Assassin's Creed and Transmedia Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

Although, the term itself was coined more than ten years ago by Henry Jenkins, transmedia storytelling still needs to be researched as the terminology has proven to be multi-interpretable. Transmedia storytelling involving computer games is even less-well researched. This article will look into both issues. First it will take a critical look at transmedia storytelling to show the difference between it and other terms such as convergence, cross-media storytelling and radical intertextuality. Next, the article will look at the role of games in transmedia storytelling, focusing on the Assassin's Creed Desmond Saga to determine if games can be used as a narrative element in transmedia storytelling or if games are only a more active way to take part in the storyworld.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

As theorists and practitioners have noticed, in the past decade a new type of narrative has emerged, one that is multimedial, non-linear, game-like, participatory, and immersive as Frank Rose states in his book *The Art of Immersion* (2011). Rose's term for this new type of storytelling is "deep media" (2011, p. 3). In *The Art of Immersion*, Rose discusses the diverse aspects of deep media using recent examples such as the Alternate Reality Campaign[1] *Why So Serious?* that preceded the 2008 Batman movie *The Dark Knight*; the fan twitter accounts for the popular TV-series *Mad Men* (2007 – 2015), which forced the television company to set up their own official accounts; as well as the often cited TV-series *Lost* (2004 – 2010). These examples are typically recognized as instances of "transmedia storytelling," a term popularized by Henry Jenkins in 2003. According to Jenkins, in its ideal form each medium in transmedia storytelling "does what it does best-so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play" (2003).

What Jenkin's definition seems to suggest is that games occupy a separate position in transmedia storytelling. Whereas the story is expanded in the more traditional narrative media such as novels, comics, television, and films, games are not used to "expand" the narrative, but can be used to immerse the player in the story world. In his book, Rose also examines some games such as *Myst* (1983), *Grand Theft Auto III* (2001) and *IV* (2004), *Black & White* (2001), and the *Fable* series (2004, 2008, 2010). Whereas media texts are always part of a larger transmedia narrative in the other examples Rose gives, games are treated as special cases, separate from other media texts. Even when it is clear that a game is part of a larger narrative, such as the game *Enter the Matrix* (2003) which connects the first film *The Matrix* (1999) with both the second film *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) as well as

with the animated film *The Final Flight of the Osiris* (2003), its story is still considered secondary, thus confirming the deviant status of games[2].

The aim of this paper is to address the status of video games as part of transmedia storytelling. To do this, I will first explore transmedia storytelling itself, as it is still a multi-interpretable term. Using theories by Henry Jenkins and Christy Dena, among others, I will discuss the elements that distinguish transmedia storytelling from other types of multiple media narratives, such as franchises and cross-media storytelling[3]. Then, I will examine the so-called Desmond Saga, a set of media texts that are part of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise (2007 – present). Using close reading and textual analysis methodologies, I will examine these media texts in relation to each other, and in relation to the overall narrative and the narrative's storyworld, to understand whether games just present a narrative's storyworld as a playable experience as Jenkins suggests, or if they can be an indispensable part of the transmedia narrative.

From Franchising to Convergence and Co-Creation.

Before publishing his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* in 2006, Henry Jenkins discussed his ideas on franchises, convergence, and transmedia storytelling in the articles 'Transmedia Storytelling' (2003) and 'Welcome to Convergence Culture' (2005). In the first article, Jenkins defines convergence as "the flow of content across multiple media channels" (2003, para. 3). In the second article Jenkins is more explicit about what convergence really entails:

By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, the search for new structures of media financing which fell at the interstices between old and new media, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted. Convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes, depending on who's speaking and what they think they are talking about. (Jenkins, 2005, p. 2)

At the beginning of the 21st Century, the media industry had already realized that sharing assets, such as expensive sequences of CGI (Computer Generated Imagery), across media (for instance in both the film and the licensed game) could lower production costs considerably. As Jenkins, talking about Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*, explains:

This system allowed them [the Electronic Arts production team who produced games for the franchise] to import thousands of "assets" from the film production into the game, ensuring an unprecedented degree of fidelity to the details of Tolkien's world. At the same time, working closely with Jackson and the other filmmakers gave Young [Neil Young head of Electronic Arts' The Lord of the Rings franchise] greater latitude to explore other dimensions of that world that would not appear on screen. (Jenkins, 2006, p. 107)

These media companies were therefore already taking the first steps on the convergence path, sharing content across media platforms and cooperating with other companies or just branching out into different media. However, what they had not yet grasped was that their franchises would also benefit from not only sharing assets, but from sharing the narrative as well. Until then, franchise holders such as Sony and Electronic Arts had focused on financially lucrative marketing deals, which were hierarchical and competitive rather than co-creative, so that the talents of the individual media sections had to compete instead of benefitting from each other's particular talents as Young did. As Jenkins explains, this leads to substandard narratives:

The current licensing system typically generates works that are redundant (allowing no new character background or plot development), watered down (asking the new media to slavishly duplicate experiences better achieved through the old), or riddled with sloppy contradictions (failing to respect the core consistency audiences expect within a franchise). These failures account for why sequels and franchises have a bad reputation. Nobody wants to consume a steady diet of second-rate novelizations! (Jenkins 2003, para. 6; Jenkins 2006, p. 105[4])

Of course, the competitive hierarchical form of licensing Jenkins criticizes is not new. Already in the first half of the 20th century, popular series such as the *Lone Ranger* radio show (1933) not only led to a series of books, comic books, films, and a television series, but also to related texts, toys, and other types of merchandise such as *Lone Ranger* lunch boxes. After the release of the first *Star Wars* film in 1977, however, a new era emerged when George Lucas and his company retained merchandising and licensing rights for the film. Together, with the introduction of the new medium of the video game and the removal of the ban on product-based programs by the U.S. Federal Communication Commission in 1984, the 1980s and 90s saw the rise of new franchises that particularly targeted children, such as the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*[5]. To describe how these franchises worked Marsha Kinder devised a new theory, which she called transmedia intertextuality (Kinder, 1991). Both Dena (2009) and Jenkins (2006) refer to this time in terms of commodification and consumption, with Dena explaining that, "These franchises were usually commodification machines, and each of the intertextuality linked 'secondary' elements was executed by 'others.' There was synergy, but that synergy was executed by different practitioners with varying fidelity and creative oversight" (Dena, pp. 33-34).

By the end of the 20th century, some companies had already taken convergence a step further. They were no longer in competition but pioneered the new type of "franchising" which Dena (2009, p. 34) and Jenkins call co-creation: "In co-creation, the companies collaborate from the beginning to create content they know plays well in each of their sectors, allowing each medium to generate new experiences for the consumer and expand points of entry into the franchise" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 105). Some media authors took co-creation even further, taking active control over the "secondary" media texts, as for instance the already mentioned *The Matrix* by the Wachowski brothers. As Ivan Askwith explains, the Wachowskis devised both *The Animatrix* as well as the *Enter the Matrix* game and took an active part in some of *The Animatrix* shorts*:*

In the past, film directors have had little interest, and even less participation, in the decisions that expand a particular film into other media. By contrast, the Wachowski brothers themselves conceived of both "The Animatrix" and "Enter the Matrix" as integral components of the "Matrix" narrative, rather than spin-off products to be outsourced to third parties. As a result, the Wachowski brothers wrote four of the nine animated shorts themselves, using them to provide context and explanation for the content of their live-action features. (2003, para. 8).

