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## “I love you 3000”

An analysis of the Marvel Cinematic Universe

**Abstract**

In this thesis, we will examine if the Marvel Cinematic Universe can be considered complex. We will analyse the following films *Captain America: Civil War*, *Black Panther*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, and *Avengers: Endgame* which are all from Marvel Cinematic Universe's third phase. We have chosen these films because they are connected in terms of storylines, characters, and worlds. We will focus on transmedia storytelling, seriality, kernels and satellites, worldbuilding, and complex media in order to examine the complexities within the films. Traditionally, transmedia storytelling is defined as one continuous story across multiple instalments and platforms. Two important aspects of transmedia storytelling are seriality and worldbuilding, where seriality deals with how stories are told across instalments and worldbuilding deals with how a fictional world is created and what it takes to make a fictional world believable. Kernels and satellites deal with major and minor events that occur in a narrative text and how they impact each other and complex media deals with how popular culture is becoming more and more complex because of multiple storylines that occur in different mediums. It is through these concepts that we will analyse the complexities within the films.

*Civil War* and the two *Avengers* films are very serial because they are linked together through information and events that continue from previous films. The three films require the viewers to be familiar with the universe beforehand because they rely heavily on characters, storylines, and events from previous films. Because of this, these films cannot be considered standalone films and viewers need to watch other films in the franchise to understand what is going on. *Black Panther*, on the other hand, is not very serial, and it can be watched without prior knowledge of the franchise. Whereas *Civil War* and the two *Avengers* films are set in a world the viewers are already familiar with, *Black Panther* is set in an entirely new world, that needs to be built in the film and thoroughly explained, as it is so foreign from the other films. So *Black Panther* relies on worldbuilding to a much larger degree than *Civil War* and the two *Avengers* film.

Throughout our analyses, we have found that the Marvel Cinematic Universe is complex because the franchise is very serial, and it relies on continuity. Moreover, the world, the stories are set in, is vast and complicated. This allows storylines to expand across the films and create a more complex story. The Marvel Cinematic Universe requires viewers to pay close attention to the films as what can seem like a small detail will become important in later films. Due to the films' vast world and stories, we consider it to be complex as viewers need to invest

a lot of time to be able to fully understand the films and get the full entertainment experience of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

As Marvel is moving into a new era, now that the Infinity Saga is completed, it will be interesting to see if they will simplify the universe going forward or if they will continue as they are. Both directions have their advantages and disadvantages, and the discussion will try to outline some of the problems they may face. One of these problems being that they can lose existing viewers if they go in a completely new direction or alternatively, they can find it difficult to gain new viewers if they continue to make the franchise more complex than it already is, as 23 films is a lot to take on for a new viewer.

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## Introduction

Over 22 billion dollars at the global box office across 23 films that is how much the Marvel Cinematic Universe has earned since 2008 (Bean). With eight films earning more than one billion dollars worldwide, it is safe to say that the Marvel Cinematic Universe films are popular. The Marvel Cinematic Universe consists of many smaller franchises such as *Iron Man*, *Captain America*, *Thor*, and *Guardians of the Galaxy*, just to name a few. Each franchise has a set of superheroes and supporting characters that are unique to that franchise. However, the Marvel Cinematic Universe differs from other franchises by having these characters move freely in the films across the universe. For example, in the film *Marvel's The Avengers*, the first Avengers film, six of the most popular characters from the separate franchises came together as the Avengers to fight a common enemy and save Earth. The Avengers continue to expand as the Marvel universe grows and in *Endgame*, it becomes apparent how vast the universe has become. Now, the Avengers consists of over twenty superheroes and even more supporting characters, who are all established in the universe and are important in the films. Moreover, it is not just characters that the films share, they also share events and locations. This complexity is what has attracted us to the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the reason why we have chosen to write about it in our thesis.

In this thesis, we will analyse four films from the Marvel Cinematic Universe's third phase and to do this, we will use several theories to examine areas such as transmedia storytelling, seriality, kernels and satellites, worldbuilding, and complex media. We have chosen to examine the complexities within the Marvel Cinematic Universe through the lens of transmedia storytelling, focusing on worldbuilding and seriality, as all of the films in the franchise are connected to each other, and this is a trait of transmedia storytelling. We will use theorists such as Henry Jenkins, Roger Hagedorn, Seymour Chatman, Mark Wolf, and Steven Johnson and their theories will lay the grounds for the analysis of the four films. We have chosen to analyse the following four films: *Captain America: Civil War*, *Black Panther*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, and *Avengers: Endgame*. We have chosen *Captain America: Civil War* and the two *Avengers* films because they are very serial and connected to previous films in the franchise, whereas *Black Panther* is chosen because of the large amount of worldbuilding that happens in it, as it takes place in a fictional country. We have chosen to analyse films from the third phase because it becomes extremely apparent that the films are connected to each other here. Each film will have its own chapter with the exception of *Avengers: Infinity War*, and *Avengers: Endgame* as they are essential one film. The analyses will be based on the theory, and they will contain the following sections. We will begin each analysis by examining

transmedia storytelling in the films, and here, we will use transmedia theorist Henry Jenkins to examine if the films contain transmedia elements. The seriality section will be based on Roger Hagedorn's theory, where we will analyse the films' serial nature. Then, we will analyse the films in terms of kernels and satellites where we will use Seymour Chatman's terms. The following section, the worldbuilding section, will be based on Mark Wolf's ideas on worldbuilding and how it can be seen in the films. Lastly, we will discuss the complexity in the films in terms of narrative threads and complex media, and here, we will use Steven Johnson's theory.

While seriality and worldbuilding are already a part of Henry Jenkins' transmedia theory, we have chosen to use other theorists as we believe they give a better and more expansive understanding of the terms, as they are so important in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Adding these two up with Jenkins' term of continuity and Chatman's kernels and satellites, the universe within the films becomes so vast and complicated. As of now, there are 23 films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and these films are connected in terms of characters, events, and worlds, this can only make the Marvel universe complex.

With *Avengers: Endgame* being the second to last film in phase three and concluding the first three phases, the discussion will discuss phase four and if and how it will be different from the first three phases, as they had a clear format. Marvel is reportedly moving in a new direction with phase four, so we will discuss how this will impact the universe and its viewers. Because the fourth phase has not started yet, the discussion will be based on the very little information that is available now, but we will still discuss the potential problems that might arise, with the new direction Marvel seems to be moving in.

In this thesis, we want to examine how complex the Marvel Cinematic Universe is and how it can be seen in the four selected films. The analysis will examine just how complex the universe really is and will lead to a discussion on how Marvel will go from here. To answer this question, we will take a formalist approach and focus on the films themselves and not their larger context.

## Theory

In this section, we will outline the theory we will use to analyse the four chosen films. As mentioned in our introduction, we have chosen to focus on transmedia storytelling, seriality, kernels and satellites, worldbuilding, and complex media, and we will use theorists such as Henry Jenkins, Roger Hagedorn, Steven Johnson, Seymour Chatman, and Mark Wolf to do so.

Aside from his book *Convergence Culture*, most of Henry Jenkins' work on transmedia storytelling has been published on his website, and are therefore in the form of blog posts. Jenkins writes on his blog why he chooses to publish his findings on a blog:

Another key frustration of anyone who writes about contemporary culture is that the world is changing so fast that certain details become out of date before a book sees print. Having a blog has allowed me to return to some of the case histories and explore those changes, as well as to extend the argument in order to deal with more-recent developments. (“Why Academics Should Blog...”).

Jenkins uses his blog as a way to present his finding on transmedia storytelling in real-time, and the blog allows him to elaborate, make changes to, or update his theories. So, as a result of this, we will use Jenkins' blog posts to define and explains his terms.

### *What is transmedia?*

In the following section, the term transmedia storytelling will be explained. Henry Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling will be the starting point for this section, as Jenkins is credited for introducing the term transmedia storytelling. However, other definitions, from Melanie Schiller and The Producers Guild of America, will also be drawn in to expand the transmedia storytelling term and find a definition that fits this project. The term transmedia storytelling will be used to analyse the four films from the Marvel Cinematic Universe we have chosen, and the term will help shed light on whether the Marvel Cinematic Universe can be considered an example of transmedia storytelling and if so, how this can be seen in the films.

Henry Jenkins defines transmedia storytelling as a way to tell a story where it gets “dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (“Transmedia Storytelling 101”), meaning that a story is told through several instalments and on different mediums. While the story is told on different mediums and instalments, it is important that that the story is clear and unified, however, the instalments must still be able to stand on their own and make a ‘unique contribution’ to the story (“Transmedia Storytelling 101”). What sets transmedia storytelling apart from traditional storytelling is that it is one continuous story that is told across several



instalments and on different mediums. This could be a story that is first presented to an audience in a film, and then it is continued in a book. Each instalment has to be able to stand on their own and add something new to the story, but it must still be visible that they belong together. An example of traditional storytelling could be a film franchise that follows the same characters or is set in the same place but has a new story for every film. In transmedia storytelling, it is also important that the new instalment adds something new to the story, for example, information that expands the viewers' understanding of the story. Jenkins further elaborates that it is difficult for transmedia producers to find the balance between making a film that is accessible for first-time viewers to follow but also adds new elements for existing viewers and doing so on different mediums and instalments. Jenkins writes that most transmedia stories are based in worlds which have the opportunity to tell many stories about characters that exist in the world. This is where transmedia storytelling differs from traditional storytelling, which often centres around a specific character or storyline, whereas a transmedia story is set in a world that offers opportunities for more complex stories ("Transmedia Storytelling 101"). In his blog post "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections", Jenkins reflects that transmedia stories have to offer backstory, map out the world, offer other characters' perspectives, and/or enhance audience engagement to be a transmedia extension because it has to expand the world, to be considered transmedia ("Transmedia 202: Further Reflections"). If it does not expand the story or world, it is not a transmedia story ("Transmedia 202: Further Reflections").

A transmedia story will often be introduced on one medium, and then it can be expanded on others, as mentioned earlier, as many of the mediums have their limitations. Scholar Melanie Schiller writes that "each medium involved in the storytelling practice is assumed to do what it does best" (Schiller, 99), and a tv-series will be able to delve much deeper into a story than a two-hour film will, the film and television series serve different purposes and can expand a story in different ways. Schiller writes that despite a story being transmedia, every story should be "sufficiently self-contained" (100), so viewers can enjoy and understand a film without having to watch, read, or play everything to understand what happens.

An important aspect of transmedia storytelling is the way the stories are consumed by audiences. Previously, it was not necessary to research a film before a viewer watched it, and it could be easily followed, even if you missed part of the film, as many films followed the same simple structure. However, today in what Henry Jenkins calls "the new Hollywood system", the viewer has to pay full attention to a film to fully understand what is going on and perhaps do some research before watching it (*Convergence Culture*, 106). This is certainly the

case with many new films, such as *Star Wars* and the Marvel Cinematic Universe, where the films rely on the viewer to be familiar with the world they are set in, as they do not set up the world and characters in every film.

In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins argues that viewers are now encouraged to look into and examine the films, make their own theories and share them with other viewers (*Convergence Culture*, 98), and by doing this, viewers can participate in the story. Jenkins calls these viewers “hunters and gatherers” (20-21), as they pick up on all the information given in or about a film (or tv-series), and they do this to get the full experience and understand the world completely. Transmedia stories can quickly become very complex and intricate, especially, if they are told over several instalments and on different media, and if viewers want the full experience, they almost have to study the works to fully understand the world and get the full experience.

Henry Jenkins is not the only scholar to study transmedia storytelling, and while many scholars rely on Henry Jenkins’ definition of transmedia storytelling to express their opinions of the term, The Producers Guild of America, an association that represents and protects film and tv producers, has defined the term differently. Their definition of transmedia storytelling is: “a Transmedia Narrative project or franchise of one that consists of three (or more) narrative storylines existing within the same fictional universe” (“PGA Board of Directors Approves Addition of Transmedia Producer to Guild's Producers Code of Credits.”). So, for The Producers Guild of America, transmedia storytelling does not have to be spread across multiple mediums as Jenkins states in his definition.

Henry Jenkins’ definition of transmedia storytelling is rather straightforward, it is a story that is “dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (“Transmedia Storytelling 101”). This definition can be considered a very strict definition, and Jenkins himself writes in a later blog post that there is no “transmedia formula” and further writes that “Transmedia refers to a set of choices made about the best approach to tell a particular story to a particular audience in a particular context depending on the particular resources available to particular producers.” (“Transmedia 202: Further Reflections”). Transmedia storytelling can, therefore, be looked in more ways than just one, one of them being in the strict sense, where there has to be one story told through several instalments on different mediums, and another way is that it can be one story told through several instalments, that uses some of the transmedia storytelling principles. The second way is a much less strict way to look at the transmedia storytelling definition.

Transmedia storytelling is a relatively new term in the film and television world, and it is changing as the genre evolves, and this is why Henry Jenkins, Melanie Schiller, The Producers Guild of America, and many other scholars have different definitions for the term because it is so new and always evolving. In our project, we have chosen to lean on The Producers Guild of America's definition of transmedia storytelling, because the Marvel Cinematic Universe favours this definition. The Marvel Cinematic Universe films are all connected and create "a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" as Jenkins states in his definition ("Transmedia Storytelling 101"), however, the narrative is not spread out on different mediums as Jenkins requires it to be. Moreover, the films are also not "sufficiently self-contained" as Melanie Schiller requires a transmedia storytelling narrative to be (Schiller, 100), as one would struggle to see, for example, *Captain America: Civil War* or *Avengers: Endgame* without having seen the previous films. While it is, of course, possible to watch a Marvel film without having seen all of them, the films, especially the newer ones, heavily rely on viewers to be familiar with the universe and characters to fully understand what is happening and to get the full experience. So, because Jenkins' and Schiller's definitions of transmedia storytelling are too narrow, we are relying on The Producers Guild of America's definition as it fits better with the Marvel Cinematic Universe and therefore this project.

#### *Henry Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia storytelling*

In the following section, we will outline Henry Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia storytelling. These principles are essential to understanding transmedia storytelling as they focus on how a transmedia franchise is characterised both in terms of structure and audience participation. We will use these terms to examine the Marvel Cinematic Universe's transmedial nature. We have chosen to only use Jenkins' principle of continuity as the Marvel Cinematic Universe is characterised by a connected universe. Some of Jenkins' principles focus on fan participation or alternative stories, which is not our primary focus in this thesis, therefore, we will not use them in the analysis.

Jenkins writes about spreadability and drillability, continuity and multiplicity, immersion and extractability, worldbuilding, seriality, subjectivity, and performance as the most important elements when working with transmedia storytelling and he has defined these principles on his blog in the form of two blog entries. Some of Jenkins' principles cover more than one element of transmedia, for example, continuity and multiplicity, but Jenkins regards them as one principle in his blog entries, so we will also treat them as such in the following section.

Jenkins' first principle concerns itself with spreadability and drillability and the way audiences interact with a transmedia universe. Here, spreadability deals with the ways consumers share content. Where spreadability concerns itself with consumers sharing content online, drillability encourages consumers to engage further with a universe by 'digging deeper' into the story to uncover all of the complexities of a story. Jenkins argues that not all franchises can be considered spreadable and drillable, so, some franchise can be very spreadable, but they lack drillable content for fans to engage with. Thus, spreadability and drillability can create great fan experiences, but both terms do not need to be present in a transmedia franchise for it to be successful ("Revenge 1").

The second principle is continuity and multiplicity, and it concerns itself with stories in a franchise. Continuity seeks to achieve a "unified experience" across multiple instalments for fans, therefore, the term is characterised by a universe with one main story that fans can engage with which is then expanded through several mediums and platforms. Here, Jenkins explains that continuity is very important in a franchise as fans appreciate coherent and plausible fictional worlds and that way, hardcore fans are rewarded for their time put into understanding all aspects of a universe's complexity. On the other hand, multiplicity concerns itself with alternative retellings of a story to give new perspectives of a story or a character. Here, Jenkins uses the character Spiderman as an example, as he is part of the mainstream Marvel universe, which is characterised by continuity, but he is also present in other franchises that are characterised by multiplicity as an alternative version of the mainstream Spiderman. Jenkins argues that continuity and multiplicity are two opposites, and some franchises may use continuity in their story, while other franchises will use multiplicity to create multiple versions of a story for fans to engage with ("Revenge 1"). The Marvel Cinematic Universe is mainly characterised by continuity as most of the films in the franchise relate to each other and the main story is expanded through these films and the phases the films are a part of.

Jenkins's third principle is immersion and extractability, and these two terms focus on the connection between the audience's experience with the transmedia universe and the audience's everyday life ("Revenge 2").

The fourth principle involves the term worldbuilding, which is a process of creating vast worlds with the possibility of creating complex characters and storylines. Jenkins argues that it is important for a transmedia universe to be a vast world full of possibilities for character and story development, so fans, who want to know more about the universe, can fully immerse themselves into the universe and the story. This is the case with Marvel Cinematic Universe as the universe consists of many characters with their own storylines and the main storyline of the

franchise is fleshed out in more than one film (“Revenge 2”). This will be expanded on further in an upcoming section about worldbuilding.

The fifth principle concerns itself with seriality. Here, Jenkins argues that the important chunks of information in a serial story are dispersed across multiple instalments and media systems. Thus, a story can first be told through a film or a television series and then it can continue into a new film or a different medium, but it is the same story that continues even if it is a new film or if the type of medium changes. Seriality is an important part of transmedia storytelling as the transmedia story is told across multiple platforms and instalments (“Revenge 2”). The Marvel Cinematic Universe is very serial as the main storyline is present throughout several films. Seriality will be discussed in more detail in an upcoming section.

Jenkins’ sixth principle deals with subjectivity, and it focuses on “unexplored dimensions of the fictional world”. For example, this can be extra character backstories or information about what happens next in the universe which expand the universe, thus, with subjectivity producers can show other perspectives of a story. Moreover, subjectivity also focuses on secondary characters in a franchise where fans can get a different perspective of an event from a character who is not the main protagonist (“Revenge 2”). For example, the character Black Widow in the Marvel Cinematic Universe was introduced early in the franchise, but she does not have her own film yet like most characters in the franchise do, but she will star in her own film later in 2020 which will focus on her past.

The last principle is performance, and the term focuses on fans’ participation with a franchise. Here, fans actively participate with a universe by creating fan content in the forms of, for example, cover songs and fan videos which are then uploaded to social media platforms such as YouTube and other community forums (“Revenge 2”).

As we have mentioned previously, we will only use some of the principles as some of the principles are not relevant for our project in our analysis of the four chosen films.

### *Seriality*

When thinking of seriality, one might think of it in terms of how television shows and series use seriality as they are classified by episodes. However, according to seriality theorist Roger Hagedorn, seriality does not only cover television, and he argues that seriality can be used to discuss how different types of mediums have used seriality throughout history, both in terms of medium and genre (Hagedorn, 27). In the next section, we will outline how different mediums have used seriality through time.

In his chapter “Doubtless to be continued: A brief history of serial narrative” in the book *TO BE CONTINUED ... Soap operas around the world* edited by Robert C. Allen, Roger Hagedorn describes how seriality is not only limited to a particular medium, for example, television, but it has been utilized in different mediums throughout time. These are, for example, newspapers, radio, film serials, television series, and films. Moreover, Hagedorn argues that seriality is not limited to the genre either (Hagedorn, 27).

Hagedorn differentiates serials from other narrative forms as serials are a product of the relationship between the producing industry and the consumers where serials offer “a narrative text to consumers in isolated, materially independent units available at different but predictable times” (Hagedorn, 27-28). Hagedorn describes this as ‘successive episodes’. Hagedorn describes the term episodicity as one of the most important traits that differentiate serials from the classic narrative text, which is a single-unit narrative as, for example, a novel or a feature film. Another important trait that distinguishes the serial from the classic narrative text is the process of multiplying the elements of time, space and character, which Hagedorn argues creates the possibility of narrative complication. Here, Hagedorn writes that serials also differ from classic narrative text in terms of how many riddles and mysteries are presented and resolved in later episodes to create cliffhangers, so consumers continue to follow the serial (28).

As previously mentioned, seriality is not limited to a single medium, and Hagedorn argues that serials have been used in every medium right when the mediums were created as mass mediums. As Hagedorn mentions, the purpose of the individual serial was to increase sales of, for example, newspaper and film theatre tickets, but the serials also promoted the medium they appeared in to create a massive consuming public for that particular medium. Thus, once the consumers had experienced texts through that medium, they were ready to consume other texts from the same medium (Hagedorn, 28-29). For this reason, creators have used serials to expand already existing target groups of subgroups of the population which generally are women and children. In relation to this, Hagedorn argues “When a medium needs an audience, it turns to serials” (29) as they create stories which people will continue to follow due to cliffhangers. If we discuss this in relation to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the franchise only consists of films right now. This is closely related to one of Johnson’s main points about a film’s limitations where most films only last somewhere between two to three hours (Johnson, 130-131), which we will discuss further in a later section. This means that the entire film’s plot and conflict should be resolved in that time and there is not much time for character development in contrast to a television series where characters can develop over the course of multiple seasons. The Marvel Cinematic Universe took a different approach to this

as the creators decided to create one unified universe with multiple characters and storylines that are not necessarily resolved in one film and these storylines may be carried over into the next film. This gives a sense of seriality, and if the audience wishes to receive the full serial experience, they must watch all of the films. This creates a fan base and thus, an audience, for the franchise as most fans wish to learn what happens next in the universe, and as a result of that, they go to the cinema to watch the newest instalment in the franchise.

In the last part of Hagedorn's chapter about the history of serials, he writes about the 'current' situation concerning serials. This book edition was written in 2001, which was almost twenty years ago, however, the topic Hagedorn writes about concerning serials is still relevant today, as serial narratives are still very popular today. Hagedorn writes that narrative serials can be considered to be the most dominant form of narrative storytelling today. Hagedorn concludes his chapter by writing that serial narratives will continue to change throughout time both in terms of mass media and serial narrative.

#### *Seymour Chatman's 'kernels and satellites'*

In his book *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Seymour Chatman defines many narrative elements which can be used to analyse a narrative and we have decided to use Chatman's terms of kernels and satellites in order to examine the events that occur in the films.

Chatman describes kernels and satellites as narrative events that have "a logic of hierarchy" (Chatman, 53), where he clarifies that some events are more important than other events. This is where the two terms kernels and satellites come in, as Chatman, borrowing the terms from Roland Barthes, defines kernels as major events and satellites as minor events in a narrative text. Kernels are major plot events in a narrative text, and they can be considered "nodes or hinges in the structure, branching points which force a movement into one of two (or more) possible paths" (53). This means that kernels indicate which direction the story will go in, and as a result of this, they cannot be omitted without damaging the logic of the narrative text. A satellite, on the other hand, is a minor plot event, which is 'not as important' in contrast to kernels as they can be omitted and dismissed without destroying the logic of the story, however, if they are omitted, the narrative will not be as fleshed out as they offer elaboration and completion of the kernels. Thus, satellites would not exist if there were no kernels. So, satellites may be dependent on kernels, but not the other way around (54).

As a closing remark, Chatman addresses the topic of how relevant kernels and satellites are in the narrative analysis. Some critics say that the terms are not important, and they do not

add anything new to the analysis of a text, but Chatman argues that they are an important contribution to understanding a narrative text (Chatman, 55-56).

### *Worldbuilding*

In 2012 Mark J. P. Wolf, a communications professor at Concordia University Wisconsin, published his book *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*. The book deals with how imaginary worlds are built in primarily literature, but Wolf also draws on films and other types of texts. Wolf's aim is to describe how imaginary worlds are built and what makes them believable to audiences, so they can immerse themselves in said worlds. Wolf writes that worlds are often just a setting for a story to happen in and are rarely noticed, let alone studied by scholars (Wolf, 2). As written in an earlier section, Henry Jenkins also uses the concept of worldbuilding, however, his use of the word is broader and vaguer. Jenkins writes about the importance of being able to expand a world, in terms of characters and stories, to further develop the world as a transmedia storytelling example, whereas Wolf's use of the word is much more extensive, and he outlines how one can create a world. Therefore, Wolf's focus is on the world itself, and how it functions, and Jenkins' focus is on how the world can be expanded.

The following sections will outline and explain Wolf's many concepts that provide the basis for building a believable world, according to Wolf. The following theory will provide the grounds for our analysis on worldbuilding.

Imaginary worlds can become very expansive, some stretching over more than one media outlet, and it is through these, the viewers experience the world. An example, Wolf uses, is Star Trek with 11 films, over 500 hours of television, as well as books, comic book, video games, and more. Wolf argues that due to the vast amounts of information about imaginary worlds, such as Star Trek, for example, an imaginary world can be a lot to take on for viewers as it requires viewers to spend time engaging with content to try to fully understand the world (Wolf, 2). To build a world, a lot of details are necessary to provide information to viewers about the world. While these details might not be a part of the story told, they will enhance the world. These details do not have to be a part of the narrative, they can instead appear as maps or timelines, giving viewers more information about a world, which do not necessarily add to the story, but enhance the viewers' understanding of the world (2). These worlds can turn into franchises and continue telling stories about new locations and characters, and thereby expand the world itself (3).



Wolf writes about the importance of a “completely furnished world”, a term borrowed from Umberto Eco, and that it shows how important the world is. Furthermore, Wolf quotes Henry Jenkins for saying that world building has become an art form and that creating worlds which are compelling cannot be “fully explored or exhausted” in just one film for example (Wolf, 10). For Henry Jenkins, a world is more than just a film or even a franchise (10), he then quotes a screenwriter who told him that he used to just pitch a story, then as sequels took off he would pitch characters, and now he pitches a world, “because a world can support multiple characters and multiple stories across multiple media.” (Wolf, 10; Jenkins, 116). For Wolf, it is important to recognise that a world is “different and distinct” from a narrative and that the two function differently and have different purposes (Wolf, 11).

For Wolf, the action of immersing oneself in a novel, film, or tv-show is to step into “a new experience” in an imaginary world (Wolf, 16), and when these worlds are made expertly, they can draw audiences in without much effort (16). The story that is told might be a part of it, but it can also be the world the story is set in if it is different enough from our world. It is important to note that Henry Jenkins also uses the term immersion as one of his seven principles, however, his definition is very different from Wolf’s. Jenkins’ immersion term refers to how fans can psychically immerse themselves into a story, for example in theme parks or by owning merchandise, which he calls extractability, whereas Wolf’s use of the term immersion refers to the viewer’s ability to be drawn into the imaginary world and feel as if they are there themselves.

