
Designing, Implementing and Producing for Participation: Media Convergence in Practice

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1 Introduction

One day a few years ago a young woman disappears from her wedding without a trace. The case gets attention when a drama series based on the event is promoted. A group of people claims that the woman became a victim of a conspiracy, and when the husband tries to prove them wrong there are no traces of her having existed at all. What is the truth? Is it a game or is it a true story? The mystery is a fact! What is the truth about Marika?

SVT opens up a web office with the mission to seek out the truth, engages the audience in the quest. /.. / As the team starts to investigate the matter, traces and evidence of Marika's existence begin to pop up. The question the team tries to answer is: Who lies behind her disappearance and why does someone try to hide her traces?...

The treatment: 11

In Sweden around 20,000 people have disappeared since the mid 1960s. And year-to-date, many of them have actually still not been found. The lines above depict the base story of an unusual and somewhat crazy hunt for a disappeared person that took place in Sweden during 2007. Thousands of people followed the hunt online in forums and chatrooms, and searched webpages for traces. Some of them also scouted streets and woods all over the country, guided by the disappeared woman's friend. The hunt was a hybrid media production created by Swedish Television (SVT), the largest public service television broadcaster in Sweden, and the small experimental games producer, The company P¹ (P). 'Participation drama' was the format name given indicating that it was more of a story than a game. A drama series was created around the disappearance and debate programs dealing with the issue were set up. Background facts of the production were interwoven with made up fictional content, communicating a dispersed narrative

¹This is how the company spelled its name at the time.

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using various platforms such as television, internet, mobile technology and game-like online and physical world activities. Social media like *YouTube*, *Flickr* and *Google Maps* were used too. It was claimed that it was a real investigation, and that the disappeared woman existed. At least this was what some participants thought. All was set up to help find out *if* she had existed at all, and if so, trying to find her whereabouts.

Up to that date the production did not resemble anything ever experienced in Swedish media. The aim was to create a (pilot) format that would invite a mass audience to more than ordinary TV spectatorship. Inspired from a range of emerging games, the idea was to support a variety of engagement levels, based on the consumer's choice of frequency, depth and immersion. It had no clear (game) conditions regarding winning or losing. Instead it offered collaborative activities like puzzle solving, deciphering, and missions to be corporally performed/enacted in physical world settings. Together producers and participants created a coherent game world. Even if it in different aspects did not reach the types of activities and the size of audience aimed for, it got international acknowledgment for its novelty. In April 2008 it won an International Interactive Emmy Award for best television service.

1.1 Problem Discussion

Sanningen om Marika (hereafter called *SOM*) was a significant example of media convergence in that many types of convergences took place: industrial, technical, cultural and social. It offered opportunities to identify, examine and analyze priorities and challenges in the making, and the various difficulties the convergences created in the (blurred) processes of production and consumption. A second reason why it was an interesting study object was that the producers were an unusual constellation. Never before had SVT collaborated with a similar games startup, and, as it would show, never before had SVT given a contracted company such loose reins during production. Thirdly, production processes of games—how they are produced, work processes and practices of design and implementation, is an under-researched area. So when I got the offer from the IPerG² project leader to take part, it was a singular opportunity to conduct research with my own research focus which I could not resist.

I was able to study the production from idea to implementation, what it consisted of and how the parts worked together. I could study the teams' cultures of production, and examine their practices, and whether and how the media logic of the two

² IPerG was a European Union-funded project (FP6—004457) run between 2004 and 2008. The aim was to create entirely new game experiences, tightly interwoven with everyday life through objects, devices and people that surround people and places. Through an exploratory approach several showcase games were created called “pervasive games”. New technologies and methods were explored for the creation of novel and compelling forms of content. <http://iperG.sics.se/index.php> Accessed 28th Jan 2013.

companies differed. Did it have any impact on the collaboration and outcome? The new forms of audience interaction aimed for implicated that the two medium specific types of storytelling for games and television drama would be merged, and form a novel format. How would that work? Lastly, I was able to study the changing relationship of producers and consumers. As an observing participant-researcher, I observed participants, their actions and the interplay with the producers. As I will show, some aspects of media convergence were fruitful, while others did not really succeed.

2 Literature Review

Media convergence is a concept with many connotations and definitions. This is partly depending on the current state of development, but is also due to the fact that different actors use the concept for different reasons. For my own empirically grounded observations of *SOM* the work of Henry Jenkins (2004, 2006) and Jenkins and Deuze (2008) forms an important base. Jenkins embraces not only the common technological and/or industrial perspectives, but shows that convergence is a multi-layered and complex phenomenon that also includes social and cultural processes. The following section provides both the theoretical underpinnings and the backdrop for the analysis of the hybrid media production *SOM*.

