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Tumblr and fandom

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[0.1]   Abstract—Editorial for special issue, "Tumblr and Fandom," *Transformative Works and Cultures,* no. 27 (June 15, 2018).

[0.2]   Keywords—Affordances; Bricolage; Eschatology; Fan terminology; GIFs; Online fandom

1. Introduction

[1.1]   This special issue on "Tumblr and Fandom" for *Transformative Works and Cultures* grew out of the forthcoming *A Tumblr Book,* for which the call for papers brought in a disproportionate number of submissions on fandom for a book that wasn't going to be only about fandom. But really this excess was only appropriate, given how fandom seems to find its way into all corners of Tumblr, and to fill all the spaces in between.

Figure 1. GIFs for everything. Source: Fearless-Beautiful-Insanity, Tumblr.com.

[1.2]   Ultimately, we, along with *Tumblr Book* coeditor Allison McCracken, came up with the idea to spin off some of this energy into a special issue of TWC. For too long there had seemed to be a dearth of scholarship on Tumblr fandom relative to the creativity, richness, and breadth of the fan cultures on the platform as we experienced it. We knew many folks were thinking about Tumblr through scholar-fan lenses, and we wanted to hasten that scholarship. Between that time and the publication of this issue, writing on Tumblr has flourished, to the extent that this issue is now part of a growing body of scholarship.

[1.3]   We are excited to present to readers new and insightful perspectives on Tumblr and fandom, including historical analysis, close studies of particular fan communities, aesthetic practices, and fan/industry interactions centered on the

site. Tumblr has changed, and continues to change, the face of online fandom; simultaneously, it reflects fannish practices that predate online fandoms. We hope that the combined picture created by the essays featured in this issue will bring us closer to understanding the implications of Tumblr for fandoms past, present, and future.

2. Tumblr and fandom: An overview

Figure 2. "If the ship goes down, I go with it: Tumblr." Source: Tumblr.com.

[2.1]   Although Tumblr was founded in 2007, online media fandoms (defined here as predominantly English-language, fan work–centered communities largely populated by women) did not begin to migrate en masse to the site until about 2012 (Bury 2016; De Kosnik 2016; Kohnen 2018; Stein 2018). This was precipitated by a number of mostly unrelated factors, not least of which was the 2008 Russian corporate acquisition and reconfiguration of the blogging platform LiveJournal, which up to that point had arguably been the main locus of online fandom activity, particularly within fan fiction circles. In addition to instituting changes in the look and functionality of LiveJournal, new terms of service were implemented, which resulted in the administrative mass deletion of a number of fan blogs on the basis of unfounded and untrue claims that they were engaged in child pornography. Combined, as Melanie Kohnen (2018) argues, with the deeply unpopular attempted corporatization of fan fiction distribution by a company called FanLib, these perceived attacks on fan fiction writers' autonomy and freedom of speech led to the creation of Archive of Our Own (AO3; https://archiveofourown.org/), under the auspices of the newly formed Organization for Transformative Works, as a fan-funded and -managed fan fiction repository. The result, Kohnen writes, was that "AO3 supplanted one of LiveJournal's central functions for fandom" (356), that is, fan fiction culture, leaving a void that Tumblr—with its greater emphasis on visual rather than written fan works—managed to fill. Together with the rise of new fandoms and a younger generation of fans who engaged comfortably with social media, Tumblr eventually supplanted LiveJournal as a, if not the, key hub of multimedia online fandom activity.

[2.2]   For fans coming from LiveJournal, Yahoo! Groups, and other community-centric sites, Tumblr was notoriously difficult to navigate or even understand. This was largely because of its structural differences, which ultimately led to changes in how online fandoms communicated, as well as who was doing the communicating. The communities (or comms) to which online media fans flocked from earlier fandom message boards appealed in part to users' ability to control who interacted with them, and indeed to shape the nature of those interactions. Individual users on LiveJournal (as well as InsaneJournal and Dreamwidth, sites sourced from the same code) could restrict access to their entire journal or to individual posts, and the communities to which these users belonged were equally able to moderate participation. In contrast, Tumblr (like Twitter) can seem almost defiantly nonhierarchical, decentralized, and uncontrollable. On the comms individual users are effectively in control of their own domains. On Tumblr, however, individual accounts typically act as nodes for the creation and further dissemination of posts. As with Twitter, Tumblr is structurally rhizomatic; in contrast, however, from the point that a public Tumblr post is reblogged by someone else, it cannot be recalled and deleted by the original poster, as is possible on Twitter.
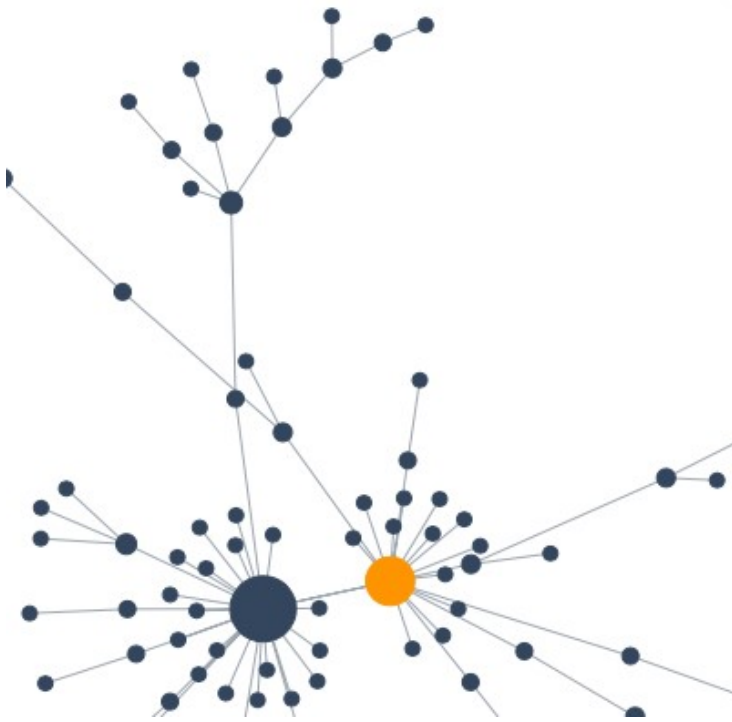
Figure 3. Tumblr-generated map of reblogs of a popular post, June 7, 2018. Source: Tumblr.com.

[2.3]   These dimensions of rhizomatic spread and limited authorial control lend Tumblr some of its aura of anarchy, intensified by a restrictive, even counterintuitive commenting system that effectively encourages rebloggers to add commentary to the original post itself. From the point a Tumblr post begins to be reblogged, it takes on a life of its own. It is no longer in the control of the original poster.

[2.4]   This uncontrollability is at once both bane and boon to online fandoms, and it has had a material effect on expressions of and participation in those fandoms. A range of practices evolved in response to posts that have gone viral through hostile discourse appended to them. Fans on Tumblr will exhort antifans and nonfans (or the "wrong" fans) to "stay out of the tags," and they may even refrain from searching for new fandom posts via tags lest they encounter either original posts that are intended to be antagonistic to that fandom or reblogs that have been co-opted to equally negative ends. Fandom wank on Tumblr is thus aided and abetted by weaponizing the platform's own functionality, lending it a kind of Wild West lawlessness that has driven many fans from the site.

Figure 4. "I'm helping Cas to find the Doctor." Source: JampackedOffensiveAustraliansilkyterrier, Gfycat.com.

[2.5]   Yet it is precisely users' inability to establish effective boundaries on Tumblr that has led to the ongoing and still hotly contested diversification of fandom participation and expression. Tumblr-enabled fandom cross-fertilization— what Matt Hills (2015) calls transfandom—has contributed to the growth of portmanteau fandoms such as SuperWhoLock and the proliferation of semiotically linked visual fan works (Morimoto 2018). The inability to control both the circulation of and commentary on posts has contributed to the greater visibility of peripheral fans and fan communities as they bring their own perspectives to what may originally have been intended as in-group utterances.

[2.6]   Further, as others have noted, Tumblr as a platform is intensely visual (Bennett 2014; Petersen 2014; McCracken 2017; Willard 2017; Stein 2018), precipitating the evolution of new fannish practices (particularly in the area of GIFs). This visuality has also lowered linguistic/textual barriers to entry within heretofore predominantly English-language online fandoms, resulting in a higher degree of cross-border fan communication and concomitant potential for cross-cultural clashes (Morimoto and Chin 2017).

Figure 5. "Thorin-Senpai has noticed me." Source: Giphy.com.

3. Where Tumblr and fandom meet

[3.1]   The essays featured in this special issue approach the intersection of Tumblr and fandom in ways that cumulatively attest to its complexity, including cultural history, interface, industry, transcultural work, personal experience, community engagement, fan aesthetics, and fan discourse. Further, and perhaps in keeping with Tumblr's porousness, many of the essays' authors also self-reflexively consider what it means to research fandom on Tumblr, what Tumblr has meant for scholar fandom, and what scholar fandom (or academia more broadly) has meant for Tumblr.

[3.2]   We can situate Tumblr's specific fannish histories within larger histories of fandom and practices of vernacular cultural authorship. Evan Gledhill connects/locates Tumblr microblogging within the history of the commonplace book and scrapbooks; it is bricolage as resistant reading as well as writing by marginalized people, including young, queer, and female-identifying people. Engaging with more recent history, Lily Winterwood uses linguistic analysis to suggest that there has been a shift from old fandom (LiveJournal/Dreamwidth) to newer fandom (Tumblr) terminology: from "squick" to "trigger," from "wank" to "discourse." Winterwood argues that these linguistic changes reflect a broader shift in the perception of fandom as having serious cultural weight, in turn emphasizing fandom's potential contribution to understandings of representational politics, in contrast with past perceptions of interfandom debates as "self-aggrandizing …emotional release" (¶ 17).

[3.3]   Tumblr's interface specificities—its affordances and limitations—have shaped fandom uses of the site and arguably have thus shaped fandoms themselves. At the same time, fans work with Tumblr's affordances and limits in unexpected, creative, and generative ways. All the essays in this issue consider, to a greater or lesser extent, how the affordances and limitations of Tumblr have shaped the particular focus of their study, be it the emergence and cultural work of GIF sets as a fan art practice, the evolution of scholar-fan identity within Tumblr, or the growth and sustenance of specific fan communities.

[3.4]   Indira Neill Hoch conducts close analysis of how hashtags both define and negotiate communities, given the specific affordances of Tumblr that do not support community function and formation in quite the same way as those of Facebook and other social media networks. Hoch's essay also highlights how, despite its lack of familiar formal community organizing tools, Tumblr nevertheless serves as community space for fandoms initially connected on other platforms (in this case, YouTube).

[3.5]   In her examination of antifandom hate blogs directed at the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–17), Judith Fathallah suggests that Tumblr affords critique via self-reflexive polyphonic pastiche rather than authoritative dominance. Fathallah argues

that fan communities on Tumblr have developed traditions of self-conscious and playful critique, which are dispersed across the performative surfaces of Tumblr fandom and which are distinctive in their multitonal, fragmented logics.

[3.6]   Daisy Pignetti's Symposium essay on Tumblr fans' responses to Tom Hiddleston's unexpected relationship with Taylor Swift considers how Tumblr provides a forum for fans to work through their surprise over Hiddleswift sightings and analysis in the media, which seemed to contradict the star persona Hiddleston had previously cultivated. Pignetti argues that the Tumblr interface provides both form and forum for Hiddleston fans to self-reflexively (re)consider their investment not only in Hiddleston but also in stars and star personae more generally.

[3.7]   Bo Allesøe Christensen and Thessa Jensen's contribution explores how Tumblr's emphasis on interactivity and gratification facilitated the formation and perpetuation of The JohnLock Conspiracy (TJLC) communities and discourse. Christensen and Jensen bring theological analysis to bear on these communities, theorizing their convictions as a form of secular eschatology, in which belief in a true reading of *Sherlock*'s ending connected and sustained a distinctive fan community within Tumblr.

[3.8]   In a study that nicely dovetails with Christensen and Jensen's study of TJLC communities, Tosha Taylor examines the Team Delusional subset of the *Walking Dead* (2010–) fandom, which was built around fan theories that beloved *Walking Dead* character Beth Greene survived her apparent death in the series' fifth season. Taylor describes how Team Delusional persists as a fan community within Tumblr years after Beth's death, using Tumblr's participatory and interpretive affordances such as multimodality and tagging to maintain community identity.

[3.9]   Other essays examine how Tumblr's formal affordances and constraints shape emerging fannish aesthetic traditions, most especially GIFs and GIF sets. Rebecca Williams explores how fans use GIFs to work through moments of affective disruption and mourning regarding series' endings or characters' canonical deaths. Through a case study of GIF usage specifically within *Supernatural* (CW, 2005–) fandom, Jessica Hautsch considers how GIFs enable fan rhetorical play with intertextuality, looking at how GIFs can mean different things to different communities and how fans can tailor the source text to particular interpretive ends.

[3.10]   Tumblr's porous interface has generated particular interest among scholar-fans in its capacity for bridging seeming divides between academic and fan discourse while at the same time exposing potential frictions between the two. Mélanie Bourdaa explores this through her consideration of the possibilities offered by Tumblr as research space, as well as the methodological and ethical issues such research raises. Specifically, Bourdaa examines her own Tumblr, created purposefully for scholar-fan engagement, in which she represents herself as what she terms an ethnofan, "a researcher who analyzes fan practices by integrating into the community and fandom under study" (¶ 3.3).

[3.11]   Similarly, in their coauthored Symposium essay, Elizabeth M. Downey, Sherly Lyn Bundy, Connie K. Shih and Emily Hamilton-Honey share a collective interdisciplinary perspective on their experiences discovering *Glee* (2009–15) fandom, acafandom, and meeting one another through Tumblr. They look at the affordances Tumblr offers for scholar-fan and acafans for both research and social and professional networking, considering what insights these Tumblr experiences then offer for academia more broadly. They suggest that Tumblr facilitates interdisciplinary networks built on actual conversation and community that augment the "professional pressures of academia," allowing scholar fans to connect "as fans more than academics" with "joyful, excited, in-the-moment exchanges" (¶ 2.1), and fostering iterative collaborative scholarship in the form of reblogged and expanded meta posts.

[3.12]   In his Symposium essay, Paul Booth describes the productive challenges he has faced teaching with Tumblr, arguing that using Tumblr in fan studies courses is in some ways a necessity if students are to gain a full understanding of contemporary fandom. Yet Tumblr's opacity to outsiders and complex processes of fan pleasure make it a difficult fit for assigned work within a graded college class. Nonetheless, Booth argues, this very challenge—or necessary failure—remains instructive, and perhaps even necessary, for the project of teaching fandom.

[3.13]   As fandom and intrafandom communities have evolved on Tumblr, fandom itself has become more publicly visible, with the result that many fans have used their fandom to mobilize industry and political activism. Natalie Chew looks at Tumblr as a counterpublic for fan mobilization through a case study of the campaigns to save the canceled animated TV shows *Young Justice* (2010–) and *Green Lantern: The Animated Series* (2011–13). Chew situates Tumblr within a larger social media context, arguing that Tumblr serves as a counterpublic support to platforms like Twitter that served as the public face of the *Young Justice* and *Green Lantern* renewal campaigns. This broader perspective on Tumblr

within a social media context offers particular insight into how fandoms (on Tumblr and more generally) function in relation to industry within larger contemporary transmedia contexts.

Figure 6. "My hostage!" Source: Anotherwellkeptsecret, Tumblr.com.

[3.14]   In a roundtable moderated by Lori Morimoto, Amanda Brennan, Elizabeth Minkel, Keidra Chaney, and Aja Romano discuss and debate the effect of Tumblr on evolving online fandoms; intersections of fandom, politics, and activism facilitated by their shared Tumblr locus; and changing perceptions of (Tumblr-based) fandoms within an increasingly borderless journalistic environment that has engendered fan-reporters, who, like scholar-fans, have a fannish foot in social media-based fandoms and a professional one engaged in their analysis.

[3.15]   The issue's four book reviews map out a dynamic picture of the broader cultural landscape and evolving fan practices within which Tumblr fandom functions, including communities of fan handicrafting (Close), fan fiction authorship and readership (Jamison), and transnational and transcultural production and reception (Lee and Hemmann).

[3.16]   We hope this special issue leaves readers with a clearer sense of the myriad ways that Tumblr at once reflects, inhabits, influences, and facilitates fandoms past, present, and future.

4. Acknowledgments

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Tumblr and the romantic sentiment album: Bricolage and the culture of the margins

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[0.1]   Abstract—Tumblr enables users to collate and share content. This modality hearkens back to the commonplace books and scrapbooks of the romantic era. The practices of Anglo-American fannish compilation have changed little from paper to pixel since the late eighteenth century; the materials available to the compiler change as fashions in art and media technologies develop, but the practices of combining and recombining these changing elements remain remarkably consistent. Textual response practices, such as collage, demonstrate an impetus to subvert or transcend the originary meaning of the texts, echoing Claude Lévi-Strauss's idea of bricolage in constructing meaning. The Tumblr microblogger and romantic-era commonplacer act as bricoleurs, working with mainstream cultural signs and signifiers to produce new meanings and possibilities for representation. The continuation of the same resistant reading practices across two centuries speaks to the practices' effectiveness in drawing out subsidiary themes from cultural texts. However, that the bricoleur communities are still thought to be dominated by young women and their objects of romantic interest, suggests that the main production and dissemination routes for narrative fiction is still dominated by men, thus foregrounding masculine perspectives and content. Young female consumers and authors remain culturally devalued and thus practice in the margins. The features of bricolage—that is, working with premade materials—speak to why and how dominant hierarchies of value are often replicated rather than challenged in the seemingly resistant creative spaces in which transformative works are shared.

[0.2]   Keywords—Commonplacing; Gender; Resistant reading; Scrapbooking

1. Introduction

[1.1]   This article explores similarities of practice in collecting and compiling in the romantic era and the digital present of the twenty-first century, identifying the similarities between the form and content of Tumblr, and the commonplace books and scrapbooks of the past. Both the online platform and the paper page enable users to collate and share content. The practices of Anglo-American fannish compilation have changed very little since the late eighteenth century; examples include the addition of a favorite line from a text to a chosen image, or the rewriting of key words in a text to make it more relevant to the owner of the page on which it appears. As Jessalynn Keller has established, girls' blogging is "part of a lengthy tradition of girl's media production...such as zine-making, consciousness-raising, and media production such as *Ms. Magazine*" (2016, 2). Keller establishes these twentieth-century practices within the framework of a recognized feminist movement, exploring the use of these tools for publicly engaged activism. Here I seek to explore not the political intentions of the blogger and commonplacer but rather the mode they choose to communicate. The textual response practices familiar to both contemporary Western media fan spaces, and to romantic-era customs in the construction of the sentiment album, such as collage, demonstrate an impetus to subvert or transcend the originary meaning of the texts. These practices clearly echo Claude Lévi-Strauss's idea of bricolage in constructing meaning. I explore the notion of the fan as bricoleur, working with mainstream cultural signs and signifiers to produce new meanings and possibilities for representation. The materials available to the compiler change

as fashions in art and media technologies develop; however, the practices of combining and recombining these changing elements remains remarkably consistent. The continuation of the same practices across two centuries speaks to their effectiveness in drawing out subsidiary themes from cultural texts. That the bricoleur communities still seem to be predominately composed of marginalized people—such as young women and queer-identifying people—and are often culturally positioned as focused on romantic interests and sexuality, suggests that many of the same exclusionary hierarchies of cultural value are still in play. The production and dissemination of narrative fiction is still dominated by men, and still foregrounds masculinist perspectives and content that does not reflect the desires of the margins.

[1.2]   Discussions regarding these practices from outside the audience and community in which the compiled works are originally shared and created are consistent in their critical tone. The idea that the original text is being misread, or devalued, is often put forward and the criticism is also often highly gendered, assuming female identity for the fan, or assigning femininity to compilation methods. Tumblr is viewed as an online platform predominated by, and aimed at, young women. The sentiment album of the romantic era was similarly culturally coded, even though this perception is not entirely borne out by evidence (Duggan and Brenner 2013). Pejorative online terminology such as "Tumblrina" demonstrates this perceived femininity that is repeated by authors writing about social networks and online platforms; critics like Angela Nagle call Tumblr "more feminine," as compared to sites such as Reddit and 4chan (2017, 19). Further, young women's skills as negotiators of online space are perceived as being less developed when compared to male contemporaries, even by women themselves, though this is not supported by evidence (Hargittai and Shafer 2006). As outlined in the next section, similar divisions were imagined between a "masculine" tradition of commonplacing and the development of "feminine" sentiment albums. Whether the creator of the transformative work is (or is not) female is thus less important than their position as a responder to a mainstream culture industry that is dominated by men, and consistently reproduces male perspectives. Resistant reading practices are consistently considered feminine by default.

[1.3]   The continuity of practice by teenage girls as fans is not evidence of some inherent quality in young women, but evidence of the continuing marginalization of their views and interests in Anglo-American culture. Despite enormous social change regarding the economic and social opportunities for women in the course of two centuries, the markers of quality in canonical texts have not greatly altered; English-language literary and media traditions are heavily dominated by male producers, and by content and themes that privilege male perspectives. Since practices associated with femininity are culturally devalued, these bricoleur practices remain in the margins. The continuation of the same resistant reading practices across two centuries speaks to their effectiveness for expressing particular ideas, and drawing out subsidiary themes from cultural texts. These are practices performed, in part, for personal pleasure, and shared within a community to ensure that those who experience similar feelings of marginalization can also find enjoyment that is lacking from the consumption of standard publications. Though Tumblr is often used as a space of social organization and resistance by marginalized communities, I would suggest that it is the limitations of bricolage practice for resisting dominant norms that suggest why, and how, dominant hierarchies of value are often replicated in the otherwise resistant creative spaces in which transformative works are shared.

[1.4]   It is possible to work as a bricoleur without recognizing oneself to be a poacher, in Michel de Certeau's terminology often used in fan studies. As Derrida notes in his response to Lévi-Strauss (1978), all thought and discourse exists within what is already available; it is impossible in human culture to create a completely original thought or image that bears no trace of the cultures and histories of its means of production, and its producer. A smooth bricolage can blend into the conventions of the dominant form, and disrupts the reader as little as possible in its reconfiguration of the material. In a telling example of the "Barack and Joe" meme that peaked in 2016, shared by Twitter user @bihighlife, Joe Biden states, "I replaced all of the books with slow burn fanfictions...I want Pence fully invested when he realizes it's gay." This instance of the meme relies upon an understanding of smooth bricolage practices; in this case, the slow interpolation of queerness into a previously accepted fictional diegesis, to ensure that a reader must emotionally connect with a character before they are presented with a viewpoint or action that challenges their preconceptions. A punk bricoleur, who deliberately rips the sign from its setting, makes the viewer aware of their own cognitive dissonance as they must contemplate the juxtaposition of meaning and text. Neither of these forms is inherently more politically progressive than the other; and fandom is fully aware of the possibilities for both modes of resistant reading. The circulation and creation of transformative works on Tumblr in the bricolage that occurs within a single collage image, and/or in the juxtaposition of posts in the scrolling timeline, has the potential to be both radical and conservative.

2. Themes and memes: Consistency in textual practice

[2.1]   Before printed books became affordable to a wide market, educated persons would keep handwritten books of useful, devotional, or interesting excerpts transcribed from expensive and/or rare texts, a practice dating back hundreds of years. These collections might include sketches or maps, and also song lyrics and poetry. These books circulated among middle- and upper-class households, so that a poem, drawing, or message could be collected from absent friends or distinguished visitors. Many of the most popular authors and poets of the romantic era appear in these albums, contributing work in their own hand, copied across by another, or in print as a cutting from a commercial publication. However, it is in the visual representation and creative expression that the continuation of practices is seen most clearly across these works to the present day digital platform. I originally approached commonplace books, as a scholar of the Gothic, to explore the circulation of romantic poetry, and was struck by the visual commonality between some of the albums and Tumblr pages within fandom. There are, also, many textual modes used in commonplace books and sentiment albums that are still in use today as ways to resituate and respond to popular culture ([note 1](#)). The romantic-era albums examined for this study are drawn from the Sir Harry Page Collection held by Manchester Metropolitan University. This collection spans the romantic to the Edwardian period, and comprises diverse forms, from the dense textual commonplace book to the wholly pictorial scrapbook. Of the 285 albums in the Page Collection, identifying details of the owner/creator have only been established for 112 so far, and of this number, 66 authors are identified as women and 44 as men, based on their name or direct textual references to their gender. This is a slightly more feminine weighting than is suggested by demographic studies of social media, performed by users such as CentrumLumina (2013). Images in this article are from two albums in the Page Collection: #178 has a title leaf identifying the owner as teenager Elizabeth Reynolds and giving the date as 1817, and #2 was produced by E. and T. Wilson, between 1800 and 1830, whose relationship and genders are unknown. The differences in presentation and content are outlined below, with descriptions to highlight the aesthetic and thematic commonalities between the romantic sentiment album, and practices on the modern microblogging site Tumblr.

[2.2]   These first images are from the Wilsons' commonplace book, in which the paper has been divided into portions to give the impression that multiple notes and scraps have been pasted into the pages. This album was unfinished, and the final pages show the process by which the pages were subdivided, the trompe l'oeil effect produced with pencil and ink, and then the content added at the final stage. The extra effort, and cost, expended to achieve a consistent look and feel also demonstrates the importance of this textual space for its creators and their desire to entice and engage others with their work. The angles of the various texts on the page of this album require the reader to repeatedly turn the book around in their hands, which would be frustratingly inefficient if this were simply a record of favorite quotations for personal use; the visual schema is clearly designed to engage an audience. This styling reflects the idea of the theme for online blogs. Themes for Tumblr can be purchased or created, as on other blogging platforms, to impose a distinct and consistent style for the display of a blog's content. In both book and blog, the use of a consistent style unifies what might otherwise seem utterly disparate content; it suggests to the viewer which content is most important by visual highlighting, and signals the creativity and style of the owner.

[2.3]   The compilers of album #2 show considerable skill in painting and drawing, not only in the construction of the theme but also in the inclusion of illustrations and small maps. The paintings of flowers, as seen in figures 1 and 2, are labeled with care and seemingly drawn from life. The practice in identifying the source of the textual material varies; while Thomas Moore has his poem introduced by name and title, an extract from Shakespeare gives no citation details at all. This might suggest that knowledge of the works of Shakespeare is assumed, and the compiler is performing a familiarity with the text, or it might suggest the opposite—an ignorance of the source. Homilies, such as the one about the "coin of flattery" displayed below the poem by Moore in figure 1, were included in many popular books of quotation in this era. Books such as *The Orator, Being a Collection of Pieces in Prose and Verse Selected from the Best English Writers* (1776) compiled by William Perry, and *Elegant Extracts: a copious selection of passages from the most eminent prose writers* (1812) compiled by the publisher, did not always credit the source of their contents. It is possible that the Shakespearean extracts were derived from such collections. As with the elegantly framed quotations that circulate in online spaces for affirmation or inspiration, the source is often unknown, and the text has become a currency of its own, divorced from its original context. There is thus little evidence of detailed textual engagement with original sources and longer works in this album; how well the compilers knew the texts from which their material is culled, and how widely read they were, is impossible to ascertain. This album has been constructed to suggest that the maker is talented and discerning; the content was selected to imply a high level of cultural knowledge, which contrasts with the effect created

of hastily pasted scraps of paper and pinned notes, that suggests they wear this learning lightly. This is quite a conservative display of cultural texts and tastes.

Figure 1. Page of commonplace book number 2, displaying a detailed drawing of Veronica flowers (known as Georgia Blue) and several extracts of poetry and a homily, each as though on a separate scrap of paper with decorative borders in varying colors. Sir Harry Page Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University, Special Collections.

Figure 2. Page of commonplace book number 2, displaying a brief stave of music, some poetry, and a pastoral picture in classical style. Each appears as though on its own scrap of paper, and pins have been drawn as though holding the scraps in place. Sir Harry Page Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University, Special Collections.

[2.4]   Themes are visually enticing, but not all albums (or microblogs) are so clearly designed for a wider audience. Album #178 (figure 3) belonged to a teenage girl, Elizabeth Reynolds. It is less structured than the Wilsons' thematic presentation, and the content is often more personal, though the theme of romance and relationships between men and women predominates in both. Instead of a consistent visual style, the dominant form in #178 is collage, which brings disparate elements together with the direct intention for those elements to inform one another to make

meaning with, and through, the assembled materials, in Lévi-Strauss's terms. Each page of collage stands alone, much as each post or piece of fan art might do in a Tumblr blog without a set theme. In figure 3, Reynolds has surrounded the etching of a man identified as Robert Coates, Esq., with images of women that bear no direct relation to him, in a nonnaturalistic layering. The monochrome portrait of the gentleman stands in marked contrast to the hand-painted coloring that brings out the detail of the female busts. These images are open to interpretation by the viewer—the added quotation from *Romeo and Juliet* (ca. 1595) and the fashion plate busts, create a unified theme of traditional heteronormative romance with a hint of tragedy; the black border to the portrait suggests mourning, which would echo the end of Shakespeare's tragedy. However, the extracts copied below the collage complicate a simple reading of admiration or memorialization; from John Tobin's *The Honeymoon* (1804), the plot of which echoes *The Taming of the Shrew* (ca. 1590) as a haughty young woman is courted and tamed, the monologues convey rather misogynistic antimarriage sentiments. This album's lack of clear boundaries, and any form of citation, bring all the elements of the page into direct contact, suggesting that the content, rather than the source, is important. The exact nature of the compiler's interest in her subject is impossible to ascertain; Reynolds may be memorializing a man she knew, or this collage might be a more general reflection on the romantic norms circulating in her social milieu. The potential is with the audience for a conventional or a radical interpretation.
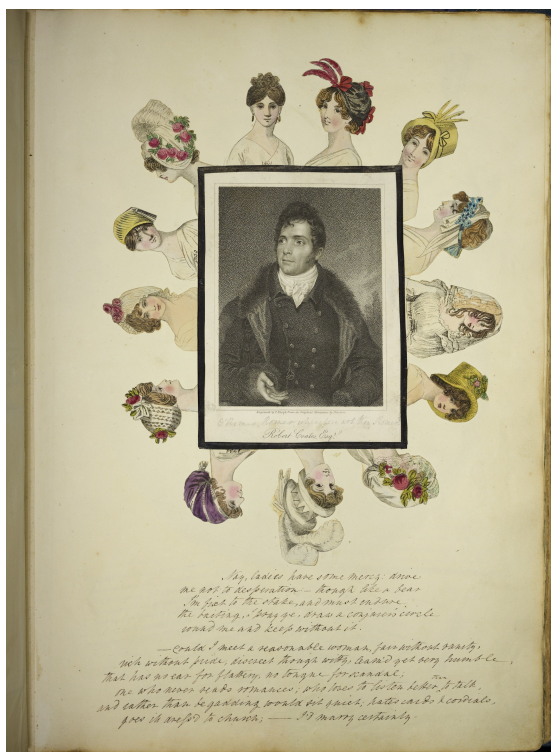
Figure 3. Page of commonplace book number 178. Below a black-bordered portrait of a fashionable young man is penciled "Oh Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" Sir Harry Page Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University, Special Collections.

[2.5]   I would suggest that Reynolds's arrangement communicates to the reader a more personal engagement with the original texts than does the Wilsons' album. The Wilsons' aim for their album is clear; the reader can acquire knowledge, and/or recognize the knowledge of the compiler. Extracts and poems about romance and interpersonal relationships are not overtly given more or less weight in the design, and no personal opinion can be readily discerned, apart from a general support for cultural normativity expressed through the dominant markers of literary worth. Elizabeth's view of her audience is less clear; her collages aim more for an artistic expression, suggestive of conveying emotion or narrative rather than factoids about the external world. These two modes can also be seen in Tumblr blogs: some compilers remain emotionally detached while creating or circulating items of interest on a theme (for example, collections of on-set photographs, acting as an anonymous resource to others); other bloggers create and/or reblog highly personal art or relatable content directly referencing lived experience.

[2.6]   Figure 4 shows another recontextualization of scenes from dramatic texts from album #178, this time presented pictorially. The small prints arranged in a grid pattern are each drawn from a different play, though they share a visual

format suggesting they were published from one source. In this usage, these pictures can be read much like a modern GIF set, I suggest, in which short moving images drawn from a single or multiple sources are arranged in sequence to either suggest a new narrative or focus the viewers' attention on particular elements considered important by the compiler. Kayley Thomas has explored this mode in relation to repositioning villainous characters as sympathetic, as one example of the ways this pattern of extraction and recombination can adapt meaning (2013). The images used by Elizabeth Reynolds all include a citation to the play from which they are taken, as a modern GIF might have a subtitled line of dialogue or description of the action. If we read across from left to right, top to bottom, we can construct an effective narrative from the source material. In the first illustration, from Robert Cumberland's *Wheel of Fortune* (1795), a lawyer seeks out a recluse, who retired from the world after a bad love affair, to inform him of his inheritance. The inheritor decides to use his new fortune to exact revenge against the man who wronged him. Next is a scene from George Colman's *The Mountaineers* (1791), in which lovers Floranthe and Octavian are united, the woman disguised as a boy. Then we have an image from Mrs. Inchbald's *To Marry or Not to Marry* (1805), in which a man receives word that his daughter has eloped, and is made desperately unhappy by the news. The fourth picture in the set is from John O'Keefe's *Wild Oats* (1791): the character Ephraim is discovered attempting to woe an unwilling lady, which demonstrates his religious hypocrisy. The penultimate image is from *The Count of Narbonne* (1780) by Robert Jephson, where a young woman flees from a marriage to which she does not consent. The final illustration is drawn from George Colman's *The Poor Gentleman* (1802), and depicts an old father comforting his daughter, though he is facing ruination. These scenes can thus be read as a narrative in which a girl is seduced by a man for revenge against her father and, given the implications of the wider texts from which the images are drawn, though she succeeds in escaping the physical horrors of seduction, it is not certain that she saves her family's reputation. Unlike the previous collage surrounding Robert Coates, Esq., this compilation would require the reader to use the citations provided to create a composite meaning, demonstrating the compiler's familiarity with the wider text from which their reference is derived. Of course, it is possible that this reading projects the form and expectations of the GIF set onto an earlier mold and model. Nonetheless, whether Elizabeth's aim was to create a coherent narrative or not, the action of arranging these scenes has clearly been considered and thus echoes in aim, if not form, modern fan practices of recontextualization. This gallery, as with all the creations made from borrowed parts in these formats, is open to interpretation and resists fixity of meaning in the original text, the derivative images, and in its own reconfiguration.

Figure 4. Page of commonplace book 178. The six images of the dramatic set are separated by small poetic asides in red borders, which are written at a ninety-degree angle, suggesting another interplay of space, text, and meaning. Sir Harry Page Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University, Special Collections.

[2.7]   The lack of rigidity in meaning that Elizabeth achieves is further demonstrated by the lack of structure in this volume. Unlike the commonplace books modeled after John Locke's instructions for scholars, explored in the third section of this article, this album invites the reader to wander between themes, creating juxtapositions of ideas and the possibility for many dissonant readings. In figure 4, we can see that short quotations from satirical verses are interpolated between the images, seemingly unrelated to the content of the stage drama. As with album #2, the reading of these different sets of texts requires the viewer to turn the book. I propose that the framing device of the drawn feathered swags suggests that these brief verses are to be read as a separate entry to the visual story that is constructed on the same page. However, given that there are multiple blank pages toward the end of the book, the decision to have these two sets of content share one page is not wholly one of necessity; yet any suggestions for

thematic links or the intent of the compiler would be pure conjecture. What is certain is that these choices demonstrate a thoughtful engagement with the cultural materials.

[2.8]   These albums demonstrate two differing approaches to compilation: #2 seems primarily designed to communicate a level of learning, whereas #178 seems to privilege narrative and emotional response. This is important within the gendered context of contemporary opinion regarding the commonplacing tradition and the perceived differences between a traditional commonplace book and a sentiment album. Despite its foregrounding of aesthetic design through thematic unity, album #2 conforms to many of the ideals of the commonplace book as promoted to scholarly men as a repository of knowledge but, ironically, never demonstrates an engaged readerly knowledge of the texts quoted. There is no evidence of the Wilsons having read the originary texts, such as would be suggested by a careful juxtaposition that would lead the reader to reflect on the nuances of the works' themes. Album #178, with its seemingly frivolous collages of fashion plates, some of which include feathers and mixed materials, by contrast demonstrates an active engagement with the texts from which it borrows. The use of the quotations suggests, through emotional and narrative resonance, that the compiler knows the wider context of the original material. I would term these different styles passive and active readership, in echo of the contemporary theories of reading.

3. A material difference: Gender and compilation

[3.1]   Active, rather than passive reading, was discussed as an important distinction in the romantic era; Coleridge railed against modern novel readers and "their past-time, or rather kill-time, with the name of reading. Call it rather a sort of beggarly day-dreaming...the trance or suspension of all common sense and all definite purpose" (1817, 49). The associations between novel reading and femininity were well established in this period, and opposition of passivity to activity culturally aligns with ideas of masculine and feminine attributes. Corin Throsby suggests that commonplace books can be viewed as "the ultimate example of readers interacting with a text, constructing meaning in a quite literal and physical sense" (2009, 230). However, critics such as Peter Beal and Ann Moss have suggested that the practice of compiling a commonplace book transforms reading into an exercise that turns the text into a source of fragments, and the act of reading into a hunt for extracts rather than a process of engagement (Brayman Hackel 2005, 143). This echoes descriptions of the fannish bricoleur as in some way damaging an original text, or its wholeness. In these criticisms we can see the different purposes of commonplacing contrasted between an active personal response to meaning construction through ideas expressed in the text itself, and a more passive and performative consumption of the text as object, and as a signifier for cultural values such as education and erudition.

[3.2]   The romantic era was a key period of change in the popular perception of the commonplace book in Anglo-American culture. In the previous century, John Locke wrote a guide to compiling and indexing a commonplace volume, the nearest modern equivalent to which might be a bullet journal, with an emphasis on the utility of the collection for reference. In the late eighteenth century, bound albums were produced on a large scale commercially, either blank for the purpose of traditional commonplacing or already filled with a selection of poetry, art and prose, often designed as a gift item. The interior of a sentiment album shows its divergence from the careful indexing and dense texts of the earlier Lockean ideal. Richly colored and full of art, pages may be pasted in from other sources with no regard to the matching of materials; there are rarely indexes, and organization might be by a theme known only to its owner. The result is vibrant but chaotic, and leads the reader by chance rather than by design. That these became known as sentiment albums reflects the connotations of emotion and affect and, by association, femininity. The gender associations between these formulations is clearly binaristic; active, intellectual pursuit is traditionally coded as masculine, whereas passivity, consumption, and performance are coded as feminine within mainstream Anglo-American cultural discourses about cultural engagement.

[3.3]   That Locke, whose philosophy championed a division of the self and the body, was influential in the culture of commonplacing links the intellectual tradition of masculine humanism—which privileged the rational mind over emotional response or bodily sensation—to the act of knowledge acquisition, and particular textual practices. Lucia Dacome (2004) explores how Locke's model of the commonplace book develops the links between the construction of knowledge and conceptions of the self in the Enlightenment. By the end of the eighteenth century, the idea that identity and selfhood were functions of the mind, rather than the mechanistic flesh, was an accepted philosophical concept. Women, under this schema, are associated with emotion and sentiment, which is aligned with bodily response. Thus, commonplacing was a traditionally masculine activity, and as women engaged increasingly with this practice, their

compilations were termed sentiment albums. This redesignation indicates key differences in organization and theme, even though the two modes share many of the same traditions of compilation, and the use of these terms and these books became highly gendered. Likewise, Alexandra Simpson aligns Tumblr with the construction of the self, in that it "archives the acts of identity formation. Queer fandom...can help to assemble a user's self and provide an anchor, drawing other like users together" (2015, ii). Just as the forms associated with masculinity were considered to have more cultural value in the romantic era, so the continued denigration of femininity and queerness lead to contemporary pejorative judgements about "Tumblrinas" and "otherkin" being used on platforms like Reddit and Twitter regarding Tumblr. Thus, the digital and the paper spaces of compilation are textual forms intimately associated with identity.

[3.4]   It is notable that, as commercial sentiment albums developed, precompiled commonplace books full of notable extracts and wise excerpts were also often aimed at women or a family audience. However, guides to creating one's own commonplace book, full of active scholarly learning, were still aimed at men. It was also popular for male family members to compile collections for their female relatives, to guide them in their tastes. In commonplace book #19 in the Page Collection, created by a man in the 1790s for an unnamed woman in his family, the compiler wrote an introduction, stating:

> [3.5]   It has been thought that a woman's reading should be confined to such books as are directed to the imagination and fancy, asserting that they have not capacity for any other subjects, and admitting they had capacity, these declaimers of the fair sex, will have it, that any other sort of reading, only makes troublesome wives and inattentive mothers.

[3.6]   Though respectful of women's intellectual capacity, the author goes on to place woman's learning with reference to the benefits to her family, likening a woman of learning to a safe harbor for men in society. Women are clearly considered to engage with culture in the wrong way, and must be guided because they are sentimental, emotional, affective, and passive. Collections of supposedly appropriate content were published to guide the compilers of sentiment albums, one of the earliest being *Original Album Verses and Acrostics* (ca. 1800), published in Toronto, Canada. These efforts demonstrate that attempts to incorporate textual practices associated with women into the commercial publishing or media industries have long gone hand-in-hand with attempts to control, or to denigrate, the content women consume.

[3.7]   Attempts to contain and control the intellectual and creative pursuits of women speaks to Judith Fetterley's argument that literature, and cultural production more widely, is inherently masculine, even as commercial publishing exploits female fan labor for content, and denigrates the fan for overtly gendered reasons. The feminine genres, such as romance and the gothic, associated with strong emotions, sentiment, and femininity, are much mocked in form, content, and readership. Female reading practices are, traditionally, not viewed in positive terms. In 1819, the genre fiction fan Amelia Hopeful wrote to the editors of *The Fireside Magazine,* saying that her favorite books are called trash, but that she still wants to be a romance writer herself (April 1, 1819, 121). All Amelia received in response was mockery that targeted her supposed lack of feminine skills and virtues, through a satirical depiction of her neglect of her domestic duties:

> [3.8]   Let her not trouble herself about the making of a pudding or a pie, or any such servile occupation... Food, too, the consideration for which belongs only to such whose appetites are depraved by sensuality, and which we never read of as occupying the thoughts of a heroine of romance, is far too gross a thing for the refined imagination of our correspondent. (122–23)

[3.9]   Amelia outed herself as a fan in good faith, hoping that a literary magazine would support literary endeavor, regardless of gender. Tumblr fans, with their content made searchable through aggregating search engines like Google, do not have to reach out to published media to find themselves featured within its content; there are articles on sites like BuzzFeed and Comedy Central with titles like "17 Riddikulus Harry Potter Fanfiction Quotes" culled from the publicly accessible platforms.

[3.10]   There are two particular forms of criticism to note, when discussing the condemnation that both fans and commonplacers face: criticism of the quality of their cultural choices, and criticism of their mode of engagement with that culture—though these approaches are often combined, and both are heavily gendered. The collection of sports data and trivia is thought of as a masculine pastime, and the creation of fan fiction and the emotional investments of shipping considered feminine; yet the male sports fan may weep in public openly at his team's failure, and the female

media fan compile endless data on a wiki for a television show. As Kristina Busse notes, female fans' emotional responses are consistently delegitimized, not only as appropriate responses to media, but as fannish responses in and of themselves "clearly marked as a not good-enough fan,...because she is a fan for the wrong reasons and in the wrong way" (2013, 87–88). The judgments of typical fan behaviors are formed within a complex network of gendered expectations. The behaviors, the bodies, and the fan objects each bring a gendered significance into the equation. The female sports fan who collects statistical data about baseball may find herself more readily welcomed than the female hockey fan who ships teammates, as Busse notes that a female fan of the Lord of the Rings films is rejected for investment in the actors above the world-building of the narratives (2013, 87). The linking of bodily identities by gender and sexuality with specific textual practices and spaces is thus a consistent theme in both critical and celebratory explorations of both the sentiment album/commonplace book and microblogging platforms.

[3.11]   The differences between the commonplace book and sentiment album are gendered in similar ways to modern fan practices and spaces, in which associations of femininity and queerness are considered damaging because they suggest illegitimacy. Peter Beal describes the changes in the commonplace book; from having been "the primary intellectual tool for organising knowledge and thought among the intelligentsia...of the seventeenth century," to being thought of as "degenerated to a plaything" by the nineteenth century (1993, 134). Note that ideas of immaturity and play are contrasted against intellectual thought, aligning women with childishness and men with rational maturity, just as fan scholars like Henry Jenkins have long noted in discussions of fandom and fan practices. Although reliable usage data based on gender or other demographics is not available for either digital platforms or commonplace books, what is most important here is the dominant public perception. Femininity and queer sexuality are culturally associated with Tumblr, and Tumblr is thus likewise associated with youthfulness, immaturity, and emotional irrationality. Nagle seems to suggest a direct alignment of the development of queer identity with Tumblr usage by young people, and then uses this alignment to denigrate political movements she disagrees with (2017, 69–74). Thus, women's use of a platform can lead to it being considered a denigrated form: under the binaristic understanding of gender in the dominant culture, that which does not share the dominant perspective, which is ironically figured as a neutral perspective, is feminized and/or queered by bodily association.

4. The bricoleur and the poacher

[4.1]   As I have outlined, the exploration of the material spaces in which the romantic-era compilers are working demonstrates the distinct similarities in practices of recombining visual and textual elements in aesthetics and form with the digital platform of Tumblr. To explore the ways in which these practices create meaning, I situate them as examples of what Claude Lévi-Strauss terms bricolage. The bricoleur works with materials that are already available, but with an eye to creating a meaning that is new or different from what is currently available; he "interrogates all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed to discover what each of them could 'signify' and so contribute to the definition of a set which has yet to materialize" ([1966] 2004, 18). The textual response practices familiar to both contemporary Western media fan spaces, and in the construction of the sentiment album, can thus be said to demonstrate an impetus to subvert meaning. However, this perspective suggests that there is perhaps a fixity to originary meaning, and an ownership inherent in authorship. This formulation echoes also through explorations of fan practice such as Henry Jenkins's theorizations based on Michel de Certeau's notion of textual poaching. Ideas of appropriation and poaching bring to the fore ideas of a power negotiation, suggesting that at the heart of these textual remixings is a contested ownership of the text. In foregrounding the concept of bricolage, I hope to approach from a new direction.

[4.2]   The terms bricolage and poaching, although often combined in textual readings of fan practices, are not synonymous. The terminology of textual poaching is overtly about ownership, and the politics of access and use. Bricolage, on the other hand, simply means working with existing materials, and does not directly address the source of those materials. While it is productive to bring these concepts into dialogue together, I also believe it is important to separate them—to be able to explore bricolage practices as situated within, and products of, the power structures that control content, without these practices necessarily actively engaging with a dialogue of ownership. Jenkins suggests that fan bricolage is a process "through which readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards...salvaging bits and pieces" (1992, 27). The language used here reflects these ideas of ownership and textual wholeness, with the idea that the compiler has broken an original text. Yet the clipped prints used to construct a tale told in pictures in sentiment album #178 are not broken shards, but rather carefully adapted portions of a text that were reframed by an

artist, possibly to illustrate the original work itself. They were very carefully excised from their original setting by Reynolds's scissors. The idea that these are jagged shards that do not fit smoothly together in reassembly suggests a more chaotic process, and one that in some way damages the source material. Jenkins's idea of salvage, I think, is more apt, providing an image of the bricoleur as taking cultural flotsam and jetsam: these small images were set adrift from their originary source as soon as they were made; they were created as fragments, as their attached citations attest. This is the same for GIFs; carefully constructed to convey a brief moment, they circulate on digital platforms divorced from their original context, but whole in themselves as communicative memes. The ownership of these images is unimportant; their content is often their sole value in their reuse.

[4.3]   Negative portrayals of both microblogging and commonplacing often suggest that particular textual practices and readings are wrong or illegitimate, just as the imagery of breakage suggests they are damaging, and this certainly makes these transformative works resistant to the dominant narrative. Fetterley suggests that the American canon of literature, legitimated by scholarship and traditional publishing practices, excludes the identities, the very selfhood, of women. As the literature that is lauded foregrounds a male viewpoint, Fetterley states that "to be universal, to be American—is to be *not female*" (1978, xiii). To not accept the invitation to identify with the central protagonists directly, to read without becoming part of a universalized image of a human that elides gender, race, nationality, and other bodily markers and experiences of identity, Fetterley terms "resistant reading." In Fetterley's analysis, resistant reading, and the feminist criticism that it produces, represents "the discovery/recovery of a voice, a unique and uniquely powerful voice capable of cancelling out those other voices...which spoke about us and to us and at us but never for us" (1978, xxiii–xxiv). I posit the bricoleur as a resistant reader, one who seeks to reassert the individuality of his or her identity as a reader, to vocalize that which has been left out of the texts they are offered. However, this should not lead us to assume that the content creators are engaging directly with ideas of ownership, or are overtly attempting a challenge to traditional notions of authorship, because they suggest that signifiers are multivalent. The resistant reader, as theorized by Fetterley, is, by definition, an engaged and active reader but not necessarily an activist reader. I want to suggest that reading these modern and past compilers' actions as those of a bricoleur, rather than a poacher, enables us to understand the lack of direct political engagement in many fan works more effectively as an act of resistance defined as separate from an activist activity.

5. The limits of the bricoleur as resistant reader

[5.1]   The compilation techniques of the sentiment album and Tumblr blogger suggest important similarities in the experiences of those creating transformative works in two differing eras. I have suggested that the construction of multimedia reinterpretations of popular texts is popularly constructed as a distinctly gendered practice associated with young women because it is a resistant mode of reading. This is because readings from perspectives foregrounding nonmasculine or nonheterosexual experiences of sexuality and gender are constructed as resistant, within a literary tradition that privileges rationalist, disembodied (yet predominantly masculine) perspective. This circularity of signification ensures that these practices are marginal. The practices of bricolage have often been advanced as politically resistant; Dick Hebdidge uses this concept to analyze symbols of political resistance in youth subcultures of the twentieth century. His analysis recognizes the limited access to materials experienced by poor working-class youths and that, in overtly political subcultures, the signifiers are chosen because they have already attached signification that is deliberately subverted through the "explosive junction" of seemingly incompatible elements (1979, 106). The bricolage effected by a punk to demonstrate alterity to middle-class notions of commoditized success can thus seem ideologically oppositional to the bricolage assembled by a fan of romantic narratives who wishes to extend the genre. The former seeks to rip apart the signs and signifiers and demonstrate their lack of fixity, seeking the possibility for a new system of meaning; whereas the latter seeks to join in with already established systems of meaning. (This is not to suggest that demanding space within the current system cannot be a politically resistant action, of course; the campaign for same-sex marriage, for example, fundamentally challenged political exclusion.) However, as previous critics who have worked with commonplace books have suggested, "there is a danger of attributing too much subversive significance to commonplacing—it is very unlikely that the women who owned these books saw themselves as part of a 'counterculture' of readers" (Throsby 2009, 234). The creation of transformative works is a resistant reading practice by default, but this does not necessarily always make its practitioners political by design.

[5.2]   Transformative works and spaces can be seen to perpetuate the dominant discourse because the participants work with preexisting materials without interrogating the history, use, and meanings attached to those materials. A key

current debate within cultures of transformative works on Tumblr, and in academic and other reflective discourse around Tumblr, explores the predominance of white characters and ships within fandom, and the whitewashing of people of color in official adaptations and other derivative works. There are whole microblogs devoted to the discussion, with names such as starwarsfandomh8speopleofcolor and fandomhatespeopleofcolor. As blogger Ryn Silverstein (2013) writes, "As a digitized space constructed primarily around hierarchies of image, Tumblr is particularly suited to visual expressions of identity," yet "so much popular fanart feature whitewashed characters of color, even when the characters are explicitly racialized in the source material." Thus, it is my contention that fan practices have remained remarkably consistent from the sentiment album to the microblog because, even though reformulation enables creators to advance a voice that can speak for us, rather than about us and to us, they are unable to do as Fetterley suggests, and cancel out the dominant voice. A resistant reading is *always* a response to an existing voice, just as bricolage works with material that always has a "history, use and meaning," as Leoni Schmidt and Jeroen de Kloet note; the bricoleur "always works with hindsight" (2017, 100). How radical can resistant readings become, and what disruptive potential do they hold, when they continue to work with, rather than replace, the materials created within the patriarchal tradition?

[5.3]   The radical possibilities for bricolage require us to focus less on the ideas of ownership when considering meaning making, and more on our own individual responsibility as users of symbols and images. In discussions about which fan practices come under academic scrutiny, much is made of participatory cultures, and the authenticity or the ownership of the space as well as the content. All fandom is figured as a response to an original, a fan object. However, on Tumblr, as in the pages of the commonplace book, the creator of the original content is simply another participant. The official Tumblr microblog for a star actor or television show production team engages on the same terms as any other actant, as they have limited control as to where their content ends up in the stream, what juxtapositions are made between their post and the next in any user's feed, and what tags and responses their content collects as it circulates. This echoes the commonplace book experience; the original author might have transcribed the poem into a commonplace book for a friend or a fan, but what imagery the book's owner chose to surround it with, and what content additions will be made by other contributors, is not within their control. If the work is surrounded by other literary work, the commonplace book functions rather like an art gallery, with the compiler acting as curator; value judgments based on cultural and intellectual worth might dominate. However, if the poem becomes one element within a young woman's personal romantic reflections, its intellectual properties may be secondary to the emotional, affective response it generates. A hierarchical comparison of the value of these responses is moot; what is key is the active creation of meaning. Through active engagement with cultural materials, there is no passive way to be a bricoleur, and thus we are all complicit in our meaning making.

6. Conclusion

[6.1]   The capability to create radical art from conservative sources lies within all bricoleurs, but it takes conscious choice. The smooth bricolage of the GIF set can interpolate queerness or characters of color into a previously white hetcis space, as though it had always been there, effectively demonstrating belonging. This may be a radical act of reclamation, or a conservative mode that seeks to establish homonormativity alongside heteronormativity. The edits demonstrating the minimal screen time for featured actors of color, as compiled on the Tumblr blog "Every Single Word," may serve as a humorous response to marginalization, or a vigorous clapback, or both. The context is as important as the content, yet the compiler is situated in this environment of collage—in control of their materials as they create their own entry, yet unable to control the context in which it appears as it scrolls along another's timeline. Thus, we see the limits of using the flotsam of the mainstream; the original is always present, always brought into dialogue with the reedit. The lack of control over the text, the space in which the text circulates, and the juxtaposition with other texts means that there is always the potential for both conservativism and radical rereading. Thus the continuation of traditional hierarchies of whiteness and straightness in fan spaces is not simply a function of the media from which fans draw their inspiration. It is indicative of a failure to perform active reading; to demonstrate an engaged knowledge of the message of the originary text, in content or context, is as important in using this material as the use to which it is eventually put. Passive engagement always risks replicating the dominant value systems. Thus, bricolage can only be a powerful tool when it wrests meaning from ownership, and says that the former does not depend upon the latter. However, its proponents must remember that collage form—dependent upon recontextualization to make meaning—cannot afford ignorance of context in the originary materials either.

7. Acknowledgments

8. Note

1. I have not addressed the rewriting of poetry designed to satirize the original or the practice of substituting key names or phrases to make the poem specifically relevant to the reader, though these are frequently utilized in the pages of the albums studied. These forms of parody and pastiche are accepted modes of textual challenge, often utilized by members of literary elites; instead, this study focuses on responses from the margins of cultural production.

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Ms. Marvel, Tumblr, and the industrial logics of identity in digital spaces

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[0.1]   Abstract—This essay examines fan interactions on "The All-New Ms. Marvel Backstage Pass," a Tumblr site initiated by Marvel Comics to promote the *Ms. Marvel* (2014–) comic book. I conceive of this site as a space in which racial, ethnic, and gendered identity dimensions can be uniquely articulated in accordance with identity markers of the Ms. Marvel character, a female teenage Pakistani American Muslim. These articulations are possible due to Tumblr's unique affordances as a mediator of fandom formation—affordances that are both technological and social. For *Ms. Marvel* fans, Tumblr affords opportunities for intertexual and paratextual productivity, orienting emerging fans into broader rites and practices of fandom participation and specific forms of identity expression undertaken in accordance with identity vectors of *Ms. Marvel,* its creators, and its fans. For Marvel Comics, fan activities on "The All-New Ms. Marvel Backstage Pass" are a source of promotional labor inflected with the veneer of authenticity, providing the company with a centralized means of instigating fannish promotion and emboldening an emergent audience that corresponds to institutional desires for audience diversification. This Tumblr therefore brokers the economic and institutional drives of Marvel Comics and the cultural drives of an emergent diversified fandom.

[0.2]   Keywords—Comics; Gender; Identity; Industry; Labor; Marvel Comics; Promotion; Race

1. Introduction

[1.1]   In late 2013, Marvel Comics launched the Tumblr site "The All-New Ms. Marvel Backstage Pass" (https://allnewmsmarvel.tumblr.com/) (henceforth referred to as "Backstage Pass") in anticipation of the company's impending *Ms. Marvel* comic book series. *Ms. Marvel* stars Kamala Khan, a 16-year-old Muslim Pakistani American who takes up the Ms. Marvel mantle. She is also an ardent fan of the Avengers and other superheroes who populate her world, as the first issue of her comic establishes Kamala as a creator of Avengers fan fiction. The character was cocreated by two female Muslims: writer G. Willow Wilson and editor Sana Amanat, the latter of whom is also Pakistani American. Whereas the series garnered critical and commercial success, Backstage Pass evidences its own success by enabling a space in which racial, ethnic, and gender dimensions of the character of Ms. Marvel, its creators, and its fans are uniquely articulated, affirmed, and ennobled.

[1.2]   These unique capabilities stem from Tumblr's reputation and affordances as the "fandom platform du jour" (Deller 2014) and a "particularly friendly site for women, queer people, people of color, and progressives" (Pande and Moitra 2017). While many fans use a variety of platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter, as part of their social media fandom, Tumblr distinguishes itself in the transmedia ecosystem for the ways in which it enables broad fandom coalitions to form, connect, and seamlessly integrate. Pande and Moitra (2017) describe Tumblr as highly interconnected and fluid along lines of gender, sexuality, and race, with many Tumblr sites connecting fan practices to social justice politics. Compared to other platforms, Tumblr is also more adept at inaugurating unpracticed fans into communities, learning community norms, and undertaking intertextual practices, since Tumblr facilitates an

"intertextual discourse" (Thomas 2013) based on its predilection towards highly visual pictographic textuality that ultimately enables a sense of coherency and engagement among many users unfamiliar with intertextual functions. Other have singled out Tumblr as uniquely capable of helping users connect personalized narratives with broader cultural narratives, whether it's connecting personalized feminist practices to wider cultural conceptions of feminism (Brandt and Kizer 2015) or connecting personalized preferences for reconceptualizing the race of individual characters to notions of whiteness among media franchises (Gilliland 2016).

[1.3]   By using Tumblr to engage with Ms. Marvel fans, Marvel Comics realized an opportunity to connect creator Sana Amanat with fans who, like herself, were eager for opportunities to assert their passions for both fandom and cultural belonging. Rather than merely promoting *Ms.Marvel* to fans, Amanat engaged with fans through Backstage Pass, fostering a sense of community by emboldening fans to align fandom and identity expression through social media campaigns and practices. Emboldening and rendering visible active nonwhite and/or female fans feeds into an ongoing effort by Marvel Comics to diversify its staff, creators, characters, and fans. This effort has been driven by an institutional desire for both cultural esteem and economic growth, especially as younger demographics are increasingly comprised of nonwhite and overlapping identity vectors. By opting to develop this Tumblr site, Marvel Comics signaled a desire to engender and legitimate diverse fan coalitions on the Tumblr site, as well as align these fans with the cultural bearings of Ms. Marvel and her creators.

[1.4]   Backstage Pass provides a means for fans to articulate identity formations emblematic of the emergent Ms. Marvel fan culture and consistent with Marvel Comics' desire to foster a readership of greater cultural diversity. Through discursive and textual analyses of fan interactions on this Tumblr site and interviews with Wilson, Amanat, and others in the Marvel Comics institutional hierarchy, I interrogate complications among fans, industry, and identity expression transpiring through Backstage Pass, as a means to more assuredly understand the ways fan practices alternately converge and diverge with the motivations of industry. Even though Tumblr affords unique opportunities for fandoms and identity expression, understanding these complications also tracks to other social media platforms increasingly situated amidst the interplay of industry, fandom, and identity expression. In the next two sections, I account for technological and social affordances of Tumblr that give rise to unique opportunities for identity and fandom expression and, from there, I delve into interactions on Backstage Pass.