Wolf writes that it is “the essence of *entertainment*” when an audience enters another world and stays there to experience it (Wolf, 17). But for an imaginary world to be successful, it has to be well-created because worlds do not rely on narrative structures as the stories told, and stories are dependent on the world they are set in. If created well, these worlds can go even further than just the stories (17). For Wolf, every story needs a world that it takes place in, and it can, therefore, not exist without a world, however, a world can exist without a story (29). Wolf’s argument is that a world can have more than one story set in it, and if the world has been constructed well, it can seem to exist without the events or characters in the story and live on its own (29)

One of the types of worlds Wolf writes about is secondary worlds, these worlds have to be different from what he calls the ‘Primary World’ (which is our world as we know it). It is these differences that make them secondary, and it requires a “fictional *place*”, that cannot be the real world (Wolf, 25). Wolf clarifies that by “place” he does not mean a world, but place refers to the things that the characters experience, so a life event can be considered a place. A

secondary world can be isolated geographically from the Primary World, but it is not required. However, it does have to have clear borders between the secondary world and the Primary World, even if the secondary world is set within the Primary World. The two worlds are often connected in some way, so the characters can access both worlds, but it has to be difficult to move between them, to make the world “more believable” as the audience has not experienced the world themselves, because it is fictional (26). Secondary worlds can be entire universes, towns, or even parallel universes. A city can also be considered a world as long as it is separate from the Primary World (26). The secondary world has to be separate from the Primary World, and it also has to be different enough that it contains fictional elements which are fully developed and believable (26). While this definition of secondary worlds seems clear, Wolf argues that a story set in the Primary World can also be considered a secondary world, if it has enough fictional elements that set it apart from the Primary World, simply because it depicts a place in the Primary World that is so dramatically different (27). Moreover, Wolf also uses the term “overlaid worlds”, these are stories where “fictional elements are overlaid onto a real location”, Wolf uses Spider-Man as an example, as Spider-Man and the villains live in New York City, and the story is set there, but they are obviously fictional (28). The term secondary world is therefore almost a spectrum, where on one end you can have entire fictional universes and on the other, you have overlaid worlds that are located in the Primary World but are so different as it contains fiction elements that it is still considered secondary to the Primary World. Elements that set secondary worlds apart from the Primary World are languages, cultures, and customs, as these show how different the worlds are (28).

#### How to build a world

Wolf has three “main properties” that he believes are important to make a believable secondary world that is different from the Primary World. These three properties are invention, completeness, and consistency (Wolf, 33). While a secondary world can never be as complete as the Primary World, it is highly important that the secondary world has these three properties, otherwise, it will not be believable and could affect the viewers’ ability to engage with the world they are seeing or reading. Wolf elaborates that without invention, the world would just be in the Primary World as something has to set the world apart from the Primary World. Without completeness, there will be too many unanswered questions about the world, which will affect the viewers, and without consistency, the different elements of the story and world will contradict each other, and the world will not be believable, as it is not coherent (34).

However, while the three properties are important, they also make world building more difficult, as everything has to fit together. In relation to the difficulty, Wolf writes:

Completeness also demands more invention, as more of the world is revealed. The more invention a world contains, the more difficult it is to keep everything in that world consistent, since every Primary World default that is changed affects other aspects of the world, and those changes in turn can cause even more changes. Likewise, consistency will limit what kind of invention is possible as a world grows. (34).

So, the three properties affect each other and make the creation process more complicated as a creator always has to pay attention to the three properties equally and how one addition or change can affect the others.

The first property is invention, and it deals with how different the secondary world is to the Primary World, meaning how are elements such as language, history, physics, culture, geography, and so on different in the secondary world (Wolf, 34). These elements set the secondary world apart from the Primary World and make it obvious that the world and story are a work of fiction. Wolf divides the changes that can occur with invention into four “realms”, these realms influence how the world is designed. The first realm is the nominal realm where things that already exist in the Primary World are given new names, this means that there are very few changes, other than giving things new names or defining a new concept (35). The second realm is the cultural realm, and this realm often has the most changes from the Primary World. The cultural realm deals with new inventions, such as technologies, customs, institutions, and objects and so on, furthermore, in the cultural realm new cultures or even countries can also appear (35). The third realm is the natural realm, here the nature is different, for example, new plants can exist, moreover, new animals and even new species and creatures can also be invented. If new creatures exist, it is important that there is a plausible explanation for their existence, relying on biology and zoology to explain it (36). The fourth and final realm is the ontological realm. This realm deals with the world itself, for example, the law of physics, time, and space, all the things that affect the world’s existence (36). The Marvel Cinematic Universe has a high degree of invention, most of the films are set in our world, and yet there are still many changes that sets it apart from the world as we know it, however, other films such as *Black Panther* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* show new places that are completely fictional and therefore requires a lot of invention.

The second property is completeness. Completeness refers to how well the world is explained, meaning that there has to be a possible explanation of how the world works and how

the society, the story is set in functions. If the explanation does not make sense, it will potentially affect how believable the world is. For completeness to be present, there has to be a backstory, well-made characters, and a well-constructed world. Sometimes this means that additional information is needed, even if it does not add anything to the story, it will make the world seem more real (Wolf, 39). Completeness can be seen through explanations on how a world is governed, how they get food, how they pay for goods, and defend themselves from outsiders, and on a smaller scale, information on how the characters get food, do they have a place to live, and where do they get clothes is needed. However, this does not mean that audiences need to see a character buy clothes or food, or get the full backstory on how the world works, but there has to be a feasible explanation as to how the society functions for it not to impact the story (39). The explanation can, for example, be given through hints or bits of backstory, that fans will then have to piece together to fully understand the world (39). The Marvel Cinematic Universe film *Black Panther* is a good example of how important completeness is. The film is set in a fictional country in Africa and has a full backstory and explanations on how the society functions. The film even explains why Wakanda, as the country is called, is so unknown to outside countries.

The third and last property is consistency. Consistency relies on whether the world's details "are plausible, feasible, and without contradictions" (Wolf, 43), so it is very important that the information about the world works together and does not contradict each other as that will ruin the consistency. The bigger a world becomes, the more likely it is to have inconsistencies, as the sheer vastness of the world means it becomes more difficult to make sure everything is consistent and work together. Consistency is especially important in franchises, as they rely heavily on it and if an inconsistency is found, some fans even speculate as to how it can be explained from the information they already have on the world (44-45). With 23 films released, as of writing this, consistency is incredibly important in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, especially because they are all connected and have been leading up to the film *Avengers: Endgame*, which was released in 2019, and making a film like *Endgame* would not have been possible if the universe had not been consistent.

Wolf uses the term "world gestalten" to explain how fans deal with these inconsistencies. While the word *gestalt* is often used in relation to Gestalt psychology, Wolf also believes that it applies to worldbuilding. For Wolf, "world gestalten" explains that details grouped together "implies the existence of an imaginary world" and this makes the audience "automatically fill in the missing pieces of that world, based on the details that are given" (Wolf, 52). This means that when a gap occurs in a narrative or in a world, the audience will

attempt to fill in the gap with the knowledge they already have, and thereby close the gap. If the audience has enough information about the world, they will easily be able to close the small gaps without it affecting the viewing experience. However, some gaps are too big to just close unconsciously, and it requires more effort to close them. While some fans enjoy the task of closing the larger gaps and engaging with the world, casual viewers might get lost in it (55, 57).

Since most worlds are not fully fleshed out and require viewers to apply world gestalten and fill in the gaps themselves, it can often lead to a lot of speculation about the world and how it functions, and this speculation often continues after the film or book has ended. Creators often encourage this speculation as it keeps people interested (Wolf, 60). All secondary worlds have gaps in one way or another, simply because they are imaginary and it is, therefore, impossible to fully flesh out the world, and it is these gaps audiences have to fill out, and this only happens if there is a possibility of a correct answer. Wolf writes that the ideal balance is to give enough information that multiple theories can exist but not enough to actually confirm a theory (61).

However, not all gaps are damaging, Wolf uses the term ‘defaults’ to explain that unless otherwise stated a secondary world can rely on Primary World defaults. These Primary World defaults can explain everything from how a world functions to how a society functions and viewers will automatically assume that a secondary world follows Primary World defaults unless otherwise stated. Changing a lot of defaults require a lot of invention and will make a world more secondary, and this will, in turn, require more completeness and consistency to ensure that the world makes sense (Wolf, 24-25, 27).

For a secondary world to be well-constructed and believable, it is important that it has certain infrastructures. Wolf writes that while early worlds were created for the stories they needed to tell, developed worlds, as he calls the more recent secondary worlds, “grew beyond the needs of narrative, and transnarrative worlds have an even greater wealth of detail to organize” (Wolf, 154), and it is these details that essentially make the world. Wolf outlines several structures that help create a world, but they all stem from very basic elements that a world requires, and these elements are:

a space in which things can exist and events can occur; a duration or span of time in which events can occur; and a character or characters who can be said to be inhabiting the world, since defining “world” in an experiential sense requires someone to be the recipient of experiences. (154)

So, a place and time where events can happen, and characters that can exist in said place and time are the basic needs for a world to exist, and once a creator has these in place, more infrastructures are needed to create a world, and these are maps, timelines, genealogies, nature, culture, language, mythology, and philosophy. Not all of Wolf's terms are relevant when analysing The Marvel Cinematic Universe as they do not appear in the universe. For example, maps, timelines, and genealogies are not present in the universe, they are instead created by fans, and while other languages are spoken in the films, these are all languages that are spoken in the real world. Because these four elements do not appear in the universe, they will not be explained in the following section.

*Nature.* As all worlds have to have some kind of setting, nature “deals with the materiality of a world” and concern itself with biological, chemical, physical, and geological structures in the secondary world, and how it differs from the Primary World (172). Worlds, which have a high degree of changes in the nature category, are often not set on Earth as these changes would affect the audience's ability to view the world as believable, as they already know that it is not real. The most common way of changing a secondary world's nature from our own is through new plants and animals, but entire ecosystems can also be changed, new planets or even new creatures invented (173). According to Wolf, the natural realm essentially “provides the raw materials for civilizations” (179). The nature in the Marvel Cinematic Universe films are for the most part based on our nature in the real world, however, there are films like *Black Panther* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* where the nature is different because they are set in fictional countries or planets.

*Culture.* Wolf describes culture as the link between nature and history and states that it is often central in the story's conflict (179). Culture shapes the secondary world's worldview and explains how society functions in terms of its traditions, customs, and languages. It is through the culture the audience learns more about how the society functions and how it differs from other cultures, both within the story and in the Primary World (180, 182). Not all cultural changes in a secondary world need to be explicitly addressed, some might just appear for audiences to figure out for themselves, while others need an explicit explanation. The changes that need explanations could be the big changes that audiences cannot figure out for themselves such as languages, customs, or artefacts, while others, like food, for example, does not need an explanation, as it is a familiar thing and audiences will know its purpose even if they do not recognise the food (182). Culture is used to structure a secondary world and brings the other

realms, such as nature, history, and geography together to explain how society functions (183). Once again, like with the nature aspect, films such as *Black Panther* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* portray a different culture than viewers are familiar with, and therefore, this will be examined in the analysis section.

*Mythology.* Much like culture, mythology gives secondary worlds history and places them in a context. Mythology is told through legends and origin stories, and it gives depth and explanations to the events that have already happened and those that have not happened yet (189). The mythology can be made up by the creator to fit the story, or it can be based on or inspired by already existing mythologies such as the Roman, Greek, or Norse mythology (189). Many of the Marvel films rely on mythology, the film *Thor*, for example, relies on Norse mythology and the film *Black Panther* has its own legends and origin stories.

Maps, timelines, and genealogies functions as a way of building the world and making it seem complete and believable, whereas nature, culture, language, mythology, and philosophy mostly add background information that is not necessarily essential to understand the world, but it makes the world seem more real. However, a secondary world does not have to contain all of the above-mentioned structures, but the structures show the audience how the secondary world is different from the Primary World, and according to Wolf, it is also part of the fun for audiences to see how different the worlds are and immerse themselves in how the secondary world works (Wolf, 155).

It is very important that the above-mentioned structures fit together and that they are consistent with each other because if they are not consistent, the story will suffer for it and the audience will view the worlds as less believable. The reason it is so important for them to fit together is because many of them are closely linked and rely on each other to give the full picture, for example, maps are closely linked with nature, and it is through nature that culture arises and so it continues (Wolf, 194-195). Because of the close links, it is important that they all work together to create “the illusion of a complete and consistent world” (196) and then it creates the “world logic” the world can be based on (197).

While the technological aspect of worldbuilding is important to create a believable world, as just outlined above, it is also important to examine how narrative plays into worldbuilding, and this next section will examine just that.

## Narrative in fictional worlds

One of the obvious ways a creator can establish a world beyond the current story is to include a transnarrative character that can link stories and worlds together (Wolf, 66). When objects, locations, and characters appear in several stories, it becomes apparent that they are set in the same world, and the world expands further than just one story. Linking characters or locations also help audiences fill in the gaps, as the world expands (66). Today, we see examples of this in film franchises, as they are created to span over multiple films with transnarrative characters that can appear in them. The Marvel Cinematic Universe uses transnarrative characters to establish that all the characters exist in the same universe. When the first films came out, *Iron Man*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Thor*, and *Captain America: The First Avenger*, viewers, who were not familiar with the comics, could easily have assumed that the films were standalone, until the characters started appearing other films than their own. An example being agent Phil Coulson from *Iron Man* appeared in *Thor*, and while his character is certainly not a main character, his appearance still signalled that the stories are set in the same universe. As more films were released, main characters began appearing in other films, and the universe became one in the first Avengers film *Marvel's The Avengers* in 2012 when all the main characters appeared in one film to save the world.

According to Wolf, narrative is the “most common structure found in imaginary worlds, and the reason that most of them exist in the first place” (Wolf, 198), meaning that worlds are typically made to fit a narrative and that the world then expands as the narrative does. More and more information about the world is given through the narrative, and this is how it evolves, and structures such as mythology, maps, and timelines rely heavily on narrative as they also imply some kind of previous existence before the current narrative (198). This next section will focus on how narrative influences worldbuilding and the key elements to look for when analysing narrative structures in an imaginary world.

One of the ways to examine narrative in worldbuilding is through looking at what Wolf calls narrative threads, braids, and fabric. For Wolf, narrative is defined as a “series of events” that are connected, and narrative units are these events. A narrative thread is then a series of events that usually “revolves around the experience of a particular character, place, or inanimate object” (Wolf, 199). Some stories only have one narrative thread, while others have multiple, and if a story has multiple threads that are closely linked together, they are called narrative braids. However, not all narrative braids are equally closely linked, some might have the same characters that interact, and this interaction affects the outcome of narrative threads, while others have narrative threads that might not affect each other but just exist in the same



place (199-200). Furthermore, when new information is given about a narrative, and it becomes more complex than narrative braids, it becomes a narrative fabric (200). Some ways for narrative threads to become fabrics is through “shared locations, events, and characters” (201), and these narrative threads can then impact each other. Narrative fabrics are typically seen in secondary worlds because they are entirely fictional, therefore, anything is possible, but they can also happen in stories set in the Primary World (201). However, having a fictional story set in the Primary World is not without its problems when it comes to narrative fabrics, because as the narrative fabric grows, it can create conflicts with what the audience knows to be true about the real world and this conflict can impact the completeness of the world. The narrative fabric in the Marvel Cinematic Universe is extremely vast and complicated, as it includes 23 films’ worth of narratives, characters, and places, and the narratives are so interwoven that it can only be considered a fabric.

When a world expands through additional stories, it is important that the new stories carefully consider the already existing information, as it is important that the world stays consistent even as it is growing, and that new narratives do not contradict the older narratives that they are built on (Wolf, 205). New narratives can, of course, bring new information with it that perhaps changes what the audience previously knew. This can be through seeing events through a different point of view or by learning that a character’s motivation was not as expected, and this new information can change a narrative (205). One of the ways a world can be expanded is through sequels. These stories built on the existing story, but they can also be challenging as they come with more constraints because the world already exists (205).

When a creator has considered the structures of building a world and how the narrative plays into, it is also important to consider how an audience is introduced to an imaginary world, especially if that world consists of more than one work. This is especially important when it comes to films franchises. If there are several films set in the same world but with different stories, audiences will not necessarily watch the films in order of release but could instead watch them in chronological order. Wolf writes that there are six different ways for audiences to enter into a world, and they each change how the audience experiences the world (Wolf, 265). These six orders are “order of public appearance, order of creation, internal chronological order, canonical order, order of media preference, and age-appropriate order” (265). The most common is public appearance, as most audiences will see a film as it is released, and then watch a film franchise in the release order. Wolf also states that when a series or franchise is planned ahead, public appearance is the most likely watch order, as it has probably been planned that way (265). Audiences cannot decide the watch order until several films have been released,

and this is when watching in the order of creation is possible, as some film have prequels, which have been made after the “first” film. Yet another popular way for audiences to watch a franchise is in internal chronological order if the film’s overarching storyline does not fit the release order, audiences can choose to watch films in the order they are set in, in terms of the storyline (265 – 266).

### *Complex media*

In his book *Everything Bad is Good for You*, Steven Johnson’s main point is that popular culture is making people smarter because it is becoming more complex and sophisticated (Johnson, 9). In the book, Johnson gives several examples of how narrative stories found in television series, films, and video games have become more complex in their structure and subject matter where some of the stories have multiple storylines and events occurring now. We will outline some of these examples in this section to discuss how they have become more complex in relation to ‘older’ works. Johnson writes that there used to be an assumption that media consumers wanted “dumb, simple pleasures” (9), but now consumers are much more “intellectually demanding” now, and they want to have their minds challenged (9). The theory outlined in this section will be used to discuss the Marvel Cinematic Universe’s complex nature in the analysis.

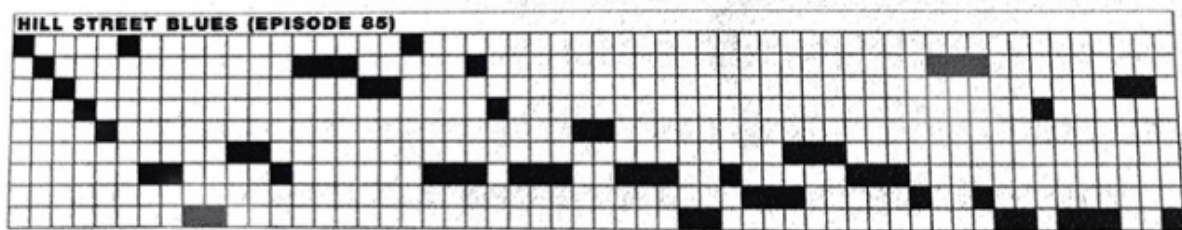
In the book, Jenkins writes about games, reality television, television, and films that show how popular culture has become more complex. However, we will mainly use the keywords found in the television and film sections in our project as we will analyse the Marvel Cinematic Universe which consists of several films and these films act somewhat like a serial television series where the audience needs to watch all of the films to get the full experience of the universe.

In the section about how television is becoming more and more complex, Johnson describes that televised narratives place cognitive demands on their viewers as “some narratives force you to do work to make sense of them, while others just let you settle into the couch and zone out” (Johnson, 63), which means that some televised narratives require the audience to focus on details when watching the television series, while other series do not require a lot of focus to follow what is going on. To explain this in more depth, Johnson describes three elements of television complexity, and these three elements are multiple threading, flashing arrows, and social networks (65). We will only use the multiple threading element in our project. Therefore, we will not outline the other elements.

Multiple threading deals with the number of different narratives in a television series episode (Johnson 65-66). Jenkins also has a term for this, and he calls it ‘chunking’ which refers to the creation of several important pieces of information unfolding throughout a story (“Transmedia 202: Further Reflections.”). To explain this, Johnson uses two television series *Starsky and Hutch* from 1975 and *Hill Street Blues* from 1981 as examples to explain multiple threading in a television series:



(Johnson, 66)



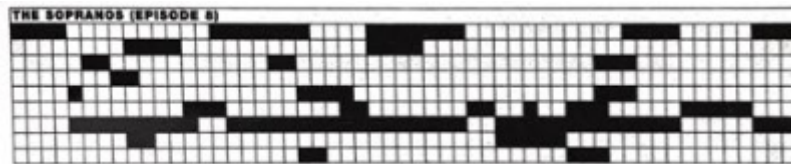
(Johnson, 67)

According to Johnson, multiple threading was a new trend that began with the series *Hill Street Blues* which was released in 1981. In the pictures above, Johnson compares the two series’ narrative threads to show that there has been a structural transformation in terms of the number of active narrative threads. Johnson argues that television shows like *Starsky and Hutch* rely on one or two main characters, a single narrative plot, and a conclusion at the end of each episode. Moreover, *Starsky and Hutch* episodes do not offer many variations in terms of structure where an episode will start with a comic subplot which appears again at the end of the episode (Johnson, 65-66). Thus, every episode of the series is very similar in terms of structure.

When looking at the *Hill Street Blues* episode, Johnson decided to look at a specific episode, and it becomes apparent that it consists of many narrative threads compared to *Starsky and Hutch*. Here, Johnson describes that the narrative threads can differ in size and importance and the borders are seen as ‘fuzzy’ as the narrative threads are not necessarily concluded in each episode and narrative threads from a previous episode might be expanded on further in the next episode. According to Johnson, *Hill Street Blues* differentiated itself from other single episode television shows. For example, the show’s creator, Steven Bochco, paired complex

narrative structure with complex subject matters, thus, *Hill Street Blues* had well-described characters tackling different personal issues and a narrative structure that worked well together with it (Johnson, 67-68).

Since *Hill Street Blues* appeared in 1981, the multithreaded drama genre has become very popular, and here, Johnson uses the television series *The Sopranos* as an example with its many narrative threads and over twenty recurring characters:



(Johnson, 69)

When comparing *The Sopranos* to *Hill Street Blues*, the two television shows have an equal amount of active narrative threads, however, in *The Sopranos* episode each narrative thread is more fleshed out and the shows do not make a clear distinction between major plots and minor plots. Moreover, *The Sopranos* will connect several different threads at the same time, thus, the threads will be layered on top of each other. Like in *Hill Street Blues*, Johnson writes that *The Sopranos* episodes build on threads found in previous episodes, but the threads may continue throughout the seasons (Johnson, 69).

When looking at all three pictures, it is possible to see how television shows have become more and more complex over thirty years. Johnson call this trend ‘the Sleeper Curve’ which refers to how complex popular culture makes people cognitively smarter over the years (Johnson, 9, 70, 131-132). The three pictures show how television shows have changed over thirty years, but the pictures also show how the television shows attempt to challenge viewers with multiple ongoing narrative threads, thus, challenging viewers to focus on different details to get the full experience of the show (70). Johnson argues that when *Hill Street Blues* was released, there was an assumption that viewers would not be able to follow more than three active narrative threads and after the first screening of the *Hill Street Blues* pilot episode, viewers complained that the episode was too complicated. Now, viewers welcome complexity as they have gotten used to multithreaded drama series (70-71).

If we return to Johnson’s term ‘the Sleeper Curve’, he argues that this is a new trend within popular culture that makes people smarter. However, it can be argued that Johnson is exaggerating the ‘newness’ of this trend as literature underwent some of the same changes years ago. It can, of course, be discussed whether one should relate classical works of literature

to popular culture, however, just like television, literature has also evolved through time, and thus, it has changed and grown more complex than previous works of literature. This trend that happened within digital popular culture might be new, but the newness of the trend of works of art making people smarter might not be as new as Johnson had anticipated.

In Johnson's section about films, he argues that films have undergone an equivalent transformation in relation to television series. Johnson points out the obvious transformation has been in terms of visual and technological transformations with the many special effects, but he is more interested in the complexity in terms of narrative threads and characters. Here, Johnson compares the film adaptation of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and George Lucas' original *Star Wars* trilogy from 1977-1983 in terms of complexity. Both franchises deal with the fight between evil and good and the idea of the epic quest, Johnson argues that *Lord of the Rings* is much more challenged than *Star Wars* when comparing the two franchises' characters and these characters' active narrative threads. The original *Star Wars* trilogy consisted of roughly ten characters whereas *Lord of the Rings* contains around twenty-one characters, so the audience is forced to keep up with twice as many characters as they were in the *Star Wars* films (Johnson, 125-126).

Johnson argues that the Sleeper Curve is most predominant in the children's film genre where new and popular films follow a far more complex narrative path than previous films in the same genre. These films contain multiple layers of narrative threads and enhanced dialogue and visual effect, thus, the films are both interesting for both children and adults. To describe the transformation of how children's films have become more complex, Johnson compares the film *Finding Nemo* with films such as *Mary Poppins* and *Bambi* where there is a certain number of characters with important roles. The amount of characters differs in the three films, where *Bambi* contains three important characters, *Mary Poppins* introduces five additional characters, and lastly, *Finding Nemo* consists of over twenty unique characters, thus, the audience needs to follow several characters and their respective narrative threads. Johnson argues that these films are important for the development of children's minds as their minds are trained when watching films with multiple threads, they are learning how to distinguish and hold different narrative threads consciously (Johnson, 127-129).

Johnson writes that there has somewhat been an explosion in cinematic complexity where films such as *Pulp Fiction*, *The Usual Suspects*, and *The Matrix* require the audiences to focus on and to figure out what is going on in the film. Where some of the films create intersecting narrative threads, other films attempt to blur the lines between fact and fiction.

Johnson calls these types of films mind-benders and mind-benders as a genre, was a popular genre and it did well at the box office as well (Johnson, 129-130).

