

LEGO Dimensions meets Doctor Who: Transbranding and New Dimensions of Transmedia Storytelling?

*LEGO Dimensions conoce a Doctor Who: Transmarca
y Nuevas Dimensiones de la Narrativa Transmedia?*

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Abstract

This article explores how the ‘toys-to-life’ videogame LEGO Dimensions (Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment/Traveller’s Tales/The LEGO Group, 2015) mashes up many different franchise storyworlds and brands. Specifically, I focus on how Doctor Who (BBC, 1963—), the British TV science fiction series, is licensed and transmedially engaged with in Dimensions. I consider how the transbranding of LEGO Dimensions appears to co-opt children’s “transgressive play” (Nørgård and Toft-Nielsen, 2014) by combining intellectual properties, but actually continues to operate according to logics of shared corporate ownership where many of the combined storyworlds are ultimately owned by Time Warner (placing Dimensions in competition with Disney’s own ‘toys-to-life’ game). Considering what value might accrue to the brand of Doctor Who by participating in LEGO Dimensions, I identify this as a particular example of “What If?” transmedia (Mittell, 2015), arguing that LEGO Dimensions’ Doctor Who nevertheless fluctuates in terms of its brand (in)authenticity. The Starter Pack remains closer to LEGO Games’/Traveller’s Tales’ established format, subordinating Who, whilst the separate Level Pack engages more precisely with Doctor Who’s history, albeit still displaying some notable divergences from the TV series (Booth, 2015). Although LEGO Dimensions challenges influential theories of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2006; Aldred, 2014), its transbranding and child/adult targeting accord with established approaches to transmedia licensing (Santo 2015) and fan-consumer socialization (Kinder 1991).

Key Words

LEGO games - Doctor Who - Transmedia - Transbranding - Storyworlds - Fandom

Resumen

Este artículo explora la forma en que el videojuego que anima los tradicionales juguetes LEGO, LEGO Dimensions (Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment/Traveller’s Tale/The LEGO Group, 2015) mezcla distintos mundos de ficción y marcas de franquicia. Me centro particularmente en cómo Doctor Who (BBC, 1936—), la serie británica de ciencia ficción, consigue intervenir transmedialmente en el propio Dimensions. Presto atención al modo en que mediante la combinación de distintas propiedades intelectuales, el carácter transmarca de LEGO Dimensions parece apropiarse de cierta

“dimensión transgresora del juego” infantil (Nørgård y Toft-Nielsen, 2014), aunque en realidad continúa funcionando desde una lógica de propiedad corporativa compartida en la que muchos de los mundos de ficción combinados son en esencia propiedad de Time Warner (colocando el Dimensions en relación de competitividad con los videojuegos de juguetes animados propiedad de Disney). En cuanto al valor que la marca Doctor Who puede adquirir con su intervención en LEGO Dimesions, lo identifico como un ejemplo particular de un “¿Qué pasaría si...?” transmedial (Mittell, 2015), arguyendo que en todo caso el Doctor Who de LEGO Dimensions fluctúa en términos de la (no)autenticidad de su marca. Mientras el tratamiento de Who en el Pack de Inicio es bastante fiel al formato establecido en los juegos de LEGO/Traveller’s Tales, en el Pack de Nivel, vendido a parte, se integra de forma más precisa la historia de Doctor Who, si bien aquí manifiesta destacables diferencias con la serie de televisión (Booth, 2015). Aunque LEGO Dimensions desafía teorías dominantes sobre narrativa transmedia (Jenkins, 2006; Aldred, 2014), su carácter transmarca y su público potencial infantil/adulto coinciden con los propuestos por las aproximaciones establecidas sobre la concesión transmedia (Santo, 2015) y sobre la socialización del consumidor-fan (Kinder, 1991).

Palabras Clave

LEGO games - Doctor Who - Transmedia - Transmarca - Mundo de ficción - Fandom

1. Introduction

Transmedia storytelling has often been seen as creating a coherent and consistent storyworld across different media platforms. Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca (2014, p.297) suggest that transmedial worlds should display “three dimensions” of authenticity: extending the “mythos” (establishing story), “topos” (setting in space and time) and “ethos” (characters’ moral codes) of a narrative universe, or what I’ve termed a “hyperdiegesis” (Hills, 2002, p.137). And when developing the concept of transmedia storytelling, Henry Jenkins stressed how

More and more, storytelling has become the art of world building, as artists create compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium. The world is bigger than the film

[or TV series], bigger even than the franchise – since fan speculations and elaborations also expand the world in a variety of directions... World-making follows its own market logic... in the business of creating licensed goods (Jenkins, 2006, pp.114–5).