2.1 Industrial Convergence

The last 40 years of technological, economic, cultural and political shifts have affected media industries. Digital technology, the internet, inexpensive computers and increasing bandwidth have pushed changes and boundaries between them. The strategies have been to integrate both vertically and horizontally to handle the technological shifts as well as the economical and cultural ones that followed. The television industry faces increasingly unforeseeable changes in audience preferences and is confronted with the consumers-producer shift which leads to a balance between being flexible and innovative in production on the one hand, and keeping steady routine within parts of the more or less reliable structure of the creative process, on the other (Deuze, 2007: 191). The games industry has developed fast and become a global industry. With games, the consumer pattern has changed towards interactive-participant-co-producer. Meanwhile, growth towards an increasing merge with other cultural industries like film, television and advertising takes place (Deuze, 2007; Johns, 2006). Compared with the broadcast industry's hierarchical and bureaucratic features, the games industry features a kind of democracy. The culture of small development studios is often described as anti-authoritarian and rebellious (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, & De Peuter, 2003).

2.2 Technological Convergence: Multi Media Platforming

The internet with its almost infinite information-providing capacity enables enhanced audience communication, relations and services. For broadcasters, the strategy has been to migrate towards a diversified (digital) multi-platform resulting in new forms of content, multiple layers and interactivity (Roscoe, 2004). Changing consumer patterns have imposed on this as well. The usage of the internet has also made the number and types of new game concepts grow, as well as the number of new marketing and new collaboration platforms. The broadcast industry grows in the direction of multiplayer online games and increasingly relies on online business models (Küng, Picard, & Towse, 2008: 89).

2.3 Convergence of Consumer: Producer

For decades the internet and digital technological tools have enabled consumers to develop and spread personal ideas, news and content. Individuals, groups and networked communities co-produce different cultural works. Companies also embed interactivity and related services into their products since it has shown to have a growing value for digital advertising and a way to better target consumers and manage subscriptions. Traditional TV operators' models of interaction, however, have been characterised by closed technical/multi media platforms and content formats that have limited viewers' freedom and participation. This may look paradoxical. Industries seem to gain and loose power at the same time as media control seems to be concentrated and dispersed (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008: 7). Similarly consumers gain and lose control. The process of media convergence can be described as twofold, taking place both top-down and bottom-up: sometimes the processes are reinforcing each other, and sometimes they are in conflict (Jenkins, 2006).

Multiple forms of media formats and technical platforms are today used in media productions in which every part and technology in itself holds distinctive contribution to a consumer's understanding. This 'aesthetic', transmedia storytelling, arises as an effect of media convergence (Jenkins, 2006). Dena (2008) points out that games like alternate reality games, contain another form of participatory culture. Here the primary producer has designed 'gaps' to enable participation for massive global audiences. With these tiers, different audience segments are targeted, and provided with separate content to facilitate and differentiate the experiences. Through filling in these intentionally (or unintentionally) left gaps the audience may co-create and develop new content. This way a smaller (game) audience segment with specific skills create content that becomes the main consumption part for a large 'non-playing' (television) audience. In this respect these new forms of games may offer new degrees of freedom and participation for media consumers, whether they are television viewers or game participants.

2.4 Convergence of Games, Play and the Ordinary

Contemporary games and play are not only leisure activities but grow into other social domains like work and education. Cultural productions like films and books not only illustrate the ambiguity of real and fictive, but the growth of the ludic in society, a kind of maturation of the gamer generations in contemporary society (Stenros, Montola, Waern, Jonsson et al., 2007). This development, coupled with the cultural awareness and struggle over public space, results in the growth of a particular type of games.

Such games, pervasive games, form a broad category and are played in public spaces and urban areas (Montola, Stenros, & Waern, 2009).³ The word pervasive ‘having the quality or tendency to pervade or permeate’⁴ denotes the expansion ‘outside’ of the agreed on limits of playing. Outsiders are involved and intertwined with participants’ everyday life and thus flavour it. Game actions can be difficult to separate from non-game ones (Montola, 2005), shaping ambiguous and unique ‘brink’ experiences (Poremba, 2007). Since they are neither just game experiences nor normal everyday experiences they always work at the borders in terms of both the nature of play and its contextualisation in culture. The game world is brought into the workplace, school building, or the home and grows online into chat rooms and forums (Montola et al., 2009). Game-related activities can take place with bystanders participating both in their ordinary life as well as in online spaces. Commonly, pervasive games are designed not to involve non-participants in ways that are ethically infringing, dangerous and/or risky.

2.5 Convergence of Cultural Commodities

Previously cultural commodities could easily be identified and interpreted through their common features and content. They were tied to a specific medium. This is no longer a fact. Types, formats and genres merge and form new types of entertainment. Games, previously produced for one single media, are nowadays developed for new platforms and TV programs which contain contests and game activities. Online viewing and co-authorship in programming are other examples.