In his book, Johnson also addresses the limitations of films. While there was a tendency to create narratively complex films, there were also created films that Johnson refers to as 'junk films' which refers to films that easily digestible in terms of plot and characters, therefore, the films become as simple as they were a few decades ago. Therefore, Johnson questions how the Sleeper Curve works in contemporary society in relation to films. Here, he argues that the narrative film is an older genre compared to television and as the film evolved as a genre and the form started to change in terms of the cognitive demands it placed on the audience. The changes in the film genre occurred gradually, so the audience did not notice these changes. However, the audience quickly noticed the changes within the television genre because the changes were drastic. Historically, films are limited by the fact they only last somewhere between two to three hours, which is not a lot of time to unravel the complexity. Television series can unravel the story through multiple episodes, and a television series can last more than a hundred hours, allowing the series to become very complex and allowing fans to become very familiar with the series' characters. Thus, the average two-hour Hollywood film is equivalent to a television pilot episode or the opening sequence of a video game, and Johnson argues that it is not coincident that one of the most complex blockbuster franchise, which is the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, last several hours in the uncut version of it (Johnson, 130-131).

Johnson's main point in his book is that popular culture is making people cognitively smarter due to its complex nature. Viewers want to be challenged by the films and television shows they watch, therefore, viewers want to watch films and television shows that have a narratively complex nature. This point works well with the idea of transmedia storytelling where many franchises that focus on transmedia storytelling wish to challenge viewers by creating complex universes with many characters and multiple storylines for viewers to keep track of.

To sum up, Johnson argues that popular culture is making people smarter because of the many narrative threads and the number of characters present in television series and films. The amount of narrative threads and characters enhances the complexity in films and television series as people are forced to follow the threads and characters in order to understand what is going on.

### **A short description of Marvel's history**

The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) can be described as a universe where multiple franchises take place in this universe, thus, it can be considered as a shared fictional universe. The MCU was created in 2008 by Marvel Studios with the release of the first *Ironman* film and the *Incredible Hulk*. Since 2008, many films and new characters have joined this shared fictional universe, and because of its popularity, the MCU has become the world's highest-grossing movie franchise with its nine billion dollars revenue. Especially the franchise *The Avengers* became massively popular with *Marvels' The Avengers* from 2012 earning 623 million dollars and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* from 2015 earning 459 million dollars (Richter). The two newest films in *The Avengers* franchise *Avengers: Infinity War* from 2018 and *Avengers: Endgame* from 2019 have both earned more than two billion worldwide (“Avengers: Infinity War” & “Avengers: Endgame”).

The MCU works in ‘phases’, which mean that producers of Marvel Studios create a schedule with the films they plan to make, and these films are divided into smaller groups and story arcs. Right now, there are three completed phases with *Spider-Man: Far From Home* from 2019, concluding the third phase. The first phase started with the first *Ironman* film and concluded with the first *Avengers* film. Thus, this phase introduced the first original Avengers, who were Ironman, Thor, Captain America, The Incredible Hulk, Black Widow, and Hawkeye. Many of these characters had their own films, and in the first *Avengers* film, they all teamed up to fight a common enemy. The second phase consisted of sequels to some of the films from the first phase, and these films led up to a new *Avengers* film, but new characters from the films *Ant-Man* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* were also introduced in this phase. Just like the second phase, the third phase consisted of more sequels, new characters and two *Avengers* films with several characters being considered ‘an Avenger’ (Richter). In 2020, the fourth phase will start with the new *Black Widow* film, which will be a prequel.

Thus, in short, the Marvel Cinematic Universe consists of many instalments that take place in the same fictional realm. The Marvel Cinematic Universe became massively popular, and it will most likely continue being popular due to its serial nature.

In our thesis, we will use films from the Marvel Cinematic Universe's third phase, and we will use the following films: *Captain America: Civil War*, *Black Panther*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, and *Avengers: Endgame*. We will also reference other films from other phases in relation to the chosen films to analyse the franchise on a deeper level.

**“While a great many people see you as heroes there are some who would prefer the word vigilante”.**

An analysis of Marvel’s *Captain America: Civil War*

In the following section, we will use the theory, we previously outlined, to analyse how the different terms have been utilised in Marvel’s *Captain America: Civil War* (henceforth, *Civil War*). We have chosen to analyse this film because it begins the third phase of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and it continues the events from phase two. Despite the film being the third *Captain America* film, many Marvel Cinematic Universe characters star in this film. These characters are both supporting characters that do not have their own film as of now, for example, Black Widow, and characters that do have their own films, for example, Iron Man. The film also features new characters in the universe, but we will discuss all of this in a later section in this analysis.

*Civil War*, just like the title of the film refers to, tells the story of a conflict within the Avengers. After the unfortunate events in Sokovia, many people are questioning if the Avengers are superheroes or if they can be considered vigilantes. As a result of this, politicians worldwide have decided to create the Sokovia Accords, which can control the Avengers and regulate their activity. The Avengers are split into two teams; Team Captain America and Team Iron Man. Captain America is against the regulation while Iron Man supports the regulation. However, this is not the only conflict in the film. Captain America’s friend, Bucky Barnes, also known as the Winter Soldier, is framed for the bombing that occurred when the Sokovia Accords was supposed to be signed in Vienna. Captain America and Bucky fight against Helmut Zemo, who aims to defeat the Avengers because of the incidents that happened in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*.

We will now begin the analysis of *Captain America: Civil War*, and we will start the analysis by examining the film in relation to Jenkins’ theory on transmedia storytelling and his seven principles of transmedia storytelling. Afterwards, we will examine how the film is using seriality, and then, we will analyse the film in terms of worldbuilding, and here, we will use Wolf’s theory. Then, we will analyse the kernels and satellites in the film. The previous analyses will lead into the last analysis, where we will use Johnson’s theory on complex media to analyse the complexities within the film. Here, we will examine the narrative threads and discuss if *Civil War* can be considered complex.



*What is transmedia?*

As we established in the theory section, we are leaning on The Producers Guild of America's definition of transmedia storytelling which is: "a Transmedia Narrative project or franchise of one that consists of three (or more) narrative storylines existing within the same fictional universe" ("PGA Board of Directors Approves Addition of Transmedia Producer to Guild's Producers Code of Credits."). It is through this definition we classify *Civil War* as an example of transmedia storytelling because it is a part of a much larger fictional universe, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and because it lives up to the criteria that it has to have more than three narrative storylines. *Civil War* is the third *Captain America* film and the thirteenth film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. It relies heavily on earlier films, and it continues storylines from previous films. *Civil War* not only continues Captain America's storyline from the previous films, but also many of the other characters', it continues to show the aftermath of the events in Sokovia, which was shown in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, and it also answers the question of who killed Tony Stark's parents, something that has been talked about in the *Iron Man* films. *Civil War* continues the storylines from previous films, and deals with them, it answers some questions, and it also creates new storylines to be explored in later films, and because of this, we consider it to be an example of transmedia storytelling.

*Henry Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia storytelling*

In this section, we will apply Jenkins' principles of transmedia storytelling to *Civil War*. Our focus is on how the Marvel Cinematic Universe is created and how the films in the franchise are connected to each other, therefore, we will use Jenkins' principles of continuity.

The Marvel Cinematic Universe is characterised by continuity, meaning the universe has one unified story and universe. The Marvel Cinematic Universe uses a specific set of characters to tell their stories, and they do not rely on multiplicity in their films, but Marvel as a company does use multiplicity when telling their stories. As we have mentioned before, Marvel operates in 'Earth numbers', which means that the different franchises may have some of the same characters, but they are in different settings, thus, they can be considered alternative retellings. This is to ensure continuity within a franchise, so that way, they do not overlap and contradict each other. The Marvel Cinematic Universe does not use much multiplicity when telling its stories, and the franchise focuses on continuity in their stories as all of the films are connected by characters and events. It can be argued that the Marvel Cinematic Universe was created to be more simple than other Marvel franchises to attract an audience that could follow what was going on in the franchise by only watching the films. This way, the audience did not

have to worry about any alternative timelines. Even though we have now argued that the Marvel Cinematic Universe is more simple than other Marvel franchises that rely on multiplicity, the Marvel Cinematic Universe's use of continuity requires a lot from its audience. Here, the audience needs to watch all instalments in the franchise in order to understand what is going in the films and who the characters are. This is extremely evident in *Civil War* as the film is the first film in Marvel Cinematic Universe's third phase and it takes its point of departure in the aftermath of the *Avengers: Age of Ultron* film. Therefore, to fully understand what is going on in *Civil War*, viewers must watch films from Marvel Cinematic Universe's second phase. To give an example, one of the writers (Emilie) of this thesis had only seen one Marvel Cinematic Universe film (the film *Guardians of the Galaxy*) prior to writing this thesis. The other writer (Maya) has seen all but a few films prior to writing this. Thus, to analyse if the Marvel Cinematic Universe is complex, we wanted to do an experiment with Emilie when she was going to watch all of Marvel Cinematic Universe films. She was to watch *Civil War* as the first film, thus starting in the middle of the franchise, and she would note every time she was confused by something in the film. It turned out that there were many details she was confused about, for example, events prior to *Civil War*, some of the superheroes, and of course, details that still were mysteries and not uncovered until later films. Even when Maya decided to rewatch *Civil War* for the purpose of analysing it, she had to pause the film and remember what happened in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* as the *Civil War* displayed the aftermath of *Age of Ultron*.

Besides having to watch *Avengers: Age of Ultron* to fully understand *Civil War*, it is also important to watch other films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. This can, of course, be said for all films in the franchise, but we will argue that it is particularly important in *Civil War* due to the fact that it stars many characters despite the film being the third *Captain America* film. If we take a quick look at, for example, the three *Iron Man* films, the films have a 'set' of characters that are *Iron Man* specific, these being Iron Man, Pepper Potts, Happy Hogan, and James Rhodes, also known as War Machine. In the beginning, these characters only appeared in *Iron Man* films, but as the Marvel Cinematic Universe progressed, they began to occur in other films as well. This is the same with the *Captain America* films which also have a 'set' of *Captain America* specific characters, these characters being Captain America, Bucky Barnes, Peggy Carter, and Sam Wilson. The interesting thing about *Civil War* is that the film can almost be considered a 'small' Avengers film as many characters of the Marvel Cinematic Universe star in the film and their appearance is not just a cameo, they have an active role in the film. This is very different from previous sequels in the franchise that mostly only star film-specific characters, just like the *Iron Man* films. *Civil War* shows that the universe and the characters

are connected. The *Avengers* films do this as well of course, but we would argue that *Civil War* marked the beginning where the Marvel Cinematic Universe's characters could freely appear in other films even if it was not considered to be 'their' film or franchise. This is due to the fact that the events in *Age of Ultron* were so crucial and the Marvel Cinematic Universe needed a film that dealt with the events in the aftermath of *Age of Ultron*. The internal affairs in *Civil War* also became very important to the franchise and the overall storyline in the third phase. Moreover, this also relates to the fact that there are fourteen Avengers at this point whereas in the first Avengers film, there were only six, so this number increases as more superheroes are introduced into the universe. Thus, to fully understand *Civil War*, viewers must be familiar with all of the characters and must understand the events that happened and culminated in Marvel Cinematic Universe's second phase as *Civil War* starts right after the second phase. At this point in the franchise, most viewers are already invested in the franchise, and they know enough about the characters and events that is required of them to understand what is going on in the franchise.

To sum up, some of Henry Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia storytelling can be applied to the film *Civil War* from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and these were continuity. This film is clearly part of a unified universe where it starts off from previous events found in other Marvel Cinematic Universe films.

### *Seriality*

We will now analyse *Civil War* in terms of seriality using Roger Hagedorn's theory and Henry Jenkins' principle of seriality, which we have defined earlier. Here, we will discuss how the Marvel Cinematic Universe is characterised in terms of seriality.

Hagedorn states that seriality is not necessarily limited to a specific medium. While other transmedia universes are using several different mediums when telling stories, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has chosen to use films in their serial universe. Thus, we would argue that the films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe are the biggest part of the franchise. To stay updated on the films, most viewers will go to the cinema to watch the films. The films within the Marvel Cinematic Universe are not released at the same time, and multiple films may be released in one year. These films are connected in terms of seriality where the franchise operates in so-called phases where each phase has one overall storyline connected by the films. For example, the Infinity Stones have been an important part of the entire Marvel Cinematic Universe, but the focus on them has predominantly been in the third phase. Furthermore, each film in the universe has its own storyline that may be referenced or carried over in other films.

As we have already discussed, *Civil War* is a continuation of the events that occurred in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Here, the events from *Age of Ultron* are carried over into the beginning of phase three. *Civil War* also includes several characters from other films in the franchise, and this highlights the franchise's use of seriality as it shows that the universe is connected by the characters and the films.

As we have written earlier in the theory, Hagedorn separates serials from other narrative forms in different ways. For example, he writes that a serial can offer a narrative text in 'successive episodes' over time and this is also the case with the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The films act somewhat as episodes in the Marvel Cinematic Universe as they are continuations of previous films or sequels of a smaller franchise within the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but there are not clear cuts between these films. As the Marvel Cinematic Universe continues to release more and more films, the franchise also expands in terms of characters. This is particularly evident in all the *Avengers* films as the Avengers team in the first film of this franchise consisted of six superheroes. In *Age of Ultron*, this number is increased to eleven, and in *Infinity War* and *Endgame*, this number is increased to over twenty superheroes. Even in *Civil War*, which was released before *Infinity War* and *Endgame*, we see an increase in numbers as the Avengers team now consists of fourteen superheroes in contrast to the eleven that were in *Age of Ultron*.

Hagedorn also writes about riddles and mystery when comparing serials and classic single-unit narratives. In *Civil War*, as we have previously discussed, the film is connected to previous films, such as *Age of Ultron*, but at the time of the film's release, viewers did not know that *Civil War* was already connected to future films as well. There are some details in the film that are touched upon, for example, the Infinity Stones, but they are not resolved, they are carried over into future films. This creates cliffhangers as this makes viewers want to watch the newest film in the franchise.

Jenkins also writes about seriality, and this term is part of his seven principles of transmedia storytelling. As we have already discussed in the previous section concerning continuity, the Marvel Cinematic Universe is very serial due to the fact that all of the films in the franchise are connected by characters, events, and information. We have already discussed how the characters and events are connected in the continuity section, therefore, we will use this section to discuss how the pieces of information found in the films connect the universe.

One way the Marvel Cinematic Universe creates a coherent world is by placing details that do not seem important at the time or details that are still mysteries. This is closely tied together with Seymour Chatman's terms of kernels and satellites which we will discuss later.

These details might not be resolved in one film, and therefore, they can be carried over to the next films in the franchise. An example of this in *Civil War* is the conversation between the two superheroes Vision and Scarlet Witch. They are talking about people being afraid of superheroes' powers which leads to a discussion about the gem in Vision's head. Vision does not know what it is, but he does know that is not from Earth and it powered Loki's staff from *Marvel's The Avengers* and that it gave Scarlet Witch her powers (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 00:52:05-00:54:49). At this point, viewers do not know how important the Infinity Stones are yet, but they will have a bigger role in the two latest Avengers films, *Infinity War* and *Endgame*. Most of these stones have appeared in the Marvel Cinematic Universe films, but they appeared under different names and had different functions in those films. Furthermore, the characters are connected by information in *Civil War* as well. At the beginning of the film, we see Bucky Barnes, a character from the Captain America universe, crashing a car and murdering the people in it (00:02:00-00:02:35). At this point in the film, we do not know who he murdered, but this is resolved at the end of the film as it turns out the people in the car were Iron Man's parents (02:01:19-02:02:44). This results in conflict in Captain America and Iron Man's friendship which is not resolved in the film and carries over into *Infinity War*.

We have already discussed some of the most prominent examples of unresolved mysteries in the film, but most Marvel Cinematic Universe films are tied together by the end credits scenes that occur after the film. In the end credit scene in *Civil War*, we see Bucky Barnes going into cryogenic sleep in Wakanda which may act as a teaser for the *Black Panther* film (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 02:18:35-02:20:07). The Marvel Cinematic Universe utilises seriality when dispersing information across multiple films.

### *Kernels and satellites*

This next section in the analysis of *Civil War* will concern itself with Seymour Chatman's terms of kernels and satellites. Here, we will examine the different events that occur in *Civil War*, and this analysis will be related to the complex media analysis where we will examine the narrative threads in the film as we will analyse the different events that occur in the film. Chatman's two terms concerning kernels and satellites deal with narrative events where some events are more important than others.

An example of a kernel in *Civil War* is the villain Helmut Zemo where we learn about his motivation for wanting revenge on the Avengers. If his family had not been killed during the battle in Sokovia (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 02:00:01-02:08:22), then

Zemo would not have been the villain in *Civil War*, and then, the film would have focused on the internal conflict within the Avengers concerning the regulation against superheroes. Moreover, Iron Man also has a sense of guilt in *Civil War* because of the aftermath of the battle in Sokovia, which motivates him to support the regulation against superheroes (00:17:18-00:18:50). Thus, the events in Sokovia in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* are important kernels that continue the storyline in *Civil War*.

If we look at the satellites in *Civil War*, these are related to the minor threads we have discussed earlier, for example, the conversation between Vision and Scarlet Witch (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 00:52:05-00:54:49). This event is not important to the story in *Civil War*, but the event does enhance the overall storyline concerning the 'are we heroes or are we vigilantes' conflict as the two characters discuss why people are afraid of them. Their relationship is further developed in later films in phase three and that way, this satellite travels across multiple films. Other satellites such as the debuts of Black Panther and Spider-Man are also introduced in *Civil War*, and their storylines go from being satellites in *Civil War* to becoming kernels in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* from 2017 and *Black Panther* from 2018.

To sum up, there are examples of the kernels and satellites found in *Civil War*. The kernels and satellites are either continued from previous films or completely new in *Civil War*. This is closely related to Steven Johnson's theory, where popular culture is becoming more and more complex due to the increased number of events that occur.

### *Worldbuilding*

When explaining worldbuilding, Wolf uses the concepts of secondary world and Primary World to explain the difference between the real world and the imaginary world. However, as we explained in the theory section, the divide between the two is not always so clear, as a secondary world can be set in the Primary World, as long as it is different enough. Moreover, Wolf uses the term "overlaid worlds", which are stories set in worlds where "fictional elements are overlaid onto a real location" (Wolf, 28). Overlaid worlds are stories that, as the quote suggests, are set in the Primary World and contain fictional elements that would not or could not happen in the Primary World.

*Civil War* takes place in the real world, and because of this, we consider the world in the film to be an overlaid world. Because the film takes place in the Primary World, the amount of invention within the world is limited, as too much invention would conflict with what viewers know to be true about the world. While a true secondary world can contain much more

invention because it does not have to consider whether it fits into what viewers already know, an overlaid world is limited by viewers' pre-existing knowledge, and that too much invention can affect the completeness and consistency of the world.

In *Civil War*, the narrative takes place in many different locations and parts of the world. It starts out in Russia in 1991 and then moves to Lagos in Nigeria in present day. Furthermore, throughout the film, scenes also happen in Vienna, Cleveland, London, Bucharest, Berlin, New York, and Siberia. So, while the story might be set in the Primary World, the narrative is entirely fictional, as viewers and fans of the Marvel Cinematic Universe will be well aware.

Moreover, while it is not present in the film, the country of Sokovia is mentioned repeatedly throughout the film, as the events that happened in Sokovia are the reason why the Avengers are asked to sign the Sokovia Accords. Sokovia is a fictional country located in Eastern Europe, and it was used in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, where the big battle between Ultron and the Avengers took place. While it is a fictional country, it is located in the Primary World, and it relies on Primary World defaults, because of this we are considering it an overlaid world, as there are very limited fictional elements, that could make it a secondary world.

Because *Civil War* is set in the Primary World, it relies heavily on Primary World defaults, meaning that almost everything in the world is as viewers will expect to find it in the real world. The few defaults that have been changed will be explored in the following section on invention, completeness, and consistency. While Wolf writes about his three properties, invention, completeness, and consistency, in relation to secondary worlds, we will still use them to examine how *Civil War* uses the three properties as there are fictional elements in the film. Because the film is set in the Primary World and relies on the Primary World defaults, it means that Wolf's four realms are not applicable in this analysis, moreover, Wolf's infrastructures, which we explained in the theory section, are also not relevant, as these rely on invention too, so these will not be written about in this analysis, instead, we will outline how invention can be seen in *Civil War*, even if it is to a limited extent.

### Invention

As written above, *Civil War* takes place in the Primary World and relies on its defaults, which means that the world is largely as viewers will expect it to be, however, there are fictional elements in the film, and one of these is the presence of superpowers. Steve Rogers, or Captain America as he is also called, was made into an enhanced human in the first Captain America film, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, using a super-soldier serum, and as a result of this, he has enhanced strength and agility. Another example of superpowers is Wanda Maximoff,

her abilities include telekinesis, telepathy, and energy manipulation. We see her use her telekinesis and energy manipulation powers in *Civil War*, as it becomes the catalyst for the war between the two Avenger camps lead by Captain America on one side and Iron Man on the other. Beside superpowers, the film also features advanced technology, like wings that make the Falcon fly, Iron Man and War Machine's suits, and a raft prison, which is a prison that is submerged under water and can hold even the Avenger's captive (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 01:51:18-01:55:10). Because the story is set in the Primary World, the amount of invention is limited, however, as just mentioned, the world still has invention in the existence of superpowers and advanced technology, which viewers will know does not exist in the real world, and it is these elements that show that the film is not just set in the Primary World, but in a fictional world, within the Primary World.

### Completeness

For a world to be complete, there has to be an explanation as to how the world works and the society functions, and as *Civil War* is set in the Primary World and relies on its defaults, it is really more a matter of whether the new inventions impact the completeness of the world and if they conflict with what viewers know to be true about the real world. *Civil War* is the third *Captain America* film and the thirteenth Marvel Cinematic Universe film, so a backstory for the world has already been established, and viewers will understand how the world functions as long as they have seen the other films. While the film's narrative will obviously conflict with what viewers know to be true about the real world, because superheroes are not real and they have not destroyed many cities across the world, viewers are of course aware that the film is a work of fiction and it is therefore fictional, it just happens to be set in a world they recognise.

### Consistency

Wolf's consistency term deals with whether the world's details "are plausible, feasible, and without contradictions" (Wolf, 43), and the term is especially important in franchises. The events in *Civil War* are certainly possible within the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which have been established in the thirteen films that came before *Civil War*. How the characters got their superpowers and how they have become the people they are in the film, and the advanced technology viewers see, are well explained and possible in the universe. While the stories take place in the Primary World, the universe and fictional world are so complete and consistent that the events can take place and the characters that exist in it are believable.



When looking at consistency in relation to the other films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, there are some areas where *Civil War* sets itself apart from the other films, for example, there is so much fighting in the films, and while there has always been fighting in the films, there is much more in *Civil War*, than there normally is. Some of the films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe are very different from each other, for example, some films are more comedic, like *Ant-Man*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and *Thor: Ragnarok* and *Iron Man 3* was a psychological thriller, but *Civil War* is more of a superhero film, with all of the fighting, one would expect from a superhero film.

Because *Civil War* is the thirteenth film in the universe, there is not a lot of worldbuilding in it because the world has already been set up in previous films. Instead, the film relies more on narrative and it has a complicated narrative fabric, as there is so much information from previous films. This next section will focus on narrative threads, braids, and fabric and how *Civil War* uses transnarrative characters.

#### Narrative in *Civil War*

##### Transnarrative characters

The Marvel Cinematic Universe often uses what Wolf calls transnarrative characters in their films, and this is certainly the case in *Civil War*. The film is filled with transnarrative characters from previous films in the universe. Up until the film *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, it was only smaller characters that featured in the different films as transnarrative characters, however, in *Age of Ultron*, all the Marvel Cinematic Universe characters came together, and this is also the case in *Civil War*. Besides all the main characters, like Iron Man, Black Widow, the Falcon, and the Winter Soldier, who are all established characters in the universe, we also see transnarrative characters such as Rumlow and Thaddeus Ross. Rumlow first appeared in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, as a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent, who turned out to be a double agent for HYDRA. In *Civil War*, Rumlow appears again as a villain seeking revenge for what happened in *The Winter Soldier*. The character Thaddeus Ross first appeared in *The Incredible Hulk*, as an Army general, and in *Civil War*, he has become Secretary of State and presents the Avengers with the Sokovia Accords which become the catalyst for the events in *Civil War*. Furthermore, we also now see new Avengers being added into the story, characters such as Scarlet Witch and Vision, who both appeared in *Age of Ultron*, and Ant-Man, who had a stand-alone film released just before *Civil War*, are now a part of the Avengers and the universe. The film also introduces new characters into the Marvel Cinematic Universe, where Spider-Man and Black Panther make their first appearance in *Civil War* and will both get their own films

after *Civil War*. This appearance makes them transnarrative characters as they will expand the universe going forward.

As a film, *Civil War* is the start of a new era for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, it is the first film in the third phase and the use of so many transnarrative characters in the film shows, that while the characters might have had their start in different films, they are now all in one universe and going forward they will impact each other's stories. By having so many transnarrative characters in one film, it challenges the viewers as they need to know the characters to be able to follow the film. None of the characters are reintroduced in the film, so it relies on viewers already being familiar with the films and the characters, because as a new viewer there is not much help in terms of who the characters are.

#### Narrative threads, braids, and fabric

As mentioned earlier, *Civil War* is the thirteenth film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and because of this, there is a lot of fabric already that the film has to take into account and can build upon. Right from the start, the film picks up a thread from a previous film, when it starts in Russia in 1991, where viewers see how Bucky Barnes became the Winter Soldier. Barnes has featured in previous films as Steve Rogers' best friend from childhood, who was captured by HYDRA and brainwashed into becoming an assassin. In the first minutes of *Civil War*, viewers see Barnes being brainwashed (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 00:00:00-00:02:41). Another thread from the universe that is mentioned in the film is the death of Tony Stark's parents (00:14:45), and in the film, Tony finds out that it was Barnes as the Winter Soldier who murdered his parents (02:01:10-02:03:15). At this point the two threads become a braid, as they are interwoven, while the murder happened in 1991, it has massive consequences for the events that happen in the film after the reveal, and it shows once again how everything that happens in the Marvel universe is connected.

Another thread in the film is the scene where Tony Stark speaks to a mother in a hallway, and she tells him that her son was killed in Sokovia (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 00:17:18-00:18:50), and this places the small thread in *Civil War* into the larger fabric in the universe, as the events that happened in Sokovia, the mother is talking about, are seen in the film *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. The meeting with the mother is also part of the reason why Tony wants the Avengers to be supervised, as he struggles to live with the fact that they accidentally killed an innocent person.

