposefulness of the construction of the project, and the necessity for each individual medium.

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smart Pigs Album Review</td>
<td>discusses energy’s impact on the shifting hydrological cycles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart Pigs Album Review</td>
<td>discusses underwater pipeline ruptures, which is due to negligence and mismanagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Tiller</td>
<td>discusses monoculture, and the pollution that results from the use of chemical fertilizer in the practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A poem by Catherine Hertz</td>
<td>discusses salinization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A poem by Catherine Hertz</td>
<td>discusses land subsidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart Pigs Album Review</td>
<td>discusses the production of “produced water,” which is a byproduct of oil drilling and fracking, and it poisons groundwater sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart Pigs Album Review</td>
<td>discusses the superstorms that plague the world, which are a direct result of shifting hydrological cycles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle of Blue article: “U.S. Not Prepared for Tar Sands Oil Spills, National Studies Find”</td>
<td>goo.gl/K8t36u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mono-Thought essay by Rachel Enman</td>
<td>discusses the migration of the agriculture industry to inland states.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle of Blue article: “Israel’s Desalination Plants Shift Regional Water Balance”</td>
<td>goo.gl/LQsIJq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle of Blue article: “As Groundwater Withdrawals Increase, Jarkata Sinks”</td>
<td>goo.gl/VVsdAO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart Pigs Album Review</td>
<td>discusses the prevalence of toxic algae blooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A poem by Catherine Hertz</td>
<td>discusses the super storms that plague the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart Pigs Album Review</td>
<td>discusses bitumen, which is an especially viscous type of oil that has to be diluted with lighter oils to be transported through pipelines. When it spills in water, the lighter oils evaporate due to weathering, while bitumen sinks to the bottom of the bed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mono-Thought essay by Rachel Enman</td>
<td>discusses food and energy riots throughout the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A poem by Catherine Hertz</td>
<td>discusses how the EPA was gutted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mono-Thought essay by Rachel Enman</td>
<td>discusses the Flint Water crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mono-Thought essay by Rachel Enman</td>
<td>discusses depleted groundwater sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle of Blue article: “El Nino Is Over But the Damage Continues”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Circle of Blue article: “Amid California Drought, Oil Industry Wastewater”</td>
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<tr>
<td>The two recipes provided in the back of the zine provide easy to make recipes that don’t consume as much water as</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Mono-Thought essay by Rachel Enman</td>
<td>discusses the growing trend of farmer suicides.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mono-Thought essay by Rachel Enman</td>
<td>discusses the lack of federal regulation in regards to water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mono-Thought essay by Rachel Enman</td>
<td>discusses the hookworm epidemic in Alabama due to</td>
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<tr>
<td>goo.gl/j5JOFz</td>
<td>Attracts New Scrutiny”</td>
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<tr>
<td>goo.gl/hB5Cqz</td>
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</table>

A poem by Catherine Hertz discusses the steadily receding coastline.

“EPA Review Finds Clean Water Fund Allocations Needs Revisions” — Circle of Blue, 2016 — goo.gl/7PWDYb


“California’s Oil Industry’s Wastewater Adds New Twist” — Circle of Blue, 2015 — goo.gl/AelA3c

“Hookworm Infections and Sanitation Failures Plague Rural Alabama” — Circle of Blue, 2015 — goo.gl/MPRhTX

“India and Pakistan Water Tensions Escalate to the Hague” — Circle of Blue, 2016 — goo.gl/MqZCYZ

Table 3 details the specific mentions of the water crisis within the zine.

The zine addresses the water crisis largely through the storyworld tentpole of water policy and politics, which was a consistent theme throughout most of the mediums. The zine is especially related to the water crisis because it presents audience members with multiple URLs.
Contextual Essays

1. Narrative Content. There are three contextual essays distributed through the project website. Each essay provides a different perspective on both the content, and the contextualization of the storyworld as compared to the current state of world. Each essay was placed at a point on the website where the contextualization would be most effective, and provide the most context. The first essay was the first narrative fragment encountered by the audience.

Monologue One: Pre-Void Understanding. This first essay established the intent behind From Region V: 2030, and the motivations to create it. It discusses first-hand the ways in which the author sees the water crisis in his everyday life, before discussing how the project changed to become the end result. This essay is intended to reveal how to see the crisis in places where it isn’t as apparent.