Moreover, as Jenkins (2006) shows, the Wachowskis not only took a direct interest in *The Matrix's* media extensions, for the third parties that would create the "secondary" media texts, they choose media producers that they themselves admired.

Trans- and Cross-Media Storytelling, Additive Comprehension and Radical Intertextuality

As mentioned above, Jenkins devised the term transmedia storytelling in 2003, talking about the flow of a narrative across media. According to Jenkins, at the base of a good transmedia narrative lies a compelling storyworld: "A good character can sustain multiple narratives and thus lead to a successful movie franchise. A good 'world' can sustain multiple characters (and their stories) and thus successfully launch a transmedia franchise." (Jenkins, 2003, para. 13). In his book *Convergence Culture* (2006) Jenkins calls *The Matrix* a prime example of this new practice of transmedia storytelling. In this book, Jenkins gives a more elaborate definition of transmedia storytelling:

A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best—so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 95-96)

As Jenkins later clarifies, the difference between franchising and transmedia storytelling is the expansion of the storyworld, which takes place in the latter. Franchises also disperse a story over different media, "but not necessarily … to extend the story in ways which expand … its scope and meaning" (Jenkins, 2011, para. 10). According to Jenkins, the extensions serve different functions to the transmedia story, for instance as a backstory, or mapping the storyworld, or as a different perspective on the narrative, or deepening audience engagement. An extension, however, augments our understanding of the narrative as a whole, a process that Jenkins calls additive comprehension (ibid.).

In the new era of the internet, the complexity of transmedia storytelling is a valid proposition as fans can now keep in touch both with other fans as well as with the production team to discuss individual media texts. Subsequently, producers have seen the value of transmedia storytelling, clearly not always as a means to expand the storyworld, but certainly as a means to satisfy fans in between films or TV-seasons or to re-attract them to the original product, medium and airtime[6]. Consequently, in transmedia storytelling the audience takes on a more energetic role:

Transmedia storytelling refers to a new aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence—one that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities. Transmedia storytelling is the art of world making. To fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 20-21).

Christy Dena (2009) argues that Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling overemphasizes the end product. As Dena points out, in Jenkins' definition, the relevance of the contribution to the overall story is not questioned. Furthermore, it does not say anything about authorship. As Jenkins explains in *Convergence Culture*, (and Frank Rose (2011) and Geoffrey Long (2007) also show), transmedia storytelling only works when the dispersal of the narrative over distinct media is a consciously planned effort. Dena and Long go even further, as for them the expansion to the original work has to ensure the continuation and maintenance of the fictional world's lore, consequently, the storyworld should be canonical from the start. Accordingly, Dena argues that the planning of the narrative from the outset should be the key identifying element for transmedia storytelling[7], instead of the expansion of the storyworld[8].

Dena also makes an interesting addition to the theory of transmedia storytelling. As she rightly points out in her dissertation, most scholarly theories on the subject have focused on transmedia projects that involve media texts from different mono-media. These she refers to as intercompositional transmedia practices. Intercompositional transmedia practices are by definition multimodal because they disperse the story over different media that each have their own (visual) grammar and affordances, which shape the story accordingly. Or as Jenkins puts it "each medium does what is does best" (2006, p. 96). However, there are also transmedia projects that involve multimedia productions, such as websites, or communication media, such as telephones, which are normally not seen as entertainment media, but as mere platforms. These and other cases, such as Alternate Reality games such as *I Love Bees* (2004) and *Sanningen om Marika* (2007) that also use multimedia texts and/or communication media, Dena refers to as intracompositional transmedia practices.

In a response to, among others, Dena's critique, Jenkins acknowledges that a story may unfold within the same medium. The example he gives is that of the DC and Marvel Comics in which characters and plots move and unfold between the universes of both franchises. Another example would be the movement of characters between the TV-series *Law and Order* (1990 – 2010) and *CSI* (2000 –). However, as only one medium is involved, to Jenkins, this it is not transmedia storytelling. To refer to this kind of expansion, he introduces the term radical intertextuality (Jenkins, 2011, para. 15). Even though in radical intertextuality the story spreads out in the same medium, it should not be confused with intracompositional transmedia storytelling. Jenkins uses radical intertextuality to refer to extension within the same mono-medium, whereas when using intracompositional transmedia storytelling, Dena is talking about cases that are multimodal in themselves.

Similar to radical intertextuality, multimodality in itself is also not a guarantee for transmedia storytelling. As Jenkins points out, franchises can be multimodal without being transmedial (2011). An example would be the George R.R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* books (1996 –), which have been gradually adapted to the TV-series *Game of Thrones* (2010 –). The television series then instigated other adaptations in the form of comic books, a board game, a card game, a table-top role playing game, and several genres of computer games. Certainly, as Dena points out, although it basically is the same narrative that has been adapted, such adaptations are not merely reproductions. The mere fact that different media are involved already ensures that the story is experienced differently. However, as a unique originating medium can be singled out (the books), and as the derived texts do not offer additive comprehension, such adaptations are not transmedia storytelling according to Jenkins. Not long ago this type of adaptation in different media would have been called cross-media storytelling[9].

Assassin's Creed's Desmond Saga: Altaïr Ibn La'Ahad

The storyworld of the Desmond Saga[10] consists of several interlinked plots. The main plot is contemporary and centers around Desmond Miles, a 25-year-old barkeeper who is kidnapped by a company called Abstergo. Abstergo is a modern day front for the Templars, the enemy the Assassins have been fighting at least since the Middle Ages. Abstergo has developed a machine, the Animus, that lets subjects relive the memories of their ancestors. Abstergo uses this machine to find specific objects that have been scattered throughout history, so-called pieces of Eden. They need these pieces for a mysterious project that will come to fruition on or just before December 21, 2012. Desmond was chosen because more than one of his ancestors possessed a piece of Eden, so his memories should contain information about their location. The interlinked plots involve three of Desmond's Assassin forebears Altaïr Ibn La'Ahad, Ezio Auditore da Firenze, and Ratonhnhaké:ton (aka Connor Kenway). All Assassins share a special ability, called Eagle Vision that enables them (and the gamer) to see an enhanced version of their surroundings in which enemies, hiding places and special objects stand out. Assassins are furthermore recognizable by their weapon of choice, a retractable hidden blade. Lastly, because of the "lore" of the storyworld of the games, Desmond can only track the bloodline of one Assassin ancestor at a time, so as soon as a new life is created by that particular Assassin, his or her memories are no longer available.