The film also makes a lot of references to the narrative fabric in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Threads and braids become a fabric when they are so interwoven and complicated

because there are so many of them, and they all impact each other that it is too complex to just be understood. Pepper Potts, Tony Stark's former assistant and girlfriend is mentioned (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 00:16:17), Loke from the *Thor* films is mentioned (00:53:34), and places such as New York, Washington DC, Sokovia, and Lagos, are mentioned, these are all places where the Avengers have fought villains and destroyed the surroundings in the process in earlier films (00:22:10-00:23:00). S.H.I.E.L.D. and HYDRA are also mentioned, and these two corporations play an important role in the films and therefore, also in the overall fabric, as there is a lot of backstory to them.

Generally, *Civil War* relies a lot on the fabric build in the earlier films, it continues threads from previous films, it also solves some, like the question of who killed Tony's parents, and it adds new threads, braids, and expands the fabric for films to come. One of the ways *Civil War* expands its fabric is through the appearance of Spider-Man and the Black Panther, both characters and their threads will be continued in their own films after *Civil War*.

How is the film seen?

*Captain America: Civil War* is the thirteenth film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and it is also the first film in the third phase of films. As all the films are out now, new viewers can choose to watch the films in order of public appearance as Wolf calls it, or in chronological order. Either way for a film like *Civil War*, it is important that viewers have seen the other films before they watch *Civil War*. *Civil War* is, as we have written above, filled with references to previous films and has many transnarrative characters and if a viewer has not seen at least some of the previous films, they would find it difficult to follow the film completely. As a film, *Civil War* is very dependent on viewers being familiar with the universe it is set in and the characters, as it relies so heavily on the characters, their relationships with each other, and their backstories. Because *Civil War* is both set in 2016 and was released in 2016, it does not make much difference if fans watch the Marvel franchise in order of release or chronological order, as it will end up in the same place, as it is mostly films in phase one and two and a few films from phase three that will be watched in another order than the order they were released in. So, viewers can watch *Civil War* in release order or chronological order, and it will not make much of a difference, as they will have all the information they need to understand the film, however, if they watch *Civil War* as a stand-alone film, it will be difficult to understand the story and all the little details in it.

### *Complex media*

The next part of the analysis of *Civil War* will concern itself with the complexities of the film. We will analyse the active narrative threads that are present in *Civil War* and determine if some of the narrative threads are new to this film or if they are continuations from previous films. Moreover, we will discuss how this film deals with the limitations of films that Johnson writes about in his book, and we will also discuss the term ‘the Sleeper Curve’ in relation to *Civil War*.

Johnson’s main point in his book is that popular culture is making people smarter due to it becoming more and more complex. To discuss this, we will start this analysis by looking at the active narrative threads found in *Civil War*, both new narrative threads and continued threads from previous films. After watching *Civil War*, we found that there are three major active narrative threads in the film. As we wrote in the short summary of *Civil War*, this film displays an internal conflict within the Avengers group, and this is, of course, one of the major narrative threads in the film. This thread is somewhat a continued thread from the film *Avengers: Age of Ultron* as the characters in the film refer to the events that occurred in that film and therefore, it shows continuity within the franchise.

The main conflict in this narrative thread concerns itself with the Avengers being seen as either superheroes or vigilantes, and this conflict is a result of the collateral damage in the fight between the Avengers and Ultron in the imaginary European country Sokovia in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. The politicians of the world wish to regulate the superheroes’ activities (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 00:21:06-00:24:31). This leads to internal conflicts within the Avengers team and as a result of that, the Avengers split into two teams where Captain America is against the regulation and Iron Man supports the regulation (00:27:53-00:31:40). Team Captain America consists of the following superheroes: Steve Rogers/Captain America, Sam Wilson/Falcon, Bucky Barnes/The Winter Soldier, Scott Lang/Ant-Man, Clint Barton/Hawkeye, and Wanda Maximoff/Scarlet Witch and during the fight, Natasha Romanoff/Black Widow switches to this team. Throughout the film, viewers learn the characters’ motivation for being against the regulation. Most of the characters do not like the idea of a group of people controlling the Avengers, and the superheroes want the Avengers to defend humanity freely without acting as the last resort. Captain America also fears that the group of people controlling the Avengers and S.H.I.E.L.D. could be compromised, which was the case in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 00:30:21-00:31:40). The other team consists of Tony Stark/Iron

Man, Vision, James Rhodes/War Machine, Peter Parker/Spider-Man, T'Challa/Black Panther, and Black Widow. Their motivations for supporting the regulations are also shown in the film. Iron Man has a sense of guilt after meeting Miriam Sharpe whose son died due to the battle in Sokovia and Iron Man believes that the Avengers should take responsibility when something bad happens (00:17:18-00:18:50).

This conflict in this narrative thread is enhanced further by another narrative thread in the film concerning Captain America and Bucky Barnes' friendship and storyline from the two previous *Captain America* films. This storyline has been present since the *Captain America: The First Avenger* film where both characters were introduced, and viewers quickly learned that they are very important characters in the *Captain America* franchise. This relationship was enhanced even further in the *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* film as Barnes was introduced as a villain of the organisation HYDRA and he later became an ally of the Avengers. In *Civil War*, Barnes has deserted HYDRA and tries to remember his old life before the Winter Soldier brainwashing. However, he is framed for the bombing that occurred at the signing of the Sokovia Accords in Vienna. As a result of this, Captain America and Falcon decide to find Barnes and protect him. This spirals out of control, and it further escalated the conflict between the Avengers (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 00:43:00-00:52:04). Iron Man is given 36 hours to capture Captain America and his allies, and this results in a fight between the Avengers (01:15:08-01:16:42; 01:28:29-01:45:40). Normally, Captain America is a rational character in the Avengers films where he somewhat acts as a leader along with Iron Man, however, in his own films, Captain America is rather irrational when it comes to his friend, Bucky Barnes. As we see in *Civil War*, Captain America and his allies break multiple laws and suggestions from Secretary Thaddeus Ross, including the order to stay out of the conflict concerning Bucky Barnes.

While these two conflicts are continuations of narrative threads found in previous films, there is also a major narrative thread in the film that begins in *Civil War* and somewhat ends in the film as well. This narrative thread concerns the villain Helmut Zemo, who is from Sokovia and who wanted revenge on the Avengers because his family died in the Battle of Sokovia (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 02:00:01-02:08:22). Of course, this narrative thread and this character was a result of the events in *Age of Ultron*, but we would argue that this narrative thread is not a continuation like the Captain America and Bucky Barnes storyline. The Zemo storyline starts in *Civil War* and concludes in the film as he is imprisoned at the end of the film. It can also be argued that this thread continues into newer films as the conflict

between Captain America and Iron Man is not resolved in *Civil War*, but the storyline concerning Zemo as a villain ends in the film.

These three narrative threads appear throughout the entire film, and therefore, they are not resolved right after each other, and they act as chunks that occur simultaneously throughout the film. Moreover, they are also connected to each other in terms of characters and events. An example of this is Helmut Zemo who uses the internal Avengers conflict to his advantage to have his revenge on the Avengers because of the incident in Sokovia in *Age of Ultron*. Here, Zemo frames Bucky Barnes for the bombing in Vienna, and this caused the Avengers to intervene in this thread, and as a result of this, Captain America and Bucky go rogue in order to stop him. As we have mentioned previously, this results in a split between the members of the Avengers, which caused Iron Man and his team to intervene in Captain America and Bucky's narrative thread. This shows that the narrative threads are connected by characters and events as they can move freely across the narrative threads.

So, as we have covered, the film consists of three major narrative threads, but the film also contains several minor narrative threads. For example, *Civil War* includes several characters that have appeared in other Marvel Cinematic Universe and *Captain America* films. For example, *Civil War* starts in a minor narrative thread where a small group from the Avengers consisting of Captain America, Falcon, Black Widow, and Scarlet Witch are in Nigeria on a mission to apprehend HYDRA infiltrator Brock Rumlow, who also starred in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. This thread is resolved in the film as Rumlow commits suicide with a bomb vest, but it begins a new narrative thread with Scarlet Witch as she attempts to contain this explosion with her superhero powers, but she loses control, and as a result, many Wakandans are killed (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 00:03:07-00:13:03). This results in discussions concerning her powers if she can be considered dangerous, and it becomes a minor narrative thread in *Civil War*.

*Civil War* also includes new characters that are introduced into the Marvel Cinematic Universe for the first time. For example, early in the film, viewers are introduced to King T'Chaka and his son T'Challa and viewers are introduced to the country of Wakanda. King T'Chaka is killed during the attack in Vienna, and as a result, T'Challa attempts to hunt down Bucky Barnes by using his powers as the Black Panther (Russo & Russo, "Captain America: Civil War", 00:35:09-00:36:03). This narrative thread is expanded throughout the film as viewers learn more about the character Black Panther. The end credits scene of *Civil War* includes a scene where Captain America and Barnes are in Wakanda, which would then indicate that there would be a film about Black Panther and Wakanda in Marvel Cinematic

Universe's third phase (02:18:35-02:20:00). Moreover, Spider-Man is also introduced in *Civil War* as Iron Man decides to find more allies for the upcoming confrontation with Captain America. When viewers first see the appearance of Peter Parker, it is still unknown that he is Spider-Man and it is not until Iron Man begins to ask Parker questions about videos on YouTube (01:16:42-01:22:29). Just like with Black Panther, Spider-Man is also seen in the end credits scene, which again indicates that there will be a film about Spider-Man in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (02:26:30-02:27:24).

The Marvel Cinematic Universe has chosen to introduce new important characters in *Civil War*, and this is due to the fact that these new characters will have important roles in future Marvel Cinematic Universe films. They are introduced in *Civil War*, and it works well with the theme of the film where the main focus is on the internal Avengers conflict, and the respective teams try to find new allies. Here, Ant-Man is also introduced as an Avenger helping Captain America, but in contrast to Black Panther and Spider-Man who are introduced in *Civil War*, Ant-Man had his own film after *Age of Ultron*.

We have now discussed the narrative threads in *Civil War*, therefore, we will discuss how the film has dealt with the limitations of films that Johnson has written about. To discuss this, we have to include some of the previous films in the franchise we have referred to the analysis, like for example *Avengers: Age of Ultron* as it is very clear that *Civil War* draws upon events and characters from that film. So, this leads us back to Johnson's discussion of films being 'narratively complex films' or 'junk films' that are easily consumed. We would argue that *Civil War* can be considered a narratively complex film, but at the same time, it is not so narratively complex that viewers cannot understand what is going on in the film. To fully understand what is going on in *Civil War*, it is, of course, necessary to watch previous films such as *Avengers: Age of Ultron* as *Civil War* references a lot to events from that film. This is to avoid confusion about who the characters are and what happened in the events that they are referring to. However, if viewers have watched all of the films prior to *Civil War*, they will understand most of what is going on except for the details that have not been dealt with in the films yet. Therefore, we can argue that films from the Marvel Cinematic Universe require viewers to invest time in watching all of the films to get the full experience and understanding of the franchise. If we return to Johnson's discussion of junk films, we would argue that *Civil War* cannot be considered a 'junk film' that is easily consumed. This is due to the fact that there are many characters, their relationship with one another, and narrative threads that viewers must keep track of. This is also related to Johnson's discussion about cognitive demands as viewers cannot zone out while watching this film and other films in the Marvel

Cinematic Universe as there are many details that will be important in upcoming films. For example, after Maya watched *Civil War* a second time after watching *Infinity War* and *Endgame*, many details, such as new characters, events, and the Infinity Stones, made much more sense and we would argue that this is common within the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

As a last remark, we will now discuss *Civil War* in relation to Johnson's term 'the Sleeper Curve' where Johnson argues that popular culture is making people smarter. In the theory section, we discussed this in terms of 'newness' as Johnson may have exaggerated the 'newness' of this trend. Before the Marvel Cinematic Universe was created in 2008, there were other examples of transmedia universes, for example, *The Matrix* and *Star Wars* franchises. So the idea of a transmedia franchise is not new, but where *Star Wars* connected its films in episodes, Marvel Cinematic Universe connects its films with continuity and seriality by allowing their characters to freely move across films. The story in the Marvel Cinematic Universe is depicted as one single and unified story, while the stories in the *Star Wars* films have somewhat clear cuts between them.

This brings us back to Johnson's main point about popular culture making people smarter, and this creates a discussion about the Marvel Cinematic Universe's and *Civil War*'s complexity. The Marvel Cinematic Universe is an expansive universe, and it requires attention to detail from its viewers, and that way, viewers have to hold several narrative threads consciously to fully experience and understand the franchise. This is also the case with *Civil War* as it is a part of one big unified universe. The franchise consists of several characters, events from previous films that viewers must keep track of as there are both new characters that are introduced in the film and older characters that have been a part an active part since the beginning of the franchise. Therefore, viewers must be familiar with characters and events from previous instalments in order to understand what is going on. As we have already discussed, *Civil War* is a continuation of the events from *Age of Ultron*, so, viewers must be familiar with the events and the characters and their motivations from this film. As a result, there are many kernels and satellites that are carried over from previous films that viewers must be familiar with in order to understand the story that is presented in the film.



## “Wakanda forever”

### An analysis of Marvel’s *Black Panther*

In the following section, we will analyse the film *Black Panther* using the theory we have outlined in the theory section. We have chosen to analyse this film because many of the characters in *Black Panther* are new in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. This film is also particularly interesting as it is the first Marvel film to receive three Oscar awards for music, costumes, and production and it was nominated for best motion picture as well (“Black Panther Awards”). The film mainly features characters within the *Black Panther* universe, and it presents the beginning of a new franchise in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

*Black Panther* takes place in the imaginary African country of Wakanda. We follow the soon to be king, T’Challa, whose father tragically died in *Civil War*. Besides facing the terrors of becoming Wakanda’s new king, T’Challa also faces new threats. Wakanda is known for having the metal vibranium. The black-market arms dealer, Ulysses Klaue, wishes to share Wakanda’s advanced technology with the world, so he receives help from Erik Stevens, also known as Killmonger. Killmonger reveals himself as N’Jadaka, who turns out to be an exiled Wakandan and T’Challa’s cousin and as a result of this, he wishes to fight T’Challa to claim the throne. Killmonger defeats T’Challa in combat at first, but T’Challa does not stop here as he later returns and defeats Killmonger for good. At the end of the film, T’Challa decides to share Wakanda’s advanced technology with the world.

#### *What is transmedia?*

As mentioned earlier, we are relying on the Producers Guild of America’s definition of transmedia storytelling, and when placing *Black Panther* as a standalone film it cannot be considered transmedia, however, when placing the film in the context of the Marvel Cinematic Universe it can narrowly be included in that definition as the character T’Challa and the kingdom of Wakanda was first introduced in *Civil War*, and the story impacts later films in the franchise.

*Black Panther* is one of the few Marvel Cinematic Universe films that can actually stand on its own, as it is a film that viewers can watch without any prior knowledge of the Marvel universe. As opposed to the majority of Marvel films, *Black Panther* barely contains any references to the other films or any major characters from the other films. While the film does have returning characters from other films, these are minor characters, and new viewers can easily follow the story because it is explained in the film who they are. As we mentioned in the

theory section, most of the Marvel films are not “sufficiently self-contained” as Melanie Schiller calls it (Schiller, 100), because they require some prior knowledge of the universe, however, as just stated, *Black Panther* can definitively be considered self-contained, as it does not rely on any already known characters or events. With the exception of the protagonist T’Challa, who appeared in *Civil War*, all the characters in *Black Panther* are new to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and so is the world the story is set in, the kingdom of Wakanda. Wakanda has been mentioned briefly in earlier films and is very briefly seen in a post-credit scene in *Civil War*, but nothing more is revealed about the place. Because Wakanda and its characters and history are so unknown, the film has to set these up, and this makes it self-contained, and it is why the film can stand alone, as fans do not need extensive knowledge about the universe before they see the film, like they would with *Civil War*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, and *Avengers: Endgame*.

When looking at *Black Panther* in the context of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, its protagonist T’Challa is first introduced in *Civil War* and is part of the story in that film. In a post-credit scene for *Civil War*, Captain America and Bucky Barnes are seen in Wakanda with T’Challa, and this cements Wakanda as being on the same universe as the other Marvel films. In the scene, which is set in Wakanda, Bucky Barnes is frozen, to protect himself and others as he was previously controlled by HYDRA until they can figure out how to free him from the mind control. Furthermore, at the end of *Black Panther*, Bucky Barnes appears in a post-credit scene, alive, living in Wakanda and interacting with Shuri, T’Challa’s sister, and this shows that Bucky’s storyline has continued during *Black Panther*, and while he has not been a part of the film, his appearance signals once again that there are storylines happening simultaneously in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

While we are not relying on Henry Jenkins’ definition of transmedia storytelling, one of his statements, that something cannot be a transmedia story, if it does not expand the story or the world, is interesting in relation to *Black Panther*. The world the film is set in, Wakanda and the events that happen in the film expand both the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the overall storyline in the universe, and while this is not necessarily evident in the *Black Panther* film, it becomes evident in the next film *Avengers: Infinity War*, where one of the most important scenes in the film takes place in Wakanda and shows the importance of having Wakanda be a part of the Marvel universe. *Black Panther* not only expanded the Marvel Cinematic Universe in terms of the universe, but it also provided more characters and stories to explore, which will be seen in future Marvel films, as a *Black Panther* sequel is set to be released in 2022.

The fact that *Black Panther* can be seen as a stand-alone film stands as a stark contrast to *Civil War*, which should not be seen on its own. As mentioned in the previous analysis, *Civil War* cannot stand on its own, because it relies so massively on the previous films and their characters that new viewers will not be able to follow the film and fully understand it, where *Black Panther* can be seen on its own because it introduces a new “world” and characters to the Marvel Cinematic Universe. While T’Challa featured in *Civil War*, it is not necessary for viewers to have seen it to understand the character, because everything is explained in *Black Panther*.

#### *Henry Jenkins’ seven principles of transmedia storytelling*

In the following section, we will apply some of Jenkins’ seven principles of storytelling to the film *Black Panther*. Just like with *Civil War*, we will only focus on Jenkins’ principle of continuity.

The term continuity deals with a unified universe, and there are a few examples of continuity in *Black Panther*. When watching the film, it is possible to watch it without having watched previous films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, therefore, it can be considered a standalone film. The film tells the story of the Black Panther, the protector of Wakanda, and this story has not been dealt with before in previous films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Even though *Black Panther* can be considered a standalone film, *Black Panther* is also connected with other films from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. For example, at the beginning of the film, there is a flashback to the events in Vienna from *Civil War*. Here’s King T’Challa’s father, T’Chaka, dies in a terrorist attack (Coogler, 00:06:58-00:07:32). Moreover, Agent Everett Ross, who appears shortly in *Civil War*, has a more prominent role in *Black Panther* as he first meets T’Challa in South Korea. When meeting Agent Ross, T’Challa and Ross speak about the villain Helmut Zemo, who was the main villain in *Civil War*. They are both trying to apprehend Ulysses Klaue, who sold vibranium to Ultron in *Age of Ultron* (00:43:43-00:44:26). At the end of the film, Ross helps T’Challa fight to become the king of Wakanda again. As we have mentioned earlier, *Black Panther* can be considered a standalone film, but if one watches *Age of Ultron* and *Civil War* prior to watching *Black Panther*, one would understand T’Chaka’s and T’Challa’s characters and motivations better in *Civil War* and *Black Panther*. However, we would not compare *Civil War*’s continuity in relation to *Black Panther*’s continuity as much more information about previous films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe is required to understand what is going on in *Civil War*. Many new characters in the *Black Panther* universe are introduced in this film, and only a few characters were established in previous films in the

Marvel Cinematic Universe, these characters being T'Challa, Agent Everett Ross, and Ulysses Klaue. New characters such as Okoye, Shuri, Nakia, and Erik Stevens/Killmonger have not been introduced in previous Marvel films, but they are important characters within the *Black Panther* franchise. Okoye and Shuri also make an appearance in *Endgame* in the final battle.

### *Seriality*

In this section, we will analyse *Black Panther* in terms of seriality. As we have discussed earlier, the Marvel Cinematic Universe consists of films, and these are connected in terms of events, history, and characters. This is also the case with *Black Panther*, but not to the same extent as *Civil War*. As we have discussed in the previous sections, *Black Panther* is part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but the film can be watched as a standalone film, therefore, viewers do not necessarily need to watch other films from the Marvel Cinematic Universe in order to understand what is going on in the film. However, if we turn to Hagedorn's theory, he writes that serials can offer a narrative text over successive episodes and even though we argue that *Black Panther* can be seen as a standalone film, there are small details that show that the film is part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. These details are references to previous films, for example, the events and the villain from *Civil War* are mentioned at the beginning of *Black Panther*. Thus, in order to understand all details that are referenced from previous films, one should watch previous Marvel Cinematic Universe films. The film *Black Panther* may not be the best example in relation to seriality as most important information is either explained or revealed later in the film, for example, Wakanda's history or the characters' relationship with one another. This can be put in contrast to *Civil War* with its inclusion of the Marvel Cinematic Universe's many characters. These characters' relationships, personalities, and backgrounds are not explained, and here, viewers are required to know who the characters are. Thus, we would argue that even though *Black Panther* is part of the complex Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise, this film is relatively easy to follow without having watched previous films from the franchise as this film functions as an introduction to the beginning *Black Panther* franchise.

Hagedorn also writes about riddles and mysteries being an important part of a serial. This is also true to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, however, there are not many details that are left untouched in *Black Panther*. Most mysteries are resolved in the film, for example, the villain Erik Stevens' relations with Wakanda. Some details concerning the metal vibranium are still unclear, but they may be covered in the next *Black Panther* film which will release in 2022.

Jenkins has also written about seriality and discussed it in relation to how important pieces of information are dispersed. As we have already mentioned, it is possible to watch

*Black Panther* as a standalone film, but in order to understand certain aspects of the film, one should watch films such as *Age of Ultron* and *Civil War*. *Age of Ultron* refers to the country of Wakanda and vibranium which Ultron buys from Ulysses Klaue and *Civil War* introduces T'Challa, the protagonist in *Black Panther*. The film *Captain America: The First Avenger* mentions the metal vibranium for the first time in the franchise, and Captain America's shield is made from this metal. So, there are small chunks of information about Wakanda and vibranium in the film *Captain America: The First Avenger*, but at the time, this information does not seem very important. Wakanda and vibranium are linked together in *Age of Ultron* and viewers meet T'Challa and see him in the Black Panther suit in *Civil War*. All this information leads up to the *Black Panther* film where Wakanda, T'Challa, and vibranium are described more thoroughly. However, there is still one aspect that is somewhat unknown. At the beginning of *Black Panther*, there is a short introduction to the history of Wakanda, and here, it is mentioned that vibranium came from a meteor from space and it crash-landed in Africa that would become Wakanda (Coogler, 00:00:00-00:01:38). Thus, there are some examples of seriality in *Black Panther*, for example, Wakanda and vibranium are mentioned in previous films which are more thoroughly described in *Black Panther*. The film can be watched without having watched any other Marvel Cinematic Universe films, but to get the full experience of *Black Panther*, one should watch other films from the franchise.

### *Kernels and Satellites*

In this section, we will discuss Chatman's terms of kernels and satellites in relation to the film *Black Panther*. Here, we will examine the events that occur in *Black Panther*.

If we start with examining the kernels found in *Black Panther*, an important kernel in *Black Panther* is T'Challa's journey to becoming king. This kernel was already explored in *Civil War* as T'Challa's father, T'Chaka, who was the King of Wakanda, was killed during a terrorist attack in Vienna. Here, T'Challa tries to come to terms with his sudden new title as King of Wakanda. This kernel is continued in *Black Panther* as T'Challa is unsure what to do as king and T'Challa seeks help from his father in the spiritual plane. T'Challa wants to become a good king like his father, but he does not believe he will (Coogler, 00:28:39-00:33:09). In the film, T'Challa's view on how to be a good king is challenged by the film's main villain, Erik "Killmonger" Stevens also known as N'Jadaka when he reveals himself to be Wakandan. T'Challa learns that Stevens was abandoned in America after his father, N'Jobu, was murdered by T'Chaka because he had betrayed Wakanda by helping Ulysses Klaue steal vibranium (01:04:12-01:07:45). T'Challa believes that his father made the wrong choice, and he decides

to abandon the traditional Wakandan isolation principle in order to help other countries and black people by using their advanced technology (01:36:24-01:38:04). This is the most prominent kernel in *Black Panther*, and it shows what the main conflict is in the film.

There are also examples of satellites in *Black Panther*, and one of the most prominent examples can be found at the beginning of the film where T'Challa and Okoye travel to Nigeria to find Nakia on her undercover mission, so she can support T'Challa when he is to be crowned King of Wakanda (Coogler, 00:07:35-00:12:00). Before this event in Nigeria, viewers see in a news report that the world considers Wakanda to be a poor third world country (00:06:58-00:07:30). However, in the scene in Nigeria, viewers get the first glimpses of Wakanda's advanced technology, and the Black Panther's combat skills are reintroduced as they were introduced in *Civil War*.

Moreover, there is another example of a satellite turning into a kernel, and this example is Wakanda itself. Here, Wakanda as a country started out as a satellite in *Civil War* and continued in *Black Panther*, but here, it turned out to be an important kernel in upcoming films as T'Challa decided that Wakanda needed to open up to the outside world, and therefore, it becomes an important kernel in upcoming Avengers films as the battle to protect the Mind Stone from Thanos takes place in Wakanda.

### *Worldbuilding*

As written earlier in this analysis, the country of Wakanda is first introduced in *Civil War* where we see very little of the country in the short post-credit scene, so Wakanda is not properly introduced until *Black Panther*. For the first half of the film, the location moves between locations in the Primary World and in Wakanda, and in the second half of the film, it is only set in Wakanda. This next section will focus on worldbuilding in *Black Panther* and will attempt to shed light on what makes Wakanda an imaginary world and how it is different from the Primary World.