But what happens to this account of world-building when storyworlds from multiple franchises are brought together? I will focus on the ‘toys-to-life’ game *LEGO Dimensions* (Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment/Traveller’s Tales/The LEGO Group, 2015), where physical LEGO minifigures such as the Doctor, along with the TARDIS – the Doctor’s time-travelling vehicle that outwardly resembles a 1960s UK Police Box – can be built materially and then spawned in digital gameplay. *LEGO Dimensions* – much like Disney’s *Infinity 3.0* – thus combines haptic and digital gaming as well as mashing-up assorted media brands. Of course, LEGO has a longer history of “co-branding” with different media licenses; *Star Wars LEGO* has attracted its own fanbase (Geraghty, 2014, p.164). But *LEGO Dimensions* is less about the blending of LEGO with one property, and more about the “multifannishness” (Stein, 2015, p.171) of transbranding, as multiple intellectual properties (IPs) are drawn together, all of them mediated through LEGO as a unifying dimension. There is not a singular storyworld being expanded through toys and games here; instead multiple worlds (*The Simpsons*, *Scooby Doo*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Batman*, *The LEGO Movie*, *Back to the Future*, *The Lord of the Rings* etc) playfully intersect, raising questions over whether, and how, the “authenticity” of storyworlds can be conserved (Harvey, 2015, pp.3–4). As Jessica Aldred has argued: “rather than expanding the franchise storyworld established in the films they are based on, according to the logic of Henry Jenkins’ influential theory..., LEGO games tend to revel in the repetition and even parody of their source material’s most famous scenes” (2014, p.107). If LEGO games already have a distinctive relationship to transmedia storytelling – premised on the transformative retelling of key moments – then I will consider how this is enacted in a transbranding environment.

Given that *LEGO Dimensions* mashes up so many franchises, extensive study could be undertaken of the ramifications for each one. Partly due to limitations of space, but also due to my own established research interests (Hills, 2015) as well

as an emergent body of work on *Doctor Who* games (both physical and digital: see Evans, 2013; Perryman, 2014; Booth, 2015), my focus will be on how *Doctor Who* is remediated in *LEGO Dimensions*. Originally a BBC TV programme which began in 1963 and was reinvented by BBC Wales in 2005, *Doctor Who* features a time-travelling ‘Time Lord’ who can ‘regenerate’ his body, and who can therefore be played by different actors. Thirteen actors have portrayed this main role on television to date, with Peter Capaldi being the current incumbent. Featured in this LEGO game via specially recorded voice acting, Capaldi plays the twelfth Doctor (John Hurt having played the ‘War Doctor’ in the 50th anniversary special, ‘The Day of the Doctor’).

I will begin by considering how the ‘Whoniverse’ is combined with other storyworlds in the *LEGO Dimensions* Starter Pack, before moving on to address how the add-on Level Pack reworks *Doctor Who* in a series of ways, some of which can be read as ‘authentic’ to the expansive transmedial world of the show (Wolf, 2012, p.135), and some of which seem distinctly inauthentic, even within the remit of LEGO’s transformative playfulness. First, though, how is *Doctor Who* integrated into the multiple franchises and “world-sharing” (Derek Johnson, 2013, p.109) of *LEGO Dimensions*?

2. Transbranding: Storyworlds as Building Blocks

With its hashtag #breaktherules, *Dimensions* promises to go beyond the corporate norms of co-branding, bringing many franchises into creative dialogue. Established storyworlds are not a mythos to be elaborated upon so much as the raw material that can be bolted together; storyworlds seemingly become objects to be manipulated rather than hyperdiegetic spaces to be expanded, each assigned a level in the Starter Pack.

In an excellent study of how “*LEGO* at its very core is characterized by playful seriality and movements across materials, media, and modalities—oscillating, centrally, between tangible bricks, digital bits, and blockbuster worlds” (2014, p.173), Rikke Toft Nørgård and Claus Toft-Nielsen identify three different modalities of play practices with LEGO: transmitted, transformational and

transgressive play. Where the first closely replays narrative information from a franchise, such as building an official *Star Wars LEGO* set (Wolf, 2014), transformational play seeks to elaborate on canonical franchise elements, emulating but also reimagining them via a LEGO version, typically referred to as a “MOC” or “My Own Creation” (Garlen, 2014, p.123). By contrast, transgressive play refuses to respect the logics and identities of media brands, e.g. a LEGO player placing a Gandalf minifigure on a Death Star set. This kind of play diverges from transmission and transformation by combining separate storyworlds in personalized imaginative activity. However,

even though a participant may initially have put Gandalf on the Death Star as a playfully transgressive act against the intended purpose of the franchise’s designed universe, that participant may well subsequently find that this act of transgression is appropriated by the franchise and incorporated into its product line. This might in fact explain the logic behind *The LEGO Movie* (2014), where worlds and franchises blend together in a way that makes previously segregated bricks, bits, and blockbuster universes disintegrate and melt into each other (Nørgård and Toft-Nielsen, 2014, pp.193—4).

