FAN, INC.:

INTERACTIVITY, INDUSTRY, AND AUDIENCES

IN CONTEMPORARY POPULAR CULTURE

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Interactivity has become a hyped notion in industry and academic rhetoric, often as an idealized concept in which new pathways of feedback and non-professional production have the potential to reconfigure the relationship between industry and audience. While the implications of interactivity are widely discussed, its nuances are less so; this project, therefore, articulates a more complex perspective of how interactivity structures the experience of popular media. Interactivity frames how industry and audience construct the other's identity and their own, guides limitations and affordances for users, and provides models, restrictions, and incentives that function as protocols of behavior. In other words, interactivity is a means by which participants move beyond individual practices of production and consumption to become constituents in larger systems of meaning.

This dissertation considers four sites at which industry interests and audience goals come into contact, which provide case studies of different modes of interactivity. Television Without Pity, a user-generated online viewing community turned corporate venture, illustrates interactivity as appropriation. Co-option is the dominant narrative of interactivity, presuming industry takeover of authentic audience engagement, and it is in contrast to this somewhat reductive narrative that other modes are situated. Social TV check-in apps represent interactivity as motivator, rewards and incentives designed to promote particular user viewing behaviors; San Diego Comic-Con is interactivity as incorporation, as an increasingly broad range of attendees are interpellated into an identity of "fan"; and Pottermore, an online Harry Potter experience, introduces interactivity as constraint, meant to model appropriate levels of participation and contain transgressive fan behavior.

Through these cases, this project considers how sociality, community, work, and engagement operate through interactivity. Interactivity is not all "good," effective, or sustainable, and so these cases offer a lens through which social rewards, affective benefits, and meaning have the potential to be align with economic goals, agency, and power structures – or to fall all together out of balance. This project considers the self-valuations made by participants of interactivity, and those left out of its structures; further, it critically analyzes how those systems of value engage with one another in order to construct spaces of significance.

Dedication

This is for all the geeks who do amazing things on the internet.

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Introduction
Manifest interactivity

In May 2013, Amazon announced the launch of Kindle Worlds, a commercial platform for publishing and selling fan fiction. Writing, editing, and sharing fan fiction has long been an affective pursuit for fans (Derecho, 2006; Jones, 2014), but Amazon set itself up as the intermediary in a newly commercial approach: Amazon secured copyright licenses from various corporate entertainment properties, including comic books and book and television series; Amazon created an offshoot of their digital self-publishing platform so that fan authors could publish and sell original fan fiction works; and Amazon arranged a profit-sharing model in which the revenues from the sale of these stories would be split among the copyright holder, the author, and Amazon itself.

Though it exists in a space of perhaps dubious legality (Tushnet, 2007), writing and circulating fan fiction is a longstanding and productive user venture; these practices already sit at the center of closely-bonded fan communities and act as a manifestation of consumer engagement with media texts. Kindle Worlds, however, offers a chance for those pre-existing fan practices to be corporate-sanctioned – and monetized. Amazon promises a benefit to writers, who can "earn royalties" by writing about established characters for whom "Amazon Publishing has already secured the necessary licenses" (Amazon, 2013). For the licensors of media properties, Amazon has even more to offer; Kindle Worlds is "an entirely new way to monetize" an entertainment franchise; it also allows those property owners to "more deeply engage with existing fans" while, at the same time, establishing content guidelines that offer "flexibility and openness" for writers while still having the ability to place restrictions on the kinds of stories, characters, and

perspectives not "reasonable" for the franchise (Amazon, 2013). In other words, Amazon's Kindle Worlds is an attempt to re-position a fan practice already taking place as an unregulated, entertaining pastime, in order to increase both control over and value generated from the activity. The Kindle Worlds experiment has faced some significant roadblocks, from lack of interested licensors to prospective fan authors unhappy with the types of storylines deemed unreasonable by the platform's author guidelines. Nevertheless, it continues as an attempt to offer benefits to all sides: money, yes, but also engagement and involvement. Kindle Worlds is one point at which the interests of industrial license holders and those of consumer/authors must navigate one another in the name of interactivity.

In contemporary media studies, it is common practice to take snapshots such as this one, and myriad others that are similar, as indicative of where we are now and where we are headed. Henry Jenkins (2006) speaks of convergence: "Convergence is taking place within the same appliances, within the same franchise, within the same company, within the brain of the consumer, and within the same fandom. Convergence involves both a change in the way media is produced and a change in the way media is consumed" (p. 16). Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson (2013) refer to participatory knowledge cultures, "in which people work together to collectively classify, organize and build information " (p. 3), and Nico Carpentier (2011) distinguishes between participation "through" the media and participation "in" the media. The former describes "the opportunities for mediated participation in public debate," whereas the latter "deals with the participation of non-professionals in the production of media output…and in media decision-making" (p. 520). Jenkins considers participation as well:

> The term *participation* has emerged as a governing concept, albeit one surrounded by conflicting expectations. Corporations imagine participation as something they can start and stop, channel and reroute, commodify and market…Consumers, on the other side, are asserting a right to participate in the culture, on their own terms, when and where they wish. (p. 175, emphasis in the original).

Rob Cover (2006) addresses these issues in terms of interactivity: "Digital interactivity is the culmination of a much older and ongoing contestation over control of a text *as if* a text were a finished, unified and coherent whole at the time at which it has been disseminated" (p. 145, emphasis in the original). And Su Holmes (2009) argues, "The idea of an intervention *in* a text, as well as some form of reciprocal communication or feedback – 'the ability for message receivers to respond to message senders' – has nevertheless emerged as a key point of discussion in debates about interactivity" (p. 4, emphasis in the original).

These considerations of contemporary media practice, and the everyday anecdotes that illustrate them, provide the features that define characteristics of what is alternately called media convergence, participation, or interactivity. These include changes in consumer practices, most notably feedback, self-representation, and non-professional production; changes in industrial ownership and production models; and changes in how (and when) textual meaning is constructed. Underlying these, whether implicitly or explicitly mentioned, is that principles of interactivity have the potential to fundamentally alter the relationship between media industries and media audiences, if they have not done so already. Interactivity involves consumers taking up new forms of engagement, making themselves heard in new ways, and accessing – and potentially shaping – media narratives via new technologies, and these practices have therefore been hyped, as Jenkins does above, as empowering moments in which consumers can assert their sense of control and authority.