Monologue Two: View From My Screen (Constructing the Context). This essay is the most direct conversation about the water crisis, linking to several Circle of Blue articles that informed the creation of the storyworld. It details the specific facets of the water crisis discussed in the graphic novel, and EP. It is written in straightforward language, and it discusses the prevalence of the water crisis in the world.

Monologue Three: Post-Void Discussion. This essay is used to discuss the ways in which the author combats the water crisis in his everyday life. It also includes scenes that were cut from
the graphic novel, which is important because it brings into light invisible water, which is water that people aren’t aware they are consuming. This is found in clothing production, food, beer and wine. The essay concludes with steps that people can take to combat the water crisis in their everyday lives.

2. Water Crisis Content. Each medium addresses the water crisis in unique and explicit ways. The following table details the distribution of content that directly relates to the water crisis. It is divided into six columns, which corresponds with the six storyworld tentpoles established during the content analysis. Contained on the chart are narrative points and specific Circle of Blue articles that are referenced within the medium. This chart emphasizes the importance and purposefulness of the construction of the project, and the necessity for each individual medium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Climate</th>
<th>Energy</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Policy &amp; Politics</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Quality</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monologue One discusses shifting weather patterns.</td>
<td>Monologue Two discusses underwater oil spills, especially the 2010 oil spill in the Kalamazoo River, which was the worst inland oil spill in history.</td>
<td>Monologue Three discusses invisible water, which is often unknowingly consumed in food, and clothing.</td>
<td>Monologue Two discusses how environmental activists are consistently assassinated for their fight for ecological equality.</td>
<td>Monologue Two discusses how water utilities are not prepared to respond to emergencies.</td>
<td>Monologue Two discusses how poor communities suffer the most from polluted water sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monologue Two discusses how weather is pushing back, destroying energy projects throughout the world.</td>
<td>Monologue Two discusses diluted bitumen, which is the worst oil to spill underwater.</td>
<td>Circle of Blue article: “Murders of Activists Defending Safe Water and Environment Rise Sharply.” <a href="https://goo.gl/HznbzK">https://goo.gl/HznbzK</a></td>
<td>Monologue Two discusses how there is a lack of centrality in water management.</td>
<td>Monologue Three discusses ways to reduce water consumption habits in everyday life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circle of Blue article:</td>
<td>Circle of Blue article:</td>
<td>Monologue Two discusses the depleted groundwater sources in California. This is due in large to a lack of federal regulation on farmers’ water consumption habits.</td>
<td>“Slideshow: Faces of Tulare County’s Drinking Water Crisis” Circle of Blue. 26 June 2015.</td>
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<td><a href="https://goo.gl/AeNmeX">https://goo.gl/AeNmeX</a></td>
<td>[<a href="https://goo.gl/E">https://goo.gl/E</a> DiXvU](<a href="https://goo.gl/E">https://goo.gl/E</a> DiXvU)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circle of Blue article:</td>
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<td>“Great Lakes Oil Pipeline in Violation of Operating Agreement, Groups Allege.”</td>
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<td><a href="https://goo.gl/fpq5kk">https://goo.gl/fpq5kk</a></td>
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<td>Circle of Blue article:</td>
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<td>Circle of Blue article:</td>
<td>Circle of Blue article:</td>
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<tr>
<td>“California Groundwater Regulation Hangs on a Few Words”</td>
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<td><a href="https://goo.gl/F7VCD8">https://goo.gl/F7VCD8</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Circle of Blue article:</td>
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</table>
Table 3 details the specific mentions of the water crisis within the contextual essays.

The essays connect most to the storyworld tentpole of water management, in addition to linking to multiple Circle of Blue articles. These essays serve as one of the most direct correlations between this project and the water crisis, as they blatantly discuss the ways in which the water crisis is prevalent within the current world. The essays provide valuable contributions to the project, and present vital cohesion to the storyworld. The essays are also important because they present actionable things that people can do within their everyday lives to combat the water crisis. While these were present in the zine as well, they were more explicit with the essays.
Music EP

1. Narrative Content. The Smart Pigs EP by Black Carbon is comprised of three songs, and it deals largely with the negative impacts that energy has had on water sources. Much in the same vein as the in-world zine, this EP is intended to deepen the immersion of the narrative, allowing audience members to overtly engage with the culture of the storyworld. Figure 8 shows the cover of Smart Pigs, which contains an image of a smart pig (pipeline inspection gauge). These tools inspect the quality of oil pipelines, and they are responsible for maintaining the health of a pipeline. Smart pigs as a concept are used ironically within the storyworld, as Colin uses them to comment on the often-failing pipelines of his world.