There are important distinctions between storytelling in television and games, like the ways the content is organised and how it is meant to be consumed. In literature, film and television the dominant user function is interpretive (Aarseth, 1997: 62–65). In games, configuration—the process of selecting content and

³ As Montola et al. state this new family of games has been called many names like ‘adaptronic games, alternate reality games, ambient games, appropriative games, augmented reality games, brink games, context aware games, crossmedia games, geogames, hybrid games, immersive games, invasive games, location-based games, locative games, massive games, mixed reality games, mobile games, pervasive games, reality games, supergames, total games, transreality games, ubiquitous games, urban games, and so on’ (2009: xix–xx).

⁴ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/pervasive>, accessed on 6th February 2013.

putting together what is going to be experienced—is the main player activity (Eskelinen, 2001). The concepts of text and story also express the differences. The term ‘ergodic literature’ denotes a text that demands some effort to be ‘read’ (Aarseth, 1997). A computer game consists of a network of choices, in which each choice has a number of outcomes. Each choice will affect the particular story (outcome) to be experienced. A characteristic for interpretive practices (i.e. reading, viewing) is the need to read (more or less) the entire text. In (computer) games, you often don’t come across every possible combinatory event. Thus, the entire network of choices and outcomes is the text, but a player can never see (experience) the (entire) text. Consequently, games that are not settled, but open-ended, do not take the player’s activity and game contribution into consideration. However, in live action role-playing where collective story building is the main activity, the player’s agency and actions are emphasised and thus a crucial contribution to the game.

2.6 Convergence of Fiction and Facts

The previously rather stable notions of fiction and fact in media and cultural expressions seem to be continuously breaking up. Genres, the common agreement between consumers and producers, have since long helped consumers read/interpret the cultural product at hand telling them if the production was a fiction (i.e. a fabrication of events and people) or factual product (i.e. referring to the reality).

Expressing realism in media has grown in art, film and various mass media in recent decades and is reflected in new genres like talkshows, docusoaps and reality television (Sandbye, 2001). Today’s perception of reality is a kind of ‘performative realism’ (Knudsen & Thomsen, 2002) where reality and the authentic are staged, created and constructed. However, new genres like docudrama, docusoaps and dramadocs show that nuances have appeared. Realism in program trailers, listing information, titles of program and social gossip also influence. Television genres in motion, using authenticity tools and methods of television, obstruct the viewers’ interpretation of the show as being either factual or fiction. It may seem controversial and could be questioned ethically, but it becomes even more problematic when the audience is expected to engage, and interact, in the production.

3 Methodology and Approach

This chapter is based on the research I undertook of the *SOM* production during the phases of design, implementation and production of the interactive participatory parts. I here present my main results.⁵

⁵The reader who wants to dig deeper into my analysis will find it in Pretend it is real!: Convergence culture in practice (Denward, 2011).

I followed the production team for 9 months in 2007, joining the team when it was about to start the creation of the interactive participatory parts. An ethnographic approach would provide my research scope—to learn from the teams' own perspectives and within their own contexts (O'Reilly, 2005, 2009; Spradley, 1980). Everyday practice of observing and categorizing allows development of a consolidated, systematic study of structures, cultures, people and phenomena (de Certeau, 1984). I used a wide array of ethnographic methods applicable both online and in the physical world (Hine, 2000; O'Reilly, 2005, 2009). I conducted participant observation and interviews, and I spent long periods with the production teams, observing meetings, interviewing the designers and game masters recurrently. I collected a variety of other data such as (design) documents, sketches and pictures. I attended game events and met with, and observed, participants, both online in forums and chat rooms and in different physical locations. At the end I conducted in-depth participant interviews and a participant web survey. The broad scope implied the use of an iterative-inductive approach (O'Reilly, 2005) where I started early on to analyze data and turned back to search new data, while writing up.

4 Analysis: The Truth About Marika

The analysis is divided into three parts. The first sections deals with the background and early ideas of the production and the final outcome (4.1–4.3). Secondly follows the production process and the collaboration (4.4), and thirdly the reception in general (4.5). The chapter ends with a conclusion of the analysis.

4.1 Background and Ideas

At this time (2007), the company P was a small newly founded pervasive entertainment company consisting of a group of very engaged individuals, all members of the Nordic live action role-playing (larp) subculture. They were experienced in organizing larps and other entertainment productions built on participation.⁶ Their goal was to commercialize their knowledge and skills. P also had strong ideological political ideas: pervasive entertainment had powers that could transform individuals and society. SVT, on the other hand, is the oldest and largest national television broadcaster, responsible for the national production of public service television programming and broadcast activities. SVT had to deal with similar problems as other European public service broadcasters (Enli, 2008)—losing viewers due to 'competition, channel proliferation, digitalization, digital media and technology'. Their analyses showed that TV viewing had declined in favor of

⁶ See www.thecompany.se

computer gaming and social media offered on digital platforms. A design document expressed the agreed quantitatively goal:

- Viewers, who watch and possibly follow the drama series (600,000 persons)
- Engaged, who visit SVT.se and follow the debate (60,000 persons)
- Participants, who take on missions in the game and that may report (6000 persons)
- Co-creators, who propel and report back (600 persons)

However, qualitatively slightly different pictures surfaced. SVT wanted to reach new and younger audience groups, explore new production methods built on well-known ones. P's main qualitative goal was to create a reality game where reality outside the game started to intervene with the game⁷ and to create a transmedia narrative production layered with game components that fully invited to participation.