Power relationships, however, are never that straightforward, and the relationship between industrial forces and audience interest is inherently a power dynamic. Jonathan Sterne (2012) questions the limits of interactivity, noting, "When people's participation becomes someone else's business – and here I mean business in the market-share and moneymaking sense of the term – the social goods that are supposed to come with it can be compromised" (n.p.). This is the ongoing challenge of interactivity: It involves the engagement of varying – perhaps even oppositional – interests, and in order to make for sustainable, productive, and meaningful interactions, it must align those "moneymaking" functions with the social rewards offered to participants. Doing so at times means co-option, in which the affective investment of users is appropriated by industry forces, in the hopes of channeling positive engagement into positive economic gains. Other times, however, navigating interactivity is an effort to construct audiences and structure behaviors so as to engender a mutually beneficial relationship.

These practices are not taken up solely within media contexts, in regards to corporate media industries and popular culture consumers. Democratic political systems are based on participatory cultures, in which investment is meant to translate to a government in which the practices of power and the interests of its constituents are in alignment. Audiences – and in particular audiences that constitute markets that vote, buy, organize, donate, protest – are constructed by cultural producers and economic actors in a variety of contexts. Business enterprises that fold employees' personal networks into marketing systems, social causes that rely on "clicktivism" and viral awareness strategies, health campaigns and social policy procedures that solicit individual involvement that

extends beyond compliance are all making use of principles of interactivity that extend beyond the context of media studies.

What is at stake with this project, therefore, is a critical focus on how interactivity manifests in contemporary cultural practice. Interactivity structures how industries and audiences construct the identity of one another and themselves, guides the limitations and affordances for how users situate one another and their own roles, and provides models, restrictions, and incentives that function as protocols of behavior. As a result, this project considers how sociality, community, work, power, and media operate through interactivity. In short, interactivity is a lens through which popular media – and, more broadly, other contexts – are experienced and given meaning.

Project design and scope

This project is structured to address the following question: How does interactivity manifest in contemporary everyday practice at sites of contact between media industries and media audiences? This constitutes the motivating question of the research. To address the issues that arise with greater specificity, this project is organized around questions meant to illustrate the complexity and significance of interactivity in contemporary culture:

How do site structures, affordances, and limitations define and shape interactive practice – and how are these parameters defined by interactivity?

How do participants understand, engage in, and perpetuate the protocols of interactivity at a given site?

What is the role of technology? How does user participation with new media translate to offline settings, and vice versa?

What constitutes success and viability in contemporary interactive practice?

This dissertation addresses these questions through site-specific analysis of points at which consumers and producers meet. The project is organized into four case studies of contemporary media sites, three of which are technologically mediated points that take place on the internet and via smartphone and tablet-based apps, and one of which involves an offline coming together of individuals in a fixed time and place.

In these chapters, I argue that interactivity frames the relationship between media industries and audiences. In order to complicate how we approach the notion of interactivity, I investigate four modes of interactivity, corresponding to each of the case study chapters: Interactivity as appropriation, interactivity as motivator, interactivity as incorporation, and interactivity as containment. Through these individual instances, I argue that interactivity marks the need to create a frame of alignment in which the interests of industry participants and those of consumer contributors complement one another. Though the relationships may retain unequal balances of power, they can nevertheless negotiate successful, sustainable boundaries in which economic value and legal regulation are aligned with affective rewards, perceived meaning, and social capital.

The case studies offer a critical perspective on interactivity as a structuring principle of media experience. More than an idealized opportunity for agency, a site of resistance, or an inevitable corporate co-option, interactivity functions as all of these simultaneously. Interactivity is the promise of investment that can have unintended consequences and unexpected results for those involved. It is enacted to model appropriate protocols of behavior for participants; its manifestations reveal the technological affordances, restrictions, rewards, and incentives that shape these behaviors; and efforts at interactivity reveal the ways in which the varying interests of

industry and audience, economic and social, might (or might not) operate in alignment with one another.

In the first chapter, "Navigating audience/industry constructs," I outline existing research into notions of media audiences and industries. This chapter begins with the principle that "the audience" is a construct that is both manufactured and reflective of those interests who are building it, and proceeds to trace a thread of audience constructs from passive to active to interactive. This progression is depicted in media studies scholarship as an evolution that renders interactive audiences more engaged, invested, and productive than in previous relationships with the industry. It also organizes industry/audience relations into a binary, one in which participation functions as an opportunity, but one that needs to be managed in the interest of maintaining industry dominance. The chapter sets the stage for an alternative approach, considering both consumers and industries as disaggregated collectives, ones that bring heterogeneous perspectives and varying interests into play when navigating sites at which they come into contact.

"Appropriation Without Pity?: Theory and practice of interactivity-as-takeover" presents a historical case study of an early site of online participation, that of Television Without Pity. The site's genesis as a user-created community, to its purchase and corporatization by NBC Universal, to its ultimate demise as an unproductive element of contemporary interactive practice illustrate the dominant narrative of interactivity. This case study presents the presumptive relationship between consumers and industry forces, one in which the authentic, affective labor of users is appropriated by corporate interests and participation is co-opted, regulated, and exploited. As this chapter indicates, this is

the history of Television Without Pity, but this project resists the notion that this mode of interactivity is the only one.

Subsequent chapters present case studies of contemporary media practice in which audiences and industries come into contact, and considers how interactivity manifests in each. In "Where are you on television? Social TV and viewers that count (and are counted)," I consider Social TV, third-party apps in which users check in to television shows they are watching and are rewarded with points and badges, as interactivity that motivates users while addressing the challenges of television/new media relationships. Social TV deploys interactivity as a means of incentivizing user behaviors that are valuable, easily monitored, and do not challenge the primacy of television content. These apps are part of an ongoing series of attempts to gamify the practice of television watching, one that has yet to truly catch on in popularity; the effect is that the qualitative co-creation of meaning that occurred on sites such as Television Without Pity is flattened to empirical modes of investment, while edging out of participation viewers who do not watch TV in ways that matter.