Figure 8: The cover of Smart Pigs features an image of a smart pig, a tool that cleans oil pipelines and helps maintain the health of them.

Smart Pigs is narrated by three distinct voices: Speaker 2029, Speaker 2050, and Machine. Speaker 2029 possesses a selfish and apathetic mindset about the world, disregarding the consequences of constantly consuming resources, and blatantly disregarding the world of the future. Speaker 2029 embodies the mentality that Colin sees in the current society of the
storyworld, which he describes as unable to take responsibility to develop sustainable habits. Speaker 2050 lives in a resource-barren, dismal world whose resources have been consumed by this selfish mindset. Her voice is used to explore that potential future, toward which society is headed for through its current habits. The last speaker, Machine is a kleptocratic, sociopathic entity, something like an oil god within the world of the EP. Machine is fed blood, water, and money, and the people of the world are as much addicted to feeding it as it was to consume resources.

2. Water Crisis Content. Each medium addresses the water crisis in unique and explicit ways. The following table details the distribution of content that directly relates to the water crisis. It is divided into six columns, which corresponds with the six storyworld tentpoles established during the content analysis. Contained on the chart are narrative points and specific Circle of Blue articles that are referenced within the medium. This chart emphasizes the importance and purposefulness of the construction of the project, and the necessity for each individual medium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Climate</th>
<th>Energy</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Policy &amp; Politics</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Twenty</td>
<td>Fifty” discusses the burning of black carbon, which alters hydrological cycles.</td>
<td>“Twenty</td>
<td>Fifty” discusses produced water, which pollutes aquifers and other groundwater sources.</td>
<td>The song “Machine” discusses depleted aquifers.</td>
<td>“Algae” discusses phosphorus, which is found in chemical fertilizer. Phosphorus is a large contributor to the creation of toxic algae blooms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Twenty</td>
<td>Fifty” discusses melting ice-caps, and its</td>
<td>The song “Machine” discusses diluted bitumen.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Algae” discusses microcystin, which is the</td>
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contribution to rising water levels.

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<td>toxin found in toxic algae blooms that has forced several cities to be without water.</td>
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“Algae” discusses shifting hydrological patterns, which disrupts topsoil, sending more fertilizer and therefore phosphorus into waterways.

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Table 5 details the specific mentions of the water crisis within the music EP.

The EP deals largely with the storyworld tentpole of water and energy and water and climate, both of which are closely related. The EP is important to the world because it provides the most unique, unconventional medium, and it deepened the immersion of the storyworld. The language of the EP is also important to disseminate specific facets of the water crisis, and to make the storyworld more accessible.
Chapter V: Discussion

The goal of this project was to create a fictional transmedia story that raised awareness of the water crisis, and provided actionable solutions to the crisis that audience members could implement in their everyday lives. The project was centered around three guiding questions: 1) How can transmedia fiction by used to raise awareness of a global water crisis at a local level? 2) How can transmedia fiction be used to draw younger audiences to Circle of Blue content? and 3) How can transmedia fiction be used to encourage social change? This project sought to answer these questions, which guided the development and creation of the story, heavily influencing the final result. The final project was a transmedia story titled From Region V: 2030, and it answered these questions to various levels of success. The story was told through an online graphic novel, an in-world zine, an in-world music EP, a series of contextual essays, and a project website that served as a central hub for each of these mediums.

How can transmedia fiction be used to raise awareness of a global crisis at a local level?

This question established the framework of addressing a larger, complex problem through smaller, more relevant perspectives. While the water crisis isn’t overtly apparent in Muncie, Indiana, the citizens of the city are still connected to the crisis. It was important to establish this story in a local setting for a number of reasons, the first of which was to strengthen the realism and seriousness of the story. It sought to show people how the world will change in the near future if sustainable practices aren’t implemented. The second reason is that there is no silver bullet to solving the water crisis. Solutions are local, and unique to each community.
The storyworld of the project was informed by Circle of Blue content, so it was rooted in hard data and science. This allowed for the project to provide a realistic world, in which every major event mentioned was reflective of an event that has already happened. The storyworld was explicitly established as Muncie, Indiana through the inclusion of Ball State University as a setting in addition to the inclusion of a map of both the Ball State Campus, and Muncie as a whole. Characters spoke about landmarks specific to Muncie and northern Indiana, referring places such as Tri-Lakes, or Chain-o-Lakes state park. After establishing the setting as Muncie, the narrative brought the water crisis to the city by shifting real-world events into the city, making the water crisis more visible.