Moreover, the companies' inspiration also differed and imposed on the expectations on the future production. P's inspiration came from alternate reality games (ARG) and the Nordic style of role-playing games (larps) that use real-world history and events, and are played out in the physical—pervasive games. Both producers (game masters) and participants take part and influence the storyline development in these games tailored for around ten to a few hundreds of participants. The SVT team's inspiration emanated from an ARG that was combined with a television production.⁸ It was largely based on fictional content, a clue hunt that took part mostly online and where the game masters were hidden for the millions of participants that it was tailored for.

4.2 Production Overview

SOM can be defined as a game of progression—a strong story containing a series of sequentially presented challenges (Juil, 2003), and aimed to be performed only once. Meticulously the designers puzzled a lot of design elements together in order to craft a game full of rich engagement, entertainment, and problem solving opportunities. It was made up of a distributed narrative coupled with story fragments that the participants, through play, would piece together to form a collective story (Montola et al., 2009). In order to create a solid and unified story universe, the parts had to be spliced together and run simultaneously on different platforms. A substantial number of the story elements were scripted in advance, ready to be implemented in an on-the-fly production manner, if participants took the bait. *SOM* was designed to create an experience in which participants, stepwise, would uncover layers of truth to reveal a 'true story' behind a televised drama series

⁷ Interviews P producer, CEO and Creative Director, May 2007.

⁸ The ReGenesis ARG was produced by The Movie Network.

based on ‘real events’. It also contained a TV debate and several media/game activities. SVT was the responsible publisher and P was commissioned to design, implement and manage the (street) game parts.

SOM was a game-mastered game (Fine, 1983; Mackay, 2001), meaning that it was not entirely run by the players (it would require that they adhered to pre-written instructions), and neither was it controlled by an automatic game engine (as in a computer game). The production team monitored and steered the game and remained hidden from the participants. This way several team members could be given roles in the game (called *The True Story*). Pervasive games, that are not automated, are experienced as less predictable and feel more realistic (Jonsson & Waern, 2008) and can dynamically adapt to unexpected participants initiatives. These roles also allow for the on-the-fly addition of content during runtime (McGonigal, 2003) and sustain a responsive game world (Montola et al., 2009). Additionally, this allowed the organizers to fix bugs and other game technology. It also made the game extremely realistic. The game masters’ characters and names were closely based on the real people playing them and lay very close to what was actually going on outside the game. The P producer put it⁹:

The *True Story* was built on many facts from the real lives of the people playing characters in it, and during the game runtime their actions were both adapted for the story and the story adapted to explain their actions. Every piece of truth that somehow fitted the game narrative and was not too personal to be brought into *The True Story* was generally used in it, to strengthen the illusion that *The True Story* was real.

To be able to create a reality game with an indistinguishable borderline between fiction and facts, the production team went to great length to uphold the illusion. This conscious obfuscation and ambiguity continued throughout the production and was employed in all media channels. Many production parts were posing as fictional and factual at the same time.

4.2.1 Storylines

The communicated fiction was a TV drama (hereon called *The Drama*) that told a story about a woman, Marika, gone missing on her wedding night. Her husband Andreas and childhood friend Janna started to search for her. Janna had a theory of the disappearance as being part of a conspiracy. Trails pointed towards an underground organization into which she might have been pulled. The clues were uncovered bit by bit, and Marika was ultimately found. The drama had its own storyline and had some significant disparities from the ‘true’ background story as told in the game. According to the game activities, the woman had stopped looking for her disappeared friend after an encounter with a security company that threatened to kill her and had stolen her computer with all her research. The posters, that she still had the nerve to put up, were later found by SVT who planned to create a TV series about missing people. After finding out about SVT’s plans the woman

⁹ Nordgren, A. (unpublished work) Tools for Runtime Game Mastering of Large-Scale Pervasive Games. Stories and Lessons from *The Truth of Marika*.

started touring Sweden, communicating that the upcoming TV series was based on her true story, and that her friend had really disappeared. People signed up on the website *conspirare.se* to take part in the search. SVT publicly announced they would search too, and create a debate program to explore the issue, as an answer to the allegations that they were exploiting a personal tragedy. The story continued with the woman getting in contact with the secret organization and a week before the TV series started, the forum members uncovered the secret society's website. Both story layers were fictional, although *The True Story* (the game activities) had elements of facts woven into the narrative.

4.3 Production Parts

In this section the most important parts are described. Table 1 showing the main production parts with their function, content form and media use can be found at the end of the section. Table 2 deals with the types of activities and engagement levels that were offered to participants.