2. Tumblr and social affordances

[2.1]   As a social media platform, the technological affordances of Tumblr share some similarities with other sites within the social media ecosystem. Tumblr users are networked with other users who follow the content that these users post, just as Twitter users are interlinked with their followers and Facebook users are interconnected to friends. Interaction among users proceeds along broadly similar lines of functionality and nomenclature. Content posted by Tumblr users can be liked by clicking on a heart-shaped icon, similar to the clicking of a heart-shaped icon as an affirmation of a tweet or other content proliferated through Twitter and also not dissimilar to the Facebook like function through which users may select from a series of emoticons that best express their reaction to the posted content. On Tumblr, content is accessible as a blog post and recirculates by reblogging these posts (similar to Twitter's retweet function or Facebook's share function).

[2.2]   Tumblr's uniqueness as a social media site, however, owes less to its technological affordances and more to the way these technological affordances chart a pathway for distinct social affordances. Scholarly research on Tumblr has thus far considered the site's sociality with regard to affect, self-identification, and cultural exchange within LGBTQIA communities (Cho 2015; Oakley 2016; Fink and Miller 2014); the formation of self-injury narratives (Seko and Lewis 2016); conflict around the use of selfies in a Not Safe For Work (NSFW) community (Tiidenberg 2016); postfeminist conceptions of individuality and conformity (Kanai 2017); and counterpublic communication and interaction (Renninger 2015). A particularly vibrant thread of research focuses on Tumblr as a facilitator of fandom performativity, expression, and practice (Deller 2014; Thomas 2013; Booth 2015; Gilliland 2016; Gonzalez 2016; Pande and Moitra 2017).

[2.3]   Much of this research considers Tumblr a site for renewed forms of sociality, visibility, and practice that resist normative constructs. Fink and Miller describe Tumblr as a "system of simultaneous consumption and production" (2014, 614), enabling users to supplant distinctions between producers and consumers. Tumblr therefore occupies a "liminal space between produced and consumed" (Booth 2015, 74) since Tumblr content is largely comprised of

pictorial-based images and mashups extracted from other online and offline domains. Users then reappropriate, repurpose, and recirculate these images to suit their needs and desires. Through this circulation and interaction, users cohere around shared patterns of distinction and solidify group formation.

[2.4]   Circulating images and other texts throughout Tumblr therefore supersedes circulation as a mere act of distribution or dispersion. Instead, circulating and dispersing texts on Tumblr fosters the creation of "intimate publics," as Tumblr engenders a "sense of commonality and likeness" (Kanai 2017, 5) through not only the circulation of texts, but through reblogging and liking texts. In this sense, reblogging and liking are not only technological modes of dispersion and interaction; they are social modalities that create a pathway for users to "gain credibility according to particularly intense systems of distinction" (Fink and Miller 2014, 615), and therefore solidify cultural bearings around issues of taste, identity, and collectivized inclinations.

3. Identity and fandoms on Tumblr

[3.1]   Tumblr's chief attribute, then, stems from the way its technological affordances open up distinct social affordances. In other words, what it affords from a technological sense is important because of who is afforded renewed conceptions of expression, interaction, and visibility. Renninger notes as much when considering the value of Tumblr for counterpublics "defined by a specific non-mainstream use they have for the site" (2015, 8). This nonmainstream may be fannish preferences that run counter to a predominant taste or practice with respect to fandom communities. In many instances, the nonmainstream inclinations of Tumblr also accommodate users whose self-actualization of identity components do not correspond to normative mainstream constructs.

[3.2]   In a study of LGBTQIA Tumblr users, Oakley notes that many within LGBTQIA communities acknowledge Tumblr as a "safe space where it is appropriate to display labels outside of the [gender] binary" (Oakley 2016, 9), notably in comparison to a social media site like Facebook that more prominently makes personalized information visible to onlookers. Fink and Miller also affirm Tumblr's distinction as a digital space uniquely suited to interlink users oppositional to gender distinctions (2014, 611) as well as their ability to express their own conceptions of queerness, sexuality, and sexual practice. In addition to countervailing dominant cultural norms around gender and the gender binary, these authors also note Tumblr's role in facilitating a "callout culture" in which "people of color can draw awareness to and effectively critique daily practices of racism and cultural appropriation that often go unchecked" (Fink and Miller 2014, 616).

[3.3]   While Tumblr enables many to countervail dominant cultural norms, the platform is nonetheless susceptible to the permutation of oppressive modalities undertaken by otherwise marginalized peoples who amass power within the Tumblr ecosystem. Angela Nagle cites Tumblr's role in callout culture as one also prone to vicious and aggressive reprimands from identitarian vanguards whose callouts are a mix of "performative vulnerability, self-righteous wokeness, and political bullying" (2017, 76). Her notion of an "online economy of virtue" accounts for a tendency among some Tumblr users to self-promote their own marginalization, castigate would-be perpetrators of this marginalization, and thereby accumulate virtue through a concomitant exhibition of victimhood and reprisal built upon a politics of vain moral righteousness (2017, 77). Others have taken stock of Tumblr's political economy, tying its financial precarity to the vast circulation of pornography, hate speech, and the approximation of this content to intellectual property (Feldman 2017), repelling advertisers (as well as many potential users) wary of Tumblr's unwillingness to more strenuously police content. When stressing the possibilities for social and political progress in relation to identity expression and the affordances of Tumblr, the urge to conceive of a space rife with utopian purity must be weighed against asocial consequences proffered by its openness and anonymity.

[3.4]   Despite these consequences, Tumblr is a particularly verdant space for the flowering of online fandoms. Just as Tumblr can enlarge possibilities for users to denormalize hegemonic constructs related to gender, sexuality, and race (as well as their intersection), the platform concomitantly provides an assured pathway for accentuated fandom visibility and practice, notably since fandom is often composed of participants stigmatized for both fannish inclinations and identification with traditionally marginalized communities of people. As John Fiske notes, the very notion of fandom is highly associated with "cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race" (1992, 30). For Fiske, fandom is suffused with a tension between intensifying attributes of normative mainstream cultures and refashioning the values and

characteristics of the culture it opposes (1992, 34). In this way, fandom approximates a cultural distance that is—much like Tumblr—a liminal space of its own, one that exists between sanctioned and separatist arenas.

[3.5]   Fandoms, on Tumblr and elsewhere, often circulate image-based pastiches expropriated and refashioned from mass-produced works, whether it's amateur fan art that reworks depictions of the Marvel Comics character Loki (Thomas 2013) or blogging communities that appropriate imagery and gamic rules from *The Sims* franchise (Deller 2014). The tension between production and consumption, normative and nonnormative, mainstream and subculture, is alive in many of these pastiche texts. Fan-made pastiches and similar refashioned texts often constitute a means of "reflecting on the multitude of available fannish work about other texts" (Booth 2015, 59) and therefore help us understand productive fandom practices as a form of pastiche in their own right. In other words, fandom produces and consumes pastiche as both artifact and practice. This dynamic further helps to illuminate the intersection of two paradigms occurring through Backstage Pass: intertextual and paratextual encounters.

4. Backstage Pass: Intertextuality and paratextuality

[4.1]   The proclivity toward remixes, mashups, and other forms of pastiches and reappropriations is indicative of Tumblr as a space wherein "intertextuality develops wider coherency through its pervasive dispersion" (Thomas 2013), a coherency that gestures toward opportunities and mechanisms for disparate sectors of fandom coalitions to converge around characters, iconography, and other recognizable attributes of media texts.

[4.2]   Backstage Pass is, by virtue of its orientation around the central character of a mass-produced Marvel Comics publication, an intertextual encounter with forms and imagery associated with the primary *Ms. Marvel* text. It's important to keep in mind, however, that the creation of this Tumblr site is not the result of amateur fans advancing their enthusiasm through off-market production. Instead, the site was initiated by Marvel Comics as a promotional vehicle for the *Ms. Marvel* comic, a vehicle that the company likely imagined as an opportunity to both promote Ms. Marvel to fans and leverage their productive activities as promotional vehicles, a trend increasingly common on Tumblr and other social media sites. Citing the emergence of online virality and a tendency for fan works to be reconceptualized as viral marketing, Busse notes the danger of "co-optation and colonization of fan creations, interactions, and spaces" (2015, 112), while stressing the greater danger of "actual exploitation of fan labor" (2015, 112) stemming from industrial motivations to view fannish works as viral marketing tools inflected with authentic fannish devotion. On this front, De Kosnik accounts for fan work (or labor) in addition to fan works as the realization of fan labor exploitation, since these works are infected with the performative value of fan work (2012, 100). When *Ms. Marvel* fans display and express their identity components in accordance with Sana Amanat and Marvel-led initiatives, they undertake work that "should be valued as a new form of publicity and advertising" (De Kosnik 2012, 99).

[4.3]   For Marvel Comics and other companies, fan works are opportunities for authentic off-market promotional tools and a form mimicked by professional marketers seeking to associate their products and brands with user-generated content. In 2016, for example, the magazine *Ad Age* designated MTV as the brand most adept at using Tumblr to market to millennials. This designation was based on MTV's use of a short video minimalistic in its form and length, thereby connoting user-generated creativity (Ha 2016). On Backstage Pass, fan-generated works are valued, then, not only for fostering a sense of community and rendering visible particular demographics, but also for their function as de facto promotional tools imbued with authentic fannish passion.

[4.4]   Even if the site is associated with Sana Amanat and the cultural attributes she shares with Ms. Marvel fans, the site's genesis stems from Marvel Comics' economic and institutional motivations. Central to this tension is the paratextual nature of Backstage Pass and the role of paratextuality as a point of inflection and deflection among industrial practices, fandom interaction, and textual components.

[4.5]   Paratexts are materials that exist in proximity to a primary text (traditionally conceived as mass-produced media objects such as films, comic books, etc.) and influence the understanding and reception of the text. Jonathan Gray describes paratexts as elements that occupy a space between audience, industry, and text, elements that are actively "conditioning passages and trajectories that criss-cross the mediascape" (2010, 23), positioned as they are between audience, industry, and text.

[4.6]   While paratexts can be objects that occupy a spatial domain (such as a website), "paratextuality" is the quality ascribed to the orienting capacities of paratextual elements, be they tangible objects (i.e., an advertisement) or textual associations that condition and inflect upon ascribed meanings, associations, and practices. Part of this inflection is the tendency for paratexts to function as intertexts that alternately "deflect readers from certain texts or to inflect their reading when it occurs" (Gray 2010, 36), indicating that passages and trajectories can be charted by either (or both) fandom pastiche or industrial audience management techniques. In other words, Backstage Pass is a paratext in relation to the *Ms. Marvel* comic, a paratext that orients fan cohesion around the character of Ms. Marvel and reorients these fans to preferred encounters with the *Ms. Marvel* primary text.

[4.7]   These textual/intertextual/paratextual components intersect across Backstage Pass, just as the site intersects across lines of audience/industry, consumption/production, normativity/nonnormativity, and mainstream/subcultural. Given the viability of paratexts as a business practice (Gray 2010, 39), the paratextual qualities of this Tumblr site provide a sanctioned venue for Marvel Comics to embolden the intersectional identity components of the budding Ms. Marvel fandom and therefore expand the demographics, size, and visibility of its audiences.

5. Ms. Marvel, identity, and fandom

[5.1]   Issues of identity and difference informed *Ms. Marvel* from the beginning. Marvel Comics announced the title's publication in November 2013, and shortly thereafter Marvel.com interviewed cocreators Amanat and G. Willow Wilson. When asked "who is the new Ms. Marvel? And what makes her different?" Wilson responds by describing Kamala Khan's "dual identity" as one that "struggles to reconcile being an American teenager with the conservative customs of her Pakistani Muslim family" (quoted in Wheeler 2013).

[5.2]   When Marvel Comics launched Backstage Pass in December 2013, the use of Tumblr may have been influenced by a desire to reach teenagers and young adults enticed by a teenage female superhero. A non-Marvel survey conducted in early 2013 found that 61 percent of teenagers aged 13 to 18 regularly use Tumblr, while 55 percent regularly use Facebook (Lynley 2013), a preference that tracks to all other social media platforms. Respondents aged 19 to 25 also preferred Tumblr over other platforms (Lynley 2013). A move by the digital comics platform ComiXology might have also influenced this decision.

[5.3]   In July 2013, ComiXology transitioned from an in-platform blog to Tumblr. Later that year, ComiXology CEO David Steinberger shed light on what likely incentivized ComiXology's transition to Tumblr: "a new customer is emerging: she's 17–26 years old, college-educated, lives in the suburbs, and is new to comics. She prefers Tumblr to Reddit. She may have never even picked up a print comic" (quoted in McGarry 2013). Steinberger not only accounts for the concentrated teenage demographic of Tumblr but conceives of it as a space oriented toward females and their potential preference for consuming digital comics. Just as Julie Wilson and Emily Chivers Yochim describe Pinterest as a "highly feminized platform" with the potential to impact "how women move through and feel everyday experiences" (2015, 233), Steinberger similarly perceives of Tumblr as a feminized space suggestive of how some women move and feel their way into online comics culture.

[5.4]   In the run-up to the publication of *Ms. Marvel* #1, Marvel Comics used Tumblr to create and strengthen audience ties. In doing so, the company provided a space ennobling of oft-marginalized identity characteristics that do not necessarily conform to tropes, iconography, and conventions commonly associated with superhero characters and texts. While Tumblr's unique social affordances are an integral component to the ways these nonconformist possibilities took shape for Backstage Pass fans, the Ms. Marvel character and comics text are also key to understanding the way in which interactions on this Tumblr site serviced the visibility of traditionally marginalized fans.

[5.5]   The Ms. Marvel character and text enable fans to both identify with Ms. Marvel and her identity vectors and also disidentify with normalized conceptions of a superhero's visual, narrative, and cultural elements. Landis notes the overlap of Ms. Marvel fan engagement with the comic book, character, and creators in ways "meaningful to their own subject formation" (2016, 43), especially when Amanat prompts engagement with reapproprations of Ms. Marvel imagery.

[5.6]   This prompting is evident—and perhaps more deliberate—in the first post on Backstage Pass on December 27, 2013. The post features the cover to the impending first issue in which Kamala is portrayed from the waist up, with the

top edge of the page cutting off her eyes and the upper portion of her head. Accompanying text describes the intent of the picture to capture critical aspects of her identity: "note the bracelet with her name written in Arabic, while the scarf around her neck is representative of her culture and faith." Similarly, the first line of a running header atop the blog notes "'Ms. Marvel' is the first Marvel comic to feature a Muslim super heroine."

[5.7]   Marvel Comics' discourse suggests that the company conceived of Tumblr as readily equipped to attract female fans and similarly believed the character's racial, ethnic, and religious attributes were a critical aspect of how the character's depiction on Backstage Pass could enable a platform comprised of diverse voices. The image's religiously freighted signifiers highlight Ms. Marvel's "complex and unstable entanglements of gender, religion, and identity" (Khoja-Moojli and Niccolini 2015, 25) and work in combination with the accompanying text to ensure that racial, gender, and religious aspects are foregrounded as significant identity markers. The foregrounding of such imagery plays a critical role in reproducing and resisting "dominant constructions of Muslims, Islam, and immigrants in the United States" (Khoja-Moojli and Niccolini 2015, 25). Ms. Marvel's visual iconography similarly reproduces and resists presiding depictions of Muslims, Islam, and vectors of gender and race entangled therein, aspects that Marvel consciously heightened through Backstage Pass.

[5.8]   A notable example is Sana Amanat's inducement for Backstage Pass fans to help spread the word about the upcoming release of the first issue by approximating their own identity with that of the fictional Kamala Khan. In a post entitled "I am Kamala Khan. So Are You," dated January 20, 2014, Amanat holds a print copy of *Ms. Marvel* #1 over part of her face so that her eyes and the top of her head complete the bodily aspects of Kamala omitted from the cover image (figure 1). A brief note accompanying the image asked followers to submit similar pictures by February 5, the day of the series' launch. In this way, Marvel explicitly asked its fans to assert their fandom. It also implicitly required fans to complete the image of Kamala Khan by using the print comic in ways that highlight gender and racial markers for fans and character alike. These fans were also given another implicit requirement: perform labor on behalf of Marvel Comics. Given that many companies, including Marvel Comics, increasingly rely on unpaid fan labor to spread their brand and suffuse it with value (Jones 2014), complying with the "I am Kamala Khan" initiative meant that fans were undertaking promotional labor by directly promoting the *Ms. Marvel* comic itself and indirectly promoting Marvel Comics as a brand actively engaged with issues of diversity across content, intellectual property, and audiences.

Figure 1. Sana Amanat completes the cover of *Ms. Marvel* #1.

[5.9]   Fan reactions to the "I am Kamala Khan" request exemplify Fiske's notion of "enunciative productivity" (1992, 38) of fandom whereby the enunciating capacities of fans leverage socially specific forms of communication to generate and reinforce discourse unique to their fandom community. When Fiske notes that many fans choose particular fandoms based on "the oral community they wished to join" (1992, 38), he implicates enunciative productivity as not just an ancillary function of fandoms but a capacity highly determinative of how and why fans cohere around a cultural object.

[5.10]   Many fans responding to Amanat's request chose to enact their enunciative productivity on Tumblr, Instagram, and Twitter. On February 5 2014, Twitter user @ksreenivasan24, for example, posted a picture of a female completing the *Ms. Marvel* cover, while a male also poses with a copy of the *Ms. Marvel* comic so that the entirety of his face is visible. On February 17, 2014, on Tumblr, @carolineballardreports posted a picture of a woman identified as Lena Shareef completing the *Ms. Marvel* cover (figure 2), alongside subsequent photos of Lena interacting with the comic and a photo from earlier that same day of Lena standing outside New York City's Midtown Comics (figure 3). Recalling Tumblr's ability to connect personal lived experiences to larger cultural narratives, we see in this post the way @carolineballardreports used Tumblr to enunciate Lena's personal experience with the *Ms. Marvel* comic and then, by virtue of approximation to the Midtown Comics picture, connect this personal experience with cultural spaces for consumption and interaction, to not only become Kamala Khan, but to also become a knowledgeable participant in comics culture.

Figure 2. A fan replicates Amanat's pose with Ms. Marvel #1.

Figure 3. Outside Midtown Comics in New York City.

[5.11]   These enunciative productivities find accord with Kristen J. Warner's recent work on black female fans of the television show *Scandal* (2012–) for whom "producing content is a necessary act of agency" (2015, 34) as they seek visibility in cultures that conflate fan identity with racial whiteness. Similarly, at Marvel's behest, fans of Ms. Marvel strove to make themselves visible within a comics culture prone to code normavitity as masculine and white. Their heterogeneous use of platforms also suggests possibilities for fandoms to stake out territories on Tumblr and elsewhere that affirm multitudinous identity expression and resist normativity as a hegemonic construct. As previously noted, Tumblr and fandom operate within liminal spaces between, respectively, production/consumption and industry/audience, suggesting that movement both within and external to spaces such as Backstage Pass may occur with greater fluidity, especially as it corresponds to the more fluid nature by which identity is understood, enunciated, and rendered visible across this community of fans and their spatial permutations.

[5.12]   These enunciative capacities also help undermine presiding conceptions of fans as apolitical and disinterested in puncturing oppressive normativity (Warner 2015, 36). In this way, Backstage Pass affords opportunities for fandom as an enterprise oriented not just around a character or brand; it readies emergent perceptions of who a fan is, what she looks like, and how she practices her fandom. For Marvel Comics, however, this enlargement also presents an opportunity to inaugurate these fans into preferred industrial practice, particularly as Marvel leveraged Backstage Pass to channel these fans toward the company's preferred spaces for comics consumption.

6. Diversity, politics, and the logics of consumption

[6.1]   For Marvel Comics, Backstage Pass affords the company two opportunities to serve its institutional and economic goals. First, the site enables Marvel to grow and diversify its comics-buying audience by sanctioning a space that accommodates diverse identities, fan practices, and technological flexibility. Second, Backstage Pass is a centralized means of channeling this newly emboldened fandom toward comics specialty stores. With very little exception, comics specialty stores are the exclusive point of consumption for serialized periodical comic books. Although many comics initially produced as periodicals are subsequently collected into bound volumes more widely available outside specialty stores, the sales of periodicals often economically underwrite their subsequent collection into bound volumes, necessitating a degree of emphasis on periodical comics for stores and companies alike. For a comics company like

Marvel, sales of periodicals have historically been interpreted as indicative of market interest across publishing formats, while, for specialty stores, their near-exclusive domain over the sale of periodicals provides a central part of their allure as consumptive and cultural sites of exchange. Thus, Marvel has a vested economic interest in preserving the overall economic health of the comics specialty market, as sales to these stores are both a source of revenue and an important measure of market interest for subsequent formats.

[6.2]   While Marvel could have used the Tumblr site to promote the sale of *Ms. Marvel* on ComiXology or its own digital storefront, many Backstage Pass posts make no mention of digital comics and instead urge fans toward specialty stores. Examples include a January 10, 2014 admonition to "pre-order from your local comic shop by 1/13/14 to guarantee your copy!"; a February 5, 2014 (the day of the first issue's release) headline that reads "It's Ms. Marvel DAY. You in a comic shop yet?"; and an April 16, 2014, post proclaiming "Patience is a virtue—oh stop it, just get to your comic shops already. It's Ms. Marvel Day once again. Issue #3 is on sale NOW." Despite the seeming lack of promotion for digital comics on Backstage Pass, every purchase of a printed Marvel Comics book is a de facto purchase of the digital comics version, since Marvel Comics includes in all its print issues a redemption code for a digital version of the print comic available through Marvel's mobile application (an initiative in place since 2012). Thus, emphasizing physical comic book stores can be interpreted as either Marvel prioritizing direct market stores and print comics over digital counterparts or, instead, as an attempt to incentivize fans to establish a footprint in Marvel's digital ecosystem by situating the print comic as a value-added entry point into digital comics consumption and readership. These two possibilities are also not necessarily mutually exclusive, as leveraging long-standing distribution channels to augment the scale of audience investment and perceived value is a common practice in many industries beyond the comic book industry or, for that matter, nonmedia industries. While Marvel's exact intentions are subject to speculation, less susceptible to such speculation is evidence of *Ms. Marvel*'s success in both print and digital: one week after the first issue's publication, *Ms. Marvel* #1 was Marvel's best-selling digital title for that week (based on rankings on Marvel's digital storefront) and the first print issue was ultimately reprinted six times.

[6.3]   Shortly after this printing, reports indicated that digital versions of *Ms. Marvel* still outpaced sales of its print counterpart. By November 2014, comics journalist Heidi MacDonald noted Marvel's "established talking point that Ms. Marvel is a digital hit" (2014). Indeed, after the initial digital sales success of *Ms. Marvel,* utterances of this success were often folded into broader discourses. Marvel publisher Dan Buckley described *Ms. Marvel* as a "legitimate top-selling title for us in all channels" (ICV2 2015). Digital and print, in this and many other instances, were often collapsed into a pithy talking point that conflated their successes.

[6.4]   MacDonald speculated that the repetition of this talking point represented "perhaps a teensy hint at why diversifying the audience is not a dirty word any more" (2014) for Marvel Comics. Just a few months later, Buckley seemed to verify this sentiment through an endorsement of Axel Alonso and his efforts to be "very aggressive in making sure that we have more female lead characters, that we have a more diverse palette of ethnicity in the books" (quoted in ICV2 2015). He described comics conventions and social media as feedback mechanisms that provide a sense of an increasingly diverse readership. On that front, *Ms. Marvel*'s sixth printing spoke to the "growing number of women and supporters of multi-cultural storylines who are entering the fold" (Romano 2014).

[6.5]   By mid-2016, Ms. Marvel's increasing visibility and success was evident in the continued publication of her comic, the manifold formats in which the comics were published (periodical, trade paperback, and deluxe hardcover editions), her inauguration into the Avengers and Champions teams (and her continued presence in their respective comics), and her appearance in the animated *Avengers Assemble* television program. As of this writing, the last Backstage Pass post is dated August 4, 2016. This post sought to align Kamala Khan's identity components with American virtues of inclusivity, openness, and plurality, and further implore fans to vote in the upcoming presidential election. The post features the cover for *Ms. Marvel* #13 (Vol.2) in which Kamala Khan strikes an assertive stance set against the backdrop of an American flag. The image "speaks volumes about who Ms. Marvel is and what she stands for" and ends with a reminder that the issue is out in November and therefore a "great reminder to get out and vote."

[6.6]   The subsequent results of the electoral college were not likely the intentions of this admonition to vote. In the wake of the election, however, even as Backstage Pass went silent, fans took to Tumblr and elsewhere to assert their identity components in conjunction with Ms. Marvel and in contrast to president-elect Donald Trump's ideologies and policies (particularly the Muslim Ban on entry into the United States). In doing so, these fans replicated the logics of the

"I Am Kamala Khan" initiative to not only assert personal and collective dignity along lines of race, ethnicity, and gender, but to also foreground Ms. Marvel as a character oppositional to the new political climate.

[6.7]   While it might seem somewhat paradoxical that fans were both compliant with an initiative instigated by Marvel Comics as a promotional vehicle and later repurposed the initiative to assert civic and cultural politics, such paradoxes are often at the heart of translating fan participation into participatory civic politics. Brough and Shresthova note that fan-generated works transpiring through commercial venues are often both resistant and compliant, but the political significance of these works is the contestation and alterations of cultural codes and discourses so that "resulting content is consumed and reconfigured as a resource for mobilization" (2012). Seen through this lens, tactics used to comply with the original "I Am Kamala Khan" initiative can later be repurposed as tactics of civic resistance. Just as compliance meant asserting identity markers corresponding to Ms. Marvel, the repurposing of these same cultural codes and discourses became the grounds to mobilize contingencies of fans resistant to xenophobic, racist, misogynistic, and anti-LGBTQIA politics brought to the forefront through the election of Donald Trump. If the question of translating fan practices into civic political activity hinges on "how to move from having a voice within a subculture to being heard more broadly in civic and political spaces" (Brough and Shresthova 2012), the repurposing of tactics associated with the "I Am Kamala Khan" initiative demonstrates some headway in bridging politically minded enunciations across fandoms and civic arenas.

[6.8]   Shortly after the implementation of Trump's "Muslim Ban" in late January 2017, comics artist Phil Noto circulated a modified version of his cover art for Marvel Comics' *Civil War II* #0. In the original, Ms. Marvel stares out from the cover towards the reader as she aggressively rips in half a picture of Captain Marvel (figure 4). In the modified version, the picture she tears asunder is of Trump. The image not only circulated widely on social media, but was one among numerous instances of fans approximating their own identity with that of Kamala Khan in a manner similar to the "I am Kamala Khan" initiative. One prominent example is an image posted by Twitter user @navdeep_dhillon and ultimately used as the header image for a *Vox* story on Ms. Marvel's newfound status as a resistive icon (Romano 2017). In this image, the modified Noto image is juxtaposed with a picture of a real-life girl ripping apart a photo of Trump (figure 5). Her facial expression and dress are similar to those of Ms. Marvel, and similarly code as nonwhite. Another similarity fans such as these share with Ms. Marvel is her love of fan fiction. As previously noted, within the context of the diagetic shared Marvel Comics universe, Ms. Marvel creates Avengers fan art and stories. In the first issue of *Ms. Marvel,* Kamala's fan fiction comic sees the Avengers defeat a space creature threatening Planet Unicorn (Wilson 2014). In this way, Kamala shares with Ms. Marvel fans a capacity to reimagine characters and circumstances, notably in the face of dominant narratives. When Ms. Marvel fans are "scripted toward similar identifications and reimaginings" (Landis 2016, 36), they do so as a way to justify their identity attributes and fan preferences with the intent of counteracting dominant narratives, be it civic political narratives that correlate racial and religious signifiers with threats to national security or narratives within fan cultures that downplay the significance of fannish participation based on gendered and/or racial conceptions.

Figure 4. Cover to *Civil War II* #0 showing Ms. Marvel ripping a picture of Captain Marvel in half.

Figure 5. Figure 5. Life imitates art: Donald Trump replaces Captain Marvel on the cover of *Civil War II* #0; and a young girl imitating Ms. Marvel tears the photo of Donald Trump.

[6.9]   Within all media industries, there are ongoing struggles between fans and institutions, including the incorporation of fannish tastes into institutional market strategies and fans' tendencies to "excorporate" these institutions' products (Fiske 1992, 47). The fan excorporation of Ms. Marvel from industrial text to fandom pastiche to politically charged icon exemplifies the possibilities for fandoms to foster a sense of community, values, and practices that produce tangible outcomes in civic spheres, industrial markets, and lived experience. Looking ahead, one of the challenges facing Marvel Comics, its fans, and the broader marketplaces of ideas and commerce is the extent to which a fandom such as that engendered through Backstage Pass aligns with long-standing business practices and the capability of Marvel to shift its corporate mechanisms to meet the desires of emergent audiences.

7. Conclusion

[7.1]   In an April 2017 interview, Wilson spoke to this dilemma, describing comics culture as split into two broad sectors of audienceship and the comics industry at large as one hesitant to "recognize that these two audiences might want two very different things out of the same series. They don't shop in the same places, they don't socially overlap, and their tastes might not overlap" (quoted in Tolentino 2017).

[7.2]   As alluded to by Wilson, the bifurcation of comics culture into two prominent audienceships cuts across spaces of consumption, sociality, and cultural identification. While Warner cautions that producers of media texts are often "ill prepared to discuss and negotiate bodies unlike their imagined demographic" (2015, 37), one legacy of Backstage Pass and the success of *Ms. Marvel* is their intertwined role in motivating Marvel Comics to continue reimagining its superheroes with an eye toward gender, racial, and cultural diversity that expand upon the ways Marvel traditionally imagined its demographics. To that extent, the company's 2017 anthology series *Generations* consists of ten issues featuring classic depictions of superheroes alongside their contemporary counterpart, including an issue pairing Kamala with Carol Danvers, who previously assumed the mantle of Ms. Marvel. Many of these contemporary counterparts reflect Marvel's attempts to broaden the identity components of its superheroes, such as the female Jane Foster taking over as Thor; African American Sam Wilson (formerly the Falcon) becoming Captain America; Korean American Amadeus Cho becoming The Hulk; and African American female RiRi Williams becoming Ironheart, the primary Iron Man stand-in.

[7.3]   The sales success of *Ms. Marvel* across multiple formats, alongside the proliferation of Kamala's imagery across horizontally integrated mass-market ventures (i.e., *Avengers Assemble* cartoon; merchandising), validates for Marvel Comics the economic viability of Ms. Marvel as both a character and brand and also gives the company leeway to claim an aptitude for creating characters that resonate with audiences increasingly composed of greater gender, racial, and ethnic plurality. The mobilization of Ms. Marvel as a signifier of personal identity, cultural belonging, and political resistance across online and offline spaces both reinforces corporate objectives and extends beyond the boundaries of institutional ideology, as the Backstage Pass showcases the possibilities for Tumblr and other digital spaces to serve as a proxy for overlapping industrial and cultural interests, while continually negotiating the points at which unaligned vectors collide and repel amidst shifts in institutional, social, and political climates. In this way, the formation of the Ms. Marvel fandom on Backstage Pass also orients to circumstances in which the affordances of digital spaces are, alternately, a flowering for fandom identity and expression, the channeling of their labors toward commodified objectives, and the precarious nature of maintaining corporate-sanctioned spaces amidst evolving market, institutional, social, and political conditions.

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The JohnLock Conspiracy, fandom eschatology, and longing to belong

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[0.1]　Abstract—Using The JohnLock Conspiracy (TJLC), developed by the fandom of the BBC television series *Sherlock* (2010–17), as an exemplar, we analyze how the functionality of Tumblr supported the development of a fandom eschatology. In this instance, eschatology is not religious but secular: fans claimed to know what the final end of the *Sherlock* series was to be, and they interpreted various signs as indicating that this would happen. The infrastructure and interactive design of Tumblr as a platform creates a foundation permitting fan group radicalization. Because of Tumblr's infrastructure and gratification system, forming a tight-knit group is difficult. By developing and using eschatology as a belief system, fans create boundaries, decide membership and proper behavior, and enable the policing of other fans.

[0.2]　Keywords—Group; Platform infrastructure; Radical fan groups; Secular eschatology; *Sherlock;* TJLC; Tumblr

1. Introduction

[1.1]　I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.

—Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891)

[1.2]　In this analysis of the relation between a social media platform's infrastructure and the creation of a fandom eschatology, we attempt to understand how the functionality of Tumblr supported the development of The JohnLock Conspiracy (TJLC), a fandom of the BBC TV series *Sherlock* (2010–17), as a fandom eschatology. We explore fandom's radical groups through the lens of a secular eschatology in order to understand why and how these groups emerge within fandom, and thrive or collapse when the end result of their beliefs fails to materialize.

[1.3]　In *Homo Ludens,* Johan Huizinga ([1939] 1949) explains how play is conducted within a magic circle, which is set apart from real life. While within this magic circle, the players must play by the game's rules, which must be taken seriously or else the game would fall apart. Fandom can be likened to this magic circle: within in, fans develop serious analyses of TV shows, engage in meta, and create fan art. Yet for some fans, it stays serious even outside the magic circle. While what follows will focus on a specific group dynamic on a specific platform, fandom wank, policing, and antifans have been present ever since fans organized into groups. Indeed, Bacon-Smith (1992) shows how fanzine editors acted as gatekeepers, with their perceptions of what made good fan fiction crucial for its publication in the first place. Even after the hard-copy fanzine era that Bacon-Smith describes in her ethnography, fans continued in this gatekeeping role, with, for example, fans maintaining online lists in which they decided what was worth mentioning.

[1.4]   With inclusion comes exclusion, and through the years fandoms have had their share of wars and upheavals (https://fanlore.org/wiki/The_Blake%27s_7_Wars; https://fanlore.org/wiki/Ship_War; https://fanlore.org/wiki/CrystalWank). Inevitably, infighting occurs between groups—infighting that evokes the seriousness of religious believers rather than supposedly fun-loving creators of fan works. We understand TJLC as a version of secularized eschatology—secularized because TJLC is not a religion, yet the actions of its proponents express characteristics of forms of eschatology common to many religions. Eschatology denotes events that lie in the future; it may signify "the last days" or "the end of days," much like religious eschatology may focus on an upcoming apocalypse, as Christianity does (Collins 1999b, viii; see also Collins 1999a).

[1.5]   With secularization increasing after the Enlightenment, eschatology gradually became decoupled from specific religious contexts. Instead it came to signify any thinking about the future and anticipating an end within this future. In the twentieth century, it also found its way into more secular and popular contexts, like the Doomsday Clock; it also appeared in films depicting the end of the world, like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) or the aptly named *Armageddon* (1998) (O'Leary 2000). Although eschatology has come to encompass both religious and nonreligious contexts, here we refer to eschatology as a way of thinking about the future that anticipates an inevitable end.

[1.6]   The case of TJLC as a secular eschatology relies on the group's belief regarding what must inevitably happen at the end of the program: John Watson and Sherlock Holmes (JohnLock) must get together romantically. While explaining and developing this belief, fans create meaning and control, both within the canonical text—*Sherlock*—and within the problems and challenges users face in on- and off-line worlds. When the final episode of the series, 4.03 "The Final Problem," aired on January 15, 2017, fans found the ending ambiguous. Some were convinced that the pairing was upheld; others were convinced that such a pairing was forever closed off. Reactions to the final episode ranged from disbelief that it was in fact the final episode (https://fanlore.org/wiki/The_JohnLock_Conspiracy) to the physical destruction of Sherlock merchandise (figure 1).
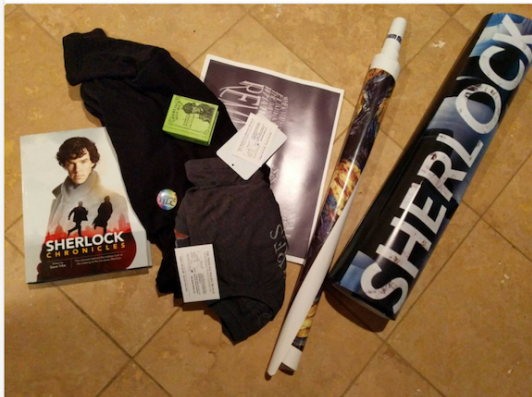
All my stuff besides the DVDs before I destroy it

After the destruction. only saved the DVDs so my parents can watch see an example of queerbaiting

Figure 1. Screenshot, January 16, 2017, of a now-deleted Tumblr account showing *Sherlock* memorabilia before (top) and after (bottom) its destruction.

[1.7]   In what follows, we provide an overview of TJLC and then argue for the need to broaden our understanding of groups like TJLC. We also acknowledge the harm groups like TJLC cause within fandom, as well as the harm inflicted on members of TJLC by other fans.

2. Methods

[2.1]   Here we use an autoethnographic approach, which provides a deep understanding of the processes and events unfolding in fandom, to collect data and try to understand the do's and don'ts of fandom (Ellis 2004). We collected data from the Archive of Our Own (AO3; https://archiveofourown.org/), from our own Tumblr blogs, and from various online fandom sources. We acknowledge the limitation of being unable to research the whole of TJLC. Instead, we tried to follow relevant threads, although of course other users or posts might have had a larger impact than the ones we found and describe here. Neither of us engaged in online discussions except for a few reblogs and likes. Lurking on the internet is one of the ways that researchers can examine their subject without its being affected. While Tumblr makes lurking easy, and much of the data can be collected from what seems like public places, trespassing is still an ethical research issue. We did not directly approach fans considered as being at the center of TJLC because outing ourselves as researchers would have put us in a direct line of attack, leading to possible personal repercussions. However, we made the fans we talked to aware of our research.

3. The JohnLock Conspiracy

[3.1]   In 2010, BBC One aired the first episode of *Sherlock,* a modernization of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective tales about Sherlock Holmes. Starring actors Benedict Cumberbatch as Sherlock Holmes and Martin Freeman as John Watson, the series became an instant hit. Only three episodes per season were released, and as of September 2017, the series comprises four seasons plus one special and a mini episode. The ratings for *Sherlock* indicate a clear decline, from a Rotten Tomatoes 100 percent positive rating for the first season to 55 percent for the final episode of season 4.

[3.2]   When 4.03 "The Final Problem" aired, members of TJLC were convinced that John and Sherlock would kiss. When the episode concluded without any kiss, TJLC began discussing the possibility—nay, the actuality—of a fourth yet-unaired secret episode, which would canonize JohnLock. This idea became so established that many fans watched the BBC miniseries *Apple Tree Yard* (2017), which aired on Sunday, January 22, 2017, a week after the last *Sherlock* episode. The consensus of these fans was that the BBC would broadcast only a few minutes of the this alleged show; then the character of Moriarty would interfere, and the real final episode of *Sherlock* would be shown instead (Lewis 2017; O'Connor 2017). Alas, *Apple Tree Yard* was indeed another show. Despite this blow, TJLCers began discussing when the actual final episode would air, interpreting as signs of the upcoming event the numbers and dates given in canon and in interviews by producers, writers, and actors. As of this writing, however, this alleged secret final episode has not aired.

[3.3]   The impetus for TJLC came from a post by AB (name anonymized), posted on January 26, 2014, entitled "What John Watson Likes, or How to Ship JohnLock without Really Trying" (figure 2).
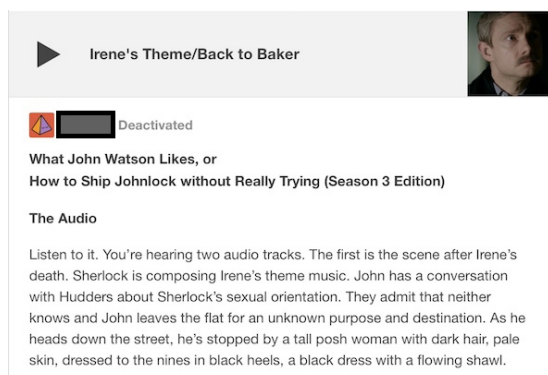
Figure 2. Screenshot of the first part of AB's "What John Watson Likes, or How to Ship JohnLock without Really Trying," January 26, 2014, which founded The JohnLock Conspiracy.

[3.4]   AB later stated that the post was thought of as a game, not to be taken seriously. Still, the basic idea of the post —the perception of the various hints and interactions between John and Sherlock in the series, found fertile ground among a group of JohnLockers, who coined the term The JohnLock Conspiracy. In a later post, AB wrote about how the idea of the death of the author was meant as a mode of distancing from the conspiracy (figure 3). AB eventually deactivated the blog in 2017 to avoid further hate and aggression from TJLC community.

Mofftiss as Lazarus: TJLC and the Resurrection of The Author

The above quotes come from **Roland Barthes**' short, but astoundingly influential essay, **"The Death of the Author."** Nearly everyone who studies literature and/or cinema at the graduate level has read Barthes during the course of their study. Most of us tend to take his tenants for granted. Barthes is known, in part, for his engaging writing style and keen observations. I love him, find his work illuminating and poetic. It's absolutely core to my philosophy of reading. **Every meta I've ever written** is in conversation with Barthes on some level.

Fandom loves The **Author**, loves to hate The Author. The *Sherlock* fandom desires Moftiss, needs Moftiss. While most of us academic types cockily think we've long ago hammered the last nail in The Author's coffin, many members of the *Sherlock* fandom gleefully point us to the *Empty Hearse*. The Johnlock Conspiracy (#tjlc) is the ultimate Lazarus narrative; tjlc is the resurrection of the Author-God.
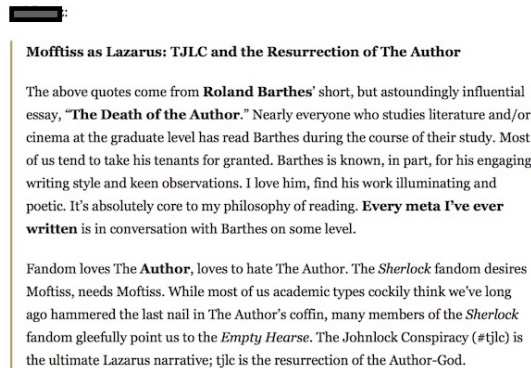
Figure 3. Screenshot of part of AB's post regarding the death of the author, June 10, 2014. "Mofftiss" is the portmanteau for Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, the writers of *Sherlock.*

[3.5]   The notion of "TJLC—The JohnLock Conspiracy" was coined a few hours after the first broadcast of 3.03 "The Sign of Three." Already meta had been written regarding the possibility of JohnLock, but from then on, TJLCers meticulously analyzed every detail and scene, every shrug of Moffat or pause from Gatiss. The meta showed a profound knowledge of a variety of areas—music, color symbolism, cinematography, mathematics. Absolutely everything was examined to find hidden leads. Gestures, dialogue, clothes, camera angles, wallpaper, books, and soundtrack were scrutinized. Nothing was too small or too big; everything found equal consideration. The hope that Moffat and Gatiss were following a sophisticated and secret already laid-out plan became a certainty. Analysis and interpretation of the available material was turned into proof of JohnLock.

[3.6]   Conspiracies like TJLC take their point of departure the possible development of future texts. As such, it has the aura of a soothsayer trying to convince his followers that he alone can predict what will happen—or, as a secular eschatological approach shows, it becomes a belief in a future outcome. The conspiracy exists in the mind of the fan group because they are convinced that the producers and writers of the show know the endgame—in this case, JohnLock. Once the fans have deduced the result, these same fans have to accept that the producers will keep this a secret until the big reveal. Yet this is the crux of the problem. When interpreting future texts—and through it the development, or its lack, of characters and their relationships—outspoken members of the conspiracy group analyze existing texts and thereby describe, via elaborate explanations and proof, the certain future that is to come. Certainly this is a worthwhile reading of the text, and many fans engage in it, trying to find hints of future development for the beloved possible pairing, or just playing around with imaginative ideas to be used in fan fiction or fan works.

[3.7]   Problems arise once these ideas are taken as the truth, when one group of fans starts to divide fans into believers and unbelievers, into those who are right thinking and those who should be persecuted and shamed for their perceived disbelief. These groups find common ground in their spreading of the one true belief and in their fierce fighting of anybody who opposes them. Anything that may be used as to support and confirm the theory will be applied, and anything contradicting it will be ignored, dismissed as a lie, or attacked. If the producers or actors involved in the show deny the conspiracy, then the fan group will accuse them of lying or hiding something. As our research showed, sometimes it could be difficult to prove a certain remark made by the writers. For example, Gatiss (2016) directly accused the press of quoting him incorrectly regarding the idea of JohnLock, and Moffat notes, "It is infuriating frankly, to be talking about a serious subject and to have Twitter run around and say oh that means Sherlock is gay. Very explicitly it does not" (Parker 2016). Contradictions like this fuel the belief of a conspiracy.

[3.8]   Another problem arises through the way fans choose to view the canonical text. The scholastic fallacy (Bourdieu 2000, 49–84) may be found in the academic idea of contemplation and reason when thinking about the world and its inhabitants. As Bourdieu reminds us, everyday life is nothing like that. TJLC meta and discussions show exactly this kind of fallacy. Fans seem to believe that every little sign in *Sherlock* has a deeper meaning and must be interpreted within the rubric of an inevitable JohnLock pairing. Despite the writers' repeated explanations of how they concocted ideas on the go and developed plot points within the series on a whim, TJLCers stood their ground, claiming that everything shows the endgame to be JohnLock.

4. TJLC as a group

[4.1]   In understanding TJLC as a group, we follow Noyes's (1995) suggestion that the notion of a group is shorthand for a dialogue between an "empirical network of interactions in which a culture is created and moves, and the community of social imaginary that occasionally emerges in practice" (452). The network of interactions is in our case made up of the actual exchanges taking place on and mediated by the functionality that Tumblr uses to facilitate dialogue. The social imaginary is in our case a secularized eschatology. We follow Taylor (2007) in understanding a social imaginary not as a set of ideas but rather as what it enables: making sense by studying the practices of a group.

[4.2]   The practices of TJLC are in alignment with the notion of authorial intent being clearly stated in the text. In this, TJLC differs from practices of transformative fandom in which the author is dead, as stated by AB in figure 3. Defining TJLC by using existing fandom terms turns out to be challenging. Because TJLC is perceived as disruptive and aggressive by other fans, the terms "antifan" or "nonfan" come to mind.

[4.3]   The definition of antifans has changed through the years, coming to refer to different kinds of fan groups or nonfans who in some way are opposed to the canonical text, other fan groups, or certain kind of ships. When Gray coined the term in 2003, the antifan was defined as a fan who strongly disliked the original text. The term "antifan" has since been expanded to fans who could be defined as "inverse loving critics" (Duffett 2016, 48), meaning fans of a given text complaining about the same for not meeting expectations. Although this sounds close to a definition of TJLC (complaining about the lack of JohnLock), it is still a misleading characterization. TJLC is about interpreting the text, and thus accepting the original TV series, but it is also about understanding the text as a sign indicating what is to come. As such, there is no complaining about how the TV series as such is developing; rather, there is a need to further interpret and deduce when and how the "real" endgame will play out. Any complaining about the series would actually be a contradiction to the belief in TJLC because the series itself lays the ground for the belief.

[4.4]   Antifans should instead be seen as groups of fans fighting for discursive dominance and struggling to reach consensus about how a given text should be interpreted. Through this ongoing discussion, fans are able to construct competing truths about the series (Johnson 2007, 286). Hills (2002) talks about the "endlessly deferred narrative" and "hyperdiegesis" to show how a given, finite text can be retold and reinterpreted within fandom spaces (131). These discussions can create great chasms between fan groups because "fans do not easily agree to disagree" (Johnson 2007, 288). This is further enhanced with regard to TJLC because the group sees the text as the ultimate truth, with only one given result possible: JohnLock. Any fans disagreeing with or doubting this result would have to be convinced of the rightness of TJLC or be ostracized.

[4.5]   Although we see TJLC as a secular eschatology, it differs from Hills's notion of a cult (2002, 131–71). According to Hills, a cult is dependent on the text to be interpreted and speculated about. For TJLC, there is no speculation regarding the certain outcome of the text. Everything must be interpreted and discussed with an eye to the endgame: JohnLock. This is only possible through the development of a clear belief system that enables all members to see themselves as true believers—or that permits fans to point out nonbelievers.

[4.6]   TJLC might have different motivations than trolls, but because of the group's strong belief in a certain outcome of the text, their behavior in *Sherlock* fandoms creates fear and anger, resulting in what might be described as shouting matches, which are destructive to the discourse and the creation of fan works. Many fans have left *Sherlock* fandom, citing TJLC as the cause. Fans who write posts discussing or providing meta on JohnLock are reluctant to tag them accordingly, afraid of being drawn into an argument and becoming a target. This goes for both die-hard TJLCers and fans who oppose the idea of the canon endgame being JohnLock.

[4.7]   TJLC cannot be explained solely by using the existing definitions of antifans, particularly because TJLC cannot be defined as antifandom because everyone agrees on the canonical text. Only the repercussions of TJLC within fandom discourse have similarities with antifans; TJLC can be seen as a deeply felt wish for representation and change. As we argue next, TJLCers are more akin to secularized eschatologists.

5. TJLC as secularized eschatology

[5.1]   What does a secularized eschatology regarding an understanding of TJLC and the aftermath of series 4 of *Sherlock* entail? The notion of a secularized eschatology comprises two parts. The first is interpreting the idea of secularization and its place in Western history, a transition that occurred from a world where God was central in everyday life five hundred years ago to a world where God is dead in the everyday public space (Taylor 2007). The other is interpreting particular instances of the development of secularization and how these articulate or rearticulate eschatological elements—that is, knowledge of what will come, perhaps with a religious aspect but in a nonreligious setting (for modern biology as an example, see Nyhart 2009).

[5.2]   The presentation of a history of secularization and eschatology is outside the scope of this essay; we refer readers to Taylor (2007). Here we limit ourselves to some relevant aspects of eschatology while interpreting it in relation to TJLC. Eschatology contains four key notions, which we use as a heuristic in interpreting TJLC: a question about purpose, plan, or teleology; whether apocalyptic aspects are involved; whether it contains considerations of *parousia* (Greek for "being present"); and what kind of time, linear or cyclical, is presupposed. These key notions underpin TJLC as a fandom phenomenon, especially as a particular instance of secular eschatology, which we take as a defining feature, thus differentiating TJLC from other fandom phenomena like antifans, social justice warriors, or cult fandom.

[5.3]   Defining the eschatological as containing an inevitable future end is claiming something teleological about it—that eschatology involves a final end or cause. But in what sense? If we look at how TJLC pictured the coming event of John and Sherlock getting together, it is presented as a final end (the final episode) containing a radical transformation of one form of existence to another (John and Sherlock finally expressing their true love). However, teleology in and of itself does not necessitate an absolute final end. Indeed, we can readily picture an eternal universe made up of all kinds of plans and causes; let us call this an unbounded teleology. Unlike the abruptness and transcendent character of the event of eschatology, teleology is often connected with some gradual, perhaps even immanent process. Furthermore, in teleology we can trace a rational explanation (Okrent 2007), whereas in eschatology faith is important. Within the perspective of TJLC, certain signs indicate the coming event of John and Sherlock revealing their true relationship, but only if the fan believes beforehand that this event actually will happen. The case of TJLC is more of a bounded teleology: there is a final end and a transcendent plan laid out for getting to this end, and faith or believing in this end is what upholds TJLC in light of the failure of certain events to materialize (such as the interpretation of a Moriarty-interrupted showing of *Apple Tree Yard*).

[5.4]   The word "apocalyptic" is derived from the Greek word *apokalypsis,* meaning revelation in the sense that a god has revealed the end of something, perhaps the ongoing struggle between good and evil, as in the Book of Revelation (Collins 1999b, viii). What is interesting here is the function of apocalypticism, which Collins (1999a, 158), following David Hellholm, states is intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by divine authority. Hence, as Idel (2000) claims, apocalyptic aspects of texts present us with an "unveiling of a collapsing reality" (204), as well as a projected hope for repairing this reality: "the 'collapsing' vision of reality is never detached from its more positive sequel dealing with the dramatic improvement that follows the collapse of the older order" (205). Apocalyptic aspects of texts are influenced by social concerns or problematics of the groups producing these texts, using their imagination to solve these problematics by projection of this solution into the future—that is, hoping a new and better order will replace the old, collapsed one.

[5.5]   In TJLC, there is a social concern of the fandom reflecting a collapse of the old order between Sherlock and John, which reflects a wider social order in which Sherlock and John, as a result of societal norms, are not allowed to show their love for each other, as well as the projection of the installment of a new order into the immediate future. These secular revelations are made up of what the producers of the series reveal regarding coming episodes, which is interpreted by TJLC fandom—alongside the already shown episodes—as signs of what will inevitably happen. However, "apocalyptic hope is invariably hope deferred" (Collins 1999a, 159). This is exemplified in TJLC, with the failure of the

realization of what was imagined to be inevitable. As the new order fails to materialize, TJLC seeks to uphold the imagined future-to-be by reinterpreting the failure as a nonfailure and as a new sign of what will inevitably happen. Thus, the promise of an inevitable future is upheld. This is exemplified by fans claiming that the upcoming *Apple Tree Yard* TV miniseries would in fact be the fourth, real, and final *Sherlock* episode. After this failed to be the case, fans began speculating about upcoming events and important dates within canon and fanon, such as birthdays and anniversaries, to discover the actual air date of the supposed missing episode.

[5.6]   This process of interpreting events and signs as revealing the presence of something absent, an event about to happen, is connected to *parousia,* a term literally denoting the arrival of a king or emperor. In Latin, the word is *advent,* a term now used within Christianity to signal the coming of Christmas. In its Christian theological use, *parousia* denotes the Second Coming of Christ; it is also tied to the psychological experiences of anxiety, doubt, and searching for certainty within the realization of what is absent—in this case, Christ's return (McGinn 2000, 373). Heidegger ([1920–21] 2004) performs a reading of what is specific for the Christian concept of *parousia,* which can function as a frame for understanding the concept's applicability in relation to TJLC.

[5.7]   Heidegger ([1920–21] 2004) starts out by noting what is distinctive about the Christian sense of *parousia:* not just the arrival of the Lord or Messiah, as in the Old Testament or Judaism, but the "appearing again of the already appeared Messiah" (71). This, he claims, changes what he terms the factual experience of the Christians (a precursor for his notion of facticity in *Being and Time* [1927]), because the structure of the Christian hope is different from a pure expectation of a future event. Rather, Heidegger claims, for Christians, the Second Coming of Christ cannot be grasped and answered using an objective and linear sense of time in which the this event is predictable. Instead, the knowledge of the when "must be of one's own." It must be anchored in the factual experience of the Christians. Heidegger therefore claims that what *parousia* does is referring Christians "back to themselves and to the knowledge that they have as those who have become" (72). The Second Coming of Christ is an event in the future, but its real meaning lies in the enactment of the previous life of Christians themselves in light of what they have become. Thus, there is a complicated relationship between presence and absence in the notion of *parousia*. Because one is incapable of delineating when, detecting traces in the present of what is absent becomes important. Heidegger cites the letter of Paul to the Thessalonians that "the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night" (79, referring to 1 Thessalonians 5:2), implying that these traces come unanticipated or suddenly. Furthermore, being able to see the traces as traces when they appear is equally important because this defines Christians and their understanding of *parousia* in comparison to other understandings of *parousia*.

[5.8]   Similarly, TJLC requires the same effort in detecting in the present traces of the absent though the inevitable coming. Whatever traces are laid out, they could not be anticipated. Rather, they are related to the factual experience of TJLC—how they enact it by interpreting it as pointing toward JohnLock as the endgame. TJLC at first seems like presupposing an objective sense of time because the endgame—the when of the kiss—is predictable, as it will occur in a particular episode (the series finale). However, the failure of the endgame to take place is an event that, like in the Christian sense, refers back to TJLC participants themselves. If Heidegger's interpretation of the Christians as "those who have become" is correct, then it means that they have a history—namely their experience of the First Coming of Christ—that facilitates the enactment in their present life. TJLC, however, has no tradition or history to turn to, thus enabling TJLCers to interpret their lives in terms of what they have become, in much the same way as the Christians. This gives us a clue for interpreting time, with a common destiny in mind as the endgame.

[5.9]   Relatedly, an analysis is required of what conception of time is presupposed. Heidegger argued against using an objectivist conception of time because such a conception is incapable of understanding temporality as it unfolds in the factual existence of humans. Instead, *parousia* reveals a complex relation between future and past in the present, which resembles neither a cyclical nor a linear conception of time (Gallois 2007). The case of TJLC, however, hints at a subjective conception of linear time. TJLCers are united not by a common background but by a common destiny: the shared belief in the endgame's inevitability. As Cassirer (1961, 290) notes, if the development of history is conceived as already laid out in advance—that is, what will happen, must happen, as in TJLC—then this implies two kinds of fatalism. First, the road to the endgame is already laid out, and TJLCers cannot affect it. Here destiny is passive and inexorable; no matter what TJLCers do, the endgame will take place, and all the signs show it, with the canonical text demonstrating hidden leads that need only be correctly interpreted. Second, after the failure of the final episode to result in the desired outcome, the sense of destiny becomes more active and irrevocable. The shared belief now turns on demanding the endgame to happen: the final episode is supposedly already made, and the producers are keeping it

from the fans. This reflects linear time: the endgame will inevitably happen, so TJLCers keep pushing the event forward by interpreting what happens in light of this inevitability. As Esposito (2010) notes, "Only by repeating that beginning [*inizio*] will the community with a destiny be up to the task that awaits it" (100). Esposito is referring here to Heidegger describing this repetition: "The beginning is still here. It isn't behind us, like an event that happened long ago, but lies in front of us...The beginning...calls us to reconquer once again its greatness" (100). The temporality of TJLC resembles this repetition of the beginning of John and Sherlock's love story, the culmination of which (its overt acknowledgment) continues to lie ahead, and the inevitability of which is assured again and again by interpreting the signs pointing to it. Indeed, the very ending of 4.03 "The Final Problem" is described as a beginning—as the actual start of what we know as Sherlock Holmes (Bone 2017).

[5.10]   To reiterate, we propose that TJLC can be understood as an example of secular eschatology. This is characterized first by a bounded teleology involving a final end and a transcendent plan laid out for arriving at this end. Furthermore, faith in this end and the existence of a plan to bring it about uphold TJLC in light of the failure of the significant event to materialize. Second, TJLC contains apocalyptic elements reflecting a collapse of or a problematic within an old imagined order, here between Sherlock and John, and the imagination and projection of a new and better order replacing the old collapsed one. Third, though this new order to come is absent, it is interpreted through different present signs that indicate what is to come. Finally, the sense of time relies on subjective linearity, in which a new beginning is continuously claimed to be what is to come.

6. Tumblr's infrastructure

[6.1]   TJLC has its origin and development on the social media platform of Tumblr. Although fandom wank and infighting have long been a hallmark of the fan experience, the infrastructure, gratification system, and functionality of Tumblr can be partly blamed for the unrestricted expansion of TJLC within *Sherlock* fandom. To analyze Tumblr's infrastructure, we use the following main topics: functionality (What can I do? What does it do?), interaction among users (What can I do with whom?), and site and content navigation (Where am I in relation to the whole? What are the boundaries to this domain?) (Jensen 2017). Different kinds of online culture and behavior result from the responses to these questions.

[6.2]   Platforms such as LiveJournal (LJ), Dreamwidth (DW), and Reddit enable groups to create and share content. Each group has one or more administrators, who can set a number of rules for the interaction within the particular group. LJ and DW have fandom groups dedicated to fandom wank that demand anonymity from users (e.g., https://fail-fandomanon.dreamwidth.org/). However, even within these groups, certain behaviors and rules must be followed. It is seen as bad conduct to link or tag hate, meaning that wank about a fan should be conducted without said fan being aware of it. While this might seem like an ethical problem, it gives fans the possibility of avoiding hate, while other fans can use these sites to release their anger and frustration.

[6.3]   Tumblr, however, has no possibility to create a place within which a group can identify itself and its members the way LJ, DW, or Reddit do. Users can create discussions in an entirely closed, password-protected Tumblr group, but this is not how Tumblr is meant to work because posts from these closed sites are not visible on members' timeline, the dashboard (or dash). Instead, Tumblr is an open platform, which provides few tools for users to create a safe space on their blogs. For example, user A may block user B to avoid seeing any of user B's posts on user A's dash. By blocking user B, A's posts are no longer directly visible for B, and user A will no longer see any of user B's posts on user A's dash. User B, however, will still be able to see user A's posts, and can like and reblog them, if a post from user A is reblogged by user C, who is connected to both users A and B without being blocked by any of them. User A will receive a notification of the activity; that is, despite blocking user B, user A may be able to see user B's comments and tags via user C.