These events were spoken of in plain, straightforward, and unforgiving language. As revealed in the previous chapter, Tables 1-5 detail the specific facets of the water crisis that were contained within each individual medium. This emphasizes how this project presented the global water crisis at a local level, by placing those facets within the narrative. By addressing the universal through the specific, this project was able to shift the events already occurring in the world to a more accessible, and more importantly a local level.

This question was answered directly through several narrative threads, the first of which were the contextual essays, which served as a direct way to show audience members how to see the water crisis, which is complex, multifaceted, and not as visible in some places as in others. In Monologue One, the author discusses the ways in which he sees the water crisis outside his window, making note of changing weather patterns that are a result of climate change. This essay aimed to show the audience how to see the crisis within their own world.
In Part One of the graphic novel, characters discuss the ways in which they see the water crisis beginning to emerge in the city, and then speculate what will happen when it finally closes in on the city. In Part Two the water crisis has come to in Muncie, so it is visually represented within the local setting. Jared reads by candlelight because he doesn’t have electricity, indicative of the common experience throughout the city. Food and water are rationed, and there is a common fear that riots will happen again due to the growing tension in the city. The Great Lakes have been consumed by toxic algae blooms.

While this project was successful at placing the narrative within a local setting, it fell short of engaging with community members in more direct ways. Unfortunately this project was created within a bubble, which was due largely to a lack of time and resources, as the project was created almost entirely by a single person. It would have been more successful at directly addressing the crisis at a local level had it engaged with local environmental or community groups. This would have served the transmedia activism framework, and it is a valid facet to any future development of a similar project.

How can transmedia fiction be used to draw younger audiences to Circle of Blue content?

This question attempted to connect audience members to the source material that informed the construction of the project. While the coverage of Circle of Blue content is important, a majority of those viewing and engaging with the content often already have a working knowledge of the water crisis, and are most likely already engaged with the issues. There was a disconnect between younger, more diverse audiences and Circle of Blue content, which inherently limits the dissemination of information. The project sought to use transmedia
storytelling as a less traditional approach to engage new audiences, employing unconventional mediums.

This was an important guiding question because the content published by Circle of Blue is more comprehensive and in depth than the project was able to achieve. Through the content analysis conducted for this project, a working knowledge of the water crisis provided a broad repertoire of issues. With this knowledge, the project recontextualized the content, combining several complex concepts within an engaging narrative, and providing more accessible entry points. The breadth of coverage that Circle of Blue has published is sprawling, heavy, and massive, and this project sought to provide more accessible doorways into that content by focusing on specific facets of the crisis.

*From Region V: 2030* led to Circle of Blue content in a number of ways. The construction of the narrative provided several unconventional mediums in which to encounter information about the water crisis. The least conventional of these mediums were the in-world zine and music EP. The language and perspectives of these mediums were informed by Circle of Blue content, therefore rooted in the language found within that coverage. Both the zine and the essays contained URLs that connected directly to Circle of Blue articles. These were one the most explicit connection between the project and its informing content. There were a total of 15 URLs included within the content of the project. 11 of the URLs were placed within Monologue Two, and the remaining 4 were placed within the zine. The zine and project website also contained introductions that directly presented the fact that storyworld was constructed with Circle of Blue content, and contained a URL to the Circle of Blue website. In Monologue Two:
Constructing the Void (View From My Screen), the author explicitly writes about the Circle of Blue content.

While this project provided several doorways into Circle of Blue content, there was not a means of measuring the age of audience members engaging with the project. The zines were distributed around a college campus, so it was assumed that the audience would be younger. Through employing unconventional mediums, it was hoped that it would engage different people who would otherwise not interact with the content found on the group’s website and social media. In future development of a similar project, a more definitive and explicit means of measuring this engagement would be established.

**How can transmedia fiction be used to encourage social change?**

This question allowed the project to contribute to the small collection of transmedia fiction that is used within activism, adding to such projects as *LowLifes* and *World Without Oil*. By using a fictional narrative, it allowed the project to embed information about the water crisis within narrative threads, making it more accessible and digestible. While there is a great deal of information about the water crisis prevalent, the narrative was the driving factor of the project. The story contained a good balance of storytelling and activism, juxtaposing information with ways in which to combat the crisis.