The TV drama series was called *Sanningen om Marika*.¹⁰ Its function was to tell the backstory and to work as the (main) game entrance. One of the many planted game entrances and clues could be found via the URL *conspirare.se* appearing in the first episode. The theme of an upcoming episode was followed up in the game

Table 1 Main production parts

Component	Function	Media used	Production form	Content
Drama series	Backstory Game entrance	Broadcast Streaming	Pre recorded	Five TV programs
Conspirare.se	Hub of game activities	Internet	Continuously edited, real time and asynchronous monitoring	Blog Forum Chat
Debate series	Splicing game and drama Game input	Broadcast Streaming	Pre recorded	Five TV programs
Svt.se/ marika	Production website	Internet	Partly edited through production, asynchronous monitoring	Production facts Eva's video blog Editor's 'chat' SVT inbox
Ordo Serpentis	Street game	Physical world Internet	Game-mastered real time and asynchronously	Street game Game report system on web

¹⁰ It was aired on five consecutive Sundays evenings on channel SVT2, starting end of October 2007. Each 45-min-long sequence was followed by a 15-min debate show.

Table 2 Participant activities and engagement

Component	Activity	Engagement level
Drama series	TV viewing	Low
Conspirare.se	Reading, following story development, communicating, collaborating, playing, socializing, chatting	Medium-High
Debate series	TV viewing	Low
Svt.se/marika	Reading, following story development, communicating	Low-Medium
Ordo Serpentis	Physical world/embodied game activities	High

activities. It was also meant to work as a standalone TV drama production. According to the trailer, the drama was based on the fact that 6000 Swedes disappear annually. This contextualization was confirming its factional status. The formal aspects, such as genre features or the marketing, contradicted this set up.

The website *Conspirare* (www.conspirare.se) worked as the hub of the game activities and as a communication platform. The site looked like a contemporary community website comprising a forum, a chat, and a text and video blog. Apart from freely accessing the front page with its recent blog entries, the participants had to register to get access to all forum posts, to contribute with material and participate in the chat. The motives behind crafting a forum were to enable steering the game and monitoring all contributions. It also made the game world dynamic and responsive, and as such more authentic. The updates were almost daily during the intense game runtime. The chat offered live communication and as such carried a significant social and practical function. This way P could control the players in the street game, instead of letting the players themselves take command, as is common in ARG (Martin, Thomson, & Hatfield, 2006). Participants (and game masters) socialized, discussed clues, and planned real-world actions to be performed. All communication on *Conspirare* took place in character with no chance to meta-discuss, something that had a significant implication of the fact-fiction blur. The organizers worked hard to moderate and control it real-time, to uphold the reality illusion, which did not always work. Partly this was due to television viewers going online wanting to know what it was all about asking meta-questions. Closing the chat for outside participants and only giving *Conspirare* members log in access solved it. On occasions members were banned from the chat discussions.

The svt.se/marika web was fairly static and offered only limited asynchronous interaction. This was due to a decision that put P in command of the interactive parts since they were the game experts. However, the website held some importance with features like a video blog, a ‘chat’, an archive, an application for uploading user-generated material and a picture quiz tool. On the site the television drama, debate, and actors were promoted. Eva’s video blog handled the SVT investigation of the game events. It complemented the one on *Conspirare*. The online tool, SVT

inboxen (Eng. The SVT inbox), enabled the submission of video snippets, photos and sound tracks that were then compiled in the archive. Participants could phone or email the editorial office and also register to get SMS or email notifications when a drama episode was due to start. Another offer was to ‘chat’ with the editorial staff in ‘Redaktionschatten’ (Eng. Editorial chat). This was in turn moderated, rendering the communication with participants selective and asynchronous. A picture quiz would offer television viewers a lightweight form of involvement, as an option to the more demanding streetgame’s physical play and the online oriented *Conspirare* engagement. However, in reality the active participants were the ones that solved the riddles. The last feature was the then recently implemented online service, SVT Play, offering on-demand streaming of the TV series.

Several different marketing activities were conducted, from viral marketing to more or less conventional strategies. The main intention was to try to create media buzz to kick off the game with a snowball effect. Due to different reasons several of the efforts failed—there was no media buzz—an issue that was on the team’s table during the entire production.

In the current affairs debate program, following the drama, a serious editorial staff, led by a credible host examined the truth-value of the drama’s claims about the missing people. The original idea to connect the drama and game activities through audience interaction in the debate program was thoroughly changed, and created tensions, challenges and negotiation between the two teams. The SVT director used his artistic creativity and individual influence and decision on the form of the program, to craft a ‘quality’ product according to common broadcast production demands (Küng-Shankleman, 2000). The result was a novel product, merging a fiction story into a factual programming format, however it was without the planned (live) viewer interaction.