[6.4]   Tagging, a method used to find and archive relevant posts, is another way to try and avoid unwanted attention, or to avoid seeing posts that might be triggering or offensive. Tagging on Tumblr is useful for user A to avoid seeing unwanted content, provided other users remember to tag said content. But any other user is able to visit user A's blog and comment or reblog from user A's blog. Although user A might stay away from the TJLC tag, nothing prevents a TJLCer from going to user A's blog and using it in their discussions. What was intended as an ironic comment on BBC's *Sherlock* could morph in to an aggressive explanation of why JohnLock has to become canon—an example of bounded

teleology. Because every reblog creates a copy of the original post, several discussions and understandings of the original post can be ongoing in parallel on various sites that have duplicated a post. Users can delete or edit a post, but copies reblogged from the unedited original will remain.

[6.5]   The functionality of Tumblr has changed and will continue to change; perhaps future changes will enable users to create a safe environment for their fan works and fan discussions. However, currently, the fast-changing dash, and the way reblogs and likes are distributed fuel heated discussions among users of different opinions. Although each reblogged post can initiate a new string of explanations and discussions, only one user is notified of all the actions regarding the original post: the original poster. A reblogger will only receive direct notifications of any actions on the reblogged post from the first subsequent user. That is, user B reblogs user A's post X and comments on it. User C likes and reblogs post X from user B; notifications of both actions are sent to users A and B. User D likes and reblogs post X from user C; notifications are sent to user A and user C. User B will not receive a notification of user D's potential comments. If user B wants to follow the discussion, the user would have to check the notifications of the post itself. Even so, however, it can be difficult to see how the discussion progresses and who reacts to what statement. Comments are not threaded, with the original statement followed by the first reply, second reply, and so on. Instead, comments, likes, and reblogs are shown in a timeline without showing the actual time, thus hiding the nuances of discussions taking place in actual time. In the newest Tumblr design (July 2017), comments are shown separately, without any indication of their inherent relationship.

[6.6]   Tumblr's interactive design therefore has content at its center. Enabling easy access to the site, easy posting, reblogging, commenting, and liking are of the highest importance. The main drawback is the lack of groups, which could permit training new members in fannish norms, as well as creating a space providing a modicum of safety for its members. Furthermore, the idea of belonging to a group is difficult to maintain on Tumblr because the individual blogs and users can change their content or intention without warning. While this allows for diversification, it can also leave users feeling isolated and unsure whom they are interacting with. In the wake of TJLC, a few abandoned blogs were hijacked by other users, who would post hate and the like using the former users' blog names—hijacked in the sense that anyone can claim a deactivated blog name and continue blogging under that name. While the blog has to gather new followers, users are accustomed to glitches in the form of a sudden unfollowing thanks to Tumblr's known technical problems. This means that the new owner of a former well-established blog can spread hate and misinformation without any repercussions.

[6.7]   Tumblr's infrastructure cannot in and of itself account for the eventual impact of TJLC. Still, the obvious differences between Tumblr and older fandom platforms such as LJ and DW might account for the sense of insecurity in *Sherlock* fandom during the height of TJLC. "Staying in your lane" or "not going into the tags" only works if there is a possibility to set boundaries and enforce them. None of that is present within the current functionality of Tumblr. Tumblr does not support the creation of a place where members have to follow a set of rules. No administration or enforcement of rules is possible. Tumblr remains an open space in which a post is posted and reblogged; the creator of the post loses control with each subsequent use and interpretation of the post, even if the original post is deleted or the blog is deactivated. The impact on the users is twofold: they cannot create boundaries to ensure a safe experience on Tumblr, and they may become isolated in their fandom experience. All of this enables the success of TJLC as an eschatology: a belief system like TJLC makes it possible to belong to a group, to feel like a member of something bigger than oneself. By creating and using the #tjlc hashtag, a Tumblr user becomes part of an ephemeral community, not designated by an actual place (Christensen 2017), however abstract digital spaces might be, but by a common interpretation of *Sherlock.*

[6.8]   Because of the lack of a safe place in which to become a group, TJLC needs radicalization to ensure a clear idea of what membership entails. It is not enough to become a follower of a certain blog or to use the #tjlc hashtag. Reblogs, likes, meta, and interpretation have to be in line with supporting the endgame: JohnLock. Tumblr is here a space in which groups try to define a separate and safe place of their own by using the #tjlc hashtag. This hashtag, however, only functions on the social imaginary level because the space mediated by Tumblr will never allow a group to define and delimit its own place and identity in a meaningful way. Groups therefore revert to the social imaginary mode, here manifested by secular eschatology, to perform group identity.

7. Conclusion

[7.1]   TJLC has for years been blamed for many transgressions within *Sherlock* fandom, including doxxing, harassing, and bullying other fans on- and off-line. However, explaining the behavior of TJLCers as antifans is not helpful in understanding this particular fandom phenomenon. TJLC evolved through the particularity of Tumblr's platform. It is not inclusive and diverse, and it is not based on the idea of a better world. Rather, it is exclusive: in TJLC, fans do not embrace diversity or criticism but rather enforce a certain kind of singularity. During the height of TJLC, just before the airing of the last episode in 2017 of *Sherlock,* both sides escalated their fight. On one side were TJLCers who wanted be able to say, "Look! We told you so! JohnLock is canon!" On the other side were TJLCers who wanted to be able to point out how stupid TJLC had been in the first place.

[7.2]   Fans create and participate because they are emotionally involved in a media event. The media event is transformed into a meaning-making endeavor. Embracing the idea of TJLC, becoming a member of a clearly delineated group on a platform like Tumblr, is one way of dealing with emotional affect when engaged in fandom. However, as we have noted above, Tumblr can be a confusing and dangerous place to practice fandom. Although users can employ tags to obtain information on new fan works as well as categorize their own, the feeling of belonging to a group is only manifest when users manage to engage personally with other fans, which means fan engagement is necessary to create a sense of commonality. One way of doing this is engaging in TJLC.

[7.3]   However, several elements must come together to create the perfect storm that is TJLC: a platform that has content, not users, at its center, and that includes an interactive design unique in fandom because it does not support group formation, user administration, or enforcement of rules in a particular space; an original text that hints at a larger idea hidden behind the visible part of canon; and a fandom that is able to engage with and is knowledgeable about the original canonical text. Although we see TJLC as a fandom (or antifandom) created by Tumblr functionality, fandom eschatology provides a useful lens through which to examine highly directed fandoms that do not support user-controlled spaces and posting. Fandom eschatology acknowledges the seriousness that characterizes the work and efforts of the fans involved.

8. Authors' note

[8.1]   Both authors contributed equally to this work, and both should be considered first author.

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Digital space and Walking Dead fandom's Team Delusional

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—As previous fandom studies have shown, fans' disappointment in canon narratives may lead to adaptations and fragmentations in fan communities. This article examines Team Delusional, a subset of *Walking Dead* (2010–) fandom that emerged on Tumblr after the death of a series character. Rather than accepting the character's death as canon, Team Delusional has built a postobject fan community around the theory that the character secretly survived and will return to the series. Largely overlooked or even rejected by the larger *Walking Dead* fandom, this group continues to use Tumblr as its main community base. By deploying Tumblr's specific features and politics, the group maintains its identity and engages in interpretive practices that resist canon restrictions and intrafandom conflict. This analysis of Team Delusional's interpretive practices on Tumblr demonstrates the ways in which this social media platform particularly lends itself to postobject counternarrative fan subgroups.

[0.2]   *Keywords*—Digital community; Fan community; Fandom conspiracies; Hashtag; Interpretive practice; Multimedia; Postobject fandom; Television; Tumblr

1. Introduction

[1.1]   Beth Greene deserved better, she deserved everything. And they killed her. And I won't ever forgive them for what they did. (Tumblr user, December 1, 2014) (note 1)

[1.2]   They killed hope for all of us. (Tumblr user, December 1, 2014)

[1.3]   I just can't believe they did this. So I'm left with this awful feeling like "What am I supposed to do now?" (Tumblr user, December 1, 2014)

[1.4]   These reactions appeared on Tumblr the day after the airing of 5.08 "Coda," the midseason finale of *The Walking Dead* (2010–), which ended with the death of a particularly polarizing core character, Beth Greene. The physically slight, softspoken young woman lacked the propensity for violence and survival skills common among the show's more popular characters, for which she was often criticized. Yet subsequent to her development in the fourth and early fifth seasons, she gained a small yet vocal following. Her death in "Coda" came as an unwelcome shock to her fans, many of whom initially felt it occurred for unacceptable reasons (such as shock value or furthering male characters' pain). A campaign was mounted to persuade the showrunners to "Bring Beth Back," including a Change.org petition that ultimately gained 65,738 signatures, and a "Spoon Riot" in which fans mailed plastic spoons (a reference to Beth's finding of a spoon that foreshadowed the core characters' future location) to AMC's offices. Arising concurrently with such demands, however, were alternate views of her death scene that were disseminated online, primarily via Tumblr. Previously devastated fans began asking if it were possible that Beth had not actually died at all. The question soon evolved into proposed theories of her survival.

[1.5]   When the series returned from its midseason hiatus in February 2015 and Beth did not, these fans were not dissuaded. Rather than succumbing to what Cohen (2004) and, respectively, Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017) call a "parasocial breakup" with a text that has displeased them, they have transitioned to a postobject fandom in which,

according to Williams (2011), fans continue to interact with the fan object after it has become "dormant" (266). Yet, while Williams further describes the postobject fandom as occurring when the fan object "yields no new installments," this group believed new installments were, in fact, still ongoing (266). The fandom grew as time passed without Beth's return, encouraged by perceived references to Beth hidden in the show's narrative and promotional materials. Online, fans created and disseminated complex theories to explain that Beth's death was artful misdirection. In response to criticism from other *Walking Dead* fans, the group adopted the name "Team Delusional." Despite the passage of two additional seasons of the show, Team Delusional has survived as a stigmatized group within the larger *Walking Dead* fandom, updating their theories with new episodes of the series. To support their theories, members also monitor the social media of the show's creators and performers, analyze marketing materials, and compose lengthy intertextual essays.

[1.6]   Recent studies have identified Tumblr as being particularly conducive to fandom practices (DeSouza 2013; Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014). Though its members use other social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and *Walking Dead* forums, Tumblr serves as the primary base for Team Delusional. This article will examine the ways in which Tumblr's interface and features have facilitated Team Delusional's development as a community, their production of transformative works, and other fannish practices. However, I will also argue that Tumblr serves a dual purpose for Team Delusional: while the site has become a relatively safe space for members, Tumblr's obscurity and cliquish tendencies relative to other platforms (such as Twitter) create a sense that this group has been relegated to a stigmatized digital space. Throughout this article, I will consider Team Delusional in the context of postobject and conspiracy fandoms to elucidate the ways in which they maintain their community through utilizing this particular social media platform. For conciseness, hereafter "Team Delusional" will be abbreviated to TD, an abbreviation that is also accepted by the group itself.

2. Situating Team Delusional

[2.1]   The communal nature of fandom has been discussed since the inception of fan studies, with many commonalities remaining despite fandom's continued evolution (Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002; Chadborn, Edwards, and Reysen 2015; Tsay-Vogel and Sanders 2017). Such commonalities include shared passion for the media object, active engagement with the object through interpretive practices, and the production and dissemination of transformative works. Postobject fandoms often include the same practices. Williams (2011) argues that, after the fan object's conversion to "dormancy," its fandom is not over but rather sees changes in the ways such practices manifest (269). For instance, rewatching episodes, a practice Williams (2015) posits as integral to television postobject fandom, allows fans to produce new discussions and works. Such practices have proven essential to TD, whose members return to past episodes to connect them to new ones. A sign Beth kept in her jail cell-turned-bedroom in season 4 is, for example, interpretively linked to a nearly identical sign on a villain's fortress in season 7 and is thus considered a sign of Beth's impending return.

[2.2]   TD members are not simply postobject Beth fans, however. They are a much smaller subset of Beth fans whose community is built upon the belief that this character secretly survived a seemingly fatal wound and has been hidden by the showrunners from the audience for years. In this way, the fandom resembles other conspiracy-based television fandoms, such as The Johnlock Conspiracy (TJLC) fans of the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–17) who believe that the show's creators have misdirected viewers by placing their male leads in heterosexual relationships to disguise a canonical same-sex romance; like TD, this fandom is primarily based in Tumblr (Collier 2012). Acceptance of the basic conspiracy theory (that Beth survived and will return) is a necessary shared conviction within the community. Individual TD members are not required to create their own subtheories, but they must adhere to certain general interpretations of the canon text, as well as the actions and statements of the show's creators, performers, and marketing partners. They may, for instance, disagree with the theory that Beth was bitten by a walker (the show's term for zombies) and will be integral to a future immunity arc upon her return, but there is a general interpretive consensus that the presence of the show's theme song over the ending credits to "Coda" was meant to signal her survival.

[2.3]   Outside of fictional contexts, conspiracy theory–based fandoms include those centered on celebrities. While TD's theories do not resemble these as closely, some notable overlap exists, particularly as many of TD's theories involve observation and narrative explication of the performers' actions, statements, and personal lives. Writing of celebrity death conspiracy theories, Ballinger (2014) finds that such fandoms "transform [fan objects] into symbols" for their

communities (182). As a young, optimistic woman whose abilities are called into question by both characters and the show's fans, a secretly surviving Beth serves as a figure of fan identification for some audience members. Additionally, according to Ballinger, the conspiracy theory elevates the fan object. By participating in the conspiracy-based fandom, TD members believe they recognize and propagate the true importance of a character often otherwise neglected by the larger fandom.

3. Team Delusional and digital community

[3.1]   According to Booth and Kelly (2013), the relocation of fandom to online spaces has "augmented" fannish practices and "made fandom as a whole more visible" (57). Booth (2015b) notes that fans have become "more rigidly categorised" as a result of this heightened visibility (288). TD members may participate in other fandoms, but within the larger *Walking Dead* fandom and among themselves, "Team Delusional" functions as a distinct community marker. Some members maintain separate Tumblr blogs and accounts only for participation in TD. While Tumblr requires only that a blog's URL is publicly visible, users wishing to categorize themselves as TD may place TD markers in their usernames or optional blog descriptions, the latter of which often function as shortform autobiographies. Markers popularly include "Team Delusional" or its abbreviation, references to "Bethyl" (a portmanteau representing the ship of Beth and fan favorite Daryl Dixon), or simply the #Team Delusional hashtag. Identifying oneself so explicitly as a TD member simultaneously signals solidarity with this fandom subset and with an underdog character, but it also opens users up to criticism and harassment from other *Walking Dead* fans. TD members who identify themselves as such thus invite community while inherently signaling resistance to adversity from the larger fandom.

[3.2]   Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter (2014) find that Tumblr allows a fluid movement in and out of fan communities through which fans "are part of the fandom they feel they are" (4). As it is based upon an unpopular conspiracy theory, TD is particularly fluid, with members moving from TD to Team Fence, who are unsure of Beth's survival but believe, based upon fan-curated evidence, that it is a future possibility, and Team Acceptance, former TD members who no longer believe the theory but who may still participate in the TD community. Fans may change their Team identification depending upon their current feelings about the show's development and at times receive encouragement to do so from other members (note 2).

[3.3]   Quantification of TD's membership poses a number of problems. The number of likes for TD posts on Tumblr would seem to indicate that the community is much larger than a count of its most active members would suggest. Indeed, while a foundational discussion may only involve a few TD members, the discussion may receive more than 100 unique likes by Tumblr users who do not actively contribute to the theories but who consider themselves part of the community nonetheless. However, likes recorded on the original post need not relate to the original post at all but may instead be linked to reblogs (including those critical of TD), or may simply express approval of some of the post's content without signaling TD membership. Members have periodically sought to perform headcounts by requesting likes and reblogs, but the resulting numbers may be skewed when the requests are recirculated, as recirculation on Tumblr allows the same users to like/reblog the post anew. Furthermore, as likes and reblogs are publicly visible as notes under the original post wherever it appears, users who wish to avoid ostracization for being TD might forego participation in these headcounts. Tumblr, therefore, initially enables and subsequently complicates efforts at quantifying the community.

[3.4]   Regardless of the community's size, its members have recognized and used Tumblr's particular interface and features to establish a presence on the periphery of the larger *Walking Dead* fandom. Here, believers can congregate, converse, build upon their own and each other's fannish works, and avoid the criticism that typically follows when their theories are acknowledged on other sites. The use of Tumblr's features also enables forms of fan governance within and outside the fan groups themselves. The collective mourning of Beth fans on Tumblr after "Coda" as expressed in the quoted passages that begin this article (part of the "loveshock" phenomenon that precedes postobject fandom [Williams 2011, 27]), has transformed into a viable fandom subset complete with gatekeepers, internal hierarchies, intrafandom conflicts, and perhaps most importantly, an organized system of production and interpretive practices.

4. Tumblr's interpretive capabilities

[4.1]   Digital fandom spaces enable fans to engage in more participatory and interpretive practices and facilitate more personal interactions between fans and media creators (Busse 2013; Bourdaa and Delmar 2016). Because of its conspiracy-based nature, interpretive practice is the key manifestation of TD's productivity. Fandom studies has often awarded the fan a "position of *expertise*" (Booth 2015a, 87). Such a position is not undeserved, for, as Jenkins (1992) notes, fans' readings of their texts may rival even those performed by academic scholars. Because of this attention to detail, passionate fans notice "discrepancies and contradictions" occurring within the fan object (Leavenworth 2014, 141). TD bases much of its theories on such discrepancies, creating complex explanations for deviations in visual or narrative continuity, seemingly unfulfilled storylines, and apparent gaps in footage, all factors that may make significant contributions to postobject fandoms (Williams 2011). For instance, shortly after "Coda" aired, fans' visual analysis of Beth's death scene revealed that the bullet's trajectory could not possibly match the manner in which it was fired (a practice common to death conspiracy theories). Stills from the scene were quickly disseminated on Tumblr, with users adding lines to the images to highlight the discrepancy. Similar discrepancies that TD commonly cites as being unaccounted for in the show's canon, as documented on Tumblr, include a seventeen-day gap in the narrative after Beth's death, footage of the main cast members running from an unseen threat during that time, a broken music box canonically representative of Beth that begins to play again, and one character's accusation that the core group "sacrificed one of [their] own" in season 5, an accusation that does not clearly correspond to any other deaths that season. Conspiracy interpretations thus offer fans a means of publicly explaining points the show itself has neglected.

[4.2]   Because of their strong emotional connections to the text, their own fan communities, and their wealth of "discursive resources," fans approach texts with certain expectations for their primary object of interest (Davis et al. 2014, 51). TD members approach each new episode with the hope that it will work to confirm their theory of Beth's survival. When the episode contains an element they may link to Beth, members are quick to update and explicate their interpretations and, subsequently, to disseminate their analyses online, with Tumblr serving as the primary production/dissemination point. This practice also occurs when an episode does not contain any clear references to Beth herself but rather to things perceived by TD as secretly signaling her future return, such as yellow clothing, scissors, or tunnels.

[4.3]   Zubernis and Larsen (2012) identify three modes of fan practice: the technical, the analytic, and the interpretive. TD falls between the analytic and interpretive spaces on this model, fusing "analysis of the text from within the parameters of the text itself" and "interpretation of texts from without the text by comparing them to something else," often other television series but at times more traditional narratives such as classical mythology (18). Their fannish productions include both blogs (analytic) and more conspicuously transformative works (interpretive), and these are combined so intricately that, barring Beth's actual return, their more detailed written analyses hosted on Tumblr may be deemed akin to fan fiction (note 3). Furthermore, as will be discussed below, their production/dissemination of fannish works takes advantage of Tumblr's place on the border of the semipublic and the private, fans-only space, which affords them some anonymity even as it prevents their theories from receiving wider spread validation from others within the greater fandom (18).

[4.4]   Through digital platforms, fans' commentaries also take on the role of reproducible text (Hills 2013). Booth (2015b) finds that the blogs are not discrete and insular but rather "the combination of the post plus the comments (plus the multitudinous blog entries written over time)" (43). Tumblr reblogs both further disseminate the original blog content and create new content through commentary and other textual additions, such as reaction GIFs. Such posts become infinitely reproducible, gradually transforming with subsequent modifications and amendments. A further textual layer is added when posts are intentionally recirculated. For instance, it is common for TD members to reblog old posts as reminders to the existing community, as a means of boosting morale when a specific prediction or subtheory has failed to manifest in the series, and as new information to new readers. Each recirculation, then, may be imbued with new or multiple intentions as well as alterations to the original interpretation. Tumblr's notes feature, which records likes and reblogs regardless of whether or not they include new commentary, may also be counted as an added, communal textual layer, for these typically indicate support for the text, and even in the case of reblogs without commentary, present the text to a wider audience.

[4.5]   Bothe (2014) further finds Tumblr particularly appropriate for fandom practices as a result of its allowance of mixed media posts. Tumblr's primary interface is a multipurpose dashboard that, in addition to displaying posts by followed blogs, is also the point at which users reblog and create content (DeSouza 2013). Individual contact between users may also result in content generation for the community. Users may publish asks they receive from other Tumblr

users publicly if they choose, and anonymous questions (which may be sent by users without Tumblr accounts) must be answered publicly (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014). Tumblr's "highly visual-focused nature" further enables users to engage in participatory consumption and interpretive practices (DeSouza 2013).

[4.6]   Tumblr's facilitation of graphic communication enables visual rhetoric within the larger corpus of TD's evidence of Beth's survival. In a post dated August 8, 2015, a user juxtaposed several images of actress Emily Kinney crying in character with screenshots of her crying on her final appearance on the talk show *Talking Dead* (2011–) to argue that, because Kinney was complicit in the conspiracy, her weeping was merely a performance. Here, the two-column multirow image format allowed on Tumblr establishes a graphic argument before the reader even sees the user's analysis. Similar visual arguments are easily constructed and disseminated in the same manner. Indeed, discussion of the technical discrepancies in Beth's death scene noted above often receive a multimedia treatment, with screenshots, GIFs, and behind-the-scenes DVD footage interspersed with analytical commentary in a single post.

[4.7]   The same multimodality is applied to discussions and fan interactions. In a post dated April 28, 2016, a TD member reblogged a post addressing Beth's age, a contentious topic in *Walking Dead* fandom because of the popularity of the Bethyl ship and Beth's early establishment as a teenager (note 4). The original post begins by quoting an unspecified interview with Kinney, then quotes contradictory information from a previous interview. The contradiction is then explained in the Tumblr user's own commentary. On the next line of the post, the user references actor Scott Wilson (who portrayed Beth's father) and his seeming approval of the ship in another interview, for which the user provides a YouTube link. A screenshot is then provided of Wilson voicing a similar sentiment on Twitter. This text/image juxtaposition continues immediately below but still within the same post, as the user first quotes actor Norman Reedus (who portrays Daryl) in two separate interviews, then provides a screenshot of the actor's confirmation of an implied Bethyl romance in his 2014 Reddit AMA. From here, the user quotes an interview with actress Lauren Cohan (who portrays Beth's sister), once again providing a link to the source within the text. Finally, the user concludes with their own affirmation of the character's adulthood. Throughout the post, the user bolds text they find particularly significant, adding another implied gloss to the collected text. In a similar post on January 26, 2017, a TD member responded to an anonymous ask regarding Kinney's schedule for a new series (which could preclude her from secretly filming for *The Walking Dead*) using text, screenshots of Twitter posts by other actors in the new series, a production notice for the series (which another TD member was credited with providing), and set photos. Far from anomalies, these analytical curations are common in TD's Tumblr discussions.

5. Community tags

[5.1]   Another Tumblr feature that appears integral to TD's fandom practices and community maintenance is the use of hashtags. Although typical search engines such as Google may include results from Tumblr and some Tumblr blogs include an internal search feature, tags are perhaps the simplest means of finding content (Bell 2013). Unlike Twitter and Facebook, Tumblr allows spaces in tags, thus making multiword tags easier to read and interpret (note 5). On Tumblr, TD appears to have an unofficial monopoly on #Team Delusional, to the point that members of other fandoms using this tag may be publicly cautioned. In response to insults and trolling, TD has also adopted the label and hashtag #Team Defiance. Other common tags centric to TD's postobject nature include #Beth Is Alive, #Beth Will Rise, and #Beth Greene Deserved Better. Additional hashtags may be utilized in response to specific events; after Beth did not return in *The Walking Dead*'s seventh season, one user proposed that #TDLives be used for a week to affirm the community's continuance.

[5.2]   Tags also provide a means of categorizing information and thus lend themselves to interpretive practices. Describing fans' listmaking, Booth (2015a) finds "order made of disorder" and a "database" emerging from "an inherently unordered collection of raw bits of data" (90). Navigating TD's myriad theories, evidentiary images, links, and other artifacts would pose great difficulty for readers elsewhere, but through utilizing Tumblr's tagging system, users have created such order from disorder. TD-specific tags allow readers to find these artifacts and build an understanding of collective and individual interpretations within the group. Formative TD members have turned their blogs into databases by using the tagging system and have also created corresponding directories to facilitate readers' experience. Tags may pertain to predicted narratives within the larger scenario of Beth's survival, specific props (the music box, Beth's hunting knife, conspicuously emphasized clocks), and perceived artistic and literary allusions.

[5.3]   In addition, users often write commentary in the form of tags, a practice that is especially useful when reblogging non-TD content for TD purposes (note 6). Tagging a reblogged image from another *Walking Dead* episode as #Coda, for instance, may highlight a discrepancy between the cited episode's statements, visuals, or narrative and Beth's death scene. A GIFset of Daryl reacting to another character may be reblogged with #Daryl Misses Beth to argue that the scene is a covert reference to Beth meant to keep her in the audience's memory. After the show's seventh season finale, which restaged a scene that originally included the Beth-symbolic music box with the box now missing, a TD member reblogged another Tumblr user's screenshots from the scene with #Music Box to draw TD members' attention to the absent prop. In this way, a wide variety of posts may be reappropriated into TD's theories.

[5.4]   The use of tags is, perhaps unsurprisingly, political. Deller (2015) argues that, despite a lack of official rules regarding tags, Tumblr communities establish their own conventions. Tumblr users discourage using tags simply to identify the topic of a post; rather, the use of a tag here ideally indicates the post will be supportive of the tag's subject. (Obvious exceptions include content and trigger warning tags and posts about distressing subjects). A fan posting in the #Bethyl tag, then, is expected to support the ship. So pervasive is this convention that many fans perceive negative posts in a tag as a form of harassment. This perception is not without merit in TD's case. TD's stigmatization has given rise to a number of troll accounts whose purpose is to collect TD posts for the purpose of mockery. Public ridicule, which may include identifying information and personal accusations, are then placed in the TD tag. To further annoy TD members, one such account uses as its avatar a close-up of Beth's head as the bullet exits her skull; this avatar then appears beside every post this user places in the tag so that, unless they manually block this user, all readers following #Team Delusional are confronted by the inflammatory image. Thus, while tags allow for the easy aggregation of information and content appropriation, they may also be used against fandom groups.

6. Fandom pariahs

[6.1]   While Tumblr shares features with other social networking sites and fan forums, it suffers from neglect or even stigma in many popular discourses. Studies of Tumblr are still nascent, and at the time of this writing, even some academic knowledge of its marginalization appears to rely on personal user observation. Writing of tension between Tumblr and Reddit, Mogilevsky (2014) finds that Tumblr "has emerged as a scapegoat for everything that's perceived 'bad' about social justice" as a result of politically minded posts that have gained popularity there. Outside of its concern for identity politics and its callout culture, Tumblr has also gained a "reputation as something of an insular platform, a space for artists and advocates and kids," and while similar sites, such as Twitter, Facebook, and even individual blogs are frequently acknowledged in mainstream news, Tumblr typically does not receive such attention (Dewey 2015). In short, Tumblr seems less likely to be considered a valid discursive space, and therefore TD's primary location there evokes a sense that, regardless of users' agency, this controversial fan subgroup has been relegated to its obscurity. This relative obscurity, however, affords users some protections. With only a URL visible by necessity, Tumblr may potentially reveal no identifying details of its users and thus may serve as a social media experience entirely divorced from its users' offline identities (Bell 2013; DeSouza 2013; Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014). Writing of the queer community, Bell contends that Tumblr "become[s] a public manifestation of [a] private face" which requires no explanations from its users (33–34). This characterization may be easily extended to fandom, particularly for fan groups and subgroups deemed unpopular or controversial.

[6.2]   Unlike many fan-centric forums, Tumblr boasts a general lack of moderation that is particularly conducive to stigmatized fandoms. While fan spaces challenge notions of ownership and social hierarchies (Hills 2013; McCulloch, Crisp, Hickman, and Janes 2013), they are not always or entirely democratic. The personal moderator in particular may function as a censor and wields a degree of power over other participants in the fan space; in "determin[ing] the baseline rules of discussion," the moderator may establish a status quo within a community and inhibit those who do not abide by it (Gibson 2017, 2351). It is perhaps no surprise that very vocal fandoms, including other conspiracy-based fandoms such as TJLC, have gained ground on Tumblr. More problematic and personally invasive fandoms, such as those based upon conspiracy theories regarding members of the band One Direction, have also found a home on Tumblr (Jones 2016b; Asquith 2016). The site has no limitation on how users approach or contribute to a discussion or on the frequency of topics being addressed, as there is, for instance, on Reddit's various fan forums, where posts deemed by moderators to be too similar to other recent discussions or too unpopular may be removed from public sight entirely or may be downvoted to oblivion by other users, a phenomenon that may result in the post or comment being rendered invisible. Similar practices occur on more specialized forums. In short, while fan interactions present

their own risks (as discussed below), the absence of conspicuous moderating forces is likely an initial factor in TD's ability to maintain their community on Tumblr.

[6.3]   TD's adoption of Tumblr may also be rationalized through the acknowledgment of stratifications within fan groups. Competing and opposing methods of fan engagement and interpretation may lead to fragmenting of fandoms, which in turn gives way to a division between more publicly acceptable practices/interpretations and those left on the margins (Jenkins 2006). Such stratifications occur, in part and whether intentionally or not, as a result of the privileging of only certain relationships among fans and between fans and media creators (Johnson 2007; Scott 2013; Booth 2015b). TD's relationship to *Walking Dead* canon particularly places them at risk. The group, as reflected in the statements with which this article begins, was born out of disappointment and even outrage at the show and its creators. Simultaneous dissatisfaction with and love for the text, according to Jenkins (1992), leads fans "to try to articulate to themselves and others unrealized possibilities within original works" (24). Williams (2011) sees a similar phenomenon in the "loveshock" that follows the death of a fan object character, which is exacerbated by a perceived lack of narrative satisfaction. TD's fusion of postobject fandom and conspiracy theory position them as less-than-ideal fans when compared to media creators and fans whose interpretations of the canon are deemed more acceptable.

[6.4]   While canon creators do need their fans (Jenkins 2013), they are also selective about the kinds of fans they want publicly representing their work (Johnson 2007). Creators determine which interpretations and interactions are valid and may promote their work in ways that invalidate or even penalize fans who present alternatives to approved approaches. As *The Walking Dead* has aligned itself more closely with the source comics (in which Beth does not exist), it seems unlikely that the creators of an androcentric zombie drama might wish to encourage a small fanbase whose basis is a somewhat peripheral, young female character primarily associated with a controversial romantic pairing. TD, furthermore, poses something of a threat to the accepted overt canon by assigning particular intentions to showrunners. Just as celebrity death conspiracy theorists help raise their object to an "iconic" status (Ballinger 2014, 182), TD demotes the show's central narrative (currently that of a war between hypermasculine factions) to argue that the true but as-yet-covert narrative is that of Beth's resurrection.

[6.5]   Extrapolating on terms coined by Dreamwidth user obsession_inc, Busse (2013) notes two particular types of fan works: "affirmational" works that uphold the boundaries of the canonical texts and "transformational" works that privilege fans' interpretations over the canon (82). We may locate TD at the intersection of these types, for the group simultaneously dismisses the surface canon and posits itself as the true interpreters of the real canon. In reinterpreting, remixing, and appropriating canonical works that have left them dissatisfied, fans do not necessarily reject canon authors outright but rather hold them responsible for erring, at times rejecting events within the canon. In this way, TD has been particularly resistant to the Barthesian reading common in fandom studies (Goodman 2015). TD and similar canon conspiracy fandoms such as TJLC find artful deceptions in problematic narratives. They do not argue, for instance, that Beth was not shot; accepting as canon the brief image of the bullet wounds on Beth's head, they verify what all spectators are able to see (she was shot) while arguing for a truth we do not see (being shot did not actually kill her). In this way, they credit the canon authors with a high degree of manipulative creativity.

[6.6]   Yet, as noted above, even a flattering interpretation may not be approved by creators. Jenkins (1992) writes that, particularly when fans' readings run counter to intentions, creators may take action to keep fans "in line" (19). Creators of some popular series have represented such fans negatively on the shows themselves, with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and *Supernatural* (2005–) serving as prime case studies (Johnson 2007; Stanfill 2013; Goodman 2015). To date, *The Walking Dead* has not lampooned TD within its own narrative, but outside of Tumblr's relative safety, parties associated with it have engaged in behaviors that may appear to be calling attention to TD, if not outright trolling them. An overview of such interactions reveals a marked difference in the fandom's discursive capabilities on and off Tumblr and thereby imbues their location on Tumblr with added social justification.

[6.7]   Few of the show's creators acknowledge TD as a viable subset of their fandom. In a March 2017 interview, executive producer Greg Nicotero maintained silence when a crowd of fans shouted support for Beth's return, but in the previous month, in an interview with Rodney Ho of AJC.com, he referenced pro-Beth campaigns as an example of how fans' desires do not dictate the show's direction. Most explicit policing of fans' preferences, however, seems to occur through marketing channels. Official Twitter accounts of the show's media team have made jokes about Beth's survival, implicitly encouraging approved fans to mock TD in their own comments and replies. Shortly after TD began to form in 2014, the official *Walking Dead* Facebook account linked an article entitled "How to Bring Beth Back" that

proposed ways Beth could still appear on the show, preceded by the caption "Okay, it's been a Beth heavy week ... You'll see that headline and roll your eyes, we know." Comments were largely vitriolic toward the nascent TD and were neither removed nor discouraged by the account's moderators. Official Facebook and Twitter accounts have deployed language reminiscent of TD to acknowledge Emily Kinney's other projects, advertising her debut LP with "Beth is back!" in 2015. In January 2017, as part of their series of fan reactions to characters' deaths, the official Twitter account referred to "Beth's *ahem* fate" rather than her death, a noticeable difference from the language used in other videos and which TD members promptly noticed. The account later identified a mysterious hooded figure as Beth; subsequent comments included a mix of fans' criticism and praise for trolling TD.

[6.8]   Actors who appeared in Beth's season 5 solo arc have notably provided vague responses to TD's questions that are certain to (and do) encourage the belief that Beth will return. Their engagement with TD is an anomaly in *Walking Dead* performers' social media, which is usually quite limited in casual correspondence with fans. As the main cast members' social media accounts are all much less interactive with fans and must also refrain from posting even the most minor spoilers, the allowance of these actors to publicly troll TD points toward a larger disregard for this fandom at best and an open disdain for them at worst (note 7). Skeptical TD members have speculated on Tumblr that the actors may also be engaging in a practice similar to the queerbaiting that is commonly also suspected by discouraged members of TJLC (Collier 2012).

[6.9]   Just as canon producers may undermine fan's desires, "antagonistic corporate discourse" may be deployed to help shape a preferred "consumer [fan]base" (Johnson 2007, 298). Unapproved interpretations may still play a part here, for, despite fandom's oft-cited engagement in materialistic consumer culture, TD members' requests for Beth-centric merchandise have been met with public mockery on more popular social media platforms. When a Twitter user asked the official Funko account "how many times do i gotta ask for a beth greene pop" on December 11, 2015, the account responded, "More. Way more. She dead" (regardless of the fact that Funko has licensed Pop figures for other deceased *Walking Dead* characters) (note 8). Funko was quickly called out for their response on Twitter and, when screenshots of the interaction were posted on Tumblr, Tumblr users also mobilized in contacting Funko directly. Their efforts resulted in a Twitter apology and a longer explanation of product licensing restrictions via email. Both forms of response were reported to TD Tumblr accounts as screenshots, where they could be archived and discussed within the community.

[6.10]   This system of reporting is common for TD members, who may discuss antagonistic discourses, typically occurring elsewhere, in the relative safety of their community and may choose whether or not to engage on more public and personally identifiable platforms. It is apparent from this system that while some TD members may feel comfortable engaging on other platforms, Tumblr remains their rallying base. Yet while Tumblr does offer users agency over their anonymity and viewable content, it is not an entirely safe space. Busse (2013) writes of "geek hierarchies" in which "wherever one is situated in terms of mockable fannish behavior, there is clearly a fannish subgroup even more extreme than one's own, and it is that group that one can feel secure in not being part of" (78). Evidence of such hierarchies is present in any *Walking Dead* fan space, but TD's location on Tumblr inadvertently makes Tumblr an equally appropriate space for anti-TD accounts. Indeed, Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter (2014) find that fan groups cite "anti" blogs and behaviors as the "largest negative aspect to Tumblr fandoms" (5). One method of trolling TD using Tumblr's interface has been described previously; more frequent methods include augmenting screenshots of TD posts with mocking commentary and submissions of insults and even threats directly to TD members. Such behaviors, described by Johnson (2007) as "fantagonism," are an inherent component of fandom, but particularly fandom subsets with controversial or unapproved interests (Jones 2016a). Yet while Tumblr's lack of moderation means that fantagonism will not be censored, TD members have utilized Tumblr's block feature to limit their visibility to antis and tag categorization to create a cautionary database of such accounts. With both sides of this informal fan war constantly adapting their tactics, Tumblr is a simultaneous community enclave, site of mobilization, and battleground for this (and similar) fandoms.

7. Conclusion

[7.1]   At the time of this writing, there is some doubt regarding TD's future. Disappointment after *The Walking Dead*'s seventh season finale ran high, and while in previous years, members following actors' social media accounts believed they had gleaned evidence that Beth scenes were secretly being filmed, Emily Kinney's public summer 2017 schedule

has made such conspiracy-based beliefs difficult to sustain. A number of previously active TD members have changed their affiliation to Teams Fence and Acceptance. Although TD has sustained itself for over two seasons without their theories manifesting in the series, it seems possible that the Team may move away from conspiracy fan theories and further into a truly postobject fandom.

[7.2]   Some limitations of this study must be acknowledged. As this research was conducted entirely through observation of TD as facilitated by the online features described in this article, some fannish practices were not as visible as others. For instance, while Tumblr is used for the dissemination of links, some transformative works, such as fan fiction, are still primarily situated on other sites such as AO3. In addition, as Tumblr allows for private direct messaging, many interactions between users are not publicly available. Discussions of interpersonal conflict between TD members and antis appear to only partially occur in publicly viewable space, leading to public accusations of offensive behaviors that cannot be verified through mere observation (note 9). Although efforts have been made to present this group as objectively as possible, those efforts are hindered by Tumblr's public/private dichotomies. What this study reveals, then, is what Tumblr itself makes most readily discoverable.

[7.3]   Regardless of the seeming unlikelihood of TD's theories manifesting on *The Walking Dead,* it is clear that this small fandom has carved a digital space for itself that warrants scholarly study alongside more prominent postobject fandoms. Tumblr has indeed emerged as a platform conducive to fan practices, and it is through negotiations of the site's features and peculiarities that this group has forged a fluid community that is often unwelcome elsewhere. Moreover, that the group's origins can be clearly traced through Tumblr's public archives lends it a significance in studies of the site outside this fandom's speculative subject. Members have, without moderation or external assistance, collaboratively created directories, archives, and analytical compendia that, to return to Jenkins above, are on par with or even exceed academic treatments. In this way, TD's Tumblr presence digitally exemplifies the possibilities for counternormative, conspiracy, and postobject fandoms, especially those that lack support in larger fan communities.

8. Notes

1. To protect fans' identities, I have omitted usernames, blog names, and other information that could be used to identify specific parts discussed in this article.

2. This fluid movement is facilitated by the show's creators, who occasionally make verbal or imagistic references that can easily be interpreted as pertaining to Beth. While it is possible that such references are entirely unintentional, their execution and timing do lend credence to the possibility that the creators are baiting TD members (or, as TD believe at the time of this writing, planting clues signaling Beth's return).

3. It is not within the scope or purpose of this paper to comment on the validity of TD's interpretations. I will, therefore, not propose that they are correct nor will I discount them.

4. The original post, created the same day, was written by a Beth fan who is not a member of TD who, in 2016, voiced support for the TD fandom. As reblogging itself constitutes a form of textual production on Tumblr and Beth's age is a frequent topic of TD discussion, I have cited the TD member's reproduction of the post here.

5. Some TD members insert spaces into hashtags while others do not, thereby creating two possibilities for each tag. For convenience, only one version is presented in this discussion.

6. At the time of this writing, unlike likes and reblogs, added tags are only made visible in a post's notes if the viewer uses certain extensions on their browser. Tag commentary, therefore, still allows most users to avoid unwanted scrutiny in notes.

7. For example, in the summer 2016 hiatus between *The Walking Dead*'s sixth and seventh seasons, Norman Reedus posted, then quickly removed, a photo that subtly contradicted promotional material regarding the cliffhanger with which season 6 had ended.

8. As of July 2017, Funko has yet to release a Beth figure in its flagship Pop line, though recent requests for one are still posted on their website. The only Beth figure they do offer at the time of this writing is a blind box miniature; according

to the official product information, purchasers have a 1/36 chance of receiving Beth. Funko's 2017 In Memoriam line, which exclusively featured deceased *Walking Dead* characters, failed to include Beth.

9. Lending some credence to the idea that some TD members have been the subject of unprovoked discursive attacks, however, is the fact that when I publicly voiced an interest in this fandom subgroup online, I soon received a threatening message from an anti.

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Tumblr's GIF culture and the infinite image: Lone fandom, ruptures, and working through on a microblogging platform

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[0.1]   Abstract—Tumblr's modes of looping and repetition (especially via the circulation of GIFs) offer a potential source of comfort during moments of fannish rupture. By analyzing my own responses to the ending of a favorite television series, I argue that the repetition of Tumblr—the sense of infinity that is engendered by the fact that users may see the same thing reblogged and turning up on their dashboard over and over again—can be understood as offering the potential for working through moments of affective disruption. By assessing Tumblr's sense of endlessness and the reblogging of images and GIF and GIF sets across fan blogs after the finale of the television series *Hannibal* (2013–15), I consider how the use of a single specific platform can relate to the absence rather than the presence of fan-created objects. In an analysis of fan engagement and attachment, I draw on Freud's work on repeating and working through to study the relationship among repetition, trauma, and the wider media. The repetition engendered by the repeated viewing of GIFs and GIF sets on Tumblr offers comfort and catharsis for fans in periods of mourning. These areas of study inform an analysis of Tumblr as a specific platform for fan engagement and this platform's use as a mechanism for reassurance in the face of moments of rupture.

[0.2]   Keywords—Fan endings; Freud; *Hannibal;* Rupture; Television fandom; TV fandom

1. Introduction

[1.1]   Louisa Ellen Stein (2016), in her discussion of Tumblr, GIF sets, and fan mixes, describes the "endless scroll" that the platform offers: Tumblr "conveys a sensation of limitlessness; no need to click on an arrow or the word 'next' to see what else fans have created, just keep scrolling and the Tumblr posts keep coming." In contrast to other social networking sites or platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook, where fannish attachments may be played out, Tumblr offers an often bewildering display of images, GIFs, text posts, video clips, and music files for fans to negotiate. As Stein points out, "The interface limitations of Tumblr are many, and can make it feel very opaque and confusing to newcomers." However, this very limitlessness can offer opportunities for fans to cope with disruptions to their attachments to objects or texts and present a space for fannish mourning. Tumblr's opacity and impenetrability may actually work to allow those who identify as lone or individual fans a space to engage in private acts of working through such disruption without needing to actively interact and engage with other fans. Tumblr thus offers a space for "ordinary fans who do not tend to be textually…and only spasmodically enunciatively productive" (Sandvoss and Kearns 2014, 102).

[1.2]   Tumblr's endless scrollability offers opportunities for comfort and affective working through when presented with moments of fissure or termination in the fan experience. Here, in an analysis of my own responses to the ending of a favorite television series, NBC's *Hannibal* (2013–15), I consider how Tumblr's repetition—that is, the platform's sense of infinity, which is engendered by the fact that fans may see the same thing repeatedly reblogged and repeatedly turning up on their dashboard (also known as a dash)—can be understood as a potential tool for coping with instances of affective disruption. In particular, Tumblr users frequently post GIFs—"web-based graphics that contain a series of

frames" that "can be used to create graphics in the form of looped moving images" (Gursimsek 2016, 330)—from favorite series. GIFs in general comprise single looped images, but fans often create more complex GIF sets, which are "sets of images, sometimes animated, sometimes not, arranged in a grid of sorts to communicate as a whole" that have "evolved primarily on Tumblr, where the interface allows for easy juxtaposition of multiple animated or still gifs" (Stein 2016). The dominance of this use of GIFs and GIF sets on Tumblr takes narrative moments out of time and out of their place in a narrative. They are instead replayed and looped in ways that can change meaning or render visible moments that were hidden until images or sequences were slowed down and reworked in the GIF format. Tumblr's modes of reblogging and the infinite scroll means that the constant repeat viewing of the same content can be therapeutic as a result of the physical act of repetition. Such viewing works to assuage fannish anxieties, helping fans cope.

[1.3]   I have three key aims here. First, I aim to show that Tumblr's modes of looping and repetition (especially via the circulation of GIFs) offer a potential source of comfort during moments of fannish disruption. Second, I advance previous studies of fan responses to the ending of fan objects by exploring how use of one specific platform can "make more visible how fans respond to the absence, rather than the presence, of fan objects" (Williams 2015, 205). Although the GIF sets themselves function as fan-created objects, their use takes place in a period of postobject fandom, which "refers to fandom of any object which can no longer produce new texts" (Williams 2015, 16). However, fan attachment does not necessarily end in the postobject period, and fans often create their own texts and transformative works (such as GIFs and GIF sets as well as fan fiction or fan art) to continue their engagement with a text. Third, I consider the experience of the lone fan, a figure too often overlooked in fan studies even though "many viewers and readers who do not actively participate in fan communities and their textual productivity nevertheless derive a distinct sense of self and social identity from their fan consumption" (Sandvoss 2005, 30).

[1.4]   Although my own engagement with *Hannibal* fan blogs on Tumblr involved reblogging the posts of others, which could be viewed as form of participation within a fan community, I did not engage in any conversation or reciprocal posting and reblogging with any other fans. In this, I acted as a lone fan—that is, someone who does not engage in dialogue with other fans in fannish spaces, even though such fans may visit such sites and recirculate content created by others. To address these fan practices and behaviors, it is useful to approach fan engagement and attachment via the Freudian concepts of repetition and working through ([1924] 1956). These concepts have been usefully expanded by others to attempt to understand the relationship among repetition, trauma, and the wider media (Lee 2016; Meek 2011; Sturken 2007). By building on these areas of study, it is possible to better understand the specific appeal of a platform such as Tumblr, particularly its use as a mechanism for reassurance in the face of moments of rupture, and how the transformative potential of GIFs and GIF sets can function as a mode for fannish coping during trauma.

2. Freud and fandom

[2.1]   Although I draw on approaches that utilize Freudian psychoanalysis to understand fan communities and identities as well as the wider media, I am aware, as Sandvoss (2005) has pointed out, that Freudian thought is currently outmoded; certainly it may seem strange to return to his ideas to understand a modern fan platform such as Tumblr. Indeed, Freudian analysis of fandom has been limited compared to approaches that draw on the work of Melanie Klein (1952) (see Hoxter 2000) or D. W. Winnicott's (2005) object relations work on transitional objects (Hills 2002, 2013). Those studies that do draw on Freudian psychoanalysis tend to highlight the importance of libidinal pleasure for fans in the production of sexually explicit slash fiction (Penley 1991) and in fan fantasies (Sandvoss 2005). More recently, Mel Stanfill (2013) has explored intrafan practices of stereotyping, drawing on "psychoanalysis not because fans are a psychic anomaly…but because they illuminate processes of all identity" (129), whereas Judith Fathallah (2011) has discussed the Freudian *fort-da* theory ([1920] 1995) in her autoethnographic discussion of hurt/comfort fan fiction.

[2.2]   However, as Sandvoss (2005) notes, the "hesitation of fan studies to adopt psychoanalytic perspectives to explain fans' actions and experience is understandable" (67). Such approaches have been argued to potentially pathologize fans (Hills 2002, 95) because they are "associated with the troubled psyche and therefore…suggest that it springs from a kind of inner unhappiness" (Duffett 2013, 113). Stanfill (2013) has cautioned against studies that draw on psychoanalysis and "extrapolate from their own experience to make claims about the inner workings of the fan psyche" because of the risk of "rendering the fan experience unrecognizable through analysis" (129). Such approaches have also been accused of disempowering fans, rendering them passively in thrall to hidden drives and desires and

characterizing them as lacking the agency to self-reflexively construct their own fannish connections or emotions. The construction of fans as rationally unable to explain their own fandom is also often maintained by theorists themselves, who, it has been argued, are permitted "a privileged insight into the experiences of their subjects that is not available to the subjects themselves" (Fiske 1990, 90). Psychoanalytic approaches have therefore been accused of being theoretically and ethically limited because they explain away fan emotional ties from the position of the skilled researcher who is able to uncover the unconscious motivations behind fans' attachments.

[2.3]   However, despite such critiques, psychoanalysis is not "an integrated, homogenous point of view" (Mitchell and Black 1995, 206) that can be easily dismissed in its entirety. Thus, to critique the entire discipline as ethically dubious does a disservice to the useful insights into culture (and fandom) that such approaches can provide. It is not my intention here to pathologize fans; nor is it my argument that all fans using Tumblr for fannish practices respond in the same way. Rather, I want to highlight the importance of trauma and repetition by using Freudian psychoanalysis in order to consider the rationale for using Tumblr in particular, with its unique modes of communication and its imbrication in fan practice. Tumblr was the place I went when I sought to cope with the rupture of the ending of a favorite show, along with the resultant feelings of loss and mourning.

[2.4]   The use of ideas derived from Freud can allow us to "help us investigate *individual fandom* as a reflection of each individual's personal psychology" (Duffett 2013, 120) and help us begin to understand the responses of those like me who engage as lone fans, as individuals who may feel a sense of membership of a fandom but who eschew active interaction with fellow fans. As Sandvoss (2005) notes, "only a minority of fans participate in textual production" (29). Thus, a Freudian approach explains the process I went through as I sought to make sense of my own individual responses, and how the repetition and recirculation of images engendered by Tumblr enabled a form of working through my affective reactions to the ending of what for me was an important fan text.

3. Repetition, fannish trauma, and working through

[3.1]   Writing about responses to trauma, Freud ([1924] 1956) argued that some patients repressed moments of severe shock or trauma: "The patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He produces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it… not as an event of the past, but as a present-day force" (150–51). As Meek (2011) summarizes, Freud argues that some shocks are so sudden and profound that "they could not be assimilated as an individual experience in this way. Instead they could only be 'worked over' retroactively through the process of psychoanalysis and if this did not occur the victim was doomed to a compulsive repetition of the traumatic experience" (95). The compulsion toward repetition, which Freud called *Wiederholungszwang*—the need "to re-experience the event involuntarily"—"is both the problem and the path to a solution, since the repetition may serve the healing by allowing the creation of a proper response to the event and by producing a proper memory" (Breithaupt 2003, 76). According to Freud, then, repetition is often a necessary step toward recognizing and dealing with trauma.

[3.2]   Such ideas have been used to understand the broader media and how contemporary society deals with moments of trauma. For example, in discussion of the use of repetition in the National September 11 Memorial Museum in New York, Toby Lee (2016) gives examples of the media loops that are shown to visitors:

> [3.3]   One of the first we encounter in the exhibit is a 40-second clip from that morning's *Today Show* broadcast, showing the moment when Matt Lauer first interrupts their scheduled program to report breaking news of the attacks. In the next gallery, overhead speakers play a 60-second sound loop of voice messages left by a man on a top floor of the South Tower for his wife on their home answering machine, just a minute before the tower was hit. A 12-second video loop shows the plane crashing into the tower, and further down the timeline, a 15-second looped projection shows the tower's collapse.

[3.4]   Lee (2016) argues that the "glitchy repetition of the looping media and visitors' insistence on multiple viewings" are reminiscent of Freud's ideas in "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through" ([1924] 1956). However, the re-viewing and looping of moments from the traumatic global event of September 11, 2011, allows the working through of the trauma because "repetition can be a central part of the processing of a narrative of trauma" and can offer "a means through which cultures process and make sense of traumatic events" (Sturken 2007, 27). I am not suggesting that the collective trauma experienced by those who witness an event like 9/11, either in person or on television, is equivalent to

the emotions experienced by fans when a favorite object comes to an end. However, the arguments proposed by Lee (2016) and Sturken (2007) do offer a way to extend Freud's ideas to understand contemporary media and to begin to understand how the concept of repetition, as well as its encouragement via a platform such as Tumblr, may work for fans.

[3.5]   Mark Duffett (2013) argues, "Locating fandom in relation to [Freud's work] is difficult because fans have not shared any obvious trauma which they have in common" (96). However, fans' shared reactions to moments of fannish rupture often results in processes of grief and mourning that are shared collectively within the fan culture. My own reactions to *Hannibal*'s cliffhanger ending offers one example, but as I note elsewhere, a range of "moments of separation and detachment for TV fans, such as the departure of favoured characters, the replacing of actors or moments where the return of a show is uncertain" (2015, 2), can cause a sense of trauma. Perhaps the clearest example of this, however, is fans' responses to the deaths of actors "when fans are often left to deal with grief for both the character and the actor who portrayed him/her" (48) or celebrities. Duffett goes on to say, "To describe fandom as the acting out of a 'repetition compulsion' in the Freudian sense would seem questionable because fans are not trying to quell anxieties by repeatedly restaging traumatic moments. Instead they are interested in exploring their connections and rediscovering joys they have found in the text" (96). However, fans do engage in acts of repetition, such as the rewatching of episodes or scenes. In such acts, "pleasures can come from new details every time." In addition, "they can also come from being able to rerun engaging scenes or from being able to predict what will happen as the text unfolds" (Duffett 2013, 96). Fans may not be trying to deliberately restage traumatic moments, but they are able to use the common practices and pleasures of fan engagement (the rewatching of episodes or scenes) to understand and come to terms with events such as the endings of shows, or character or actor deaths. Tumblr's infinite sharing and recirculation of images, GIFs, and clips permits fannish repetition; such repetition can be a source of comfort and security in the face of the ending of a beloved fan object.

4. Tumblr, lone fandom, and the end of Hannibal

[4.1]   I joined Tumblr in August 2015, shortly before the final episodes of *Hannibal.* The series was designed by creator Bryan Fuller as a way to tell the story of author Thomas Harris's fictional serial killer and cannibal, Hannibal Lecter (Mads Mikkelsen), before his incarceration. Fuller's *Hannibal* ran for three seasons on NBC; the final episode aired on August 29, 2015, with a literal cliffhanger that saw FBI investigator Will Graham (Hugh Dancy) and Hannibal fall from a cliff top after defeating serial killer Frances Dolarhyde (Richard Armitage). Despite continued calls from fans, production personnel, and the show's cast for the production of new episodes, the series ended there (see Williams, forthcoming).

[4.2]   Aware that the show, which had become a source of comfort and reassurance as well as providing fannish pleasures of interpretation and identification, was coming to an end, I sought out spaces where I could prepare for the ending of the series. After the finale, I was devastated by this potentially tragic—or at the very least ambiguous—ending for the characters, and I turned to Tumblr to see how other fans were responding and how they were expressing their feelings about the final episode. As noted above, I was not (and am still not) an active member of the online *Hannibal* fan community, preferring to enjoy my fandom as an ordinary fan, to use the term of Sandvoss and Kearns (2014). My own mode of engagement echoes the fact that although "for some fans…the communal context of their fandom, or even their own textual productivity, form the true core of their fandom,…for others, their fandom is driven more by an idiosyncratic bond with their object of fandom" (Sandvoss 2005, 10). My lone fandom, however, meant that I had nobody with whom to share my responses to the final episode of the series. I thus joined Tumblr because I was well aware of its prominence as a platform for fannish expression, and I began following a range of *Hannibal* fan blogs.

[4.3]   Tumblr's connections with fan cultures are well documented (Bury et al. 2013; Deller 2015; Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014; Newman 2014; Stein 2015, 2016; Thomas 2013; Willard 2016). Fan connections on the platform are more loosely defined than membership of fan communities in other online spaces, such as fan message boards or forums, because "fans primarily find one another through tags rather than through the linear and more formal threads of a message board or forum." Indeed, "Tumblr allows for fluidity of engagement and a community with no clear boundaries to define membership" (Deller 2015, ¶3.6). As I discovered, Tumblr offers a more open space for membership of fandoms because users can simply start to search through tags and follow blogs relevant to their interests. Relatedly, on the site,

[4.4]   "belonging" to a fandom [is] a fuzzy concept. Unlike Facebook, Tumblr users do not get accepted to groups. Instead, they are part of the fandom when they feel they are. Participation entailed following posts with hashtags associated with a TV show, following posts by users who posted about a show, or posting about a show, regardless of whether others read the posts. (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014, 4)

[4.5]   This casual ability to join a fandom can be useful for those fans who seek out Tumblr but are initially confused by how to navigate the platform or are unclear about the rules of membership and engagement. This can mean that some "struggle to become part of a fandom community, question when and if they are a part of a fandom, [and] are unclear of the size of the community they are a part of" (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014, 6). However, for others, Tumblr's size, relative anonymity, and lack of clear boundaries offer a space for unique forms of expression, such as intertextual references between different fandoms, the best example of which is the *Doctor Who* (1963–89, 1996, 2005–) *Sherlock* (2010–), and *Supernatural* (2005–) fan crossover fandom of SuperWhoLock (Booth 2016).

[4.6]   In my case of dealing with the ending of a beloved TV program, the platform offered a place for me to safely negotiate and work through my affective responses. Although the concept of a safe space may seem at odds with the porousness of fandoms on Tumblr, the site has long been viewed as a place where users can freely express themselves politically and personally (Bell 2013; Connelly 2015; Oakley 2016). However, the platform's opacity can also work to allow individual fans who do not wish to actively interact with others to remain hidden. The "social network in Tumblr is unidirectional" (Chang et al. 2014, 21) and does not require the reciprocity of being accepted as a friend or follower, or any expectation of being followed back (as in other platforms such as Facebook or Twitter). This, coupled with the site's relative sprawl of fan blogs and connections, facilitates a space where lone fans can negotiate and express fannish identities via reblogging and sharing posts without needing to interact directly with anyone.

[4.7]   Although I joined Tumblr to see what other fans were posting about *Hannibal,* I assumed the status of a lurker (Bury et al. 2013, 316), and despite not actively participating in organized fandom, I considered myself a loyal fan. As Harrington and Bielby (1995) point out, a focus on fan production and creation "obscures an important dimension of fanship, the acceptance and maintenance of a fan identity…[because] fanship is not merely about activity; it involves parallel processes of activity and identity" (86–87). At first I intended to simply see what other fans were saying and posting about *Hannibal,* but this soon led to infrequent sharing and reblogging content from other fans. This mode of engagement may seem to challenge my definition of lone fandom because it involves recirculating content created by other fans while not creating my own. This was enabled by the fact that "the connections in Tumblr do not require mutual confirmation" (Chang et al. 2014, 21). I was able to follow *Hannibal* fan blogs without the requirement of reciprocity.

[4.8]   In so doing, my mode of participation lay between the acts of creating content (textual production) and its consumption—a liminal space of engagement that lies somewhere between production and consumption. The act of sharing and recirculating GIFs, fan art, or commentary is not an act of production in itself, but it is more involved than simply scrolling through Tumblr and viewing the work of others. Despite this, the lack of active engagement with other fans meant that I continued to identify as a lone fan despite my minimal foray into Tumblr's *Hannibal* fan spaces. Indeed, the lack of mutuality engendered by Tumblr's functions offered me a space for mourning and working through that was unencumbered by the need to share my feelings or interpretations with other fans. Although some find such collective mourning useful (Williams 2015, 58–61), my experience as a lone fan meant that I was anxious about entering into fannish debate with other posters or potentially having my own interpretations of and responses to the series finale challenged. The opportunities to work through and deal with my responses to the end of *Hannibal* were thus uninhibited by the potential constraints of conflicting views or the norms of a collective fandom that I was not an active, visible member of. Of course, I can only reflect here on my own experiences and use of Tumblr as a mode of coping with the end of a fan object. However, as I have argued throughout, exploring how individuals deal with such moments of loss allows consideration of how "lone fans may have very different reactions in the post-object period" after a favorite fan object ends and "how they continue to interact with fan objects in individual contexts" (Williams 2015, 202).