Part of the story takes place in the Primary World, and we see locations such as Oakland in the USA, London, and South Korea. The film starts out in 1992 in Oakland in the US, and the scene provides backstory, and it then fast forwards to present day in a museum in London, and after this, part of the film is set in Busan, South Korea. These cities are exactly how viewers know them and expect them to be: busy, multicultural, and the characters speak the languages one would expect, English in Oakland and London, and Korean in South Korea.

Wakanda is the secondary world and is first introduced in the first minutes of the film with an origin story, which will be examined later. The film starts out explaining how Wakanda

came into existence and also solves the problem of why viewers are not familiar with the country that is located in Africa. It is explained that a meteorite hit a place in Africa and five tribes settled in the land and built the country of Wakanda. The country is built on vibranium, a rare metal that is only found in Wakanda and the reason why Wakanda is the most advanced nation in the world. However, Wakanda has been closed off from the rest of the world to protect themselves and the vibranium and has stayed like that for centuries (Coogler, 00:00:00-0:01:45). This explanation sets the film off and also solves what could have been a problem if it had not been explained why no one has heard of Wakanda before, and it also explains how the Wakandan society functions.

As far as the Primary World is aware, Wakanda is a small country in Africa. It is said to be one of the poorest countries in the world, and Agent Ross describes Wakanda by saying that they have shepherds, textiles, and cool outfits (Coogler, 00:56:00-00:57:00). This is the extent of what the Primary World knows about Wakanda, however, Wakanda is aware of the Primary World, this is evident when Shuri, T'Challa's little sister, says at one point that their father used to watch old American films (00:39:00:00:39:08), indicating that Wakanda is aware of what is going on in the world. Furthermore, Wakanda also has spies placed around the world to protect Wakanda's image.

Having locations set in the Primary World be a part of the film shows the contrast between the Primary World and the secondary world. While Wakanda is the most advanced nation in the world, it looks very different from the locations in the Primary World, and this contrast highlights just how secluded Wakanda has been for centuries. Visually, Wakanda still looks very traditional and had it not been for the futuristic-looking buildings, it would not have looked any different from any other rural African city, but the buildings stand in stark contrast to the old huts, and yet, they seem to blend in perfectly, a mix of the old and the new.

#### Ways to move between the worlds

In his theory, Wolf argues that a secondary world should have clear borders that cement it as secondary and remote from the Primary World to make the secondary world believable to viewers. Due to Wakanda being so closed off from the rest of the world, it seems like it is only Wakandan people that can get there. In the film, we see T'Challa, Okoye, and Nakia on a plane flying into Wakanda, which seems to have a barrier around it to keep outsiders from seeing what Wakanda really looks like. In the scene, all that can be seen at first is nature, but when the plane flies through the barrier, the city is revealed (Coogler, 00:12:38-00:13:51). The city is vibrant and has tall futuristic-looking buildings, one would not expect to see in what is

referred to as one of the poorest countries. Furthermore, to keep appearances up that they are just another poor country in Africa, any outsiders who manage to make their way to the border to Wakanda will be met by the Border Tribe. These people live around Wakanda's borders and appear to be farmers, and they wear what looks like traditional African clothes, making Wakanda look like the poor country they want the rest of the world to see and not the developed country they actually are.

As Wolf argues, a secondary world should be difficult to get to, and this is certainly the case for Wakanda, as it is protected by a barrier that cannot be seen from the outside, and the Border Tribe protecting the country from outsiders. It is very difficult to get into the country for outsiders and to see Wakanda for what it really is. However, Wakanda is perhaps not as remote as other secondary worlds. While Wakanda is a fictional country, it is said to be located in East Africa, bordering up to Uganda and other East African countries, so while the country itself is not remotely located in relation to the Primary World, it is very closed off to the rest of the world and difficult to get in to. An example of Wakanda not being remote is that Killmonger is able to find his way to Wakanda on his own through the borders, however, he does have a map to guide him. This shows that, while Wakanda is fictional, it is still located in the real world. We would argue that Wakanda, as a country, is, in fact, a secondary world, first of all, because it is fictional, the country simply does not exist, but also because the fictional country, that is located in Africa, is so remote and closed off from other African countries in what is the Primary World. Furthermore, Wakanda has so many fictional elements that do not exist in the real world, like vibranium and the advanced technology, that it can only be considered a secondary world.

### Invention

The first property invention deals with the differences between the Primary World and the secondary world, and this is in terms of concepts such as language, history, physics, culture, and geography, for example (Wolf, 34). Wolf divides these into four realms, the nominal realm, the cultural realm, the natural realm, and the ontological realm, however, only two of the four realms are relevant when analysing *Black Panther* and will be explored here. Moreover, as we have chosen to include Wolf's infrastructures in this section, an analysis of how mythology plays into *Black Panther* will also be included in this section. The invention property and the infrastructure section will be written into one section in this analysis. While Wolf writes about them separately in his book, we have chosen to combine them under the invention property to avoid repetition, as they deal with some of the same elements.



## Culture

One default area that has massively changed from what most viewers are familiar with is the culture. As *Black Panther* is set in Africa, there would, of course, be some cultural changes, simply because the western world and some African countries have different cultures. Moreover, as Wakanda is also a fictional country that has never been colonised, there is bound to be even more differences between their culture and the western culture many viewers might be more familiar with.

A big cultural change is the use of languages in the film, as several languages are spoken in the film. Throughout the film, the characters speak either English or Xhosa, a language spoken in South Africa, that the film's director chose to use as the language spoken in Wakanda. Nakia speaks Korean, and the Jabari Tribe speaks Igbo, a language spoken in Nigeria (Black Panther Press Kit, 22-23). While it is never explained in the film what languages are spoken, there are always subtitles to ensure that viewers understand the dialogue. The fact that the characters not only speak English but also Xhosa highlight the change in culture, and while it would have been easier just to make the characters speak English, both for the filmmakers, cast, and also the audience, that fact that they speak Xhosa cements that Wakanda is, in fact, another country that has its own separate culture.

As mentioned above, Wakanda was built on land where vibranium has enhanced the soil, and because vibranium powers their city, they are the most technologically advanced nation in the world. According to Wakandan history, which will be explained further in the mythology section, Wakanda was originally made up of five tribes. These five tribes were The Border Tribe, The River Tribe, The Merchant Tribe, The Mining Tribe, and The Jabari Tribe. The first four tribes agreed to serve under one king, while the Jabari Tribe isolated themselves in the mountains and stayed there until the events in *Black Panther*. Each tribe has a purpose of ensuring that the society runs smoothly. Another cultural difference that viewers will not be familiar with is the Dora Milaje. They are essentially a military force, made up of women, and they protect the king and his family (Black Panther Press Kit, 24). The Dora Milaje's role or purpose is never explained in the film, however, it is clear that they are warriors and that they protect the throne. The character Okoye is the leader of the Dora Milaje.

Another significant change is that Wakanda is a monarchy, and in the film, viewers see the ceremony that makes T'Challa king. In the ceremony, T'Challa is stripped of his Black Panther powers, and the other tribes can challenge him for the throne. The ceremony scene takes place in a waterfall, with four tribes present, as they stand on ledges on the waterfall to

witness the ceremony. In this scene, it becomes evident how different and varied the culture in Wakanda is, every tribe is dressed differently from each other, and they have different chants (Coogler, 00:20:00-00:28:30). The outfits the tribes wear are all inspired by different African tribes and reflect what tribes stands for in the Wakandan society. The ceremony and the ritual in itself show just how different the Wakandan culture is from the Primary World. To ensure that viewers are not lost in the unfamiliarity of the ceremony, its purpose is explained by Wakanda's spiritual leader Zuri, to ensure that viewers understand the importance of the ceremony.

A big Primary World default change is the advanced technology in *Black Panther*. Due to the vibranium, Wakanda is the most technologically advanced nation in the world, and some of these inventions are seen in the film. Viewers also see Shuri's laboratory in the film, it is placed underground, and the scene also shows how vibranium is embedded into Wakanda's ground, giving the ground a blue colour (Coogler, 00:37:30- 00:40:55). Shuri's laboratory looks very futuristic, and in the scene, she shows T'Challa her new inventions, among them, are communication devices (00:38:22), remote access Kimoyo beads (00:38:36), which later allows Shuri to remote control a car in Busan, South Korea from her laboratory in Wakanda (00:48:45-00:52:39). The Kimoyo beads also save Agent Ross from dying after being shot and keeps him stable until he is saved by Shuri's advanced technology in Wakanda (00:59:30-01:01:18). Shuri has also invented soles that automatically turn into shoes when stepped on, these are also sound absorbent, so they make no noises when walking (00:38:56), and a new Black Panther suit, which hides within a necklace, and is voice-activated, the suit is made from vibranium, and it absorbs kinetic energy and turns it into power, that T'Challa can then use (00:39:22-00:40:55). These are only a few examples of the advanced technology Wakanda has as a result of vibranium, and it shows how different Wakanda is from the real world, as none of these inventions exists in the real world.

### Nature

While *Black Panther* is set in the Primary World, Wakanda is a fictional country, and because of this, much of the nature is like our own, however, there are a few default changes, as Wolf calls changes that differ from the real world. Wakanda was built on land that had previously been struck by a meteorite of vibranium which affected the plant life around it, and because of this, Wakanda is the most advanced nation in the world (Coogler, 00:00:00-0:01:45). It is important to note that vibranium is not real, but it is a fictional metal that only exists in Wakanda and is mined there, and this metal essentially powers the country. It also affected the

plant life making it more fertile, and new plants grew from it, one of these being the heart shaped herb, which gives incredible strength, speed, and instinct to whoever ingests the plant. Vibranium also powers T'Challa's Black Panther suit, which makes it difficult to harm him, as the suit protects him from everything, including gunshots which cannot penetrate the suit.

So, while Wakanda operates on most Primary World defaults, it does have changes to the nature aspect as discussed above. The biggest change being the existence of vibranium, which impacts everything in Wakanda.

### Mythology

*Black Panther* is a prime example of how mythologies can add history and context to a world. The film starts out with a man telling a child how Wakanda came into existence.

Millions of years ago, a meteorite made of vibranium, the strongest substance in the universe, struck the continent of Africa, affecting the plant life around it, and when the time of men came five tribes settled on it and called it Wakanda. The tribes lived in constant war with each other, until a warrior Shurman received a vision from the panther goddess Bast, who lead him to the heart shapes herb, a plant that granted him super human strength, speed, and instincts, the warrior became king and the first black panther, the protector of Wakanda. Four tribes agreed to live under the king's rule, but the Jabari tribe isolated themselves in the mountains. The Wakandan used vibranium to develop technology more advanced than any other nation. But as Wakanda thrived, the world around it descended further into chaos. To keep vibranium safe, the Wakandan vowed to hide in plain sight, keeping the truth of their power from the outside world. (Coogler, 00:00:00-0:01:45)

This story is Wakanda's origin story, it is the Wakandan mythology, that the world is based on, and it explains how the society functions. Not much has changed from the origin story in present-day Wakanda, as there are still five tribes, one of which is isolated in the mountains, Wakanda is still a monarchy, with T'Challa becoming king in the film, and they have built their city on vibranium and is the most technologically advanced nation in the world. This mythology also gives context to why Wakanda has chosen to hide from the world, and why it is a problem that some characters in the film want to open Wakanda up to the outside world and share its resources with the rest of the world. Having that problem placed in a larger historical context can perhaps help viewers understand the hesitancy T'Challa and other

characters have when it comes to opening Wakanda up, which viewers might not have understood, had there not been a reason.

### Completeness

As written in the mythology section above, Wakanda has an origin story of how it came into existence, and this story also explains why Wakanda has chosen to stay hidden from the rest of the world, and it is because of this story that Wakanda, as a fictional world, seems complete. Had that introduction to the film and Wakanda not been there, viewers would not have understood why or how Wakanda existed. The same applies to the culture in Wakanda, while not all cultural changes are explicitly explained, the most important ones are, such as the crowning ritual of the new king, as mentioned above, had the character Zuri not explained the ceremony's purpose in the film, the scene would have been confusing and affected the completeness of the world. Therefore, *Black Panther* generally does a good job of explaining, whether implicit or explicitly, how the society function, which in turn makes the world seem more complete.

### Consistency

While a metal like vibranium, and the powers it has, is unlikely to exist in the real world, it is not unlikely within the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and because of this, its existence is definitely plausible. Vibranium has been mentioned before in Marvel Cinematic Universe, for example in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, where Howard Stark created Captain America's shield from it, *Marvel's The Avengers*, and in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, where Ultron tries to buy vibranium from Ulysses Klaue, so viewers are already familiar with the metal, which also helps with consistency. As is Shuri's advanced technology, that is improbable in the real world, but it certainly is not in the secondary world that is the Marvel Cinematic Universe, where viewers are already familiar with advanced technology, like Iron Man being kept alive by technology or the science experiment that became the Hulk. Furthermore, the technological advances have a solid explanation that makes sense in the universe, as does Wakanda's existence, and why it has stayed hidden for so long. Therefore, Wakanda and *Black Panther* is very consistent as it does not contradict itself, nor does the invention in the film, conflict with the real world, as it is all possible within the Marvel universe.

One of Wolf points in relation to consistency is that it is extremely important in franchises, as there is often a lot of information from earlier film to consider and fit into a new film. However, *Black Panther* can mostly stand on its own in the Marvel Cinematic Universe,

as it does not rely on any characters or narratives from earlier films, so the need for consistency in terms of the Marvel Cinematic Universe is small, however, that will of course change going forward in new films.

As *Black Panther* takes place in our world, it largely depends on Primary World defaults to make sense of the world, meaning that viewers will not have to question how the people get food and clothes for example. However, the defaults that have been changed, as discussed above, are all mostly explained in the film in such a way that it does not create gaps that the audience have to fill out themselves.

### Narrative in *Black Panther*

#### Transnarrative characters

As mentioned previously, Marvel Cinematic Universe films often use transnarrative characters to show that different stories and places exist in the same universe. In *Black Panther*, there are a few transnarrative characters, that connects the film, which is set in an imaginary place, unlike most of the Marvel films, to the other films. One of these transnarrative characters is Agent Everett Ross, Agent Ross first appeared in *Civil War* where he was the Deputy Task Force Commander of the Joint Counterterrorism Centre and was tasked with capturing whoever bombed the Vienna International Centre. In *Black Panther*, Agent Ross works for the CIA and runs into T'Challa on a mission to buy vibranium from Klaue in South Korea, when the mission fails, Ross is shot, and T'Challa brings him to Wakanda to save him. Ross' character only played a small and insignificant part in *Civil War*, that would then turn into a much bigger and important role in *Black Panther*. Another transnarrative character is one of the film's villains, Ulysses Klaue. Klaue first appeared in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, where he possessed vibranium that Ultron needed. In *Age of Ultron*, viewers saw him loses his arm, and in *Black Panther*, he has a technologically enhanced prosthetic arm that is made of vibranium. In *Black Panther*, Klaue's backstory is revealed, and viewers find out why and how he has the vibranium that Ultron needed in *Age of Ultron*, as vibranium is only found in Wakanda. And finally, one of the bigger characters Bucky Barnes, or the Winter Soldier as he is also known as, appears in *Black Panther* very briefly in a post-credit scene. Bucky Barnes has appeared in all of the *Captain America* films as he is Steve Rogers' best friend from his teenage years, while Barnes was later brainwashed by HYDRA, trained as an assassin and became the Winter Soldier, he eventually remembers his former life, and at the end of *Civil War*, he is granted asylum in Wakanda and is frozen until Shuri can find a way of undoing the brainwashing he endured from HYDRA. Barnes then appears in a post-credit scene in *Black Panther* alive.

The most important transnarrative character in *Black Panther* is obviously T'Challa. He appeared in *Civil War*, where his father was killed in the attack in Vienna, and he then goes after Bucky Barnes after he is framed for the attack. In *Civil War*, it is established that T'Challa and his father is from a country called Wakanda and that it is a kingdom. Moreover, it is also established that T'Challa will take over as king and the Black Panther from his father.

By using transnarrative characters, such as Agent Ross, Klaue, Bucky Barnes, and of course T'Challa in *Black Panther*, Marvel has established Wakanda as a part of the Marvel universe, which could have been a challenge as the story is so far removed from what Marvel films are normally like. It could be difficult for viewers to see how T'Challa and Wakanda fit into the overall narrative in Marvel Cinematic Universe, but by having characters from earlier films and having T'Challa visit Vienna for example, a place that is also seen in *Civil War*, it becomes clear that it is certainly a part of the universe and will most likely play a part in later films.

#### Narrative threads, braids, and fabric

The first narrative thread is shown within the first minutes of the film, the first scene takes place in Oakland, California, in 1992, and we see two men in an apartment. As the scene progresses and more people appear, it is revealed that the men are from Wakanda and that one of the men is, in fact, a prince who has betrayed his country, the prince is then killed by his brother, the king of Wakanda. Moments after a plane is seen flying away and a young boy looks at it and then up at the apartment building. The story then fast forwards to the present and a young man, who is working with Ulysses Klaue, steals a Wakandan artefact from a British museum. This artefact contains the metal vibranium, which can only be found in Wakanda. Throughout the first part of the film, this young man appears to be nothing more than just Klaue's accomplice, however, Agent Ross later reveals that he is in fact "one of ours" (Coogler, 01:11:30-01:11:36). His name is Erik Stevens, and he is known as Killmonger, he is a trained assassin who works with the CIA. As for T'Challa's narrative thread, he has just been made king of Wakanda, and he wants to find and kill Ulysses Klaue for his crime against Wakanda, something his father failed to do. Thirty years earlier, Klaue had infiltrated Wakanda and stolen vibranium, and he had escaped, and now, T'Challa has discovered that Klaue is trying to sell vibranium and he wants to bring him to justice. At this point, the only thing that seems to tie T'Challa and Killmonger's narratives together is that Killmonger is working with Klaue, who T'Challa wants to capture and kill for his previous crimes against Wakanda. This connection makes the two threads into a narrative braid as what happens in one thread affects

the other, what Killmonger does now affects what happens in T'Challa's thread, and while the two characters do not meet face to face until late in the film, they come close when Killmonger breaks Klaue free from where Agent Ross and T'Challa are interrogating him. The fact that Killmonger and T'Challa do not meet until late in the film means that viewers are unaware of who the "real" villain of the story is.

As the story progresses further, Killmonger makes his way to Wakanda, after killing Klaue, and it is revealed that he is in fact, Wakandan. His father was a prince of Wakanda, the man that was killed in the first scene, by the King of Wakanda, who was T'Challa's father, making T'Challa and Killmonger cousins, which in turn means that Killmonger has a right to the throne (Coogler, 01:13:40-01:16:45). It is at this point the narratives become a tightly woven braid, as the two threads, T'Challa and Killmonger's threads, become closely linked, and the threads start interacting. We would even argue that it is now a fabric, as the braid has become so complex and interwoven that it has moved past being a braid. According to Wolf threads and braids became fabrics through "shared locations, events, and characters" (Wolf, 201), and this is the case with the film, while Klaue seemed to be the film's villain, it soon becomes apparent that it is, in fact, Killmonger, and T'Challa has to protect and defend his country against Killmonger. The rest of the film takes place in Wakanda, a place Killmonger has never been, but his father told him about it as a child. After Killmonger becomes king of Wakanda, he orders Wakanda to open its border and help black people around the world, but his anger is not just about the unfairness black people face in the world, and that he faced as a child growing up in Oakland, but the anger is also about his father's death and his need to revenge his father's death. At times, it seems like Killmonger wants to destroy Wakanda as a way to revenge his father. Just moments after he first becomes king, his first order is to open Wakanda up to the outside world and help black people fight the injustice they face, and he does this with limited knowledge of Wakanda's resources and without considering the effect it will have on the country and its people. What started out as seemingly two narrative threads soon became a narrative fabric when Killmonger and T'Challa come face to face and have to fight each other to protect Wakanda. The fabric is so full of backstory, both Killmonger's and T'Challa's, but also character motivations, Killmonger wants to revenge his father's murder and start an uprising, and T'Challa wants to protect and serve his people as is his duty as the king of Wakanda. Therefore, it can only be a fabric as it is so vast and contains so much information about the characters and places that are so tightly interwoven.

While *Black Panther* is relatively self-contained as a film, as it can stand alone, it can still be looked at in the context of the rest of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, since the film

also shares a fabric with the rest of the Marvel universe and characters. As mentioned earlier *Black Panther* has two transnarrative characters, Agent Ross and Ulysses Klaue, who were both already a part of the universe, as they have appeared in previous films, and because of this, their narrative threads in *Black Panther* needs work with what happened in the other films they were in, otherwise, it would have ruined the completeness of the universe. The appearance of the two characters also shows that, as written earlier, *Black Panther* might be set in Wakanda, but it is still a part of the Marvel universe. This also means that the story in *Black Panther* will impact the overall fabric of the universe, and while it might not have done that yet, it surely will in future films. *Black Panther* does not truly become a part of the narrative fabric of the Marvel Cinematic Universe until *Infinity War*, where the battle scene against Thanos' army happens in Wakanda and the characters from *Black Panther* interacts with the characters from the rest of the films for the first time.

How is the film seen?

T'Challa and the Black Panther was first introduced in *Civil War*, but the *Black Panther* film was not released until 2018, two years after *Civil War* was released, in fact, *Black Panther* was the 18<sup>th</sup> film to be released in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Because of this, viewers had to watch the film in what Wolf calls the order of public appearance, watching films in the order they are released, if they watched it in the cinema, simply because the film came out years later. Now that the films are out, fans can also choose to watch them in order of creation or internal chronological order, however, neither of these are particularly relevant because as we have mentioned earlier, the *Black Panther* film can largely stand on its own in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, as its narrative is fairly separate and can be seen on its own. However, if fans want to watch the film, watching it in the order of public appearance makes the most sense for *Black Panther*, as T'Challa first appeared in *Civil War*. Furthermore, going forward with the Marvel films, it is important for viewers to have seen *Black Panther* as Wakanda plays a large part in the next film *Avengers: Infinity War*, and if fans have not seen *Black Panther*, they will be missing out on a part of the narrative going forward.

### *Complex media*

In the next part of the analysis of *Black Panther*, we will discuss the film in terms of complexity. We will, therefore, apply Steven Johnson's theory concerning complex media to *Black Panther* to discuss in what way the film is complex. Here, we will examine the narrative



threads in *Black Panther*, and here we will discuss if these threads are continuations from previous films or if they are new to *Black Panther*. Lastly, we will discuss the film's limitations.

After watching *Black Panther*, we have found that there two major narrative threads which deal with Wakanda's advanced technology and the internal conflict in Wakanda. Throughout the film, the question of whether Wakanda should share their advanced technology with the world is discussed. The film takes place one week after the events in *Civil War*, thus, one week after King T'Chaka's death. Here, we learn that the world considers Wakanda to be a poor third world country that has refused to receive help from others and has isolated themselves from the rest of the world. In reality, Wakanda is a thriving country with highly advanced technology (Coogler, 0:06:59-00:07:30). The question of whether or not Wakanda should share their advanced technology is touched upon in several parts of the film. For example, at the beginning of *Black Panther*, where Nakia believes that Wakanda should share their technology to aid those in need (00:33:50-00:34:30). The film's villain, Erik 'Killmonger' Stevens, also believes that Wakanda should aid the oppressed in the world by giving them Wakandan weapons. T'Challa does not share this opinion in the beginning as he believed that Wakanda should not interfere with the outside world (01:14:28-01:15:11). However, he changes his opinion later in the film when he learns that his father murdered his brother, N'Jobu, who betrayed Wakanda by aiding Ulysses Klaue, allowing him to steal vibranium from Wakanda, and as a result, N'Jobu's son, Erik Stevens, was abandoned in America (01:04:12-01:07:45). This narrative thread is somewhat limited to the *Black Panther* film, but it is touched upon in *Civil War* when T'Chaka dies in the terrorist attack. The narrative thread is also resolved in the film as T'Challa decides that Wakanda will open to the outside world, and thus, the country will show its advanced technology (02:00:40-02:02:43).

The other narrative thread concerning the internal conflict within Wakanda is a *Black Panther* exclusive narrative thread. This narrative thread deals with the conflict between T'Challa and Erik Stevens, and it is connected to the previous thread concerning Wakanda's advanced technology. Erik Stevens turns out to be N'Jobu's son, N'Jadaka, thus, he has a claim to the Wakanda throne, and he succeeds as he defeats T'Challa in ritual combat. With the help of W'Kabi, a member of the Border Tribe, Stevens wishes to share Wakanda's advanced technology with the world by distributing weapons to oppressed people around the world (Coogler, 01:13:21-01:15:43). This narrative thread is a *Black Panther* exclusive thread as it begins in the film and it is resolved in the film as well. Unlike in *Age of Ultron*, where the events were carried over to *Civil War*, all narrative threads conclude in *Black Panther*. This is due to the fact that *Age of Ultron* required a film that showed the aftermath of the events in that

film and *Civil War* showed these events as they could be connected with other narrative threads in *Civil War*. This is not the case with *Black Panther* as this film functions as an introduction to the world of the Black Panther.

We have now written about the most important narrative threads, but the film also displays minor narrative threads. For example, at the beginning of the film, T'Challa and Okoye travel to Nigeria extract Nakia from her undercover mission (00:07:35-00:12:00). This narrative thread is resolved in the film, and it acts as an introduction to new characters and Wakanda. In the scene, viewers are reminded of the Black Panther's combat skill which was introduced in *Civil War*. Furthermore, Nakia is introduced as one of the film's important characters, and Wakanda's advanced technology is introduced here as T'Challa, Okoye, and Nakia travel towards Wakanda in a highly advanced aircraft. Thus, this minor narrative thread functions as an introduction to the film's main characters and the technological culture of Wakanda.