The first *Assassin's Creed* game featuring protagonist Altaïr Ibn La'Ahad (which can be translated from Arabic to "the flying one, son of no one") was released in 2007[11]. The production company Ubisoft did not immediately commit to a sequel but wanted to wait and see how the game would perform (Raymond, 2007), even though the game's Creative Director Patrice Désilets already had plans for six *Assassin's Creed* games featuring Desmond and six of his Assassin forebears (North, 2015). Throughout the six games, Desmond would acquire the special abilities his ancestors possessed, becoming the ultimate Assassin who would eventually no longer need the Animus to travel through time (ibid.). In the first game[12], Desmond is held captive at the Abstergo headquarters. At the end of the game, through exposure in the Animus to his ancestor Altaïr, he has acquired Eagle vision and some fighting skills. Using Eagle vision, he sees strange markings on the walls and floor of the Abstergo rooms he can access. One of these markings is the date December 21, 2012. Altaïr's part of

the story takes place in the Levant during the third Crusade in 1191. Altaïr is a master Assassin but through his hubris, he loses this rank at the beginning of the game. To regain his rank and weapons he has to kill nine opponents. By the end of the game Altaïr has learned valuable information about the Templars and the Assassins and has found a piece of Eden, a sphere, called an Apple of Eden.

In 2008, Ubisoft launched a new game, *Assassin's Creed: Altaïr's Chronicles*. This game was not the anticipated second *Assassin's Creed* game, but a story-prequel to the previous game released on a different game platform, the Nintendo DS. In fact, *Altaïr's Chronicles* did not even feature Desmond or the Animus. The game was all about Altaïr and told about his exploits in 1190, a year before the main game. In the game Altaïr is tasked with retrieving another piece of Eden, a Chalice. Because of the success of the two previous games, *Altaïr's Chronicles* was followed by *Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines* (2009) for another handheld game platform, the PlayStation Vita. *Bloodlines* again did not feature Desmond but followed Altaïr's adventures after the main game *Assassin's Creed*. In *Bloodlines* Altaïr follows the Templars to Cyprus to learn more about their intentions. He rescues one of them, Maria Thorpe. At the end of the game, they travel east together, toward India. In *Bloodlines,* there is no new piece of Eden, only Altaïr's Apple, which he uses consciously for the first time in this game. One of the reasons he wants to travel east is to learn more about the Apple.

Apart from the above-mentioned games, Altaïr also appears in an adaptation of the main *Assassin's Creed* game for the iPod and iPhone developed by Gameloft in cooperation with Ubisoft, also called *Assassin's Creed* (2007). As was the case with *Altaïr's Chronicles* and *Bloodlines,* only Altaïr's adventures are featured in this adapted version of the main game[13]. Ubisoft also released a short comic in which Desmond, Abstergo, the Animus, and Altaïr are introduced. It was, however, only included in the limited edition of *Assassin's Creed* (2007), and therefore not widely circulated[14]. Looking at this small constellation of texts, it is obvious that the "good character … sustain[ing] multiple narratives and thus lead[ing] to a successful … franchise" as Jenkins put it (2003, para. 13) is Altaïr and not Desmond.

As for the "sharing of assets across media" (Jenkins, 2003, para 3), it should be noted that, in both the comic as well as the prequel and sequel game, the only assets Ubisoft could share were the original artwork (which for the games had to be redesigned to comply with the graphic allowances of the other platforms' architecture) and Altaïr's narrative. It could be argued therefore that at this stage we have a character driven franchise (Altaïr not Desmond). With only one comic book, which functions more as an introductory paratext[15] to the main game than as a main text in its own right, it would be hard to argue that this is a case of transmedia storytelling. In addition, even though the three games require three different platforms, they are still games, which also supports the franchise theory. However, contrary to, for instance, a character-driven movie franchise, the gamer who wants to play the complete Altaïr story has to invest heavily both in money as well as in time, because apart from buying the three games, she also has to invest in three different gaming platforms, as well as master the gaming skills the different platforms require. Still, the comic and handheld games (apart from the adaptation) increase our understanding of Altaïr's story. Using Jenkins's terminology, we can say that as far as the narrative is concerned, these "extensions" provide "additive comprehension" (2011, para. 10) but as they mainly use the same medium it is a case of "radical intertextuality" (ibid., para. 15) not transmedia storytelling. (See Table 1 for an overview of the mediatexts involving Altair).

*Assassin's Creed'*s Desmond Saga: Ezio Auditore da Firenze

In 2008 Ubisoft acquired Hybride Technologies, a visual effects studio. In a news statement at the time, Ubisoft CEO Yves Guillemot explained the acquisition saying, "The future of our industry depends on our ability to create brands that captivate audiences and to extend those brands to other forms of entertainment" (Ubisoft News US, 2008), to which Montreal CEO Yannis Mallat added, "Ubisoft and Hybride share the same vision of entertainment convergence" (ibid.). Most gamers assumed that Ubisoft would be branching out into film, but at Ubisoft's 2009 E3 Press Conference Guillemot explained that the acquisition was not merely a bid at media convergence. Rather, Ubisoft wanted

Table 1. Overview of the media texts in the Desmond Saga[25]

Main Games Desmond	Main Games	Handheld Games	Books	Films	Graphic Novels
(Born 1987) 1 Sept 2012 – 7 Sept 2012 At Abstergo headquarters (age 25)	*Assassin's Creed* Altaïr (Born 1165) 1191	*Altaïr's Chronicles* 1190 Altaïr	*The Secret Crusade* 1176-1257 Altaïr		*Desmond* Subject 16 & Desmond D. kidnapped by Abstergo. Animus (Aquilus, **Altaïr**). Escapes to the modern day Assassin's (first glimpse of **Ezio**).
		Bloodlines 1191 Altaïr			
			Lineage 1476 Giovanni Auditore, Ezio's father		
9 Sept 2012 – 15 Sept 2012 With modern day Assassin's in Rome	*Assassin's Creed II* Ezio (Born 1459) 1459/1476 – 1499	*Discovery* Ezio 1491 – 1492	*Renaissance* Ezio 1476 - 1499	*Ascendance* 1497 Cesare B. 1499 Cesare B.	*Aquilus* 15-16 Sept. Desmond on his way to Monteriggioni
16 Sept 2012 – 10 Oct 2012 when he finds Ezio's Apple and kills Lucy. Monteriggioni with modern Assassin's	*Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* Ezio 1499 – 1507		*Brotherhood* Ezio 1499 – 1507	1502 Cesare & Ezio	*Accipiter* Desmond in Monteriggioni
In coma. 10 Oct 2012 – 30 Oct 2012 Early life up until the kidnapping. Desmond	*Assassin's Creed Revelations* Ezio 1511 – 1512 Altaïr 1190, 1191, 1228, 1247, 1257† (92)		*Revelations* 1507 – 1524† Ezio 1189, 1191, 1228, 1247, 1257† (92) Altaïr	*Embers* 1524† Ezio	
30 Oct 2012 - 21 December 2012† (25) Sacrifices himself to safe mankind. In America with the modern day Assassins and his father.	*Assassin's Creed III* Ratonhnhaké:ton (1756*) 1760, 1769 – 1783 aka Connor Kenway				