5. Tumblr, GIFs, and the recirculation of images

[5.1]   As I explored Tumblr, I quickly realized that more common than fan posting of interpretations or responses was the circulation and recirculation of visual images such as screenshots and GIFs from the final episode. This reliance on

the visual should not have been surprising, given that "Tumblr is especially known for its use of reaction GIFs: short clips of movies and television shows that communicate emotions ('feels'), reactions, and everyday events" (Bourlai and Herring 2014, 171). Thus, Tumblr's potential as a safe and hidden space for lone fans is also linked to the fact that it differs from other social media and microblogging platforms in its reliance on images rather than words. Indeed, "the rapid method of posting and re-circulating content is convenient for Tumblr bloggers because the dynamic flux of images, videos, and GIFs is valued over composing and reading lengthy passages of text" (Gursimsek 2016, 334). Users have

> [5.2]   their own individual blog(s), on which they can post new content or "reblog" content posted by other Tumblr users. Users can choose among seven rebloggable types of posts: text, photo, link, audio, video, chat, and quote. Tumblr also has a Private Messaging (PM) feature that lets users reply to messages received either privately or publicly. (Bourlai and Herring 2014, 171)

[5.3]   When users reblog a post, they have the option to add their own comments to it, and if several users engage in this way, a conversational thread can be formed, with different Tumblr users either talking to one another on a post, or a sequence of subsequent, different users making comments. However, because a comment is not a prerequisite for sharing Tumblr images and GIF sets, users can reblog without ever needing to directly converse with the original poster or reblogger. Thus, as noted above, fans on Tumblr can thus also be rendered invisible via the platform's emphasis on the visual, participating as lurkers who do not have to engage in reciprocal relationships with other fans in order to post and share content.

[5.4]   In relation to the *Hannibal* finale, images such as those in figures 1 and 2 were commonly reblogged on Tumblr (note 1).

Figure 1. Image of Hannibal and Will's embrace on the cliff top in the 2015 series finale of *Hannibal.*

Figure 2. Dual image of Hannibal and Will's embrace, with dialogue added in captions.

[5.5]   As *Hannibal* fans on Tumblr began to create, post, and reblog GIFs, especially those from the final scene of the series, it became clear that these blogs were being used as sites to transformatively "annotate, appreciate, and recirculate objects of interest" (Newman 2014, 128). The GIF sets of the final scene, where Will and Hannibal share an intimate moment of connection regarding their pleasure in having killed Dolarhyde, or their subsequent fall from the cliff, became endlessly looped reminders of the moments that had had such an emotional and affective impact on me when I watched the episode (figures 3, 4, and 5).

Figure 3. GIF of Hannibal and Will embracing on the cliff top.

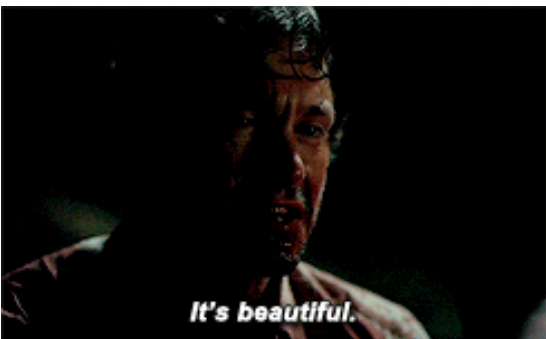Figure 4. GIF with dialogue text of Hannibal and Will sharing an intimate exchange.

Figure 5. GIF with dialogue text of Hannibal and Will.

[5.6]   Moreover, fans also worked to remove those moments from the narrative and create new meanings. They began to rework the images they posted, adding text or changing the context of the scenes. These moments of transformative creativity, endlessly returning to my dashboard, highlighted how other fans were responding to the final episode by selecting "particular moments from the source text…and recontextualiz[ing] them among one another, [and] in so doing revealing or establishing new visual and thematic patterns, offering distilled readings or new meanings born of new contexts and juxtapositions" (Stein 2016).

6. Repetition, fannish trauma, and the infinite image

[6.1]   As I began to understand the importance that viewing these recirculated images was having on my response to the end of the series, I began to question why such repeated moments within the "river of images" (Newman 2014, 127) of my Tumblr dashboard were helping me cope. It is here that Freud's work on repetition and working through offers a

useful theoretical approach for understanding why the moments of repetition offered by Tumblr's GIF culture help fans cope with moments of rupture or ending. Such ideas allow for consideration of how "it is often the compulsive repetition of a narrative that allows for someone to feel some form of agency over the story of his or her own trauma" (Sturken 2007, 27).

[6.2]   Tumblr is predicated on forms of reblogging and recirculation in a way that is less dominant on platforms such as Facebook or Twitter (despite the prevalence of the practice of sharing or retweeting). Tumblr encourages a form of spreadability (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013) via its own tools and via the ease of sharing content among one's own followers or to other fandoms. As Deller (2015) notes, this enables "easy sharing within and across communities, which can then lead to particular approaches, be they humorous, aesthetic, or linguistic, spreading between communities in much the same way in which online memes and jokes do" (¶3.5). The phenomenon of reblogging has been mapped by Chang et al. (2014), who analyze how reblogs travel across the site: "Once a blog is posted, it can be reblogged by others. Those reblogs can be reblogged even further, which leads to a tree structure, which is called reblog cascade, with the first author being the root node. The reblog cascade size indicates the number of reblog actions that have been involved in the cascade" (26). Within fandoms, this reblog cascade appears infinite, with various Tumblr fan blogs sharing and resharing images and GIF sets. Although Chang et al. (2014) determined that "social celebrities, who are the major source of contents, reblog a lot more compared with other users" (26), this was not necessarily the case among the *Hannibal* fan blogs I was following. Instead, those with high numbers of followers and lesser known blogs were both equally likely to reblog content, leading to a combination of both more immediate cascades and longer-term recirculation of visual material from the finale.

[6.3]   The frequency with which images of scenes and moments from the finale of *Hannibal* that had initially upset me reappeared on my Tumblr dash became a source of comfort and a locus for working through and dealing with my fannish grief. For instance, the final scene of the series had initially brought me to tears and was followed by the experience of mourning for the loss of the show and characters. However, as these originally upsetting moments of narrative trauma (such as Hannibal and Will's tumble from the cliff in figure 6) and corresponding affective fannish response became more familiar via the recirculation of GIFs and images, their meanings became abstracted. The images began to function more as artifacts that provided comfort and a means of coping with these feelings.

Figure 6. GIF of Hannibal and Will's fall from the cliff top in the final moments of the series finale.

[6.4]   The ability to rewatch these moments via the GIFs recirculated on Tumblr allowed a shift from sadness and grief to a refocus on analyzing the smaller moments that make up this scene. For example, because GIFs slow down the scene, it was possible to focus on the microexpressions of the characters and their interactions with each other. Given the presence of fans who supported a romantic relationship between Hannibal and Will in the series (referred to by the portmanteau term "Hannigram"), the presence of repeated GIFs moved the final scene from one of upset to a moment where one could read the interactions between the characters as supportive of Hannigram. In these potentially transformative moments, fan edits and uses of GIFs helped refocus the final moments of the series from a potentially tragic reading to one of romance—a reading that often becomes more pronounced with the cessation of a series because it offers the last chance for that ship to become canon (Williams 2011). As fans of *Hannibal,* and in particular Hannigram, began to recut and circulate GIF sets that emphasized the romance inherent in the ending of the series, my own responses were able to move from grief and mourning toward a sense of satisfaction that the ending could be read as endorsing the Hannigram ship.

[6.5]   However, GIFs' function as a source of comfort was not limited to links to the Hannigram ship. The final moments of the episode can obviously be read as depicting the potential deaths of both Hannibal and Will. Such a reading, however, is complicated by the inclusion of a postcredit coda that indicated that at least one of the lead characters had survived the fall from the cliff, as well as by subsequent ongoing discussion by the cast and crew about a return of the series (see Williams, forthcoming). Thus, although this ending may have been a particular source of sadness, given the potential character deaths, I and the majority of other fans on Tumblr did not view the finale in this way. GIFs, instead of serving as a way to mourn and commemorate dead characters, instead became a mode of analysis to consider how the characters may have survived such a fall, functioning as a form of "forensic fandom" (Mittell 2007, 128), with evidence that needed to be scrutinized for answers. GIFs depicting the moments before the characters fall from the cliff can be examined in order to determine factors such as the distance that they might fall, the angle at which they disappear, and the subsequent probability of their survival. In this case, the repetition of GIFs allowed "the process of getting over a loss or painful experience. In this extended sense, mourning is an example of working through, since it involves the piecemeal recognition that the lost object is no longer available in a host of contexts in which he was previously a familiar figure" (Rycroft 1972, 179). The constant stream of repeated images could be analyzed so as to allow for a process of coming to terms with the possibility of the characters' deaths, but it could also be analyzed so as to open up readings for endings where characters instead survived, as further encouraged by the postcredit scene and the producers' comments.

[6.6]   The opportunity to review moments from other episodes across the series offered the pleasures of familiarity and comfort, functioning like the rewatching of entire episodes as "reassuring, therapeutic, cheering sessions with familiar guides and confidantes" (Brooker 2007, 161). The ability to revisit favorite scenes or moments from texts via recordings (DVDs or DVR'd content) may offer the chance for "scenes, characters and dialogue [to] be burned into the viewer's memory, becoming signature aspects of meaning and pleasure" (Klinger 2010, 3–4). In the case of GIFs and GIF sets, this becomes a form of shorthand, allowing fans on Tumblr to reencounter such moments through the scroll of their dashboard, providing a sense pleasure and a safe return to a beloved text.

[6.7]   Tumblr's position as a prominent site for representing fannish identities, as well as its users' posting of GIFS as a primary mode of communication, allows short snippets, images, and lines of dialogue to be endlessly replayed, reflecting elements of what Barbara Klinger (2010) calls replay culture and what Newman (2014) refers to as quotation culture. In so doing, the platform offers opportunities for what Freud refers to as working through ([1924] 1956) via repetition of key narrative moments (figure 7), allowing for lone fans to negotiate and cope with the ending of a beloved fan object.

Figure 7. Image showing the frames most commonly used in GIF set sequences of *Hannibal*'s final scene.

7. Conclusion

[7.1]   Tumblr's specific modes of communication, such as its "use of animated GIFs to express opinions and reactions" (Bourlai and Herring 2014, 171), the ease of sharing material, and its "engagement with multiple sources" (Thomas 2013, ¶2.3), engender repetition and recirculation that echo Freud's ideas about repetition and trauma, as well as subsequent uses of his work to understand contemporary media forms. Freudian psychoanalysis is here informative in enabling us to understand elements of the fan psyche and the fannish experience. Such analysis helps us broaden our understandings of the endings of fan objects in terms of working through in order to consider the use of various platforms and to better understand how individual fans respond, particularly for lone fans. As Bury et al. (2013) note, "We, as fan scholars, tend to overlook non-participatory fans, and this leads us to think that we do need to do more work on non-participatory fans/lurkers" (316). Freudian analysis is particularly well suited to turning our attention to fans for whom "the significance of their fandom is constituted primarily through their bond with, and affective attachment to, their fan object, rather than an association with fellow fans" (Sandvoss and Kearns 2014, 97), and who may engage in sharing the content of others but refrain from conversation or engagement with them. Those who identify as lone fans may have quite different responses to moments of loss or rupture. The use of platforms such as Tumblr, as well as the transformative modes of repetition that it offers, allows modes of working through periods of fannish mourning that are not as reliant on interaction and communication with other fans as those who actively participate in organized fandom. Of course, the way that other online spaces such as Twitter, Facebook groups, or online fan message boards offer opportunities to respond to the endings of fan objects may be different than Tumblr. Future research could profitably investigate how fans use these other sites. However, Tumblr, my focus here, has unique modes of scrolling, with a frequent return of the same images or GIFs to the user's dashboard and a sense of infinite scroll—all important to permit a lone fan to engage in Freudian working through.

[7.2]   Exploring practices such as reblogging and repeated sharing of images and GIFs—as well as the transformative potential they offer for changing both meaning and fannish response—thus enables closer examination of how lone fans make use of modes of repetition within fan culture. This in turn helps us better understand the uses of a specific media platform such as Tumblr, and its distinctive modes of communication and expression, as fans deal with moments of ending or potential fan trauma.

8. Note

1. Although many of the images and GIFs used here could be easily found by searching Tumblr for the #Hannibal hashtag or associated episode and character tags, I have here prioritized fans' rights to privacy and anonymity. The GIFs that I discuss and analyze are those that I reblogged during my initial period of involvement on Tumblr. Although more systematic searching—for example, for hashtags for the series finale (#Hannibalfinale) or the episode's title ("The Wrath of the Lamb," with the hashtags #wrathofthelamb or #twotl)—yields a range of content, including images, analysis, and GIFs, I have elected to focus only on the material that I encountered and drew on during my negotiation of responses to the end of the series. Furthermore, questions around fan privacy and ethics in fan studies have not yet reached a consensus; "researchers have not always been in agreement on whether to prioritize questions of privacy, confidentiality and consent or issues of data collection, representation and authenticity—or even on how to define what it is we're studying" (Zubernis and Davis 2016, 301). In keeping with ethical debates surrounding the privacy of fans in online spaces—especially Tumblr, which is considered by many users to be a safe space for debate due to its "semi-anonymity" (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014, 288)—I have not identified any Tumblr users or accounts by name. The images and GIFs that I reproduce in this article are easy to find via a Google search, and given that my argument centers on my own responses to these images, rather than on analyses of the interfan and communal practices on Tumblr itself, my arguments here remain valid without the need to name fans who shared this material. Further, given the platform's lack of clear organization and the often difficult task of identifying where a post originated, as well as the fact that "the availability of posts and consistency of user names are particularly unreliable on Tumblr" (Thomas 2013, ¶6.1), sources may vanish from the platform or become difficult to track down.

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Content, conduct, and apologies in Tumblr fandom tags

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[0.1]   Abstract—The architecture of Tumblr differs substantially from many other social media platforms, such as Facebook, because there are no personal profiles and social connections are not made public. Because Tumblr's architecture lacks formal grouping structures, tags, traditionally thought as a way of organizing resources, may take on functions otherwise associated with communities even though the affiliation is looser. Content analysis was performed to investigate content and conduct norms in two specialized fandom tags on Tumblr. This research compares the circulation of sexually suggestive material, reproaches, and apology rituals in posts tagged "zoethian" and "sjips." Even though these two tags originate from similar source material (YouTube videos produced under the Yogscast umbrella), different standards of behavior and shared content emerge among participants, which are assessed in light of the increasingly close contact and overlap between media producers and fans in social media spaces. Although the data set is from 2013, and thus describes a slightly different version of Tumblr, it serves as an historical capture of the site and behaviors from that time period.

[0.2]   Keywords—Apology rituals; Conduct control; Let's Plays; Social media; YouTube fandom

1. Preface

[1.1]   When attempting to explain Tumblr to friends and colleagues, I often tell them to forget about Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram and instead to think of Geocities. The comparison isn't perfect, but it serves to highlight how social connections across the site function less by a social network site logic (boyd and Ellison 2007; Ellison and boyd 2013) and more like the personal websites of the early 2000s (Papacharissi 2002), where content is less sanitized and messier, and where personal connections exert far more influence than raw follower count (Cho 2015). This study is an initial step to understand how community is negotiated on Tumblr, a microblogging site where no formal community architecture exists. I examine behaviors present in two tags from a single fandom in order to articulate behavioral trends within and across these two related tags.

[1.2]   The data for this quantitative analysis were collected in 2013 and thus reflect an iteration of the site that no longer exists. Tumblr, like many digital web artifacts, is a continually moving object of study. I have tried throughout to contextualize what Tumblr looked like in 2013 and how a very particular set of tags functioned as a community while being unable to call on familiar community structures found on other social media sites populated by fandom participants, particularly LiveJournal (Busse and Hellekson 2006; Kendall 2007). When trying to speak about what Tumblr is, it is equally important to acknowledge what is isn't—and it isn't an ideal web platform for exerting social control and building community boundaries.

2. Introduction

[2.1]   Here I investigate the content circulated and conduct performed on Tumblr within the Yogscast fandom using quantitative content analysis. The Yogscast are a group of online Let's Players who produce YouTube videos in which they play video games, joke with one another, and sometimes engage in long-form storytelling. Some members of the

Yogs have been friends for a decade, having met through playing the massively multiplayer online role-playing game *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2004), while others are YouTube content producers who started out independent and then later joined the group. The Yogscast as a business entity takes a portion of earned revenue from member YouTube channels in exchange for promotional, editing, and legal services. The Yogscast is thus both a friend group and a business arrangement. The Yogscast fandom in turn includes discussion of and fan works about personalities and/or characters based on both content producers who are contractually bound to the Yogscast and various friends of those content producers who appear in their videos.

[2.2]   At the time of data collection, the "Yogscast: Lewis and Simon" channel (formerly on YouTube as BlueXephos but now as Yogscast [https://www.youtube.com/yogscast], often referred to by fans as the main channel) had over 4.4 million subscribers and 1.8 billion video views (as of March 2018, over 7.2 million subscribers and over 3.7 billion views).

[2.3]   Because the Yogs are themselves social media personalities, the perceived distance between members of the group and their fans (called Yognau(gh)ts) is quite close. Yognau(gh)ts who produce romantic or sexual content do not uniformly agree whether their fandom is real person fiction. Some fans contend that they are writing fictional characters based on the Yogs' on-camera personas, particularly in regard to their *Minecraft* (2011) Let's Plays, rather than about the YouTubers themselves. Yogs have gone as far as reading fan fiction aloud on podcasts and live streams, sometimes affectionately (as on "YoGPoD 39: Christmas Fun Packed Special 2011") and sometimes dismissively (as on "Christmas Livestreams, 2015"). They have also hired fan artists to produce official promotional images. This proximity between content producers and fans produced some level of anxiety in fans, who then adopted particular tagging practices in order to regulate who gained access to fan works and through what means.

[2.4]   In this study, I focus on two specialized Yogscast fandom tags on Tumblr, zoethian and sjips. "Zoethian" is a portmanteau of "Zoeya" and "Rythian." This is a heterosexual ship that is used as a plot device in "The Tekkit Chronicles" series of *Minecraft* videos. "Sjips" is a portmanteau of "Sjin" and "Sips" (note 1). This is a male homosexual (slash) pairing that is joked about in various series, including multiple *Minecraft* video series.

[2.5]   The establishment of content and conduct norms, as well as fandom participants using these tags as both nouns and verbs, signal that tags take on some of the functions of communities in an online space that lacks formalized community pages. Content analysis is used to code for content and conduct variables and to establish quantitative measures of the norms adopted by fans who engage on Tumblr.

[2.6]   Tumblr's architecture lends itself to fandom participation because fan fiction, fan art, and general discussion can all be distributed and retrieved from a single platform. Tagging allows fans to indicate the show, movie, or video game that corresponds to a post's content. Without belonging to a community as strictly defined by Tumblr's architecture, users can nonetheless reach a potential audience that may be searching by tag. Participatory fandom culture has been considered as a possible training ground for developing and practicing the production, distribution, and social skills necessary for successful, meaningful engagement in politics and enacting social change (Jenkins 2006). The viral and memetic properties of digital platforms and applications open up participation, both political and personal, to increasing numbers of individuals and publics (Shifman 2014; Papacharissi 2015).

[2.7]   Lothian (2013) separates the subcultural fan from the common use of the term. When I say, "I am a fan of *Star Trek;* I like watching the show," it means a different level of engagement compared to the subcultural fan, who may say, "I participate in *Star Trek* fandom, where I read and write fan fiction." I use the term "fan" in this latter participatory sense. However, Tumblr supports both styles of fan practice.

[2.8]   Participatory fans on Tumblr adopt specialized fandom tags, which are unlikely to be used by Tumblr members who do not identify with a particular fandom or subsection of fandom. Such tags are not merely composed of the name the fandom (such as a show or movie title), or even one of the primary characters. Rather, specialized fandom tags further delineate the potential audience, trying to draw the attention of a specific subsection of the larger fan base or to conceal content from other fans (and content producers) who do not want to view romantic or sexual content. In using these tags, widely scattered fans take on some characteristics of communities. Norms develop regarding what is posted and how fans interact with each other when a particular tag is deployed. Without an architecturally defined community structure, content and conduct are nonetheless debated and controlled.

3. Tumblr

[3.1]   Tumblr, which was founded in 2007, by 2013 hosted over 105 million accounts (About Tumblr [https://www.tumblr.com/about], 2013). Since then, it has grown to over 400 million blogs (About Tumblr, 2018). While sometimes identified as a social network site (Dana 2012; Mlot 2012), Tumblr resists several characteristics that researchers have previously identified as characteristic of such sites (boyd and Ellison 2007; Ellison and boyd 2013). Users can follow one another, but the ties do not need to be mutual, and mutual connections do not allow for increasing levels of privacy or disclosure. Social connections on Tumblr are entirely private and for many years could not be seen by a third party (note 2). Tumblr founder David Karp states that these alterations to the blogging and social network site formula are intentional to circumvent aspects of online interactions that "poison a whole community" (Walker 2012). Gaining followers is not intended to be competitive; those wishing to make disparaging remarks are forced to display the remarks on their own blog.

[3.2]   Tumblr's multimedia approach to blogging, as well as the absence of a character limit or restriction to a single media format, affords the platform additional flexibility compared to Twitter or single-input social media sites, which may allow only for sharing images or audio, but not both. Although Tumblr blogs *are* blogs, they add the viral mechanisms of later social media, particularly the ability to reblog posts. Maintainers of early blogs through the 1990s and early 2000s hosted their blogs on personal websites, primarily dealt with technology topics, and consciously tried to distance themselves from "feminine" online journaling practice, thus setting blogs on a conceptually different trajectory than online journals (Siles 2011, 2012). As the concept of a blog stabilized in the mid-2000s, websites such as WordPress eased technical requirements, such as knowing HTML and purchasing web hosting (Siles 2012). Still, while blogging practice have always included links to other places on the web, the blog posts themselves were largely static, viewable only from the maintainer's blog and thus perpetuating a sense of distance between community members, even if they did interact on- or off-line (Kendall 2007; Siles 2011). Tumblr allows posts to be reblogged—that is, reposted to a new blog that is maintained by a different person. This function contributes to the viral nature of posts, potentially opening up otherwise niche content produced by amateurs to greater audiences (Shifman 2014).

[3.3]   Tumblr does not have formalized community, interest or group spaces or accounts like LiveJournal or Facebook. On Facebook, a user can become a fan of an account dedicated to a product or person, formalizing this relationship by means of a link that will appear on the user's personal profile. On LiveJournal, community accounts are organized around interests, products, and people. Joining a community formalizes the relationship between the user account and the community account by means of a link to the community in the user's profile, and vice versa. However, many users treat LiveJournal more as a personal journal rather than a community tool (Kendall 2007). Fandom-specific interview and ethnographic work has found that fans find LiveJournal to be an important community space where they can more freely express themselves (Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007). Tumblr lacks any of these formalized community structures. Tags are one of just a few ways Tumblr users discover content produced and circulated by other members. This is not entirely unlike Twitter, which uses hashtags to facilitate searching and to form temporary affective publics coalescing around particular tags during the height of their popularity, then dispersing (Papacharissi 2012, 2015; Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2011). Tags are not medium specific. For example, searching for the tag "Star Trek" will retrieve videos, images, and stories that all have the "Star Trek" tag.

[3.4]   Previous academic work on Tumblr focused on the platform as one of a number of blogging application options (DeVoe 2009; Welsh and France 2012). While continuing research into Tumblr practice has only just begun to appear in academic discourse, what research has been accomplished recognizes that Tumblr users do share a particular affinity with one another that is unique compared to other social media platforms (Bell 2013; Chang et al. 2014; Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014; Thelandersson 2014). While the platform lacks a visible mechanism for articulating the links between users, and there is nothing approaching a community page, which was an architectural feature of LiveJournal (Neill Hoch 2014), Tumblr users do display cohesive behaviors in reblogging practice (Chang et al. 2014) and frequently reference other users with whom they feel they share a relationship (Bell 2013; Tiidenberg 2016). Prior research by boyd (2006; see also Davis 2010) regarding Friendster and MySpace examines alternate means for crafting communities in digital spaces, including curating "top friends." While Tumblr does not have a top friends feature, boyd's work points toward alternative avenues for articulating social and communal ties through social platforms. The present research adds to the existing literature by articulating specific interaction practices occurring within two specialized fandom tags, thus highlighting emerging behaviors and allowing for contrasting the two sets of interconnected fans.

4. Tagging

[4.1]   Tags are keywords or phrases that are attached to a specific resource within a system by users of that system rather than by a designated authority (Golder and Huberman 2006; Mathes 2004; Marlow et al. 2006). The resource depends on the system in question. On Tumblr, the resource is the post, while on Flickr the resource is an image. Lin and Chen (2012) separate tagging behavior into three categories. In information organization–oriented tagging, taggers are primarily concerned with personal information retrieval; they tag resources to make it easier for them to personally find a resource again in the future, not for the express purpose of sharing. Social-oriented tagging strives to tag a resource in such a way other system users can discover and further share resources. These two positions "may not necessarily contradict each other. They could logically co-exist" (Lin and Chen 2012, 543). Finally, strategic tagging means that a tagger can work from multiple perspectives and may tag flexibly. Strategic taggers may be "more likely to produce influential tags" (Lin and Chen 2012, 543) and inspire imitation. Tagging imitation occurs when users make use of established, suggested tags. Both Delicious.com, studied by Lin and Chen, and Tumblr provide suggested tags to users on the basis of tag popularity.

[4.2]   Tagging systems have been considered as an alternative to taxonomies and controlled vocabularies crafted by information specialists. Controlled vocabularies are hierarchical indexes that require a great deal of up-front work to organize results for easy retrieval later (Macgregor and McCulloch 2006). The vast amount of information already on the internet, as well as the staggering quantity of new content that is continuously generated, means that most internet content cannot be organized into a controlled vocabulary by an authority. Instead, tagging systems develop into folksonomies, where no hierarchical system is planned before tagging begins. Mathes (2004) defines a folksonomy as "an organic system of organization" (3), which is "simply the set of terms that group of users tagged content with[;] they are not a predetermined set of classification terms or labels" (4). Folksonomies "lack hierarchy, parent-child relationships, and sibling relationships between terms" (4), which are standard characteristics of controlled vocabularies.

[4.3]   However, quantitative analysis of tag data, primarily from Del.icio.us (now Delicious.com) indicates that tags follow the power law distribution (Golder and Huberman 2006; Guy and Tonkin 2006; Kipp and Campbell 2006). A few tags are used very frequently. Early adopters of the platform establish these heavily used tags, which are then perpetuated by those who join the site later. Many tags are used infrequently. This results in a "long tail" of seldom used tags. Tags in general are therefore much more stable than their anticontrolled vocabulary ethos would suggest (Mathes 2004). Although not predetermined from the onset, tagging systems quickly become dominated by influential users.

[4.4]   Marlow et al. (2006) offer a qualitative classification matrix for tagging systems defined by seven dimensions: tagging rights, tagging support, aggregation model, object type, source of material, resource connectivity, and social connectivity. Decisions made by tagging system designers in each of these dimensions have potential implications for tagging behavior. Following this taxonomy, Tumblr is self-tagging, suggests tags to users, uses a bag model (each user tagging a resource can do so independently, allowing for duplicate resources and tags), allows for many different objects (images, video, audio, text), sources material from users, has no resource connectivity outside of the tag, and uses linked but entirely private social connectivity. By this taxonomy, Tumblr is not equivalent to either Flickr or Delicious.com, the two sites commonly researched in regards to tagging behavior. Tumblr offers a different set of constraints that may result in different patterns of tagging behavior.

5. "Zoethian" and "sjips" as specialized fandom tags

[5.1]   Scholars, particularly Booth, have considered the affordances and constraints of online platforms such as wikis (2009) and MySpace (2008) for fan participation. However, among academics researching fan fiction, LiveJournal has received considerably more attention. While there is still little specific research in regards to fan cultures on Tumblr (Bury et al. 2013), both Tumblr and LiveJournal's primary status as blogging platforms suggest some conceptual overlap.

[5.2]   The tension between the private act of journaling and the public sharing of journal entries via a social network architecture makes LiveJournal a site of performance (Kendall 2007; Lindemann 2005). Busse (2006) observes that

women sharing fan fiction with one another through their LiveJournal accounts use affectionate and sometimes sexual language with one another, even if they identify as heterosexual in other contexts. Collaborative online discussions with fan fiction writers and readers confirm that some participants consider LiveJournal fandom communities to constitute a "queer female space" where women can be verbally affectionate with one another (Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007). Fan cultures do develop norms that may differ from the cultural norms enacted by those same individuals outside the context of fandom.

[5.3]   The two tags under investigation, "zoethian" and "sjips," are specialized tags that, although not hierarchical in the formal sense, are narrower than a number of other tags in use. Both are portmanteaus that refer to specific romantic ships. Fans may favor one pairing between fictional characters and reject another. Thus, tagging a post "zoethian" or "sjips" indicates that it may be agreeable to a subset of Yogscast fandom, not necessarily all fans. In 2013, Tumblr's tagging system allowed for such distinctions to be made.

[5.4]   Previous research on tagging practice does not necessarily attend to the social norms that develop around a specific tag or set of tags. A focus on two specialized tags limits this project's scope and permits an exploration of how tags are used beyond information retrieval or gaining social clout. The use of these tags permits nascent community building and maintenance through social regulation. Previous work by Honeycutt (2005; Yahoo! Groups), boyd (2006; Friendster and MySpace), Danis and Lee (2005; intracompany websites), and Kendall (2002; MUDs), while qualitative in nature, pay special attention to repeated behaviors as they pertain to community maintenance and group identity—aspects I have tried to quantitatively capture here.

6. Conduct control

[6.1]   Conveying and reinforcing group behavioral norms in online is normally accomplished through textual rebukes. Smith, McLaughlin, and Osborne (1997) split a corrective episode into four parts: failure event, reproach, account, and evaluation of the account. Their study, and many similar studies looking at corrective episodes online, source data from message boards and Usenet groups. With these platforms, comments can directly follow the post where the failure event occurs. The account, where the at-fault poster describes or justifies why the failure event occurs, may then follow the reproach. Each is presented one after another, or at minimum in the same thread. In 2013, Tumblr did not allow comments, meaning that failures and reproach events may become separated from one another. One option is for reproachers to reblog the failure event, adding their own comments to the reblog, but this requires reproachers to post the offending entry to their own blog. It is just this type of accountability that Tumblr founder Karp intended when he decided that Tumblr would not use comments (Walker 2012).

[6.2]   The second option on Tumblr is to post a general reproach that is not directly tied to the failure event via a new post using tags that overlap with those of the offender. Thus, a failure event using the tag "zoethian" may cause a reproach post that is also tagged "zoethian." The reproach might not be formally linked back to the failure event, but all users tracking the "zoethian" tag would see this reproach.

[6.3]   Silencing speech, or "enduring noise and flames focused on the target collective identity" (Chua 2009, 235), can be deployed by aggressive, adversarial users to prevent communication among members of the targeted group. When group norms are threatened, elite or established members may also use hazing as a way of establishing boundaries. While such hazing is textual, this does not mean that is less aggressive or damaging than off-line hazing events (Honeycutt 2005). Tumblr's permeable group boundaries mean that users may become victims of silencing speech or face perceived threats to established norms. Although prior research suggests ways conduct has been controlled on different online platforms, none of it has been specific to Tumblr's architecture.

[6.4]   Therefore, to extend prior research on tagging and social media within fandoms, as well as research in conduct control in online spaces, the following research questions emerge to assess if users regard Tumblr tags as community groupings or spaces in the absence of architecturally formalized groups:

[6.5]   **RQ1:** How often do users of the "zoethian" and "sjips" tag use their portmanteau outside of the tag field?

RQ2: To what extent do users of the "zoethian" and "sjips" tags practice and reinforce the same content norms?

RQ3: To what extent is conduct control consistent between the "zoethian" and "sjips" tags?

7. Methods

[7.1]   The entire population of posts tagged either "zoethian" (n = 283) or "sjips" (n = 64) between February 18, 2013, and March 4, 2013, were collected for content analysis. The unit of observation was the Tumblr post. Two weeks of posts were collected to allow sufficient time for all four YouTube channels to release multiple videos. During data acquisition, Yogscast Sjin and Yogscast Sips released new videos almost every day; Yogscast Rythian released videos several times a week; and Yogscast ZoeyProasheck released one or two videos a week. During the observed period, all four Yogscast members appeared in at least one YouTube video with their partner and at least one video by themselves. Tumblr posting volume appears to increase as videos are released on YouTube, although the current study is not intended to investigate this trend.

[7.2]   Because the two tags are related through the larger Yogscast fandom, a small number of posts (n = 3) contained both tags, in which case they were counted twice in the data set, once for each tag. One post was eliminated during data collection because its tags were changed by the original poster within 48 hours of initial posting, thus removing the post from further tag searches.

[7.3]   After receipt of institutional review board approval for nonhuman subject research, I collected posts manually within 24 hours of initial posting. *Notes* attached to posts were counted at the time of coding, approximately one month after initial collection. Eight posts were deleted between initial collection and final coding. In these cases, an earlier *note* count, collected between forty-eight and seventy-two hours of initial posting, was used. These posts could not be assessed for the *reproach in notes* and *account* variables because they were no longer assessable, and therefore they were excluded from analysis.

[7.4]   Two coders assessed posts with a 10 percent (n = 35) overlap to calculate intercoder reliability. Posts were proportionally assigned to each coder at approximately a 4:1 (zoethian:sjips) ratio to ensure both coders would be coding posts from both sets. Coders had prior knowledge of how to use the Tumblr platform. Coders also had prior familiarity with Yogscast YouTube videos. Intercoder reliability for content and conduct variables was computed using Perreault and Leigh's (1989) reliability index (table 1). Intercoder agreement of 0.90 or above is considered sufficient agreement for coders to continue coding independently without additional overlap (Perreault and Leigh 1989).

Table 1. Intercoder Reliability for All Variables

Variable	Perreault and Leigh's (1989) Reliability Index
Notes	1
Content variables	
Tag as adjective	1
Tag as noun	1
Post type	0.95
Visual sexual content	1
Verbal sexual content	0.9
Conduct variables	
Reproach in post	0.96
Reproach in notes	1
Account	1
Apology rituals	
Ritual 1	0.93

Variable	Perreault and Leigh's (1989) Reliability Index
Ritual 2	0.96
Ritual 3	0.96
Ritual 4	0.93
Ritual 5	1

[7.5]   *Notes* are the combined total of "likes" and "reblogs" by other Tumblr members. ("Replies" are now also included in "notes," but this was not functional at the time of data collection.) This is a publically visible number that appears alongside each post. *Notes* indicate some level of endorsement by other Tumblr users. Reblogging distributes content to additional users who may not be looking at a specific tag, and likes are publically visible when viewing all notes associated with a post, but they do not redistribute the post.

[7.6]   Content variables were defined to code for specific content found within each post. References to the tag as an entity location (*tag as noun*) or descriptor (*tag as adjective*) were coded as present or absent. Posters sometimes address the tag as if it were a community, or at least as if ties exist between Tumblr members who use a specific tag with frequency. For *tag as noun* or *tag as adjective* to be present, a reference to "zoethian," "sjips," or the phrase "the tag" had to be present in the body of the post in addition to "zoethian" or "sjips" in the tag field. Posts were tagged as *tag as noun* if the phrase "the tag" or the words "zoethian" or "sjips" were used as a noun to refer to a place object, such as in the phrase, "I wrote zoethian." If the words "zoethian" or "sjips" were used as an adjective, such as the phrase, "Hello sjips people!," the post was coded as *tag as adjective.* By using the portmanteau outside of the tag field, the words "zoethian" and "sjips" are fulfilling a function other than personal information retrieval or social-oriented tagging. Using the portmanteau in the body of the post suggests that the tag is used as a proxy for a formalized group space that does not exist on Tumblr. Tumblr members may be "zoethian people" even though there is no formalized "zoethian" community space.

[7.7]   All posts were coded as belonging to one of three post types: *fan fiction, fan art,* or *general discussion posts,* with the latter used for all posts not fitting into *fan fiction* or *fan art.* General discussion posts include talking about Yogscast videos (including reactions), posting screen captures from videos, and reposting Twitter conversations between Yogscast members.

[7.8]   Sexual explicitness was coded as either *visual* (most often in the case of *fan art*) or *verbal* (most often in the case of *fan fiction*). Visual explicitness is present when "character's actions [or depictions] imply a sense of likely sexual intimacy" or behavior (Downs and Smith 2010, 276). "Sex talk," or verbal explicitness, includes dialogue or text between characters or posters that suggest sexual issues or sexual behavior at any point in time (Kunkel, Cope, and Biely 1999).

[7.9]   For conduct variables, posts were assessed for *reproach in post, reproach in notes,* and *accounts.* The method for assessing these three variables differs somewhat from methods previously used when coding Usenet and message board content, although the definitions of the categories themselves are similar to those of Smith, McLaughlin, and Osborne (1997). A reproach is any statement that draws attention to an infraction of behavioral norms. This can range from simply pointing out that an infraction has occurred to cursing and threats. Because Tumblr does not work on a thread-reply structure like a message board or Usenet group, reproaches can be difficult to tie back to a single specific behavioral infraction. A *reproach in post* occurs when the body text of a post draws attention to an infraction, even if a specific failure event is not identified.

[7.10]   A *reproach in notes* is present when one or more of the notes attached to a post was a reblog with the addition of a reproach. When reblogging a post, rebloggers have the option to add additional text that appears below the original post, potentially to add a reproach. These reproaches will generally not appear when searching for a tag because reblogging on Tumblr by default removes all the original tags from the reblog. Such tag stripping means that when a post is reblogged thousands of times, it does not appear thousands of times when someone searches for a particular tag. In the case of conduct control, it means that the reproach might be more concealed, although still completely public, than it would be on a Usenet group or message board. If a *reproach in notes* occurred*,* coders also coded the presence or absence of an *account. Accounts* are excuses or justifications for the failure event (Schlenker and Darby 1981; Smith, McLaughlin, and Osborne 1997). An *account* had to follow a *reproach in notes* in order to be correctly

identified as a response to particular reproach. More general admissions of guilt were captured using the *apology rituals* variables.

[7.11]   Apologies were considered as a means of regulating conduct. An apology indicates that the poster acknowledges that an infraction has occurred, whether or not others have identified it as a failure event. Apologies could consist of any combination of five rituals (Goffman 1971; Schlenker and Darby 1981), as follows. *Ritual 1* is a "statement or apologetic intent" (Schlenker and Darby 1981, 272) such as "I'm sorry." *Ritual 2* is an acknowledgment that the poster feels bad about the infraction: "I feel awful about this." *Ritual 3* offers restitution: "I'll make it up to you next time I post." In *ritual 4,* the poster disparages him- or herself for misbehavior, including self-deprecation: "I know my drawing is awful." *Ritual 5* involves directly asking for forgiveness: "Please forgive me." Apologies did not need to follow a *reproach in post* or *reproach in notes.* Any time one of these five rituals was present, an apology occurred, even if the offended party or recipient of the apology was unclear or imaginary.

8. Results

[8.1]   For *notes,* "Zoethian" posts average 21.53 notes per post and "sjips" posts average 63.78 notes per post. Posts using the "sjips" tag receive significantly more *notes* than those using the "zoethian" tag ($t = 4.393$, $p < .001$). *Notes* are used in the analysis below as a proxy for popularity and endorsement.

[8.2]   The first research question asks how frequently "zoethian" and "sjips" users use their specialized portmanteau outside the tag field. There is no statistically significant difference (Kunkel, Cope, and Biely 1999) between the two tags when considering either *tag as noun* or *tag as adjective.* Users of the tags "zoethian" and "sjips" use these specialized tags for reasons other than information retrieval or socially oriented reasons (Lin and Chen 2012). "Zoethian" and "sjips" users use their respective specialized fan tag equally as a noun ($\chi^2 = 0.04$) or verb ($\chi^2 = 1.06$). They may be using it to signal to other Tumblr users that they are part of a nascent community.

[8.3]   The second research question asks if users of the "zoethian" and "sjips" tags enforce the same content norms. There were statistically significant differences between both *visual* and *verbal* sexual explicitness, and for the distribution of *fan art* and *general discussion* posts. Table 2 shows the percentage of posts in each tag that use the specialized fan tag as a *noun* or *adjective* and both *verbal* and *visual* sexual explicitness variables. Users of the "sjips" tag post significantly more sexually explicit content, both visually ($\chi^2 = 31.40$, $p < .001$) and verbally ($\chi^2 = 30.32$, $p < .001$). Not only are posters using the "sjips" tag posting more sexual content than users of the "zoethian" tag but they are endorsing that content with notes.

Table 2. Content Variables by Tag

Tag	Tag as Noun	Tag as Adjective	Visual Sex	Verbal Sex
Zoethian (het pairing)	7.07%	12.37%	1.14%	4.24%
Sjips (slash pairing)	7.81%	17.19%	17.18%	25.00%
Pearson's chi-square	0.04	1.06	31.40***	30.32***
***p < .001.				

[8.4]   Table 3 summarizes the distribution of posts by *post type.* Users of the "zoethian" tag tend to engage in more general discussion (65.02 percent) than do users of the "sjips" tag (31.25 percent) ($\chi^2 = 24.57$, $p < .001$). Users of the "sjips" tag post more fan art (43.75 percent) than do users of the "zoethian" (17.67 percent) tag ($\chi^2 = 20.38$, $p < .001$).

Table 3. Post Type by Tag

Tag	Fan Fiction	Fan Art	General Discussion
Zoethian (het pairing)	17.31%	17.67%	65.02%
Sjips (slash pairing)	25.00%	43.75%	31.25%
Pearson's chi-square	2.03	20.38***	24.57***
***p < .001.			

[8.5]   Table 4 summarizes reproaches and accounts as a percentage of all posts in each tag. There is a statistically significant difference between groups for the variable *reproach in notes* (χ^2 = 5.17, p < .05). There is no statistical difference between groups when considering *reproach in post* (χ^2 = 1.38) and *account* (χ^2 = 0.63).

Table 4. Reproaches and Accounts by Tag

Tag	Reproach in Post	Reproach in Notes	Account
Zoethian (het pairing)	2.12%	8.30%	1.08%
Sjips (slash pairing)	0	0	0
Pearson's chi-square	1.38	5.17*	0.63
*p < .05.			

[8.6]   Although the "zoethian" tag had significantly more reproaches, Tumblr members using the "sjips" tag exhibited more apologetic behaviors. Those using the "sjips" tag used more self-deprecating remarks in their posts, engaging in apology *ritual 4* (χ^2 = 9.49, p < .01). Mostly these self-deprecating remarks stated that the posters considered themselves to be poor writers or artists when posting fan fiction or fan art. Table 5 summarizes apology rituals by tag.

Table 5. Apology Rituals by Tag

Tag	Ritual 1	Ritual 2	Ritual 3	Ritual 4	Ritual 5
Zoethian (het pairing)	7.77%	1.06%	3.53%	13.78%	1.06%
Sjips (slash pairing)	3.13%	3.13%	3.12%	29.69%	0
Pearson's chi-square	1.75	1.57	0.03	9.49**	0.68
**p < .01.					

9. Discussion

[9.1]   In this study of two tags used by subcultural Yogscast fans on Tumblr, differences in content and conduct between the two tags may be based on norms developed by the users of each tag in the absence of Tumblr's architectural limitations or opportunities, or the influence of moderators. Although this research is exploratory, there is evidence that online communities will emerge from available architecture, even if the explicit intent of the given architectural element may not have been community building. This is consistent with more ethnographically informed findings from boyd (2006) and Davis (2010) concerning user profiles on MySpace. Users of the "zoethian" and "sjips" tags use specialized fandom tags for reasons other than personal organization or sharing resources with others (Lin and Chen 2012). When the specialized tag is moved from the tagging field and into the body of the post, either as a noun (Zoethian, 7.07 percent of posts; Sjips, 7.81 percent of posts) or an adjective (Zoethian, 21.37 percent of posts; Sjips, 17.19 percent of posts), it serves a function unrelated to organization and retrieval. What may have begun as an organizational term, allowing fans of a specific pairing to distribute and locate posts that might interest them, becomes a way to suggest a particular community affiliation.

[9.2]   The content and conduct difference between the two groups is striking. Tumblr members using the "sjips" tag post more sexually explicit content to greater endorsement, and their posts receive more notes. Posts that use the "sjips" tag receive fewer reproaches, but the posters are more inclined to apologize. Because the use of apologies differs across cultures (Maddux et al. 2011), it is reasonable to infer that different communities may develop different strategies for using apologetic remarks, such as preemptively addressing failure events (Williams, Morgan, and Cameron 2011). Because reproaches appeared to be infrequent in these tags, apologies may substitute as a mechanism for behavioral control. Instead of waiting for the (nonexistent) moderator to determine if a post is not allowed, tag users may use apologies to prevent conflicts from arising. Without the threaded structure of a message board, where reproaches and accounts are clearly linked to the failure event, castigating others may be more difficult on Tumblr. Any castigation is posted to the reproacher's blog and only appears as one of many notes attached to the original post. While the original poster may be aware of committing an infraction, the reproach may not be as visible to others compared to message board architecture. Unprompted apologetic rituals may be an adaptation of conduct control unique to Tumblr and its architecture.

[9.3]   This study raises questions about the relationships between content producers and fans, as boundaries between the two groups are rapidly changing and being renegotiated. While research has looked at the legal gray areas that arise when distributing fan fiction and fan art (Chander and Sunder 2007; Jenkins 2006; Tushnet 2014), additional questions arise when producers and fans overlap on the same online space. All four Yogscast members studied maintained Tumblr, Reddit, and other social media accounts to interact with fans. One reproach post in the sample addressed the issue of the perceived difference between how Tumblr users treat fan art and fan fiction. Fan art is perceived as receiving more notes. Rythian reblogged this post and added additional text, supporting the idea that writing is also an art and takes a great deal of time and skill. This post garnered 156 notes—well above the average 21.52 notes per post for the "zoethian" tag. Zoey also used the "zoethian" tag once during the observed period. Her post received 204 notes—again, well above the 21.52 average for the "zoethian" tag.

[9.4]   Marwick and boyd (2011) describe the context collapse that occurs when perceived online audiences come into contact. What one user might deem appropriate material for Facebook may not be appropriate content for Twitter. Likewise, for Yogscast fandom, Tumblr content is not considered appropriate for Reddit, where semiofficial interaction between Yogs and Yognau(gh)ts occurs. The fandom adage "don't like, don't read" is extended to the subjects of the fan works themselves. Although Zoey and Rythian are supportive of continued fan works with themselves/their characters as the focus, other Yogs have expressed discomfort with romantic or sexual fan-produced content. The imagined audience (Marwick and boyd 2011) for Yogscast fandom had to include the Yogs themselves, given the limitations of Tumblr's architecture (no privacy settings), as well as technological affordances built into the platform, especially reblogging, meaning that Yogs might see fan content about themselves on their Tumblr dashboard, even if the original poster had meticulously tagged it.

[9.5]   This closeness between content producers and fans renegotiates behavioral norms and privacy. While the relationship between media entities and fans has been in a state of flux for some time (Busse and Hellekson 2012; Chin 2014; Jenkins 2006; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013), the Yogscast's direct use of fan artists, as well as their reading of fan fiction, signals a complicated relationship between content producers and fans that may account for observed patterns of unprompted apologies in the "sjips" tag.

[9.6]   Fandom scholarship has advocated for protecting fans' right to privacy even though their work may technically be publically accessible (Busse and Hellekson 2012; Nielsen 2016; Reid 2016). Fan works occupy a semiprivate location online, where consumption by other fans but not the general public is assumed (Busse and Hellekson 2012). Elm (2009) views privacy as a spectrum; simply because a piece of text is publically accessible online does not mean that it was intended for a broad audience. For this reason, I have not directly quoted any texts or used any user names, save for those of the Yogs themselves. Fan scholars advance the idea that researchers should ask permission of fans when directly or indirectly quoting their work (Busse and Hellekson 2012; Fathallah 2016), but this may be untenable when handling large data sets. Indeed, as this study demonstrates, it becomes near impossible to contact the writer of every contribution, thus raising additional questions regarding the ethics of quantitative fandom studies.

10. Limitations and conclusion

[10.1]   This exploratory project comes with a number of limitations. There may be a different perceived level of involvement by the content producers between tags, which may account for some of the difference observed in content and conduct. Either interviewing or surveying Tumblr users about what considerations they take into account when determining if they will or will not post a specific fan fiction or fan art work, and how they choose to tag that post, would allow for a richer examination of the norms developing on Tumblr. Online surveillance should not be considered unidirectional, and social media users are always participating in their own surveillance and the watching of others (Albrechtslund 2008). This can be addressed by querying fans on Tumblr if they think about whether a content producer may be reading or looking at their fan work when they decide to post.

[10.2]   This study expands the existing research on tagging, online platforms, and fandom. Tags, while often considered quantitatively, are generally considered for their social potential only insofar as distributing resources or exerting influence over what tags are used frequently. This research considers the possibility that those who use a particular tag may come to constitute a community that expresses particular norms when it comes to content and conduct. Further, few studies consider the architectural possibilities and limitations of Tumblr. Through an exploration

of the practices of these two specialized fandom tags, this research addresses how the Tumblr platform is actually used by members, including potentially different purposes, depending on their needs. Finally, as a content analysis, this research provides some strategies for considering fandom communities in a quantitative manner by coding for specific content, such as sexual explicitness, as well as how fans interact with one another, such as apologizing to avoid a negative response from others. It adapts the existing social science method of content analysis for an online space where content is diverse and continually updated. As norms develop on any online platform, it is important not only to investigate the norms themselves but also to understand the reasons why such norms develop and then stabilize.

11. Notes

1. Zoeya refers to YouTube user ZoeyProasheck (233,000 subscribers; all subscriber counts from April 16, 2013, during original data analysis phase) and Rythian to YouTube user YogscastRythian (465,000 subscribers). Sjin refers to YouTube user YogscastSjin (1,000,000 subscribers) and Sipos to YouTube user YogscastSips (870,000 subscribers).

2. This has since been altered. Users may now make the list of people they follow public.

12. References

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Tumblr as counterpublic space for fan mobilization

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—When the animated TV shows *Young Justice* (2010–) and *Green Lantern: The Animated Series* (2011–13) were canceled, fans of the shows campaigned together to have both shows renewed. I refer to this campaign as #saveYJandGLTAS, a hashtag frequently used on internet posts related to the campaign. This case study investigates how Tumblr served as a counterpublic space for this movement, while other social media platforms served as the more public face of this campaign. Through my analysis, I draw conclusions about how fandoms operate and the changes occurring as a result in the relationships between the media industry, creators, and consumers.

[0.2]   *Keywords*—Commodity activism; Fan activism; *Green Lantern: The Animated Series*; Superheroes; *Young Justice*

1. Introduction

[1.1]   The origin stories of these fandoms begin with the release of the first episodes of each show. On November 26, 2010, the first episode of *Young Justice* (*YJ*) premiered on television (Crider 2010). The series officially debuted on January 7, 2011, and ran for two seasons. On October 15, 2011, the first episode of *Green Lantern: The Animated Series* (2011–13) (*GLTAS*) was shown at New York Comic Con. The first episode of *GLTAS* re-aired on television on November 11, 2011. *GLTAS* consisted of one season in total, with 26 episodes. Once new episodes of both series were aired together on Cartoon Network, *GLTAS* was shown at 10:00 a.m. EST and *YJ* was shown at 10:30 a.m. EST on Saturday mornings, in a program block called DC Nation. The finales of both shows aired on March 16, 2013.

[1.2]   *Young Justice* is an animated show about the sidekicks (such as Robin and Aqualad) of some DC Comics superheroes (such as Batman and Aquaman, respectively) who form their own crime-busting team. *Green Lantern: The Animated Series* is about a team of heroes who work for the Green Lantern Corps and solve intergalactic problems. Both shows quickly garnered their own fandoms, with much overlap because these cartoons aired back-to-back in one thematic program and were both about DC Comics superheroes. These fandoms generally enhanced fans' enjoyment of the shows and offered a space for human relationships to form, thereby creating and sustaining an online community that fans could tap into for information about Cartoon Network and the eventual campaign to revive the shows, which I will refer to as #saveYJandGLTAS. As many of my interviewees indicated, both fandoms felt like a family to many fans, and some forged friendships that still exist to this day. One of my interviewees told me, "I also enjoyed the camaraderie and sense of community and family...it allowed me to broaden my social circle way beyond what id have ever expected and this is really cheesy but in this case, this particular show and fandom changed my life from then on." Another, speaking about *GLTAS* fandom, stated that she had "never been part of a better fandom" and "didn't know if that sort of magic will ever happen [to her] again." Fans collaborated on meta-analysis, theories, and predictions; shared jokes and memes; created fan works; and expressed their emotional reactions to new content and network decisions together. I experienced this myself primarily through Tumblr.

[1.3]   Tumblr is an excellent platform for the formation of—and study of—loosely organized groups and subcultures, because the site's reblog function encourages the proliferation of information, memes, gossip, analysis, and whatever

else fans are wont to create and disseminate, in a way that can easily and rapidly be viewed and absorbed by other Tumblr users. The tag functions work in such a way that users can contribute to, read posts under, follow, and therefore coalesce around popular tags (fandom tags or social justice tags such as feminism or names of social movements). Reblogging allows Tumblr users, with the click of a button, to share what someone else has said in its original form without requiring verbal repetition or laborious recopying of the text. In that moment, the post is viewable to all of the Tumblr's followers, who can also just as easily reblog the post and possibly add comments of their own, or perhaps go a step further and explore other Tumblrs to follow or communicate with other Tumblr users, thereby forming connections and groups across the platform. Thus, the ease of transmission of memes and ease of communication over a vast distance about similar interests has greatly increased (Cho 2015). Regarding Tumblr tags, in a study on the tagging habits of transgender Tumblr users, Avery Dame (2016) argues that tags are both about "information organization and conversation promotion...[and Tumblr's] tagging system...[is] primarily used to increase post visibility and promote sociality" (27). In other words, these sites that Tumblr tags provide often help generate loose groups as well.

[1.4]   This case study will recount the history of #saveYJandGLTAS, through which I draw conclusions about how fandoms operate and the effects of such operations on fans and the wider world. My data includes internet articles and posts; academic literature on Tumblr; interviews; and my own experience as a member of both fandoms. I conducted my interviews during the summer of 2016 and interviewed eleven people in total (who I will refer to as A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, K, and L), all of whom I contacted via Tumblr, as Tumblr was the site of the majority of this fandom activity. While other social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook were also sites of fan activities, and I have included observations from these platforms in my analysis, particularly after the cancellation was announced, these sites were used more as channels by which fans could contact institutions such as Cartoon Network.

[1.5]   This work was done under the auspices of Harvard University's Office for the Protection of Human Subjects, which held my IRB agreement. My interviewees consented to be interviewed through text and received an information and consent form, as well as a copy of the original thesis that resulted from this research. I only interviewed adults and attempted to find a mix of people who were fans of only *YJ*, only *GLTAS*, or both, to collect a range of opinions. As a member of both fandoms myself, I had an insider's view of #saveYJandGLTAS and personally experienced the devastated and then hopeful waves of emotion while the campaign was taking place. My identity and experience as a fan also fueled my desire to be as respectful and careful as I could with interviewing my informants, not all of whom had had purely positive experiences with the campaign. In short, having already been involved with the fandom gave me a foundation that I could draw upon from the very beginning of my research.

[1.6]   In November 2016, it was announced that a third season of *YJ* would be released, largely due to fans' dedication to repeatedly watching the show on Netflix. This development has significant implications for the strength of fan enthusiasm and fan hopefulness, which kept the campaign alive and revived it when Netflix added *YJ* to its lineup. This form of fan activism is particularly important, as it helps demonstrate the changes occurring between entrenched, powerful media structures and informally, organically organized subcultures.

2. #saveYJandGLTAS: 2013–16

[2.1]   In the past, fan activism has manifested in various ways. Some fans have mobilized for changes to decisions made by higher-ups in the industry, such as the renewal of certain television shows or different casting decisions for adaptations, while other fans have engaged in more politically oriented activities. Traditionally, for decades, fan activism only referred to the former, but the definition of the term has expanded since then (Jones 2011; Cochran 2012). I will be focusing more on the activism aimed at renewing shows, which often paves the way for more political/social activism and is important in its own right because it illustrates contemporary struggles between fans and producers over social power and the meanings and value of texts.

[2.2]   The defining example of fan activism to renew a show was the letter-writing campaign to pressure NBC into renewing *Star Trek* in the 1960s, which provided a sort of model for future similar campaigns (Jenkins 2011). Since then, fans have become savvier crusaders, utilizing tools such as social media or mass mailing of objects. For example, in 2011, X-Files fans ran a Tweet-a-Thon to push for another X-Files movie. Kristin Barton (2014) lists several examples of mass mailings to TV networks, such as sending six thousand bottles of Tabasco sauce to UPN executives to save *Roswell*

(1999–2002) and ten thousand Mars bars to the CW to save *Veronica Mars* (2004–7). One successful save-our-show campaign was the 2012 fan movement to renew *Chuck* (2007–12) for a third season, dubbed the "Finale and Footlong" campaign. Fans of *Chuck* made a deal with Subway, the fast food restaurant franchise and one of *Chuck*'s sponsors: if fans relentlessly bought Subway sandwiches and posted their purchases on social media, then Subway would support the continuation of the show (Barton 2014). Evidently, to the media industry elites, money is the most powerful bargaining tool, and fans know how to take advantage of this. As Victor Costello and Barbara Moore state, "that members of the audience see themselves as potentially powerful enough to influence executive decisions is a direct contradiction to the image of the passive audience, a victim of network whims and greed." (2007, 138). Indeed, in the earlier days of the movement to renew *YJ* and *GLTAS*, even among the voice actors and show creators, there was a sense that with enough campaigning, Cartoon Network just might change its mind.

[2.3]   On January 28, 2013, Cartoon Network announced its series that would be renewed in the fall of 2013 (Melrose 2013). *YJ* and *GLTAS* were absent from the list, prompting dismay and alarm from fans. On the same day, Giancarlo Volpe confirmed the cancellation of *GLTAS*, essentially confirming both cancellations (https://twitter.com/giancarlo_volpe/status/295988054781480960). At the time, both series were in the middle of their respective seasons. Fans were devastated and furious at this announcement, yet quickly became hopeful that enough action could ensure a renewal of both series. On the same day, a Change.org petition created by Amy B. calling for the renewal of both shows was created (https://www.change.org/p/cartoon-network-warner-bros-bring-back-young-justice-and-green-lantern-the-animated-series), and it had nearly 18,000 signatures by early February (Harvey 2014). A Facebook page titled "Bring Back Green Lantern: TAS and Young Justice" was also created in the same month. Soon after the announcement, Cartoon Network and DC Comics released a joint statement that thanked fans for expressing their love for DC Nation and stated that new episodes would be released and that the DC Nation program would still exist, which only further angered fans, who pointed out that this message did not actually address the cancellation (Harvey 2014). In fact, angry comments, posts, and memes abounded in the fandoms. For months, every new post on the Cartoon Network Facebook page, even ones unrelated to *YJ* or *GLTAS*, was flooded with comments that pleaded with Cartoon Network to renew the shows.

[2.4]   Feelings of ownership over the text, intense, almost-familial fondness for the fictional characters, and anger toward Cartoon Network were fiercely sustained in the Tumblr arena carved out by *YJ* and *GLTAS* fans. All these emotions primed the fandoms to refuse to accept the cancellation decision and fueled investment in the revival campaign. As a result, fans heavily used social media to spread awareness and updates about the campaign and Cartoon Network's responses (or lack thereof). Several Tumblrs dedicated themselves to this mission. The YJfanvids Tumblr, originally intended as a "Repository for Young Justice fanvids, as well as graphics, GIFs and art" frequently posted campaign updates and tagged such posts with "Operation: Save YJ and GLTAS." The greenlantern-tas Tumblr mainly posted *GLTAS* content, but also frequently posted and reblogged posts about the campaign. Other blogs, such as the justiceisours Tumblr, only posted news about #saveYJandGLTAS.