Taking the case studies offline, "Fannification: The practices of incorporation at Comic-Con" takes as its subject San Diego Comic-Con and its in-person interactivity. Though Comic-Con began several decades ago as a fan-generated convention and has grown in recent years to a massive media event, thanks in part to increased involvement by corporate entertainment industry interests, its practices of interactivity are not represented as co-option. Instead, Comic-Con illustrates interactivity as a means of incorporation, one in which the community and industry access interests of attendees are aligned with the promotional function of the event for industry participants. In order for

the event to continue to hold value, it must address the social and economic interest of those in attendance, and it is therefore presented at a point of transition of how to simultaneously reinforce industry/fan structures, validate fan consumption, and invite an increasingly broad mode of media practice into the fan identity.

Finally, the most recent case of interactivity is explored in "No creativity beyond this point: Pottermore and the boundaries of interactivity." Pottermore, an industry-created interactive online Harry Potter experience, offers longtime fans and first-time readers the opportunity to play along with "moments" in the Harry Potter saga. Pottermore is a case study of interactivity as a means of containment: Industry interests and fan devotion can (and have) clashed in both public relations entanglements and legal battles, as participants attempt to navigate the boundaries between investment and ownership. To address the messiness of past contentious relationships, Pottermore offers a means of participation that reins in transgressive fan behavior that has the potential to be dangerous to existing proprietary structures and intellectual property laws. Instead, the site models appropriate interactive behaviors and obviates the need for fan creativity in order to promote participation that remains within carefully-constructed borders.

These case studies are not wholly unique; indeed part of their appeal is that they offer perspectives on media practice, on the values on display and on the goals at stake, that are emblematic of how industries and audiences negotiate their relationship at this moment in time. Though these case studies are far from exhaustive, taken together, they do cover audience/industry interaction in ways that account for a great deal of variance. They include sites that are user generated, built by third parties, created as joint ventures, and industry constructed. The sites exist both online and off; whether legitimately or not,

interactivity is often made synonymous with new media participation, but at San Diego Comic-Con, transmedia elements are ancillary support for interaction, and on websites like Television Without Pity and Pottermore and in Social TV apps, online engagement bleeds over into offline practices of media consumption. These examples, therefore, offer analysis of interactivity that is not limited to any one platform. My particular case studies also offer a perspective on interactivity that is grounded in a specific historical moment, while still being situated within the ongoing development of interactive practice. We have here illustrations of interactivity that include a full rise-and-fall narrative, a burgeoning but ultimately stunted third-party venture, a massive event at a crossroads of identity and practice, and a new experiment meant to sustain engagement. The similarities, parallels, and lessons learned from one site of interactivity to the next, combined with the inherent difference in creation, development, platform, and history, mean that this project is able to create a comprehensive (though not exhaustive), multi-perspectival approach to interactivity in contemporary media practice.

In order to maintain the difference in perspective and approach to interactivity inherent in these case studies, I similarly adapted my research methods in accordance to the demands of the sites themselves. Taken as a whole, this project employs a variety of qualitative and interpretive research techniques in order to consider the interests, practices, participant perspectives, and technological parameters at each site of interactivity. Though I employ a number of ethnographic methods, this project is not designed to itself be an ethnography; rather than a focus on the meaning practices have for those within a culture, I structure this dissertation around a different set of questions,

outlined above, meant to investigate how institutionalized behaviors, site boundaries, and participant interests complicate existing definitions of interactivity.

Genette Verstraete (2011) argues that, within cultural studies, "we need to introduce more sophisticated conceptual paradigms that allow for differentiation of users, practices and actors involved" in convergence (p. 539). This project answers this call: The dissertation is designed to complicate the notion of interactivity by parsing the actors, and their interests, involved at each site, and considering how they negotiate the relationships. Research on audience activity and participation can effectively generalize the industry into a cohesive entity with singular aims, and industrial research can have the same tendency to homogenize the audience into a single, pre-existing unit. I aim to counteract these tendencies with analysis that balances close-in consumer research, that addresses the experiences and perceptions of individual viewers and participants, with a long-range perspective that considers audiences as part of broader cultural systems; simultaneously, I take the same balance between micro and macro analyses of industrial aims.

I approached each site as a participant observer: I read Television Without Pity, checked in with Social TV apps, attended Comic-Con, and navigated Pottermore. My experience and observation of the user interface, user behaviors, limitations, affordances, and incentives at each site was framed against other narratives. Popular press coverage of Comic-Con; industrial coverage of Social TV and Pottermore, from those in the television, tech, and book trades; and critical reflection of Television Without Pity, particularly in the wake of its announced closure, provides an additional locus of perspective on each case study. This third-party coverage both illustrates how each site is

explained or promoted to outsiders and indicates how interactivity itself is framed in popular conversation. Dedicated industry rhetoric plays a role here as well, with official statements, press releases, insider interviews, and promotional materials by producers, marketers, and creators giving insight into the explicit interests for the industry in these ventures. These perspectives come from directly published texts, such as Comic-Con's commemorative fortieth anniversary book, and from interviews by executives, organizers, and creators in trade and popular press. This is balanced by the input and experience of audience participants. At Comic-Con, I conducted semi-structured interviews with attendees, volunteers, organizers, panelists, and retailers at the event, and followed blogs, Twitter feeds, and fan pages for online response. For the online case studies, I read comments and responses offered on the sites themselves – in TWoP's forums, Social TV apps' commenting functions, in Pottermore's comment threads. For all of these, I also looked to alternative venues in order to consider those left behind by interactivity: I checked reviews – both positive and negative – for Social TV apps on iTunes and in the Android marketplace; I read critiques of Pottermore on fansites, cheat blogs, and watched them on YouTube; I talked with non- and former attendees in the area surrounding Comic-Con; and I considered reflections on Television Without Pity's decline from former users on alternative message boards and blogs. My research questions and methods are designed to uncover the specific behaviors, assumptions, and goals at each specific site, so that I might then consider how those particular activities "frame, or suggest a connection with, wider media-related values" (Couldry, 2003, p. 29). Together, these methods allow me to formulate an in-depth look at how interactivity manifests and is practiced at these sites in contemporary media.

Implications

This project argues that interactivity in contemporary practice is a complicated venture, one through which economic interests are performed, audiences are constructed, and broader issues of community, work, and engagement are moderated. There is a dominant narrative of interactivity, one in which participation is inherent in new media use, audience engagement is synonymous with agency and authenticity, and industry involvement marks a moment of wielding power and selling out. This project explores this narrative, and begins from a perspective that while there may not be inaccurate to categorize interactivity according to these terms, to do so does not tell the full story. How are participants in contemporary media incentivized to engage, incorporated into a consumer identity, and restricted from transgressive behaviors? These are also the relationships structured by interactivity.