Transgressive play can seemingly be co-opted, and *LEGO Dimensions* appears to be a perfect example of this. However, official transbranding is both enabled and constrained, unlike the example of a child’s transgressive play (Giddings, 2014, pp.26—7). As Avi Santo points out,

Licensing agreements are particularly pertinent in shaping stories that attempt to bring together properties from different owners. There are countless anecdotes of children combining discrete toy brands into shared story worlds through play... While the melding of discrete universes holds tremendous appeal for fan communities, such combining of separate IPs can pose challenges... to property owners (2015, p.210).

The key challenge lies in the fact that official transbranding is subject to licensing agreements: “After all, licensing contracts specify who gets to (legally) tell what kinds of stories involving preexisting characters or brands, under what

conditions, and in what forms. Licensing agreements precede the production of many texts and delineate production terms” (Santo, 2015, p.209). Transgressive play is free to mash-up characters, brands and story-worlds in any way that can be imagined: using story-worlds as the IP building blocks for a new product means that legally binding contracts will permit or deny potential fusions. Despite the fact that LEGO and Star Wars have enjoyed a highly fruitful co-branding relationship in the past – indeed, Star Wars characters make cameo appearances in *The LEGO Movie* – no Star Wars figures appear in *Dimensions*. Equally, no Marvel characters appear. Both Marvel and Star Wars are owned by Disney, of course, who is currently deploying them in its own *Infinity 3.0* ‘toys-to-life’ game. Thus, regardless of fans’ interest in seeing *The Avengers* or *Star Wars* storyworlds intersect with those of *Doctor Who*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Back to the Future*, no such transworld travel is permitted.

Co-opting transgressive play, such crossover IP mashup remains entirely restricted by corporate ownership, making *Dimensions* the Time Warner competitor game to Disney’s in-house transbranding. And official transbrand combinations are constrained and enabled in other ways. Avi Santo notes that when the film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* was negotiated among assorted cartoon character rights-holders, “Warner’s agreement with Disney stipulated that Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck be given equal screen time with their cartoon rivals Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck” (2015, p.210—11). When brands and their storyworlds are combined then the relative status or standing of each IP evidently becomes an issue. Having said that, *Doctor Who* is relatively subordinated within the crossover of *Dimensions*: although there is a *Doctor Who* level within the Starter Pack, the initial characters that one can play as are Wyldstyle, Gandalf and Batman. This has the effect of representing a character who first appeared in *The LEGO Movie* only a year ago, as a proprietorial LEGO creation, on the same gameplay and narrative level as popular cultural icons like SZC’s Gandalf and DC’s Batman. However, Batman is given precedence – suggesting a contractual matter – on the Starter Pack and game covers, while the Starter Pack features a Batmobile as well as a Batman minifigure. Batman’s prominence, and the composition of the Starter Pack player-characters, are unsurprising when one considers that Time Warner own New Line Cinema, and thus have a prior IP investment in *The Lord of the Rings/The Hobbit*, as well as

owning DC characters such as Batman, backing *The LEGO Movie*, and even purchasing Traveller's Tales. What appears to be a random, wonderful mash-up of different storyworlds is largely facilitated by Time Warner's financial investment in these multiple branded universes. Different hyperdiegetic realms can become the building blocks for transworld travel here in part because so many of them have a shared IP ownership, just as Disney's *Infinity 3.0* is able to combine Pixar, Marvel and Star Wars properties. Even the inclusion of *The Wizard of Oz* in Level 1 of the *Dimensions* Starter Pack primarily makes sense in terms of Time Warner's ownership of Turner Entertainment and hence this film's IP, as one could hardly argue that *The Wizard of Oz* is a narrative universe with the contemporary media presence and appeal of *The Lord of the Rings*, or even *The LEGO Movie*. Bringing it into the game permits a refreshing of the property, however, allowing it to live alongside characters that children may be more affectively engaged with.

BBC Worldwide, of course, remains outside the Time Warner stable. And when Batman, Gandalf and Wyldstyle explore a *Doctor Who*-themed level, it feels somewhat as if the Doctor has become involved in a Batman story, rather than there being an equality of IP elements. Indeed, since the Doctor is not a player-character – appearing only in cut-scenes – Batman is allocated the Doctor's narrative role at key moments. Confronting the Weeping Angels, it is Batman and not the Doctor who warns the others, "Don't blink". The *Doctor Who* level then contorts itself in order to maintain the narrative pre-eminence of the Doctor, ending with a cut-scene in which the Time Lord returns and saves all the player-characters despite his avatar having taken no agentive part in the actual game. The brand values of *Doctor Who* are hence conserved, but only by cut-scenes acting in tension with the gameplay itself. I'm not suggesting that there is an essential tension between ludology and narratology, but rather that there is a specific tension here between the authority and power of the Doctor (displayed in opening and closing cut-scenes) and the gameplay which involves Gandalf, Wyldstyle and Batman defeating assorted monsters. And since none of these player-characters belong in the 'Whoniverse' then playing the *Who*-themed level as a fan involves a high degree of dramatic irony: although Batman has no awareness of what a Cyberman, a Weeping Angel or even a Dalek might be, these elements of the game (and others, such as the 'Bad Wolf' graffiti included on backdrops) have a thrilling familiarity for fan players.