[2.5]   Bryce Renninger (2014) analyzes how Tumblr serves as a counterpublic space among asexual people, drawing from Fraser's idea of subaltern counterpublics, which are spaces for retreating from mainstream society but also sites of preparation for interaction and agitation toward the general public. These publics and counterpublics are "not formal organizations" but instead "are created by communicative acts within specific contexts" (1516). This perfectly describes *YJ* and *GLTAS* fandoms in their #saveYJandGLTAS days. On one hand, Tumblr was where fans shared their love of the cartoons as well as their rage and despair over the cancellation, with all these emotions building on "a sense of an intimate collective," in the words of Louisa Stein (2015, 156). Stein uses this idea to explain fan transformative creativity, but it is also applicable to this instance of fan emotional turmoil and mobilization, particularly because her observation —that Tumblr has become a hub of "visual enactment of collective emotion" (2015, 158) because of the use of heavy image usage to represent emotion—is completely accurate. I encountered numerous posts on my dashboard that used images and GIFs (especially relevant ones from the shows) to express outrage at the cancellation decision in the weeks after. At the same time, Tumblr was also used as a space to organize and prepare to mobilize on Twitter, the more public social media platform of the two, against Cartoon Network. One of my interviewees even informed me that she created a Twitter handle for the sole purpose of this sort of mobilizing.

[2.6]   Each Saturday, when new episodes aired, fans would watch the shows to increase ratings, while also live-tweeting. The hashtag #saveYJandGLTAS was used in the early weeks of the campaign as the general movement hashtag, but for weekly live-tweets during new episodes, fans created new hashtags that referenced the new episodes

for each Saturday. While this hashtag activity was a Twitter phenomenon, news about which hashtags were to be used each week circulated on Tumblr. For instance, the codex-apollo Tumblr created weekly "Hashtag of the Week" posts (http://codex-apollo.tumblr.com/search/hashtag-of-the-week). Such posts alerted other fans to what hashtags had been chosen, urged them to keep hoping and tweeting, and reminded them to only tweet on Saturday, to only tweet positive comments, and to mention the shows, as well as Cartoon Network, Warner Bros., and any other company involved, in the tweets.

[2.7]   Some examples of weekly hashtags were #GreenInvasion, #CovertCorps, and #HeroesNeverDie. One general hashtag that referenced the entire campaign, besides #saveYJandGLTAS, was #symbiosi (a reference to a moment in *YJ* when a character uses the Atlantean translation for the word *together*, "symbiosi"). Fans were extraordinarily dedicated to the virtual Saturday morning rallies; C told me that she and her tight-knit group would "text each other to get up early to watch the episodes and [they] would liveblog on twitter" to ensure that the hashtags would trend. There were seven hashtags that at one point were trending in the United States (note 1). Additionally, these hashtags allowed international fans to contribute to the movement, which, according to K, was significant because many non-American fans felt as though that was the most they could do. Thus, these virtual rallies were both a way for fans to band together around one platform and a way to aggressively but politely tell Cartoon Network that there were fans who truly wanted their shows to be renewed. This type of activism was used more consciously and frequently on Twitter, but given the mechanisms of both sites' interfaces, frequent hashtagging of new posts was not as necessary on Tumblr to tap into the movement. Additionally, on Tumblr, there was no pressure to aim to make a hashtag a popular one, because fans did not believe Cartoon Network had any interest in tracking the tags on Tumblr. Nonetheless, certain hashtags—namely, #symbiosi and #HeroesNeverDie—were also fairly long-lived on Tumblr as well.

[2.8]   Despite the negativity generated toward hashtags that favor one show or the other and current feelings of betrayal toward hashtags that embody togetherness between the two fandoms (more on that later), *YJ* and *GLTAS* fans generally have very positive feelings toward the hashtags of their movement, if the testimony of all my interviewees can be accurately applied to both fandoms as a whole. A informed me that, to her, the hashtags represent

> [2.9]   community and determination and loyalty. Community [because] it brought the fandom together for a single cause, determination because wow we were very stubborn in trying as best we could to keep the show alive, and loyalty because these people—individuals with lives and school and jobs and other hobbies—spending the time and effort to bring back an animated cartoon show.

[2.10]   Similar sentiments were expressed by all my interviewees. C told me that currently the hashtags engender feelings of nostalgia and reminiscence about the "old days." For G, the hashtag #HeroesNeverDie lingered with him the most and made a particularly strong impact on social media in comparison to the others, because it was the chosen hashtag for the last episodes of both shows. #HeroesNeverDie was a reference to characters who died (supposedly) at the end of both *YJ* and *GLTAS*. This devastated fans, especially because when these episodes aired, there was no news from Cartoon Network on a possible renewal. In G's words, #HeroesNeverDie "underlined the legacy that they left behind as characters and...the impact that they had on the fanbase." B speculated that despite the lack of response from Cartoon Network (until recently), the company was affected, because no one had ever "mobilized against them like that in the wake of a cancellation before." She also stated that many fans learned what to do and not do in fan activist movements for next time and that they had been inspired by the shows to become involved in the animation industry in some fashion, and "having been part of a fandom that got hurt and then banded together like this is going to influence how they run their own brands/shows/what have you." Thus, these hashtags also represented a preview to a promising future for B.

[2.11]   Of course, many posts combined both emotion and movement-related content. For example, fans also directly contacted Cartoon Network, DC Comics, and Warner Bros., and sent a variety of items, such as physical letters, emails, and handmade objects, to them. Additionally, they often shared what they had sent to these companies on Tumblr. Junryou sent two enormous packages to Cartoon Network that included items related to *GLTAS*, a letter, and pages of her fan art. She posted pictures and descriptions of these items in two Tumblr posts, dated February 11 and February 26, 2013, one for each package. Each post now has at least a couple of hundred notes, several of which are reblogs that express admiration for her dedication. Another of my interviewees shared the text of a letter she had mailed to Cartoon Network in her own post, and one person reblogged it and tagged it with "everybody needs to write their letters like this one." C informed me that older fans who had experience campaigning for the renewal of other shows suggested

"keep things civil but direct," indicating that common fan knowledge about the right way to protest media decisions has existed for some time. Furthermore, that fans were willing to mail items to Cartoon Network became so well known that it spawned jokes about items that ought to be mailed to the company—namely, rutabagas. In one *YJ* episode, a character exclaims, "Now that's a rutabaga!" after viewing chemically enhanced rutabagas, which entertained fans so much that the line and the vegetable itself became a fandom meme. I am fairly confident that sending rutabagas to Cartoon Network was an inside joke that kept fans sane and able to maintain a shared sense of humor rather than an actual action that someone took. As far as I was aware, this sort of meme primarily but not exclusively circulated on Tumblr. (For instance, junryou made two corresponding tweets for the two Tumblr posts about the packages she sent to Cartoon Network, but both received much less attention on Twitter than on Tumblr.) (https://twitter.com/rosiesinner/status/301452374780821504).

[2.12]   Fans also bought and encouraged each other to buy actual merchandise, including the toys, episodes on iTunes, DVDs, spin-off comics, and the *YJ* video game. Fans used Tumblr to put out calls to buy this merchandise and to document their purchases. Other posts listed items that fans should buy and encouraged them to do so; http://YJfanvids.tumblr.com and http://greenlantern-tas.tumblr.com both had posts that listed merchandise under their respective fandoms, tagged with "YJ merch" or "merch," respectively. According to B, Kmart responded to fan tweets by stating that they would "seriously think about" keeping *YJ* toys available and about stocking *GLTAS* merchandise if it became available. Someone, possibly from Warner Bros.' merchandise department, responded with a smile emoji to a fan tweet asking if the company had noticed that Amazon rapidly sold out of the *GLTAS* Part 2 DVDs. Although the action was successful enough to receive acknowledgment from the stores that carried the merchandise, it does not seem as if Cartoon Network or Warner Bros., the original intended audience (both of which are separate entities from Kmart), ever publicly acknowledged this action.

[2.13]   This mass-purchasing incident, including the Kmart tweet reply, was noteworthy for several reasons. First, while fans communicated with each other primarily through Tumblr, Twitter was used to contact large industry conglomerates like Kmart, demonstrating not only the presence of fandom over multiple social media platforms but also indicating that certain platforms were meant to be used for distinct purposes. Second, fans' financial support of their shows was impressive enough that stores carrying merchandise deemed it worthwhile to communicate with fans about it, despite network executives' refusal to publicly comment on it. Third, this trend was somewhat reminiscent of industry exploitation of fan labor, which has become increasingly common as people have become more open about their fannishness and fandom has become less stigmatized (Busse 2015). There are numerous examples of such co-optation, such as Fox's commodification of *Glee* fandom to market future seasons, with the promised reward being interaction with the stars of the show and fame (Stork 2014). However, in this case, *YJ* and *GLTAS* fans advertised the show merchandise themselves with no clear promised reward and encouraged other fans to become compliant consumers of the products as well, even with no endorsement from the actual company.

[2.14]   Because of both shows' frequent hiatuses, the fandoms were already prepared to believe that Cartoon Network would treat their shows terribly, as stated in a May 24, 2013, post on the Tumblr YJ-hiatus-survival. As a result, there were numerous rumors about why the shows were canceled. For example, "Before the Dawn," a *YJ* episode, was originally scheduled to air on October 13, 2012, but then aired in January of the following year instead after an unannounced schedule change. Some fans theorized that this was because Stephanie Brown, who is somewhat notorious for having been treated rather contemptuously by DC Comics, appeared in a cameo role and, once the series cancellation was announced, hypothesized that the entire series was canceled because of her cameo (Johnston 2012). However, the rumor seems to not have been very widely believed, or at least it quickly died. F stated that this "would never have been the reason for cancellation" because "there was no indication that the background character was Stephanie Brown." Because no ideas were put forward as to how to proceed with protesting this alleged decision, there was no mobilization against Cartoon Network or DC Comics in retaliation. Nonetheless, it is not a stretch to assume that even though this rumor was not concretely provable, it very likely still contributed to resentment toward DC Comics.

[2.15]   The most infamous rumor as to why the shows had been canceled was that too many women had watched them. In December 2013, on a Batman podcast, writer and producer Paul Dini and interviewer Kevin Smith discussed the cancellation of *YJ*, *GLTAS*, and *Tower Prep*, a short-lived live-action Cartoon Network show from 2010. Dini stated that studio executives do not want girls watching their shows, because of the belief that girls do not buy toy merchandise, most of which is already made and marketed with a younger male audience in mind (quoted in Davis 2013). This rumor even spread outside of *YJ* and *GLTAS* fandoms (Luis, personal comm. November 10, 2016; Pantozzi 2013). Given the

female-heavy (at least on Tumblr) fandoms for both shows, and that many Tumblr users try to stand against social inequalities, this rumor lent itself very easily to helping cast Cartoon Network as the enemy of fans, especially female fans. It probably sparked some of the strongest feelings of outrage against the company, and the entire cartoon industry, during this campaign. According to my data, this rumor prompted a minor but not strong resurgence in campaigning. A stated that she thought that "more people became involved, because now the perceived reason for the cancellation became more 'personal' in a way, especially since sexism is something tumblr is very passionate about." From the Tumblr post, tweets, and "even Facebook reviews and posts" that she saw in response to the rumor, C felt that it "was able to fire a lot of people up, even those outside of GLTAS fandom." L could recall some people suggesting that fans send angry messages to Cartoon Network, but also that other fans quickly opposed the idea, not wanting to make the relationship between fans and the company even worse, so the idea quickly died down.

[2.16]   Interestingly, despite practically ubiquitous knowledge on Tumblr of the media industry's penchant for disdaining female fans, many (though not all) fans eventually came to believe that the high number of female viewers was not the primary reason for the cancellations; there was even a Tumblr created called YJwasntcancelledbcgirlswatched. While one might have expected the rumor to remain widely believed, many fans turned instead to other explanations: that the toy merchandise of both shows did not sell well and that the failure of the live-action 2011 Green Lantern film to make money contributed to network executives holding a pessimistic view toward *GLTAS* from its inception (Goldman 2013). Nonetheless, the rumor did not die easily; B told me, "I still see the GIF set of the YJ kids going around with the (uncorrected) caption 'Friendly reminder that CN canceled this show because girls liked to watch it.'" In short, a surprising number of fans endeavored to switch the fandom-wide villain from sexism to capitalism.

[2.17]   While both fandoms saw the networks as the other, either as the enemy or higher-ups who required appeasement, there was also friction and othering between fandoms. *GLTAS* had a smaller fandom than *YJ* (note 2), and it was not infrequently forgotten in efforts to promote the campaign, particularly in later months. This led to a significant amount of bickering between the two fandoms and to increased feelings of bitterness and betrayal from *GLTAS* fans toward *YJ* fans. There were interfandom fights about contacting network higher-ups and arguments about whether the fandoms were adequately supporting each other. C told me that, in her experience, *YJ* fans "often shut GLTAS fans out and only rallied for their show, while simultaneously asking GLTAS fans for support." J informed me that she occasionally sees posts about *GLTAS* and "a random YJ fan will reblog it and add tags like, 'If only YJ got another season,' or 'okay but, YJ needed another season too,'" which *GLTAS* fans find derailing and disrespectful. She stated that "it became the running joke for people to say that YJ fans would go, 'but what about us??'" On one post, a Tumblr user vented that when *GLTAS* was the first to receive a Blu-ray release, fans of *YJ* were quick to reblog celebratory posts and bring up *YJ*, even though at that point more *YJ* merchandise had been released (note 3). My impression is that many *YJ* fans were aware of these feelings, but there was never an extensive attempt across *YJ* fandom to consciously remember and campaign for *GLTAS*'s renewal as time passed, and certainly not after *YJ*'s renewal was announced. The widespread resentment and knowledge of these feelings within *GLTAS* fandom were used as a form of social control and to maintain the cohesion of the fandom. These feelings and shared knowledge let *YJ* fans know that encroaching onto *GLTAS* fandom would be met with resistance by *GLTAS* fans and that this sort of behavior was disrespectful to *GLTAS* fandom. Perpetuating this sentiment was a way that *GLTAS* fans could work to preserve the unity of their already smaller fandom by curbing behaviors seen as rude intrusions.

3. #saveYJandGLTAS: 2016 to present

[3.1]   As time passed, and no concrete news was released about renewing either show, fans campaigned less and less, although there were always some fans who remained resolutely hopeful—which speaks to the determination of fans and longevity of fandom. However, after Netflix added *YJ* in February 2016, it was revealed that sufficient views of the show on Netflix might allow the series to be renewed and broadcasted on Netflix (Hoffer 2016). Greg Weisman, along with several voice actors, also demonstrated support for this news via Twitter (https://twitter.com/greg_weisman/status/694376322550726656). A portion of the fandom was ecstatic and encouraged other fans via multiple social media platforms to binge-watch the show on Netflix, even by keeping it on in the background of their computers and spreading awareness with the hashtags #KeepBingingYJ and #RenewYoungJustice. For example, in one post dated February 19, 2016, YJfanvids urged fans to binge-watch the show on Netflix but also encouraged fans to contact Netflix if their country's version of Netflix did not have *YJ* (with an example of how to do so)

and to ask for a third season on Netflix's suggestions page—and also offered information on Netflix ratings and how they worked. Additionally, according to A, this resurgence in the campaign caused a "reawakening of sorts" in the fandom, as artists began to contribute more fan works to the fandom, often tagging them with #KeepBingingYJ.

[3.2]   Though some may consider Netflix views to not be a true resource, I argue that given the announcement of *YJ*'s renewal, they absolutely do count. This is an example of the ever-increasing materialization of the virtual, of the rising recognition that labor, even enjoyable labor, can be transmitted through the internet. These are trends that have been rapidly occurring with social media today (Van Doorn 2011). #KeepBingingYJ both reenergized *YJ* fandom and was an attempt to demonstrate to the media industry that fans were still willing to do anything to have their beloved show renewed.

[3.3]   However, other fans did not want to get their hopes up again until actual news about the renewal was announced. Many of my interviewees informed me that when this news was released, they merely reblogged a post or two on Tumblr that urged fans to binge-watch *YJ* and that from what they observed, most fans did not truly believe that *YJ* would return and did not attempt to campaign as fervently as they had previously. K told me that "when i see a new hashtag, i can't really bring myself to do anything about it, except cheer the people who are constantly supporting the movement on. i really admire them for their stubbornness and the will to continue even after all these years." Despite years of no concrete news wearing down the hopes of most of the fandoms, even among skeptical fans, there was support for those who were more faithful than them, indicating that at least parts of *YJ* fandom did resemble a supportive family and that the familial fandom spirit still managed to survive. Lack of news about the show largely extinguished fandom hopes but not the fandom community.

[3.4]   Rebecca Williams (2015) states that fan responses to the end of television shows vary greatly. Some vow to continue their involvement in the fandom, some concede that the shows were important but accept that they will move on, and some end up relieved that a show is ending and criticize the finales. "For every fan who desires a resurrection or a reboot of a favourite series there is one who feels that this would be a disaster…for every fan who prefers the convenience and comfort of rewatching a show on DVD or Blu-ray there is someone who desires the sense of imagined community engendered by viewing reruns on broadcast television" (196–98). The #KeepBingingYJ movement is particular interesting in light of this analysis, because not only did fans go so far as to demand from the network that their show continue but eventually expressed this desire via dedicated rewatchings of their show—because they knew that in this case, they were part of a community rewatching *YJ* together, and this community was being observed by Netflix.

[3.5]   On November 7, 2016, Warner Bros. Animation announced that it had begun production on a third season for *YJ*, although an official release date was not announced. *YJ* fandom was ecstatic at the news, and on the day of the announcement, "#Young Justice" was the second trending hashtag on Tumblr. In a November 7, 2016, post by Tumblr user jncera that garnered 1,123 notes, the poster half-jokingly declared November 7 a "young justice holiday," on which the fandom would celebrate its perseverance. However, *GLTAS* fandom did not react happily to the news, seeing it as just another reminder of how they were sidelined by *YJ* fandom in the original campaign. One blogger wrote a Tumblr post in which she said that *GLTAS* fandom campaigned just as hard as *YJ* fandom for another season, but predicted that now, with a new season on the horizon for *YJ*, which was always more popular, *GLTAS* was definitely never going to receive any more new content ([note 4](#)). Ironically, a partial victory eliminated the chance at a full campaign victory; too many fans/campaigners felt content with the partial victory, and network executives probably concluded that giving fans half of what they asked for was enough. For *GLTAS* fandom, #saveYJandGLTAS demonstrated the unfortunate potential consequences of a campaign in support of two shows with uneven popularity levels. Nonetheless, the partial victory of #saveYJandGLTAS has immensely significant implications for the power of fan communities and fan activism.

4. Conclusion

[4.1]   Tumblr served as a primary platform of community space for *YJ* and *GLTAS* fandoms, whereas Twitter and Facebook were more the front lines of the movement. This demonstrates that Tumblr functioned as a counterpublic site, where, for #saveYJandGLTAS, fans rallied together, vented about the enemy (even when this nemesis existed on the same website), and planned mobilization tactics together. I would guess that fans used Tumblr, although it is technically a public platform, as this sort of private, informal space because they believed it to be a space not as

carefully tracked by industries and the mainstream public, so there were less dire consequences to ferociously venting together.

[4.2]   Additionally, #saveYJandGLTAS demonstrated that both fans and media industry executives alike increasingly view both the internet and fandom as real; that is, they take them seriously and understand that there are real people who are genuinely invested in what they say, do, and produce online. The concept of real life is expanding, as the virtual bleeds into the real and vice versa. Though industry executives have been historically slow to view fandom as legitimate, this has evidently changed enough that what happens on the internet can affect their decisions.

[4.3]   However, this change likely has taken place because resources—primarily money but also views and perhaps reputation—that the industry wants can now be transferred through the internet. Christopher Jones, an artist for several *YJ* spinoff comics, informed me that he

> [4.4]   knew that when Netflix…[was] actively interested in making a deal to fund a new season of Young Justice which was why the #KeepBingingYJ movement was so important. Keeping those numbers up kept Netflix motivated to make a deal. And anything fans could do to keep the pressure up on the Warner Bros. Animation side of those negotiations was helpful, too. But…petitions weren't what was needed. Dollars and cents evidence of consumer demand is much more convincing than any petition, so sales of Young Justice DVDs, books and other merch were the most effective way of doing that. The problem there, of course, is that a lot of fans already had a lot of that stuff, and just watching a DVD you already own or buying something used that you can't find in stores anymore doesn't register with DC Comics or Warner Brothers Animation. (personal comm. November 21, 2016).

[4.5]   Clearly, for industries, money (and other resources) are most valued—more so than hashtags or thoughtful but nonmonetary displays of love for a show. For fan activism, this indicates that the media industry and fans fundamentally value different things and will express these values very differently in their interactions with each other, even while aware of each other's dissimilar core values.

[4.6]   Nonetheless, parts of #saveYJandGLTAS—most likely the areas that emphasized transference of resources (i.e., money and Netflix views) from fans to the industry—must have been effective enough to achieve the main goal of the campaign. Additionally, although the aspects that demonstrated the fans' love of the shows evidently did not ultimately convince executives that the show ought to be brought back (until the *YJ* binge-watching campaign), they also clearly had a positive impact. Sam Register, the president of Warner Bros. Animation and Warner Digital Series, stated, "The affection that fans have had for 'Young Justice,' and their rallying cry for more episodes, has always resonated with us" (Ching 2016) when *YJ* was renewed. This indicates that the executives were always aware of how much the *YJ* fans loved their show, and something about the campaign must have convinced Cartoon Network that this fannish love would translate to money. In other words, the perseverance and mobilization of fannish love, outrage, and hope, especially on Tumblr, was effective in keeping the campaign alive, because the more fans were engaged with the fandom, the more likely they were to engage with its activist side, and there were always at least some fans interested and active in both the fandom and the campaign.

[4.7]   What does this mean for future fan activist campaigns? B, despite only being a fan of *GLTAS*, had considerable optimism about the impact of the campaign on everyone involved:

> [4.8]   The old ways of running companies are dying out and pretty soon our generation is going to be running things, and we're far more in touch with everything than ever before with social media and the like… Whereas in the past, higher-ups and people who succeeded them sort of lived in this little bubble of ignorance with the power to just make things go away, nowadays you have to face your accountability as your dirty laundry gets aired at the speed of a viral video and the wool is getting pulled off people's eyes. That way of running things is dying out, and I think people are learning that the more transparent and open you are with the people you're serving (politically or corporately), the more likely you are to be successful. We're starting to get small media companies that are interacting with fanbases and actually taking fan's suggestions into account, and that's creating positive buzz around their work. So hopefully, the bigger media companies and the people who will run them someday can learn from this.

[4.9]   As B notes, social media has rapidly increased the speed and intimacy of virtual interactions, making it possible to spread news about a company's actions instantly, and more difficult for a company to lie or ignore a vociferous response without taking damage to its reputation. Fans, fully aware of this trend, are taking advantage of this dynamic. They are leveraging fannish emotions in ways that weren't as effective before, to achieve their goals to affect media executives' choices and convince them that giving some fans what they want can be a win-win situation for both parties. In addition, fans are increasingly joining the media industry, indicating that they are using their intense participation in subcultures that spring from media industry products to try to enter and alter the industry itself. The lines between fans and creators are blurring, although the line between industry executives and fans is still fairly clear-cut. Hopefully, this campaign will positively affect the media industry-fan relationship and will be influential in demonstrating to all fans that unleashing their emotions and mobilizing in a counterpublic site such as Tumblr can actually lead to what they want, that fan activism can work for them, and that the playing field is very slightly leveling.

5. Acknowledgments

6. Notes

1. These hashtags were as follows: #Antireach, #saveYJandGLTAS, #LoveLanternJustice, #GreenInvasion, #CrashTheMoniter, #HeroesNeverDie, and #CovertCorps.

2. This categorization of *YJ* fandom as bigger and *GLTAS* fandom as smaller is based on my interviewees' and my observations, not on any hard data. It is difficult to precisely quantify membership of groups that are as loosely organized as fandoms.

3. I have chosen not to link to the post at the behest of this Tumblr user.

4. I have chosen not to link to the post at the behest of this Tumblr user.

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Tumblr's Supernatural fandom and the rhetorical affordance of GIFs

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[0.1]   Abstract—The rhetoricity of GIFs on Tumblr is analyzed by using the *Supernatural* (2005–) fan community as a case study. Tumblr's platform design, which encourages visual communication and content sharing, allows users to assert their identities as fans and their memberships to fan communities through the production and curation of visual content. *Supernatural* fans on Tumblr make affordances of GIFs from the show and its extratextual materials, putting them to various rhetorical uses, including emotional expression, transformative storytelling, inside jokes, and argumentation. Tumblr's platform, which facilitates the spread of content through its reblogging function, allows GIFs to be shared among various interpretative communities for whom the images contain different connotations and meanings. Because of their decontextualization, recontextualization, and intertextuality, GIFs offer a complex and rhetorically layered mode of communication on Tumblr.

[0.2]   Keyword—Literary affordance; Visual culture

1. Introduction

[1.1]   As communication has moved increasingly online, technology affords users easier access to multimodal expression. Digital communication incorporates nonalphabetic elements, requiring participants to possess the visual literacy to read multimodal texts and an understanding of the rhetorical capabilities of images and animated GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format). The use of GIFs has been popularized by Tumblr, a hybrid microblogging and social networking platform notable for its reliance on visual communication and its culture of content sharing and curation (Eppink 2014).

[1.2]   Here I theorize some of GIFs' rhetorical uses on Tumblr, arguing that as imagetexts (Mitchell 1994; Thomas 2013), GIFs fill a wide range of rhetorical functions. Drawing on Peter Khost's (forthcoming) theory of literary affordance, I want to consider how fans on Tumblr make creative and rhetorical affordances of *Supernatural* (2005–) for purposes initially unintended and unanticipated by the creators of the show—although the prominence of GIF use suggests that showrunners, directors, writers, and actors are now likely aware of the ways people appropriate existing material as a mode of communication (and might even playfully cater to it). Through GIFs, users visually express themselves, embodying emotion, illustrating text, creating inside jokes, crafting arguments, and developing ethos and community. These affordances take advantage of ability to share content throughout Tumblr and rely on an understanding of visual connotation (Barthes 1977). As fans play rhetorically with the intertextuality (Kristeva [1969] 1980; Thomas 2013) and decontextualization of the source material, GIFs convey layered and varied meaning to a range of interpretative communities (Fish 1980).

2. Saving GIFs, reblogging things: The rhetorical play of Tumblr's Supernatural fandom

[2.1]   Tumblr, a microblogging platform launched in 2007 by David Karp, was designed to support visual, rather than text-based, communication (DeSouza 2013, 9). While some users post long, text-heavy entries, the platform design encourages short text-based or multimodal messages (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014b, 286). As a result, much

of the communication on Tumblr is done through visuals, especially appropriated images from popular media used to convey emotions and ideas (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014b, 287; DeSouza 2013, 9; Cho 2015, 44; Bourlai and Herring 2014, 4). Although text makes an appearance in the form of comments, captions, and tags, and directs the reader's understanding by contextualizing or recontextualizing images, it is generally secondary to visual rhetoric (Brown 2012, 7). This focus on non-text-based forms of communication distinguishes Tumblr from some of the more text-based social media platforms. While Twitter and Facebook provide the ability to communicate through images, most users continue to favor text-based discourse, which may be supplemented, but is not dominated, by visual rhetoric (Petersen 2014, 90). On Tumblr, however, images tend to eclipse text, offering a layered and deeply intertextual means of communication.

[2.2]   Tumblr's platform also allows for the easy sharing and spreading of visual communication and fannish culture (Perez 2013, 146). In fact, the content on Tumblr consists largely of shared, or reblogged, material. Less than 10 percent of posts are original (Xu et al. 2014, 21), which also differentiates it from other social media platforms (Simpson 2015, 3). Presented with content that loads as a scroll, rather than by page, Tumblr's "infinite scrolling" makes it easy for users to quickly reblog a large number of posts (Stein 2016; DeSouza 2013, 10). Reblogging changes users' attitude toward content and, as Lisa Ehlin (2014) notes, on Tumblr "the digital image has become social, liquid and open," inviting reinterpreting, reuse, and recontextualization (3; Cho 2015, 45). This culture of sharing, reblogging, and recontextualizing destabilizes the meaning of images, as they are used in ways that creators of the source text and the original GIF may not have intended, anticipated, or imagined (Highfield and Leaver 2016, 8). This ability to reuse and recontextualize opens up the rhetorical possibilities of GIFs as they are distanced from their source material and take on divergent meanings.

[2.3]   Reblogging on Tumblr also allows for the curation of images and GIFs (Ehlin 2014, 13; Cho 2015, 46) which leads to the development of fan identities and communities (Perez 2013, 149). Citing Felix Salmon, Ehlin (2014) notes that while "it would be easy to wave this aside by arguing that reblogging is uncreative and passive," Tumblr's reblogging feature allows users to "express themselves" even though they are not posting original content (14). Fans who reblog images, GIFs, or quotes from films, television shows, and novels use curation to assert their identities as fans (Simpson 2015, 18; Misailidou 2017, 2). Unlike Facebook and Twitter, Tumblr blogs are largely anonymous, using pseudonymic rather than real-life names, and the construction of identity in this space is deliberate and performative (DeSouza 2013, 8). Tumblr allows fans to build their identities through "the visual content with which they populate their blog" (DeSouza 2013, 27). The images, reblogged and original, that appear on one's Tumblr are curated to craft one's identity within the larger Tumblr community. On Tumblr, users do not officially join groups, like they would on Facebook and other social networking platforms (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014a, 778). Instead, membership to fandoms depends on the creation of a fannish identity through the material that fans actively post and curate. Reblogging also builds a sense of community and connection through the Tumblr ethos of shared content (Simpson 2015, 8; DeMeo 2016, 54).

[2.4]   Although still images play an important role in the visual language of Tumblr, I want to focus on the use of animated GIFs: compressed files of short animation clips. While the technology for GIFs has been available since 1987, Tumblr is largely responsible for mainstreaming their use (Eppink 2014). Within the visual communication system of Tumblr, GIFs play an "integral role" (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014a, 779). In their study of GIF use on Tumblr, Bakhshi et al. (2016) found that users preferred animated GIFs to still images, videos, and text (575), because they silently and effectively expressed ideas and emotions while demanding little time commitment or bandwidth from the audience (579, 582). Tumblr's platform design appeals to fans because it allows them to easily post, share, and spread GIFs that relate to their fandom, thereby allowing engagement with and analysis of the source material while developing their identity as fans, establishing a fan community, and promoting the show within the larger space of Tumblr. In fact, Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter (2014a) suggest that Tumblr's GIF-friendliness might account for its popularity among fandoms (779).

[2.5]   Fans' uses of GIFs on Tumblr are discursively flexible and complex, and can range from emotional expression to transformative storytelling, close reading and analysis, and argumentation—categories that overlap at times and create layered and complex forms of communication that help to craft users' identities and fan communities on Tumblr (Grădinaru 2016, 84). Users will post reaction GIFs to convey their response to another user's post, often in a way that highlights emotion (Newman 2016; Huber 2015; Brown 2012; Tolins and Samermit 2016). In addition to reaction GIFs, Tumblr's platform also allows for the creation of GIF sets—GIFs that have been grouped together to craft an argument

or tell a story (Stein 2016; Perez 2013). Louisa Stein (2016) makes the argument that these GIF sets are rhetorically similar to fan vids, because they "select particular moments from the source text, some highly recognizable, some not, and recontextualize them among one another, in so doing revealing or establishing new visual and thematic patterns." GIF sets, then, like fan vids, present interpretations of and arguments about the source text through the selection and recontextualization of images. Reaction GIFs, I will argue, can be used for similar rhetorical purposes, crafting arguments about the source text through the interplay between the initial and reblogged posts.

[2.6]   In order to consider GIFs' rhetorical complexity, I want to look at GIF use among members of *Supernatural* fandom, one of the most active on Tumblr. For twelve seasons, *Supernatural* has followed the apocalyptic adventures of brothers Sam and Dean Winchester as they travel the country hunting demons, vampires, shapeshifters, and other supernatural dangers: "saving people, killing things, the family business." The show's long run, fantasy/supernatural themes, witty and pop-culture-laden dialogue, and, at times, absurdist or metatextual sense of humor has resulted in a wide array of visual material. A fan movement formed around the assertion that *Supernatural* fandom "has a GIF for everything," and some fans on Tumblr began co-opting other users' completely un-*Supernatural*-related posts by reblogging them with GIFs from the television show and its extratextual materials (cast interviews, convention appearances, and production outtakes).

[2.7]   Tumblr's reblog function was imperative for members of *Supernatural* fandom to prove that they "Have a GIF for Everything." When a Tumblr user reblogs a post, he or she has the option to add a comment, tag, or image. Some fans of the show would reblog otherwise non-*Supernatural*-related posts, adding *Supernatural* GIFs and tags, which indicated to other fans that the post had been taken over and encouraged its spread throughout the community, thereby promoting their fandom and the show. By 2014, the practice had become so prevalent that several Tumblr pages dedicated to documenting this phenomenon cropped up. Here I examine four of them: we-have-a-gif-for-everything, wehaveagifforthat, spn-takeover, and snphasagifforeverything.

[2.8]   While this practice caused some annoyance among other members of the Tumblr community, who bemoaned the frequent intrusions, many took it as a challenge to see if they could stymie the fans of *Supernatural,* tasking them to come up with GIFs for increasingly specific, improbable, and absurd rhetorical situations (note 1). *Supernatural* fans' responses to these requests exhibit a kind of rhetorical play. Paul Booth (2015) describes the play done by fans as "media play," which he defines as "instances in which individuals create meaning from activities that articulate a connection between their own creativity and mainstream media, all while working within the bounds of the media text" (15). In their creation of GIFs, *Supernatural* fans are bound by the visual material made available to them through the show (which, although extensive, is still finite) to come up with GIFs for infinite rhetorical situations, the crafting and application of which requires creative use of that material (Grădinaru 2016, 85; Petersen 2014, 94).

[2.9]   This play also occurs across fandoms. One exchange curated by spnhasagifforeverything in 2014 demonstrates a playful GIF competition between members of the *Supernatural* and BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–) fandoms (figure 1). Fyoras-holy-butthole responded to the question "What would blended cucumber taste like," replying "isn't that an actor?" Heroes-do-exist then posted a GIF of Benedict Cumberbatch (the actor who plays Sherlock Holmes on *Sherlock*) with the caption "Well, I taste very good." Avengehomerlock marveled "we are now the supernatural fandom," suggesting that the *Sherlock* fandom, like the *Supernatural,* also has a GIF for everything and can co-opt posts unrelated to the BBC drama. However, yall-motherfuckas-need-misha asserted *Supernatural*'s GIF dominance, teasing, "You'll need a few more episodes to reach Supernatural Fandom level of relevant gifs" (a particularly pointed barb against a fandom that waits years for *Sherlock's* three-episode seasons), and posting a GIF of Dean with the caption "I taste even better," the text reflecting the good-natured one-upmanship of the exchange. Killingmeisso2yearsago responded with a GIF of Sherlock shrugging and smiling ruefully with the caption "Worth a shot." And applesmokedgouda has the last word in the conversation, posting a GIF of Dean saying "Strike One Sherlock," noting the Sherlockian's defeat. In this conversation, GIFs are used as a way to exchange banter between fandoms. The tone is playful; not surprising, given that SuperWhoLock (note 2) is one of the largest multifandom communities on Tumblr and it is possible that participants are fans of both shows. In this exchange, fans are playing rhetorically within the context of their conversation as well the bounds of their respective texts.

Figure 1. A four-GIF exchange between members of the *Supernatural* and *Sherlock* fan communities.

[2.10] While fans are adept at this kind of rhetorical play within the constraints of texts that do not encourage it, *Supernatural*'s own penchant for play supports fans' engagement. The series often stretches the bounds of its mythos, using its paranormal and fantastical themes to engage in the kind of playful "imaginative freedom" described by Booth (2015, 16). The show plays within the confines of genre and serialized television, often challenging and upending the viewer's conception of both. Because of the show's wide-ranging dialogue and visuals and catalog of, at the time of writing, 264 episodes (over 11,000 minutes of content), the fandom very often rises to the challenge and has produced relevant GIFs about everything from "penultimate" to "pineapples" to "that face you make when you find weird shit at stores, and then offer it to your friend" (figure 2).
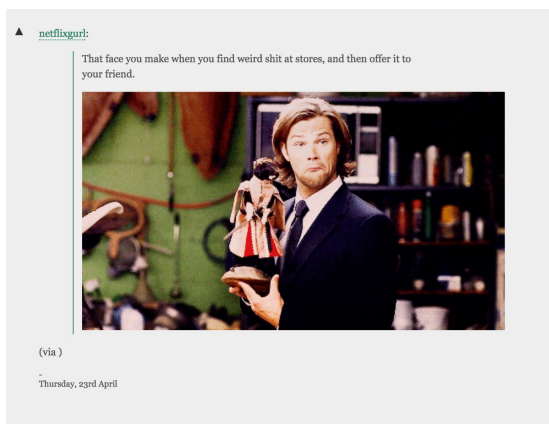
Figure 2. Reaction GIF of Sam Winchester holding up an odd object and making "that face you make when you find weird shit at stores, and then offer it to your friend."

[2.11] These GIFs demonstrate not only the incredibly wide range of *Supernatural* GIFs, but also the diverse ways in which the fandom uses them. Katherine Brown (2012) argues that while the affect illustrated by reaction GIFs is often more important to Tumblr users than its source, fans "often chose certain GIFs for their collection and use based on... their affinity for the subject matter" (9). This preference for affect over affiliation might be one of the reasons why it is important for *Supernatural* fandom to have so many GIFs. By having a GIF for everything, the *Supernatural* fan community on Tumblr has curated what Line Nybro Petersen describes as a "collective arsenal of knowledge, language and imagery that can be integrated into conversations, thus enforcing a sense of emotional connection" (2014, 97). Through the use of this "arsenal," Tumblr users develop an ethos and identity as fans and, in some cases, indicate their

encyclopedic knowledge of the show, suggesting that they know just where to look to find the most rhetorically effective material. GIF use, then, allows fans respond to rhetorical situations and craft their ethos within their fandom and the larger Tumblr community. By having a GIF for everything, and every rhetorical occasion, *Supernatural* fans, and fans who belong to multifandom communities like SuperWhoLock, do not have to sacrifice their affinity for the show in order to convey a desired emotion or idea. They can present an authentic emotional and rhetorically effective reaction, while simultaneously asserting their identity as fans and their membership to the fan community and spreading the visual content of *Supernatural* on Tumblr as a way of promoting the show and their fandom.

3. Rhetor response and literary affordance

[3.1]   When members of Tumblr's *Supernatural* fan community tout their ability to come up with a GIF for any situation, they are actually bragging about the vast number of ways they can use the text of the show for rhetorical purposes. The theory of literary affordance, developed by Khost (forthcoming), can help us to better understand the relationship between fans and their rhetorical appropriation of source materials.

[3.2]   While scholarly work has been done on the technological affordances of Tumblr as a digital environment (Petersen 2014; DeSouza 2013), here I focus on fans' interactions with and affordance of their source text, which the technological affordance of Tumblr facilitates. Drawing on the work of ecological psychologist James J. Gibson (1979) and cognitive scientist and philosopher Anthony Chemero (2003), Khost (forthcoming) adapts ([note 3](#)) the discussion about how animals interact with and use their environment to theorize how readers interact with and use texts. He is interested in "what literature could *do for [the reader]* and what *[the reader] could do with it*" (ii, emphasis in original) and defines literary affordances as "applications of features of literary texts to unrelated rhetorical situations" (2). Just as animals perceive affordances based on their environment and needs (Gibson 1979, 138–39), readers of literary and cultural texts perceive affordances based on their rhetorical situation and purpose. For example, an author might use the zombies in *The Walking Dead* to discuss her struggle with alcoholism (Linney 2011), clips from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to critique the gender politics of *Twilight* (McIntosh 2009), or Greek tragedy to discuss a stage of psychosexual development (Freud [1899] 2010). Literary affordance theory explores the ways in which we use literary texts to explain a concept, persuade an audience, or support an argument.

[3.3]   What the *Supernatural* fan community has been doing on Tumblr can be understood as an example of literary ([note 4](#)) affordance. On Tumblr, fans playfully use visual material from the show to express themselves in different rhetorical situations through reaction GIFs. Brown (2012) observes that "reaction GIFs are kept and curated by multiple types of users, awaiting that perfect moment to unveil them and be lauded for their perfect placement and emotive quality for a particular situation" (7) ([note 5](#)). Brown's assertion suggests that fans collect GIFs, anticipating their potential usefulness and waiting for their affordance to emerge in response to the kairos of a particular *rhetorical* situation. The curation of GIFs, then, functions as an anticipatory affordance ([note 6](#)): although the precise affordance of the GIF has not yet been perceived, because the rhetorical context has not occurred (and possibly may not), fans recognize that the GIF has a future communicative use, even if the exact use, the "perfect placement," remains unclear until the affordance emerges through an actual rhetorical situation. For Tumblr's *Supernatural* fandom, the ultimate "perfect placement" of GIFs requires fans to perceive their rhetorical possibilities—in other words, detecting a thematic or humorous link between *Supernatural* GIFs and un-*Supernatural*-related posts—and to use the visual features of *Supernatural,* in ways that may not initially intended by the creators of the text, as a form of digital communication, identity creation, fandom promotion, or rhetorical play.

[3.4]   Implicit in the boast that *Supernatural* has a GIF for everything is the idea that the playful dialogue, plot, and mise-en-scène of the show affords visual material or dialogue that might be used in even the most improbable of rhetorical circumstances; the challenge for fans is how to use that material. In fact, the Tumblr page We-have-a-gif-for-everything took requests for these kinds of GIFs, making or appropriating GIFs for a variety of very specific and often ridiculous situations, like "a guy lowering but then quickly raising his hand," "armadillo," and "when you drop food down your boobs but then you can't find it." We-have-a-gif-for-everything's "Disclaimers" provides some insight into how they determine which GIF to use for each request. They caution the Tumblr community, "Remember, the claim is a gif *for* everything. Not a gif *of* everything. You may not always get what you expect" (my emphasis). The prepositions highlighted in this caveat provides insight into how the administrators of this page view this challenge. They are not simply illustrating different words and situations (although sometimes they do) but are providing a GIF that can be *used*

in or as a response to a specific rhetorical situation. The responses to requests, then, become rhetorical play in their own right as fans on Tumblr attempt to find material from the show to use in specific and unlikely rhetorical contexts.

[3.5]   To perceive these affordances, actual or anticipatory, readers must engage in an active, creative, and playful reading of the text. Khost (forthcoming) characterizes literary affordance as a "productive (i.e., not passive) reading activity" (24). He connects this active and creative engagement to Henry Jenkins's (1992) (by way of Michel de Certeau's) discussion of readers as "textual poachers" and notes that "fannish readers bring the texts they are devoted to deeply into their own lives in a great variety of ways that can stray far afield from the meaning or intentions of the source texts" (Khost, forthcoming, 58) ([note 7](#)). Fans' resistance to "official interpretative practices" allows them to view and read texts in creative, playful, and productive ways that may not have been initially intended or anticipated by the creators of the source content, although they remained bound by the text's parameters (Jenkins 1992, 26). Fans' creative use and their encyclopedic knowledge of the source material allows them to perceive literary affordances for the GIFable moments in *Supernatural* and to use those moments in their rhetorical play on Tumblr as they build their identities as fans and spread their fan community through the use of *Supernatural* GIFs.

4. Reaction GIFs

[4.1]   While literary affordance through GIFs has a variety of rhetorical functions, one of the most common uses on Tumblr (and other social media platforms) is as a reaction to another text, image, or hypothetical situation. In these cases, GIFs function as a "tool" of "personal expression," allowing users to convey their thoughts, emotions, and responses through the visual language of GIFs (Huber 2015), which are "distillations of pure affect" (Newman 2016, 2). Fans isolate gestures and facial expressions from source texts and appropriate their visual cues as a part of their own embodied communication, often to emotive or humorous effect (Brown 2012, 52). Because Tumblr's design encourages visual engagement, reaction GIFs have become a popular mode of digital rhetoric on the platform.

[4.2]   As "embodied action" (Tolins and Samermit 2016, 76), Tumblr users generally employ reaction GIFs to relate an emotional response, whether excitement, affection, grief, joy, or anger. In these cases, GIFs visually enact and communicate users' affective reactions by embodying them through gesture or expression. Although it may not have been the intention of the creators of *Supernatural* to provide material for Tumblr communication, fans recognize the expressive "features" (Khost, forthcoming, 13) of the source text; they perceive the way in which actors' gestures and facial expressions might be used rhetorically to convey and prompt emotional responses. For example, in 2014, Spnhasagifforeverything archived an exchange in which carryonmy_assbut posted a GIF of Dean Winchester (portrayed by Jensen Ackles), his jaw slowly dropping, in response to a YouTube video of singer, actor, and impressionist Christina Bianco performing *Frozen's* "Let It Go," imitating a variety of singers, including Alanis Morissette, Celine Dion, Julie Andrews, and Barbra Streisand (figure 3). The animation communicates the poster's awe at Bianco's remarkable impressions and her ability to seamlessly transition from one to another. Carryonmy_assbut's affordance of the image of Dean rhetorically presents an affective reaction to the video by using the embodied expression of the television character, while also asserting an affinity for the show, thereby crafting an identity as a fan.
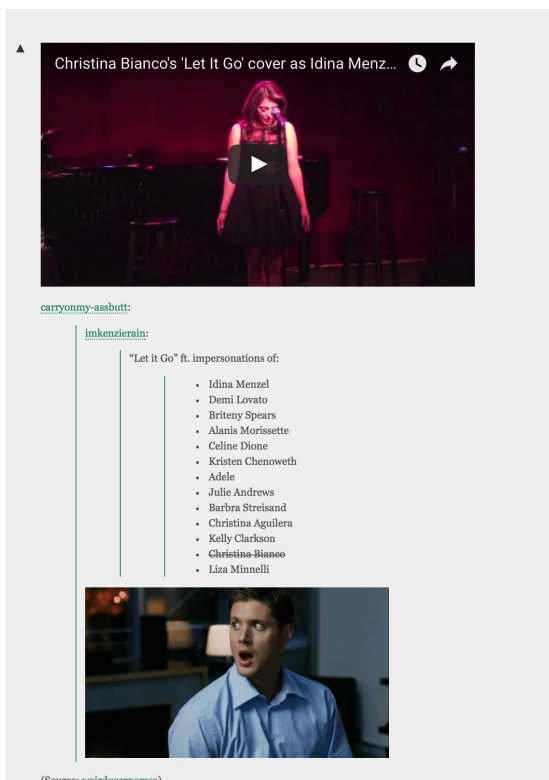
Figure 3. Use of a reaction GIF in response to a YouTube video.

[4.3]   In addition to reacting to text, GIFs can also supplement it, "visually enacting actions described in the text" (Tolins and Samermit 2016, 78). For example, the user amoying posted "if you're my friend and i catch you texting while driving im throwing your phone out the window" (figure 4). i-think-i-am-adorable reblogged annoying's threat with a GIF of Sam (portrayed by Jared Padalecki) looking down at his phone, which Dean takes and throws out the window, thereby enacting the original poster's promise to do the same. Amoying's initial post created a rhetorical situation that allowed the affordance of the image to emerge, as i-think-i-am-adorable rhetorically used the GIF to illustrate the content of the post.
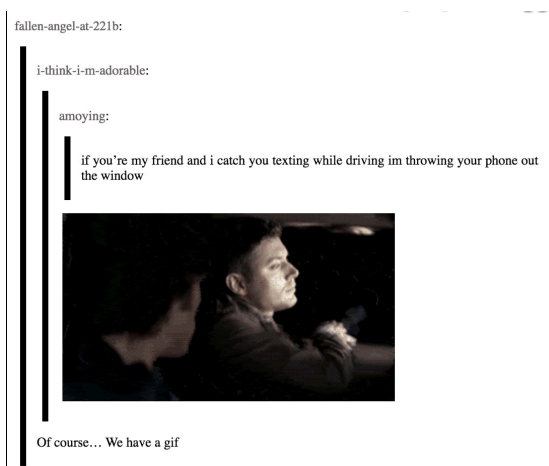
Figure 4. Use of a *Supernatural* GIF of Sam throwing a phone out the window to illustrate a Tumblr post.

[4.4]   The affordance of illustrative GIFs on Tumblr can also take on a narrative function, visually enacting verbal narratives (Booth 2015; Perez 2013). In one example, thelitanyofdee posted a screenshot of a Facebook status update by "Kevin." In this update, Kevin tells a lengthy story about how one day, when he was buying dog food, a woman asked him if he had a dog. He told her no and that he, in fact, was on a dog food diet. He then went on to inform her that one side effect is that he now had the compulsion to smell dogs' behinds and he recounted a time that he was hit by a car, because he had stepped off a curb to sniff a poodle (figure 5). Two-winchesters-and-castiel reblogged the post, adding a GIF of Dean, from 9.05 "Dog Dean Afternoon" (in which Dean mind melds with a dog and takes on several canine

traits), looking amorously at a poodle with the text "Yeah, we have a gif for that." The GIF illustrates the Facebook poster's claim that he was enticed by a poodle, elaborating on the original post by adding erotic undertones to the interaction. Supernaturalapocalypse reblogged the post again in order to conclude the narrative, writing "But wait, we have another gif to complete the story" and posting a GIF of Dean getting hit by a car during 3.11 "Mystery Spot." Supernaturalapocalypse's comment suggests awareness of the GIFs' rhetorical purpose: through their communal affordance of GIFs for two different episodes set six years apart, the *Supernatural* fans illustrate the story in the original post, casting Dean as the protagonist and using images from *Supernatural* to visually convey and rhetorically construct the narrative. The joint effort involved in this visual story demonstrates how Tumblr's reblog function can help to develop a sense of fan community as material is spread and elaborated upon and fans collaborate in their rhetorical play.

Figure 5. Use of two *Supernatural* reaction GIFs to illustrate the story told in a Facebook post.

5. "Are you sure this is about a hunt, and not about something else?": Connotations and ambiguity

[5.1]   The use of reaction GIFs requires an understanding of the connotation of facial expressions and gestures. Roland Barthes (1977) asserts that images contain "two messages," the content they represent and the "connoted" meaning, the visual codes that are perceived and interpreted by viewers (17). He explains that these codes are culturally specific and subjective; not every audience will read into an image the same connoted meaning. Depending on their cultural identity, personal experiences, and perception of the image's connotations, Tumblr users can view the same image and have different interpretations of what the gesture or facial expression emotes. The subjective connotations of images mean that the same GIF can be afforded in various rhetorical situations and for various rhetorical purposes. A post by deansmuffin at we-have-a-gif-for-everything, for example, contains an image of Dean looking down to the right, while gesturing with his left hand (figure 6). Deansmuffin asserts that "You Can Literally Use this GIF for Anything," and offers some suggestions, including "what do you wanna do with your life?" "hey can you help me with—" and "if sam bought 5 oranges and cas ate all of them, how many oranges are left?" In each case, the gesture conveys a different meaning, ranging from dismissal to acquiescence to confusion. Deansmuffin's post engages with the rhetorical playfulness of the image—the fact that Dean's gesture and expression can connote multiple meanings depending on the audience and the textual accompaniment. This flexibility suggests the variety of affordances that might be perceived in response to a single image.

Figure 6. The same reaction GIF repeated three times with different captions to illustrate the mutable meanings of GIFs.

[5.2]   As Deansmuffin's post demonstrates, text can help to clarify a GIF's ambiguous connotations by contextualizing it and thereby directing the reader's interpretation. Barthes (1977) explains that "the text directs the reader through

the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others...it remote-controls him toward a meaning chosen in advance" (27). Text, then, influences one's reading of the image's visual language, directing one's interpretation of the image and understanding of its connotations. As Elli E. Bourlai and Susan C. Herring (2014) explain, on Tumblr, "Images and text work together to create meaning...The text often provides context for the images" (1). The text contextualizes or recontextualizes the image, clarifying its intended rhetorical purpose, and the image, likewise, affects our reading of the text, repositioning it in relation to visual material and offering alternative interpretations. Although it is a largely visual site, text plays an important role in the multimodal rhetoric of Tumblr (Brown 2012, 7).

[5.3]   In some cases, textual direction is necessary for GIFs to achieve the rhetorical purpose of their affordance—the images themselves too ambiguous to be effective on their own. Three GIFs at spnhasagifforeverything appear in response to screenshot of a Yahoo ask complaining about women's preference for men's smooth chests: "i dont think they have any idea how much waxing hurts, its a real torture" (figure 7). The first is a reaction GIF of David Tennant laughing, conveying the user's emotional response to the irony and hypocrisy of the complaint. gropingyourmuse also reblogged it with a picture of Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen, rolling her eyes in an expression of angry disgust, the image expressing disapproval and annoyance. (Katniss's own experience with painful plucking and waxing in *The Hunger Games* makes this affordance especially intertextually appropriate.) The third GIF, posted by naamahdarling, is of Dean holding a baby. His expression is ambiguous; it could be annoyance, disgust, or anger, but the closed captioning on the GIF informs viewers that Dean "imitates crying sarcastically." The textual direction clarifies the rhetorical purpose of the GIF: naamahdarling is making an affordance of the image of Dean mocking a baby to deride the male poster's myopic complaint, suggesting scorn, little sympathy, and that he is being a baby. Text and image work together to render the affordance rhetorically effective.

Figure 7. Two GIFs in reaction to a Yahoo ask.

[5.4]   Adding to GIFs' connotative mutability is the fact the affordance of images from *Supernatural* decontextualizes them from their source. Visual affordances, like GIFs, are a part of the quotative, appropriative, and sharing culture of Tumblr, which means that they are somewhat divorced from their original context and develop independent meaning (Newman 2014, 128). Instead of being tethered to the source material, users "recontextualiz[e] the images for the purpose of the current interaction" (Tolins and Samermit 2016, 84) and fans' "use extends to entirely new contexts" (Highfield and Leaver 2016, 7). In the GIF of Dean throwing Sam's phone out of the window discussed above, for example, the gesture might be the same, but in the episode, the context is different. In 2.20 "What Is and What Should Never Be," the episode that provides the visual material for this affordance, Dean's throwing Sam's phone out the window is not an as act of annoyance or concern for Sam's safety but self-preservation. However, i-think-i-am-adorable's affordance of the GIF is still rhetorically effective; the decontextualized image illustrates the post, is recontextualized by its use, and allows for new interpretations of the GIF to develop and affordances to emerge as it spreads through Tumblr's reblogging culture.

[5.5]   This use of GIFs is in keeping with Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality. Kristeva ([1969] 1980) argues that "any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). Through this intertextual modification and transformation, Tumblr users appropriate and share images, taking ownership of the material (Tolins and Samermit 2016, 88), creating their own meaning, and becoming Jenkins's (1992) "textual poachers." For example, the GIF of Dean "crying sarcastically" co-opts imagery from a show that has been criticized by fans and even some of the actors for misogyny (see Lane 2015; Pless 2013; Exorcising Emily 2015) to make a playful affordance in service of a feminist argument. It rhetorically divorces the image of Dean not only from the context of the episode but also from the show's perceived sexism, to put it to a feminist purpose.

[5.6]   In fact, as GIFs are shared and spread throughout Tumblr, users might also poach and make affordances of others' GIFs, so that meanings deviate not only from the source material but also from the original GIF use (Highfield and Leaver 2016, 7; Huber 2015). As the GIF spreads, shared among Tumblr blogs, users who are not familiar with the original context of the GIF, and who might have never seen the episode or the show that the image was taken from, appropriate the image's visual language and further decontextualize it from its source (Thomas 2013, ¶ 3.3). Jackson Tolins and Patrawat Samermet (2016) argue that "GIFs may be considered successful when the original creator or source has been forgotten in lieu of its widespread distribution…Most of the source meaning is lost as GIFs and memes find novel contextualizations across different mediums" (88). The ability of Tumblr users to share and reblog GIFs creates an environment where members are encouraged to make use of GIFs in a variety of rhetorical circumstances and for different purposes.

[5.7]   This continuous recontextualization of GIFs introduces instability and multiplicity into their meaning (Hagman 2012), and the wide distribution and uses of GIFs invites new, potential affordances. Khost (forthcoming) argues that readers perceive affordances "relative to the situations in which they think, feel, or communicate, and those situations and corresponding points of view are never the same for any two people, even those who are involved in the same transaction" (17). Because of the differing perspectives, knowledge, and situations of users, they will be able to perceive affordances that the original poster might not have been able to; in some cases, decontextualization from the source material can open a GIF up to new potential affordances. This mutability is in keeping with Tumblr's culture of "setting content free" and dismantling the "hierarchical 'author-reader' model" (Ehlin 2014, 6). The meanings of these images are open to multiple interpretations as they are shared through Tumblr's networked systems of communication and used in different ways by members of different communities.

6. "I don't understand that reference": Deeper levels of meaning

[6.1]   The quotive, connotative, mutable, and sharable nature of GIFs on Tumblr means that one does not have to be familiar with the source material to make affordances of it. As Tim Highfield and Tama Leaver (2016) note, it is not necessary to know a reaction GIF's source to understand the emotions it conveys, to reblog it, or to make an affordance of it (7). However, the intertextuality between the GIF and its source allow alternative rhetorical possibilities. Having knowledge of the source material and the GIFs original context can open up "additional levels of meaning or significance" (7) because GIFs are never fully removed from their original context. As Brown (2012) argues, although GIFs might be "fragmented from their original context," they are "still indexical to the original source" (8). GIFs are decontextualized in their spread and use on Tumblr, but their visual coding continues to gesture back to their source. As a result, according to Petersen (2014), "conversations on Tumblr are often laden with multiple layers of meaning. Fans' talks have a textual layer, but also inter- and meta-textual layers" (93). Although fans might use GIFs to convey an emotional reaction, the image references back to its source material, imbuing it with meaning that is perceived by other members of the fandom. In fact, Bourlai and Herring (2014) posit that this intertextuality might be one reason why Tumblr users depend on appropriated visuals for communication (4). Not only does using a *Supernatural* GIF convey that one is a *Supernatural* fan, or that one belongs to SuperWhoLock or other multifandom communities, but recognizing a GIF's referent marks one as belonging to a larger community of fans who also get it.

[6.2]   Thus, while nonfans can interpret and make literary affordances of fandom specific GIFs, they lack the context to understand some of the connotations, meanings, and affordances that are perceived by fans. In this way, Louisa Stein and Kristina Busse (2009) argue, fandoms function as what Stanley Fish (1980) has termed an interpretive community (197). Fans' context for the visual utterances of GIFs is different from that of nonfans, and so they are likely to differ in their interpretation of connotations and perception of literary affordances. Because fans can count on other fans to

possess that knowledge, they use GIFs to make inside jokes and craft complex interpretive arguments. This rhetorical play on the part of fans is a way of marking themselves as a part of the fandom, while excluding others who are not. This exclusive understanding of context allows fans to develop inside jokes and arguments that the larger Tumblr community might not perceive or comprehend, thereby creating an exclusionary sense of identity and community: only other fans get the playfulness or meaning of the GIF use.

[6.3]   For example Spnhasagifforeverything archived a 2014 post by pennsylvania, complaining about "commercials that play twice in a row," which mitemiteiii reblogged with an advertisement for Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, reading "Déjà vu never tasted so good" (figure 8). Dontgigglesherlock shared a story about a time a commercial played seven consecutive times, observing "I thought I was stuck in some kind of loop that would never end." Journeyintohiddlestiel also reblogged the post with a GIF of Sam's eyes opening as he shoots up in bed. Without understanding the context of this scene, the imagery of this GIF does not seem relevant to the previous posts. But *Supernatural* fan's get the affordance and the joke: The animation is being appropriated from 3.11 "Mystery Spot," in which Sam and Dean are caught in a *Groundhog Day*–type time loop, reliving the same day repeatedly. Thus, the GIF is relevant to the previous posts; the episode directly mentions déjà vu, and Sam is stuck in precisely the kind of time loop dontgigglesherlock feared. Journeyintohiddlestiel's affordance of the GIF playfully crafts an analogy, elaborating on and illustrating the concepts referenced in the post's other reblogs, but only someone familiar with the image and episode would understand the rhetorical purpose and relevance of this literary affordance. Thus, the GIF rhetorically functions to not only craft a joke, but to establish Journeyintohiddlestiel's ethos as fan and to create a sense of community among Tumblr *Supernatural* viewers who get the reference.

Figure 8. Reaction GIF of Sam waking up in *Supernatural* 3.11 "Mystery Spot," in response to posts about déjà vu.