Legend: highlight = information (time period) exclusively found in this media text. Blue = Altaïr, Red = Ezio, Green = Ratonhnhaké:ton.

more, they wanted confluence, "our strategy is to put in place bridges between the creative talents building those [fully interconnected] worlds to enrich each other's experience" (Guillemot, 2009). Adding that Ubisoft, "…had already entered the era where movies, games, music and books interact

around the construction of a single universe experience" (ibid.) What could be achieved using this approach became clear when at the very end of the conference Ubisoft showed their *Assassin's Creed II E3 launch trailer*, which combined the digitally created world of the upcoming *Assassin's Creed II* game with real-life actors[16]. Acquiring Hybride Technologies meant that Ubisoft could now share assets, designers, tools and footage, between different media texts. However, when we look at the next set of *Assassin's Creed* media texts, those with Desmond's ancestor Ezio Auditore da Firenze, it becomes clear that this part of the franchise is again mostly character driven.

With the help of Hybride Technologies' expertise, Ezio's story starts with a short film called *Assassin's Creed Lineage* (2009). Using a different medium to introduce Ezio and his family was a conscious choice, as *Assassin's Creed II* scriptwriter Corey May explained:

Since our story does focus a great deal on the concept of vengeance, it became apparent to us very early on that for this to work, you know, the player much like Ezio has to grow attached to his family. And I think that is when the idea of doing something like the films became very appealing to us, with another way to further expand Ezio's back-story, you know, in a different medium, in a way where we didn't have to concern ourselves as much with gameplay, we could focus entirely on character and story and universe building. (May, 2009)

Lineage was released shortly before the new main game *Assassin's Creed II* (2009). The game itself has the same overall structure as the first main game. In it, we follow Desmond who escapes from the Abstergo premises with the help of a group of modern day Assassins, who, conveniently, have their own Animus so that Desmond can explore the memories of his ancestor Ezio. Unlike Altaïr, Ezio, whose name is derived from the Latin for eagle, is more of a developed character[17]. The game and the short movie cover his life from the age of approximately seventeen until he is forty[18]. As Corey May said, Ezio's story is about revenge, he does not start as an assassin, but is forced into that role because his father and brothers are killed.

Apart from *Lineage, Assassin's Creed II* is associated with two other types of media texts, a book by Oliver Bowden called *Assassin's Creed Renaissance* (2009) and a graphic novel *Assassin's Creed 1: Desmond* (2009). *Renaissance* is an adaptation in book form of Ezio's story, as told in *Assassin's Creed II*[19]. The graphic novel resembles the main games in that it has both the modern day Assassin Desmond, Abstergo and the Animus and one of Desmond's ancestors. It is set around the (present day) time of the first *Assassin's Creed* game, but tells a different version of Desmond's story as shown in the game. Desmond's new ancestor it introduces is the Gallo-Roman Acquilus (Acquila is Latin for eagle), who is looking for a special Ankh (piece of Eden). The story is set in 259. Although the graphic novel is copyrighted by Ubisoft Entertainment, it is considered non-canonical, apart from the Acquilus part. *Assassin's Creed II* also has a mobile game *Assassin's Creed Discovery* released for both Nintendo DS and iPhone. The game is set 1491, so during the latter part of *Assassin's Creed II*. The game can be seen as a side plot, a brief part of Ezio's life that is covered neither by the main game nor by the book.

As *Lineage* not only introduces the new medium of film but also a narrative directly linked to the main game *Assassin's Creed II*, it could be argued that the *Assassin's Creed* franchise takes it first steps into the world of transmedia storytelling in 2009. This also hold true for the graphic novel *Assassin's Creed 1: Desmond*, which is set both in the storyworld of the pieces of Eden (Acquilus part) and in the narrative of the Desmond Saga (present-day part). As the book *Renaissance* is an adaptation of Ezio's story and does not add anything new to the narrative of the main game, it should be seen as an element of cross-media storytelling. *Discovery*, finally, being a game, albeit on a different platform, is again an example of radical intertextuality. (See Table 1 for an overview of the mediatexts surrounding *Assassin's Creed II*).

In 2010, something unexpected happened. Instead of adding more additional handheld games, Desmond's and Ezio's story continues in another main game, *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, which

was released for the major platforms PS3, Xbox 360, and PC. In the game, Desmond and the modern day Assassin's flee to what once was Ezio's residence in the Italian city of Monteriggioni. Ezio's story relates his adventures from 1499 until 1507 and is mainly set in Rome. It starts with Ezio's return to his Monteriggioni villa, which is shortly after attacked by Cesare Borgia. Cesare kills Ezio's uncle and takes possession of the Apple. Ezio's part of the game ends after he has killed Cesare and regained the Apple, which he hides in a vault under the Basilica di Santa Maria in Aracoeli in Rome. There, Desmond and the modern day Assassins retrieve it, but possessed by the Apple, Desmond kills one of the modern day Assassins, Lucy Stillman. This act sends Desmond into a coma.

The game is preceded by two other media texts. First, a second graphic novel *Assassin's Creed 2: Acquilus*, in which Acquilus' search for the Ankh is continued. Contrary to the previous graphic novel, however, Desmond's present-day part is 'in canon' and neatly bridges the gap between *Assassin's Creed II* and *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*. Second, a short animated film *Ascendance* is released. Its narrative starts in 1500 when Ezio is in Rome, but then shows flashbacks of the years 1497 and 1499. The flashbacks relate part of the life of Cesare Borgia. *Brotherhood* is also accompanied by a book version of Ezio's part, also simply called *Brotherhood*, which is again just an adaptation. As there is now only one game involved, this part of the Desmond Saga's narrative is tentatively more transmedial. Desmond's and the modern day Assassin's story in the graphic novel leads us into the game, while the animated film *Ascendance* gives more background information on Cesare, Ezio's enemy in the game. Only the book remains cross-medial. (See Table 1 for an overview of the mediatexts surrounding *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*).