Given this apparent game world subordination of *Doctor Who*, why might BBC Worldwide – the BBC’s commercial arm – have agreed to license the series? I would argue that *LEGO Dimensions* works in much the same way for *Doctor Who* as it does for Wyldstyle as a LEGO property; similarly, *Who* takes on a kind of ‘halo effect’ whereby the Doctor is paradigmatically aligned with major Hollywood blockbusters: “shows like *Doctor Who* gain more status, being compared to and billed with colossal Hollywood franchises... Thus, in the process, *Doctor Who* becomes a recognizable international brand” (Geraghty, 2014, p.111). Therefore, although the Doctor is not fully equated with the likes of Gandalf and Batman, he is placed in the same class of entities by virtue of the BBC’s licensing agreement.

The Starter Pack also displays other hierarchies, such as one relating to the *Doctor Who* monsters that have to be defeated. It may come as little surprise that the Daleks form the apex of monstrosity. Specifically, the Dalek Emperor from the BBC Wales’ series one finale (2005) acts as the level boss, although Weeping Angels are also integrated effectively into the game through a feature where the entire screen temporarily blacks out, suggesting that these “definitive monsters of moving pictures ...ontologically defined by the medium of film or television, by the interplay of individual shots” can work just as effectively in both gameplay and cut-scenes (Charles, 2011, p.13). What the level lacks, however, is any sense of a Time Lord enemy pitted against the Doctor. The TV series has periodically returned to this narrative problematic. At the end of David Tennant’s and Matt Smith’s tenures then the Doctor’s home world of Gallifrey was featured on TV, as well as appearing in the 50th anniversary special in 2013 and at the conclusion of series nine, running on UK television when *LEGO Dimensions* was released. Although *Dimensions* reflects the popularity of the Daleks, it nevertheless avoids the narrative intensity of Gallifreyan involvement, something that is seemingly reserved for ‘event’ TV within the ‘primary text’. Instead, the Starter Pack partially replays a confrontation from *Doctor Who*’s history, reminding fans of the final Christopher Eccleston adventure (2005).

As Peter Capaldi’s involvement at this stage is restricted to voice work for cut-scenes then much of *Doctor Who*’s branded presence hinges on the minifigure representation of the twelfth Doctor (Johnson, 2014, p.2; Lauwaert, 2009, p.56).

Jessica Aldred has pointed out how LEGO games centre on “minifigure... versions of famous... characters, their cross-media resemblance boiled down to a series of their most iconic, recognizable traits... [as] a source of broad humor” (2014, p.107). The current Doctor is represented via a LEGO helmet of white-grey hair, but such is the necessary stylization of Capaldi’s appearance that “the drive towards ‘seamless’ technological convergence between film and games supposedly enabled by digitization” is defused and redirected (Aldred 2014, p.109). *LEGO Dimensions* does not merely fit into the array of media franchises that it draws on. Speaking at the opening day of the *Doctor Who* Festival at the ExCeL London (13th—15th November 2015), TT Games’ producer Mark Warburton noted of *Dimensions’* relationship to *Doctor Who*: “don’t ask me how it fits into continuity; ...that’s irrelevant – it’s *fun*” (Warburton, 2015). This ethos of “fun” and creative imagination means that it is the LEGO brand that ultimately predominates, not only bridging all the licensed properties that are communally rendered in digitised and physical LEGO brick form, but also overwriting them as part of a rather more singular LEGO dimension. For all the emphasis on hopping between storyworlds, the game reads as a kind of commercial ‘alternate universe’ where multiple franchises can collide precisely because the entire enterprise is plausibly, playfully and representationally insulated from all of the varied textual canons involved. Returning to the game’s #breaktherules promotion, then, it can be said that “LEGO characters... create the impression that they are outside the rules that bind games too closely to” film/TV source material (Aldred, 2014, p.115). The LEGO Doctor is patently not the Doctor as he appears on TV, but is instead a parallel twelfth incarnation existing in a distinctive LEGOverse.