Interactivity has become something of a buzzword, in industry rhetoric, academic analysis, and audience construction; this project is situated within that trend, offering a more complex perspective on how interactivity operates in contemporary culture. But interactivity is also situated within systems of practice that themselves have meaning in contemporary culture. Not all interactivity is "good," effective, or sustainable. The need for alignment in the interests involved mean that this approach is one that considers a more complicated idea of the factors necessary for engagement between industry forces and audience contribution that those involved view as beneficial or productive.

I deliberately resist, therefore, the temptation to remove audience practices from the economic systems in which they are always-already implicated. Rather than

identifying interactivity as a site of struggle for dominance that is redefining media structure, the following case studies consider how the practices of its players work within existing systems. This is also not a project that focuses on changes in technology, or aims to forge a narrative that marks an evolution in industry or audience. And finally, this is not a project grounded in resistance, activism, or the destabilization of power structures. Matt Hills (2002) articulates the potential for false absolutism with this approach:

> The system of cultural value occupied by fans and academics are not part of a single "system": fans seek to value their own activities, as do academics, and aspects of the self-valuations of each community will tend to be related to the wider cultural circulation of meaning. (p. 43)

As Hills points out, value, order, and purpose of any group of cultural players is implicated in other groups. This project takes as its focus those self-valuations, of industry and of consumer, and considers how those actors construct spaces of significance within existing power systems.

Instead, the focus is on the cultural/social, technological, and industrial shifts that have helped to shape the notion of participation, the demands it places on the interests involved, and the expectations and value of interactive engagement. The contexts of participation are determined by larger forces, but negotiated by those within it. This project, therefore offers interactivity as a lens through which popular media, and its values, challenges, and shifts, can be investigated.

Chapter I

Navigating audience/industry constructs

In "Channel 4 Working Notes," John Ellis notes,

> Broadcasting institutions are not concerned with "viewers" but they are with
> "audience." Viewers are individuals, people who use TV within their domestic and
> group social contexts…Audiences, however, do not have these irritating [individual]
> characteristics. Audiences are bulk agglomerations created by statistical research.
> They have no voices and the most basic of characteristics, they "belong" to income
> groups and are endowed with a few broad educational and cultural features.
> Audiences do not use TV, they watch it and consume it. Broadcasting institutions do
> not seek viewers, they seek audiences. (1984, p. 47-48).

Critical consideration of media audiences begins by recognizing, as Ellis does here, that

the audience is an aggregation, one that de-individualizes both the included members and

those that are left behind, and one that is deliberately defined with a particular purpose in

mind. In Ellis's parlance, "'audience' is a profoundly ideological concept, one that has

very little to do with what viewers are doing or how they are interpellated" (p. 47). The

audience is a construct, neither an objective nor pre-existing entity, and research into

audiences "works to *produce* audiences as objects of knowledge and intervention" as

much as it seeks to understand them (Allor, 1996, p. 209, emphasis in original).

Constructing audiences according to shared characteristics (race, class, gender, age),

mutual interests, or by common usage patterns is as reflective of those defining the

audience as it is of those individuals being organized (Bratich, 2008; Shimpach, 2005).

Whether they are being constructed as a targeted field of consumers or as a localized and

specific group worthy of academic study, audience definitions represent the interests,

concerns, and goals that influence the particulars of their characterization.

Though industry (and, often, academic) rhetoric touts interactivity as a byproduct

of very recent developments – digital technologies, fragmentation of media publics,

narrative expansion beyond medium borders – this perspective is both ahistorical and technologically determinist. For interactivity to be something new or recent, made possible as a result of new media, would involve a shift in people, as though individual consumers have evolved to demand opportunities of greater investment. This supposition is not supported by evidence: Early sociological research into radio listeners indicates that devoted consumers of radio soap operas (Herzog, 1943), for instance, processed the narratives and situated them within their daily practice in ways similar to soap opera viewers and romance novel readers that would come decades later (Modleski, 1982, Radway, 1991). Bridget Griffen-Foley (2004) traces audience participation back as far as the 1880s and the appearance of periodicals that solicited and featured contributions from readers; this type of investment, she contents, continues through confessional magazines, call-in radio, and into modern-day reality television (p. 544). Long before voting, social media, and smartphone check-ins, successful television programs incorporated interactive elements, viewer response, and feedback into their content (Holmes, 2009; Harrington, 2010).

I begin with the assertion that interactivity is not new, and nor is it situated in the presence or absence of internal shifts in its participants. There have indeed been significant changes: to technology, to the contexts in which media consumption takes place, to the prominence given to interactivity by academics, industry executives, mainstream press, and other viewers. History suggests that consumers have always interacted, but what interactivity means has shifted according to technological and cultural developments. Consumers may have more pathways to participate, as a result of new media developments; the ease and prevalence of interactivity as a mode of operation

may also raise expectations, for industry and consumer interests alike, that participation is the new normal in contemporary media. It is important to remember, however, that the contexts of interactivity are shaped, manipulated, and determined by larger forces.

There is a strong evolutionary narrative to conceptions of the "the audience" that is invoked for academic, industrial, and other purposes, one that casts audiences themselves as transforming from passive to active to interactive. The industry is similarly homogenized and rendered in terms of economics, power, and control. It is within these larger contexts that definitions, practices, and protocols of interactivity manifest. How interactivity is defined is a means to understand the assumptions, goals, biases, and interests in negotiation in contemporary popular media.

The audience comes alive: Constructing an active audience

At various points in media and cultural studies, it has been functionally beneficial to effectively consider film and television viewers as dupes of the culture industry, "victims of an overwhelmingly powerful ideology machine" (Bratich, 2008, p. 36). Thus early theories on effects of film and television tended toward an assumption of media acting as a magic bullet or hypodermic needle, injecting meaning directly into the passive consciousness of helpless viewers. These heavily affected audiences were rarely, as Raymond Williams (1997) points out, characterized as individuals; those swayed by media content are perpetually undifferentiated masses, and masses are always other people, gullible and lacking in the means or desire for critical reasoning (p. 19). Despite the fact that research was rarely able to draw significant correlations between media consumption and behavior, let alone make a case for causation (Marris and Thornham,

2000), versions of a magic bullet approach to media and an understanding of consumers as a herd-like mass have reappeared in discussions of media audiences when it is advantageous to highlight the presumed strength of media influence.