We have now discussed the narrative threads in *Black Panther*, and we will now discuss how *Black Panther* has dealt with the limitations of films which Johnson writes about in his book. We have stated previously that *Black Panther* can be watched as a standalone film due to it being the first film in the *Black Panther* franchise. The film introduces many new elements and characters from Wakanda, however, they not necessary to understand what is going on. For extra background knowledge, viewers can watch *Civil War* where they see the cause of King T'Chaka's death. The film is relatively easy to follow due to the narrative threads' simplistic nature as most mysteries in the threads are addressed later in the film. This brings us to Johnson's discussion of narratively complex films and junk films. Even though this film introduces new characters and the culture of Wakanda, it is easy to follow what is going on in the film as all-new details are explained. For example, at the beginning of the film, N'Jobu narrates the history of Wakanda to his son, thus, this scene functions as an introduction for viewers. Here, all the necessary details are explained, so viewers know what kind of country Wakanda is (Coogler, 00:00:00-00:01:38). This can be put in contrast to, for example, *Civil War*, where the viewers are somewhat thrown into the story, and they must be familiar with the characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise. Thus, we would not argue that *Black Panther* is a narratively complex film, but we would not call it a junk film either. This is due to the fact that the film is part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and besides functioning as an introduction to the *Black Panther* franchise, it is part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe as a whole. This may suggest that Johnson's terms of narrative complex films and junk films are not enough and *Black Panther* is somewhere in between these two categories where viewers

are required to know about T'Challa and Wakanda beforehand, but it is not so complex that viewers would not understand what is going on in the film. The film may not be different to understand in terms of narrative threads and kernels and satellites, but the complexity of the film is shown through its worldbuilding as Marvel has created an entirely imaginary country with its own nature and mythology as we have written about in the worldbuilding analysis. Moreover, many of the cultures and traditions in Wakanda are based on different African cultures and traditions, and even their language is a South African language called Xhosa. Therefore, *Black Panther* is not complex with its narrative threads, but the complexity is found in the creation of Wakanda.

## “Avengers, assemble”

An analysis of Marvel's *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*

In this analysis, we will analyse the films *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*. We have chosen to analyse these two because they conclude the third phase of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and they also answer most of the unanswered questions from the previous phases. Like the other Avengers films, many of the franchise's characters come together to fight a common enemy. We have chosen to combine these two films into one analysis so we will not repeat too many details from both films as they are essentially one film. While other Marvel Cinematic Universe films have clear cuts between them, this is not the case with *Infinity War* and *Endgame* as they are connected. The films introduce many characters from the original Avengers team, but they also feature new members of the Avengers and allies of the Avengers that have been introduced in previous films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

*Infinity War* starts in space where multiple Asgardian spaceships carrying Asgardian survivors have been destroyed. After retrieving the Power Stone, Thanos retrieves the Space Stone from the Tesseract and defeats Thor and Hulk in battle. While Thor is cast into space, Heimdall sent Hulk to Earth using the Bifröst. Here, Hulk crashlands in the Sanctum Sanctorum which is the home of Doctor Strange and he warns Doctor Strange about Thanos' plan to commit genocide in the universe. They then recruit Iron Man and Spider-Man to help them protect the Time Stone. In Edinburgh, Scarlet Witch and Vision are attacked by Thanos' forces due to Vision having the Mind Stone in his forehead. They are saved by Captain America, The Falcon, and Black Widow. The Avengers then travel to Wakanda to extract the Mind Stone from Vision in order to destroy it without destroying Vision. In space, the Guardians of the Galaxy respond to the distress signal sent by the Asgardian ships, and they find Thor, who tells them that Thanos is looking for the Reality Stone. They split into two teams, where Rocket, Groot, and Thor travel to Nidavellir to create a weapon strong enough to defeat Thanos and Star-Lord, Gamora, Drax, and Mantis go to Knowhere to find the Reality Stone, but they ultimately fail, and Gamora is kidnapped by Thanos, who uses her to get the Soul Stone. Star-Lord's group meets Iron Man, Doctor Strange, and Spider-Man and find that they have the same goal, so they team up to defeat Thanos. They ultimately fail, and Doctor Strange gives Thanos the Time Stone willingly. Most of the Avengers reunite in Wakanda as Thanos' army attack Wakanda to retrieve the Mind Stone. As a result, Scarlet Witch destroys the Mind Stone along with Vision, but Thanos reverts time and takes the Mind Stone. Now with all Infinity

Stones in his possession, he snaps his fingers, and half of all life vanish, these include the Winter Soldier, Black Panther, Groot, Scarlet Witch, Mantis, Drax, Star-Lord, Doctor Strange, and Spider-Man.

*Endgame* begins three weeks after the events in *Infinity War* where Iron Man and Nebula are saved by Captain Marvel in space. The remaining Avengers have been searching for Thanos in this time and are hoping to undo his actions by using the Infinity Stones. They locate Thanos on an uninhabited planet, unfortunately, Thanos has destroyed the Infinity Stones to prevent his actions from being interfered with, and as a result, Thor decapitates him. Five years later, the remaining Avengers are still trying to solve the problem and Ant-Man escapes the Quantum Realm. He proposes that they can use the Quantum Realm to go back in time to obtain the Infinity Stones to undo Thanos' actions. Iron Man does not wish to take part in this in the beginning because of his wife and daughter but changes his mind once he thinks of Spider-Man. To do this, they need all of the remaining Avengers. Hulk and Rocket go to New Asgard in Norway to recruit Thor, who is now overweight and an alcoholic, and Black Widow goes to Japan to recruit Hawkeye, who has spiralled downwards after his family vanished. The Avengers are split into three teams to locate the Infinity Stones. Iron Man, Captain America, Ant-Man, and Hulk travel to New York City in 2012 to acquire three Infinity Stones. Hulk retrieves the Time Stone from the Ancient One, Captain America tricks HYDRA agents into giving up the Mind Stone, and Iron Man and Ant-Man attempt to steal the Space Stone, but they ultimately fail which prompts a spontaneous visit to S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters in 1970. Rocket and Thor travel to Asgard to retrieve the Reality Stone, and War Machine and Nebula travel to Morag to steal the Power Stone before Star-Lord can. War Machine returns to the present with the Stone, however, Nebula is immobilised when she links with her 2014 version of herself. This results in Thanos knowing all about their plans and Nebula from 2014 replaces Nebula from 2023. Lastly, Hawkeye and Black Widow travel to Vormir to retrieve the Soul Stone, but the pair learns that they must sacrifice someone they love to acquire the Soul Stone. Black Widow sacrifices herself and Hawkeye receives the Soul Stone. With all the Infinity Stones now acquired, the stones are placed into a gauntlet to undo Thanos' actions. Hulk is chosen to wield the gauntlet, and he reverts Thanos' actions, and the missing people return. In this time, Nebula from 2014 uses the time machine to teleport Thanos to the present. This results in a massive fight where Captain America, Iron Man, and Thor are almost defeated by Thanos once again. At the same time, the rest of the Avengers and allies of the Avengers show up and fight alongside them. Iron Man uses the Infinity Stones to destroy Thanos and his army which results in his own death.

*What is transmedia?*

When placing *Infinity War* and *Endgame* in the context of the Producers Guild of America's definition of transmedia storytelling, it quickly becomes clear that the films live up to the requirement that there must be three or more storylines which all exist in the same universe. *Infinity War* and *Endgame* are the 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and despite there being two other films released between them, *Endgame* is very much a sequel to *Infinity War*. The film picks up just moments after the snap as Hawkeye's family disappear, and it fast forward three weeks as Captain Marvel returns Iron Man and Nebula to Earth after they have been stuck in space since the snap. The film then fast forwards once again five years this time as we see the remaining Avengers having adjusted to life after the snap and deciding to try and bring everyone back. Within the two films, the storylines that are continued are the snap, which we saw at the end of *Infinity War* where people started to disintegrate, and this also happens in *Endgame* as we see Hawkeye's family disintegrate in the first minute of the film. Another storyline is Tony Stark and Steve Rogers' strained relationship, however, the two eventually work it out, when Tony agrees to help the Avengers travel back in time to retrieve the Infinity Stones. In *Infinity War*, Bruce Banner finds himself unable to transform into the Hulk, and in *Endgame*, which takes place five years after the snap, he has successfully merged the two as he now has Bruce Banner's intelligence and the Hulk's strength and appearance, something that seemed impossible in *Infinity War* as the Hulk continuously refused to come out. These three examples are just some of the storylines that are continued in *Endgame* from *Infinity War*.

When looking at *Infinity War* and *Endgame* in the larger context of all of the Marvel Cinematic Universe films, it becomes even more apparent how present transmedia storytelling is in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. There are countless storylines that started in previous films and are continued in *Infinity War* and *Endgame*, so we will just mention a few here. As mentioned above, Tony Stark and Steve Rogers have a strained relationship at the beginning of *Infinity War* because of the events that happened in *Civil War*, where the two fell out over the Sokovia Accords and Steve's best friend having killed Tony's parents. In *Infinity War*, Tony tells Bruce Banner that the two fell out and are not on speaking terms, however, they still work together to try and save the world from Thanos. In *Endgame*, Tony refused to help the Avengers when they approached him, but he later agrees, and he makes up with Steve giving him back his shield, which he took from him in *Civil War*. Another storyline that has continued through the films is Bucky Barnes' storyline, he first appeared in *Captain America: The First Avenger* as Steve's best friend, and he is later captured by HYDRA and brainwashed into

becoming an assassin. Several films later, in a post-credit scene in *Civil War*, he and Steve go to Wakanda, where he is frozen until Shuri can figure out how to remove the brainwashing. He then reappears in a post-credit scene in *Black Panther* where he is alive, and Shuri has seemingly succeeded in removing the brainwashing. In *Infinity War*, T'Challa and Shuri approach Bucky and give him a metal arm prompting him to ask where the fight is, and he then fights with the Avengers in *Infinity War* and *Endgame*.

Because *Infinity War* and *Endgame* concludes the Infinity Saga and the Marvel Cinematic Universe, as we know it, the films conclude the storylines from previous films that were still open and unanswered, like Tony Stark and Steve Rogers mending their relationship, Bucky Barnes free of HYDRA's control and fighting alongside the heroes, and Steve Rogers getting his happy ending with Peggy Carter. In a way, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* has to tie up loose ends and close storylines, because as Marvel moves into phase four, there are some characters which will not be a part of the universe anymore, like Iron Man and Captain America, and they also have to make way for new characters. So, it was important that the films concluded most of not all storylines from the previous films, so Marvel can start fresh with phase four.

As we mentioned in the theory section, Henry Jenkins uses the term “the new Hollywood system” which refers to how new films require viewers to pay attention to the film to understand the narrative and how it is almost the norm now that viewers will have to do some form of research before watching a film (*Convergence Culture*, 106). This is certainly the case with not only *Infinity War* and *Endgame* but the entire Marvel Cinematic Universe, as the universe is so vast now with 23 films, a viewer cannot go to the cinema and watch *Endgame* without having watched any of the other films. The Marvel Cinematic Universe very much relies on viewers being familiar with it before they watch the films as it will be almost impossible to fully understand the nuances of what is happening in the films and why it is so important. And it is because of this, the films all go against Jenkins and Melanie Schiller's demand that transmedia stories must be “sufficiently self-contained” as Schiller calls it (Schiller, 100). *Infinity War* and *Endgame* are certainly not self-contained, for the reason outlined above, it will be very difficult if not impossible to get the full experience of the films if viewers had not seen all the previous films. In a blogpost, Jenkins writes about the importance of transmedia creating “a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (“Transmedia Storytelling 101”), and this is certainly something the Marvel Cinematic Universe does. Because of the vastness of the universe, there will be something in every film that looks like an inconsistency or raises questions, but when watching later films all of these questions seem

to be answered, making it feel like the creators had a plan all along. What looks like an inconsistency in one film turns out to have been planted there to make viewers wonder about it, only for it to be important in future films.

Because the Marvel Cinematic Universe films go against many of Jenkins' and also Schiller's' criteria, it begs the question how the films have become so popular, when they rely so massively on the viewers being willing to spend the time it takes to get caught up on every little detail in the films to fully understand what is happening. As mentioned above, Jenkins term "the new Hollywood system" holds the answer and perhaps, viewers today are more willing to spend their time researching films before they see them or are more willing keep up with the demand that a franchise like the Marvel Cinematic Universe requests. Viewers have to pay attention to the films and remember so much information because it will most likely be important in later films, and perhaps viewers today are more willing to do just that, they will take the time to invest themselves in a world and characters.

#### *Henry Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia storytelling*

In this section, we will discuss *Infinity War* and *Endgame* in relation to Henry Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia. As stated previously, we will only apply continuity to the two films.

Continuity concerns itself with the stories within a franchise and universe. Here, continuity is characterised as a universe with a single main story. As we have discussed earlier, the Marvel Cinematic Universe is characterised by continuity throughout their films and the two films *Infinity War* and *Endgame* contain several examples of continuity. Just like previous *Avengers* films in the franchise, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* address the entire phase's conflict, and the franchise's characters appear in the film to fight a common enemy. Here, characters from smaller franchises within the Marvel Cinematic Universe appear in the two films and storylines from these films may be carried over into *Infinity War* and *Endgame*. An example of this can be found at the beginning of *Infinity War*, where Asgardian ships are being attacked by Thanos. Chronologically, this takes place after the events in *Thor: Ragnarok*, and thus, the events and the storylines connected to these events are carried over into *Infinity War*. Another example of a storyline that is continued in *Infinity War* is the conflict between Iron Man and Captain America which originated from *Civil War*, where the two characters are not speaking with each other. We will discuss both of these examples further later in the analysis of *Infinity War* and *Endgame*, where we will discuss this in relation to complex media. As we have mentioned before, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* address the main conflict of the third phase in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but the two films also address the main conflict from all of the



three phases and viewers learn that the villain Thanos was behind the attack on New York City in the first Avengers film (Russo & Russo, “Avengers: Infinity War”, 00:14:13-00:14:20). Moreover, the Infinity Stones have been a part of many of the films, both explicitly and implicitly as the Avengers and viewers did not know that some of these special artefacts were, in fact, Infinity Stones and what sort of power they possessed. This creates continuity throughout all the films as it shows that the films are connected by characters, storylines, and mysteries.

Moreover, there are also examples of continued storylines from previous films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. An example of this can be seen in *Infinity War* when War Machine speaks to Thaddeus Ross about the Sokovia Accords. The Sokovia Accords were legal documents, and with those, governments could control the Avengers, and this was part of the main conflict in *Civil War* as some superheroes did not want to be controlled and others did not mind the regulation. However, in *Infinity War*, the superheroes that supported the regulation do not support it anymore as it split up the Avengers. This shows that *Civil War* is connected to *Infinity War* by characters and events, and this is common in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. In *Endgame*, there are also references from its predecessor, *Infinity War*, and an example of this can be found in *Infinity War* where Thor injures Thanos with Stormbreaker, but Thanos tells Thor that he should have gone for the head (Russo & Russo, “Avengers: Infinity War”, 02:11:10). In *Endgame*, this is referenced to as Thor decapitates Thanos and says “I went for the head” (Russo & Russo, “Avengers: Endgame”, 00:19:20). Another example in *Infinity War* is the scene where Doctor Strange gives up the Time Stone and tells Iron Man that they are in the Endgame now (Russo & Russo, “Avengers: Infinity War”, 02:03:36) which is a reference to *Endgame*'s title. This shows that the two films are connected and to understand these small details, it is important to watch *Infinity War* before *Endgame*.

By including all of the franchise' characters, the Marvel Cinematic Universe can create continuity in the films as it shows that the characters are not limited to a specific film, and the franchise becomes fluid. This is especially evident in *Infinity War* and *Endgame* as characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe's three phases appear in the films and storylines from all of the films are referenced or a part of the films. In *Endgame*, over twenty characters from the franchise appear, and in order to understand what is going on in the film with these characters, it is important to watch all the films to understand the continuity in the franchise. An example of this can be when one of the writers of this thesis, Maya, went to the cinema to watch *Infinity War* and *Endgame*. Prior to this, Maya had not watched the following films: *Thor: Ragnarok*, *Black Panther*, *Captain Marvel*, and *Ant-Man and the Wasp*. Therefore, there were some details

(such as new characters and events) that Maya did not understand in the films, but details were cleared up after watching the films she had not watched. These details include, for example, Captain Marvel's character which Maya had not seen before and she could not understand why this character was so strong and why she was not recruited by the Avengers in previous films. This also opens up a discussion about Jenkins' transmedia description as he would argue that creators attempt to make the main stories in a franchise more comprehensible for viewers as the instalments should be able to stand on their own and contribute to the story ("Transmedia Storytelling 101"), but this is not the case with the Marvel Cinematic Universe where the films are all connected by characters and details. Therefore, to understand the Marvel Cinematic Universe's use of continuity, one should watch all of the franchise's instalments due to its vast world filled with several connected characters and events.

To sum up, in the analysis of the two films, we found that they contained continuity in terms of characters and events from previous films and this showed that the films were connected to each other. The films had many storylines to follow, and this made the films complex to follow.

### *Seriality*

In this section, we will analyse *Infinity War* and *Endgame* in terms of seriality where we will use Roger Hagedorn's theory which we have outlined previously.

As we have written earlier, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* are closely connected to each other as *Endgame* is a continuation of the events that occurred in *Infinity War*. There are four *Avengers* films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and these films occur at the end of a phase. This is also the case with *Infinity War* and *Endgame*, however, in phase one and phase two, there was only one *Avengers* film in each phase, and now, in phase three, there are two *Avengers* films. *Marvel's The Avengers* was released in 2012, and there are four films between this film and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* which was released in 2015. There are then six films between *Age of Ultron* and *Infinity War*. *Infinity War* was released in 2018, and there are two films between *Infinity War* and *Endgame* which was released in 2019. Usually, there are several films and years between the release of the *Avengers* films, and this is because *Avengers* films deal with an overall conflict from the films in that phase and all of the characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe appear in the film to fight a common enemy.

As we wrote before, the events and characters from all of the Marvel Cinematic Universe's three phases come together in these two films, and they deal with the biggest conflict as of yet in the franchise. At this point, there are over twenty superheroes that are affiliated

with the Avengers, but there were not that many characters in the beginning, and as the franchise grew, more characters were introduced into the franchise. By including all of the characters from the franchise in these two films, it shows that the franchise is one big connected universe and that it is very serial due to the fact that the franchise consists of twenty-three films so far that are connected to each other. Here, events and characters can move freely across instalments in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. For example, characters such as Iron Man and Captain America are not limited to their own films and *Avengers* films, and they have appeared in other smaller franchises within the Marvel Cinematic Universe such as the Spider-Man franchise for example. Moreover, events such as the battle of Sokovia in *Age of Ultron* is referenced to in several films such as *Civil War* where politicians wish to regulate the Avengers' activities. This shows that the universe is vast and full of possibilities of linking information and characters to the entire franchise, but it also shows that a lot is required of the viewers as they have to know everything about the universe. Viewers have to watch the films in order to understand what has happened in previous films and who all of the characters are as they are 'thrown' into the films, and certain things are not explained again. For example, in *Infinity War*, a part of the confrontation takes place in Wakanda, which was shown in *Black Panther*. Here, viewers are not told that this is the home of the Black Panther or what relation it has to the Marvel Cinematic Universe. In order to understand why the battle takes place in Wakanda and what kind of people live in Wakanda, viewers must watch *Black Panther*.

When writing about serials, Hagedorn also states that riddles and mysteries are an important part of serials. Of course, riddles and mysteries are important in all types of genres and stories, but they are important in serials as they create cohesion across multiple instalments and in this case, across phases and films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. This is particularly evident in *Infinity War* and *Endgame* as the twenty-two films focus on the issues concerning the Infinity Stones and these stones have appeared several times throughout the films, and in the beginning, they had mysterious properties that were both unknown to the characters and the viewers. These mysteries are explained and resolved as the stories in the franchise progressed. As we wrote earlier, *Infinity War* ended on a major cliffhanger where Doctor Strange gave the Time Stone to Thanos in *Infinity War* (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 02:03:36). The speculation as to why he gave up the stone to Thanos is discussed in *Endgame* (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Endgame", 01:08:35-01:24:30), and viewers had to wait a year until this mystery was resolved. Another example of a cliffhanger in *Infinity War* is found at the end of the film where Thanos snaps his fingers, and half of all life in the universe turns to dust, and here, some of the Avengers turn to dust as well, and the film ends here. Many

of the uncertain details from all of the three phases are resolved in these two films, and the films concluded the Infinity Saga and the franchise we know is over, and now, Marvel Cinematic Universe is preparing their fourth phase which will include both films and television series with both new and old characters.

Jenkins also writes about seriality and his theory is also relevant in the discussion of seriality in *Infinity War* and *Endgame*. As we have argued earlier, the Marvel Cinematic Universe is very serial due to connected films with characters and events that can move freely across films in the franchise. Moreover, the Marvel Cinematic Universe also places small details and mysteries that do not seem important at the time, but they prove to become very important. As we have mentioned before, these mysteries are not necessarily resolved in the film that they appear in, and they can continue in another film. This is also the case with *Infinity War* and *Endgame* and one of the most prominent examples is the sequence with Doctor Strange, Iron Man, Spider-Man, and the Guardians of the Galaxy on Titan where Doctor Strange uses the Time Stone to see different outcomes of the situation with Thanos and the Infinity Stones. Here, Strange sees fourteen million outcomes with only one outcome where the Avengers win. Iron Man is gravely injured, and this results in Doctor Strange giving up the Time Stone much to the Iron Man's dismay (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 01:46:27-02:03:36). At this point, this outcome is not explained, and it is not explicitly explained in *Endgame* either, but Hulk and the Ancient One agree that Doctor Strange gave up the Time Stone for a reason, indicating the one possible outcome for the Avengers to be victorious. As we have mentioned, this is not explicitly explained, and it is up to the audience to solve the mystery concerning why Doctor Strange gave up the Time Stone willingly. This became one of the most prominent mysteries after *Infinity War* was released and viewers had to wait one year until they could solve the mystery.

### *Kernels and Satellites*

In this section of the analysis, we will analyse *Infinity War* and *Endgame* in terms of kernels and satellites. This section will be closely related to an upcoming section where we will analyse the narrative threads in the films. Here, we will examine the different events in the two films and determine if they are kernels or satellites. These two terms deal with events found in stories where some events are more important than other events. Kernels are major events that are important to the story, and satellites are minor events that are not as important, but they enhance the overall story.

In *Infinity War*, the Avengers are protecting the Infinity Stones in several locations, and this is an important part of *Infinity War* that cannot be omitted without changing the entire storyline in the film. For example, Iron Man, Doctor Strange, Spider-Man, and some of the Guardians of the Galaxy characters are protecting the Time Stone, and this is an important kernel in the film, and it is expanded throughout the film. If it was omitted or not expanded enough, it would create a void in the storyline concerning the Infinity Stones. This is also the case with the events concerning Captain America's group who is protecting the Mind Stone, and this event cannot be omitted either without obstructing the overall story in the film. In *Infinity War*, there are also examples of events that are minor and thereby, satellites, as they can be omitted without interfering with the overall story in the film. For example, the short scene where Iron Man tells Pepper Potts that he had a dream where they had a child (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:11:30-00:12:51). This event can be omitted as a single case in *Infinity War*, but it becomes more important in *Endgame* as Iron Man and Pepper Potts have a child, and as a result of that, Iron Man does not wish to partake in the retrieval of the Infinity Stones in the beginning. Another example is the scene between Scarlet Witch and Vision where they are hiding in Edinburgh in an apartment, and they wish to stay hidden and not go back to their Avengers lives (00:35:58-00:42:23). This particular segment could have been omitted without destroying the logic in the storyline, however, the next part of that segment is part of a bigger kernel that cannot be omitted as it focuses on protecting the Mind Stone from Thanos.

In *Endgame*, the Infinity Stones are also an active part of the storyline as the Avengers travel back in time to find all of the Infinity Stones to undo Thanos' actions in *Infinity War*. Here, all storylines concerning the acquisition of the Infinity Stones are kernels as they create the basis for the storyline in the film and therefore, they cannot be omitted. For example, Iron Man, Captain America, Ant-Man, and Hulk travel back in time to New York City to find three Infinity Stones. The ways the characters find and retrieve the stones are important to the story, and if they were omitted, it would create uncertainties within the overall story. The entire storyline with finding the Infinity Stones is relatively long, but it is necessary to the overall story to prevent plot holes and uncertain details. Another example is Black Widow and Hawkeye, and this is also important to the overall story as it focuses on the retrieval of the Soul Stone and to acquire this stone, one of them must sacrifice their life. If this is not done, they will not retrieve the Soul Stone, and the story will not progress. Therefore, one of the characters must sacrifice themselves, so the overall story can progress. In the film, there are also many examples of events that are not as important, and these are satellites. We have chosen only to

include some of the most prominent examples as they are many satellites in the film. For example, in *Endgame*, we see Hawkeye's family disappear before him due to Thanos's 'snap' where he wiped out half of all life in the universe (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Endgame", 00:00:07-00:01:55). This satellite is continued throughout the film, and it is resolved in the film when all life returns (02:02:30). Another example is at the beginning of the film during the aftermath of Thanos' genocide, where the remaining Avengers are talking about what has happened in the three weeks since Thanos' actions (00:10:03). In the beginning, these events do seem not important due to the fact that they can be omitted without obstructing the overall storyline in the film. However, these satellites enhance the overall story as they show that the remaining Avengers are affected by this situation and how they are dealing with this new situation that they have been put in. These satellites become important parts of later kernels where the Avengers travel back in time to find all of the Infinity Stones to get everyone who disappeared back.

### *Worldbuilding*

For the purpose of this analysis, any events that happen in a location that exists in the real world will be considered the Primary World, and any events that happen in fictional places will be considered as secondary worlds.

Parts of *Infinity War* and *Endgame* take place in the real world, or the Primary World as Wolf calls it. One of the problems with having fictional stories set in the Primary World is that any events that happen in the story which is fictional will conflict with what the viewers know to be true about the world. This is certainly the case with the scenes in *Infinity War* and *Endgame* that take place in real locations, and because of this, we consider events in the Primary World to be an overlaid world, which is a world where fictional elements happen in the real world. This is the case with *Infinity War* and *Endgame*, as the events are fictional but the places they happen in are real. For example, some scenes in *Infinity War* take place in Scotland, where Wanda Maximoff and Vision are hiding (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:35:50-00:42:23), and in New York, where the Avengers house is located (00:54:06-00:58:32).