By severing symbolic connections to transmedia storytelling conceptualised as a coherent expansion of established IPs, and positioning itself as a licensed alternate universe or ‘AU’, *LEGO Dimensions* “acts as a signifier for childhood and toy play. ...[I]n the case of the Traveller’s Tales games, LEGO’s primary semiotic value is in framing all of its varied franchises... in terms of toydom” (Buerkle, 2014, p.148). But such a reframing – secured due to LEGO’s industrial dominance in the kids’ toys’ market (Santo, 2015, p.214) – basically enables LEGO to discursively invert its licensing relationships. Whilst the company pays BBC Worldwide to use the Doctor, it suggests that media licensors such as the BBC must

correspond to LEGO's values, thus denying the company's "status as the contracted, subordinate contributor to other companies' brands, and suggest[ing] instead that... licensors... had been permitted access to the LEGO brand. Against the delegitimizing power of dominant discourses about licensing, LEGO position[s] its 'partners' as those who must prove their legitimacy" (Johnson, 2014, p.13). *LEGO Dimensions* – along with the 2015 CUUS00 TARDIS set (Garlen, 2014, p.129) – therefore appears to legitimate *Doctor Who* as a textual source of imaginative creativity and healthy childhood play. Indeed, this brand synergy was displayed at the London *Doctor Who* Festival; not only were TT Games represented on Stage 1, but a CUUS00 set signed by its fan designer Andrew Clark, a competition prize, was displayed at the BBC Shop counter and a lifesize Master-Builder LEGO TARDIS was positioned at the heart of the 'Shopping Village' for fans to take their photos with. Installing connotations of child-like creativity and imagination at the BBC Shop's point of sale and in the Shopping Village implied that even as fans avidly consumed *Doctor Who*, they were engaged in a legitimated activity of LEGO-style play.

Thus far I have argued that *LEGO Dimensions*, at least in the form of its Starter Pack, subordinates *Doctor Who* to other franchises such as DC's Batman whilst diverging from conventional logics of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2006; Aldred, 2014) in favour of constructing a playful and stylized 'AU' *Who* that is deliberately insulated from the programme's continuity. I have also considered how rather than straightforwardly co-opting children's "transgressive" play, *Dimensions* is in fact tightly hemmed in by licensing agreements in terms of what it can and can't include. Storyworlds from multiple franchises (many ultimately owned by Time Warner) become in-game objects that can be travelled between precisely because each is temporarily unified in the semiotic 'LEGO dimension'. In the following section I want to move on to address the *Doctor Who* Level Pack that fans can buy to supplement the Starter set. We might assume that this LEGO *Who* cannot possibly be an 'authentic' version of the TV programme. How, though, are issues of transmedia (in)authenticity managed by the Level Pack targeted at *Doctor Who* fans?

3. Transforming: Worlds of (In)authentic *Doctor Who*

In *Playing with Videogames* (2008) James Newman ponders whether different rates and experiences of gameplay might mean that, unlike a film premiere or a TV broadcast, gaming cannot unify players in a “watercooler moment”. However, he concludes that video games can still provoke and sustain rampant discussion: “What chance a collective watercooler moment with this incoherence of audience caused by the near-infinitely fragmented experience of play? ...[T]he mutable structure of videogames is precisely the aspect that makes talk and analysis all the more likely. ...Many videogames overflow with hidden secrets or ‘Easter Eggs’” (Newman, 2008, pp.26—7). And this was certainly true for the *Doctor Who* Level Pack, whose LEGO reconstruction of the TV show’s title sequence, acting as a type of promotional inter-paratext (Gray, 2010; Hills, 2015), was widely shared online by fan-oriented news sites. Rendered in LEGO bricks, this transformative recreation of the TV programme’s opening reassured fans that the LEGO game would pay close attention to transferrable details of *Who*’s brand identity (Johnson, 2012, pp.159—60). At the same time, it also encapsulated how LEGO had reworked *Doctor Who* in line with its own brand values – whereas Peter Capaldi’s eyes are seen briefly in the television title sequence, staring intensely ahead at the viewer, the twelfth Doctor minifigure in the LEGO sequence winks jauntily at the audience. And other incarnations of the Doctor run around revolving cogwheels or clamber over swirling clockfaces and the series’ logo, rendering CGI elements of the original title sequence as pseudo-physical playthings or LEGO brick obstacles to be parodically traversed. In less than thirty seconds, this LEGO *Who* conveys its commitment to “*re-telling* rather than telling” (Buerkle, 2014, p.136), and doing so humorously.

The Level Pack does not only transformatively rework *Who* by converting it into LEGO brick form. Players can also access an “Open World Free Roam” setting, separate from the loosely narrated gameplay of ‘The Dalek Extermination of Earth’, and akin to what has been called LEGO “Free Play’. As Robert Buerkle observes, “LEGO ‘Free Play’ mode ...[is] filled with... unexpected and humorous secrets, and these help to foster the sense of freeform gaiety that characterizes children’s play” (2014, p.139). In *Doctor Who* terms, this can involve Captain

Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) arranging to sing 'Happy Birthday' to the Face of Boe with a number of Ood backing singers. Since the Face of Boe was implied in the TV series to be a vastly aged version of the immortal Captain Jack, this is a particularly amusing Easter Egg for fans, who can recognize that implicit series continuity is being toyed with. Missy (Michelle Gomez) also appears in 'Free Roam', along with Zygons which she exhorts the Doctor to destroy. These sequences gesture toward events in series nine, without fully integrating into TV continuity: Missy and the Zygons featured in different television stories, for example, and their appearances here do not substantively reflect on or tie into those narratives. Indeed, the same is true for the LEGO version of Davros who acts as the Level boss: though his inclusion acknowledges the character's recent (re)appearance in the television show, there are no significant connections between his in-game and TV versions.