[6.4]   GIFs can also be used to make arguments within the fandom, and as with humor, the effectiveness of such arguments depends on contextual awareness of the show. In response to goatsarelife's post of a sign reading "Everyone is a little pie-curious," 7-mins-in-heaven-with-dean (whose user name has since switched to enduredean) reblogged with an image from spnhasagifforeverything of Dean winking at the camera (figure 9). Nonfans could read this post as a response to the sexuality suggested by the sign's phrasing, but knowledge of Tumblr's *Supernatural* fandom reveals the rhetorical complexity of this GIF. First, Dean's love of pie became a humorous motif in the show, and the wink could be read as an acknowledgement of this reoccurring joke. However, within some subsections of the fan community on Tumblr, pie has become a metaphor for Dean's subtextual bisexuality. In 2013, oh-so-pleasant posted a meta (a long text-based analysis of a text posted to Tumblr) in the form of a hypothetical dialogue, in which Dean uses the metaphor of pie and cake to explain his sexual attraction to Castiel, an angel and one of Dean's friends and allies. Other fans on Tumblr have appropriated this exchange and "Cake & Pie as Metaphors for Dean's Bisexuality" has emerged as a tag on Archive of Our Own, a popular fan fiction website. The fan discourse that has developed around Dean's love of pie, then, repositions the rhetorical effect of Dean's wink. This GIF is not only playing off of

Dean's canonical love of pie, but it also makes an argument for his noncanonical, but subtextual, attraction to Castiel, which is implied through the pun in the sign—"pie-curious" being a play on "bi-curious," a phrase used to indicate the same-sex desire of a person who identifies as heterosexual. This affordance, then, has three levels of rhetorical meaning, the accessibility of which depend on one's familiarity of the show: (1) a reaction GIF to the sexual suggestiveness of the sign, a reading open to all users, (2) an inside joke for fans and viewers of the show based on Dean's love of pie, and (3) an argument about Dean's bisexuality specifically aimed at fans who are aware of the pie-bisexuality metaphor within the Tumblr fandom.
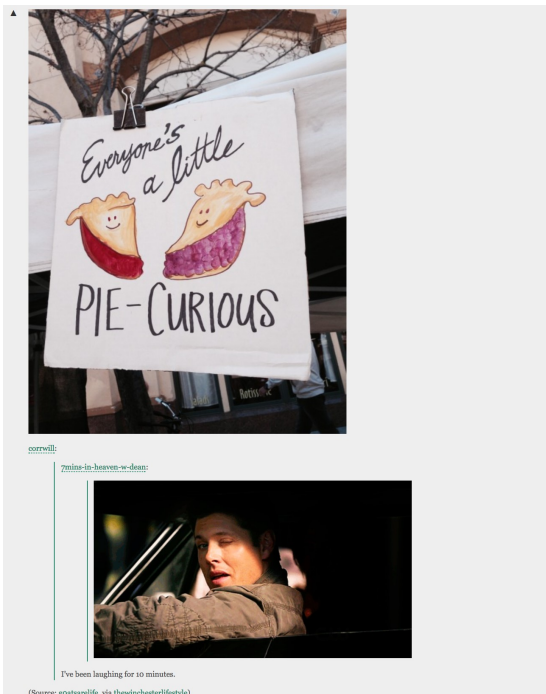

Figure 9. GIF of Dean Winchester winking in response to a "pie-curious" sign.

[6.5]   The audience specificity of these affordances also indicates one of the rhetorical uses of source texts: to "establish or deepen relationships" and create a sense of community (Khost, forthcoming, 28). Recognizing the rhetorical significance of the 3.11 "Mystery Spot" GIF in relation to its accompanying post or the relationship between Dean and the pie-curious sign marks membership to the fan and ship communities. Shipping (the intense desire for certain characters to enter into or maintain a romantic or sexual relationship) tends to "clearly delineate interpretive communities" within fandoms (Stein and Busse 2009, 197), and is one of the primary forms that textual analysis and argumentation on Tumblr. *Supernatural* fandom's use of reaction GIFs also creates arguments in support of the show's two primary ships: Wincest (Dean/Sam) and Destiel (Dean/Castiel). The literary affordance of images is one of the ways in which fans on Tumblr promote and reaffirm their interpretative communities and their ships, using GIF sets to craft visual arguments about characters' interactions and emotions (Petersen 2014; Stein 2016) and "establishing and maintaining specific fan discourses" around their preferred romantic pairing (Petersen 2014, 94). For example, as stated above, the rhetorical use of an image of winking Dean as a response to the pie-curious sign affirms discourses of the Destiel ship and the pie-bisexuality conceptual metaphor. That GIF offers a playful rhetorical wink to Tumblr fans who ship Destiel and are members of that community.

[6.6]   In another example, in 2014, *Supernatural* Destiel fans posted on we-have-a-gif-for-everything and commented on the stock image used to illustrate an article about marriage equality featured on *The Wire*'s website (figure 10). The image features two men, one wearing a light brown trench coat and the other in a dark blue suit, holding hands. The way in the shot is cropped, the viewer cannot see the men's faces. The image recalls Castiel's customary trench coat and the dark blue and black suits that Dean frequently wears when impersonating an FBI agent, which prompted propinquitous to question, "who picked this stock photo." Deancasotp reblogged with a GIF of the two characters standing side-by-side, wearing similar clothing with the caption "This is awkward." This scene is cropped so that you cannot see the men's hands, thereby suggesting that they are clasped as we see in the stock photo. The rhetorical use of the GIF, in playful conversation with the photo, suggests that Dean and Castiel's subtextual relationship, closeted by

the show's refusal to canonize it, has been outed by the photo. The clasped hands connote a homosexual relationship, which is then transferred to the literary affordance of the GIF of Dean and Castiel, making a visual argument about the homoerotic subtext of their interactions. While nonfans of the show will likely recognize that the use of the GIF in this situation queers the relationship between Dean and Castiel, they lack the context for the argument to be as rhetorically compelling as it might be for fans of the show, especially Destiel shippers, who already support that interpretation of the characters' relationship.

Figure 10. Reaction GIF of Dean and Castiel posted in response to a stock photo of two men holding hands.

7. "Endings are hard": Conclusions

[7.1]   Khost's (forthcoming) theory of literary affordances provides a helpful path for approaching the ways in which members of the *Supernatural* fan community make use of the text they love. Fans, because of the affection for the object of their fandom, develop a relationship with texts that invites us to ask "what literature could do for them" and their appropriative and productive engagement with the texts prompts analysis of not only "*what [they] could do with it*" but also how they are doing so (ii, emphasis in original). GIF culture on Tumblr demonstrates one of the ways in which fans make affordances of texts for rhetorical purposes. The ability to de- and recontextualize GIFs also promotes the emergence of different affordances; as GIFs are reblogged throughout Tumblr, they are removed from their source, and additional possibilities for literary affordances are perceived by Tumblr users.

[7.2]   While these GIFs can be used by the Tumblr community at large, their affordance is of special significance to fans of *Supernatural*, SuperWhoLock, or other multifandom communities. The eclectic visuals and dialogue of *Supernatural* allow for varied affordances to emerge for fans to use as GIFs in different rhetorical situations. Use of these GIFs in non-*Supernatural*-related posts allows fans to make rhetorical arguments about the show by using its visual media in a variety of rhetorical situations. Recognizing the original post as a rhetorical situation, fans use the interaction between the original post and their affordance of the text to engage in rhetorical play. However, more than that, use and understanding of many of these GIFs is also a way of establishing a sense of identity and community on Tumblr, a marker of membership to the *Supernatural* fandom. By making specific affordance of the text, some of which depends on interpretation of the source material, fans are asserting identity as a *Supernatural* fan and marking their

belonging to its Tumblr fan community. This GIF use also functions as a kind of promotion for the show and the fandom, spreading *Supernatural*'s humorous and playful visuals, and their witty deployment, throughout Tumblr.

8. Acknowledgment

[8.1]   Thanks to Peter Khost for his help with this article.

9. Notes

1. My use of the term "rhetorical situation" is an adaption the definition explained by Bitzer (1968), who outlines the following criteria for a rhetorical situation: "rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation…a speech is given rhetorical significance by the situation…a rhetorical situation must exist as a necessary condition of rhetorical discourse…discourse is rhetorical insofar as it functions, (or seeks to function) as a fitting response to a situation which needs and invites it…the situation controls the rhetorical response" (5–6). Although not rhetoric in the classical sense, I argue that GIFs on Tumblr are rhetorical because they "perform some task" (4), whether that is expressing emotion or presenting an argument; they "mediat[e] thought and action" (4). Their presence on Tumblr, then, is the response to a situation and, very often, their rhetorical function and the meaning they communicate is shaped and directed by the context they are posted in—the situation they are responding to. In addition, the use of GIFs on Tumblr is constrained and controlled by the context of the post they are responding to. The challenge of "a GIF for everything" is that the GIFs used must be relevant in some way to the original post. In that way, the GIFs are controlled by the situation they are responding to.

2. "SuperWhoLock" is a portmanteau used to describe fans of *Supernatural, Doctor Who,* and *Sherlock,* three of the most active fan communities on Tumblr. For more information on SuperWhoLock, see Perez (2013) and Short (2016).

3. By appropriating this term (making an affordance of it), Khost (forthcoming) is using the theory of physical affordances (what are the different uses of a chair) to describe an abstract or rhetorical phenomenon (what are the different rhetorical uses of *Pride and Prejudice?*).

4. Like Khost, I am taking broad views of the terms "literature" and "literary text." Khost explains: "By literature I mean any published or public text that is not nonfiction. This includes but is not limited to novels, stories, poems, work for the stage, art or design pieces, myths, graphic novels, comics, fairy tales, feature films, TV shows, songs, fanfiction, and video games" (forthcoming, 3).

5. Reaction GIFs are collected by fans in a number of different ways. They can be reblogged and collected on one's personal Tumblr blog. However, there are also sites, most notably gify.com and repygif.net, that offer a searchable database of community-sourced GIFs. Specific Tumblr blogs, the sole function of which is to catalog fandom-related GIFs, like allthesupernaturalgifs, also curate GIFs, compiling them for other users.

6. Thanks to Peter Khost, who, during our conversations about this piece, coined this term.

7. Khost notes that literary affordances can be conceptualized as a "kind of 'fan *nonfiction*'" (forthcoming, 63).

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Discourse is the new wank: A reflection on linguistic change in fandom

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—A survey disseminated April 13–16, 2017, revealed statistically significant differences in the definitions of various slang terms found in old (LiveJournal-based) and new (Tumblr-based) fandom. This cultural and lexical shift is indicative of a generational gap between old and new fandom, influenced by imbroglios such as RaceFail '09 and the continuing politicization of left-wing social media. As long as fandom continues to polarize around performative progressivism and the merits of callout culture, its future as an internet community remains in doubt.

[0.2]   *Keywords*—Callout culture; Dreamwidth; Fan art; Fan community; Fan fiction; Language; LiveJournal; Politics; Tumblr

[1]   There is a Tumblr post that circulates around to my dash every couple of months, talking about how fandom wank has become fandom discourse. Every week, one of my followers reblogs another post from someone on this microblogging platform that has served as one of the epicenters of post-Strikethrough fandom, reminiscing about the good old days. Within this loose confederation of fans who lived through the 2007 LiveJournal purges known as Strikethrough and Boldthrough, there is considerable nostalgia for the days when discourse was wank and trigger was squick.

[2]   Old fandom—in the context of this article, fandom from before the rise of microblogging platforms like Tumblr and Twitter—was a very different place by virtue of being hosted on journaling platforms like LiveJournal or individual domains like GeoCities. The structure of those sites was more friendly toward written posts and long, individual discussions in comment threads, as well as communities keeping to their own and not having to see content from other parts of the site unless the user crossposted or linked to them. The average age skewed a lot older, with users on LiveJournal talking about families and jobs alongside their fan works, and younger users often either lied about their age or said nothing at all.

[3]   Strikethrough '07 was the first major upheaval in LiveJournal fandom that began the splintering and mass exodus of fans throughout the internet and the change in the landscape of fandoms with the establishment of the Organization for Transformative Works and the Archive of Our Own (Silver, 2015). 2017 marks its tenth anniversary, and in those ten years fandom—especially on platforms like Tumblr and Twitter—has expanded considerably, with each new show, book, or film bringing new blood into the body of fandom as a whole. But with the arrival of younger and younger users, and sometimes the departure of older users, the knowledge of interacting with fandom in the past begins to fade, preserved only in the posts of the odd Tumblr blog of someone who made the migration from LiveJournal or on archives like Fanlore.

[4]   However, just because new blood has arrived in the fandom doesn't mean the old behavior patterns have vanished. In this, the structure of a microblogging platform plays a role. Tumblr and Twitter aggregate all content made by all users with global tags that are accessible by every user. These porous boundaries between blogs and users, coupled with the ease with which one can retweet or reblog a post to disseminate its contents, mean that fandom and

nonfandom parts of a site can easily find each other to exchange ideas, information, and—as may be the case for the introduction of the terms *discourse* and *trigger* in lieu of *wank* and *squick*—lexical items.

[5]   I ran a LiveJournal account briefly around the time of Strikethrough '07, so I remember seeing the aftershocks of the purges, alongside the Boldthrough follow-up. I remember seeing the early versions of Archive of Our Own, but I had been too young (in actual years) to understand the context for its existence. However, I have had a Tumblr account for six years, and during those six years, I have witnessed interesting linguistic changes to the lexicon of its fannish denizens. I had a suspicion that there had been a lexical shift as fandom became more and more accommodating to younger fans, alongside a greater cultural shift in how people engaged with fan works as a whole. The fact that at some point people started noticing that Tumblr users used discourse to mean wank and trigger to mean squick interested me, and I wanted to know if there was a significant difference in lexical preference between old fandom and new fandom.

[6]   In April 2017, I disseminated a survey trying to measure fandom social media platform usage and their perceptions and usages of these four words. I measured the demographics of the users, garnering respondents from Tumblr, Twitter, Dreamwidth, Facebook, and various other platforms used by people in fandom. I broadly measured their age categories, as well as the length of time and frequency with which they had been using their primary social media platform, as well as the platform on which they engaged in fan behavior.

[7]   Using a five– and six-point Likert scale, I then asked them to record which definitions of the four words (wank paired with discourse, trigger paired with squick) were closest to their usages:

[8]   For the wank and discourse pairing:

1. Don't know/not applicable.
2. The act of masturbation.
3. Written or spoken communication or debate.
4. Elaborate theorizing.
5. Objectionable fan behavior.
6. A loud online discussion without purpose or substance.

[9]   And for the squick and trigger pairing:

1. Don't know/not applicable.
2. Something I dislike.
3. Something I am uncomfortable consuming or creating.
4. Something that is a deep-seated, visceral turnoff.
5. Something that causes a strong, heavy emotional response, especially after trauma.

[10]   To eliminate confusion, especially for people who know multiple definitions of each word, I asked survey respondents to give me both a primary and a secondary definition. After that, I asked them to measure the preference and usage of each word in each pair. I hypothesized that users who had been in fandom for a very long time (more than ten years according to my usage bin) would have a different perception of the words wank and squick and even make a distinction between the use of these words and the use of discourse and trigger. After all, wank and squick are fandom terms that have been in use since LiveJournal, whereas discourse and trigger seemed to have been co-opted from academia and are more used by fans who are relatively new to online fandom.

[11]   Indeed, when I narrowed down the focus to Tumblr and Dreamwidth fandom, I found out that the Dreamwidth user base on average associated wank with "objectionable fan behavior," whereas the Tumblr user base preferred "written or spoken communication or debate," which was also their average definition for the word discourse. Similarly, for the word squick the average definition from a user on Tumblr was "something I dislike." Its treatment of the word trigger as either "a deep-seated visceral turnoff" or "something I am uncomfortable creating or consuming" is similar to the Dreamwidth definitions of the word squick. Finally, the preference questions on the survey showed statistically significant differences in the lexical choices for each platform, as Tumblr on average preferred discourse and trigger over wank and squick, and Dreamwidth preferred it vice versa.

[12]   This significant lexical difference between Tumblr and Dreamwidth users seems to support the theory of a cultural shift between old and new fandom. Dreamwidth users are on average older in both offline and fandom ages, having gotten into fandom around the rise of LiveJournal, or even before that (I remember several Dreamwidth users wanking about my survey's age bins being too small and cutting off at 35 or older, because they had been in fandom since the days of Usenet). In contrast, Tumblr users are on average between the ages of 18 and 25 and relatively new to fandom (though, as I mentioned before, there are older users on the site who reminisce about LiveJournal days). If Dreamwidth users roughly correlate to old (LiveJournal-based) fandom, then Tumblr users roughly correlate to new (social media-based) fandom, though of course given the nature of the internet there is bound to be some overlap.

[13]   The internet is a porous, amorphous medium in which people can hypothetically be anyone, although with the rise of social media it has become safer and more encouraged to be oneself on the internet. Now, more than ever, online culture has become more personalized, with the algorithms of Google and various social media sites tracking preferences and dislikes. Online identities are no longer as separate from offline ones, especially with public figures, celebrities, and organizations who run social media accounts to engage with constituents and clients. Nevertheless, there is still a semblance of anonymity, which enables average Tumblr and Twitter users to engage with each other without regards to their offline identity—until those identities are brought into the discussion.

[14]   With the engagement of offline identities in online discussions, it is no surprise that the internet has also become a place to engage with real-world issues in an abstract manner. And fandom is no exception to that: the importance of diverse media in fandom has existed since 2009 with RaceFail on LiveJournal. At that time, RaceFail was an imbroglio of discussions and derailments from writers about the portrayal of characters of color in their published books, which then expanded into a discussion about the representation of people of color in other media such as TV shows and films (Somerville). Through RaceFail, fandom adopted the social justice-linked concepts about the importance of media diversity and representation, as well as the necessity of calling out content creators who do in fact perpetuate racist microaggressions and stereotypes in their writing (De Kosnik 2016).

[15]   This growing awareness of the need for diversity in fandom spaces also came at a time when mainstream media was beginning to grasp the power of social media as a unifying tool. The protests of the Arab Spring (2010), the Egyptian Revolution (2011), and Occupy Wall Street (2011) were all coordinated through a "network of networks" on social media sites that interacted with each other (Castells 2012). These social media sites, especially microblogging platforms like Tumblr and Twitter, facilitated the dissemination of social justice concepts championed by these movements at an unprecedented rate. As mentioned before, the global tags on these sites also enabled greater crossover of ideas from political and activist groups into fandom circles, especially in the wake of RaceFail and a growing call for representation and diversity even within fan-created media. Fandom grew even more transformative, as reinterpretations of favorite characters became more inclusive. For example, Hermione Granger being reinterpreted as black is a popular headcanon in Harry Potter fandom on Tumblr, and series author J. K. Rowling has voiced her support for it in a Tweet dated December 21, 2015; in another Tweet dated June 20, 2016, Rowling even supported the casting of a black actress in the readings for *The Cursed Child*.

[16]   So within an increasingly interconnected internet culture where personalization and self-identity are more important than anonymity, the personal becomes increasingly political even within fandom circles. Fandom disagreements, too, have shifted into a more political and academic tone. This is in part because of the global access to Tumblr and Twitter's tags and searches: someone browsing these tags could stumble across content they do not agree with and start arguments with the creators of said content. While it is similar to how arguments start on blogging platforms like LiveJournal and Dreamwidth, these arguments on Tumblr and Twitter are different in that they can quickly become viral, with numerous people contributing their responses and not everyone seeing all of those responses, or with many people only seeing a certain version of a post and reacting to that instead. The same attitudes that led to the prevalence and popularity of wank communities on LiveJournal are thus replicated on Tumblr but now at a more rapid pace with less control over the thread of conversation. It is therefore very easy for a discussion or an idea to become radicalized on Tumblr, and this in turn raises the stakes in fan debates on the internet.

[17]   This is where my argument about the fandom culture shift comes back. There is a difference between old fandom and new fandom in the understanding of the intent of internet arguments and reactions to objectionable material, as evidenced by the differing definitions of wank vis à vis discourse and trigger vis à vis squick. Fan debates that spiral out of control used to be called wank, ostensibly because it was seen as self-aggrandizing with no particular

goal except for an anonymous emotional release on the internet, and it was labelled and described as such in communities such as fandom_wank and fail_fandomanon on LiveJournal and Dreamwidth. Nowadays, these similar arguments on Tumblr and Twitter are called discourse, a term co-opted from academia which lends gravitas and credence to the arguments being expounded in the post. Similarly, squick in old fandom simply implied a visceral dislike of a given topic, but the new fandom term trigger makes someone's aversive feelings towards that topic more intensely personal and potentially traumatic. As fandom became more and more political and critical of its consumption of media, its preferred terms to describe its engagement with the media have also shifted towards a more academic, professional lexicon.

[18]   In the end, perhaps that is what the old fandom denizens currently on Tumblr are bemoaning when they note the shift from wank to discourse or squick to trigger. This cultural shift to becoming more serious about one's hobby has thrown people who have been in fandom before Strikethrough slightly off-kilter. Ship wars and other fandom wank are now being treated with the same lexicon and seriousness as academic discourse; squicks are given the same amount of weight as psychological triggers in therapy. But perhaps this shift is also indicative of a growing acceptance of fandom as an aspect of cultural and media studies by the mainstream. Fandom itself is becoming more and more acknowledged by mainstream media; the rise of social media has also contributed to a lowering of the boundary between content creators and their fans. With the emergence of fandom out of the fringes of culture, it comes as no surprise that new entrants to fandom will change the existing lexicon. In its current iteration on Tumblr, fandom's shift from wank to discourse and squick to trigger indicates its growing acceptance of critical analysis of media, especially in regards to increasing representation for marginalized populations. I can only speculate on what fandom on a new platform years into the future will change in terms of its lexicon. Perhaps it will follow the advice of the survivors of LiveJournal fandom, and "bring back the squick."

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A Glee-ful collaboration: Academic networking in the Tumblr world

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[0.1]   Abstract—Four authors representing disparate disciplines recount their experiences meeting each other through *Glee* (2009–15) fandom via Tumblr, with an exploration of the popular microblogging site's utility as a platform for fan scholarship. This aspect of the site has been understudied; we thus explore the ways that Tumblr's particular culture and features support professional networking, facilitate the researching of fandom practices, and provide support mechanisms for scholars. In discussing the pleasures and challenges that Tumblr provides the acafan researcher, we weigh whether academia needs to rethink its own paradigms for audience engagement and professional development.

[0.2]   Keywords—Academia; Acafans; Connectivism; Gift economy; Social scholarship

1. Introduction

[1.1]   In April 2014, the four authors of this article conceived the idea of a conference panel focused on the musical comedy-drama television series *Glee* (Fox, 2009–15) and its cultural and scholarly functions off-screen. We were each already working on particular research projects related to *Glee* in our own disciplines; through the course of our discussions, we realized they shared a common thread, and perhaps we could present them together. Through a brainstorming process facilitated by a long string of emails and document submissions, we successfully submitted a panel, "'The Show Must Go All Over the Place': *Glee* and Off-Screen Cultural Transformations," to the Mid-Atlantic Popular and American Culture Association (MAPACA) conference and presented our papers at that panel in November of that year. Our papers varied in topic from the rhetoric of meta writing to the potential for transformative learning to the cultural impact of flash mobs; while coming from varying disciplinary perspectives, all had *Glee* at their core. The unusual part of this story is not the submission of the panel, or even the panel itself, but how the four of us met. We were (and are) all active on the user-friendly microblogging site Tumblr, a social media platform that many see as a virtual space for teenagers and passionate fans of all stripes. For *Glee* fans at that time, especially those searching for

in-depth meta commentary and community, the fandom primarily "lived" in blogs hosted on LiveJournal and WordPress. Around 2011–12, it seemed as if the fandom (including us four) suddenly gravitated toward Tumblr. This essay captures Tumblr's impact on our approaches to professional and scholarly work, as well as the ways the site became a support system for us academics, who might not otherwise have crossed each other's disciplinary paths. It examines the ways in which Tumblr's unique platform and tools facilitate social scholarship and extended conversations, as well as the implications for academia's evolving relationship with mainstream social media.

[1.2]   The Tumblr *Glee* community was generally receptive to diverse perspectives, supportive of all kinds of fans, and by and large devoid of the shipping wars that so often divide other fandoms. In addition, unlike other popular fandoms in which fans would create their own slash pairings or accept the crumbs of fan service teased by showrunners, *Glee* had canon LGBTQ+ representation, with its own relationships, romantic milestones, and character development. The show tended to attract people who not only loved music and musical theater, but also those who were invested in analysis and close textual and visual reading. Tumblr was a particularly good platform for facilitating a musical fandom for several reasons: it allowed for easy posting of videos, audio files, and GIF sets; those files could be quickly accessed and commented on by other bloggers; and all of the multimedia elements allowed for numerous layers of meta-analysis. We often depended on fandom GIF set makers who would post their creations during or immediately after an episode, allowing us to reblog and write meta commentary instantaneously. As our individual networks within the *Glee* fandom expanded, we found each other thanks to high-traffic bloggers reposting our commentary, which typically involved analyzing the show's musical numbers, wardrobe choices, accessories, and props. While the four of us found each other on Tumblr and became friends over our mutual love of a pop culture phenomenon, as academics we soon took advantage of Tumblr as a means of professional networking and CV building.

[1.3]   Tumblr as yet remains understudied as a platform for the specific ways it facilitates scholarly research, even within fan studies. Traditional academic networking usually involves considerable time and expense. To meet other scholars with common interests, one frequently has to take days off and apply for funding to go to professional conferences. While conferences can be beneficial for making professional contacts, it can be difficult to find other people there who share one's specific interests, particularly at large events that might involve thousands of scholars. Tumblr, on the other hand, makes both networking and scholarly research of fandom easier in a number of ways that differ from both scholarly networking sites and previous fan-oriented platforms. First, by using hashtags and blogs that attempt to create communities around particular fandoms, Tumblr makes it simpler to find other fans, scholars, or acafans who share one's interests. Scholarly exchange and conversation can flow freely on Tumblr in a way that may otherwise be suppressed by journal and database paywalls and expensive conferences. Second, researching popular culture in general is made easier because so much of Tumblr is dedicated to popular culture itself. Musical fandoms like *Glee* are particularly multimedia-rich cultures, and unlike LiveJournal or WordPress, Tumblr's simple interface makes both posting of and responding to fandom content easy and immediate, without needing in-depth knowledge of coding. Instead of trying to collect data and examples from individual acquaintances or through electronic mailing lists, Tumblr's unbounded nature makes it possible to address and interact with a large fandom collective, a sample size that is much broader and much more representative. Third, because Tumblr allows popular culture scholars to communicate with each other on a regular basis, it becomes a platform for mutual support and encouragement of scholarly projects and writing.

2. Tumblr as networking tool

[2.1]   Had the four of us utilized traditional academic networking methods, it's likely we never would have met, as none of us share the same academic discipline: we work in English and popular culture, composition, library and information studies, and adult education and instructional design. *Glee* happened to draw our interests together, with its intertextual mining of popular culture and music, film, musical theater, and literature. However, it was Tumblr that pulled us into actual conversation and community. Through talking, writing, and exchanging ideas about *Glee* in the fannish space of Tumblr, the professional pressures of academia were taken away. Originally, we were there as fans more than academics, discussing a piece of popular culture in our off time. We weren't worried about being completely professional, writing formally, or supporting every assertion we made with irrefutable evidence. Our joyful, excited, in-the-moment exchanges allowed us to be creative and impulsive with our analysis. In fact, this gap between a scholar's use of evidence and fandom's—in the context of making an argument—sparked the panel topic for the compositionist among us (Bundy 2014).

[2.2]   Granted, within a large fandom like *Glee's*, the "community" meant our own little fandom pocket, but it was one with a seemingly high ratio of mature, educated fans, many of whom had prior experiences in other fandoms and on other platforms. That said, with Tumblr, one cannot even really say we occupied a bounded "community." Unlike LiveJournal or a discussion board that has a virtual home base, a fan's experience of any fandom on Tumblr is porous, and largely determined by their dashboard, what blogs or tags they choose to follow (or block), and what content they choose to reblog and share. Tumblr's openness helped facilitate our finding each other and our learning about the variety of fan practices, which would provide the basis for our research. Not all of our interactions, however, happened in Tumblr's public spaces. Taking part in conversations through reblogs (which then appeared on followers' dashboards) was certainly one means of building relationships among us, but we engaged in more traditional networking as well, which Tumblr also facilitated through its private messaging feature. Through messaging, one blogger might share specifics about their research interests or upcoming presentations, or might offer up private insights in regard to a question submitted to their public ask box. In our case, one of us posted that she was attending a regional conference of the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association (PCA/ACA); her Tumblr message box soon contained questions, encouragements and invitations to meet.

[2.3]   Our migrating toward Tumblr—and each other—is an example of higher education's gradual move toward social scholarship, an "integration of the internet and social media into scholars' contemporary work" (Greenhow and Gleason 2014, 392). While online social media platforms designed just for researchers, such as ResearchGate or Mendeley, offer opportunities for networking and collaboration, they have a large learning curve and, as a result, make community building more challenging than mainstream social media platforms. They're also less pleasurable. Among mainstream social media tools, Tumblr's features create and engage its microcommunities in unique ways that facilitate fannish investments and dialogue. Because it is primarily a microblogging platform—and allows for user-friendly image, GIF, video, audio, and text posts—there is room to curate, share, squee, and have conversation in a way that's easier to follow than Facebook, allows for more depth than Twitter, and is overall more encompassing of musical fandom content. This aspect of Tumblr was especially useful for one of the authors, a librarian who had written on library flash raves in the past; her paper focused on the role viral flash mob culture played in the acceptance of musical performances on scripted television. She was able to crowdsource *Glee* performances, YouTube videos of flash mobs, and GIF sets of both from Tumblr fandom (Downey 2016). Furthermore, the Tumblr interface allows users to reblog a post and add commentary, so each reblog in effect carries a contextualized conversation. The layered conversations and the record of exchanges Tumblr posts capture so well—often a mishmash of pithy remarks, sarcasm, astute commentary, observation, and sometimes outside sources—become objects of value within the fandom's gift economy (figure 1). As Tisha Turk points out, the consumption and usage of fandom gifts by other fans is just as important as their creation: "We see the value of fan labor...in fans' consumption of the gifts produced and distributed by fellow fans...fans make these things for other fans to use. Use is therefore the clearest sign of a gift accepted" (2014, ¶4.1). Such work forges new relationships—in our case, across multiple disciplines, across very different types of institutions, and across many state lines.

███████

[lettersfromtitan](#):

[mockanddee](#):

[the-multicorn](#):

[auburndammit](#):

[the-multicorn](#):

[nadiacreek](#):

[staceysthings](#):

[stut—ter](#):

[randomactsofdouchebaggery](#):

[staceysthings](#):

In light of the most recent Glee episode, I figured I'd post this in case anybody wants to talk about Tina's spider necklace (**that has a bowtie in its grasp**, btw) that she wore in Sadie Hawkins while setting her sights on Blaine.

Ooh…interesting. And since we all know how accurate wardrobe is with their reflections in characterization, I stand by my meta. Tina is weaving one helluva web. Stellar.

Holy shit I wish with all of my soul that they did that on purpose.

The costume department is pretty brilliant that way. I'm sure it's no accident that this is the very beginning of Tina's obsessive crush on Blaine. It's from when she's singing I Don't Know How to Love him. Which, after he turns her down, she follows him to his locker and cajoles him into going to the Sadie Hawkins dance with her (after she tells him he should apologize to her for humiliating her, btw).

Is that supposed to be a Black Widow Spider? They're known for their coloring — all black with a red hourglass-shaped mark in the middle. They're also known for being dangerously poisonous and for the females eating their mates.

come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly

is way too appropriate after the last episode :/

Don't spiders virtually drug their prey with venom, so that they are paralysed (unconscious) but still alive, before they eat them?

some spiders, yes. some of the others have poisons that are just deadly.

and apparently most spiders cannot eat solid food so they secrete digestive enzymes onto their victims and then suck in the resulting pile of goo. THE MORE YOU KNOW, etc.

This just got way more disturbing.

I'm torn between making this very and obscenely clear for anyone who isn't caught up and just offering without commentary.

Aren't the more poisonous spiders more brightly colored? Tina's dresses have been so vivid lately. Then there's the dress she wore to Sadie Hawkins, which has that meshy skirt overlay …

Not as familiar with spiders, but in general a lot of animals have warning coloration because they are poisonous. It's often a "don't eat me" kind of coloration, rather than animals which are venomous and warn an attack. But typically in animals that aren't birds or mammals, bright colors are a warning.

So Tina's been sending the signal that she's the predator in this scenario (not Blaine and his concern about being a "predatory gay").

Figure 1. A conversation about the hidden and overt meanings of a costume accessory worn by Tina Cohen-Chang on *Glee* episode 4.10 "Naked."

3. Tumblr as research tool

[3.1]   Tumblr's tagging, reblogging, and note archiving qualities also make the site a rich source for extracting data and content from a broad representative sample to use in popular culture research. The tagging feature, in particular, enables users to discover new and expanded content about their own fandoms, whether they be fan fiction, fan art, meta-analysis, or canon and spoilers. In her conference paper, the adult learning scholar of our group discussed how *Glee* was used as a form of public pedagogy for transformative learning experiences in fandom by exploring the already-existing Tumblr tags "transformational power of glee" and "transformative power of glee" as examples of how fans shared personal learning experiences from *Glee* (Shih 2014). It is also possible to create a Tumblr tag in order to track a conversation, or a series of them. One Tumblr user, nadiacreek, created a "Glee meta fest" tag to keep track of people's responses to a daily meta prompt (nadiacreek 2013). The practice of reblogging and tagging fellow Tumblr users and their content in these meta conversations can be compared to the traditional mode of citation in academic research; we cite not only because it is essential to retain integrity, but also because it brings fellow authors into the "scholarly conversation." When Tumblr fans reblog and add commentary, they are very much practicing a similar type of citation. The literature scholar of our group discussed the practice of meta writing in her conference paper, and the ways that meta-analysis of *Glee* was a communal practice in which bloggers built on one another's ideas. Meta posts are often long and complex, and they draw on common cultural reference points like mythology, astrology, religion, and others (Hamilton-Honey 2014). Reblogging a user's meta post and adding new material (and then repeating that process) essentially creates a direct line of citations and references via an ongoing conversation.

[3.2]   Tumblr has its drawbacks for scholars, some of which have long existed for the acafan. For example, you can have a rapport with a fellow member of fandom anonymously, even consider them a colleague, but to properly collaborate, eventually you have to cross the thin blue line of Tumblr into real life. Some fans are completely open about their real-life scholarship online and publicly; others prefer to keep those areas separate on either end. The administrative culture at their particular institution may not be supportive of fandom activities or fan-related research, and their fan community online may be suspicious of scholarly exploitation. Fortunately, neither of these situations caused a problem for us. Within the *Glee* Tumblr community, for instance, there was not much of a reaction to the four authors self-identifying as academics. If anything, our self-disclosures drew empathy from fellow *Glee* fans with similar academic experiences or backgrounds. That said, we all managed our identities in different ways. None of us used our real names in our usernames or identified our higher education institutions on Tumblr, yet all of us identified ourselves as academics on our individual Tumblr blogs. We thus retained a degree of professional anonymity while still identifying ourselves as academics, and considered our Tumblr identities to most resemble what Kimmons and Veletsianos (2014, 295) have called an "acceptable identity fragment." In their research, Kimmons and Veletsianos found that individuals reveal fragments of themselves online, and while each fragment may be authentic, it is also incomplete, transitional, and developed intentionally. This formulation seems to us a useful method for thinking about fan participation on Tumblr more generally and reflects the way we performed ourselves on that platform.

[3.3]   We found that the other two major difficulties with doing fan research with Tumblr were verifying sources and their ephemerality. It can be difficult to ascertain or verify original authorship on Tumblr; just as fan fiction has plagiarism accusations, so can meta-analysis and theory. The impermanence of Tumblr as a platform is also a disadvantage. Users change their usernames (making posts under their former name harder to find), delete posts that they no longer like or find useful, or delete their entire accounts. In addition, old Tumblr posts are not cached in Google or by services such as the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine, making retrieval of deleted content nearly impossible. The result of this constant shifting of content and URLs is that parts of meta conversations can become unreadable. Using a "Read More" link can reduce clutter on the dashboard, but if the link creator changes their username or deletes their blog, that link leads nowhere. Without clues to new Tumblr identities, conversations can be lost. Solutions to these obstacles usually fall on the original poster, such as including a redirect to the new user name (so one can copy and paste it into the original post's URL; figure 2), or meta sites having a tag, submit, and reblog policy (figure 3). Failing that, an experienced acafan simply learns to take a screenshot content for future use.
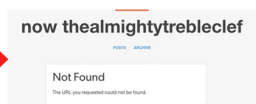
Figure 2. Example of a comment linked to a broken URL; the writer changed his or her username, making full posts harder to find.

Tagging, Archiving, And Round-Ups

Archiving's the second part of this thing. Group ownership means that everyone can see the discussion in real time, but remember the difficulty of finding discussions *later* on tumblr? I'm planning to do something about that too.

Current plan: whenever we've got a new post, I'll reblog it into a draft with a list of links to each reblog of the post, containing the reblogger's name and the first sentence or two of their addition. I'll add links as the discussion grows, and when it seems to have stopped I'll finally publish the draft as an archive/round-up sort of thing. (I think the unpublished draft should still be visible to other blog members, too.) And I'll use character tags and some subject tags on the round-up posts to make the whole thing work even better as an archive. (Of course, "whenever" and "as the discussion grows" includes the caveat of "when I'm on the internet"; but the truth is, I'm on almost every day with time enough to do this, so I shouldn't get too far behind.)

What About All That Old Meta?

I would like to make posts that are round-ups of links to old meta posts too, to make this even more useful an archive. If there's an old meta post that you think should be preserved, you can put a link to it in the ask box and I'll try to round up the pieces; if there's an old meta post that you have links to all the pieces of, and you want to make an 'archive/round-up' post for it in a similar format as I'll be using for the newly-made round-ups, I will love you forever and ever.

Figure 3. Some posting guidelines for Tumblr site "Fuck Yeah Glee Meta!" (http://fyeahgleemeta.tumblr.com/).

4. Tumblr as scholarly support system

[4.1]   One of the most beneficial aspects of basing our communication for the conference panel on Tumblr was that we could easily message each other, and share links very quickly and efficiently. Rather than going back and forth between email programs and Tumblr on our computers (or trying to toggle between apps on our phones) and composing a full message to the group, we could simply post a link or a reference and tag the usernames of the others in the group. In addition, we could exchange private messages in real time while we were writing; if any two or more of us were online at the same time, we could encourage each other through the process of writing our individual papers. Another alternative was to write a text post, tag the others in the group, and then reblog the post and add commentary and responses (figure 4). If we were searching for a particular meta essay to use, we could put out a general call to our *Glee* community and access their collective memory for examples (figure 5). Rather than pursuing our individual panel papers in isolation, Tumblr allowed us to trade ideas and sources as we wrote. We were better able to reference each other's theses, thus making our panel more coherent as a whole, because Tumblr provided us with a rapid way in which to do so.
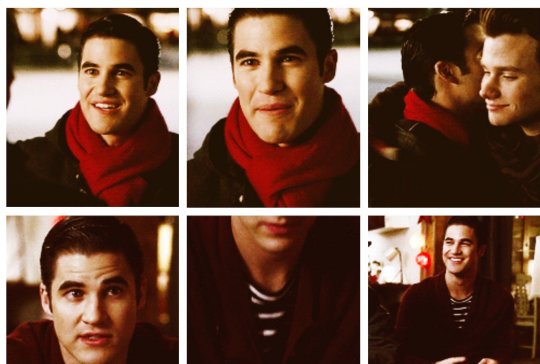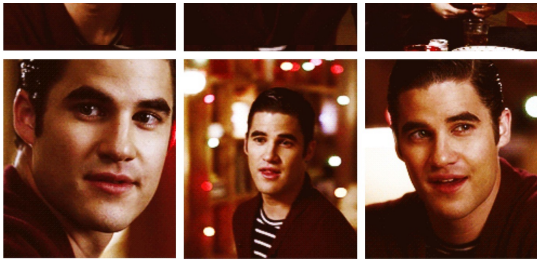
Blaine Anderson: The Personification of Love and Emotions

> It's been a while since he's worn this much red, no? Aside from those red pants he's worn a few times?

It has been a while! And almost without exception, he seems to wear red when it has something to do with Kurt/emotions. We were talking a little bit ago about his crimson jacket with the ascot in the Christmas episode last year. There were the crimson pants he wore in "The First Time," and they reappeared in "Big Brother" (though emotionally, that time, the red might have had more to do with Cooper). He wore the bright red pants in the S3 season opener, when he transferred to McKinley to be with Kurt. He was wearing the red cardigan in "Blame In on the Alcohol" and in the superhero episode this season at the end, when he decides to stay at McKinley rather than going back to Dalton. It makes a reappearance here.

So when we see Blaine in red, it is somehow connected to his deepest emotions?

Oh, and also: The Heart Eyes. Blaine wearing his heart on his sleeve. Blaine singing his emotions. Blaine Anderson is the walking embodiment of love.

Wow, I really just wrote that. Cue Klaine theme song.

If Blaine is the personification of love and emotions, though, that also makes him incredibly vulnerable, and we've seen that, too. Love and emotion can cause you to lash out. They can cause you to cry for help. They can push you to punch a wall, or a punching bag. They can cause the hottest anger and the deepest tears, all of which we've seen from Blaine. Being as open and emotional as he is comes at a cost - but it also allows him to soar very, very high when he's at his best.

Reblogging for convo purposes. :)

Oh, interesting. He was wearing red when he sang "Cough Syrup" and during the couple's counseling in "Dance With Somebody," too, which strike me as two distinct moments of Blaine crying out for help in season 3.

You're right! He was wearing red during "Cough Syrup" and the couples counseling. (Incidentally, the red sweater in "Cough Syrup" was his red Dalton sweater [they are on a bunch of the students during "Teenage Dream"], and I don't think that is coincidental.) I also just remembered that he was wearing red when he says "I love you" to Kurt for the first time, at the end of S2. Not to mention, there was always red in the Dalton uniform (and gray, which ties back into the idea of Blaine as ghost).

Yay—I was hoping to see this post on my dash. Oh, when you two list all the songs like that … well that's just really something.

So it's interesting, then, that he's in red constantly in this episode. He really does wear his heart on his sleeve—I mean, there was an intensity and eagerness there, so unfiltered, almost overwhelming. And yet there are these little undercurrents of uncertainty.

So the absence of red, then the sudden LET ME WEAR RED EVERYTHING reminds me of someone who's trying very very hard to be back-to-normal again, which is kind of how he is in the episode, isn't he?

I keep thinking of more and more to say about this idea of Blaine as the embodiment of love. To pick up your point, █████, is he trying to be back-to-normal, or is he trying to say, with both clothing and looks, "I love you. I know you're not there yet, I know we're still figuring this out, and I'm not sure how to navigate all of this, but I love you. I'm sure. I'll never cheat on you again, and I will absolutely never leave you, if you let me back in." He's saying in as many ways as possible that Kurt is it for him, the love of his life, the keeper of his heart and his love. Again with wearing his heart on his sleeve and in his eyes.

Second: In the Valentine's Day episode in S2, Blaine is the one to say, "I think there's something amazing about a day where you can put it all out there and say to someone, 'I love you.'" (The quote isn't exact, I know.) He is the one who is brave enough to serenade this boy he barely knows, to acknowledge his attraction in public, to put his love out there for the whole world to see. And while he takes it back for a little bit after he's humiliated at the GAP (there's that funny parallel scene where he's saying all the negative things he had chastised Kurt for early in the episode), he is still up there singing lead for the Warblers on "Silly Love Songs" at the end.
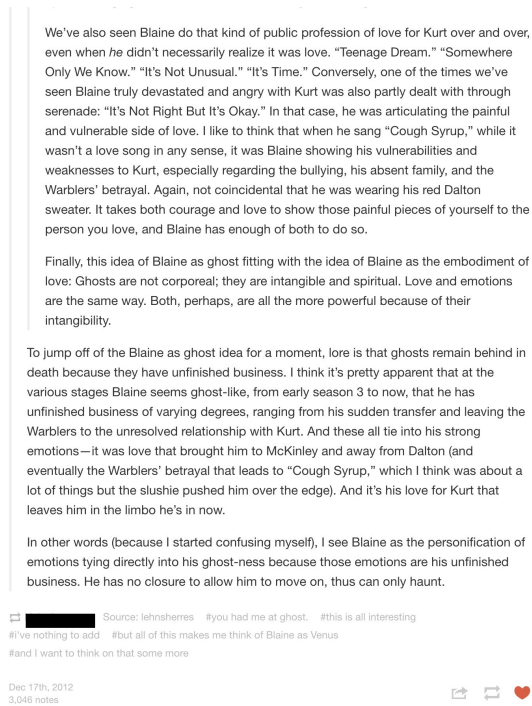
We've also seen Blaine do that kind of public profession of love for Kurt over and over, even when *he* didn't necessarily realize it was love. "Teenage Dream." "Somewhere Only We Know." "It's Not Unusual." "It's Time." Conversely, one of the times we've seen Blaine truly devastated and angry with Kurt was also partly dealt with through serenade: "It's Not Right But It's Okay." In that case, he was articulating the painful and vulnerable side of love. I like to think that when he sang "Cough Syrup," while it wasn't a love song in any sense, it was Blaine showing his vulnerabilities and weaknesses to Kurt, especially regarding the bullying, his absent family, and the Warblers' betrayal. Again, not coincidental that he was wearing his red Dalton sweater. It takes both courage and love to show those painful pieces of yourself to the person you love, and Blaine has enough of both to do so.

Finally, this idea of Blaine as ghost fitting with the idea of Blaine as the embodiment of love: Ghosts are not corporeal; they are intangible and spiritual. Love and emotions are the same way. Both, perhaps, are all the more powerful because of their intangibility.

To jump off of the Blaine as ghost idea for a moment, lore is that ghosts remain behind in death because they have unfinished business. I think it's pretty apparent that at the various stages Blaine seems ghost-like, from early season 3 to now, that he has unfinished business of varying degrees, ranging from his sudden transfer and leaving the Warblers to the unresolved relationship with Kurt. And these all tie into his strong emotions—it was love that brought him to McKinley and away from Dalton (and eventually the Warblers' betrayal that leads to "Cough Syrup," which I think was about a lot of things but the slushie pushed him over the edge). And it's his love for Kurt that leaves him in the limbo he's in now.

In other words (because I started confusing myself), I see Blaine as the personification of emotions tying directly into his ghost-ness because those emotions are his unfinished business. He has no closure to allow him to move on, thus can only haunt.

Figure 4. Reblog Tumblr thread discussing Blaine Anderson's frequent wearing of red clothing and accessories.

Searching for Glee meta on the Bushwick loft

Hello, all my lovely Glee friends:

I'm looking for a particular meta post that was done about the props and various objects in the Bushwick loft. I know there was discussion of the elephant pillow, discussion of some prop that resembled a raven, and meta on the candlesticks, too, I'm pretty sure. I'd love to use the post as an example in an upcoming conference paper, but it is proving beyond my powers to find it again. Does anyone have the link bookmarked or tagged for easy finding?

Posted 2 years ago   28 notes

Tagged: Glee, meta, Bushwick, loft, NYC, ██████ ██████████,
purplehairedwonder, sunandrainfic, misqueue, callie–quite–contrary, lettersfromtitan,
catyuy, teiledesganzen, the–multicorn, mockanddee, poemsingreenink, firesnaps.

Figure 5. "Call for content" post searching for meta regarding the "Bushwick Loft" set on *Glee*.

[4.2   This is a profoundly different model than traditional panel-building for academic conferences. At many conferences, conference organizers choose papers that have similar interests and put them together, but the presenters may have no communication beforehand and not actually meet each other until the day of their presentations; even pre-organized panelists usually do not read each other's papers before presenting them. However, Tumblr's networking space allowed the four of us to collaborate more efficiently, quickly, closely, and thoroughly than we would have otherwise done. Even in the last-minute scramble to get everything done before the conference (figure 6), we were able to create a Tumblr post that allowed us all to express our worries and give each other much-needed support. This kind of supportive collaboration is characteristic of the gift culture of fandom and participatory culture as it exists for us on Tumblr. It allowed us to nurture our own fannish behavior while at the same time creating a presentation that was going to bring us professional academic advancement. Our academic practices have migrated with us to other fandoms as well; the objects of fan affection have changed, but the need to analyze, critique, and create meta conversations has not, and those of us who happen to meet again in similar fandoms get to apply the skills developed and enhanced by our experience.

Anyone else drowning in the conference prep? It's been a horrible week, and I still have so much to do in the next three days I hardly know which end is up.

raises hand Same here with the conference prep,

████████ Going to prepping right up through Tuesday. Sorry to hear about your horrible week. I hope things become smoother for you. Excited to see you, ████████████ and ██████ in a couple of days.

Still writing, don't have a PowerPoint, don't have a hard copy of the YouTube videos I need (with my luck the wi-fi will suck), trying to clean the kitchen before the roofing guy comes tomorrow, and my team is playing in what is essentially an elimination game for the College Football Playoff tonight.

SCREAM

Yes, I'm right where you are, honey. Still writing, no Power Point, trying to do the three online modules that my students will need while I'm away, need to read and plan for my classes on Monday and Tuesday, and our apartment is a mess.

And ██████, I sympathize with you trying to finish everything, too! But I'm looking forward to seeing you all so much.

SCREAM indeed!
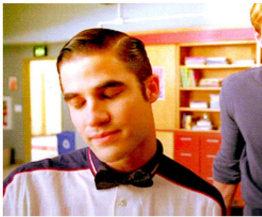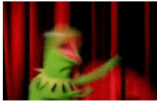
I empathize with you both. Currently taking a small break from tweaking my Powerpoint, and will be making final revisions to my paper (an ongoing process). Haven't even thought about packing yet (and I usually try to lay things out early.) I leave bright and early Wed morning (on the road at 7am!) so it'll be a flurry to the finish.

Writing is hard

Group hug to us all as we try to finish things. Sending calm and energy to all three of you ████████ ████████████ and ██████ as work with everything this upcoming week.

Welp.

New roof will be around $5000 and not only did my team lose, but our best player broke his leg and is out for the season.

Hope this isn't a sign…

crosses fingers Agreed, Pink. Let's hope that a third thing doesn't happen. Waving away all the negative juju.

This college football season has been crazy. One never knows what happens from one week to the next.

Ouch re: your new roof. Hang in there.

So sorry about the roof and your best player, ████! I'm helping ████████████ wave away all the negative energy. I am close to having my three modules done for my students, the ones they will do while I am away, but my paper and Power Point still aren't done and I haven't started packing. I will seriously be working on this presentation the whole way down to the conference. I have to drive an hour and a half to one of our airports at an obscenely early hour on Wednesday, then take a plane and a train to our conference (it was seriously faster to take the train than to wait for a second plane).

Thank you, ████████████ for all of the appropriate gifs! And the virtual hugs! And I am sending the same good thoughts to you, ████████████ and ██████, as we all try to finish everything and make it to the conference on time!

(I'm givin' a paper in the morning

Ding! dong! the bells are gonna chime!

Kick up a rumpus, but don't lose the compass,

And get me to the panel on time!)

Figure 6. Our panel members reassure and encourage each other in the last-minute rush toward the conference and presentation day.

5. Conclusion

[5.1]   Henry Jenkins (2006) suggests that convergence culture is a paradigm shift, "a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communication systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture" (254). Our experience on Tumblr suggests that convergence culture is also pushing academia to move across platforms and rethink its relationship to bottom-up participatory culture. If fandom and participatory culture allow for more spontaneity, creativity, and supportive networking (and academic forms of analysis reach greater audiences through platforms like Tumblr) then perhaps academia needs to rethink its own paradigms for audience engagement and professional development.

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"Remember a week ago when Tom Hiddleston could do no wrong?": Tumblr reactions to the loss of an internet boyfriend

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[0.1]   Abstract—Tumblr's uniquely featured blogging platform provided the space Hiddleston fans needed to react and subsequently analyze his unexpected relationship with Taylor Swift.

[0.2]   Keywords—Blog; Celebrity relationships; Fandom; Hiddlestoners; Hiddleswift; Taylor Swift

1. Introduction

[1.1]   On June 15, 2016, I sat down to my husband's birthday dinner. We were early to the restaurant, so I checked my phone to see if any of our friends had contacted me about not being able to join us since it was a rainy night. No texts, so I figured a quick glance at Facebook wouldn't hurt.

[1.2]   Imagine my surprise at seeing fifteen "World Exclusive" photos of Tom Hiddleston kissing Taylor Swift on the rocky beach outside of her Rhode Island home. The *Sun*'s headline piece on June 28, 2016, "Tinker, Taylor Snogs a Spy," made a clever nod to Tom's starring role in a recent BBC miniseries adaptation of John Le Carré's *The Night Manager* (2016) and would be shared multiple times on various Hiddlestoner Facebook fan group pages. Overnight, the coupling became every entertainment media site's trending topic and even the subject of Stephen Colbert's June 16, 2016, monologue (figure 1).

Figure 1. Screenshot from celebrity gossip blogger Perez Hilton's June 17, 2016, post titled "Stephen Colbert Gushes over Tom Hiddleston & Taylor Swift's New Romance... And Even Wants To Join Their Power Couple As 'Colbiddleswift.'" The post also includes video of *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert's* monologue entitled "Forget 'Hiddleswift,' Make Way for Power Trio 'Colbiddleswift.'"

[1.3]   Why were fans like myself, the mainstream media, and pretty much anyone you asked so surprised by the pairing? First, news of Swift and DJ Calvin Harris ending their fifteen-month relationship had broken only two weeks

prior; however, Taylor's reputation as a serial dater whose breakup songs had created a "relationships-as-performance art persona" (Finn 2016a) was what Hiddlestoners found most worrisome. Although there had been rumors of Tom dating various costars over the years (Kat Dennings, Jessica Chastain, Elizabeth Olsen), he had remained single, focused on his work, and out of the gossip columns. In other words, since his 2011 cinematic turn as Loki in *Thor,* he had "unwittingly entered into a committed relationship with the Internet" (Finn 2016b).

2. Internet boyfriends

[2.1]   Defined by *The Cut,* an internet boyfriend is "a man in his early or mid-30s, old enough that a teenager will find him refreshingly mature and a grown-up can lust after him with impunity" (Misra 2016). Most important to this discussion of Hiddleston, he is "someone surrounded by an aura of authenticity" (Misra 2016).

[2.2]   Tom's fans have had their own reasons for considering him "a paragon of enlightened masculinity" (Misra 2016), but few are immune to his charms. Reporters have described "Meeting Hiddleston [as] almost as good as YouTubing him" (Yuan 2016), and his director on *Kong: Skull Island* (2017), Jordan Vogt-Roberts, has stated: "Tom is really frustrating to be around because he's tall and handsome and knows a lot about everything...He might care too much at times, but you have no choice but to like completely love him" (quoted in Klassen 2017).

[2.3]   Repeated instances of Tom's politeness and appreciation for the craft of acting together with "his intellectualism: a degree in Classics from Cambridge, as well as a tendency to quote liberally from Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot" (Lenker 2016) all support the aforementioned key traits of being an internet boyfriend: "refreshingly mature" and with "an aura of authenticity." So when this man, who had previously stated, "some things have to remain sacred" (quoted in Yuan 2016) when asked about his personal life, was suddenly front and center in the spectacle that was "Hiddleswift," a three-month relationship that had paparazzi following him to "three different continents, four different countries, and three different [US] states" (Woodward 2016) in the first twenty-three days alone, it is no surprise that fans took to social media to respond.

3. Tumblr: Anger

[3.1]   Reactions from the British actor's fandom across all social media platforms ranged from confused to disappointed to vehemently ruthless, such as the hashtags #hiddlestunt, #tiddlesbanging, and #famewhoreTom. More can be said about the roles of Facebook and Twitter when it comes to Hiddleswift, particularly as the relationship progressed; yet for this issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures,* I will focus on Tumblr and argue that it, as a blog platform with unique features, provided the space that fans needed to react to the initial news.

[3.2]   For example, Tumblr blogs that had previously been dedicated to praising Hiddleston's every move soon became the echo chambers that Paul Booth describes: fan sites devoted to reinforcing a "particular viewpoint at the expense of a variety of other types" (2017, 236). And what was that viewpoint? Best put by *E! News:*

[3.3]   The Internet is taking this one hard. And that must have to do with Hiddleston's choice of partner and the fact that he's along for some sort of ride, romantic or otherwise, none of them befitting a man of his quirky-crush stature. He *hung out with the squad,* for Pete's sake! (Finn 2016b)

[3.4]   Leaving aside the entertainment news and gossip sites' theories that the relationship was a public relations stunt, what follows is a brief analysis of two of the many Tumblr posts that reacted to this apparent 180-degree shift in Tom's persona. In the post that inspired the title of this essay, "Remember a week ago when Tom Hiddleston could do no wrong?," lareinedenfer (2016) writes,

[3.5]   The bubble burst.

[3.6]   The image that Hiddleston and his PR rep, Luke Windsor, had carefully cultivated for so long, shattered as fans everywhere went, "what the fuck?"

[3.7]   In short, Thomas, we expected better of you.

[3.8]   By speaking directly to Hiddleston, lareinedenfer is taking full advantage of the public stage that blogging platforms like Tumblr provide. Although it is highly unlikely Hiddleston will ever see it, this post is what blog scholar Jill Walker Rettberg (2008) describes as one "deliberately written to be shared ... written with care and wit" (11). In fact, it received over 300 notes, which in Tumblr terms translates into likes or reblogs from fellow Tumblr users. lareinedenfer wrote several posts in this vein, but this first one dated June 20, 2016, references the split s/he already sees happening within the fandom and clearly sides with those who are "becoming, more and more disappointed out by [his] recent behavior." As the post continues, lareinedenfer's tone escalates, closing with the following forewarning:

> [3.9]   Looking ahead, you have become Taynted—see what I did there?—because from now on, every photo spread, every role you get, every award you win, every interview, every everything in the everywhere of all time—will have Taylor's shadow all over it. You are no longer Tom Hiddleston, respected theater actor and blossoming A-lister with an Oscar nom in your near future. No. You're just Taylor's new boyfriend. And soon you will be Taylor's newest ex-boyfriend. And your public persona will forever be tied to hers because you were either too eager for fame or too stupid to realize what you were getting into.

> [3.10]   Nothing you ever do will be yours. Ever again. Have a cup of tea with that, Thomas.

[3.11]   As the post title suggests, before news of this relationship hit, Hiddlestoners were united, but now the community was becoming what Booth would describe as "not formalized through the participants themselves, but rather organized by the topics generated by the community" (2017, 235). In this case, the aforementioned 300 notes illustrate agreement among those fans who believed that this was not the Tom they (thought they) knew. And realizing that they were not alone in this opinion only fueled their Tumblr usage, with some bloggers tagging other Tumblr users to extend the discussion.

4. Tumblr: Dialogue

[4.1]   While Booth notes that Tumblr's nature is to place "emphasis on the image rather than the written word" (2017, 238) through the reblogging of GIFs, videos, fan art, and static images, the spectacle that was tagged #Hiddleswift inspired posts that often ranged between 600 and 2,100 words. For instance, *The Haven of Fiction* Tumblr blog became an "Anonymous Ask" space, a feature that Tumblr added in 2010 ([note 1](#)). Haven's post of over 1,000 words from July 4, 2016, "Just a Man," begins with the ask she received (which actually isn't a question) and an explanation why she chose to answer it:

> [4.2]   *"I'm never letting myself get this enchanted or inspired by a public person ever again. The disappointment, whether people think it's unfounded or not, it's not worth it."*

> [4.3]   Hi, little gray face.

> [4.4]   I debated with myself about replying to this, because I'm trying to keep this blog relatively drama-free. Over the last couple of weeks, I've replied privately to Asks that were not anonymous and I've simply deleted anonymous ones that seemed inflammatory to me. I decided to answer yours because it seems to be sincere and sad.

> [4.5]   And the best that I can come up with is I'm sorry. I'm sorry that you feel disappointed. Unfounded or not, as you say, the fact is that it is real for a lot of people here.

[4.6]   By noting the desire to keep things "drama-free," Haven sets up the post as one where she will take the fan's disappointment seriously and attempt to understand it alongside him/her. Haven further establishes her ethos by admitting, "I understand what it's like to be enchanted and inspired by this man. I've never been either of things to such a degree with anyone as I am by him." She then offers the link to her "personal journey" post from January 15, 2016, which details, beginning in 2008, how she "got into Hiddleston-fandom." (This post is also known as "My Hiddleston Rabbit Hole Story" on the "HALP! (FAQ or Userguide)" tab of her page).