Because of the Avengers time travelling, large parts of *Endgame* take place in the past, for example, in New York in 2012, where Bruce Banner travels to retrieve the Time Stone from The Ancient One, and Tony Stark and Captain America have to find the Mind Stone and the Space Stone. While they are in New York, they have to be careful not to run into their past selves as they have arrived right in the middle of what was the first Avengers film *Marvel's*

*The Avengers*, where Loki tried to take over the world and the Avengers had to defeat him. Moreover, New York is not the only city in the Primary World to feature in *Endgame*. San Francisco appears, where Ant-Man reappears after being stuck in the Quantum Realm in *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, Hawkeye is in Tokyo, and Thor has established a new home for the Asgardian people who survived the snap in Tønsberg in Norway and renamed it New Asgard.

Our reasoning behind calling the world an overlaid world is that even though the events are set in the Primary World, they are still fictional and there is still invention involved, for example, The Hulk appears in New York through a portal (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:10:39), and Doctor Strange and Wong uses magic to fight Thanos' henchmen (00:20:00-00:24:00), among many other elements from the films which are not possible in the real world.

There is not just one but several secondary worlds in *Infinity War* and *Endgame* ranging from a fictional country located in the real world, to completely fictional planets that only exists in the Marvel universe. Part of *Infinity War* is set in Wakanda, which is a fictional country located in Africa, and what is arguably the most important part of the film takes place there. Like we wrote in the *Black Panther* analysis, we once again consider Wakanda to be a secondary world. While it is technically located in the real world, the country of Wakanda is fictional, and the "world" is so different, in terms of culture and invention, among other things, from the Primary World, that we will call it a secondary world. Like in *Black Panther*, Wakanda is again seen as technologically superior, as the Avengers go there to have the Mind Stone removed from Vision's body so they can destroy it before Thanos steals it.

As mentioned above, there are also entirely fictional planets in the film, such as Knowhere, Nidavellir, and Vormir, these are all planets the Avengers visit in the film. The planet Knowhere is seen in a flashback where Thanos murders half the population as it was overpopulated and he believes that the solution is to half the population, so the other half can live a good life (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:42:30-00:44:27). Nidavellir is a planet where Thor's hammer was created and, in the film, Thor returns with Groot and Rocket to make an axe that can kill Thanos, however, as they arrive, they discover that Thanos has nearly destroyed the planet and killed everyone on it except one person (01:14:22-01:17:06). The planet Vormir is where Thanos and Gamora travel to, as it is where the Soul Stone is located, the planet is guarded by the Red Skull who guards the stone and serves as a guide to anyone who wishes to have the stone (01:24:22 -01:30:31).

The secondary worlds in *Endgame* are ones viewers are already familiar with, as characters travel back in time to events and locations that happened in previous films. For

example, Asgard is shown as it appeared in 2013 in *Thor: The Dark World*, where Thor and Rocket retrieve the Reality Stone (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Endgame", 01:06:28-01:08:57), and the planet Morag where Star-Lord stole the Power Stone in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (01:28:31-01:30:30). Moreover, Vormir also appears again, as this is where the Soul Stone is hidden. Vormir featured in *Infinity War*, where Thanos sacrificed Gamora's life for the stone, and in the present day, Black Widow and Hawkeye fight to sacrifice their own life to save the other person (01:43:49-01:50:22). As a result of the secondary worlds in *Endgame* have already been established in previous films, viewers will already be familiar with them, and because of this, the world, in these cases the planets, are not explored or explained.

For Wolf, his terms Primary World and secondary world are two separate things, one is real, one is fictional, however, it is not that simple in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The events that take place in the Primary World are an overlaid world because there are so many fiction elements that do not exist in the Primary World, and the secondary world is not just one world, it is several worlds, for example, planets like Vormir and Titan, just to name a few, and the country of Wakanda, a fictional country that is located in Africa. So, in relation to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, it is not as simple as Wolf makes it sound like. This seems to be a general thing within the superhero genre, while many of the stories take place on Earth, it is not necessarily our Earth.

#### Ways to move between the worlds

As mentioned above, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* do not only take place on Earth but on other planets as well. These planets are located in space, and while Wolf argues that secondary worlds should be difficult to get to from the Primary World, that is not the case in the Marvel universe. Travelling in space and to different planets is completely possible in the universe, and it is done in spaceships. Spaceships are seen several times in the film, the first time in the first few minutes of the film where the Asgardian people have taken refuge after Asgard was destroyed in an earlier film (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:00:45-00:09:29), and when the Guardians of the Galaxy travel around space. However, not everyone can just travel to another planet, you have to possess a spaceship of course, so it is not easy for common people to move between the world, yet it is still possible, and seem easy for those who do have a spaceship. For the travel that takes place in the Primary World, planes are used to move between places, such as flying Vision, Wanda, Captain America, The Falcon, and Black Widow back to the Avengers house in New York from Scotland and flying the Avengers to Wakanda.



Moreover, portals are also used to move between places, as we see Heimdall send The Hulk through a portal from the Asgardian ship in space to New York on Earth (00:05:32-00:11:15).

In *Endgame*, it is actually shown how to travel between planets in the universe works, as the Avengers travel to “The Garden” where Thanos has retired after the snap. The Avengers are on a spaceship, and as they go through the “jump”, as Nebula calls it, they seem to break through a barrier and enter into another part of the universe, where “the Garden” is located (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Endgame", 00:14:25-00:14:55).

### Invention

Once again, we have chosen to combine the invention section and the infrastructures section because they largely describe the same changes from the Primary World to the secondary world. Three of Wolf’s four realms from invention are relevant in this analysis, as is three of Wolf’s concepts from infrastructures nature, culture, and mythology, so they will be examined in the following section.

### Culture

The culture aspect is less present in *Infinity War* and *Endgame* than it was in for example *Black Panther*. As the scenes in the Primary World are ground in the real world, it relies on Primary World defaults and is therefore as expected. While some of the scenes in *Infinity War* take place in Wakanda, which is a fictional country, as we stated in the previous analysis, it does not go into any further details about the culture, as it has already been established in *Black Panther*. Moreover, while there are other planets and species present in the films, their culture is never explored as they are not the films’ main focus point. Once again, like in *Black Panther*, Wakanda’s technology is shown as superior to the “real” worlds’, as the Avengers go to Wakanda to have the Mind Stone removed from Vision’s head, so they can destroy it. Wakanda is the only place that has the technology to do it, without harming Vision, and in a scene, Shuri can be seen trying to remove the stone, but she is unfortunately not able to do so before she is interrupted by Thanos’ henchmen (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 01:55:07-01:55:35). Wakanda also has a barrier around it, which can be seen when Thanos’ army tries to attack Wakanda and they are unable to, because of the barrier, this is also an example of invention as it does not exist in the real world (01:36:54-01:42:00).

## Nature

Nature is one of the areas where *Infinity War* and *Endgame* set itself apart from the real world, as the existence of Infinity Stones, travel in space, new planets and their inhabitants, and magic can all exist. *Infinity War* starts out on a spaceship where Thor and the Asgardians now live after Asgard was destroyed in *Thor: Ragnarok*. In the scene, new creatures are also seen, while the Asgardians look like normal human beings, Thanos and his henchmen are all other species which have come from different planets (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:00:45-00:09:29). Thanos is a Titan from the planet Titan, and his henchmen are from the planets he has destroyed, however, he has kept one child from each planet and adopted them as his own children. Moreover, the characters Gamora and Nebula are also another species, which can be seen by their appearance and they were adopted by Thanos, like his other children, but they later turned their backs on him as seen in the film *The Guardians of the Galaxy*. Besides the ability to travel in space and the existence of other species, another change within nature is the existence of the Infinity Stones, which will be explained in detail in the mythology section. The stones were created in The Big Bang, and they essentially control the universe (00:13:20-00:14:33). Moreover, as mentioned above, magic also exists in this world, as Doctor Strange and Wong use it to protect New York and the Time Stone from Thanos' henchmen. Another change in nature, or more specifically in human nature, is that some of the characters have superpowers, for example, Wanda Maximoff has the ability to use telekinesis, telepathy, and energy manipulation, which she uses to protect herself and Vision in Scotland (00:38:00-00:40:30) and to eventually destroy the Mind Stone later in the film (2:06:00-2:10:10). She is not the only person who has superpowers in the film, as mentioned in the *Civil War* analysis, Steve Roger has superhuman strength and agility due to the super-soldier serum he was injected with in *Captain America: The First Avenger* and Thor also has superpowers because he is a god. So, it is not just in the secondary world that invention happens in the film, it also happens, or has happened in the Primary World in the films, as is evident with Steve Rogers and Wanda Maximoff having superpowers, as they have both grown up in the Primary World and gotten superpowers from experiments.

As mentioned earlier, there are other species in the universe, and this becomes evident in *Endgame* as they are all in one place in the big fight scene. Here, viewers will see the full extent of the invention in the nature realm regarding other species and creatures. Besides the Avengers and their people, who are not all human beings, the vastness of creatures in the universe becomes apparent when looking at Thanos' army. The four-legged creatures that make up most of Thanos' army are called the Outriders, they are mindless creatures and do whatever

Thanos tells them to do, they also have physical abilities that are beyond human. Besides the Outriders, Thanos also has Leviathans and Chitauri Gorillas in his army, they are giant serpentine looking- and giant gorilla looking creatures, both have armour, and like the Outriders, they are completely controlled by Thanos (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Endgame", 02:09:00-02:24:50; "Chitauri Gorillas."; "Leviathans."; "Outriders.").

### The ontological realm

The Infinity Stones are an example of how time and space work differently in the Marvel universe than they do in the real world. The Infinity Stones, which will be explained further in the next section, give anyone who holds all six stones the powers to manipulate time and space. However, it is not necessary to have all six stones to manipulate an area, for example, after Thanos retrieves the Reality Stone, he can manipulate reality, which can be seen when he captures Gamora, and she tries to kill herself, however, she is unable to do so, because Thanos manipulates reality (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:51:20-00:54:00). Thanos manipulates time and space again towards the end of the film to bring Vision and the Mind Stone back after Wanda Maximoff has destroyed the stone at Vision's request. Thanos uses the Time Stone to reverse time and bring Vision back to life and then rips the Mind Stone from his head (02:06:00-02:10:10).

One of the ways invention in the ontological realm can be seen in *Endgame* is through the ability to time travel. In an effort to undo Thanos' snap and bring the missing people back, the Avengers travel back in time to retrieve the Infinity Stones from their separate timelines to bring them into the future and bring everyone back. The technology to time travel is built on technology viewers will recognise from *Ant-Man* where Scott was able to shrink to ant size and travel into the Quantum Realm, and Tony Stark also decides to help the Avengers bring everyone back after realising the dangers of time travel and having a change of heart about helping them. During Bruce Banner's time travel trip back to New York to retrieve the Time Stone, the sorceress The Ancient One explains to him what will happen if they remove a time stone from one timeline and take it to another:

The Infinity Stones create what you experience as the flow of time. Remove one of the stones and that flow splits. Now this may benefit your reality, but my new one, not so much. In this new branch reality, without our chief weapon against the forces of darkness, our world will be overrun. Millions will suffer. Tell me doctor, can your science prevent all that?

to which Banner responds: “No but we can erase it. Once we are done with the stones, we can return it to its own timeline the moment it was taken. So chronologically in that reality it never left” (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Endgame", 01:20:14-01:21:16).

This conversation essentially explains why the Infinity Stones are so important to the world, but also why time travel and what the Avengers are trying to do, is so risky because if they fail, it can have a massive impact on the entire universe and it can create alternate timelines and realities. This also shows that alternate timelines and realities are possible in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. After the Avengers defeat Thanos and has succeeded in bringing everyone back, Steve Rogers is tasked with returning the Infinity Stones to their rightful timelines, and when he has returned them, he does not return to the present day as he is supposed to, however, moments later, Bucky Barnes notice an old man sitting on a bench by the beach, and as Sam Wilson approaches him, it turns out to be Steve. After he returned the stones, he travelled back in time to his own time period, around the time of World War Two and lived a life with Peggy Carter. Because Steve has changed the past by travelling back and living his life there, it begs the question if he has created an alternate timeline (02:38:30-02:42:08).

After *Infinity War*, many viewers were upset when half of the Avengers disappeared in the snap, and they thought that their favourite superhero would not be a part of the franchise anymore, however, it quickly became apparent in *Endgame* that there was a way to bring everyone back through using the Infinity Stones. It could be argued that the Infinity Stones are just a magical solution to an unsolvable problem in *Endgame* when the Avengers all of a sudden figure out that they can use the stones to bring everyone back to life after Thanos’ snap. That the stones could potentially do this had never been mentioned before and furthermore, it took them five years to figure it out. Despite all of this, we would argue that it is not just a magical solution to an unsolvable problem. An Infinity Stone first appeared in a post-credit scene in *Thor*, and since then several stones have appeared in the different films, while their powers and importance were not explained until *Infinity War*, they still appeared in the universe long before they became important in the *Infinity War* and *Endgame*. Moreover, their powers were also shown in the films, as Thanos uses some of the stones to alter reality and time in *Infinity War* to obtain the Mind Stone and keep Gamora from killing herself as he needs her to obtain the final stone. So, while it can seem like the stones and the ability to time travel just appeared out of nowhere to bring everyone back and make viewers happy, we would argue that the stones have been a part of the universe for so long and their powers have been established enough that it is not just a magical solution to an unsolvable problem.

## Mythology

Much like *Black Panther*, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* also rely on mythology to ground some of the stories in a larger context and history and use it to explain the events in the film. The *Thor* films are rooted in Norse mythology, with Asgard being their original home in the previous *Thor* films, and characters such as Thor, Loki, and Heimdall appearing, these are based on the Norse gods of the same name. *Infinity War* also relies on mythology to give backstory and context to the Infinity Stones, this might not be mythology in the traditional sense of the word, but it provides an explanation as to how the stones came to be and why they are important. Doctor Strange and Wong tell Tony Stark and Bruce Banner about the Infinity Stones origin story: “At the dawn of the universe there was nothing. Then... The Big Bang sent six elemental crystals hurtling across the virgin universe. These Infinity Stones each control an essential aspect of existence. Space. Reality. Power. Soul. Mind. And Time.” (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:13:20-00:14:33). The stones can be used to manipulate the universe and could even destroy life, which is Thanos’ mission. Having this origin story and backstory helps viewers understand the importance of the stones and just how dangerous they can be in the wrong hands, because as Doctor Strange says in the same scene “He could destroy life on a scale hitherto undreamt of” (00:13:20-00:14:33), and it explains to viewers just what is at stake and why the Avengers need to prevent Thanos from getting all six stones.

## Completeness

Completeness can be seen through how well the world is explained and whether that explanation makes sense. *Infinity War* and *Endgame* are the 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and they rely on the completeness of a world that already been established through several films before. The explanations for how the world works and, for example, how several of the characters got superpowers, like Doctor Strange and his ability to do magic, Steve Roger’s superhuman strength and agility, and Wanda Maximoff’s ability to use telekinesis, telepathy, and energy manipulation, can be found in earlier films with a solid explanation making it possible in the Marvel Cinematic Universe films. Because the films are the 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, most of the explanations for how the world works and the backstories are found in earlier films, and because of this, the explanations are not present in *Infinity War* or *Endgame*, so the films require viewers to be familiar with the universe before they see them, because otherwise, they will not have all the information to fully understand what is happening in the films. The concept of time travel has not been explored in

any of the films before, but between the technology seen in *Ant-Man* and Tony Stark's inventions, it is seen as completely possible within the world. Furthermore, the process of how time travel works is also explained in the film, making it sound completely possible in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

As we mentioned earlier, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* concludes the Infinity Saga, and therefore the films must tie up loose ends and solve any unfinished storylines from all the previous film, so the Marvel Cinematic Universe can move forward into the next phase, and the films do just that. The films essentially give completeness to the Marvel Cinematic Universe as they provide closure and finishes off the phases.

### Consistency

Because *Infinity War* and *Endgame* are the 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, consistency is extremely important as the story builds on 18 previous films, where the world and characters have been built and explored. Consistency can be difficult to achieve because the world, meaning the entire Marvel Cinematic Universe, is so vast and complex that, with all of the invention, it is difficult to have everything be consistent across 18 films and several franchises within those films. As we wrote in our theory, consistency depends on information about a world being “plausible, feasible, and without contradictions” (Wolf, 43), and in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, it is very difficult to pinpoint consistency problems. Of course, the films do have their problems, it is mostly with the story itself, and not the world, for example, why the Avengers did not just destroy the Mind Stone, they would be risking Vision's life, but in turn, saving half the universes lives, and why does Doctor Strange not use the Time Stone against Thanos, and instead just hands it over to him resulting in Thanos erasing half of the universe's population. Another problem that could be both world and story related is why the Wakandan people do not use their weapons in the battle against Thanos' army, they have the strongest metal in the world, vibranium, and they are also the most technologically advanced nation in the world, so why do they not use it in the battle. Marvel tends to leave some questions unanswered, these questions can be inconsistencies about the world or the narrative, and these are often answered in later films like it was the case in *Civil War* where Iron Man found out who killed his parents, which happened long before any of the films. Leaving these inconsistencies unanswered create cliffhangers for later films to pick up and deal with, and this was certainly the case with *Infinity War* as it led into the next Avengers film *Endgame*, where some of the questions were answered, and loose ends were tied up.

As mentioned above, Marvel often uses cliffhangers in their films and leaves what looks like inconsistencies in the films for viewers to then later discover that it was all a part of a larger plan, because the questions and inconsistencies are often answered and solved in later films. These inconsistencies are often the centre of fan theories among fans who attempt to solve the “problems” and find answers in the previous films or even in the comic books. A big inconsistency problem in *Infinity War* that is not explained or solved is how Thanos’ army found Wakanda. In *Black Panther*, viewers learn that Wakanda has stayed hidden for centuries to protect themselves and their vibranium, and while they decided to open Wakanda up to the outside world in *Black Panther*, *Infinity War* happens right after the *Black Panther* films, so how has Thanos found out where Wakanda is located already. Moreover, Wakanda is protected by the Border Tribe at the borders and a barrier above making it invisible from the outside, so how can Thanos’ army find it so easily. This is just one of the problems the films face, and that require viewers to be willing to look past it or to try and make up a solution for themselves. This problem and the problems mentioned in the consistency section above show that *Infinity War* does have its problems where viewers will have look past it or use world gestalten to fill in the blanks and find an explanation.

Because most of *Infinity War* and *Endgame* take place on other planets, they do not rely on Primary World defaults, but on the invention of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and much of the defaults have been changed. These defaults have been changed across all the previous films in the franchise and it, therefore, requires viewers to be familiar with the films and its universe, to be able to understand what is happening and why the defaults changes and inconsistencies are not gaps or accidents.

#### Narrative in *Infinity War* and *Endgame*

##### Transnarrative characters

As we have written in the two previous analyses, Marvel uses transnarrative characters to link worlds together, however, because *Infinity War* and *Endgame* are the 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Marvel films, viewers are already aware of the worlds from the different film existing in the same universe. The first Avengers film, *Marvel’s The Avengers* took the different franchises within the Marvel universe, *Iron Man*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Thor*, and *Captain America*, and combined them into one universe and story, where they come together to save the world. This cements the films and characters as being a part of the same universe, and the universe has only continued to grow since then. *Infinity War* features 30 characters that could all be considered transnarrative characters as they originate in one film and feature in other films. *Infinity War*

also adds new characters to the Avengers, three new main characters have been introduced into the Marvel Cinematic Universe since the last Avengers film: Doctor Strange, Spider-Man, and the Black Panther are now a part of the Avengers, as are the characters from the *Guardians of the Galaxy* films. The Guardians of the Galaxy characters have so far been separate from the rest of the characters in the Marvel universe, as their films have been set in space, however, in *Infinity War*, they become a part of the Avengers and fight alongside them.

Like *Infinity War*, *Endgame* is an ensemble cast with all the characters from all the films, so none of the characters can really be considered transnarrative characters anymore because it has already been established that they are in the same world in *Infinity War*. However, *Endgame* does have a few characters in it, who were not in *Infinity War*. One of these characters is Hawkeye, after the events in *Civil War*, he was put on house arrest in his home, which explains why he was not a part of *Infinity War*. *Endgame* starts out with Hawkeye teaching his daughter archery, and she then disappears, along with the rest of his family in the snap, which sends him down a dark path (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Endgame", 00:00:00-00:01:48). Other characters, viewers will recognise from a previous film, are Valkyrie, Korg, and Miek who appeared in *Thor: Ragnarok*, and became Thor's friends, they now live with Thor in New Asgard, which is now located in Norway, after the real Asgard was destroyed in *Thor: Ragnarok* (00:46:50-00:52:05). Before *Endgame*, these characters have not appeared in any other film than *Thor: Ragnarok*, and they make their first appearance in *Endgame*. Another character that has not been a part of the ensemble cast before is Captain Marvel, her film came out just before *Endgame*, so she appears as a transnarrative character for the first time in *Endgame*, unlike the majority of the other characters who have been established characters for a long time. Captain Marvel's appearance places the Captain Marvel character and story as a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

### Fabric

As mentioned above, *Infinity War* is the 19<sup>th</sup> film, and because of this, there is a vast narrative fabric from the films before it. The film starts out on a spaceship where the Asgardian people have taken refuge, and the reason why they are onboard a spaceship can be found in the third Thor film *Thor: Ragnarok*, as it is because Asgard was destroyed in the film. The relationship between Loki and Thor in *Infinity War* is obviously based on the earlier films, where they have a strained relationship and Loki is a morally questionable character, as it can be seen why he tries to pledge his allegiance to Thanos and then tries to kill him seconds later (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:00:50-00:10:00). Thor also explicitly mentioned a storyline from



*Thor: Ragnarok*, when he tells the Guardians of the Galaxy that he had a half-sister who his father imprisoned in hell, she returned, and Thor had to kill her (00:31:30-00:31:50). Another example of how the narrative fabric of the Marvel universe and the previous films impact *Infinity War* is when Tony Stark tells Bruce Banner that he and Steve Rogers are no longer speaking to each other and that the Avengers have broken up, this happened in *Captain America: Civil War*, and it shows just how big an impact the films have on each other (00:15:30-00:16:58).

*Endgame* continues to build on the existing fabric and complicates some threads and braids further, but it also solves some. In *Civil War*, Iron Man took Captain America's shield, as he did not deserve it anymore, and in *Endgame*, Iron Man gives it back to him saying that it was always made for him. This scene both continues the narrative from a previous film and also ends it (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Endgame", 00:45:10-00:45:45). Moreover, Tony Stark also meets his father, Howard Stark, as he time travels to the time where Tony's mother was pregnant with him, and Howard asks Tony for advice, as he is nervous about becoming a father. The scene is rooted in a thread and fabric from the *Iron Man* films, where Tony's relationship with his father was shown to be strained before his early death. The scene gives Tony (and viewers) a sense of resolution and closure on their strained relationship and also that Tony never got to say goodbye to his parents before they died (01:36:50-01:42:10). Another example of *Endgame* using the bigger narrative fabric from the previous films is the scene where Steve Roger goes to return the Infinity Stones to their rightful place, and Steve tells Bucky Barnes "don't do anything stupid until I get back", and Barnes replies "how can I, you're taking all the stupid with you" (02:37:02-02:37:11), the pair have said this phrase to each other before, in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, and it is a nod to the pair's friendship that has been through so much in the films.

*Infinity War* and *Endgame* are the conclusions to the films, and with the 22 films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, there is a vast and complicated narrative fabric to conclude and loose ends to tie up to give viewers the ending they expect from a franchise of this size. Because of this, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* are both filled with references to the previous films, they bring up and deal with some of the threads that needed to be resolved before the franchise ended.

How are the films viewed?

*Avengers: Infinity War* is the third Avengers film and the 19<sup>th</sup> Marvel film, and because of this, it is filled with references to previous films, and it is built on such a vast narrative fabric that

viewers who are not familiar with the films would struggle to understand the complexity of the film's narrative. It is, of course, possible to watch the *Infinity War* without having seen all of the Marvel films, however, if viewers do watch the film out of order or without having seen all of the films, there will be some characters or storylines they are not familiar with, which could affect the viewing experience. An example of this would be if a viewer had not watched *Black Panther*, and was not familiar with the characters or Wakanda. One of the film's most important scenes, the big battle between Thanos' army and the Avengers takes place in Wakanda, and many of the characters from *Black Panther*, play an important role in *Infinity War*, so without having seen *Black Panther*, viewers of *Infinity War* would be losing out on why the battle in Wakanda is so significant.

Like *Infinity War*, *Endgame* cannot be watched out of order. The film is a sequel to *Infinity War*, so a viewer cannot just watch *Endgame* as a standalone film, as it is a continuation of *Infinity War*. Moreover, *Endgame* is also the 22<sup>nd</sup> film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, so the film is based on and is filled with references to previous films, and if viewers have not seen them, they will have a hard time understanding the film and they will lack a lot of important information about the world and the story. *Endgame* takes place right after *Infinity War* ended after Thanos' snap, it is extremely important that viewers do not watch it before they watch *Infinity War* as it will make no sense, why several of the Avengers are missing. Moreover, there are characters who appear in *Endgame* who were not in *Infinity War*, so watching the two films that were released between *Infinity War* and *Endgame* is also important, for example, a character like Captain Marvel, who play a large part in *Endgame*, was only introduced in her own film *Captain Marvel* in 2019, which is the same year as *Endgame* came out. So, because *Endgame* is the conclusion of all the Marvel films, it relies on all the knowledge viewers have of the universe, and because of this, it cannot be watched out of order or on its own.

Much like it was the case with *Captain America: Civil War*, it will not make a difference whether viewers watch *Infinity War* and *Endgame* in order of public appearance or chronological order, as they will end up in the same space. *Infinity War* is essentially the beginning of the end for the Avengers films, it is the third film out of four, and the two films signal the end of the Marvel universe as viewers know it. If a viewer watched *Infinity War* and *Endgame* as stand-alone films or completely out of order, they would lack a lot of context for the storylines in the films. Especially, if a viewer only watched the Avengers films, *Marvel's The Avengers* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, and went straight to watching *Infinity War*, they would be confused as to why the Avengers are not on speaking terms and have broken up. Because this storyline and the reason why they have broken up is the main storyline in *Captain*

*America: Civil War*. So, while some Marvel films can be watched out of order or on their own, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* cannot, as they rely heavily on the narrative fabric of the Marvel Universe and the previous films, and viewers would be missing out on the majority of the storyline in the films if they watched them on their own.