The year 2011 brings yet another twist to the Saga. Published several months before the release of a new game, the novel *The Secret Crusade* tells Altaïr's life story from his youth until the advanced age of 92. In the novel Altaïr relates his life story to Niccolò Polo who, together with his brother Maffeo, is Altaïr's guest at the Assassin stronghold at Masyaf in 1257. Most of Altaïr's story told in the book is already known from the games *Altaïr's Chronicles*, *Assassin's Creed* and *Bloodlines*. However, information about his early life, his parents and his years after *Bloodlines* is new. The epilogue of the book reveals that the book is being read by Ezio, who is on his way to Constantinople. Thus, the book not only 'recaps' Altaïr's life, it also forms a link with the next main game *Assassin's Creed Revelations* also released in 2011, once more featuring Ezio. In *Revelations* Ezio, fifty-one, travels to Masyaf (now in the hand of the Templars) in search of Altaïr's secret library[20]. To enter the library he has to find five keys, which are hidden in Constantinople. The game *Revelations* is interesting in that the player not only takes on the role of Desmond and Ezio, but also that of Altaïr. Normally this would be impossible because of the unwritten rule that Desmond can only access one bloodline at a time. In *Revelations*, however, a new piece of Eden technology is introduced, one constructed by Altaïr: the memory disk. Five of these disks were hidden all over Constantinople by Niccolò Polo. Once found, the gamer enters Altaïr's memories and in a combination of cut-scenes and gameplay learns what happened to Altaïr (partly as told by Altaïr in *The Secret Crusade* but also showing Altaïr's last days as he retreats in his hidden library). Desmond, who is kept in a coma in the Animus during the game, does not add anything to the present-day part. His actions only take place in the virtual world of the Animus, which gives Ubisoft a perfect way to reveal more about his past before he was kidnapped by Abstergo and about the man who left the strange markings in *Assassin's Creed II*, Clay Kaczmarek. Keeping Desmond's story part minimal was perhaps a conscious choice not to overcomplicate matters, as the game is meant to both tie up Ezio's as well as Altaïr's story.

The game *Revelations* itself is also accompanied by a book. However, like *The Secret Crusade*, the book *Revelations* is no longer a faithful adaptation, as it also relates Ezio's adventures journeying from Italy to Masyaf filling the gap between the games *Brotherhood* and *Revelations* and his final days and death at the age of sixty-five. The major part of the book, nevertheless, relates his adventures as narrated in the game *Revelations*, as well as Altaïr's memories as shown in the game. In the cluster around the *Revelations* game, we also find the graphic novel *Assassin's Creed 3: Accipiter* and the animated film *Embers*. *Accipiter*'s modern day part is again considered non-canonical, even

though Desmond's contribution could have taken place while staying at Monteriggioni (in the game *Brotherhood*). *Accipiter* also introduces a new modern day Assassin Hawk who will be Desmond's replacement in the graphic novels. In the ancestor part, the graphic novel concludes Acquilus' story (finding the Ankh and his death) and introduces Hawk's ancestor Accipiter (type of hawk). *Embers* concludes Ezio's story, as already told in the book *Revelations.* It shows Ezio married to Sofia, the woman he fell in love with in the game *Revelations* and his children Marcello and Flavia. In *Embers* Ezio has one final adventure when a Chinese female Assassin visits him. His death however is peaceful, waiting for Sofia on a bench in Florence, the place of his birth.

In the *Revelations*' cluster, Ezio is still the main protagonist (main game, book and animated film). Desmond is in the non-canonical graphic novel, which features the new modern day Assassin Hawk and his ancestor Accipiter and which concludes Acquilus' hunt for the Ankh. Desmond is also in the main game, but here he is in a coma. *Revelations* also concludes the story of Altaïr, first recapitulated in *The Secret Crusade* and then concluded in the main game and in the book *Revelations*. In this part of the *Assassin's Creed* series, it is no longer enough only to play the game. Moreover, as the cluster is about two Assassins, completing two narratives involves serious effort on the part of the gamer. To get the complete Altaïr story the gamer has to play *Altaïr's Chronicles, Assassin's Creed, Bloodlines* and *Revelations* and then she still needs to read *The Secret Crusade*[21]. For Ezio, she has to play *Assassin's Creed II, Discovery, Brotherhood* and *Revelations*, watch *Lineage* and *Ascension* and read *Revelations* (as *Embers* is the same as the final part of the book *Revelations* it is extra)[22]. To complete both stories, Altaïr's and Ezio's, the gamer really has to hunt for information in all the media texts. In other words, she has to become the hunter-gatherer that Jenkins envisioned (2006, p. 21). (See Table 1 for an overview of the mediatexts surrounding *Assassin's Creed Revelations*).

Assassin's Creed's Desmond Saga: Ratonhnhaké:ton aka Connor Kenway

This leaves the final part of Desmond's story and the resolution to the December 21, 2012 enigma. Both are addressed in the final game of the franchise *Assassin's Creed III* (2012). In this game, Desmond is much more active than in the previous games. Not only does he have to search his ancestor Ratonhnhaké:ton's memories for an amulet piece of Eden needed to resolve the December 21, 2012 mystery, he also has to fight Abstergo agents, most notably Assassin turned Templar Daniel Cross, and resolve past issues with his father William Miles. The enigma turns out to be a solar flare that will destroy the earth if Desmond does not find a solution. To prevent the catastrophe Desmond sacrifices himself at the end of the game[23]. Ratonhnhaké:ton's story is set against the American War of Independence. Ratonhnhaké:ton, whose name roughly translates from Mohawk to "his spirit emerges"[24], is of mixed race, half American-Indian and half English. Like Ezio, Ratonhnhaké:ton is not an Assassin by choice, he was guided to this path through a 'spirit journey' induced by another piece of Eden, a crystal ball.

Of all the main games, *Assassin's Creed III* has the least linked media texts. Within the Desmond Saga there are only the two comic books, *The Fall* (published in three instalments, already in 2010 and 2011) and *The Chain* (2012), which were later bundled as *Subject Four* (2012). The comics introduce the Assassin turned Templar Daniel Cross and his ancestor Nikolai Orelov who lived in Russia at the time of Tsar Alexander III. Apart from Daniel Cross being Desmond's major adversary in *Assassin's Creed III*, there is another link in the comic *The Chain* when Orelov finds Ezio's Codex in a hidden library beneath the Bolshoi theatre in Moscow. The comics also introduce a new piece of Eden, a staff in the possession of Alexander III. The other two media texts surrounding *Assassin's Creed III* are the graphic novel *Hawk* (2012), which only briefly involves Desmond (most of the story is about the new Assassin Hawk and his ancestor Numa Al'Khamsin aka El Cakr) and the novel *Forsaken* (2012), the diary of Ratonhnhaké:ton's father Haytham Kenway, an Assassin born Templar master. (See Table 1 for an overview of the mediatexts surrounding *Assassin's Creed III*).

To understand this seeming lack of interconnected media texts, more information about the game *Assassin's Creed III* and its place in the *Assassin's Creed* series is needed. *Assassin's Creed*

III serves a double function. On the one hand it "ends" the Desmond Saga and on the other hand it introduces the new *Assassin's Creed* series saga, the Kenway Saga. This explains the different ways the other media texts are linked. The comic *Subject Four* (*The Fall* & *The Chain*) is part of Desmond's transmedial story. The Graphic Novel *Hawk* in itself is part of the storyworld of *Assassin's Creed* and only tentatively linked to Desmond's transmedial story. The novel *Forsaken* is part of the new transmedia storytelling Kenway Saga as are Desmond's ancestors Haytham Kenway and his son Ratonhnhaké:ton. In fact, in *Assassin's Creed III* the gamer starts as Haytham, which is done in such a clever way that both Desmond and the gamer take it for granted that he is an Assassin. Only after the conception of Ratonhnhaké:ton, he becomes the new player character in the next memory. Haytham returns later in the game as a non-player character. In the book *Forsaken,* something similar happens. It contains the diary entries of Haytham from his early youth until his death, which is recorded in the book's epilogue by Ratonhnhaké:ton. Two parts through the diary Haytham's and Ratonhnhaké:ton's stories intertwine as they do in the game. However, even though part of both stories overlap, you see them from the different perspectives of the Templar father and the Assassin son.