The 'free roaming' of this Level Pack stresses a specific kind of play – rather than the rule-oriented "ludus" involved in negotiating and puzzling out different time zones and locations to defeat the Daleks, this aspect of the game is instead more strongly based around "paidia", or free-play for its own pleasures, without rules and set outcomes. The ludus/paidia contrast is drawn on by Jason Mittell, who argues that transmedia storytelling can be divided into two categories. Firstly, "What Is" transmedia "seeks to extend the fiction canonically, ...hopefully expanding viewers' understanding and appreciation of the storyworld. This narrative model... scatters narrative understanding across a variety of extensions to be collectively reassembled by a team of die-hard fans" (2015, p.314). Secondly, a "What If?" extension

poses hypothetical possibilities rather than canonical certainties, inviting viewers to imagine alternative stories... that are distinctly not to be treated as potential canon. The goal for "What If?" transmedia is to launch... into parallel dimensions, foregrounding tone, mood, character or style more than continuity with canonical plots and storyworlds. ..."What If?" transmedia multiplies the possibilities of... fictions into the realm of hypothetical variations (Mittell, 2015, p.315).

For Mittell, where “ludus” is the style of play characterizing “What Is” transmedia, the free play of “paidia” best captures “What If?” transmedia. *LEGO Dimensions*, I would suggest, complicates any clear binary of ludus versus paidia, according with Mittell’s careful recognition that “What Is” and “What If?” transmedia “can best be seen as vectors or tendencies rather than distinct categories, with fluidity and blur between the dual approaches” (2015, p.315). The overall ‘LEGO dimension’ of transformative play in brick form certainly resonates with the idea that this *Doctor Who* should be viewed as a parallel “What If?” version: this mode of transmedia extension avoids the threat of continuity errors which can bedevil “What Is” narrative extensions, for example the ‘Adventure Games’ released alongside series five in 2010 (see Perryman, 2014, p.235). Yet the gameplay involved in mastering ‘The Dalek Extermination of Earth’ involves ludic aspects at the same time as exemplifying “What If?” *Doctor Who*, while free roaming further intensifies the player’s capacity to engage in “paidia”, going beyond the basic ‘tone’ of *LEGO Who*. Complicating matters yet further, Marie-Laure Ryan has indicated that different types of player, e.g. achievers/explorers, may engage more fully in “ludus” or “paidia” (2006, p.199). If this is so, it should be noted that the *Doctor Who* Level Pack allows for broad differences in play orientation, whether gamers want to achieve high scores or explore the gameworld.

Although ‘What If?’ transmedia suspends the issue of precisely integrating with canon and continuity, it can still correspond to the “tone, mood, character or style” of the source text, as Mittell notes. However, given *LEGO Dimensions’* emphasis on transformatively reworking moments of *Doctor Who*, its relationship to the notion of textual ‘authenticity’ becomes somewhat obscured. Rather than the game representing either ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’ *Who tout court*, I would suggest that forms of brand authenticity fluctuate across different moments of gameplay. For instance, the Starter Pack’s *Doctor Who* level places an emphasis on representing its Daleks as child-like or toy-like: the defeated boss, the Dalek Emperor, is miniaturized at the level’s conclusion, with the Doctor advising it to eat its vegetables as they’re good for growth. This equation of the Dalek Emperor with an imagined child player is blatant, just as another of the Daleks is represented as having a remote control resembling those sold with physical Dalek toys. This toyification and infantilisation of characters is a recurrent feature of

LEGO games: Robert Buerkle observes of the *LEGO Star Wars* video game that it doesn't "position the player as Luke Skywalker; it positions the player as a child with a Luke Skywalker action figure. It recreates the playset experience" (2014, p.138). And he suggests that *LEGO Star Wars* displays a "fluid treatment of age... where the characters are understood as adults, yet their performance is heavily child-like. Luke is the most obvious in this regard: he... constantly smiles with earnest obliviousness" (Buerkle, 2014, p.137). Such fluidity of age is also very much apparent in the Starter Pack's representations of Daleks, where one wistfully wants to be a "red Dalek". Writing about 1960s' TV Daleks, Jonathan Bignell argues that these

stories represent the Daleks themselves as somewhat childlike... The Daleks share the powerful drives to get what they want that children experience, and like children they are often incapable of adopting the social codes of politeness, deferral of satisfaction and empathy with others that adult life, and especially family life, require (2007,p.49).