The account of the water crisis was straightforward, unforgiving and honest, while avoiding being too heavy handed, or an overload of information. Information about the water crisis was interspersed with straight narration. This allowed for the project to be accessible for different levels of engagement and awareness. For people who are already educated about the
water crisis, it presented a unique contextualization of information that was already known to them, while audience members who are unaware of the crisis, or unaware of the scope of the crisis are able to learn about it through a narrative that presented multiple perspectives and facets.

The call-to-action of social change was found most explicitly within Monologue Three, and the zine, both of which present similar ideas. In the zine, Rachel Enman writes about how she combats “Mono- Thought” through her vegetarianism, by recycling, and purchasing her clothes second hand. Then, within Monologue Three, the author presents the same ideas, albeit he elaborates on them, asking the audience to employ some of these habits within their everyday lives. By presenting the water crisis through multiple facets, it established the credibility of the space, and the importance of adopting more sustainable habits. Throughout the narrative the importance of altering everyday habits is emphasized, because everyday life is where change first occurs.

While the language and construction of the project present information about the water crisis, it does not feature any sort of engagement metrics to gauge the amount of social change that the project will make. In the development of a similar project in the future, a survey should have been written to give to audience members to gauge the ways in which it changed their perspective on the water crisis.

**Metrics and Analytics**

In addition to answering the above guiding questions, this project was measured through analytics to gauge the levels of engagement. While there is no single, established way to measure
the success of a transmedia experience, a common method is through analytics, and project-specific engagement metrics, such as observing the conversation surrounding the experience on social media, or in other social settings. This project employed two methods of analytics: Google Analytics on the project website, and unique Google URLs to Circle of Blue articles. The URLs were found within the zine, in addition to Monologue Two. The URLs will be measured to understand the crossover from the project to Circle of Blue content. While these analytics are set in place, it is still too early to determine definitive engagement results.

Conclusion

*From Region V: 2030* is a transmedia story that was told through an online graphic novel, an in-world zine, an in-world music EP, a series of contextual essays, and a project website that served as a central hub for each of these mediums. It answered its guiding questions with varying degrees of success, and it presented a unique contribution to transmedia storytelling, and transmedia activism. It is the hope that this project will inspire future conversations about the water crisis, and provide a storyworld in which future creators can construct their own stories about the water crisis.
VI. Works Cited


Appendix: External Evaluators

Name: Faith Kellermeyer
Title: Project Manager
Organization: Center for Emerging Media Design & Development

Project Design and Concept

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<tr>
<th>Tick one of the following boxes</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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<tr>
<td>Please rate how well the student articulated the problem space defined for this project.</td>
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<td>Please rate the quality of the design solution developed to address the problem space.</td>
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<td>Please rate how well the objectives of the project’s stated design have been met.</td>
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Please provide brief comments about the overall quality of the project design and concept.
You did an excellent job explaining the different genres of transmedia storytelling and providing a rationale for why this approach is a useful method for gaining wide recognition of the global water crisis.
**Research and Writing**

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<tr>
<td>Please rate the overall quality of the writing associated with the project.</td>
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<td>Please rate the extent to which the literature review demonstrates a critical understanding of the relevant background literature for the creative project.</td>
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**Please provide brief comments about the overall quality of the research and writing.**

Your writing is fluid, clear, and accessible (which is really important in academic writing). The literature review, while thorough, was redundant in several places. You relied heavily on a small number of sources and I would have liked to see a broader base of academic support to establish more credibility for creating such a rich transmedia story.

My main issue with the research methodology of this project is that it seems the research questions weren't really explored. You didn't define "younger audiences" or provide a mechanism for capturing data about the age of your audience, so why is that even a research question? Those sort of things need to be operationally defined with a measurement mechanism in place before you even put your work out into the world. Same thing with the question about encouraging social change. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with not being able to gather that data, but if it’s not in the scope of your project don’t make it a research question. My background is in more traditional research, so this part of the project was really difficult for me to follow or justify. When your discussion says that you didn’t measure something because you had limited time or resources, to me that says you didn’t spend enough time designing a feasible project and that there were issues you should have dealt with early on. That being said, I think this is a great piece of **creative** work, but as far as research you just didn’t put enough effort into it for me to view these results as useful for other researchers.
**Graphic Design and/or Project Presentation**

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<td>Please rate the overall graphic design and/or presentation quality displayed in the project.</td>
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<td>Please rate the quality of the execution of the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please rate the overall usability and/or user experience associated with this project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please rate the degree to which the graphic design and/or presentation matches the overall</td>
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<td>message/tone/focus of the project.</td>
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**Please provide brief comments about the overall quality of the graphic design and/or project presentation.**