DISCUSSION

Before answering the question on the "status" of the games in transmedia storytelling in the *Assassin's Creed* Desmond Saga, I will first shortly recap the findings so far. After the summary and the discussion of the findings, I will debate the transmedia storytelling aspects of the Saga in relation to a recent survey conducted amongst fans of the *Assassin's Creed* series, to see in how far the findings are corroborated by real world data.

As was shown above, the Desmond Saga did not start of as a transmedia storytelling project, but developed to become one over several games and linked media texts. In the beginning, with the first main game *Assassin's Creed*, most of the surrounding media texts were not produced by Ubisoft itself. However, as they were produced under the close supervision of creative lead Patrice Désilets and lead writer Corey May, they are examples of co-creation practices (Dena, 2009, p. 34; Jenkins, 2006, p. 105). From a narrative point of view, they centered on the game character Altaïr, which showed that at this stage Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* franchise was character driven (Jenkins, 2003, para. 13). As most of the media texts were games, it was determined that even though *Altaïr's Chronicles* and *Bloodlines* offered new stages in Altaïr's life story, thus adding comprehension to the story as a whole, in Jenkin's vocabulary they should be termed "radical intertextuality" (Jenkins, 2011, para. 15). Still, unlike other character driven franchises, Ubisoft could not really share assets between the different media texts at this stage.

This changed when Ubisoft acquired Hybride Technologies. According to Ubisoft's CEO Yves Guillemot (2009), the cooperation between the two companies went further than the already often-used convergence of media seen in the industry. To stress the difference, Ubisoft came up with the term "confluence" to describe the new process where bridges are put into place between the creative talents of the different media, to make the creation of the story-worlds of the *Assassin's Creed* series and other Ubisoft franchises a shared effort. Thus, the designers, writers, technicians, etc. are not only building on each other's assets but also enriching each other's experience (ibid.). For Ubisoft this also meant that they now could finally benefit from this sharing of assets within the franchise, most notably shown by the three short films *Lineage, Ascendance* and *Embers*. Here Ubisoft took its first tentative steps in transmedia storytelling. However, the transmedia story, at this stage, is not really about the modern day Assassin Desmond, but about his ancestor Ezio Auditore da Firenze, as he links the different media texts. Full transmedia storytelling is achieved with the publication of the novels *The Secret Crusade* and *Revelation* and the game *Revelation* in 2012. As shown, to gather all the bits and pieces of both Altaïr's and Ezio's story, the gamer has to use at least three different media types, the games, the books and the films. In comparison Desmond's story, which concludes in the game *Assassin's Creed III* is only tentatively transmedial as it is mostly told in the same medium, the

main games. Desmond also appears in the first three graphic novels, but Desmond's modern-day part of these novels is mostly considered non-canonical. Finally, in the comic *The Chain* Desmond only appears very briefly. This is not to say that the comics themselves are not a transmedia storytelling addition to the Saga as a whole, they give a lot of background information about Daniel Cross, Desmond's adversary in *Assassin's Creed III*.

This brings us to the constellation of the Saga as a transmedial story. As has been shown, the main storytelling medium in the Desmond Saga is the game, especially the main games. In fact, the other media texts function more in a 'secondary' capacity in that they either give more background information about and/or insights into the games' protagonists (*Lineage, Embers*) or important adversaries (*Ascendance*, *The Fall, The Chain*). The handheld games are different in that they contribute to the narrative as a whole, underwriting the status of the games as main storytelling medium. The canonical part of the graphic novels does not contribute to the main narrative, but as it is set in the series' storyworld, it is a visual presentation of that storyworld and consequently offers a different way to experience this storyworld. The novels' function is also different. At first, they were mainly adaptations of the ancestor part of the main games and thus a different way to experience part of the narrative, so that non-gamers could still enjoy the story (especially Ezio's). From *The Secret Crusade* on they contributed more to the transmedial story, offering parts of the narrative that were not found in the games, almost forcing the gamers to move away from the games to the other media texts. The unique status of novels in the Saga is confirmed by a recent interview with Maxime Durand, the *Assassin's Creed* series' historian. When asked about the transmedia storytelling aspects of the series he answered:

There's a lot of collaboration, specifically, well I mean, in every game there's collaboration, and it's linked with the novels too, so some ideas that writers can come up [with], I mean writers from novels, they're from outside Ubisoft, and even these guys, they can bring ideas and share ideas and that can make it into the game. So people who have read the novels will find these links into the game, people that haven't read them are not penalized neither… So it's for us important, I mean it's not only the games are brought to the books, but the books also bring elements to the game too… I think it's, you know, every medium has to bring something that's unique. Obviously, our main focus here is to make video games. I think we want to reward people that go read transmedia products, and I know a lot of people don't play the games; they just read the books… (Durand, 2015).

So in almost a reversal to the transmedia storytelling practices described by Jenkins in 2003, in the *Assassin's Creed* series the story is introduced in a game, expanded in more games and eventually given body in (animated) films, comics and novels, whereas its world is explored through the visual storytelling techniques of the graphic novels[26].

Thus, unlike other transmedia storytelling practices, the Desmond Saga uses the games as the main narrative medium and the other media texts more in a supportive role. This assumption is, though backed by theory, at this point only corroborated by a close reading of the texts. A recent survey, disseminated through the Digital Games Research Association's discussion list, might throw more light on the actual consumption of the Saga[27]. The survey yielded 471 valid respondents, of those 464 had played at least one of the games of the Desmond Saga, the other seven had only read the books. Contrary to the popular belief (also held by series' historian Maxime Durand) that only girls read the books, the seven people who only read the books were four men and three women. (Table 2 summarizes the games and the number of respondents who played them.)

A further question in the survey revealed that not everyone played the games in the order they were released, quite a few started with *Assassin's Creed II* or even with *Assassin's Creed III*. From a transmedia storytelling point of view, this is interesting. On the one hand, it shows that the media texts are self-contained, "Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa." (Jenkins, 2006, p. 96). On the other hand,

it deviates from for instance film-based transmedia storytelling such as *Star Wars,* where order (at least of the film trilogies) does matter. It should be pointed out here, however, that Ubisoft used other techniques, such as short videos and web-based games to bring everyone up to speed on Desmond's story in between installments of the main games. The table also shows that the handheld games are significantly (approximately one in five) less popular than the main games. Which suggests that the original strategy Ubisoft choose (main narrative on the main platforms, more information about the ancestor on handheld devices) did not pay off and that they did well to move the whole narrative to the main platforms, also because the survey shows that 69.98% of the respondents played all the main games, whereas only 1.27% percent played all games. It also suggests that recapitulating Altaïr's story in the novel *The Secret Crusade* was not as redundant as expected.