The game activities were a group of more or less game-structured experiences: the street game *Ordo Serpentis*, the picture game *Spektaklet*, the *Entropia* Universe parts, and all the pre-game activities that promoted it. These activities started months ahead of the airing of the drama. The early on small, but engaged, participant group grew slowly with the initial viral marketing activities. The more intense parts ran in parallel with the TV drama, and directly influenced the content of the debate. The game ended simultaneously as the TV series. The game involved the participants in a dramatic story with experiences such as treasure hunts, meet-ups with other participants, being chased by an evil guard company, and receiving strange missions from a mysterious secret society. The tasks were to gather information on the disappeared woman. Traces were spread on all platforms. Participants uploaded documentation of completed missions (video and photos) to *Flickr*, *YouTube* or to *Conspirare* and svt.se/marika. The producers then selected and reused the material. Participants accepting obfuscations between facts and fiction were offered immersive play in the ordinary, with real/physical people in real/physical locations.

4.4 The Collaboration and the Production Process

4.4.1 Division of Labor and Daily Work

Early plans roughly formulated the work division, utilizing each company's particular specialty and skills. But this changed. SVT produced the drama series, studio debates, trailers and other marketing activities and the svt.se/marika webpage. A web editorial team worked with and implemented SVT's interactive components and carried out some game mastering. P, subcontracted to design and produce the game parts, staged the real life installations, crafted the online puzzles and produced props, sounds, choreography and subliminal images for the key scenes of the drama series as well as edited the scripts for the series and the debate. They developed the technology platform¹¹ that enabled participation on all available media—websites, forum, chat, mobile application, game—and the orchestration of the larp parts.¹² Two groups of seasoned live action role-players, situated in Stockholm and Gothenburg, volunteered to plant clues and props.

The key team members cooperated primarily through weekly phone meetings and a project web portal, due to their geographical distance (400 km). Apart from differing in their physical environment, size and history, their societal, institutional and organizational contexts also differed. This was acknowledged and there was a strong motivation to understand each other's cultures and languages.¹³ The features of non-profit production culture were strong at P (Svahn, Kullgard et al., 2006), as was the culture of a games developer; a democratic and anti-bureaucratic way of doing things, with expectations to work long hours and with gross engagement (Kline et al., 2003). This clashed with SVT's hierarchical and bureaucratic broadcasting production culture coupled with the involvement of many departments and regulated working hours. Some of the reasons why the teams managed collaboration probably lay in their akin personal engagement and the similarity in the dynamic and informal nature of their project-based employment.

4.4.2 Opposing Cultures of Production

Television programming and role-playing games diverge highly in their practical and technical production processes. A broadcaster operates in terms of a one-way communication process and creates a show to be transmitted to an audience (Lowe & Bardoel, 2008). The (mass) audience is commonly given limited influence and interaction. Viewer ratings measure success. A director uses a written manuscript containing a set narrative and plot, to implement the show with employed actors. The result is a controlled, one-directional and easily broadcast product. So, at SVT, the production followed ordinary broadcast production processes, divided into parts

¹¹ This was carried out with two research institutes, the Swedish Institute of Computer Science and The Interactive Institute.

¹² This game mastering tool, called Games Creator, was part of the mentioned IPERG research project.

¹³ This was expressed in several interviews by different team members.

and teams depending on the type of content. But the features were also controversial and unique¹⁴ like when high-level managers took part in the spontaneous decision-making that was usually carried out at lower levels,¹⁵ and that different departments worked tightly together.

P had a different work process. The team worked satisfactorily in iterations, using a moderated software development method, to conduct the design and implementation process of the game. However, during ‘crunchtime’ game features were cut out to manage implementing the most crucial ones. The team had weekly, and during runtime daily, follow-up planning meetings. The design document was viewed as a dynamic piece, and numerous iterations and game test performed gradually. They knew that success demanded a flexible design with open-ended game elements and open-minded game masters and aimed for a planned but open-ended, interactive and multi-directional experience, played out online and in the physical. In role-playing productions all participants are players and viewed as co-creators. Participants and game masters hold equal positions (Montola, 2005) and are expected to contribute to each other’s experiences. This form of multi-directional production process, like other types of interactive narratives (Rilstone, 2000), or ergodic literature (Aarseth, 1997), represents a blur of the common distinction between producer and consumer.

By applying a multi-platform approach SVT aimed at audience interaction. It was a clear goal, pushed internally. It enabled SVT to maintain full control, as the ‘user generated’ material could be selected, edited and broadcast back. P, in turn, aimed to foster (their type of) participatory culture. The differences in attitudes and approaches were observed in the wordings in blogs, the choice of pictures and photos, and the selection of communication tools such as in the chatting tools and the usage of *Flickr*, *YouTube* and *Google Maps* (at *Conspire*).

4.4.3 Impacts

In some ways one can argue that the novel production with its planned convergence succeeded. In other perspectives, the two different organizations with their differing organizational cultures, cultures of production, and medium specific logics were not easily overcome. Tensions and impacts appeared both in the final production and as collaborative tensions, both internally at SVT and between the teams. Within SVT the production pulled organizational changes like on how to deal with economical and production organizational who-is-doing-what questions (i.e. marketing, promotion snippets, replay decisions). The impacts could also be read in how the teams chose to design specific features. The *svt.se/marika* content largely consisted of the TV medium’s specific one-way directed communication, relying to a lesser extent on features of asynchronous interaction. At *Conspire*, on the other hand, the games responsiveness was crucial for success, and thus much effort put into it.