In a shift that took place across disciplines (Nightingale, 1996), the process of reception and the variations within it garnered renewed interest to investigate the audience, and parse the audience into more distinctive and differentiated interests. Media texts became objects of focus not simply for the messages they intended, but for the messages that were understood by readers, viewers, and listeners. Stemming largely from Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model of message transmission (1980), critical analyses of media audiences focused on social, cultural, economic, and structural factors that influence how individuals perceive media texts and interpret their messages.

Studies therefore sought to identify factors that influence understanding of media texts, situating the process of media consumption within the broader contexts of gender, class, or nation to consider how the media operate in the daily lives of their readers and viewers (Abu-Lughod, 2005; Ang, 1985; Radway, 1991); Roger Silverstone (1996), for example, argues that the medium of television, irrespective of its content, is lent significance because of how it is oriented within the domestic space in which it operates: The act of watching is embedded in a complex set of existing technologic and social conditions that include the role of television and its programs in the family dynamics and in the structure of the household. In his landmark study of the British news program *Nationwide*, David Morley (1992) considers the influence of class and economic status on viewers' perception of the program's message. These approaches indicate how the process and contexts of media consumption may change, but are more problematic when

they attempt to define audiences as the product of those consumption practices. Morley's approach, for instance, has been criticized for emphasizing the effects of socioeconomic class status as a pre-constituted filter from which his subjects had little escape or ability to negotiate or resist (Ang, 1996). The conditions the researcher emphasizes as primary influencers of audience interpretation – in this case, class and income – may indeed be significant in viewer understanding, but also reveal that socioeconomics had already played a part in how media publics were defined and organized.

The turn, therefore, in audience research came to emphasize agency and activity in consumer practice, thus creating the opportunity to account for dissent and disagreement in the interpretation of media texts. Constructing the audience as a heterogeneous interpretive body allowed that popularity – and in particular popularity that simply calculates preference by number of viewers, advertising rates, or tickets and units sold – need not be equated with uniformity. Ien Ang (1985) illustrates how a single popular television program like *Dallas* offers markedly different experience for individual viewers, and that they relate a variety of different ways to "enjoy" a single text. In *Television Culture* (1987), John Fiske theorizes this phenomenon more broadly, contending that popular media texts are designed for a large, homogenized audience in order to maximize its appeal and, therefore, maximize revenue. However, the texts are able to achieve that popularity because they are inherently polysemic, able to be interpreted in multiple diverse ways and, therefore, "any discussion of popularity must account for opposing forces within it" (p. 310). Audience activity, therefore, is a means to provide for the variety of lived experiences that contribute to the understanding of media

texts, and that can also influence the decision to consume a particular text or bypass it entirely.

Differentiating the construct of the popular media audience also allows for consideration of alternative (and occasionally oppositional) interpretation and the recognition that there are some individuals who are left unaccounted for in broad constructs of popularity. Subcultures, special interest communities, and disenfranchised individuals provide "noise" that disrupts the normalizing effects of the dominant ideology (Hebdige, 1979, p. 207) and represent individual and collective interpretations that can differ from, or even directly work against, the overt message of a media text. Homogeneous constructs of popular media audiences also render invisible certain marginalized or economically undesirable groups who lack cultural capital to be accounted for in broadly-defined approaches to audiences (Gross, 1996). Fiske argues that subordinated and marginalized groups are able to seize some measure of power in their ability to resist, subvert, and repurpose mass culture to suit subordinated needs rather than those of the mainstream (1987, p. 19). Audience activity therefore becomes a means to individual agency.

The genesis of fan studies as a particular focus within audience research owes a great deal to this interpretation. Though fans had been dismissed as deviant, pathological, and excessive (Jenson, 1992), the shift to characterizing audiences in general as active participants in media culture allowed for a change in perspective toward fans as well. Drawing from Michel de Certeau, Henry Jenkins in his 1992 *Textual Poachers* depicts fans as nomads, selectively swiping meaning from fields that do not belong to them and assembling an understanding of the media text through their own actions. He

characterizes fans as deeply invested cultural laborers who rework media objects to suit their own purposes and increase the significance of those objects to the fan community in the process (1992, p. 51).

It is important to note that fan practices, or their equivalents, existed prior to cultural attention, academic focus, or industry interest in fandom. The modern concept of fan, identified from the very start by the practices of consumption in which it is implicated, is very much linked with industrialized, consumer culture, but analog equivalents of fan behavior certainly pre-date this contemporary notion of the media fan. Daniel Cavicchi (2011), for example, discusses practices of music lovers – including devotion, promotion, collecting, and repeated consumption – in the mid-1800s. Even Jenkins' assessment of fans as asserting rights of ownership over media has roots traceable to citizen audiences rioting to preserve rival theatre performances in the Astor Place riots of 1849 (Butsch, 2008). Early coverage of fans depicted them frequently as hysterical, not to mention feminized; see, for instance, Miriam Hansen's consideration of Valentino's fans (1886) and Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs' work on Beatlemania and teenaged girls (1992). Changes in technology and media consumption patterns more broadly raised the profile of media fans, and the shift toward a consideration of fans within audience studies and an appreciation of them as consumers from an industry perspective came when the presumption of the active audience construct was firmly entrenched. In the ensuing years, fans have largely become synonymous with active audience members, to the point that any study of the latter is incomplete without mention of the former (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 3).

The difference between fans and other constructs of audiences is described as one of degree and not of kind: Fans are characterized as bearing the same impulses, responses, and interpretations as others, but simply more so; this magnification of audience behavior, along with the fact that fans are often highly productive and provide a wealth of tangible evidence of their affinities (Fiske, 1992), makes fans a particularly attractive object of academic study. But like other consumer practices, the behaviors, attachment, and impulses of fans can be traced to practices from long before this particular audience subgroup became a frequently invoked construct.

Active is not enough: The interactive audience

Fans represent a convenient, rich opportunity to discuss individual viewer behavior and illustrate investment in aspects of contemporary culture, but they are nevertheless another type of audience construct. Despite comprising a relatively small percentage of consumers, fans' productivity, investment, and self-reflexivity make them an often-featured subject in audience research; their consumption habits have helped them to also become a highly desirable segment of the market for culture industries battling to offset the challenges technological innovations have brought to their former dominance (Gwenllian Jones, 2003). Moreover, just as the internet made is possible for fans to connect with others in larger numbers, to distribute their original creations with increased ease, and to engage in instant conversations that obviate geographic distinctions, so too has it made these same behaviors available to audiences who would neither self-identify nor fit the traditional definition of "fan."