[4.7]   What continues in "Just a Man" is a thoughtful reflection upon celebrity and social media that reinforces Booth's point that "Tumblr revalues emotional activity" (2017, 239):

[4.8]   This being a "fan" business is rather odd, isn't it? The internet and social media have made it such a constant, instantly accessible pastime. Gone are the days of living off of a couple of magazine articles per month and plastering our walls with pinups. Now we live in the days of an abundance of print and visual media that most of us carry around on a little device in our pocket. Celebrities are more present than they ever have been. We feel like we know them in a way that previous generations didn't know the celebrities of their times. That sense of a virtual intimacy makes the possibility of disappointment more prominent.

[4.9]   Based on how that Person has chosen to publicly present himself in the past and the act of trust that a fan gives a celebrity in taking what they say and do to be an accurate representation of their true self, I can understand how people are experiencing disappointment due to their interpretation of the Person's current choices as being contrary to the image that they had constructed of that Person.

[4.10]   I'm not interested in debating that at its core. I'm not interested in arguing and telling people that they don't really know him and that they should separate the actor from the person and that their feelings are wrong, etc. What we've seen publicly of him over the last few weeks is unprecedented and terming it as such isn't an opinion or a judgment, it's a fact. Unprecedented behavior is inherently odd. People are going to react to that oddness in a variety of ways, some of them extreme. If [*sic*] then becomes your responsibility to handle yourself in a healthy way.

[4.11]   The final lines of this lengthy excerpt emphasize the self-care that Haven feels this asker, and fans like him/her, should practice during emotional times; however, at the heart of it Haven reveals she too is a fan confused by Tom's behavior as indicated by her use of the words "unprecedented," "contrary," and "odd." It echoes lareindenfer's disappointment, but rather than chastising him directly, Haven chooses to close her post with the simple truth that, unlike the idealized internet boyfriend: "He is just a man. That is all. Just a man. Flesh and blood. Triumphs and failures. Wise choices and foolish choices. He isn't perfect." Finally, reminding us of Hiddleston's profession, she writes, "He is someone who owes me nothing more than a performance" and then concludes with the counsel, "Please let the positive effect outweigh current disappointment. <3" Not all of Hiddleston's fans were as level-headed as Haven, and some eventually chose to leave the fandom all together. Still, their taking to Tumblr throughout the relationship, soon after it ended, and even now two years later reiterates Booth's idea that it can become a site of critical discourse (2017, 240) (note 2).

5. Conclusion

[5.1]   Extended Tumblr posts like those analyzed here waned after the relationship ended in September of 2016. Throughout 2017, if you searched Tumblr for #Hiddleswift posts, there were reblogs of photos from their time together, some with snarky captions and others wishing they had never broken up. Excitement ensued in early August when Tom was announced to play Hamlet at a fundraiser for the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (Brown 2017), and Taylor wiped all her social media accounts in preparation for her latest album release (Kaiser 2017). Hiddlestoners hoped that this meant both were moving on professionally and personally, particularly since Taylor was already dating another British actor, Joe Alwyn.

[5.2]   Then the video for Taylor's newest single, "Look What You Made Me Do," premiered at MTV's Video Music Awards on August 27, 2017. While some entertainment sites have interpreted the entire video as a satirical self-reflection of the media treatment she receives, others have referred to it as "an aural burn book of all of Swift's past (and current) critics" (Chen 2017), namely Katy Perry, Kanye West, and Kim Kardashian. Lyrically, there is no mention of romantic relationships, but halfway through the video, Taylor appears in front of a line of dancers who, at the snap of her fingers, open their jackets to reveal "I <3 TS" tank tops (figure 2).

Figure 2. Lead image from *Teen Vogue*'s August 28, 2017, article, "What Taylor Swift's New Music Video Says about Her Love Life," which is further subtitled, "It's all about the 'I Love TS' tees."

[5.3]   In brief, lareinedenfer's prediction of Tom's public persona becoming "Taynted" has come true. For nearly two years, every news item that has mentioned either celebrity has always included the other, although those stories typically rehashed details from their short-lived relationship. But here Taylor was calling attention to the shirt that Tom, not she, had been endlessly mocked about on the Fourth of July (figure 3), and, to enrage Hiddlestoners further, she began selling the version from the video on her website at $50 each. In a post dated August 28, 2017, Tumblr user maevecurrywrites reacts:

> [5.4]   There's only one reason why anyone even knows who the "TS" is in that particular context ... Tom Hiddleston wearing the tank top. And every time someone sees another person wearing one of those T-shirts, they'll think of him. Wearing that tank top. She's opted TO MONETIZE THAT SHIT above and beyond of the cost of a song or an album. Surprising? Fuck no.

Figure 3. Instagram photo posted July 6, 2016, by Taylor Swift's friend, Abigail Lauren, which features Tom wearing the "I Heart TS" tank top, Taylor, and "the squad" in Rhode Island on the Fourth of July. In February 2017, Tom stated to *GQ* that he "was surprised that it got so much attention. The tank top became an emblem of this thing" (quoted in Brodesser-Akner 2017).

[5.5]   Of course, no one outside of Tom and Taylor knows exactly how their relationship ended or whether she consulted him before using the shirt in this video. Nonetheless, it is clear that Tom's fans will continue to take to Tumblr to react to media content produced by Taylor even though they would prefer the two never had connected. Indeed, this spectacle has caused me to question my own status as a Hiddlestoner. Like Haven, I appreciate Tom's work as an actor,

and I never thought the relationship was a public relations move, but the excessive pictures countered everything he previously claimed about privacy. In fact, in the midst of the short-lived relationship Hiddleston stated the following about being in the public eye: "As long as you know why you've done something and you've committed to it with authenticity, then you're okay" (quoted in McCluskey 2016). While he owed us nothing, this, to me, is a problematic statement. If he had used his own social media to comment on the relationship, even just once, rather than let the press, and now Taylor, construct the narrative, perhaps he could have reclaimed the genuine image that so many fans ascribed to him.

[5.6]   Or was this his way of breaking up with the internet?

6. Notes

1. As described by *Mashable,* the Ask feature "is sure to be a boon to Tumblr bloggers, who already have a built-in community on the platform. Now, in addition to getting feedback in the form of comments, reblogs and 'likes,' users will be able to have actual dialogues with readers" (Ehrlich 2010).

2. The so-called Summer of Hiddleswift went on to include many moments that divided the fandom further, all of which are worthy of separate discussions: paparazzi photos of Taylor and Tom with his mother and young niece walking on a beach in England, a cringeworthy *GQ* interview Tom did in February 2017 that waxed nostalgic about "a relationship in the limelight" and "how you have to fight for love" (quoted in Brodesser-Akner 2017), and, most recently, Tom's appearances at *Avengers: Infinity War* events where he is donning glasses and a beard and not smiling.

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Polyphony on Tumblr: Reading the hateblog as pastiche

Judith May Fathallah

[0.1]   *Abstract*—Tumblr accounts dedicated to criticizing or mocking a text and fandom pose an interpretive challenge. Far from a straightforward display of antifandom, what we find here is a comic pastiche of fragments enabled by the postmodern flatness of the medium. With reference to a group of blogs positioned as antithetical to BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–), I suggest we can read these pastiches as critique without authority—as a polyphonic surface that undermines both claims to discursive dominance *and* the dominance of mass media cultural icons.

[0.2]   *Keywords*—Antifandom; Fandom; Humor; *Sherlock;* Tumblr

[1]   Despite the popularity of BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–) among fans, searching "Sherlock hate" on Tumblr in 2017 turned up sherlocksucks.tumblr.com, a blog ostensibly devoted to proving its title. This blog led by links to anti-bbcsherlock.tumblr.com, whose tagline read "A blog for those who dislike BBC Sherlock." It self-described:

[2]   This is not a hate blog. It's an archive for people who don't like BBC Sherlock for various reasons. Due to the popularity of the show it's hard for people who dislike any aspect of it to be heard or supported. (anti-bbcsherlock.tumblr.com)

[3]   So far, these statements appear to belong to a traditional discourse of antifandom Gray established (2003), demonstrating measured dislike and critical judgement of a fandom and its source text. Antifandom is a term initially used to describe performative and/or creative dislike of a particular text and/or its fandom, through activities like blogging, gossip, and creative work that parallel and intersect with the practices of fandom itself (Grey 2003). Yet through the affordances of reblogging, these blogs' displays intersect with blogs titled "why-helo-is-i-stvenen-mofatt" and "sherlocksucks." These latter blogs' utilization of obscenity and crude humor immediately juxtapose and undercut the reasoned stance of the former. Their very titles deny their own claims to authoritative voice, via the obvious misspelling and grammatical inversion of "is-i-stvenen-mofatt." "Is-I" is a grammatical question: each reader must judge the authority of the claim for themselves. Via citation and incorporation into each other's textual format, all the anti-*Sherlock* blogs become part of each other, in addition to their constant citation of and interaction with *Sherlock* fandom and the show itself. The customizable Tumblr formats, all of which utilize *Sherlock*-related media, strengthen their connections to form an impression similar to a webring. Through analysis focused on a portion of the Tumblr-surface taken up by these blogs, I demonstrate that the affordances of Tumblr produce a distinct mode of critique, one which rebuffs depth hermeneutics in a comic display of postmodern pastiche that both invokes and satires fandom discourses across its depthless surface.

[4]   First, I will establish the points these blogs have in common with prior articulations of what scholars following Grey (2003) call antifandom; notably, criticism of the quality of the show, its fandom, and the politics of its messages. Then I will demonstrate how these points are undercut with self-contradiction, self-parody, parody of other forms of antifandom, and utilization of the broader tropes of fandom.

[5]   Prior to the rise of Tumblr, most intra-fandom criticism took place on the varied incarnations of fandom_wank journals. These community journals devoted themselves explicitly to mocking and laughing at instances of fandom deemed risible, which primarily comprised taking fandom or one's contributions to fandom too seriously. By contrast, there is a tendency in Tumblr fandom to construct "good" fandoms and fannish objections in a moral sense, opposing

them to "bad" ones judged to be problematic politically and socially (e.g., http://yourfaveisproblematic.tumblr.com/). However, via Tumblr's style and technical affordances, the blogs also undercut their own claims and position of authority and judgement.

[6]   At first glance, the Tumblr blog titled "antibbcsherlock" looks more or less like traditional antifandom. Its background is white, suggesting seriousness and clarity of intent, and its icon a screen cap of the *Sherlock* opening sequence with a red "X" imposed on it. The X semiotically connotes both wrongness, as the opposite of a check mark, and a desire that the show be banned or cease existing. Many of the posts are submissions and reblogs from other users. A common category of posts is statements or reblogs criticizing the show as superficial and poorly written:

> [7]   Remember when Sherlock was literally getting tortured and his brother was treating it all like a joke and then Sherlock was magically fine and it was never mentioned again...
>
> Because Moffat's characters do not have emotions, and PTSD just means you're bored. (post at antibbcsherlock.tumblr.com, reblogged from rjalker, 2015)

[8]   Relatedly, criticism of the show and its fandom's politics are also a prominent category:

> [9]   Sherlock fans are racist garbage... My friend found a Facebook/Tumblr post that said "on this day wear the ancient Chinese symbol '三' as a reference to that episode with Chinese people in it, it means three because we want a third season LOLOLOLOL!!!1!" they can't even do research "ancient Chinese symbol"...this is literally just the modern character for "3" ughh. (post at antibbcsherlock.tumblr.com, anonymous, 2014)

[10]   These types of posts fit reasonably well with understandings of antifandom developed from Gray and others. Irrational, unthinking praise is attributed to *Sherlock* fandom, while the antifan critiques it from a better-informed position, adapted to the new discourse of morally good/bad fan objects and practices indicated above. There is no distinction or separation between criticism of fandoms and criticisms of fan-objects. Integrated in the same font, size, and color, we have this reblog:

> [11]   ANONYMOUS SAID:
>
> y is irene not lesbian after seeing shrerlckock
>
> why-helo-is-i-stvenen-mofatt:
>
> HOW BOUT FLUID SXEUALTIY? Um r u hmomphobia? All women fall for Shreklok he MYSTERYIOUS and SXYE. They want DESFROTS GLCACIER and make him HUBSAND. IRENE is STRONG WOMEN with GUN AND SASS and U R BULLY BYE. (post at antibbcsherlock.tumblr.com, reblogged from why-helo-is-i-stvenen-mofatt, 2014)

[12]   At first, this seems a rebuff of interpretation, marked by intentional misspellings, the nonsensical question in response to an unmarked question, the conjunction of an abbreviated modal verb ("r") with what we presume is a noun masquerading as an adjective. It imitates and intersects with the deliberately nongrammatical style of memes in broader online culture, especially from humor sites like I Can Haz Cheezburger? But some paratextual knowledge—the kind associated with affirmational fannish capital—will illuminate what these statements are doing. "Irene" refers to Irene Adler, a lesbian character whose crush on Sherlock proved to be her undoing in the series. "Stvenen Mofatt" is a mis-citation of *Sherlock* showrunner Steven Moffat. Moffat's relationship with fandom is notoriously turbulent. He is consistently positioned as a bad/immoral object, criticized for, among other things, producing stereotypical female characters and having an inability to take criticism. The statements parody both of these tendencies to an excess: "STRONG WOMEN with GUN AND SASS" is an exaggerated synecdoche for the female characters Moffat produces. Moffat has famously attributed desire for Sherlock to his female fan base, suggesting each woman believes she is the one who will "melt that glacier," but says they are all wrong: "nothing will melt that glacier" (quoted in Ng 2014). The confused juxtaposition of "Um r u hmomphobia" with "They want DESFROTS GLCACIER and make him HUBSAND" both undermines Moffat's authorial posture through absurdity and compromises the reserved-critic posture of "anti-bbcsherlock" via its incorporation into the background, format and font. This sort of self-consciousness is evident across the Tumblr surface, as there is no border between these sorts of reblogs and the poses of authoritative criticism.

Nor is reblogging necessary to this self-consciousness. User carinaroundvevo posts "i used to like sherlock and now i have repented from those bad days thanks to this blog, god bless you" and receives the response "God bless YOU, carinaroundvevo. Welcome to the light" (2014). The hyperbolic construction of critical awareness as religious salvation parodies its own stance.

[13]   Posts sometimes slide from a distant/critical voice directly into an emotive, humorous, and playful one. Consider this submission:

> [14]   If u take away the racism, sexism, queerbaiting and every other piece of shit aspect in bbc sherlock, all u get is lizard lord benadrizzle cumbersnatch and his hobbit hole sidekick martin freeman. i rate it 2/10 heterosexist paperclips. (antibbcsherlock 2014, anonymous)

[15]   The tripling effect of "racism, sexism, queerbaiting" catalogues serious social ills, before descending into mockery via namecalling and incoherence ("heterosexist paperclips"). Moreover, embedding of reblogged posts means that as easily as the reader clicks next or back, she can click "why-helo-is-i-stvenen-mofatt," skimming the flattened surface of Tumblr across its porous borders. Thus she arrives at the blog headed "the DCOTOR LEIS" and the following blurb:

> [16]   Why HELLO Is I STVENEN MOFATT Shworuneurn of the DR WHO SHOW
>
> I aslo AM a WRITE for BCB SHLREROK. (http://why-helo-is-i-stvenen-mofatt.tumblr.com)

[17]   This title is a mis-citation of Moffat's fan-famous dictum that "the Doctor lies," a supposed principle of interpretation for his former show, *Doctor Who* (2005–). This principle is an authorial gesture: if the character of the Doctor lies, only Moffat, the showrunner, can have a final say over the meaning and coherence of the text. He is the one who can state when the Doctor is telling the truth and when he is lying. The statement undercuts Moffat's assertion of meaning without providing its own. As noted, the deliberate placement of 'Is' before 'I,' means that identity is always an unmarked question rather than a statement. A large part of the blog's humor relies on incoherence. Anonymous readers submit questions, insults, and praise, and receive replies, which are apt to be cut off mid-sentence against a white background, or refuse resolution with an over-marked like question "UMMM?????" The voice attributed to Moffat responds to criticism with the demands that fans stop "bullying" him, or chiding them with "u r a rude." In reaction to a follower's taunts regarding leaked scripts, a post responds:

> [18]   SOTPS WATCHING STOP STOP STOTP PLS IT IS BLUYLULING. WAIT TILL SERIES 8 223rd of AGAUST! THAT Is ONLY WHEN ALOUGD! THanK U GODBYE. (why-helo-is-i-stvenen-mofatt.tumblr.com, 2014)

[19]   Thus Moffat's authority as author and his practical powerlessness over fandom are ridiculed via absurdity—not least by the impossible request that fans wait until the "223rd" of the month. When these posts are reblogged into Tumblrs like antibbcsherlock, they further undercut the platform from which political and value judgments are made. This creation of meaning through juxtaposition depends both on the affordances of Tumblr and the conventions of fandom.

[20]   A similar pattern is visible at sherlocksucks, which again incorporates some of the same posts as the other blogs. Here, the background is a tile effect: photographs of a hedgehog and otter superimposed with speech scrawled in white using MS Paint: "Is that a new case?" and "Shut up John," respectively. The tile effect and comparison of Freeman and Cumberbatch to a hedgehog and otter are popular fandom tropes: indeed, to judge by the background alone, this could be a humorous, informal fan blog. But the criticism of Orientalism in *Sherlock* fandom is also posted here, as are criticisms of the show as pretentious, poorly written, and poorly acted. Yet the blog simultaneously disavows its own critical stance, especially with response to its submissions. A submitter compliments:

> [21]   I like Sherlock, I like Doctor who, but this is some funny shit. My favorite part is saying "Don't share hate." I guess they also agree that people calling the Holocaust a lie is fine. The Nazi Party was Hitler's fandom. You can hate him all you want but don't express it. (happypess at sherlocksucks.tumblr.com, 2014)

[22]   The response is "i have no idea what ur trying to say but it sounds nice so thank u." Sherlocksucks disavows interpretation, and the presumed analogy between protesting the bad politics of a television show and protesting bad

politics in action, professing to let the compliment stand at the surface level of "sound[ing] nice." Moreover, sherlocksucks appears to mock the kind of moral judgments associated with antifandom. A long text post reads:

[23]   I'm sure that if you're part of the Sherlock fandom, there's a good chance that you've been following [fan] Reapersex. And if you're following reapersex, I'm sure that you are well aware about the rape controversy that has been going on...

[24]   This has gotten way out of control. But please understand that it has *not* gotten out of control because people were offended by it. It is out of control because so many people are pretty much making posts that say "stfu rape victims lol calm down." ... Now here is the important point: *YOU DON'T GET TO DECIDE HOW OTHER PEOPLE FEEL...* Don't go attacking rape victims for being uncomfortable with a comic which reminded them of rape. Don't tell them to calm down. If they want a TW [trigger warning], let them put one and then leave the subject alone. (2013)

[25]   At this point, the post appears as a sincere appeal to fandom to police its own boundaries and ethics by attaching warnings to content that could be traumatic for some readers. Such appeals are a common statement across fandoms. But the series of posts tagged "reapersex" continues into a hyperbolic parody that turns the direction of criticism back upon fandom's own tendency to moralize and self-police:

[26]   can we call for a ban of reapersex?

[27]   after the latest panel with the nose assault, i think it's about time that someone puts a stop to reapersex. it was about enough when they didn't put a tigger [*sic*] on the rape scene, and you would have thought that they would learned by then. but as you may have noticed in the latest update, john bites sherlock's nose, and there is ONCE AGAIN no trigger warning provided.

[28]   aside from the clear anti-semitism of this gesture, it is completely inconsiderate to those who have experienced nose trauma in their life. if reapsersex will continue to create such offensive art without any warning, i say that we all call for a boycott and mass-unfollow, and maybe even write to the tumblr staff.

[29]   who else is with me?

[30]   # TW: NOSE ASSAULT FANDOM IS THE PROBLEM. (2013)

[31]   While calling for protection of rape victims taps the established discourse of morality, claiming a comic is "inconsiderate to those who have experienced nose trauma in their life" in the same font, format, and posting style levels that discourse into a parodic one. When fans start to protest the proposed ban on the blog reapersex, sherlocksucks goes on to defend in moralistic terms its earnest "desire to stop anti-semitism and victims of nose trauma," once again collapsing the distinction between a form of intolerance considered worthy of policing and an absurdist imagined one via the simple conjunction "and." As objections mount, sherlocksucks defends that "it's all about spreading awareness, and it's *relevant,* duh" and "people are so fucking rude oh my god I AM TRYING TO HELP VICTIMS HERE jesus crist!" This reads as a parody of the "social justice warrior," a figure of mockery associated with Tumblr and characterized by a shallow, self-servingly engagement with social problems, combined with excessively pedantic political correctness. Yet in the same place, sherlocksucks reblogs a long criticism of classism and ableism in the show, in addition to a deconstruction of Cumberbatch's problematic commentary on the autistic young people he studied for his role as Frankenstein. Moreover, when a commenter asks, "hey, would you mind providing a transcript next time you're posting big blocks of text in image form? It's kind of an accessibility issue. Thanks," the blog administrator replies "yes, of course. mea culpa. i went back and added a transcript."

[32]   By now, it should be obvious that criticism of the show and criticism of the fandom are inextricable on Tumblr. "Sherlock" has coalesced into a term that includes both canon and fandom, and the quality and politics of the show are criticized in the same voice of sarcastic appreciation. "I didn't know you could win an Emmy award for writing a script with no plot or continuity or coherence," reads an anonymous submission to antibbcsherlock, then continues, "If only I had a dick I could be next year's winner." Sherlocksucks reblogs excerpts of fan fiction communally judged poor by virtue of its violation of the rules of Standard English, poor use of metaphor or imagery, or lack of continuity, and tags them with ironic notes like, "i'm glad that this show inspires such fine literature." An anonymous submitter admits that

they are "a big fan" of *Sherlock* "but honestly can find humor in your posts, and some of them have valid points. I don't see why people get butthurt over shows. Television shows. TV. Shows." Sherlocksucks replies:

> [33]   This is the internet. In the way there are fandoms, there are also...butthurtdoms. Everyone has something to be angry about.
>
> It's kinda part of the tumblr thing.

[34]   In the tradition of fandom_wank, the post judges fannish investment and "the tumblr thing" as excessive and rather absurd, even though it is speaking from inside that very discourse. Indeed, at one point it points up its own entanglement in it, reblogging an article concerning Cumberbatch's fear over his more obsessive fans. Notes appended to the article read:

> [35]   so I found this
>
> and i was like
>
> "yeah, i'd worry about those obsessive fans too, i mean—"
>
> and then i stopped
>
> and i thought about my blog
>
> and my life
>
> and i cried. (reblogged on sherlocksucks)

[36]   Though this was posted by another user, its reappearance on sherlocksucks, in the font and format of that blog, is a perfect illustration of how Tumblr affordances level meaning across its surface. In this format, the referent is sherlocksucks, a blog undeniably invested in and in dialogue with *Sherlock,* as much as it is the blog sherlocksucks reblogged it from.

[37]   Sherlocksucks also bestows the hashtag #GOOD upon fans who complain about their own fandom, as a teacher might in perfunctory grading. At one point, it reblogs a piece of deductive work regarding the meaning of clues in the show with the note "taking a break from insulting the fandom to compliment the really impress parts of the fandom. Just don't expect this to happen again." From this, it might be expected that this expression of antifandom operates along the rational-good emotional-bad axis; yet, in rebuffing criticism, the voice of schoolyard mockery appears on this polyphonic surface. "You're an idiot who obviously doesn't appreciate real television," complains an anonymous submitter. "I'm surprised if you have any friends because you obviously spend all your time writing a hate blog." "We don't spend all our time writing for this blog," Sherlocksucks replies. "Sometimes we write hate for other things, like your mom"—and adds a GIF of teenagers engaged in some performative form of group mockery. The invocation of "your mom" jokes as a counterargument in the same place, font, color, size, and format as judgments on continuity and coherence cuts away the authoritative grounding the latter appropriates.

[38]   The technological affordances of Tumblr, then, combine with these self-conscious, self-reflexive codes of fannish discourse to produce this particular postmodern form of critique, less amenable to interpretation than traceable across its surface. In addressing these explicitly fragmented texts dependent on pastiche and the destabilization of identity, we can see how the disjunctions and polyphony of the postmodern surface undermine value judgments about fandoms, texts, and taste hierarchies, which distinctions become increasingly difficult to establish in the changing new media environment.

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Tumbling or stumbling? Misadventures with Tumblr in the fan studies classroom

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[0.1]   Abstract—Teaching with Tumblr can be tricky, and here I explore some of the failures I've had with the social media site in my class. I argue that learning from pedagogical failure reveals important lapses in our own teaching. For the fan studies classroom, Tumblr illustrates the difficulty of balancing fandom and fan studies in the same class.

[0.2]   Keywords—Acafandom; Pedagogy; Lesson plan; Social media; Fandom; Students

[1]   Over the past two years, I have attempted, with some successes and some failures, to bring Tumblr—a major social media platform used by fans—into my fan studies classroom. I have sometimes asked my students to curate individual Tumblr accounts and at other times asked them all to contribute to a class Tumblr account. In both versions of this assignment, the students were expected to follow both fan and professional users posting about their media text and to use work they found on the class Tumblr as a resource when writing their papers. At the end of the semester, students wrote about the experience of Tumblr as a "community of voices," and analyzed their own participation within the social media space.

[2]   Ultimately, the goal was for students to follow organically how a fandom Tumblr is created and shared. My hope was that the class Tumblr would serve a number of pedagogical functions: it could be a storehouse of content that students could refer to in their papers as evidence of fan work; it could be a way to become involved in a fan community; it could serve to both reflect and augment students' own ideas about their topics; it could be a place for students to create GIFs, GIF sets, GIF fics, and so on. Specific assignments were intended to help students acquire these skills: papers referenced specific Tumblr posts from the class Tumblr(s), while class presentations used examples from the class Tumblr to augment their arguments. However, as I will show in this essay, while the successes (including students' bringing contemporary fan discourse into our classroom discussions) were compelling, the failures of using Tumblr in the fan studies classroom stemmed from a number of sources: an assumption that students were well-versed in using Tumblr, an expectation that students would intuitively "get" Tumblr, and, most importantly, a troubling of the balance between fandom and fan studies in the course itself.

[3]   I have taught this fan studies course for nearly a decade (e.g., Booth 2012; Booth 2015). In this class, I both take students through a history of fan studies and ask them to "become" fans of a media text at the same time; they write fanfiction, make a vid, study a community, and—with Tumblr—investigate the multitudes of conversations that fans have online. In effect, I ask students both to perform fandom and to analyze fandom in the course. Thus, the class exists in a precarious balance between teaching *fandom* and teaching *fan studies*. Tumblr, I have found, has failed precisely because it illustrates this balance and, in doing so, throws it off.

[4]   If I want my students to explore fandom *as it happens,* then including Tumblr within the class becomes something of a necessity. When they read through the class Tumblrs, my students were able to bring contemporary fan discourse into our classroom discussions: they could cite fan work being made at that moment. Fandom became a lived reality for them, which is a goal of the course. For many of my students, as fandom has grown, it has come to be nearly

synonymous with Tumblr (for students, Tumblr is more well-known than other well-trafficked fannish sites like AO3 and FanFiction.net; see Stein 2015, 157). Tumblr has become a social media hub of fan activity. At the same time, many of the practices that everyday Tumblr users carry out can also be considered fannish—that is, they appear akin to work done by fans, whether or not the users would self-identify as fans. This type of work—posting GIF fics and user-created images or trading behind-the-scenes information—can be reblogged, tagged, and shared many thousands of times by fans and non-fans alike. To try to teach about contemporary fandom without using Tumblr would be a disservice to the lived experience of fans today. At the same time, formalizing Tumblr into a classroom experience (and, thus, grading based on Tumblr) may have had a detrimental effect on the way students interpreted the technology. Exploring the ways that my Tumblr assignments have failed reveals both the difficulty of using this particular technology in the fan classroom, and also the importance of failure in and of itself in the classroom.

[5]   Failure is an important aspect of teaching, even if we are discouraged from exploring it. As an instructor, I am encouraged to share my successes with colleagues, write up my positive lessons for peer review, or put my best class activities in my annual review file. The contemporary higher education classroom promotes success—as Halberstam (2011, 1–2) notes, this stems from larger Western culture concerns with positive thinking, success, and capitalism. But as Halberstam goes on to describe, failure can be a productive way of critiquing social norms: failing "may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (2–3; see Hay 2016 for the application of failure in creative classrooms in general).

[6]   The fan studies classroom lends itself to teaching with different technologies, because fans use multiple technologies to articulate and practice their fandom. But the use of technology also reveals one of the most complex aspects of this course: the balance between fannishness and scholarship. Students never quite know how to position themselves theoretically within the course. Are they supposed to be fans? (In which case, why get a grade?) Are they scholars? (In which case, how far to take their fanfiction assignment?) As Geraghty (2012) has noted, students are shy about writing slash not just because it is about sex, but because it's for a professor—for a grade. Fan studies literature has debated for decades the positionality between fans and scholars (Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002; Jenkins et al. 2011). My classroom has embodied this debate; and Tumblr has actualized it.

[7]   Tumblr is situated in a middle ground between the fannish and the scholarly for my students. And, to complicate matters, for most of them, learning Tumblr is yet another new skill set they have to complete at the start of the quarter. Despite the "digital natives" moniker applied to the millennials I teach (see Palfrey and Gasser 2013), in my experience most of my students have never posted to Tumblr. They visit the site but do not know how it works. They are all aware of it, but few would consider themselves regular users. For example, in a class of twenty-five students in 2016, only two of my students had Tumblr accounts of their own, and although both of them posted to the site, they did not feel comfortable teaching others how to post. In final course evaluations, students reported feeling that Tumblr was "unfamiliar" and "more complicated than what it should be." Learning to use Tumblr for the course became another task to complete in order to pass the course—it wasn't "fun" (re: fannish) because it was prescribed.

[8]   But Tumblr should be fun, and the fans that use it do it because it is fun. The affordances, or the "possibilities and constraints that structure conversation" on Tumblr include the ability to create posts through image, video, animation, text, and audio uploads; to "reblog" content (effectively, sharing content that one finds online), to "tag" content with original hashtags of meaning, and to create links between posts and the outside web (Petersen 2014, 90; see Perez 2013). In other words, Tumblr users "interpret the affordances of Tumblr in a certain way, and respond by applying a specific cultural logic through their fan-centric activities" (Petersen 2014, 91). Tumblr becomes an outlet for fan practices.

[9]   In my first attempt at using Tumblr in the class, I blindly attempted to have each student make their own Tumblr account and blog, and post to it each week. My assumption was that they would get caught up in using Tumblr, love it, and continue to post throughout the course. In my class, students follow a particular fandom for ten weeks (it is usually something they are already a fan of, so it is not much of a stretch for them). For this activity, they were to cultivate a Tumblr for the duration of the class focused on this one particular fandom (examples ranged from the typical *Walking Dead* and *Game of Thrones* that I have in most classes to more unusual fandoms like *DragonAge, Until Dawn,* and *Hey Arnold!*). Students were supposed to follow both fannish and corporate Tumblr accounts related to their text. I asked students to maintain this Tumblr throughout the course and to check it at least once a day.

[10]   I'm sure more experienced and wiser instructors could have told me how this would fail to demonstrate an organic use of Tumblr—instead, this merely demonstrated how effective at *school* the students were. Tumblr became one more box to check, one more assignment to complete. Students tended not to explore how fans used Tumblr; rather, they focused on how fan studies scholars and students can *make use* of Tumblr. Although they did learn something, it wasn't the fannish nature of Tumblr, which had been the goal. Students interpreted Tumblr as an assignment, quite naturally, and visited the site academically, not as a fan.

[11]   Following on from this, I contacted Melanie E.S. Kohnen, who has written about Tumblr in the classroom (2013). She recommended that I create a single Tumblr page curated by the class, a pedagogical strategy she has expanded upon for a chapter called "Tumblr Pedagogies." As she writes in a later piece for the *Wiley Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, "the Tumblr interface allows for the easy sharing of multiple types of media, which can create a vibrant backchannel or platform for multimodal assignments. Specifically, the interface and fan practices on Tumblr focus on the archiving and circulation of visual media" (Kohnen 2018, 353). I have found this in my class as well. One curates their own personal journey through their fandoms, and "this focus on curation, literally built into Tumblr's infrastructure, is one of the central ways that the site facilitates the cultivation of analytical skills"—a crucial function of Tumblr for fannish pedagogy (Kelly 2015).

[12]   For my next class, then, I created one single Tumblr that the class itself would curate as fans might, by creating "a vibrant backchannel." The intent was for everyone in class to reblog content or create original posts based on their fandom. The class would use this Tumblr to share news, art, and activism about and involving digital media and fandom. Everyone shared the same username and password—and this meant that everyone also took responsibility for curating the posts and reblogs that appear on the class's Tumblr account(s). For the posts that each student created or reblogged, they were supposed to tag them with their name or a pseudonym. Using Tumblr in the classroom in this way allowed students to follow fan culture while also placing it within larger scholarly contexts. The balance between fandom and fan studies was supposed to be maintained, as students "experience critical fan culture while they are still students so they can see how the concepts they study in class resonate and have meaning outside of class as well" (Kohnen 2018). Students rarely come to class unfamiliar with the fandoms they are a part of; but putting their fandom in a Tumblr blog helps contextualize it within the larger culture of the class, and reframes their experience of fandom given the history and scholarly criticism that fan studies has developed.

[13]   Results for this use of Tumblr were mixed, although it seemed to me to be slightly more successful than the first use. As with the earlier class, students seemed to be split between those familiar with Tumblr's interface and usability and those for whom it was a foreign country. Had I spent a class period teaching the students how to use Tumblr, those students who originally were left behind would have been caught up, but those with the experience of Tumblr would have had their time wasted. Looking back, holding an additional out-of-class session to teach students how to use Tumblr would have been an effective strategy.

[14]   Regardless of their experience with Tumblr, students stopped adding to the class Tumblr after the first few classes. I noticed that in their papers they continued to reference the same posts rather than building an argument on the different posts that could be reblogged over time. In an email conversation with me, Kohnen suggested assigning students a minimum number posts per week, although I've also found that, given the many other limits on students' time (other classes, full-time work, internships, etc.), the temptation for students to limit engagement to the minimum is strong. To re-engage students in the assignment requires not just changing the parameters of the assignment (e.g., spreading their posts out throughout the semester), but changing the way we view Tumblr in class. Rather than being illustrative of the divide between fandom and scholarship, we need to see Tumblr as a bridge between the two.

[15]   Tumblr is a space for sanctioned play—it is fannish in that participation through Tumblr takes on the appearance of fandom. We play at being fans in class throughout all the assignments—writing fanfic and making vids are equally foreign to most of my students. By learning to participate with the media as a fan might, through creative expression, students develop a different set of skills than if the class were focused more on media theory or critical analysis. Students learn fandom by doing fandom. But in the classroom, Tumblr only *simulates* fannish practice. The past two years of using Tumblr in the fan studies classroom has shown me that assigning a grade for Tumblr means that students see it as part of class, not as part of fandom. And yet not assigning grades for Tumblr runs the risk of students not completing the assignment at all. By situating Tumblr within the classroom, it reveals the uncomfortable balance between fandom and fan studies.

[16]   This, however, can be a strength—assuming the assignment follows through. Whereas academic writing strives for depth and complexity, Tumblr posts and fans' engagement with Tumblr can be very deep or very shallow. I could imagine an assignment that compared Tumblr/fan criticism to scholarly criticism, or an assignment that asked students to create critical Tumblr posts using just memes and GIFs. This might make room for and value both modes of engagement.

[17]   My ultimate goal is for students, then, to see Tumblr itself as a site of fandom *and* of fan studies: as a symphony of voices rather than a single fan interpretation (Booth 2016). But my students treated it as a blog that was rarely updated: a static text. This may in part be due to the timing of the class. DePaul is on the quarter system, and ten weeks simply isn't long enough to do everything I was asking them to do (and that's on me). But partly this is also because Tumblr, as a concept, is hard to pin down for students. What is it? A blog? A creative outlet? An archive? It is all of these things and more, so for students exploring fandom for the first time, it can be overwhelming. Not only do they have to learn a new system, they also have to learn a new language for understanding it. As Petersen (2014, 101) describes, "As fan conversations enter Tumblr they are moulded by the media logic and affordances that Tumblr offers, but that this process happens as fans interpret the website's media logic and make use of Tumblr's affordances to serve their purposes in a continuous non-linear process." In other words, becoming part of Tumblr requires becoming part of a community that students may not have an awareness of or the facility for. It's not that this can't be learned, but it must be factored into the pedagogical space of the class.

[18]   Learning through pedagogical failure can be a humbling experience but, importantly, it reveals lapses and lacunae in an instructor's own methodologies. But given the importance that Tumblr holds in fan communities today, it becomes even more crucial for students and instructors to develop the technical and cultural skills of this technology.

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Tumblr as a methodological tool for data archiving: The case of a Calzona Tumblr

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[0.1]   Abstract—This case study of a Tumblr created to study the impact of a specific episode of *Grey's Anatomy* (2005–) on the fandom of a particular romantic pairing shows how ethnoresearchers—that is, researchers embedded into the community they are studying—can use the functionality of this microblogging platform to organize and archive their research.

[0.2]   Keywords—Database; Fandom; *Grey's Anatomy*

1. Introduction

[1.1]   The emergence of transmedia storytelling and a related strategy, what I call augmented storytelling (Bourdaa 2012), as well as the increased presence of participatory culture, raises questions for researchers. What methods do researchers use to collect data and analyze this new ecosystem, on both the production side and the fan side? Digital technologies, especially the internet and interactivity, have played a huge part in the production strategies of television series and of audiovisual productions in general. As a result, researchers in the fields of reception studies and fan studies are confronted with a shifting ecosystem that is changing the methods of research and data collection.

2. Tumblr as an archive and database

[2.1]   To address these changes, as well as the way fans engage in the reception of TV shows, movies, books, and other media, Tumblr may be a useful research tool. The format is an integral part of fan activity, and it has become the platform of choice for fans to interact and post their thoughts and creations. This microblogging site permits the aggregation of content as animated images (GIFs), video, drawings, and text. This media fluidity, as well as the posting methods inherent to this social network, favor the heavy circulation of content from one Tumblr to another via easy reblogging; circulation is further expanded into the public sphere thanks to Tumblr's sharing option, which permits easy posting to other social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. Users can also categorize messages by providing tags that allow fans to navigate the content and select information according to their specific interests.

[2.2]   Several researchers have pointed out the usefulness and primacy of Tumblr as a productive site of fan activity. Louisa Stein (2016) notes that Tumblr has become "the favored interface for fans, which promotes communication and creativity," because Tumblr permits users to rework and transform preexisting media. Florent Favard (2013), in his analysis of the reception of the final episode of *Fringe* (2008–13), shows the importance of the methodological tool for research purposes, with Tumblr being used to create an archive and a database. And in their pioneering study, Yi Chang et al. (2014) "find Tumblr has more rich content than other microblogging platforms, and it contains hybrid characteristics of social networking, traditional blogosphere, and social media."

3. Case study: The Calzona breakup

[3.1]   With Tumblr an established site for fan interaction, researchers need to be able to engage with the platform in order to perform research on fan communities. Rather than just studying existing Tumblr usage, researchers should consider creating Tumblr accounts in order to work directly with fans and the artifacts they create, as well as manipulate tags and data to discover trends. Here I provide a case study of my doing just that. I collected and archived fan reactions and activities related to the specific episode of *Grey's Anatomy* (2005–) where the characters of Callie Torres and Arizona Robbins (whose fan portmanteau pairing name is Calzona) break up. I did this in order to analyze the evolution of fan reaction in the 24 hours after 11.05 "Bend & Break" aired on October 23, 2014. The essay that was the result of this research methodology was published in 2017 in a book I coordinated entitled *Fan Studies Gender Studies: la rencontre.*

[3.2]   When I first began my project, I was simply looking for a way to organize and archive the vast number of fan reactions on Tumblr regarding the anticipation for and aftermath of the episode. However, I initially didn't fully understand the potential of Tumblr: I didn't realize that I could have easily created an interactive database, with dates, reactions to posts, and chronology. Instead I began taking screen captures of all the posts that interested me and saving them in a folder on my computer. I had 135 raw screen captures, but they had no context, no posting dates, and no continuity. I discovered I could not perform analysis with so little context. Further, this method didn't take into account the fluidity of this microblogging platform or the richness of the content, especially the GIF sets that fans create to convey their emotions and reactions to other members of the community, using codes and norms that only those embedded in the fandom can understand. Further, I didn't have the ecosystem that surrounded each post—the conversations and threads created by members of the community. boyd, Golder, and Lotan (2010) suggest that this sort of "practice contributes to a conversational ecology in which conversations are composed of a public interplay of voices that give rise to an emotional sense of shared conversational context." Further, one important component of this interplay is reblogging, an essential feature of the Tumblr platform, as it is a way of continuing a discussion throughout the community. My collection of screen captures did not reflect this repetition.

[3.3]   I thus decided to create my own dedicated Tumblr, where I presented myself as an ethnofan—that is, a researcher who analyzes fan practices by integrating into the community and fandom under study (Bourdaa, forthcoming). Ethnofans invest, propose, and develop new research approaches that lead to methodologies adapted to a fandom's particular context and purpose. Activities include immersion in a specific fan community, collection of digital traces and fan works, and hypertext navigation. This permits researchers to have a sufficiently complete view of the terrain and community practices to be able to analyze the media ecosystem (production and reception) undergoing changes and to engage in multiplatform serialized narration. The peculiarity of this methodological posture, one engaged in observant participation, lies in the fact that the researcher knows the community from the inside and is able to master the community's media practices.

[3.4]   I thought it was important for me to remain sincere in my approach and to explain my research and Tumblr's fundamental purpose to Calzona fans. I carefully chose the name of the Tumblr, The End of Calzona As We Know It (now deleted), to show my knowledge of the show's universe and of the narrative arcs of the Callie-Arizona relationship. My use of the fan portmanteau "Calzona" for the pairing signaled my belonging to a community, a testimony of affiliation. This identity marker carries a double importance: first, it works at the individual level by allowing me to identify myself as a fan; second, it works at the collective level by providing a social resonance that hails the whole community. David Peyron (2015) confirms this link between the construction of an identity and the name of the community: "By being asserted, this (self) categorization is not then experienced as alienating for a group of individuals because they find a confirmation of belonging and thus a recognition of the social validity of their identity."

[3.5]   This recognition is twofold: recognition among individuals belonging to the same group, and recognition in and by society precisely because of the very act of choosing a name. Fans of the Arizona-Callie couple use the term "Calzona" to signify their knowledge of the narrative and their membership in the specific community of fans of the couple. The term "Calzona" was also used by showrunners when they discussed or created episode scenarios to label the scenes between the two characters, or to identify the places in which the characters lived and in which their relationship evolved. I used this name in the title of my Tumblr to show that I knew the practices of the community and that I was not a stranger to this community I had chosen to analyze. Use of the term "Calzona" prevented the rejection of my Tumblr and the reblogging I did. Indeed, the virtual community is also a place of social relations that emerge through participation in a mediated environment. James Paul Gee (2004) calls virtual communities affinity spaces, and

more and more these spaces are opened in order to allow the circulation of opinions and content, as well as admiration, love, and fannish excitement (figure 1).

Figure 1. Example of a reblogging I did on my Tumblr of a conversation showing Calzona excitement.

[3.6]   After I created the Tumblr, I reblogged fan reactions over 48 hours to create a corpus of text, images, GIFs and GIF sets, and video. This activity was facilitated by the Tumblr interface, which has a reblogging option, and by the community's use of tags, which allowed me to spot the posts that interested me and then allowed me to add helpful new tags. Naturally, I used the #Callie, #Arizona, and #Calzona tags. I also combined both names using the Tumblr-specific codes "Callie × Arizona" and "Arizona × Callie." Fans usually use several tags to ensure that their posts are widely seen by the community and are archived in the right fandoms. After eliminating redundant messages and reblogs from already existing posts, thus keeping only original posts, I collected and archived 363 posts. My objective was to study fan reactions of Callie and Arizona's breakup in qualitative, not quantitative, terms. By using Tumblr's built-in tools, I was able to manipulate and organize data, which permitted me to discover trends useful to my research.

4. Conclusion

[4.1]   My research aimed to analyze the reactions of Calzona and *Grey's Anatomy* fans 24 hours before, during, and 24 hours after the broadcast of the breakup episode 11.05 "Bend & Break." In addition to reactions to the episode itself, fans also responded to published interviews with the actors and the showrunners, as well as to episode trailers and teasers. These paratexts, to use Gray's (2010) term, influence fan reception and provoke anticipatory reactions, which are interesting to analyze. I also discovered that violent, angry comments were posted during the episode's actual airing, which contrasted with the experience of waiting and the anticipation of the day before. The day after the broadcast, more thoughtful reflections emerged, revealing the deep feelings of the fans.

[4.2]   Using Tumblr as a database helped me understand the functionality of the platform as well as fan dynamics. The archive I created by collecting posts via the use of tags represents a case study of fan reaction to a highly anticipated event and shows that fans reflect on their own fandoms, their understanding of the fictional world, and the links between their (affective) lives and what the characters experience in a show (figure 2). The methodology I created for this research project could be used again for another research project, as it used the functions of the Tumblr microblogging platform to put together an archive as well as a database of fan reactions and posts.
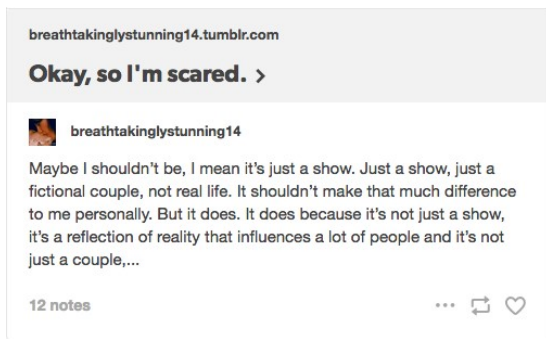
Figure 2. Tumblr post by breathtakinglystunning14 showing emotional investment in Calzona and its relationship to a fan's affective life.

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Roundtable: Tumblr and fandom

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[0.1]   Abstract—Roundtable discussion led by Lori Morimoto with participants Amanda Brennan, Elizabeth Minkel, Keidra Chaney, and Aja Romano.

[0.2]   Keywords—Fan activism; Fandom conflict; Journalism; Social media

[1]   **Lori Morimoto:** Welcome! To introduce our roundtable participants, we have Amanda Brennan, who is senior content insights manager for TumblrInc. and runs Fandometrics on Tumblr; Elizabeth Minkel, a fan culture journalist and half of the Fansplaining podcast; Keidra Chaney, cofounder and publisher of The Learned Fangirl website; and Aja Romano, web culture reporter for Vox.com and a longtime fan culture journalist. Thanks to everybody for being here today.

[2]   To begin, I'd like to ask you, Amanda, to explain a bit how Fandometrics works—what it does and how you measure it.

[3]   **Amanda Brennan:** Fandometrics is ranked by a trending score in the nine different categories we have right now: TV, music, videogames, celebrities, internet celebrities, anime and manga, K-pop, and ships. Our trending score factors in all the data about searches, original posts, reblogs, and likes for specific tags in a seven-day period. So, all the activity in that week will calculate the trending score. And there's some limitations to this. People don't always tag consistently, the use of tags has evolved as the language of the internet changes, and it's just a fact that people who are die-hard fans will always tag more. We also work with global data, which has advantages and limitations in that, for example, K-pop is so huge on Tumblr, but we can't tell where the fandom is coming from. Is it American? Is it Korean? It's just the global data; like, Bangtan Boys, for example, is often the number one tag on all of Tumblr in a time period, above every other tag. And we can't place where that content is coming from—it's just a global community.

[4]   **Morimoto:** Since I do transcultural fandom studies, I wish you could tell where it's coming from!

[5]   **Brennan:** Same!

[6]   **Morimoto:** So, based on the data you see, what do you think are some of the continuities in Tumblr fandom, and what do you think has changed?

[7]   **Brennan:** *Supernatural,* hands down, from the time I started working with this type of data, has just continued to be so huge, not only with the show, but we see the characters trend, and we see the actors around the show trend. Misha Collins just did his third Answer Time—Answer Time is our Q and A on the site, and he's just so successful and they get such great engagement that we had him on for a third. And he loves doing them, so it's very exciting to see that. As for changes, anime and K-pop have both really surged since I started working here. I mentioned that Bangtan Boys is often one of our top tags of all the tags; if it's not Bangtan Boys, it's *Yuri!!! on Ice*. So, to see this anime kind of overtake the whole community and trend so much higher than everything else on the site—it's just wild to see how things ebb and flow. And One Direction—I'm actually working through some 2013 data for a project I'm working on in secret right now (https://thefandometrics.tumblr.com/post/162441496429/fandometrics-in-depth-shipping), and most of the ships from that year are One Direction ships. And now it's very rare to see the Larry Stylinsons come out. It just feels like One Direction was this cornerstone of Tumblr fandom in the beginning, and now it still exists in different

metadata, because people are talking just about Harry or just about Zayn, and it just has ebbed and flowed. It's on the way down.

[8] **Morimoto:** The *Yuri!!! on Ice* thing …

[9] **Brennan:** Yeah, it's wild. People love anime with sports. *Haikyu!,* the volleyball anime, is also huge, and *Free*, when that happened, also was such a cultural phenomenon. When the first trailer came out for *Free*, a whole fandom sprung out of just the trailer—there was no information about the characters or anything. People just went in on headcanons and found something to connect with, with just a few seconds of content. So, there's something about sports anime!

[10] **Morimoto:** Moving on to Aja, you've been writing about fandom for a long time. Could you talk a little about how fandom is covered in the media—both mainstream media and online fan production or other fan culture-related media?

[11] **Aja Romano:** I started out as a geek culture reporter—I really started out as a fandom and Tumblr-centric reporter, then branched out into other areas of geekdom. So, a lot of the writing I've done on fandom in the past has been specifically around Tumblr fandom communities and how they're interacting with their creator franchises, and so forth. I've also written a lot of cultural critiques, a lot of analysis of the shows themselves, reviews, that sort of thing. Now that I've moved over to Vox, I mostly do cultural analysis. It's rare that I get to write about a fandom kerfluffle, although that does happen. I feel like I write fewer of those, because the audience for Vox is more niche, so now I mostly do cultural analysis. But I try to do that analysis with an awareness of what people are saying about a show in fandom, Tumblr Discourse—with a capital D.

[12] We're still, to some degree, seeing a lot of shock—this thing exists and it's got a fandom around it! Those kinds of articles. And they take a lot of different forms. Even when they're trying to be respectful and perfectly nice, I think sometimes the act of elucidating a fandom phenomenon can take on a spectator/gawker quality. But I think we're seeing a lot of advancement in how those subjects are treated in the media, and that's probably thanks in part to the mainstreaming of fan culture generally, and the fact that more reporters themselves are identifying as fans and coming up from fandom. And I think we're seeing this across the board, whether in mainstream media reporting or specific geek sites.

[13] **Morimoto:** We've talked so much about how there's been a rise of fanboy producers, fanboy auteurs, and how that comes out of geek culture. Do you see outlets for fans becoming journalists or people writing on fandom evolving in the same way? Is there any one publication that you think made the difference?

[14] **Romano:** The *Daily Dot* made a difference by hiring me and giving me the title of Fandom Reporter, because I don't think it had ever been done before. The *Mary Sue*, definitely, which came before the *Daily Dot*. The *Mary Sue* was founded in 2010, 2011, and I started writing for them in 2011. I wrote for them for a year, then was recruited directly by the *Daily Dot*. So, they not only made a difference in making geek spaces more comfortable for women in general, but making women more visible as geeks, and making fandom reporting a part of that. And the other key piece of that is BuzzFeed's complete integration with Tumblr fandom. I don't know that BuzzFeed itself has necessarily done a lot to be like, hey, we're going to talk about ourselves as if we're reporters who are also geeks. But what BuzzFeed really did that made such a difference was it just proceeded with an assumption that everyone was on Tumblr, everyone was in fandom, everyone knew what these things were. There was no, we have to explain this; it was just, let's dive into this and celebrate it because we're all fans. And it's that mentality that BuzzFeed put forward that really made a difference.

[15] The thing about BuzzFeed is—even though I was hired to be a fandom reporter at the *Daily Dot*, I was constantly fighting. In the beginning, I was constantly having to explain why I shouldn't have to explain things. In order to translate fandom for the masses you sometimes have to explain things, but if you're constantly stopping to gawk and say, this is what this is, it creates this spectator quality. And I think BuzzFeed sidestepped that so neatly that, after they'd been doing it for a while, think about the speed with which fandom shot into the mainstream, specifically after *Fifty Shades of Grey* and the *Veronica Mars* Kickstarter. It was so rapid and so complete, and a big part of that cultural osmosis was the fact that BuzzFeed was just like, here, you're going to get it or you're not going to get it. I thought that was so smart of them, and it's obviously paid off well for them.

[16] **Morimoto:** Keidra, could you describe your relationship to Tumblr both as a professional and as a fan?

[17]   **Keidra Chaney:** I pretty much run the TLF (*The Learned Fangirl*) Tumblr, and my TLF cofounder, Raizel Liebler, is, for the most part, the voice of the TLF Twitter, and we've only really talked about it formally a few times. But we decided the TLF Twitter would be the learned part of TLF, and the Tumblr part is the fangirl part of TLF. The Twitter arm of things would handle speaking to the more academic-y, acafan issues, and the Tumblr would actually be participating in fandom. This wasn't something we came up with on purpose—it just fit the way that we used each of the platforms personally. But, I think, in fandom and participating—you can't really be on Tumblr and get fandom in the same way if you just sit there and post things. It's so interactive, and if you don't participate, you're missing out on a lot of what makes it what it is. So, for me, there was a point, I think early on, where I was like, well, we're just going to post TLF stuff. And I have other Tumblrs that are very specifically about other things, so I was like, let me just make it specifically about TLF. But I couldn't not participate, especially with a lot of the K-pop stuff I'm into. I'm like, "I just gotta say something; I can't help it!" I couldn't stay away from it, on a personal level. So, I was like, screw it, it's not hurting anything. I don't think it's hurting the TLF brand. If anything, it's like, look, we're actually into this stuff. We're not sitting back and trying to analyze folks, we are y'all. So know that we're on the up-and-up, because I'm commenting on fanfiction just like the rest of y'all. For me, I think it makes sense.

[18]   TLF started about five or six months after Tumblr started, so what was interesting about it was that we were looking at fandom through the lens of what I guess would be called old fandom or even pre-social-media fandom. Social media as the conduit for fandom didn't really exist at the time—it was very much LiveJournal and these, if not actually closed spaces, they felt closed because you didn't have wider public audiences peeking in on conversations that were fandomoriented. And then you had closed spaces like Yahoo! Groups and message boards, stuff like that. So, with Tumblr, we didn't know what it was going to be at the time we started TLF, and there was a lot of speculation about what Tumblr would be and how it would play a role especially in the early days, because no one really knew at the time. I think it's interesting, and if I have the chance to even go back and look at some of the older posts where we do reference Tumblr, and see what we thought of Tumblr at the time …

[19]   **Morimoto:** That would be really interesting.

[20]   **Chaney:** Yeah, because I do wonder if—there were a lot of things that I think we were fairly decent at anticipating, and a lot of things that we didn't. We were more concerned with the possible death of LiveJournal than what Tumblr would be.

[21]   **Morimoto:** And Elizabeth, I know you've used a variety of different platforms in order to reach different iterations of fan communities. How do you approach Tumblr?

[22]   **Elizabeth Minkel:** Well, I guess it depends on which of my things we're talking about. I don't post that often, but I'm there constantly. So, for the *Rec Center*—the newsletter, and my partner there, Gavia Baker-Whitelaw, I think is just as active on Tumblr as I am, probably more of a poster—we're always pulling out things that we like. That's more a site about things that are pleasurable about Tumblr, which I often—no offence to Amanda, but you know that I think Tumblr is a hellscape, right?

[23]   **Brennan:** No offense taken, it's alright.

[24]   **Minkel:** Okay, I just want to preface that. As a journalist, I'm different from Aja or Gavia in that I don't necessarily write about what's happening in fandom. I often write about the way fandom is butting up against other spaces—in particular, creators or pop culture entities, or the broader pop culture conversation—how fandom slots in and often mostly clashes with that. So, a lot of my experience with Tumblr is on a personal level, and that informs the conversations and the approach that I have. If I am trying to explain the worst behavior of fandom, I will often fall back on things I've personally seen as a fan, not in a research way, in the way I know that Aja does for her own reporting—or, at least, the way she did when she was at the *Daily Dot*.

[25]   **Morimoto:** How does Tumblr fit into …

[26]   **Minkel:** How do we use the *Fansplaining* Tumblr? Well, when we set up fansplaining.com, we were like, well, obviously, there should be a Tumblr. Like, even my own website, elizabethminkel.com, is on Tumblr, which is possibly not professional, but I don't care at this point. I know other people who do it, too. But, our *Fansplaining* Tumblr—we made a decision early on, unlike Keidra, to not make it an expression of our own fannishness. Otherwise, right now it

would literally just be Flourish (Klink) posting pictures of Harry Styles, and so I think we made the right decision. And probably me sneaking in pictures of pirates. I don't think we have to prove to anyone that we're deep-level fans, and possibly too invested in these things. We use it more ... we do reblog stuff that is panfannish. Mostly text posts about fanfiction or memes about fic. But right now, in the last six months, we've gotten a lot more engagement directly from our listeners on Tumblr. We turned anon on, and mostly that hasn't been a terrible mistake. We've gotten some negative comments, but we haven't gotten anything super hateful. And so now I feel like we're using it as the main place we can really correspond with our listeners and make that kind of community.

[27]　Which is interesting, because people do talk back to us on Twitter, but it doesn't feel the same as someone leaving us a thoughtful message in our Ask box. They are expecting us to put that out in the world, and then for other people to engage with it. It's different than any other way people can communicate with us. I think that's something very unique to the platform.

[28]　**Morimoto:** I'm going to move on and ask each of you, how do you see Tumblr changing fandom?

[29]　**Brennan:** I think Tumblr has made fandom way more accessible, and it feels less niche. It's not like other social networking, where someone might feel like they have to hide their passions from their family and friends. On Tumblr, no matter what you love, this is the place to connect with people who love it as fiercely as you do. And while other sites may have done that, like LiveJournal or Fanfiction.net, the attention to multimedia posts and reblogging makes fandom feel more rounded and immersive, so you can really dive in and be part of something bigger.

[30]　**Minkel:** That's what I was going to say. When I came on to Tumblr, which was only five years ago, I was a lurker. I was a lurker for most of my time in fandom, from the late 90s until two years ago. And LiveJournal always seemed very closed-off. I saw people on LiveJournal, but—I have a friend who last year brought up the metaphor of LiveJournal being a dinner party, and Tumblr being a coffee shop. And, obviously, I love throwing a dinner party, but that's not very open. That being said, you're having much more engaged conversations at your dinner party than you are in your coffee shop. So, Tumblr can feel a little surface-y. I do think that specific user experience choices and design choices of the platform cause a specific kind of conflict within fandom that we did not see previously. It has to do with context collapse: the way that a post can be written and reblogged, and suddenly it is an utterly different post. That's something we do not see on any other social network. That being said, it means that ideas can spread much farther than they could elsewhere, and you see posts that have, really, 100,000 notes. You don't get that on Twitter. You don't get that on Facebook in that way. But it also means the conversation branches in ways that can cause strife.

[31]　**Chaney:** The two things I think Tumblr really changed are, I think before Tumblr the primary language of fandom was text-based, and it was very much fic and filk—very text-oriented. I think Tumblr changed it so that the culture of memes as a form of communication and visual communication really became, not just a primary, but possibly now the primary way that fans communicate—the shorthand fans use. I think Tumblr played a large part in that, because before, platforms were based around text and there wasn't an easy way to share—and it was before people really got comfortable with GIFs. So, changing to a visual language in fandom is a lot of what I think we can thank Tumblr for. But I also think there was a lot of fragmentation in fandom pre-Tumblr, specifically because you had different platforms— you had LiveJournal folks, you had Yahoo! Groups folks. And especially if you were in Groups, it was super specific, and you could have a whole community just based around one particular ship and never really venture out into other places. And now Tumblr creates more of a panfandom community where there's overlap between fandoms, there's conversation that's relevant to different fandoms. You can kind of have it all in the same space, while previously it was much more difficult, and it would be discouraged. You can't talk about this here because ... whatever. Now I think that Tumblr makes it a lot easier to have those panfandom conversations without feeling like it's distracting from something else.