¹⁴ Several SVT team workers confirmed this during interviews.

¹⁵ Interviews with SVT management.

This resulted in low activity on the SVT parts. The forum at *conspirare.se*, on the other hand, grew quickly containing vivid discussions and a stream of participant material. An argument in favor of the interaction at *svt.se* was that the modes were supposed to demand less engagement to be consumed (i.e. tiered participation). Other likely explanations were that the SVT inbox application was a prototype and technologically deficient. SVT policies also imposed. For example, the SVT workers had regulated working hours, but P workers accepted more hours of workload. Extensive working hours during larp productions is a well-known fact.¹⁶ All in all, the SVT management had to deal with several virgin areas like the external moderation coupled with the rather controversial themes and content of *SOM*. Other issues were the subcontract with the content producer P, that implemented and managed (SVT) production parts during transmission, as well as the implicit game nature and the production's blur of facts and fiction.

4.5 The Reception

For a transmedia production, like *SOM*, the interest from the mainstream audiences is important as it determines the business model's bottom line, affecting the engagement from the most ardent fans (Davis, 2012). Thus, the number of viewers affects the number of highly engaged participants. According to SVT statistics the *SOM* TV drama had 350,000 viewers week one, a number that decreased to 210,000 the second week and decreased even more the following weeks.¹⁷ In total 92,000 people watched the streamed *SOM* material¹⁸ (drama, debate and Eva's video blogs), with a weekly rate around 8400 people. According to P's statistics *conspirare.se* had around 47,000 unique visitors.¹⁹ The forum got 490 registered members and almost 5800 unique visitors. The *Conspirare* chat had 100,000 posts. The *Ordo Serpentis* game got 751 registered members. This can be compared with the statistics of *ReGenesis*.²⁰ A fair assumption is that the 385 survey respondents were among the active participants. Most of them had followed the production for at least 1 or 2 weeks and the most popular activities were to watch the drama and debate and/or browse the websites (70 % active at *Conspirare* at least once a week). Research show that only a small minority of viewers are likely to fully engage as

¹⁶ Interviews with P workers.

¹⁷ This could be compared with the common reach of 600,000 viewers for similar SVT drama productions. Interview with SVT production manager, December 2007.

¹⁸ SVT did not carry our regular measuring until January 2009, then viewed as a stable activity. To compare, in 2011 a viewing rate of 10 % was considered high. Interview M Sterner, SVT Analyst, 6th February 2011.

¹⁹ The average time on site was around 5 min where 31 % visited 3 pages or more, and less than 3 % visited 15 pages or more. Sandberg, C (unpublished work) Truly a lot of lies.

²⁰ Dena (2009: 241) describes how 10 % of the audience of the TV drama visited the website and 10 % of these visitors signed up for accompanying game, and that 10 % of these players became hardcore players.

fans (Evans, 2011) and as highly engaged collaborate, moderate discussions, and lead development (Davis, 2012). According to the survey, it is also likely that the production attracted a fairly gender-balanced audience and had a geographical reach nation wise. Collaboration seemed more popular than competition, which is typical for ARG (Martin et al., 2006). Larpers were overrepresented among the respondents, probably a result of P's promotion in their own larper network.

The survey shows that all parts had to be read, or participated in, in order to grasp the (entire) production. *Conspirare* and the TV programs were considered core parts, although the *svt.se/marika* site did not spur the same engagement. Even if tiers of engagement cannot be traced in the data the participants' interpretational stances may say a bit more. The majority were TV viewers perceiving *SOM* as a conventional TV drama. Another group seemed to investigate further online, concluding it was a game, and showing up at public events. The third group, the players of the game, consisted partly of people understanding they were playing a game. The other part seemed to shift from being unaware to becoming aware of the gameness. There is reason, however, to believe that some still kept the belief that they were taking part in a proper search for a missing person. The survey also shows that the street game (i.e. *OS*) did not work as expected. Possible explanations are that the debate was not linked to the game as intended, the content too occult and that the missions were perceived as scary, making even the seasoned gamers hesitate. Also, the difficult game design task, to get people to rise from their TV sofas to engage in real-world enacted/corporeally mission, did not succeed. One week was probably also a too short timeframe to manage to gather the player groups, find time to perform and report missions. The elaborate narrative and complexity of the production apparently posed challenges to the audience, which is often the case (Davis, 2012) and casual viewers may lose interest if the production is too complex for casual consumption (Dena, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Leiter, 2011).

5 Conclusion and Viewpoints on Convergence

This book chapter presents an in-depth analysis of a transmedia storytelling production *Sanningen om Marika* (Eng. The Truth About Marika). As such, transmedia production strategies are today common among television and film industries as a means to promote their narrative content and attracting larger audiences. However, a number of 'pure' transmedia productions have shown difficulties to create the aimed for synergy between different types of media (Bourdaa, 2011). The legal and economic vagueness has also been difficult to deal with. *Sanningen om Marika* was no exception.