The impact of the internet extends beyond a technological advance or a media evolution; some theorists contend that it represents a profound shift in social relationships and perspectives on knowledge. Pierre Lévy (1997) describes new media technologies as offering the opportunity for individuals to band together, irrespective of geographic or temporal restrictions, in order to construct a world of shared information and increased knowledge that exists beyond the capacities of any one single person or institution. This is the power and the demand of new media, and in this context, a construct of an active, engaged audience is no longer sufficient; truly invested viewers answer the call of new media technologies, and have become *interactive.*

In general terms, interactivity has been optimistically recognized as involving "real and observable" interactions between individuals, mediated by technology, or between individuals and systems and industries of communication (Quiring and Schweiger, 2008, p. 151). This indicates a minimum threshold for defining interactivity in media contexts: Interactivity involves some form of communication on multiple levels, among fellow viewers and in response to a media text. Media communication in interactive contexts is not a unidirectional broadcast by established media producers, along traditional modes of distribution, to be received by the masses. Instead, both texts and communications are multi-directional: media consumption becomes about response, feedback, and multiple access points; its grand promise is that response is able, in theory if not always in practice, to work its way up the ladders of power in addition to flowing down them. It is important to note that, within this definition of interactivity, it is not the *reality* of affecting change that gives audience participation its idealistic allure, but the

promise of engaging with others and with the text toward the possibility of agency that is sufficient to be touted as interactive.

"Interactivity," note Deborah Jermyn and Su Holmes, "has…emerged as one of the defining features of media cultures, edging the conventional media category of audiences toward the 'new media persona of user'" (2006, p. 50). Individual viewers have been reconceived as users, and the audience is not a group defined, as Ellis observed above, by broad educational and cultural features (1984, p. 48); instead, in this construct, the users come together as participants who organize, collaborate, and collectively engage with one another and media texts. In the terms described above, this means that the construct of interactivity is built around a baseline of individuals who use technology, cultural contexts, or sites of intersection to construct pathways of feedback, meaning, connection, and analysis.

Thus interactive audiences are described as something more than points of reception; they are expected to take part in creation of both meaning and content. In *Convergence Culture* (2006), Henry Jenkins argues that "convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content," which means that "consumption has become a collective process" (pp. 3-4). The goal of interactive media, Jenkins argues, is not only the product, but the process as well; interactive participants collaborate with producers, texts, and other users to create original work, hunt for clues and spoilers to how onscreen narratives will unfold, and communally interpret textual meaning.

The close relationship between the construct of interactive audiences and the development of new media technologies means interactivity is used to characterize

consumers who engage with media across multiple platforms, and has meant the proliferation of sites that facilitate communication among media consumers and with a media text. It is sites such as these that comprise the case studies of this project. Chat rooms, message and bulletin boards, and online communities, such as Television Without Pity, represent an early form of new media interactivity for consumers, and app-based programs build off that foundation. Media corporations have also promoted the spread of content distribution in a variety of ways, all aimed at increasing viewing and response with a nod toward interactivity. Network websites stream full episodes of television programs, often including summaries and information on the episodes and video previews of upcoming events. Some network programs spread original content on to alternate, new media platforms as well: Disney and NBC Universal have a joint stake in the Hulu.com, which brings both NBC and ABC content streaming to the site to mix with online and television content from numerous sources. Shows like *The Office*, *Heroes*, and *Community* have run online "webisodes" featuring secondary characters in short, original content that only airs online and does not intersect with the primary television text. Show creators also occasionally get into the act, as with *Battlestar Galactica*'s executive producer offering audio podcasts with insider information to accompany each episode as it aired. And, as will be discussed in a later chapter, the stakeholders behind the Harry Potter saga in books and film are attempting a new mode of interactivity with Pottermore and its online Harry Potter experience.

Interactive audiences are constructed as those who feature a response to, engagement with, and, occasionally, influence over textual content and ideological meaning. Reality television is particularly fertile ground for researchers to examine this

kind of investment (see, for instance, Holmes, 2004; Wilson, 2004; Oullette and Hay, 2008; Andrejevic, 2003); these programs invite participation by viewers via internet chat rooms and message boards, websites, second screen apps, and telephone voting systems, all of which promise the potential of influence over the outcome of the program. Though the content of the show remains a one-way production in the hands of the television networks, many reality shows cultivate the perception that the content is interactive and that viewers have the potential to engage and affect change. Estella Tincknell and Parvati Raghuram note that actual options offered to viewers are heavily constrained, but the patina of power is nevertheless a key ingredient to show success: "The sense of participation engendered by this process…increased the feeling of ownership experienced by audiences and led to an intensified engagement with the text" (2002, p. 211).

Influence over textual content can take a more directly hands-on approach; transmedia consumption and consumer feedback are viable "consumption-adjacent" forms of participation that enhance, but begin from, a use perspective, but interactivity invites individual users to take on more "production-adjacent" behaviors as well (Sinnreich and Latonero, 2014). Interactive audiences are described, in a somewhat optimistic manner, as being producers as much as they are consumers (see, for example, Bruns, 2006; Potts et. al., 2008; Jenkins, 2006). In fact, according to Aram Sinnreich (2010), "Paired with the power to remix, mash up, and otherwise reconfigure such cultural information, the rise of 'curatorial me' makes it virtually impossible to arrive at a functional distinction between artists and audiences in the age of configurability" (p. 84). Though this refers specifically to the cultural and technological developments that have impacted regulation and organization within the music industry, the blurred boundary

between producer and consumer is a perspective that extends to other mediums in contemporary culture as well. The ability for individuals and consumer collectives to make, sort, alter, juxtapose, and create media content that is circulated alongside "official" media work makes the distinction between media produced by media industries and media produced by non-media industries amorphous and, at times, arbitrary.