In a sense, child-like and miniaturized Daleks may be 'authentic' to an earlier era of *Doctor Who*, but they certainly don't correspond to contemporary television representations, and the Daleks of the Starter Pack are far more strongly positioned as child-like or toy-like than has ever been the case in televised *Who*. As such, they appear to be more strongly linked to LEGO brand values, and the established format for Traveller's Tales games, rather than mimetically reproducing the Daleks as seen on TV. Indeed, the LEGO design for the Daleks does not capture their 'authentic' form at all well, and fan posters at the *Doctor Who Merchandise* site either defended or critiqued the design, noting the difficulty of accurately representing a Dalek in LEGO brick form without introducing specifically moulded pieces (see <http://merchandise.thedoctorwhosite.co.uk/doctor-who-lego-dimensions-fun-pack/>). Transforming the Daleks so that they are authentic to LEGO's value system of brick-building rather than being constructed out of pre-formed pieces means that these child-like, toy Daleks are again insulated from the 'primary text' of *Doctor Who*, representing alternate universe Daleks rather than seamless parts of the overarching Whoniverse.

While the Starter Pack's Daleks display a degree of "toydom" and infantilisation that lacks textual authenticity in relation to *Doctor Who*, the Level Pack strives for a more authentic rendering of the series. Such an oscillation in (in)authenticity could be read as reflecting game producers' sense that while the Starter Pack needed to appeal significantly to children as players and LEGO fans, the *Doctor Who* Level Pack was more likely to be bought by 'Whovians' of all ages. The Level Pack not only enables the Doctor to be used as a player-character, but gamer-fans (Crawford, 2012, p.103) can also choose which of the Doctor's incarnations they want to play as, since all regenerations can be accessed. Indeed, when a new LEGO Time Lord body is occupied, then the correct era's TARDIS interior and theme tune arrangement are incorporated into the game. This context-specific use of the *Doctor Who* theme amounts to a kind of paratextual shifter, cueing fan nostalgia and a greater sense of textual authenticity. Speaking at the *Doctor Who* Festival, TT Games producer Mark Warburton suggested that this feature – along with the Level Pack featuring settings from 1960s and 1970s *Doctor Who* stories – would appeal to "Dads" and older players who could use the game to introduce children to classic episodes of the series (Warburton 2015). Although the game may self-referentially educate younger players about *Doctor Who* itself, it appears to have little or no other educational aim, *contra* the BBC's public service mobilization of *Who* in previous video games such as 'The Gunpowder Plot' (Evans, 2013). In this case, creativity, imagination and playfulness may be celebrated as values, but the celebration is wholly brand-centred, and does not reach educationally outside the worlds of LEGO, *Doctor Who*, or other featured storyworlds.

Furthermore, although the Starter and Level Packs appear to be configured quite differently in terms of their balance in LEGO/*Doctor Who* authenticity, there are still some moments of marked inauthenticity that remain in the latter. The Doctor rides K-9 around in a way that makes no sense in terms of the TV series, for instance: the scale of the K-9 prop would not allow an adult actor to comfortably do such a thing, and K-9 has never been conceptualized as a vehicle (unless the Doctor was miniaturized, in 'The Armageddon Factor' from 1979). Here, though, K-9 comes to resemble a kind of Batmobile-esque gadget. Monsters in the 'Open World Free Roam' aspect of the game are also treated in ways that do not correspond to the current TV series. Writing about *Doctor Who* boardgames as paratexts, Paul Booth shows how these can become inauthentic:

All the elements of the [*Time Travelling Action Game*]... match *Doctor Who* precisely—the images on the cards are from the series, the playing pieces feature a lovely image of David Tennant, and the TARDIS is accurate in terms of sound and color. However, playing the game simply doesn't feel like *Doctor Who*. For example, the Doctor rarely travels around the universe looking for fights. Rather, he attempts to solve his problems peacefully instead of combatting aliens (Booth, 2015, p.184).

The same problem recurs in the Level Pack, when Missy suggests that Zygons – represented purely as human bodysnatchers – should be killed. Far from resonating with the human-Zygon peace assiduously preserved in series nine of *Doctor Who*, these in-game Zygons become potential cannon fodder in a sequence that doesn't feel like *Who* (though it could perhaps be rationalized as part of Missy's villainy). The result of such K-9 and Zygon misrepresentation is that these aspects of gameplay “simply ring false for the series, and alienate the player[-fan] of the paratextual game from the *Doctor Who* universe” (Booth, 2015, p.184). Similarly, the Doctor has no companion such as Clara Oswald playing alongside him, meaning that the game mechanics and typical narrative structures of *Doctor Who* remain widely divergent.