The producers, Swedish Television (SVT) and the games company, The company P (P), jointly created what they called a 'participation drama' The aim from start was to build on one central story that extended narratively over several media (pure transmedia), including pervasive games activities such as alternate reality gaming and live action role-playing, Nordic style. Multiple processes, or types of

convergences took place on various levels and places in the two companies' collaboration process. The ambition, to consciously form a hybrid media production offering novel forms of audience interaction thus merging their expertise in broadcasting and games development, would show to be a difficult task.

As an example of industrial convergence, it was novel and unusual for Swedish circumstances. Collaboration was problematic, where cultures of production and features such as size, history, corporate culture, ideology and sub-cultures imposed. The process of product merging created tensions although the companies acknowledged their differing cultures of production. Less easy to merge was the different views of what quality was and how to achieve it. Both were driven by their own media industrial logics followed by different viewpoints on what and how to produce, and for whom. Being a bureaucratic company and with complex government mandates, the collaboration gave rise to internal tensions and communication issues at SVT, and forced a more pragmatic decision-making. Later a new improved organization was launched. Inter-organizational cultures that cut across the corporate culture at SVT also existed, creating tensions between the more bureaucratic corporate culture, and the small project-based team's culture. The different corporate culture at P featured a similar culture to other game developers with their rebellious anti-authoritarian attitude of operating. At P the collaborative authorship and a common political and ideological mission made them solve internal conflicts differently than at SVT.

The merging of the two different types of storytelling in the design of audience participation is an example of the mentioned synergy difficulties for pure transmedia products. The two media's specific features and elements and the quality demands coupled with their interaction models opposed, as described above. The TV audience activity is mainly interpretation, with a low ambiguity factor. This makes it opposite to a (digital) game, which is an ergodic text (i.e. interactive) and an effort is demanded to experience it. The user has to configure game elements to create a game experience, watching is not enough. These different demands could not be merged fully as planned in the design of audience interaction in some of the production parts, and thus partly failed.

Other 'convergences' appearing were the reality-fiction content blur and the reality-games blur. Elaborate transmedia storyworlds, like *Sanningen om Marika*, must be designed to appeal to, and be accessible to, casual media consumers in addition to more highly engaged audiences (Davis, 2012). In many respects this was not the case. The story world was very multifaceted and complex, and as if this was not enough, two opposing pervasive games design elements were added. Even if alternate reality games blur reality and fiction, an online space allowing for meta-discussions about the game is often added to support the notion that you are actually playing a game. However, the Nordic style live role-playing did not allow for such a space, and thus not set up. A consumer non-familiar with these types of games could not detect the gameness. And casual consumers lost interest early on due to these complexities and thus the lack to casually follow the production. Furthermore, the producer-consumer agreement of TV genres implicates that SVT should have been clear about the fictional nature of it, but this was not the case. The producers'

unclear communication divided the consumers. Some probably chose not to participate, because they did not grasp the blur and for others (the aware/hardcore players) this feature disturbed their participation through the (unaware) participants trying to unveil that it was all set up, and not (a) real (hunt). The producers solved it by controlling participation and interaction in various ways, strategies content owners may use to control audience expression to prevent behavior that would damage the brand (Scott, 1996).

The motive to craft audience participation/participatory culture also parted the collaborators, an institutional strategy versus a potential for activism. Their attitude to the audience was similar though. As many individuals as possible were to be as active as possible, believing that participation is a basic consumer characteristic (Carpentier, 2009). Generally P, as interaction specialists, criticized conventional media for not being participatory, arguing that live action role-playing empower the individuals and promote personal development. Still P wanted to keep the audience under control to fulfill their aims, see previous paragraph. This was obvious in the *Conspirare* chat. Overall, participants had no chance to question the frames of the production. The many qualitative web survey comments can be interpreted as if there was a wish, and need, to question it.

Finally, transmedia storytelling products as a result of media convergence are still an experimental phenomenon. The use and ownership-taking of new technologies in production practices have enabled the phenomenon to develop, as has the high level of competition in the audiovisual sector and the variety of consumer and fan practices. The book chapter has highlighted one product example showing that the process of consciously striving for/towards convergence in crafting pure transmedia is complex and not an easy task. Producers have to take into consideration the continuously changing consumer behaviors and new modes, kinds, degrees and dynamics of audience engagement. How to effectively accommodate business logic with audience logic and aesthetic logic in a variety of offerings is a central transmedia design challenge (Davis, 2012). Developing audience information systems using multiple sources of data and deep analytical capabilities would be an important instrument in enabling the measurement of the effectiveness of transmedia products, campaigns and integrated market campaigns as well as to provide greater insights into the value to the firm of the individual audience member [Breur (2011), Gunzerath (2012), and Napoli (2011) in Davis (2012)].

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