Also owing to the rise of DIY media production technologies and the prominence and normalization of fan behaviors, the practice of user-generated derivative, original, and transmedia works has been integrated as a component in audience interactivity. Participation in content creation, or even remix and alteration, is certainly well above the minimum characteristics of interactive engagement, but the ability for these practices to make creativity – along with artistry and distribution – widely accessible (Sinnreich, 2010), makes this a very appealing perspective on interactivity. There is an aspect of the optimism and promise embedded into the construct of interactive audiences: Fan-generated forays into co-creation, argues Suzanne Scott (2010) carry with them an "implicit promise to decentralize authorship and promote collaboration, both between creations in different mediums and creators and fans" (p. 30). As these practices are increasingly brought in from the margin and given prominence, they promise the ability to have a say and to become as much creators as audiences. Neil Perryman (2008) offers the case of *Doctor Who*, the story of which exists on British network television, in a vast array of self-published and network-endorsed novels, and in numerous locations online. The result, he asserts, is a "flagship franchise for mainstream transmedia practices that eschew passivity for participation and static simplicity for multi-platform complexity [that] *became* the future" (p. 22, emphasis in original). *Doctor Who* becomes a fully

realized interactive text because it can be experienced on multiple media platforms, but also because its creation comes from multiple sources, in both industrial content and collaborative consumer productivity.

Characterizing interactive audiences as more-evolved instances of audience behavior, it is important to note, is a vital component of this construct. Interactivity is therefore able to imply progress by viewers who have become users, thus intimating that interactive audiences are simply more: more involved, more engaged, and more evolved than other audiences. The consequences of this idealized view, and the way that it is deployed in order to privilege and promote particular types of participation, provide the foundation for how interactivity manifests in everyday use.

Toward defining terms

As is likely evident to this point, there are numerous terms employed to discuss the idea of the audience – viewer, consumer, user, fan, participant, etc. Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that the definitions of these terms are not fixed, and may be used interchangeably or to refer to different behaviors in different contexts. It is necessary, therefore, at the start of a project such as this to explicitly lay out the terms, practices, and organization of media consumption as I see them and as I will be using them in the following chapters. These definitions are inherently fluid, and individuals may occupy more than one category simultaneously or shift between them over time. As with existing research in this field, any means of organizing individuals into audience categories is about affixing constructs to behaviors, and it is done for a very particular

purpose. In this case, it is an effort to organize a spectrum of behaviors and investment

that can help create a vocabulary with which I can meaningfully discuss interactivity.

To start at the most specific level, I begin with individuals. As indicated by Ellis

(1984) at the beginning of this chapter, though they are influenced by social situations

and viewing contexts, television viewers are first individuals who are then subject to

efforts to aggregate them into groups based on demographics, patterns of behavior, or

taste preference; as Ellis also points out, the individual nature of the viewer raises the

potential that he or she may be idiosyncratic, re-watching the favored bits and wandering

away from others (p. 47). A viewer engages with the text by watching the television show

or the film; for other media, he or she could also be considered the reader, the player, or

the listener; in the case of San Diego Comic-Con, the attendee. There is no presumption

of frequency, dedication, level of devotion, or technological platform associated with

these terms; though individual tastes, preferences, and behaviors are embedded into

broader socio-cultural contexts that can influence the nature of a viewer's television or

film practices, the purpose of the term is to denote an individual who *is* a viewer, as

opposed to a non-viewer, non-reader, non-attendee. Because this project covers a variety

of media platforms, it is also important to note that I am largely unconcerned with media

specificity here; a reader of Harry Potter, for example, may encounter the saga as a series

of novels or a series of films, or both. In other words, though the physiological practices

are different, I do not distinguish between "reader" and "viewer" as different categories

or as engaged in different consumer practices for the purposes of this work. In order to

avoid implications of medium specificity, I use the term "consumer" to refer to

individuals who read, watch, attend, play, listen to media, without necessarily identifying

the content as a book, television show, film, game, song, and so forth, also leaving open the possibility for those individuals to also take in content across platforms.

Similar to consumers but involving more medium specificity are users. These are new media consumers, ones who take part in digital media platforms, such as those who play Pottermore online or check in to television shows via a Social TV app. In one respect, this term is not a wholly different category than the consumer; the idea of the user also does not connote a particular frequency to its application, but refers to one who uses an online media service. However, the technological specificity here – as users do refer to those who are engaging with media online in some way – does carry implications for level of investment. Constructs of audiences that mark passive-active-interactive as a progression of engagement mean that users are often automatically presumed to be more invested, dedicated, and involved than consumers. For example, this assumption would mean that a user who watched a television show and checked in to it is more engaged than a consumer who only watched the show. Part of the goal in articulating these terms, however, is to resist that assumption; similar to readers, viewers, and attendees, "user" does not presuppose a particular level of devotion or engagement, but rather speaks to the use of apps, the internet, and digital media technologies as part of consumer practices. Though he or she may provide feedback and create an archive of behavior and consumption patterns as a de facto consequence of using new media platforms, users is not meant to refer to inherently more invested consumers.

Instead, I employ the term participant to refer to individuals who are more fully engaged with the principles of interactivity. Participants are users and consumers who take part in the behaviors attributed to interactive audiences: They create pathways of

feedback; they are producer/consumers; they connect with one another to build communities, collective identities, and systems of governance; they consistently cross media platform boundaries as consumers and creators; and they are invested in developments of technology and media content simultaneously. The term participant is meant to refer to a greater degree of activity than a user or consumer, one that is prompted by a deeper level of involvement: Participants' engagement is more consistent, and implies an affective bond toward content and/or to others that is not necessarily (though may be) present in consumers or users. I therefore use the term participant to refer to individuals who are implicated in the practices of interactivity.

A fan is separated from a participant in part by degree: Though a participant is identified by his or her behaviors, with connotations of emotional investment, for a fan, the devotion is paramount. Fans are frequently characterized by their degree of consumption, described as "excessive readers" (Fiske, 1989), as highly productive (Jenkins, 1992), as vociferous consumers (Hills, 2002), and the presumption of emotional and intellectual investment in media texts accompanies this assessment. The focus on increased interest, as I noted above, contributes to view of fans as a highly desirable niche in an increasingly fragmented and disaffected market (Gwenllian Jones, 2003); the effort to move individuals from consumer to participant, and participant to fan, therefore, forms a key component of my argument for how interactivity manifests at San Diego Comic-Con. Because of this effort, I should note that I reserve the term fan for those who use it to self-identify, or who engage in spaces and with groups that identify as by and for "fans," including fan sites, fan conventions, and fandom communities. Individuals who engage in common fan practices but who do not consider themselves to be fans would be,

under these terms, identified as consumers or participants. Fan investment involves a degree of identity construction, and it is thus problematic to attribute the fan identity onto one who chooses not to take it up him- or herself. It is also possible to consider individuals who are not otherwise participants, but who do consider themselves fans, within this category; this arises in the discussion of Pottermore, and its efforts to encourage fans of the Harry Potter books and films to become active participants within the transmedia fandom.