As far as the other media are concerned, the survey showed that they were not as well consumed as the games. (see Tables 3 to 6 for a summary of the number of respondents interacting with the films, comics, graphic novels, and novels).

Only 1.27% percent of the total respondents answered that they had played all of the games, read all of the books, graphic novels and comics, and watched all three films. Of all the media, apart from the games, the films did best with 15.29% watching all three, as opposed to 11.25% who read all the books, 11.04% who read both comics and 6.79% who read all three graphic novels.

Table 2. Number of respondents that played the main games

Assassin's Creed I	Altaïr's Chronicles	Bloodlines	Assassin's creed II	Discovery	Brotherhood	Revelations	Assassin's creed III
382	70	69	401	56	389	379	428

Table 3. Films

Lineage	Ascendance	Embers
135	84	143

Table 4. Comics

The Fall	The Chain
70	53

Table 5. Graphic novels

Desmond	Acquilus	Accipiter
48	43	33

Table 6. Novels

Renaissance	Brotherhood	Secret Crusade	Revelations
107	97	91	80

As far as the transmedia narrative is concerned, the numbers show that the respondents are perhaps not as involved with that part of the Saga. In the analysis I concluded that to get the complete Altaïr story the gamer has to play *Altaïr's Chronicles, Assassin's Creed, Bloodlines*, and *Revelations* and then she still needs to read *The Secret Crusade*, this only holds true for eighteen of the 471 respondents (3.82%). For Ezio, she has to play *Assassin's Creed II, Discovery, Brotherhood*, and *Revelations*, watch *Lineage* and *Ascension* and read *Revelations*, this only holds true for fifteen of the 471 respondents (3.18%).

The survey data are sobering as far as transmedia storytelling is concerned. Of course, the respondents only represent a specific population within the *Assassin's Creed* fan community. To get a more complete picture further research is necessary into the reception of the Desmond Saga. Still, even without considering reception, many questions concerning the role of computer games in transmedia storytelling remain unanswered, for instance why other media franchises shy away from games as a true narrative contribution to the overall story, instead of just using them as a playable part of the storyworld? As far as *Enter the Matrix* is concerned, fans of the films were not really pleased with the fact that the two protagonists, Niobe and Ghost, were only two seemingly minor characters in the film *The Matrix*[28]. One reason that is often mentioned to explain why games are only given a "secondary" role is that the death of a main protagonist in a game would affect the overall story. However, dying usually is an integral part of learning gameplay skills. For gamers it is only natural, albeit frustrating, that their protagonist dies regularly. In the *Assassin's Creed* series, it is even less of an issue. When you "die" in the Animus, i.e., when Desmond is accessing his ancestor memories, this is just seen as loosing sink with that ancestor.

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ENDNOTES

[1] According to Jane McGonigal, an Alternate Reality Game is "An interactive drama played out online and in real-world spaces, taking place over several weeks or months, in which dozens, hundreds, or thousands of players come together online, form collaborative social networks, and work together to solve a mystery or problem that would be absolutely impossible to solve alone." (2004) An Alternate Reality Campaign is a marketing campaign that uses (elements of) Alternate Reality Gaming to promote a product.

[2] Experience designer Ivan Askwith in his review for *Salon* calls it a "companion video game" (2003, para.1).

[3] A franchise is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as "A general title, format, or unifying concept used for creating or marketing a series of products (esp. films, television shows, etc.)". Cross-media storytelling will be explained in the next section of this article.

[4] In *Convergence Culture*, the citation is exactly the same, apart from the last sentence, which reads "Franchise products are governed too much by economic logic and not enough by artistic vision" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 105).

[5] They first appeared in 1984 in a comic book. Three years later a cartoon TV-series was launched followed by the first computer game in 1989 and the first live action film in 1990. Other media texts and merchandise followed.

[6] For instance, the recent increase in the expansion of the storyworld on a second screen during the airing of a TV-series is a direct attempt to re-attract viewers to the TV screen, where they would otherwise (illegally) download the episode or wait for it to be shown on services such as Netflix or Hulu.

[7] Or transmedia practice as she calls it.

[8] Confusingly in 'The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling (Well, Two Actually. Five More on Friday)' (2009a) and 'Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: The Remaining Four Principles of Transmedia Storytelling' (2009b) Jenkins concedes that fan creations can expand the storyworld, although he adds that the "alternative" versions of the storyline should be consistent.

[9] Before the introduction of the term transmedia storytelling the term cross-media storytelling was used to indicate stories that were told in different media, whether they expanded the storyworld or not. After the introduction of the new term, cross-media storytelling was used for adaptations across different media. More recently, however, the term cross-media storytelling is used to indicate media texts e.g. TV-series that are released on different platforms (TV, mobile phone, tablet, DVD, etc.) (Philips, 2012, p. 16).

[10] For an overview of all the media texts in the Desmond Saga, see the list of media texts (after the bibliography). In this discussion, I will not include the downloadable content for the games (available from *Assassin's Creed II* onwards) nor will I look at the two web-based games *Assassin's Creed Project Legacy* and *Assassin's Creed Initiates.*

[11] For an extensive analysis of Altaïr, see Veugen (2014).

[12] Detailed information about all the media texts and characters in the *Assassins Creed* series can be found in the *Assassins Creed Wiki* at http://assassinscreed.wikia.com.

[13] All the other main games have a similar mobile version. As they are direct adaptations of the ancestor part of the main game, I will leave them out of the discussion.

[14] Another comic book with a separate Altaïr assassination mission was published by Penny Arcade in August 2007. This comic was also just called *Assassin's Creed.* Though considered non-canonical its story, a confrontation between Altaïr and a 'kill' in Acre, does not go against the main game's narrative.

15 A paratexts is a 'subsidiary' text supporting the main text e.g. a book's title, author, cover etc. The term was originally coined by Gérard Genette (1987) to apply to books. Jonathan Gray (2010) expanded the term's use to paratexts surrounding films, games and other media texts, such as trailers and merchandise.

16 *Assassin's Creed II E3 Trailer* (2009). Ubisoft Montreal & Hybride. Available at http://assassinscreed.uk.ubi.com/assassins-creed-2/#/videos/5693/.

17 See Veugen (2014).

18 The game actually starts when he is born on 24 June 1459, but then skips to the seventeen-year-old Ezio shortly after the events shown in *Lineage*.

19 There are some differences between Ezio's story in the book compared to the version in the game, but for the most part the story is the same.

20 Ezio learned about the library form letters left to him by his uncle.

21 There is also a short scene with Altaïr and Maria in *Assassin's Creed II* when Desmond has some trouble with the Animus.

22 As the books offer almost the same information about Altaïr and Ezio as the main games, one might get away with only reading the books. However, the books contain no information about Desmond, contestably the main character of the Saga.

23 As the game still left some questions unanswered, Desmond "returns" in the next game *Assassin's Creed Black Flag* (2013) in videos and text messages found at the Abstergo headquarters.