The zine and graphic novel are really impressive and I love the way that you combined low-fi, DIY design in the zine with a more sophisticated graphic novel using Adobe software. Especially knowing that you are not a designer, these results are impressive. I think your project is cohesive across all the different story mediums and I’m pleased with how the website turned out. I did have a hard time following whether the website was meant to be absorbed all at once, and I had an easier time understanding the rest of the story’s parts/ I had the articles from Circle of Blue to connect your narrative elements to real events.
**Storytelling**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tick one of the following boxes</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please rate the degree to which the storytelling associated meets the objectives laid out for this project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please rate the level of creativity exhibited by the storytelling in this project.</td>
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</table>

**Please provide brief comments about the overall quality of the storytelling.**

Storytelling is your real strength, and this was the best part of your project. You created a captivating narrative and you did a nice job synthesizing real-world problems into a digestible, and even entertaining, piece of work. I’m really pleased with your work here.
Name: Ken Eklund  
Title: Principal Artist  
Organization: Writerguy

**Project Design and Concept**

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please rate how well the student articulated the problem space defined for this project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please rate the quality of the design solution developed to address the problem space.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please rate how well the objectives of the project’s stated design have been met.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please rate the extent to which the project makes a significant contribution to its genre.</td>
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</table>

**Please provide brief comments about the overall quality of the project design and concept.**

This project was well-conceived and scoped by the student. The looming global crisis in freshwater is a relevant and pressing issue, and the creative directions chosen for the transmedia elements of the story seemed to be unusually astute given the constraints of time and budget.
**Research and Writing**

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<tr>
<td>Please rate the overall quality of the writing associated with the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please rate the extent to which the literature review demonstrates a critical understanding of the relevant background literature for the creative project.</td>
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<td>Please rate the degree to which the writing involved meets the expectations of the field and/or genre.</td>
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<td>Please rate the overall quality of the research conducted for this project.</td>
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**Please provide brief comments about the overall quality of the research and writing.**

I was impressed with the literature review and its analysis; it is cogent in an emerging field that’s full of contradictory ideas and misleading claims. I did think, though, that the review focused on the structure and other nuts-and-bolts of transmedia work, at the expense perhaps of the creative side – ideas and storytelling affordances that transmedia authors have used to expand the experience of story itself.

Although I did not click through the sources cited by the student, I have little doubt as to their quality – they match the research I have done independently about water issues.

The in-world writing (the elements that in the fiction of the piece, were created in the future) I thought to be equal to or exceeding the expectations of the genre: genuinely affecting and immersive, whether in prose, poetry or lyric. The in-world framing of these different voices was well-done (the interstitial narratives had an authenticity to them).

I had difficulty, however, with the writing that framed the piece overall – i.e., the 2017 writing. It didn’t engage me as a participant in imagining this possible world (or my own), which I think is a key opportunity for transmedia work. (Also, at a more mundane level, it seemed to repeat information in various places.) This brought down my overall rating of the work.
Graphic Design and/or Project Presentation

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<td>Please rate the quality of the execution of the project.</td>
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Please provide brief comments about the overall quality of the graphic design and/or project presentation.

It’s by no means a settled issue, but many “storyworld” transmedia projects take care to separate their in-world and out-of-world elements in their presentations. I myself take pains with that separation, because I don’t want “the real world” to intrude when a reader is doing the hard work of imagining a different reality. This project did not do this separation, and I’ve reflected this perceived lack in my “Good” scores above.

However, in the end I found the piece to be quite affecting: the music, the poetry, the imagery and the prose all combined to immerse me in a future world! The student created a transmedia work that successfully conveys the passion born of research – that is authentic, if you can use that word about the future.
Storytelling

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Please provide brief comments about the overall quality of the storytelling.

One of the key challenges in any storytelling is exposition – i.e., explaining something to the audience – as we all know from any number of movies where this is done inelegantly. From my own experience I know it is difficult to work the information into the narrative itself, which is the elegant solution. I think this work falls short in the elegance of exposition, and that’s reflected in the “Good” scores above.

But as stated before, despite the perhaps clunky moments, the tone and emotional timbre is there, and does its work. In my view transmedia is best when it embraces its inherent fragmented nature and opens up a space between its set pieces that inspire reflection and co-creation in its viewers.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this student’s work. – Ken