Despite overall differences between the Starter and Level Packs in terms of their authenticity to Traveller's Tales LEGO Games or to the “experiential core” of *Doctor Who* (Gray, 2014, p. 59), each transformation of *Who* targets both child and adult gamers. Jennifer Garlen observes that LEGO has increasingly aligned itself with franchises and games where the “frame of reference seems to have more in common with fanboy and geek culture at large” (2014, p.127). Targeting fan/geek culture in general, as well as child consumers (Hjarvard, 2013, p.135), seemingly places *LEGO Dimensions* in a liminal position between ‘child’ and ‘adult’ cultural status. This arguably replays a “constitutive ambivalence in gaming culture”, whereby video games seek autonomy from children's culture, but remain linked to hegemonic locations of “play”, imagination and fun, i.e. “childish concerns” (Kirkpatrick, 2013, p.96). Such liminality has never been far from *Doctor Who*'s cultural identity, it should be noted. But whether gamer-fans engaging with *Dimensions* are ‘Adult Fans of LEGO’, AFOLs (Bender, 2010, p.24), or children

immersed in LEGO and/or *Doctor Who* (as well as the other storyworlds involved), cultural categories of 'the child' versus 'the adult' are not merely traversed here, or rendered ambivalent: they are significantly transformed and unified. Lincoln Geraghty suggests that the "blurring of the line between adult and child is illustrated best by the Lego video games that have become popular with children and adults alike" (2014, p.179). World-building that is extended into the narrativisation and semiotic open-ness of toys and games (Fleming, 1996, p.102) can certainly render child and adult entertainments "virtually indistinguishable" (Bainbridge, 2010, p.838). But more than this, such transmedia extensions may not clearly map on to 'doubled coded' texts, i.e. 1960s and 70s intertextual *Doctor Who* references for the "Dads" and child-like Daleks for the "kids", as I've implied. Instead, Robert Buerkle argues that games such as *LEGO Star Wars* form "part of a new and more earnest wave of transgenerational media: texts that do not rely on separate pleasures for their respective audiences..., but rather appeal to adults precisely for their childish sincerity" (2014, p.130).

To suggest that the cross-generational appeal of LEGO's transmedia dimensions somehow indicates a lapse or failure in adult identities fails to consider the contemporary "new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) which infuses elite work identities with a sense of playfulness (TT Games' staff represent themselves as fans of *Doctor Who*, for example) and converts play into forms of labour wherever possible. *LEGO Dimensions* appropriates one's gameplay as labour that, however intangibly, reinforces the brand value of multiple franchises and yet celebrates this process as 'breaking the rules' of conventional transmedia tie-ins that are restricted to just one IP, or concerned with seamlessly integrating into a 'primary' text.

Whilst revelling in a spirit of rebellious play, and facilitating the consumer individualization of gameplay via various waves of character toys that can spawn in the game, *LEGO Dimensions* is significantly structured by Time Warner's corporate concentration of ownership, performing its stylized, licensed twelfth Doctor as an example of "cool capitalism" (McGuigan, 2009). In such a context, 'child' and 'adult' cultural identities are rebuilt: no longer binaries, nor even blurred, deconstructed categories, they are harnessed to the unifying

socialization of play-as-consumption, or more precisely, of fandom-as-consumption. It is no accident that *LEGO Dimensions* is not available as a PC game; it has been designed as a console title because the “toy pad” through which physical LEGO minifigures and minikits interact with the digital realm is intended to be used as a persistent addition, meaning that subsequent, ongoing purchases can supplement the Starter Pack. It was felt that PC users would not want to keep a toy pad plugged into their computing device, whereas it could readily sit alongside a console (Warburton, 2015). The transformative capacities of *Dimensions* – blending material and digital and mashing up story-worlds – hence extend to ‘child’ and ‘adult’ identities that are remade as sharing in the subversive and yet consumerist values of “cool capitalism” (Kinder, 1991, p.43).

4. Conclusion

In this article, I’ve suggested that the transmedia storytelling of *LEGO Dimensions* amounts to a commercialized ‘Alternate Universe’ version of multiple franchises that are reimagined in LEGO brick form (and in line with LEGO’s brand values). Insulated from issues of canon and continuity, this represents “What If?” transmedia (Mittell, 2015) but it simultaneously combines the play-forms of *paidia* and *ludus*, as well as displaying fluctuating relationships to *Doctor Who*’s brand ‘authenticity’ (Catherine Johnson, 2013, p.108). In particular, although the Starter Pack represents its Daleks in ways that are more authentic to Traveller’s Tales LEGO games rather than to televised *Who*, the Level Pack uses paratextual shifters (variants of the theme music) to perform a greater degree of transmedia authenticity. At the same time, though, the Level Pack does not straightforwardly interpellate *Doctor Who* fans, since it also fails to feel like *Who* via its transformation of aliens into cannon fodder, its rewriting of K-9 as an in-game vehicle/gadget and its lack of a companion. For all *LEGO Dimensions*’ marketing as a playful combination of storyworlds, the realization of this transbranding is nevertheless strongly delimited by licensing agreements and by Time Warner’s ownership of various IPs. Fans’ “affective play” (Hills, 2002, p.90) may well be enmeshed in new dimensions of transworld storytelling and transbrand gaming, but *Dimensions*’ story of corporate licensing and fan-consumer socialization remains far from novel.

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