24 Native Languages of America website http://www.native-languages.org/mailbag/ratohnhaketon.htm [15 July 2015].

25 Not to overcomplicate the table, the book Forsaken and the comic Subject Four (The Fall & The Chain) have been left out.

26 Some of the protagonists of the 'secondary' media texts such as the Chinese Assassin Shao Joa, who sought Ezio's help at the end of his life in the novel *Revelations* (and the film *Embers*), the Assassin Arbaaz Mir who is the protagonist in the graphic novel *Assassin's Creed Brahman* and Nikolai Orelov, Daniel Cross' ancestor in *Subject Four* (*The Fall* & *The Chain*) are now to appear in their own games, in the new game series *Assassin's Creed Chronicles.*

27 I would like to thank research master student Samantha Schäfer, who set up the survey, for allowing me to use the raw data for this article. The survey produced 677 responses. Of these only 550 were valid. As the survey researched the complete *Assassin's Creed* series up until the latest media texts published in 2014, only the data of respondents who had consumed at least one of the Desmond Saga's media texts where taken into consideration, reducing the total to 471 records. Most of the respondents (74.52%) were male, 23.14% were female, the rest 2.34% considered themselves to be neither male nor female or did not state their gender. The majority of the respondents was either twenty years or younger (45.01%) or between twenty-one and thirty (45.22%). Most respondents were either European (63.48%) or North American (17.62%). The next biggest number was the people who did not specify their nationality (9.34%).

28 For a discussion of this particular example, see Veugen, 2010.

APPENDIX

Media Texts in the Desmond Saga

Note that this list consists of all the media texts in the Desmond Saga, including some that are not discussed in the text. When a media text is preceded with an * it expand the storyworld (additive comprehension), if a medium is preceded with an a it is an adaptation of (part of) the main game. For each medium, the main assassin(s) is/are given as well as the piece or pieces of Eden that feature in the story.

Main Games (Released for PS3, XBox360, and PC)

Assassin's Creed (2007, Ubisoft). Desmond & Altaïr; Apple of Eden #1.
Assassin's Creed II (2009, Ubisoft). Desmond & Ezio; Apple of Eden #2.
Assassin's Creed Brotherhood (2010, Ubisoft). Desmond & Ezio; Apple of Eden #2 & Staff.
Assassin's Creed Revelations (2011, Ubisoft). Desmond, Ezio and Altaïr; Apple of Eden #1 & Masyaf Keys aka Memory Seals.
Assassin's Creed III (2012, Ubisoft). Desmond & Ratonhnhaké:ton; Crystal Ball, Medallion, and Apple of Eden #2.

Games for Mobile and Handheld Platforms

aAssassin's Creed mobile game (2007, Gameloft & Ubisoft Montreal). Altaïr; Apple of Eden #1.
*Assassin's Creed: Altaïr's Chronicles (2008, Nintendo DS; 2010, iPad, Ubisoft). Altaïr; Chalice.
*Assassin's Creed Bloodlines (2009, PSP, Ubisoft). Altaïr; Apple of Eden #1.
AAssassin's Creed II mobile game (2009, Gameloft & Ubisoft Montreal). Ezio; Apple of Eden #2.
*Assassin's Creed II Discovery (2009, Nintendo DS, Ubisoft). Ezio; Apple of Eden #2.
AAssassin's Creed Brotherhood mobile game (2010, Gameloft & Ubisoft Montreal). Ezio.
AAssassin's Creed Revelations mobile game (2011, Gameloft & Ubisoft Montreal). Ezio.
AAssassin's Creed III mobile game (2012, Gameloft & Ubisoft Montreal). Ratonhnhaké:ton (in this game he is only referred to as Connor).

Online Games/Databases

*Assassin's Creed Project Legacy (2010, Facebook, Ubi Workshop). Mario Auditore, Ezio, Giovanni Borgia (and others); Shroud of Turin, Chrystal Skull, and Ankh.
(a)Assassin's Creed Initiates (2012-2013). (Online, Ubisoft).
Multiplayer games (these use the existing storyworld as setting)
Assassin's Creed Twitter Assassination Experience (2009, Twitter, Ubisoft).
Assassin's Creed II: Multiplayer (2010, iPod, Ubisoft).
(Animated) Films (all expansions of Ezio's story)
*Assassin's Creed: Lineage (2009). Simoneau, Y. (director). Ubisoft Montreal & Hybride. http://assassinscreedlineage.us.ubi.com/.
*Assassin's Creed: Ascendance (2010). Ubisoft Workshop (production). Ubisoft Entertainment. http://www.megavideo.com/v/ZQV0Y3H2c2801992086a1c1ca1865c66522a82f41
(*)Assassin's Creed: Embers (2011). Ubisoft Workshop (production). Ubisoft Montreal. www.youtube.com/watch?v=QL30864YID4

Books

aBowden, O. (2009). Assassin's Creed Renaissance. London: Penguin. (Ezio; Apple of Eden #2).

aBowden, O. (2010). Assassin's Creed Brotherhood. London: Penguin. (Ezio; Apple of Eden #2, Staff).

*Bowden, O. (2011). Assassin's Creed The Secret Crusade. London: Penguin. (Altaïr: Apple of Eden #1).

*Bowden, O. (2011). Assassin's Creed Revelations. London: Penguin. (Ezio & Altaïr: Apple of Eden #1).

(*Bowden, O. (2012). Assassin's Creed Forsaken. London: Penguin. (Ratonhnhaké:ton & Haytham Kenway: Amulet)).

Graphic Novels

*Corbeyron & D. Defali. (2009). Assassin's Creed: 1 Desmond. Paris: Les Deux Royaumes Ubisoft France. Desmond and Aquilus; Ankh.

*Corbeyron & D. Defali. (2010). Assassin's Creed: 2 Aquilus. Paris: Les Deux Royaumes Ubisoft France. Desmond, Aquilus, and Accipiter; Ankh.

*Corbeyron & D. Defali. (2011). Assassin's Creed: 3 Accipiter. Paris: Les Deux Royaumes Ubisoft France. Desmond, Jonathan Hawk, and Accipiter; Ankh.

*Corbeyron & D. Defali (2012). Assassin's Creed: 4 Hawk. Paris: Les Deux Royaumes Ubisoft France. Desmond, Jonathan Hawk, and Numa Al'Khamsin aka El Cakr; Sceptre of Aset.

Comic Books

Kerschl, K., & Stewart, C. (2010). Assassin's Creed: The Fall. Ubisoft. Daniel Cross and Nikolai Orelov; Impirial Sceptre. Staff.

Kerschl, K., & Stewart, C. (2011). Assassin's Creed: The Chain. Ubisoft. Daniel Cross and Nikolai Orelov; Impirial Sceptre. Staff.

(*)Kerschl, K. & C. Stewart (2012). Assassin's Creed: Subject Four. Ubisoft. (compilation of Assassin's Creed: The Fall and Assassin's Creed: The Chain).