### *Complex media*

In this section, we will analyse the complexities found in *Infinity War* and *Endgame*. Here, we will mainly examine the narrative threads. These two films consist of many expansive narrative threads; therefore, we will only include some of these threads in the analysis. Here, we will examine the different narrative threads that occur in the films, and we will look at narrative threads that are continuations from previous films and narrative threads that are new to the films.

As we have mentioned previously, Steven Johnson's main point is that popular culture is making people smarter due to its complexity, and here Johnson discusses the viewers' ability to hold several narrative threads consciously. *Infinity War* and *Endgame* contain many narrative threads, both continued threads from previous films in the franchise and new threads that begin in the films. These threads are not resolved in one specific section of the films, and the threads occur in several parts in the films.

If we examine the narrative threads that are continuations from previous films, we see the first major narrative thread at the beginning of the film. Here, we see many Asgardian ships carrying Asgardian refugees being attacked by Thanos. This thread is a continuation from the events in the film *Thor: Ragnarok* where Asgard was destroyed because of the villain Hela. Here, Thor, Loki, and Hulk work together to defeat Thanos, but they fail, and Thanos acquires his second Infinity Stone. Loki is killed, Thor cast into space, and Hulk is sent to Earth by Heimdall (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:04:17-00:09:32). This is where the thread from *Thor: Ragnarok* somewhat ends and two new thread branches out from this thread. The first thread starts on Earth where Hulk lands in the residence of Doctor Strange who is protecting the Time Stone. This narrative thread mainly deals with the protection of the Time Stone, and it stars Iron Man, Doctor Strange, Spider-Man and some of the Guardians of the Galaxy characters at a later point in the story. Thanos' army arrives in New York City where the stone is located, and this escalates into a fight where Doctor Strange is kidnapped into space and Iron Man and Spider-Man follow to save him and the Time Stone. The next thread takes place in space when the Guardians of the Galaxy respond to the distress signal of the Asgardians ships only find them all destroyed, but they find Thor floating in space alive

(00:27:43-00:29:28). This thread also splits into two threads where the Guardians split into two teams. Here, Rocket and Groot go to Nidavellir with Thor (00:35:40) and Star-Lord, Gamora, Drax, and Mantis try to find the Reality Stone only to find the stone in Thanos' possession already (00:47:35-00:53:44). The narrative thread with Star-Lord's team intersects with Iron Man, Spider-Man, and Doctor Strange's narrative thread where they fight each other in the beginning as this is the first time the Guardians of the Galaxy characters are introduced in the Avengers franchise (01:18:57-01:19:17). They team up to fight Thanos on the planet Titan (01:46:27), but they fail, and Doctor Strange gives Thanos the Time Stone (02:03:36). The narrative thread with Thor, Rocket, and Groot also intersects with another thread, but we will discuss this later.

Another example of a narrative thread that is a continuation from a previous film is the ongoing conflict between Iron Man and Captain America. As we discussed in the analysis of *Civil War*, there was an internal conflict within the Avengers and especially Iron Man and Captain America due to the fact that Captain America knew that his friend Bucky Barnes had murdered Iron Man's parents. This created a conflict between the two, and this conflict is also present in *Infinity War* as Iron Man does not want to call Captain America for help, but Hulk says this conflict between them does not matter and the only thing that matters is that Thanos is coming to Earth to destroy it (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:15:51-01:16:29). The conflict between Captain America and Iron Man continues into *Endgame*, but it is resolved when Captain America and Iron Man time travel to New Jersey in 1970 (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Endgame", 01:38:56-01:01:46:39). Another example of a continued thread from a previous film can be found in *Endgame*. Here, we see Ant-Man escape the Quantum Realm (00:22:58), and this is a continuation of a post-credit scene from *Ant-Man and the Wasp* where Hank Pym, Janet van Dyne, and Hope van Dyne turned to dust and thus, they are unable to get him out of the Quantum Realm. This thread is continued into *Endgame* where the Avengers use the Quantum Realm to travel back in time to find the Infinity Stones to undo Thanos' actions.

There are also examples of narrative threads that begin in and are exclusive to *Infinity War* and *Endgame*. Most of these new narrative threads are about the Infinity Stones as the films focus on protecting the Infinity Stones. If we start with examples of narrative threads that are exclusive to the films, there is an example of this in *Infinity War* with the scene between Vision and Scarlet Witch, who are hiding in Edinburgh due to wanting a normal life without the Avengers. However, after seeing the attack in New York City because of the Time Stone, Vision and Scarlet Witch decide that they cannot escape that life and in the same moment, they

are attacked by Thanos' henchmen who are trying to extract the Mind Stone from Vision's forehead. This thread continues throughout *Infinity War* as the Avengers do not want to kill Vision in order to destroy the Mind Stone. The pair is rescued by Captain America and other Avengers, and they travel to the Avengers compound in New York (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:35:58-00:42:23). Here, War Machine speaks to the Thaddeus Ross about the negatives concerning the Sokovia Accords which were introduced in *Civil War*. Realising that the Accords did not work, War Machine decides to side with Captain America and the Avengers decide to go to Wakanda to extract the Mind Stone in a safe way (00:54:09-00:58:36). This is also where one of the main conflicts in the film takes place as Thanos' army attacks Wakanda to retrieve the Mind Stone. The narrative thread with Thor, Rocket, and Groot, which we mentioned earlier, intersects with this narrative thread as they show up in Wakanda after crafting a weapon strong enough to kill Thanos for Thor (01:45:29). This narrative thread concerning the Mind Stone continues throughout *Infinity War* until Thanos extracts the Mind Stone from Vision which kills him (02:09:18-02:09:58).

In *Endgame*, there are four new major narrative threads with many minor narrative threads associated with them. These narrative threads deal with Ant-Man escaping the Quantum Realm (which we have covered earlier), the idea of controlling the Quantum Realm to travel back in time, finding the Infinity Stones in the past, and lastly, the final battle between the Avengers and Thanos. The thread concerning finding the Infinity Stones in the past is the largest narrative thread in the film, and this thread is split into four additional narrative threads with several minor narrative threads as the Avengers split into four teams to find the Infinity Stones at different times and locations in the past. Therefore, there are narrative threads connected to those events.

The first group consists of Captain America, Iron Man, Hulk, and Ant-Man and they travel to New York City in 2012 during the Battle of New York which was shown in the film *Marvel's The Avengers*. Hulk goes to the Sanctum Sanctorum to retrieve the Time Stone from the Ancient One. Here, Hulk and the Ancient One discuss the mystery concerning the reason why Doctor Strange gave up the Time Stone in the future. The reason is not explained explicitly throughout the film, but in *Infinity War*, Doctor Strange said that out of fourteen million possible outcomes they would only win one of them (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 01:23:30-01:24:13). As we have mentioned before, when Iron Man and Ant-Man failed to take the Space Stone, Iron Man and Captain America time travel back to New Jersey in 1970. Besides dealing with finding the Space Stone, there is an example of minor narrative threads that is not necessarily important to the story but adds more flavour to the overall story. The

first minor narrative thread is the scene where Iron Man meets his father, Howard Stark (Russo & Russo, “Avengers: Endgame”, 01:41:03) and they talk about their children. Here, Iron Man learns that his father cared about him, which he did not think he did. The other minor narrative thread deals with Captain America seeing his love interest, Peggy Carter, from the first *Captain America* film (01:44:26) and this thread is connected to the minor thread at the end of the film where Captain America decided to travel to 1949 to be with Peggy Carter instead of returning to the future after returning the Infinity Stones.

The second group consists of Rocket and Thor who travel to Asgard in 2013 to extract the Reality Stone from Jane Foster (Russo & Russo, “Avengers: Endgame”, 01:09:20). Just like the previous narrative thread we explained above, there is also a minor narrative thread in this scene. Here, Thor meets his mother, Frigga, who dies the day they arrive in Asgard (01:28:52). Frigga recognises that this Thor is not from the present, she knows that he is from the future and she says that the future has not been kind to him (01:29:24). This segment is a minor narrative thread, but Frigga encourages Thor to fight and not be afraid to fail (01:30:22-01:31:39), and this creates the basis for Thor’s new motivation when fighting against Thanos at the end of the film.

The third group consists of War Machine and Nebula who travel to Morag in 2014 to find the Power Stone before Star-Lord steals it. This opens a new narrative thread concerning the 2014 versions of Thanos, Gamora, and Nebula who can access Nebula from 2023’s memories, thus, the memories concerning the Infinity Stones in the future. With Power Stone safely teleported to the future, Nebula stays behind as she immobilised when she becomes linked with her past version of herself (Russo & Russo, “Avengers: Endgame”, 01:33:41-01:34:26). This information is used against the Avengers as Nebula from 2023 is kidnapped by Thanos’ forces, and Nebula from 2014 takes her place (01:48:14). This narrative thread becomes important at the end of the film as Thanos from 2014 is teleported to the future and wants to destroy all humans on Earth this time instead of half the population (02:09:40-02:10:38).

The last group consists of Hawkeye and Black Widow who travel to Vormir. Here, they learn that one of them must sacrifice the other person to get the Soul Stone. This results in a fight and in the end, Black Widow sacrifices herself to get the Soul Stone for Hawkeye (Russo & Russo, “Avengers: Endgame”, 01:48:14-01:54:48). This thread is relatively short as it mainly focuses on the acquisition of the Soul Stone.

As we have shortly written about in the sections above, there are many examples of minor narrative threads in *Infinity War* and *Endgame*. Some of these minor narrative threads

are connected to major narrative threads, and some are not connected to major narrative threads. This shows how invested viewers must be in the franchise in order to understand what is going on in the films. Here, viewers must navigate through all of the narrative threads, and this becomes particularly complex at the end of phase three as there are many previous threads that viewers have to remember and keep track of.

In *Infinity War*, there is a short segment that covers the story of Gamora's childhood. Here, we see a young Gamora with her mother during an attack on her home planet. Here, Thanos killed half of the planet's population (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:42:34) and he adopted Gamora as his daughter and taught her about his beliefs about achieving balance in the universe. Later in the film, we learn about the reason behind Thanos' genocide on Gamora's planet that the planet was "on the brink of collapse" (01:06:41) because of overpopulation, poverty, and starvation. With the help of the Infinity Stones, he wishes to bring balance to the universe by eradicating half the universe.

Another example from *Infinity War* is the multiple segments concerning Bruce Banner not being able to turn into Hulk to fight. The reason behind this can be found in the narrative thread at the beginning of the film where Thor, Loki, and Hulk lose to Thanos aboard one of the Asgardian ships (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War", 00:04:17-00:09:32). This narrative thread concerning Hulk's fear of failure is present throughout *Infinity War*, and this can be seen in the fight in New York City where Thanos' attempt to take the Time Stone from Doctor Strange (00:22:17) and the fight in Wakanda to protect the Mind Stone (01:16:53). This thread continues in *Endgame* as the Hulk is now a mix of the Hulk and Bruce Banner (00:37:22).

In *Endgame*, there are also several minor narrative threads present. One of the most prominent minor threads can be seen in the beginning, and it continued throughout the film, and this thread concerns itself with the character Hawkeye when his family turns to dust (Russo & Russo, "Avengers: Endgame", 00:00:07-00:01:55) and it takes place at the same time when Thanos has all Infinity Stones and has eradicated half of the universe in *Infinity War*. This thread continues throughout the film as we see Hawkeye as a vigilante killing criminals in Japan before the Avengers started looking for the Infinity Stones in the past (00:28:07). This thread concludes when Hawkeye is reunited with his family after the final fight against Thanos (02:34:53). Another example is the scenes concerning the aftermath of Thanos' universal genocide, and the Avengers are talking about what has happened in the last five years (00:09:40-00:10:14). Here, we see that the remaining Avengers have not found a way to return

everyone who vanished after Thanos' snap. This thread is a predecessor to the thread where Ant-Man escapes the Quantum Realm and helps the Avengers build a time machine.

As we have seen in the previous sections above, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* consist of many characters and each of these characters have their own storyline. This can be put in relation to Johnson's theory concerning complex media. As we have previously discussed, the Avengers team continues to grow as more characters are introduced into the Marvel Cinematic Universe. *The Avengers* from 2012 introduced six characters being part of the Avengers. With the release of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, this number increased to eleven, and this number was expanded in *Civil War* as the characters Black Panther, Spider-Man, and Ant-Man are introduced in the Avengers franchise increasing the number to fourteen Avengers. With the latest Avengers films, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* introduced many new characters such as Doctor Strange and the Guardians of the Galaxy characters, increasing the numbers to over twenty Avengers and additional allies of the Avengers such as Okoye and Shuri from the *Black Panther* film.

As with the two other *Avengers* films, viewers must be familiar with characters from *Infinity War* and *Endgame* due to the many details from previous films. However, as these two films focus on most unanswered events from previous films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, it is very important to have watched all films prior to these two films in order to understand what is going in the films. This is also connected to the many characters that are part of the two films as the characters are from different franchises within the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The characters have their own stories and narrative threads, and it is important to know all the characters and the most important events from the films in order to understand what is going on in *Infinity War* and *Endgame*.

To sum it up, *Infinity War* and *Endgame* consist of many characters from the entire Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise. There are several narrative threads in the film, and these threads are both new threads and pre-existing threads from previous films that have been carried over into the two films.



### **What is next for the Marvel Cinematic Universe?**

Since 2008, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has released films that were connected to each other in terms of storylines and characters. These were leading into what would be named the Infinity Saga, where 21 films in the franchise all built up to the events in *Endgame* which concluded the saga. While *Spider-Man: Far from Home* officially concluded the third phase, we would argue that *Endgame* wrapped up the saga as many of the storylines were concluded. Moreover, some of the main characters are not a part of the franchise anymore such as Iron Man and Black Widow, who died in *Endgame*, and Captain America, who decided to not return to the present and instead live his life with Peggy Carter after World War Two. Black Widow will have her own film, but it will take place between *Civil War* and *Infinity War*, and it will focus on her past before she became an Avenger. Now that the Infinity Saga has concluded, Marvel is preparing the next phases and the next phase will not only consist of films, as seen in the Marvel Cinematic Universe so far but also television series. There has already created some television series such as *Agent Carter*, *Jessica Jones*, *Luke Cage*, and *The Defenders*, just to name a few. However, these series have not been a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Going into phase four, there will be several new television series which will be a part of the universe, and many of them will take place after *Endgame*. In this section, we will examine how the Marvel Cinematic Universe will change in phase four. Phase four has not started yet, however, we will look at the line up of films and television series that will be released in the next few years and based on this information, we will discuss which direction the Marvel Cinematic Universe is heading to.

Just like previous phases in the franchise, the fourth phase will consist of several films, some of which will revolve around familiar characters, for example, Black Widow, Spider-Man, Doctor Strange, and Thor. Spider-Man, Doctor Strange, and Thor will have sequels while Black Widow's film will be a prequel. With Captain America and Iron Man, arguably two of the most important characters, out of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, it gives Marvel the opportunity to go in a new direction, and focus on other characters and new stories that will not be connected, or lead into an overarching storyline. Instead, the new films can focus on the characters, like Doctor Strange or Spider-Man, and tell stories in what might be standalone films.

The fourth phase will also introduce new characters to the Marvel Cinematic Universe in the films *The Eternals* and *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*. All films besides the *Black Widow* film will take place after *Endgame* (Alexander & Liptak). With the introduction of new characters in phase four, the Marvel Cinematic Universe can go in a new direction, and

this allows the creators to be less limited in the next phase in relation to characters, stories, worlds, and events. This way, Marvel does not have to rely on the continuity from previous phases, because the new phase will contain new characters and new stories.

For the first time, the Marvel Cinematic Universe will now include television series as a part of the universe. Moreover, some of these television series will now impact and be impacted by the films as the series will now share continuity with the films. Examples of these series include *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, *WandaVision*, and *Hawkeye* which will all take place after the events in *Endgame* and they will deal with the aftermath. Interestingly, all of these television series will focus on minor characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, allowing viewers to learn more about the characters and potentially set up storylines in future films, as is supposedly the case with *WandaVision* and *Loki*, which will feature in the next *Doctor Strange* film. The television series also present a different seriality than the films, as these will have only six episodes each and therefore, they will have a different structure, because they will have a clear beginning, middle, and end, unlike the films which all led up to *Endgame*.

As of now, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has mainly used continuity when telling stories, but in phase four, they will experiment with multiplicity in the series *What if...* and *Loki*. *What If...* explores what would have happened if events had happened differently in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, for example, if Loki could use Thor's hammer. *Loki* will explore what happened after Loki stole the tesseract in *Endgame*, this version of Loki is from 2012, as seen in the first Avengers film *Marvel's The Avengers* where he is the villain (Alexander & Liptak; Broome).

Going beyond phase four, Marvel has already announced three television series and four films in the fifth phase. The television series will revolve around completely new characters, which are unknown in the universe as of now, and this gives Marvel free reign as they do not need to rely on pre-existing seriality and continuity. The films will be sequels to already existing franchises within the Marvel Cinematic Universe, such as *Black Panther* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*. As opposed to the television series, the films will have to rely on the seriality and continuity established from previous films because they are sequels.

With all of this in mind, we will now discuss how the Marvel Cinematic Universe will change in the future. All of this is of course speculation as the fourth phase has not started yet and the information about the films and television series is limited, but with the limited information we do have, we can already start to see that franchise will evolve beyond what it is now. In our analysis of the four films, we discovered that we could not use most of Henry

Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia storytelling as most of them were not present in the films. However, in the fourth phase, we can already see examples of multiplicity and subjectivity, which was not present in the Marvel Cinematic Universe before. As we have mentioned before, the two television series *What If...* and *Loki* will explore alternative timelines. *What if...* is an animated series that will explore 'what if' scenarios, for example, if Peggy Carter was injected with super-soldier serum instead of Steve Rogers and if Steve Rogers fought in a suit created by Howard Stark (Dinh). In the *Loki* series, we follow Loki from 2012 where he steals the Tesseract, which we saw in *Endgame*. As mentioned above, this version of Loki is the Loki we saw in *Marvel's The Avengers*, where he was the villain. Loki had not grown as a character, as the events in the later *Thor* films had not happened yet, which led to his eventual death in *Infinity War*, where he tried to save Thor and the Asgardian people from Thanos and redeemed himself. These two television series are examples of multiplicity where they explore alternative timelines which were not seen in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Multiplicity can give a new perspective on a story, and it can also explore new stories which have not been told before. In *Endgame*, Loki disappears with the Tesseract which leaves more stories to tell, as they can now explore what he did after he stole it, this was not explored in *Endgame*, where he just disappeared, and the story quickly moved on.

Jenkins' principle subjectivity was not present in previous Marvel Cinematic Universe films, but it will be present in the fourth phase as *Black Widow's* film will focus on her past and therefore, it will offer backstory to the character. In previous films, *Black Widow* and *Hawkeye* reference her past, but they do not actually talk about it, so viewers do not know anything about her past before she joined the Avengers. This film will explore her past in more detail and give viewers backstory, which will explain how she became the Black Widow. Subjectivity can provide more explanation and context about a universe or a character. From what we know now, it seems like the *Black Widow* film will do just that, it will explain how and why Black Widow became the character she is in the films.

Since the Infinity Saga ended in phase three, it will be interesting to see what the new phase will revolve around. It will be interesting to see if Marvel will make the next phases in the same format as the first three, where all the films build up to a climax just like in *Infinity War* and *Endgame*, or if they will go in a new direction. Moreover, it will be interesting to see if Marvel will continue to make Avengers films to connect the films and characters, or if the films in the next phases will just be sequels and new instalments, which are not internally connected, apart of existing in the same universe. Potentially, Marvel might even abandon the use of phases if the films are not connected through an overarching storyline. They will no

longer have to divide the films into phases that conclude with an Avengers-like film if the films going forward are not connected to each other. This would also mean that viewers will not have to watch all the films to understand what is happening, because they may not impact each other.

The Marvel Cinematic Universe is so vast with its 23 films and countless characters that can freely move across films in the franchise, therefore, it can be a daunting task for a new viewer to get into the franchise. Moreover, the films can be difficult to get a hold off if you do not buy them, some of the films can be found on streaming services like Netflix and Viaplay, but they never stay for too long. This makes the films difficult to access if one does not buy them, making it hard for the Marvel Cinematic Universe to find new viewers because they are so inaccessible. Moreover, due to the vastness of the universe, Marvel might have issues getting new viewers interested in the universe because of the amount of time they have to set aside to watch all 23 films and remember the complexities of the films and characters. In 2020, Disney launched its own streaming service called Disney+ where viewers can stream products that Disney has created and owns. One of these is the Marvel Cinematic Universe where viewers can watch all of the films on Disney+ (with the exception of *The Incredible Hulk*, *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, and *Spider-Man: Far From Home*). This way, the franchise has become more accessible to both new and old viewers. As we have written throughout our thesis, the Marvel Cinematic Universe is a complex universe to enter into due to its vastness. Because of this, it is hard for Disney to get a bigger and new audience, and Disney needs to do something new to attract new viewers to the franchise. As we have written before, phase four will consist of new films and several television series, the latter being new to the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The television series could be an attempt from Disney to attract new fans to the Marvel Cinematic Universe. At this point, we do not know if the television series require viewers to have watched the entire franchise beforehand or if they can be watched without any prior knowledge. If it is possible to watch the new television series without any prior knowledge, it will be easier for viewers to get into the Marvel Cinematic Universe. For example, the television series *WandaVision* and *Loki* will reportedly lead into *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*. This poses the question of whether phase four will be so self-contained that viewers do not need extensive knowledge of any films before phase four, and they will just be able to watch the film and television series and know everything they need to know. If this is the case, it will, of course, pose another question, as many of the films are sequels, and do the fans then need to watch these films to follow along or are all the phase four films a completely new beginning. If they are a new beginning, it will then make it easier for new viewers to get into the universe, but if it is not and viewers still need to know what happens in the previous films, then it just

makes the universe more complicated for new viewers. This then brings up the big question surrounding phase four of whether it will cater to existing fans or to new viewers. If it only caters to existing fans, then it will be difficult to get new viewers on board, and if it only caters to new viewers, then Marvel risks losing the existing fans who are already invested in the characters and storylines and want to see more of that. An example of this is the upcoming television series *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier*. The series will star characters such as The Falcon (Sam Wilson) and The Winter Soldier (Bucky Barnes), who were both important characters in the *Captain America* films and the series will reportedly take place right after the events in *Endgame*. The series is the perfect example of the dilemma Marvel face with phase four. If they do not rely on existing viewers who are already familiar with the story, they will have to explain what happened in *Endgame*, why Sam Wilson has Captain America's shield, where Captain America is, and Bucky and Sam's relationship to new viewers. However, if they do not explain all of this for the benefit of new viewers, the series will be difficult to get in to for new viewers because there is so much backstory from the *Captain America* films and *Endgame* that will presumably be embedded into the story. Had Marvel chosen to just begin phase four with entirely new characters, they could potentially have lost some of the existing viewers because they are already invested in the characters from the films. Instead, they are using existing characters that viewers do not know a lot about, and therefore, new viewers will easily be able to follow along, because there is not a lot of information they need to know. Moreover, all new characters will be introduced in the universe at some point with the television series *She-Hulk*, *Ms. Marvel*, and *Moon Knight*, and here, new and existing viewers will not need any pre-existing knowledge to follow along.

Going forward it will be interesting to see what the new films and especially television series will add to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which is already so established in terms of the world, characters, and stories. At this point, with the limited knowledge we have, it looks like phase four will not be a continuation of the previous phases. Phase four will bring something entirely new to the Marvel Cinematic Universe that viewers have not seen before.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, we wanted to analyse the complexities in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and how these can be seen in the four films we have chosen. We have found that the Marvel Cinematic Universe is very complex

Throughout our analyses, we found that the Marvel Cinematic Universe does not fit into Henry Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling as the films are not self-contained and they are not spread throughout several mediums. However, it does fit into another definition, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has countless storylines that are continued across multiple films, and these are all connected, meaning that a viewer cannot see just one film and expect to fully understand what is happening. The fact that the films cannot be seen out of order or as a standalone film is connected to Henry Jenkins' principle continuity as the films are connected by the story that is continued from previous films in the franchise, and because of this, the films cannot stand on their own. Because the films are so connected and share storylines, they are very serial in their nature. The films act as 'successive episodes' where seemingly unimportant details in one film turn out to be very important in another, an example of this is the Infinity Stones which are mentioned throughout the films, but their importance is not revealed until *Infinity War*.

Just how complex the films are, becomes apparent when looking at how the world is built. The Marvel Cinematic Universe does not only take place on Earth but also in space. Moreover, while it takes place on Earth, it is not our Earth, or the Primary World as Wolf calls it, it is an overlaid Earth, due to the many fictional elements that do not exist in the real world. So, the universe, the films are set in, contains both the Primary World and several secondary worlds that require a lot of invention, and this is not uncommon for superhero films, which often have a high degree of invention in them because of superpowers for example.

The complexities in the franchise can also be seen in terms of the events that happen in the films. While some events seem more important than others, all of the events carry the story forward in their own way. An event can start as a satellite and then turn out to be a kernel later as the story progresses. An example of this is Wakanda which started out as a satellite in *Civil War*, but it became a kernel in *Infinity War* where it became very important to the story. Furthermore, the Marvel Cinematic Universe is not just light entertainment, and it requires that the viewers invest their time and pay close attention to the films due to a large number of details. There are multiple narrative threads that viewers will have to follow and have to remember from previous films. This makes the Marvel Cinematic Universe films not easily consumed due to vast narrative fabric from previous films.

When looking at continuity, seriality, worldbuilding, and complexity, it becomes apparent just how complex the Marvel Cinematic Universe is, because it requires viewers to retain large amounts of information and keep up with the films to fully understand them.

With phase four starting this year, it will be interesting to see if the Marvel Cinematic Universe will become more complex as it grows or if it will be a new beginning where they begin to simplify the universe to attract new viewers, both ways have their advantages and disadvantages.

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