[32]　**Romano:** So many ways. Starting with the fact that we all left LiveJournal. And those of us who didn't leave LiveJournal, who came up on Tumblr, have just accepted so many of Tumblr's norms as being the way things are in the culture, like Tumblr's emphasis on queer-friendly relationships and queer shipping, general emphasis on diversity and racebending and call-out culture. These things that we sort of proceeded towards with very hesitant steps and hand-wringing on every other platform before Tumblr—now fans are just absorbing them like, that's life, that's just how things are. When you think back to 2009 and the year-long, deep, dramatic struggle and saga that sci-fi fandom went through over the Racefail debate and discourse and discussion, and how fraught and heavy and intense that was, that

would have been like a half-hour on Tumblr. It would have taken half an hour, involved fifty people, and everybody would have been on the side of people who were talking about Racefail from the perspective of characters of color and people of color and the experiences of people of color. It wouldn't have been as much drama so much as this is how things are now. We accept that diverse voices are necessary, we accept that the experiences of people of color should be represented in fiction, and you just move on from there.

[33]   **Morimoto:** Do you think that's a platform-specific thing?

[34]   **Romano:** I think it's very much part of Tumblr's ethos within social media. I think social media has had a huge hand in evolving our discourse as a culture around this, because social media makes the voices of minorities and the voices of people of color so much more prevalent and so much more visible. If you go on Reddit, you don't get those voices because they are being drowned out by alt-right trolls and gamers and misogynists. And so, you really need to have spaces where those people feel comfortable talking and where they feel comfortable having discussions. I would say that Tumblr definitely has had a hand in elevating that discourse and those ideas.

[35]   **Morimoto:** What are your thoughts about the use of Tumblr to attract a certain kind of user by corporations?

[36]   **Minkel:** I have a more positive framing of that. So, you're like, brands on Tumblr, and I'm like, ugh brands, terrible. But it's not just brands: the University of Iowa Special Collections or JSTOR or Oxford University Press. So, coming at it as a digital humanities person, I don't want to draw hard lines between, like, Denny's and Oxford University Press, or whatever. I love that non-human things can go on there and construct a persona and engage and genuinely have fans. As we were just saying about the *Fansplaining* Tumblr, obviously, it's the two of us, but we can also be there like someone who's in a conversation, and I think that's really great. Obviously, if you get into brands, then there's money involved and that's a different thing. But I do like how it's a broader conversation, and that's really interesting.

[37]   **Brennan:** There's two ways to really look at this. There's a specific language of Tumblr. When I meet Tumblr users, you talk about Tumblr and you feel like you're part of something much bigger. You understand the language, you speak the memes, and it's like a code word. And when a brand comes in and figures it out, it feels different than if they're just showing you some sort of ad on Instagram. Like, they have an Instagram ad for Beanie Babies—what is that, even? But when people come in and speak your language—when Denny's is like, "Who up?"—it feels more personable. It's funny you bring up the University of Iowa Special Collections, because I always use that as an example of a good entity, because they have a special collection of miniature books, and who's going to go look at miniature books? They're kept away from people, and it's all this really cool history and awesome stuff that's just sealed away. But on Tumblr it's given an audience. There's tons of book lovers here. And once they learned how to make GIFs and really make the posts interactive—they're just bringing this content to a brand-new audience of people that would never get to see it in their lifetimes. It's just this amazing way that Tumblr can democratize that kind of content from an archivist or museum, aquarium, all that kind of stuff.

[38]   **Minkel:** JSTOR is doing it right now. It's really good.

[39]   **Brennan:** I love the JSTOR Tumblr.

[40]   **Romano:** I bring up Denny's all the time when I talk about this, but Denny's was, like, 2012, and Amber has moved on so completely from that—Amber, who ran the Tumblr at the time. Now she's got her self-care app and she's just in a completely different realm of marketing. And Denny's itself has tried and mostly succeeded in continuing that vibe, but I don't think that other marketing people on Tumblr have necessarily had that success. The only corporate Tumblr we can say with any certainty has achieved that level of complete integration with Tumblr is BuzzFeed. But that's because BuzzFeed is also using Tumblr and deliberately making Tumblr language part of its overall brand. Whereas most brands that come to Tumblr are just looking for ways to soak up users and soak up new customers. And this is also why I'm skeptical of the term superfan, which is a whole different thing, but I think that idea that fans are there just to be exploited and just to fall in love with your product and find it and then go buy it, is—I don't think brands who come to Tumblr necessarily get that they can engage with fans. But you have to do the work of figuring out what the fans want, and allowing them to have critical responses to your product, allowing them to make deep emotional attachments that might make you uncomfortable.

[41]   So often we see creators that start out with this, yay fandom! But when they actually start getting fans at their most fannish—you know, you start getting the slash and the RPF shippers, and then there's this element of, wait, wait, we didn't want you to go this far.

[42]   **Morimoto:** Do you think Tumblr draws certain kinds of users? What do you think about the overlap between fandom and social justice issues, if you see one?

[43]   **Brennan:** Yeah, Tumblr can be something different to everyone, depending on who you follow and what kinds of tags you participate in. There's lots of different pockets of Tumblr, and I think that anonymity, where you can be the best version of yourself and really explore who you want to be, draws people here who want to explore their identity. When it comes to fandom specifically, I see people who are drawn here because they want to participate in fandom, whether by creating something or even just curating from the people and the conversation—the people you would see at a con.

[44]   **Minkel:** Are we talking about labeling culture? I think this is a bleed between broader Tumblr culture and specifically fan-focused culture, right? I don't think that there's a bunch of fans who are wandering around the internet desiring to label their sexuality and race and their Hogwarts house in their bio, like, "Oh, my space is here!" Also, it seems like for teens and people in their young 20s right now, that kind of labeling culture is just inherent. You have a big list of things about you. And it seems like expressing this fannishness is also—like, I'm in a new fandom right now, so I'm finding blogs that are specifically set up for a character or show or ship or whatever, but for the most part, a lot of these are fans and it's the whole production of yourself. So, it's the things that you're into, and also the ways that you label yourself.

[45]   **Romano:** Yes, but it's not like people who label themselves are saying that this is the only thing I am. I tend to look very askance at the—a lot of those blogs are troll blogs, and a lot of them are like, hi, I'm a feminist—like, every single label they can cram in, and a lot of it is done specifically to troll parameters. This gets back to the question of does Tumblr fundamentally attract certain kinds of people? I don't think it does, because we're obviously increasingly seeing trolls and members of the alt-right who are coming to Tumblr specifically to troll social justice warriors. But I think initially, yes, for many years there was a certain type of Tumblr user, and demographically we know it's slightly younger, slightly more female, slightly wealthier, in terms of disposable income.

[46]   **Minkel:** This is the fundamental question of critiquing fandom. I definitely think that labeling culture within fandom on Tumblr contributes to trivializing actual identity categories, whether it's race, sexuality, able-bodiedness, etc., with people talking about their Myers-Briggs results and their Hogwarts houses.

[47]   **Romano:** I think there are two sides of fandom that we identify. One is the curative side, which is focused on recitation of facts and really upholding creators' original visions. I don't want to say putting them on a pedestal, because there's a lot of critique that happens, but the emphasis is not on reshaping what the creator has done, but anticipating what the creator is going to do next. It's a very top-down way of looking at the creator-fan relationship, because you're basically accepting greedily what the creator gives you and digesting it from there. And that's also the male-dominated side of fandom, and that's really the kind of fan culture, and the kind of geek culture, that people were familiar with for decades. But obviously, as we've seen in the last two decades, there's also the transformative side of fandom, which is the female-dominated side, all about re-creation and taking it and making it your own, and writing fanfic and making fan art and all that stuff. I don't want to say there's something inherently more progressive about the transformative side than the curative side, but I think in terms of the discourse that comes out of one side and the other side, that seems to be how things shape up, at least right now. Because I think the act of saying, what could I do instead, what could I do differently, what is this creator not doing that I want to do—those basic questions lead you in the direction of finding subversive solutions and thinking outside the box, which leads you to have an open mind, which leads you to be more politically aware, and so forth.

[48]   And the people who are asking those questions are people who are already on the outside of various cultural narratives we tell ourselves. The people who are going to want to transform the text are the people who want to make it something that appeals to them more directly, and that tends to be people who are marginalized, people who are outside the curative space where everything is pristine and there's a certain set of values that are held in place. Whereas transformative fandom is every person for themselves. So that leads to a naturally more diverse space to begin with.

[49]   **Minkel:** I just feel like I've seen too many posts where people conflate being a fan, or being whatever Hogwarts house, with being marginalized, and I'm just tired of that.

[50]   **Chaney:** Yeah, for me, I came relatively late to Tumblr as a place for fandom. My other Tumblrs were very specific, and I kind of had my fandom space so I didn't really go to Tumblr for that until a few years ago. So, my perspective is a little different. How that has evolved would probably be different from other people. People use different platforms differently, and you can't take away what it means to be a marginalized person online, especially now, over the past few years, when you could indeed be putting a target on your forehead by self-identifying in certain spaces and having people come at you. Depending on how you are marginalized in society, there are certain spaces that you see as safer for you to be who you are and put it out there. And I think that for many people who use Tumblr, it is a space where you can feel safe to be open about your identities, your intersectional identities, without feeling like it's possibly putting you in harm's way.

[51]   But I think a lot of why that is, is because it's not about transparency in the same way as, like, Facebook, where your name and your face and all of that are the identity that you put out there, visually. And even Twitter, to a certain extent, is about putting your face out there, your identity out there, visually, and identifying yourself that way. Tumblr, just the structure of it, puts other images in the forefront and makes that the focus, as opposed to yourself. That, to me, makes it easier for people with marginalized identities to be out and open with that, knowing that it's going to be whatever content they put out that's going to be the focus. Not, here's my visual identity as a marginalized person out here for you to possibly attack. And so I do think it makes people feel safer.

[52]   That being said, I think for different groups it may not even matter as much. If you're there to talk about fic, and something happens in the news or in the world that you want to comment on, that may reflect who you are—your identity—but it's not necessarily going to be the focus of what you talk about, because you're there to talk about fic. So, I think it's part and parcel of how Tumblr is structured—that it creates that space for people to be upfront and open about identity in a way that, in other places, since you're visually leading with who you are, people feel less safe doing. And I think that's a good thing, because it offers people that opportunity to be upfront about their identities, but it gets complicated when people use that as the thread of conversation, like, "as a so-and-so and so-and-so…", and then people start to use that as a way of leading the conversation, where on other platforms you have some kind of visual identifier telling the world, the other people in that community, who you are. To me, it's really a lot about the structure of that that's created the way people interact and talk about social justice, identity, and all that. The idea of having political arguments online is certainly not anything new at all, but I think that the nature of the conversation and how it is led—a lot of it does have to do with how the conversations are threaded, how they're presented, how individuals are presented, and who's perceived to be talking to who at any one time. And Tumblr's setup is so specific and so different than any of the other platforms that, I think, it changes the nature of the conversation.

[53]   **Morimoto:** To move the identity question a bit further, what do you think of the characterization of fans on Tumblr?

[54]   **Brennan:** For the actual stats, teens and millennials ages 13 to 34 account for more than 50 percent of the Tumblr audience, and that's straight from the comms team. But in my personal experience, I see the same thing. Fans range from teens to their 30s, and I talk to a lot of these people when I do conferences or I speak at colleges, and the range of voices that talk to me about their experience is just phenomenal. I've had people tell me that they met their partner here, or something as simple as they found a new fandom. I had a teen come up to me and tell me how Tumblr saved his life. The wide range of people that are here—everyone has a different experience based on what you come here for.

[55]   **Minkel:** Do you have a breakdown? Thirteen to 34 is hilariously broad—we could be the parents of a 13-year-old (I'm 32, for context). The last time I saw a stats presentation from you guys, the actual teens—under 18—was a small percentage of the overall user base. Which is something I've clung to as people outside Tumblr, and on Tumblr too, go, "I know it's mostly teens here, but …" Every time we have a stupid ageism-in-fandom conversation, one person I know who's 40 will be like, "I know everyone here is 16, but…" when not everyone here is 16, even remotely. We need to reframe this; people in their 20s and 30s are probably the majority of users—I don't know if that's true.

[56]   **Chaney:** I think [the perception] is negative. People use Tumblr anytime there's something they don't understand about what's going on socially—let's just blame it on the millennials. It does skew younger, and that's fine.

Fandom reporting and talking about fandom really tends to go forward. It's very immediate, and it's always looking to the future. But the fact is, if we look back on fandom history, there's nothing to be surprised about what's happening now, because it's already happened. And people blame it on millennials because they're young; and because we don't have a lot of spaces for fandom history, millennials often don't know that this kind of ridiculousness has happened before elsewhere. I think if there was more understanding about, like, hey, this has a history of—pardon my French—there's a history of fuckery that has happened in fandom. It's nothing new—then maybe we wouldn't be so quick to deride millennials for things that they don't understand, because it's actually not very different from fandom fights that have happened before.

[57]   I know that there's data that says Tumblr skews young. I'm sure it does—I'm convinced it does. But in general I feel like fandom in general has traditionally been more closed off to different folks and, if anything, Tumblr has made it possible for people who are into something to have a space to talk about it, without feeling like they're getting into somebody else's space. I don't think it necessarily attracts a narrower definition of fans, I think it attracts a more diverse, a wider definition of what a fan is. And it skews younger because a lot of the older fandoms may not necessarily be on Tumblr, so it's almost like it's a different space. A Star Wars fan who's newer or younger may not go to TheForce.net, or whatever. But they will go to Tumblr and have those conversations. So, if for no other reason than that it's a space that people know about and are familiar with, it will attract a different kind of fan than, say, a legacy fan who already had a space.

[58]   **Minkel:** We're coming on the heels of what I thought was not a very fantastic thinkpiece in the *New Republic* about—did everyone see this? About adult women fetishizing teen girls? The way I came at that article—we don't need to go into the details of the article, but the kicker was the final paragraph, which said something like adult women and teenage girls don't belong in the same cultural space. And I was like, this is the weirdest thing I've ever read as someone coming from fandom, because I have been in the same space with adults since being a relatively young teen, and now I currently share a space with teens. It's hard to draw lines these days.

[59]   Also, to tie it into fandom and fandom on Tumblr, I think it kind of equates the idea of youthfulness as being—[the author] mentioned pre-sexual, the idea that if it has anything to do with sex or romance—sex, in particular—it's adult. The way I read stuff like this, it's as if being fannish as an adult is something that's inherently immature, which is obviously a stereotype that all fans, classic dude-fans included, fight. So, I think because Tumblr is a big open space where there's a lot of crossing streams, for all the problems that causes, it's also a space where people can just be really into stuff. I've seen people posting this: if I'm reblogging you or engaging with you and you're underage, and you feel uncomfortable because you know I'm an adult, tell me and I will unfollow you right now. Like, this is in your court, I need you to know that I respect you. But beyond that, it seems like it's just a way for everyone to have these big conversations and not be ashamed, and not bifurcate what is a proper adult interest and a proper youth interest.

[60]   **Romano:** I don't think they skew very young, but I think people are always surprised by how many older people are on Tumblr, because the stereotype is that it's so much younger, that it's full of teens and preteens. And we know that that's not true, but it does skew slightly younger. I think that the biggest takeaway is that people on Tumblr are all speaking a common language that's very millennial, even though we're not all millennials. I have a friend who I talk to every day, and I constantly have to remind her that we're the same age, because in her head she thinks I'm younger, for some reason. I think it's because I write about internet culture and I'm on top of all these trends, but you can say that about anybody on Tumblr.

[61]   **Minkel:** Last summer, Aja and I went to a convention. This convention, which I enjoyed generally, had a lot of older—they weren't even older, they were just from a different era of platform fandoms, so they were all on LiveJournal and they venerate LiveJournal, and the derision for Tumblr that I encountered in those five days was astounding to me. And it actually left me with a negative overall impression. Nothing against anyone there, this is what I read into this. It was like [those fans thought], I don't know these people, there's too many random people, I know everyone on LiveJournal—it's going back to the accessibility thing. Also, there seemed to be this undercurrent of, and everyone there [on Tumblr] wants to talk about social justice and maybe call me racist—I got a little of that vibe, too. And so, there are some fans from older eras who are not participating, so you do get those posts on Tumblr where they'll be like, I was mimeographing a zine back in whatever, you know. And you need to respect me. That's not a good conversation starter, right? I mean, Lori, you're older than me, right?

[62]   **Morimoto:** I'm 50, yeah.

[63]   **Minkel:** You're Gen X and I'm a millennial, but we engage fannishly in the same way. And I know fans who are boomers, who are my parents' age, who are also engaging in the way we are. You have to adjust to the platform, and I understand that it's hard for some people to get in, especially if you're a teen and all your friends are on Tumblr, it's going to seem more accessible. But I think it's a problem that there are people who are not willing to join this conversation. I think the lack of these voices is one of the reasons we get these weird divisions. And also why we don't seem to have any historical memory. Obviously, there are many reasons why we seem to have trouble with historical memory.

[64]   **Morimoto:** This is the kind of conversation that could go on for days, but as a final question, how do you think the ways conflict plays out on Tumblr is specific to the platform?

[65]   **Minkel:** I have endless feelings about this. It's impossible to have a normal conversation. Amanda, please put the replies back.

[66]   Building on what Keidra was saying earlier about anonymity, and not really knowing who you're talking to, I see that as a double-edged sword. I really value anonymity, as someone who's lurked for a long time. But, that being said, I think part of the problem, bringing the context collapse into it, is you have people coming into what you think is one big conversation, but in fact everyone is having 150,000 different conversations, and not all of them are in good faith. So, I might be coming into it saying, I want to talk about queerbaiting in X show, and someone might be saying that they want to have the same conversation, but actually they want to yell at me because I ship the guy on top that she ships on the bottom. And she's going to call me a pedophile somehow, because that's always where it winds up in these conversations. It's really, really hard, and it makes me feel really, really bad about conversations about representation and shipping. Because I don't feel like everyone's approaching it in good faith, and you have no way to know, because people zing out of nowhere.

[67]   There are so many people with such good intentions and so little knowledge, and I think this is true across social media. I see it a lot on Twitter, too. But it is embedded in the fabric of Tumblr discourse. People who want to fight racism, who want to critique media, who want to fight for queer representation, but who lack any—obviously, there are people who have been working on this stuff for decades. So, you see people throwing around terms, you see people with different amounts of knowledge, but you don't see a lot of listening. Obviously, these are problems that are endemic to a lot of platforms, but I really feel like there's something about Tumblr culture that needs to be critiqued, because I think it causes a lot of harm.

[68]   **Romano:** You basically can't have a conversation on Tumblr because of the way reblogs are and aren't threaded, and the culture of not tagging any type of critical reaction or response. And the way tags are used to hold discussions and so forth is so antithetical to the way tagging taxonomy is used on any other platform. People don't have conversations in the text; they have conversations in the tags. You can't use tagging on Tumblr to categorize anything. If you go to somebody's Tumblr, they're just as likely to have nothing tagged or just as likely to have a sea of tags of them talking about themselves, or them talking about whatever; like, tags as sentences, tags as whole conversations. And yet there are also the universal fandom tags that do come up, and it's sort of weird, because you have this sea of people just talking at each other in tags, making the tags that they use completely useless, while also being, don't tag your hate, while also checking the fandom tags. The category tags. I think it's really interesting that you have both of these.

[69]   **Chaney:** As Elizabeth talked about, when threads of conversations get misinterpreted because it's less about the original post—that is so Tumblr-specific. Like, people are reblogging something not for the original post, but for the comments to it, but then there's all this misinterpretation that happens. It happens so often, and that's something I've never seen anywhere else. And sometimes I even fall victim to it, like, wait a minute, and then I have to go back and read the rest of the thread. But the one thing that I've seen that's just so troubling to me, and I don't know if it's a Tumblr thing or K-pop Tumblr thing, but anti-fans get really specific about harassing an individual. And this is not about anything deep—this is not about politics or anything. This is just, I DON'T LIKE THIS GUY AND I DON'T LIKE THAT YOU LIKE HIM, AND I'M GOING TO MAKE YOUR LIFE MISERABLE, for months; or, YOU SHIP THESE TWO DUDES AND I DON'T LIKE IT BECAUSE I LIKE THESE TWO DUDES, SO NOW I'M JUST GOING TO HARASS YOU, for days, months, years. The worst of it seems to happen with the anonymous asks, because people just use them as an excuse to just be cruel. And

very specifically cruel; it's like a concerted effort among a bunch of people to say, let's make this person's life miserable, or these people miserable. Now you've got some of the anonymous asks ability on Twitter. I don't have one of those, but I guess I get why people do it. But the harassment I've only seen on Tumblr. It's like, it's never going to be led back to me, so I can do and say whatever, and be as abusive and cruel as ever, and know that it'll never get back to me. That is something I've only really seen on Tumblr. It just freaks me out.

[70]   **Morimoto:** I want to thank you all for your time and your thoughts—see you back on Tumblr!

Rogue archives: Digital cultural memory and media fandom, by Abigail De Kosnik

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[0.1]   Keywords—Digital history; Fan data; Fan fiction; Media studies; Media theory

[1]   *Rogue Archives* makes a strong, even unassailable case for the centrality of the fan fiction archive to online culture's history and present. In arguing that "memory has gone rogue" in the age of digital media, Abigail De Kosnik gives fan fiction and its communities starring roles in her ensemble cast of independent archives the internet has been home to since its inception. Fan fiction—presented as intimately interwoven with its evolving archives—emerges as distinctive but also representative of a rich and varied company of creative countercultural conservation efforts. From the omnivorous Project Gutenberg to the myriad smaller, more specialized archives devoted to marginalized interests, identities, and populations, these "rogue" archival projects have wrested control of public memory from the staid institutions of state power, transferring and dispersing it among diverse counterpublics. This is the book's broad and provocative claim, with its chapters devoted to delineating, from a truly virtuosic range of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, exactly when and how this memory migration happened and why it matters.

[2]   De Kosnik's study is productively if almost dizzyingly interdisciplinary in a way that is highly appropriate to the heterogeneous objects of fan fiction in particular and digital culture in general, but also in a way that can be— disciplines being not just different but at times even antagonistic—difficult to pull off. But *Rogue Archives* takes interdisciplinarity beyond academic buzzword or empty gesture to adopt and sustain a genuinely unique assemblage of divergent theoretical and methodological elements. For example, my own rhetorical gesture toward casting took its cue from the way in which De Kosnik encourages readers to think of archives themselves as well as the rogues that run them as actors in more than one sense. The book's theoretical framework and terminology draws liberally on its author's background in performance studies; she explains that her own work's "theatrical gaze" departs from the "cold" or deterministic gaze that has thus far guided archival studies and media archeology in order to "capture the participation of human as well as non-human actants" (53) in the important work of internet archiving. Archives and their human and technological constituents are also considered as actors in the sense of actor-network theory, the influential idea that in a sociotechnical system such as an internet archive, both humans and nonhumans have agency and can cause the system's other human and nonhuman constituents to act in specific ways. Along these lines, De Kosnik importantly highlights the role of the internet archives' "techno-volunteers" (an earlier generation called them "archive elves") and what she terms their "repertoire"—again drawing on theatrical vocabulary—of archival practices: the repeated, often unseen, marginalized, and background actions that make it possible "to 'save' the internet" (53). This repertoire "consists at least as much of managing human relations, including arbitrating majority/minority disagreements, as it does of providing technical services" (57). But design scripts and software versioning also play an important role. Building on the rapport her career establishes between the digital and theatrical, De Kosnik adopts design studies' appropriation of the sense of script as the directions technology gives to humans, but she folds it back into the theatrical term and the understanding that every actor's every performance of a script is different. This rapport

between theatrical and digital culture in turn feeds into Coppa's (2006) notion that fan fiction's many repetitions and iterations of source elements are akin to the limitless performance variations of theatrical production. In this way—and in so many other ways—*Rogue Archives* interweaves existing scholarship, theory, and lexicon to produce a new account of the digital archive, an account that is not just exemplified but generated by internet fan fiction, its communities, and its practices.

[3]   In addition to this exciting and unusual theoretical and methodological approach, *Rogue Archives* brings an invaluable wealth of historical detail and documentation about those parts of the internet archive that are most likely to get lost or be forgotten. An innovative structure of chapters and breaks adds to the buzzing sense of heterogeneity and interdisciplinarity that makes *Rogue Archives* such an engaging read and also invites readers to dip in and out according to their interests. That welcoming ethos also launches "Break 0," a glossary of key terms that introduces the volume's sometimes idiosyncratic terminology ("archontic production") and other specialized vocabulary and concepts—and fan and fan studies readers shouldn't assume this will be another list of terms like "slash" and "ship" and skip over it, because it also integrates discipline-specific definitions and assumptions into a somewhat skeletal précis of where the book as a whole will lead. These breaks are shorter and less dense than the chapters themselves and allow for introductions to the unfamiliar territories the book traverses—and I am certain that all readers of this book will be unfamiliar with some aspects of it, because it is by no means a frequently convened assembly of characters. A brief list must here suffice to give a sense of the range of material covered: chapters include the history of digital memory theory and practice since the 1950s; a rundown of the three main archival styles De Kosnik identifies and defines (universal, community, and alternative, which should be understood to mix and blend); the politics of queer and feminist archives; "Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice Fandom," which will be of urgent interest to many fandom and fan studies readers; the differences between print and early internet fan archives; new media performance; and the chapter "Archontic Production: Free Culture and Free Software as Versioning." The concluding chapter and appendix, "Fan Data: A Digital Humanities Approach to Internet Archives," may be the most eagerly devoured and widely embraced among fan studies scholars and fan commentators because of the paucity of reliable demographic and other statistical information about fan fiction, its archives, and its communities. The appendix also explicates the methodology of the oral history project that informs much of the volume and comments on the ethical considerations of studying fans and fan works.

[4]   *Rogue Archives* is a vital work for anyone interested in digital history and its cultural meaning, and it should attract readers in media studies, cultural theory, digital humanities, digital sociology, computer-human interaction, information and archive studies, and, of course, fan studies. In fact, to my mind, one of the book's most crucial interventions is the way in which it understands fan fiction as integral to the development of the digital archive, situating fan fiction and its practices on a continuum with other digital cultural activities and thus presenting fan studies as a peer discipline among others more institutionally established. This methodological and disciplinary turn befits an argument that sees fan fiction as taking a leading role in shifting the archive away from institutionalized power—but that said, it must be noted that the rogue archive at the theoretical and practical center of the volume—Archive of Our Own (AO3; https://archiveofourown.org/)—is itself increasingly institutionalized in fan fiction generally and even more so in its study. In this focus and in some of its attendant accounts of fan fiction culture, *Rogue Archives* covers ground that may seem well traveled to its fan studies readers, however unfamiliar to its other audiences, and it also replicates some of those earlier studies' limitations (my own work included). The study's overall celebratory account of the archive's history and transformative politics—and more broadly the optimism with which *Rogue Archives* regards internet fan culture and its role in fostering and conserving the creative history of marginalized groups such as sexual and gender minorities—will feel familiar to many of *TWC*'s readers and more in keeping with an earlier wave of fan studies than with the more critical moment both fans and fan studies scholars find themselves in today. Even the chapter on race, a topic fan studies (and much of fandom) has too long neglected, tends to emphasize fandom's potential to offer a corrective to the "symbolic annihilation" (168) communities of color face at the hands of mass media rather than focus on issues of erasure within fan works or on intrafandom racism. De Kosnik, who identifies herself almost from the outset as a woman of color from the Global South, hardly ignores conflicts such as RaceFail '09 or the long-standing critique that "fannish discourses and practices…reproduce many of mass media's biases and hierarchies" (182), but her emphasis here is on tensions between fan works and official culture rather than those between white fans and fans of color. The book's outlook is also positive about the potential for real-world social change as the result of fan action. As a part of this overall fan-positive narrative, *Rogue Archives* highlights accomplishments and successes, such as the important cultural work done by the dual-purposed creative and archival dark_agenda challenges, Chromatic Yuletide

of 2009 and 2010, or the Racebending Revenge Challenge. These efforts will seem like ancient history to many fans and even some fan scholars today, such being the nature of internet time (also a topic of interest here). De Kosnik's work here resembles the rogue archival work her book describes, but *Rogue Archives* preserves these unstable internet histories (always susceptible to decay and disappearance) in the institutionalized print archive of a leading scholarly press that will be disseminated to hundreds of university libraries.

[5]   As De Kosnik and anyone publishing on digital culture with a scholarly press well know, internet time and scholarly time are irrevocably at odds, which has the inevitable result of turning any study that aspires to be about contemporary culture into a work of history. For instance, part of *Rogue Archives'* methodological and scholarly interest lies in the ethnographic study its author has undertaken, interviewing fifty fan fiction community members who further identify themselves by age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, and location. These interviews were conducted in 2012—early on in the mass media mainstreaming of fan culture kick-started by the *Fifty Shades of Grey* phenomenon, and relatively early in the rise to fandom prominence of Tumblr, which, as De Kosnik and some of her informants acknowledge, has entered into an unanticipated if productive symbiosis with AO3. It also means that the data predate both Gamergate (2014) and the 2016 US presidential election, when the dark side of social media, with its abusive trolls and state-sponsored misinformation, became impossible to ignore. If the accounts of some interviewees seem to hearken back to a less highly visible and in some ways gentler experience of internet culture, any one of these factors might be enough to explain it. However, it does seem to produce something of a generation gap (in terms of fandom time, not biological age).

[6]   *Rogue Archive's* frame of reference with regard to contemporary fan fiction is limited in other ways as well. It absolutely traces important, neglected histories of a variety of archives, projects, communities, and styles, many of which are introduced in discussion well before AO3 makes its entrance. However, I could not help but notice that the very way the internet archive was being defined suited no fan fiction archive as perfectly as it did AO3. (Only archives that offer freely downloadable stories are included in the key definition, thus excluding FanFiction.net; archives must be noncommercial, thus also excluding Wattpad.) The centrality of AO3, its creators, and its enthusiasts is entirely justified by the book's emphasis: this fan-owned, fan-designed, and fan-operated open source archive is the perfect poster child for the exciting potential of the combined forces and histories De Kosnik traces. AO3 is more multiply functional as infrastructure than any other fan fiction archive. Its transparency and metadata make it attractive as a research resource; its nonprofit, profan status is attractive for classroom and scholarly use as well as for pleasure reading; it attracts many longer-term fans (from among whom fan studies scholars are almost universally drawn); the list goes on. A data-based comparison between FanFiction.net and AO3 details even more advantages AO3 seems to enjoy as an archive.

[7]   Despite the many good reasons for AO3's centrality to contemporary fan studies, however, this archive, its founders, its users, and the stories it houses are not coextensive with the broader, global fan fiction ecosystem. I think no one—certainly not De Kosnik—would claim that they are. Nevertheless, a great deal of recent fan studies work uses this attractive specific to stand in for the general, and this slippage is something to be wary of. *Rogue Archives* thus replicates a limitation evident in other scholarship on fan fiction, although in this specific case the limitation is not a bug but a central feature: the book attends to specific archives and their attributes. From a fan studies perspective, though, it is worth emphasizing that whatever its founding charter and ambitions, AO3 is not a universal platform. While this book (given academic time) would have been completed long before a recent round of fan criticism of AO3's abuse policies and responsiveness to fans of color, these critical voices do challenge AO3's claims and ambitions to universality as well as illustrate the extent to which it is recognized as an established and even a hegemonic force within fan fiction.

[8]   With all this in mind, *Rogue Archives* readers should be all the more aware that in (naturally) focusing on those active in founding and running AO3, the book amplifies some voices that have already played an outsize role in shaping the discourse around fan fiction and fan studies. These highly engaged fan-activists and fan-intellectuals are typical of those likely to donate their labor to archival projects such as AO3 as well as to other forms of fan advocacy and cultural conservation—among which scholarship can certainly be counted. Respondents are hardly limited to AO3 founders, workers, or prominent acafans, but these categories do provide a disproportionate percentage of the survey's fifty respondents. My concern is simply that such voices should not be taken as representative of fan fiction and its communities as a whole. Furthermore, the interviewees were all people either known to De Kosnik or suggested by people known to her, further limiting the sample's range, which makes sense given that fandom is identified in the

book as connecting like-minded people who hold interests and practices in common. The respondents also skew older than many participants in fandom, which grants them the experience and perspective so necessary to the book's documentary and historical project but also excludes much of the active population of fan writers and readers (if not of archive builders). I must be clear that in general *Rogue Archives* is explicit and diligent about acknowledging its methodological and historical limitations. It centers archives and the work and workers necessary to establish and maintain them and not the wide world of fan fiction writers and the even wider world of fan fiction readers. It is simply to be hoped that its data-hungry readers will also keep these avowed limitations in mind.

[9]   Many of my caveats about De Kosnik's respondents likely hold true for most people who would volunteer their time to answer surveys or participate in interviews, and hence these methodologies may always self-select for fans who view community activity, reciprocity, and building as more central to fan fiction than do lurking readers or writers who post fiction but who do not engage as much socially or who feel themselves to be marginalized or excluded. Because concrete demographic data on fans are much sought after but difficult to come by, any data will likely be cited by journalists, academics, and fan commentators, and my critical comments should be understood with that audience in mind. *Rogue Archives'* comparative data on fan archives is unique and invaluable, like so much of the book. Archives and their role in fan fiction systems have not been examined with anything even approaching this kind of rigor and detail, and De Kosnik sets an important direction in fan studies and the broader field of digital cultural studies. I eagerly awaited *Rogue Archives,* and it did not disappoint.

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Cult media, fandom, and textiles, by Brigid Cherry

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[1]   In *Cult Media, Fandom, and Textiles: Handicrafting as Fan Art,* Brigid Cherry provides a deep and detailed dive into a tradition of fan production that is well-known and often shared within fandom but very rarely discussed in fan studies: knitting and crochet. The study is based in communities hosted on the internet platform Ravelry, a little-known (to non-knitters) but massive site that grew from a database of yarns and patterns into a vibrant social ecology sometimes described as "Facebook for knitters," as in Kathleen Cubley's (2011) column introducing Ravelry on craft publisher Interweave's knitting blog. This case study of material fan production should ignite work that changes the terms of persistent debates around gendered fan traditions, the nature of remix production, and the mainstreaming of fandom.

[2]   Within fan studies, a binary division has developed that often categorizes fan production as either "textual/transformative/female" or "material/affirmational/male" (31). Cherry argues that this binary clearly needs to be revisited, given that textile handicraft is manifestly material and over 99 percent of the fannish knitters and crocheters of Ravelry identify themselves as female (64). This book mostly approaches this revision by showing that women also produce material and mimetic works, forms of fannish production usually associated with male fans. Mimetic fandom is a mode of production that seeks to replicate objects seen on screen with a high degree of accuracy, such as in prop replica and cosplay (Hills 2014; Scott 2015). Cherry adds to theories of material fan production by recognizing "emblematic," in which "the work uses or incorporates logos, character likenesses, iconic objects, or elements of the text," as well as "interpretive," in which "the work is inspired by the text, but does not overtly reproduce identifiable elements," approaches to material fan production as well (100).

[3]   Hills coined the term "mimetic fandom" in part as a way to move beyond the gendered divide in analyses of fan production. Cherry expands on this theoretical move by arguing that the sociality around, for example, researching a pattern design for a *Doctor Who* scarf is key to understanding mimetic fandom. This is a promising avenue for further discussion, particularly as mimetic and emblematic crafting comes under legal threat in cases like Fox and the BBC's actions against, respectively, Jayne hat knitters and a free pattern for knitting *Doctor Who* Adipose toys. This line of research also has to contend with continuing gendered discrepancies in how fans and industry relate, as Scott argues that despite male and female participation in mimetic fan practices, "gendered binaries around fannish professionalization not only persist" but reinforce a hierarchy wherein male fans are able to professionalize their labors and female fans are not (2015, 147).

[4]   One of the refreshing aspects of the study is its embrace of a fannish promiscuity that felt, at least to me, very true to life on Tumblr, at cons, and in reading fics that designate themselves "Avengers—All Media Types" rather than paying attention to strict canonical boundaries. By situating her analysis within the boundaries of Ravelry, Cherry is able to explore how individual fans embrace multiple texts at the same time in their handicrafting, rather than focusing on production related to one particular fandom. In vidding fandom, this has sometimes translated to a feeling that "vidding is my fandom" or, more broadly, a "fandom is my fandom" stance that emphasizes dedication to fan practices

as such. These knitters and crocheters are different. Many have only weak connections to organized fandom outside of Ravelry; their fannish promiscuity demonstrates the "hybridity and fluidity of fan interests and identities" rather than dedication to craft or the idea of fandom as such (86).

[5]   *Cult Media, Fandom, and Textiles* raises a third important question: What does fan studies do in a convergence culture where "we are all fans now" (Cherry 2016, 196; Booth 2017)? There are two strands to the idea that fandom, as a mode of living and of engaging with media, is more widespread in the contemporary moment. The first is the expansion of fannish practices to more casual audience members and more mainstream spaces, both outside the bounds of organized fannish communities. The second is a move by media industries to engage with fans and valorize certain modes of fan production, with widely varying degrees of success. The case study of fan handicrafting speaks to both of these threads in a novel way. Instead of starting with an organized, bounded fandom facing dispersion or corporate entanglement, Cherry's case study of Ravelry and fannish fiber arts has been a hybrid fannish/mundane and gift/monetized environment from its very beginning.

[6]   Knitting and crochet are hobbies with long histories that, while historically far less stigmatized than fandom, have often been disparaged in both mainstream culture and some feminist scholarship, given their associations with women, the elderly, and domesticity. A significant portion of the fans mentioned took up their hooks and needles out of fannish desire, learning to knit so they could make a *Harry Potter* scarf or teaching themselves a new technique so they could follow a difficult lace pattern replicating the *Legend of Zelda* triforce design. One might, then, have expected friction between mainstream and fannish knitters together on the same platform. But this has largely not been the case. A non-fannish crocheter, for example, might easily use a fan-created *My Little Pony* toy pattern to make a gift for their daughter or niece. Fannish yarn dyers' micro-businesses are similarly just as at home selling on Etsy and advertising on Ravelry forums as are non-fannish indie yarn dyers. Cherry argues convincingly that fan handicrafters on Ravelry demonstrate "one way in which fans are no longer marginal" (196).

[7]   Some argue that such mainstreaming makes organized fandom less powerful and more open to co-optation by outside companies or institutions. This argument raged with particular ferocity, for instance, in North American anime fandom and continues to do so in relation to fan fiction (Close 2017; De Kosnik 2009; Stanfill 2018). Cherry disagrees with the co-optation thesis, arguing that "for handicrafters generally handmade is always best"; thus, fan handicrafting need not fear co-optation (196). I do not necessarily disagree. But an opportunity for a more nuanced analysis is missed here. Fannish insularity and full-on corporate co-optation are no longer the only options in a time of fannish entrepreneurs, including the independent yarn dyers and podcasters Cherry discusses. Also largely left out of the analysis is the impact of the Ravelry platform itself, which is a very small, privately owned company sustained largely by carefully curated advertising. Fan activists have argued for the importance of fan-owned platforms, such as Archive of Our Own (De Kosnik 2016). Ravelry is not such a platform, but neither is it the distant corporate behemoth of YouTube or even LiveJournal. I look forward to more debate about the political economy of fan handicrafting and what it, given its long history of mixing monetized and gift economies, could suggest for fandom as a whole.

[8]   The structure of *Cult Media, Fandom, and Textiles* comprises an introduction, two chapters that provide context for the analysis to come, four chapters focused on analytical approaches to fan handicrafting, and a brief conclusion. The first background chapter situates the book in the context of both craft and textile studies and of studies of fan production. The second explains Cherry's methodology; provides basic information about fan handicrafters, such as demographics; and describes the Ravelry platform. Spelling out her methodology of participant-observation, focused follow-up interviews, and material-semiotic analysis of objects created is a good practice for the field, as is doing some brief quantitative work to introduce the space. Cherry gives the breakdown of her participants' genders, ages, and national origins. I wish that there were also mention of race and ethnicity in this demographic breakdown. Race has been too long left out of analyses of fan identities and traditions, resulting in blind spots around African American acafandom and the impoverishment of theories of pleasure and identity in fandom (Wanzo 2015; Klink and Minkel 2016; Pande and Nadkarni 2013).

[9]   The remaining chapters focus respectively on fan handicrafter identity, how fan handicraft can be understood as fan art, the relationship between fan handicraft and narrative, and a Bourdieu-inflected analysis of status and economy within fan handicrafting. Cherry brings some of her own experiences into the analysis via auto-ethnography at the start and conclusion of the text. In that spirit, I must confess that my reading was regularly interrupted by trips to Ravelry to look up the patterns, yarn dyers, projects, and groups she referenced! This is well worth doing, particularly for readers

who, like me, are also crafters. But it also stems from a frustration with the publishing process—even the digital version of the book has black and white instead of color photographs, making it difficult to follow some of the discussions about yarn color.

[10]   The book is very rich in examples of fan practices that will be new to non-handicrafters. Ravelry's Nerd Wars, for instance, is an event in which knitters and crocheters form teams themed around their fandom (such as the Brass Octopus team for steampunk) and participate in challenges wherein members craft things and make posts to the Nerd Wars forums. The crafters must explain how their project fits into the given challenge or ties in to a particular fandom—and projects are often creatively tied into multiple fandoms so as to count in different challenges or fulfill multi-fandom challenges. Cherry points out similarities between these short explanations and fan fiction writing practices of "crackfic, flashfic, and drabbles" (137). Such events are key in developing the kind of nomadic fan identities mentioned previously. They also provide a venue for fan handicrafters to write brief narratives, from simple explanations of how the knitter created a scarf while watching *True Blood* to more complex role-play that situates the crafter and their friends inside fannish story worlds, putting down zombies with long metal straight needles or crocheting in the Slytherin common room.

[11]   Cherry describes fan handicrafting as an ecology, in a similar way to Turk and Johnson's (2012) analysis of *Hawaii Five-O* vidding fandom. This allows her to highlight the sociality around handicrafting and the impact it has on knitting and crochet as fannish production. She builds on the rich sociality within Ravelry to respond to calls for more emphasis on social, rather than cultural, capital in fan studies. Cherry brings in examples of fannish podcasters and indie yarn dyeing businesses that address micro-celebrity, ultimately arguing that handicrafting BNFs are more friendly and mutually sociable with other fans and handicrafters than likely to stand on hierarchy (175).

[12]   The book sometimes reads defensively in its comparison of fan handicrafting with more oft-studied forms, such as fan fiction or vidding. Cherry writes, for example, that "fan handicrafting is not obviously a form of narrative fan production in the same way that fan fiction is… Nevertheless, as shown through the examples discussed in the previous chapters, the social aspects of handicrafting and the opportunities for sociability offered by the Ravelry fan groups open up spaces in which fans can play with the text" (136). This is a shame, as it misses an opportunity to adapt and nuance theories developed around fan fiction, vidding, and art according to the insights provided by handicrafting. When Cherry does revise or add to theories of fan production, such as with her identification of mimetic, emblematic, and interpretive fan works mentioned earlier, the new and different dimensions that crafting's materiality brings to fan production and affective responses are clear. This taxonomy of fan production in particular will be useful to future studies in the way it links memetic and emblematic works, usually seen as material-only approaches, and interpretive works, usually seen as a fiction or vidding-only approach.

[13]   *Cult Media, Fandom, and Textiles* will certainly be of interest to scholars of material fan cultures, from collecting to cosplay to model building. Its wealth of closely observed case studies is an excellent resource for researchers with a wide variety of concerns around production and identity. It provides a fertile jumping-off point for key questions in fan studies going forward, particularly around multifannish identity and the apparent mainstreaming of fannish practices.

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Transnational audiences: Media reception on a global scale, by Adrian Athique

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1. Introduction

[1.1]   While perceiving media audiences as transnational is in fashion, actually defining transnational audiences is a difficult task. There are many types of audiences whose media consumption practices might be labelled transnational; for example, a national audience that consumes foreign media content or diasporic audiences that routinely enjoy both mainstream media in their domicile and culture from their homeland. A transnational audience could also be a collection of nonrelated people across national and linguistic borders who consume the same media content, or members of an online fan community for a globally popular film star or pop idol. Another example might be YouTube and Facebook users who contribute self-made content to these global platforms, as well as their viewers.

[1.2]   All of these audiences, users, viewers, and fans, situated in dissimilar socioeconomic, political, geographical, and technological contexts, might be identified as transnational. Given this, how can we develop a coherent conceptual framework for understanding the factors that drive their transnational media consumption and the social meanings that such consumption generates? In searching for answers to this question, Adrian Athique takes the ongoing developments in media businesses and technologies as important contexts for our inquiry into transnational audiences. He argues that we need to examine multiple configurations of transnational audiences by contemplating their identity, location, mobility, belonging, standpoint, access to media and communication infrastructure, and relations to others at different scales from local to global.

2. Key themes

[2.1]   *Transnational Audiences: Media Reception on a Global Scale* consists of three parts. The first part, "Imagined worlds: National, international and transnational," looks into national, imperial, and networked audiences. Thoroughly canvassing key theories on cultural nationalism, media imperialism, decolonization, and globalization, Athique explains the overall shift in our understanding of media audiences from national to global, that is, from "technologically passive, nationally defined, but culturally homogeneous, mass audiences" to "technologically interactive, physically transnational, but culturally ethnic, niche audiences" (2016, 72). Seemingly, social imaginations of globally networked media audiences are broadened by transnational references and awareness. However, they are also in constant negotiation with commercial imperatives of global media industries and with gatekeeping by state authorities. At the

same time, the inequality between nation states in terms of cultural power and infrastructure means that the configurations of audience experiences of being transnational vary significantly from one nation to another.

[2.2]   The second portion of the book, "Media flows: Diasporas, crossovers, proximities," focuses on the locality, mobility, belonging, and motivation of transnational audiences, who are broadly seen as culturally ethnic communities. The first chapter in this section discusses ways by which migrant and diasporic audiences stay connected to their homeland through a mix of personal communications and media consumption. Discussing their transnational cultural experiences, Athique reframes their identity as "hybridities" (91)—rather than minorities—whose inhabiting and interpreting of multiple cultures can engender cultural fusion and dialogue. Transnational audiences can also be niche audiences who access media content from the periphery through specific institutions such as art house cinemas or festivals. Or they can be more mainstream, crossover audiences who adopt nonresident viewpoints, enjoy the exotic and the unfamiliar, aspire to accumulate cultural capital, and seek "parallel modernity" alternative to the Western modernity. The final theme of this section is media consumption within and across cultural civilizations. Athique argues that transnational media consumption is affected by "cultural proximity" and happens in the "zone of consumption" where media audiences are located locally, nationally, regionally, and transregionally.

[2.3]   Part three of *Transnational Audiences*, "New formations: Clouds, trends, fields," attends to interactive online audiences—fans and users who are dispersed, invisible, and culturally and ethnically heterogeneous. Their emergence is embedded in the development of media infrastructure, technology, and business models. In this section, Athique provides an important conceptual discussion regarding transnational audiences, their online sharing and participation, digitalization, big data, and datafication of audiences, which determine today's media ecology. He notes the double roles played by audiences as prosumers and commodities, calling for a more critical understanding of "user-led transnationalism" and pointing out that "the active audience concept was dovetailed neatly with the functional interactivity of digital media platforms" (145). The author argues that audience itself has become "an intrinsic package of commodities that make up the media economy" (64). Although part three does not discuss them in detail, its key points are salient for our understanding of the transnationalization of hate culture and racist politics online that heavily rely on (inter)active audiences. The author continues to theorize the meaning and value of the concept of audience in the context of the big-datafication of audiences—their past selections, current engagements, and future preferences— while also pinpointing serious gaps in currently available audience data. Finally, Athique synthesizes the key arguments of the book and proposes a "transnational spectrum" that captures "the subjective inter-relationship between the personal, communal, political and civilizational positionings of various viewers, users, readers or fans" (172–73). He closes by proposing that "transnational" be understood as "a full spectrum of communicative relationships, where exchanges are taking place simultaneously at a number of scales" (173).

3. Assessment

[3.1]   This book has many merits, and the biggest is that it guides us to freshly explore the terrain of media studies and review key theories regarding national culture, globalization, media flow, media reception, fandom, and big data from the dynamic perspectives of transnationalism. Athique's theoretical examination of the transnational is conscious of practical methodological issues. *Transnational Audiences* routinely questions how certain understandings of transnational audiences prefer and benefit from different research approaches and methods. It also draws our attention to the methodological difficulties facing researchers who investigate globally dispersed transnational audiences and the problems of exclusive access to big data by global media companies. Athique's reflections on the links between theory and methodology will be particularly beneficial for PhD students in this field. Additionally, the book introduces and explains a number of useful concepts: digital sovereignty, digital diasporas, polymedia, (non)resident mode, crossover audiences, parallel modernity, zone of consumption, relative proximity, proximate audiences, datafication, and so on. Many of these can be used to trigger more focused discussion and future research.

[3.2]   *Transnational Audiences* elaborates upon the complexity and multiplicity in transnational media reception by exploring different scales of the transnational, from individual, local, national, and regional to global. While seeing the interdependency between these concepts, readers might wonder about the analytical efficacy of the transnational if its articulation depends so heavily on them. The vagueness in the concluding chapter, especially its attempt to situate individual members of transnational audiences in the cultural field, can also be pointed out. It is not very clear how this field is constituted and where it is located—for example, at the local, national, or global level (or even across the

transnational spectrum). Athique's comments on the cultural field seem to be an unnecessary addition to the book, which is already quite packed with dense conceptual discussions. Meanwhile, the issue of agency and positionality of individual audience members looks important to explore from the perspective of their active involvement in creating and responding to multiple, competing voices and ideas that travel transnationally.

[3.3]   Overall, *Transnational Audiences* is lucidly written, coherently structured, and convincingly argued. It makes important contributions to the research of media audiences, cultural globalization, communications, and media industries. Each of its chapters will be able to serve as an excellent point of reference for further research and classroom discussion.

Manga in America: Transnational book publishing and the domestication of Japanese comics, by Casey Brienza

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Review of Casey Brienza, Manga in America: Transnational book publishing and the domestication of Japanese comics. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Hardback £70 (232p) (ISBN 978-1472595867); paperback £21.99 (232p) (ISBN 978-1472595874); e-book £23.74 (ISBN 978-1472595881).

[1]   Although its main topic is the American publishing industry, sociologist Casey Brienza's *Manga in America: Transnational Book Publishing and the Domestication of Japanese Comics* is essentially a book about American fans of Japanese popular culture—specifically, manga, the serialized graphic novels whose runaway success has transformed transnational mediascapes during the past two decades. Brienza is interested in the people who license and translate manga, many of whom were fans before they became professionals, and continue to bring their fannish passions and preferences to their careers.

[2]   At the end of the appendix, where she discusses her research methodology, Brienza explains that the goal of her project is to address a critical gap in the English-language scholarship on Japanese popular culture, which often focuses on "culture" while failing to address what is meant by "popular." Mass media texts are generated by media industries, after all, and they cannot be fully understood if they are separated from the patterns, practices, and peculiarities of these industries. Brienza closes *Manga in America* by writing that "researchers assume without trying it for themselves that making industry contacts as a researcher is too difficult," and her monograph serves as an exciting invitation to explore the information and new avenues of inquiry that can be revealed by speaking with the people behind the products (194).

[3]   Brienza's own fannish and professional background situates her in a unique insider position with specialized expertise. As she recounts in the appendix, Brienza worked as a journalist during the manga boom of the mid-2000s, publishing writing on manga and other works of Japanese entertainment media in venues such as *Anime Insider* and *Otaku USA* magazines and the *Anime News Network* website. Her work on what she calls "the periphery of the manga industry" has provided her with a wealth of key insights and contacts; but when she performed the bulk of her fieldwork for this project in 2010 and 2011, the American publishing industry was reeling from the blow of the global recession of 2008 (182). This inspired a certain critical cast in the attitudes of many of the industry professionals whom Brienza interviewed, while she herself was able to create an appropriate critical distance through the methodology of her PhD research, which forms the basis of this monograph.

[4]   The introduction positions the book within the specific cultural moment of its publication in 2016. Brienza clarifies what she means by "manga" not simply in terms of artistic styles and demographic marketing categories (in which the presumed age and gender of the reader matter more than genre), but also in terms of how manga has served as a central category within the construction of the concept of "Cool Japan" within both the English-language and the Japanese-language journalistic press. Brienza also references political and academic attempts to use Japanese popular

culture to fashion a national brand of "coolness," the purpose of which is ostensibly to profit from the association with international interest in media properties such as manga, anime, and video games. The second chapter, "Theorizing Domestication: Manga and the Transnational Production of Culture," builds on the introduction as it explains the theoretical foundation of the author's discussion of cultural production and flow across national borders. Brienza opens this chapter by imagining a composite image of the sort of person who works in the business of manga publishing in the United States, "a young, casually dressed Caucasian woman hard at work in her home office," and then she offers her own term for what this woman is doing, which is not exactly "translation" or "localization," but rather, "domestication" (15). Brienza draws on scholarship relating to international book publishing to argue that there is a separate space that exists between national fields of production, and it is in this transitional space of transnational cultural flow that the domestication of culturally specific content occurs. Brienza's point is that the social practice of domestication is not unilateral; instead, it affects both the origin and the target of the flow even as the processes that enable and facilitate this flow—such as licensing, editing, translation, lettering, graphic design, marketing, and so on— collectively generate a subculture within the larger practices of the domestic and international publishing industries.

[5]   Chapter 3, "Book Trade: The History and Structure of American Manga Publishing," contributes additional background information in the form of concrete examples and data sets. Brienza first contrasts the manga industry in Japan with the practices of American book publishers, pointing out that one of the most significant differences between the two originated in the Japanese emphasis on serialization of content through printed periodicals and the concomitantly brief scope of advance scheduling for the publication of individual manga volumes. These differences meant that it was difficult to fit manga into the pre-existing practices of most American publishers, which resulted in an opportunity for independent publishers to create their own niche in the American book market. Brienza then demonstrates how this market was greatly expanded through the partnership of manga specialty publishers such as Tokyopop with chain bookstores such as Waldenbooks (a former staple of American shopping malls) and "big box" stores such as Borders (a major American bookstore franchise that declared bankruptcy in 2011). This chapter contains multiple tables and graphs tracking sales, publishers, and top titles in the decade between 2002 and 2012 that saw the sudden rise in the popularity of manga as a publishing category. Brienza thereby demonstrates how, "within a few short years, manga publishing went from being a nonentity bumbling gamely along at the margins of the American cultural field to the overnight success story that everyone working anywhere in comics or books was talking about" (67).

[6]   In chapter 4, "A License to Produce: Founding Companies, Negotiating Rights," Brienza elucidates the details of how this shift in the American publishing industry occurred. This chapter is where Brienza begins her discussion of her fieldwork in earnest, as it contains a summary of her conversations with industry professionals about the process of selecting and securing titles to license for translation and publication in the United States. Based on these conversations, Brienza is able to create a typology of the people who make these decisions at the executive levels of American manga publishing companies. There is "the evangelist," who was emotionally affected by manga in his youth and thus "introduces a new product to the market not because he thinks it has an audience but because he believes it *should* have an audience" (77). There is "the opportunist," who "is motivated solely by the notion that there is value to be extracted from publishing manga in America" and simply wants to make as much money as possible (80). Then there is "the specialist" in manga publishing, who resents the standard industry practices and wants to create a better model for licensing and translating manga in the United States. While the evangelists and opportunists did not survive the market crash of 2008 and 2009, many specialists did, a victory of sorts that Brienza attributes to the ability of these executives to work well with Japanese publishers, as well as the close attention they were able to devote to the consumer market.

[7]   In the second half of chapter 4, Brienza outlines the concrete details of the process of how manga licensing works. This section is of special interest to fan studies scholars, as it illustrates a specific instance where fan preferences can and have shaped the production of mass-market content. Although many early manga publishers in America chose manga titles to license based on what the executives enjoyed, and while other publishers are pushed by their parent or partner companies in Japan to release certain titles (such as those associated with franchises with anime or video game tie-ins, for example), many companies now conduct targeted market research. This often takes the form of outreach and the solicitation of opinions on social media platforms, but also, "because many manga industry people cannot read Japanese, 'research' in many cases is actually a euphemism for reading illegal scanlations, fan translations of manga published online" (89). Because many Japanese publishers from whom licenses are procured are both physically and

financially removed from the American market, Brienza argues that it is American manga publishers who are more invested in the success of their titles. The often tumultuous relationship between American and Japanese companies means that American manga publishers are often relatively dependent on the interest and goodwill of manga fans, while continuing to work in the industry is itself an extension of fandom for many employees.

[8]   Brienza delves deeper into the close relationship between fannish interest and professional media production in chapter 5, "Working from Home: Translators, Editors, Letterers, and Other Invisibles." Translators especially tend to be young women, often with advanced academic degrees, who love manga so much that they are willing to accept the poor working conditions that accompany their labor. Many of these translators are freelance, so they have no office space and are not offered any sort of benefits from their employers. Given the relatively low wages they receive, which Brienza targets at about $1.50 per page in 2012 for an experienced translator, many of these young women also exist in a constant state of economic precariousness. Furthermore, the cultural contributions made by these translators, which involve not only the output of English-language material but also the selection of what titles to be translated, are often erased from conversations regarding the transnational flows upon which the Japanese government has relied in its aggressive construction of "Cool Japan."

[9]   Accordingly, the question Brienza tackles in this chapter is whether the labor of young female manga fans is empowering its connection to the realization of artistic goals and self-expression or overtly exploited by both a market that capitalizes on emotional investment and by various government agencies tasked with promoting Japan's soft power encouraging tourism. In the process of answering this question, the chapter delineates the details of what the domestication of a volume of manga entails, from the first rough translation to the final adjustments to the cover image. Although certain steps in this procedure may be subject to "direct, day-to-day interference" from Japanese licensors, many of the young women working with manga find ways to exert their control over the text (126). Brienza offers a nuanced yet effective argument that it is in fact the very marginality of these workers that enables the aggressive creative decisions necessary for domestication. As she points out, "their subordination to capital, and the lack of self-determination they have over the day-to-day conditions of their own lives, only magnifies their yearning to have control over *something*" (135). Because the investment these translators and other localization professionals feel regarding their work stems from their fannish attachment instead of any financial incentive, they are less concerned with profitability than they are with altering the source texts to appeal to communities of their fellow fans.

[10]   Brienza conducted the interviews that comprise the bulk of her fieldwork in the early 2010s; since then, the publishing industry has transformed drastically. Chapter 6, "Off the Page: New Manga Publishing Models for a Digital Future," maps out the landscape of book publishing in the United States after the collapse of the bookstore chain Borders in 2011. For manga publishers, this meant that it has become more important than ever to appeal to the specific tastes of fans, as general readers can no longer be counted on to stumble across manga in a physical retail space. The problem with a digital-only market, however, is that licensed e-books must compete with unlicensed scanlations, which often enjoy the benefits of faster serialized updates along with higher search engine visibility. Brienza lists several of the methods manga publishers of various sizes tested to promote their books, from specialized apps to fan-funded publishing (via crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter). Brienza concludes that the main problem these publishers face is that if they focus only on satisfying pre-existing fans, it becomes difficult for them to attract new audiences and renew their readership. The danger of an industry run strictly by and for fans is that it has not been proven to be financially viable on a large scale. Meanwhile, there have been several experiments in adapting popular parent company–owned properties (such as Stephenie Meyer's young adult romance Twilight series, owned by manga publisher Yen Press's parent company Hachette) into manga that can be sold in large retail chains like Walmart —but is this still "manga," and is it even recognized as such by readers unfamiliar with Japanese popular culture?

[11]   What Brienza describes in *Manga in America* is a sizeable corner of the American publishing industry run by fans and, if not necessarily for the benefit of fans, then at least according to the demonstrated tastes of fans. This study is of interest not only to scholars and other cultural critics who are interested in how fandom communities have increasingly begun to shape mainstream media, but also to manga fans themselves, who will find a wealth of information about the behind-the-scenes details of an industry that has long been a hot topic in blog posts, convention panels, and online forums. For an avid manga reader such as myself, the media history that Brienza has constructed is fascinating in its reflection and analysis of what may be personally lived experiences. Even for people who only have a passing interest in manga and graphic novels, however, Brienza's account paints a vibrant picture of the seismic shifts in the structure of the American publishing industry and its transnational components during the past two decades.

[12]   With the exception of chapter 2, "Theorizing Domestication," in which Brienza lays the academic foundation of her work and establishes the ways in which her study builds on this foundation, Brienza's writing is not only accessible but also compelling, and even at times quite entertaining. The author's background as a journalist shines through her clear and lucid prose, which is driven by a powerful intellect that is not afraid to ask critical questions and state bold opinions. *Manga in America* is a valuable scholarly resource for specialists in media studies, fan studies, and Japan studies, and almost every chapter may serve as a useful point of discussion for an undergraduate-level class. I also recommend *Manga in America* to my fellow manga fans, as the history of the American manga publishing industry is a welcome and engaging history of our own fandom cultures.