Clear and consistent use of these terms allows for identifiers such as consumer, user, participant, and fan to refer to distinct practices: Consumers watch, read, attend, play; users click and type; participants engage, offer feedback, and produce, and fans do these things as well, but under the explicit guise of participating in fandom as well as with media. These terms are also deliberately not meant to refer to constructed groups, but to those that comprise the aggregates. "The audience" is an idea meant to aggregate users, consumers, or participants into a cohesive grouping, even as the commonality proposed by such constructs are external rather than self-identifying. As a result, any use of *the audience* as a descriptor in this project is meant to deliberately refer to the fabricated nature of the construct, and is done while acknowledging the interests involved in that particular mode of aggregation.

Media industries, institutional power

In every day media practice, it is often industrial interests, and not those of the academy, that perform the work of aggregating and constructing audiences. Industrial constructs of the audience are frequently attempts to homogenize consumers, to link the

preferences and practices of individuals into a consistent market with predictable – and malleable – consumption behaviors. Industrial work to construct audiences generally have economic undertones, considering, for example, television viewing audiences according to demographics, advertising markets, and purchasing power. How the industry strives to construct audiences, however, is more illustrative of their own interests, and raises the challenge to consider how that industry operates as a heterogeneous combination of forces rather than as a uniform field. It is important, therefore, to deconstruct how industries have been defined, researched, an understood in order to appropriately consider the implications when the complex institutional structures come into direct contact with the equally complicated behaviors of participatory audiences.

Early consideration of media industries privileged political economy as the theoretical framework that best accounted for the considerable power wielded by massive corporate media institutions. Havens et al (2009) contend that this decades-long trend in media research as one that "begins from the assumption that media culture is the ideological extension of powerful capitalist forces and that the role of research is consequently to uncover the ways in which we, as citizen-audiences, are socialized into broader economic interests" (p. 237). This approach is concerned with the macro-level view of media industries; Robert McChesney and those who follow his theoretical approach, for example, consider how ownership structures, politics of deregulation, and corporate consolidation carry implications for how ideological messages and power dynamics are distributed via media content (e.g., 1999, 2004). Other industrial political economy approaches are grounded in the work of Dallas Smythe, among others, who argues that institutional practices effectively eliminated the distinction between media

viewer and capitalist consumer, contending that audiences have been structured as both workers and commodities in their own right in order to uphold a larger system of power and economics (1981). The political economy approach to media industry extends beyond these approaches, but largely takes a big picture approach to industry research, focusing on organizations, structures, political negotiations and economic implications.

The shift here, then, came with research that concentrated on micro-level experiences, relationships, and practices in industry organizations. Conducting what he refers to as "critical production studies," John Caldwell (2008) draws upon individual behaviors at multiple levels of media production in order to consider the types of social behaviors, identity construction, and meaning making happen for those working within the entertainment industry. His findings indicate that values and rituals can vary a great deal according to the nature of the work and its relative position within the industry, offering an approach to media studies research that is not incorporated into the big picture research that is a part of political economy work. Amanda Lotz (2007b, 2007c) considers how the television industry's upfront presentations are part of the process of media culture in the United States, but they also represent professional ritual and quotidian workplace duties for media buyers and marketers both. Fellow scholars have picked up this thread, arguing that the nature of "media industries" varies greatly for those working within them, with dividing lines along gender, income, and prestige boundaries, as well as marked differences among those working in production from a craft or technical trade perspective, those defined as above-the-line creatives – i.e., writers, producers, actors, and directors – and those in marketing and business administration (see, for instance, Mayer, Banks, & Caldwell, 2009; Mayer, 2011).

Additional research into media industries operates somewhere between these two approaches, considering both the larger structures of industrial organization and the individual experiences of how they manifest. This research focuses primarily on the negotiations and adaptations that are necessitated within industrial practice, as demanded by technological developments, perceived audience demands, cultural shifts, or some combination of the above. It is this approach to industry research, for example, that accounts for Jenkins's central argument in *Convergence Culture* (2006), that contemporary media industries are constantly attempting to navigate a terrain in which the conventional strategies of old institutions no longer apply, and new media, audience participation, and a democratization of production tools require making a new set of rules. This approach has been used to consider, among others, how film distribution practices must adapt to shifting viewing practices and industrial structures (Perren, 2013); how television content reflects changes to the industry in the face of new media (Gillan, 2011); and, perhaps most commonly, how industrial distinctions between media platforms like film, television, and promotional or paratextual content have been altered or dissolved all together (Gray, 2010; Perryman, 2008; Scolari, 2009; Banks and Deuze, 2009).

This project draws from a variety of methodological approaches, but it most closely resembles the work done in this last category. Because "media industry" can operate as an unwieldy and overly inclusive phrase, for the purposes of this project, I am focusing solely on those corporate institutions that participate in the development, production, distribution, exhibition, and marketing of professional content for television, film, and internet media platforms, or similar investments in transmedia projects that

include multiple media streams. Though the institutional/consumer interactions that emerge in contexts focused on other media institutions – those of video games, for instance, or music and sound recording industries – are certainly rich and valuable as well, they are beyond the scope of what is possible in this project.

Media industries, as used here, has a decidedly mainstream corporate definition, focusing on the media financed and produced by major international media conglomerates (Viacom, Time Warner, Disney, NewsCorp, etc.), as well as major corporate interests that partner with others to produce or distribute content. Given decades-long international corporate mergers and consolidation within the production, distribution, and exhibition functions of popular media, distinctions between media platforms and media interests are not always clearly defined; as a result, I will be drawing on theoretical frameworks and existing research that touches on a variety of media content types, but my own examples and case studies will remain more narrow. To approach media industries as those organizations with an institutional interest, in the creation and selling of film and television, particularly bundled with new media access points, is sufficiently broad for a project such as this one.

From there, my interest is primarily how these industries organize themselves, set parameters, and enact practices that reveal and support the underlying institutional goals. As Douglas Kellner (2009) reminds us, "The media industries are an essential economic force, helping manage and promote consumer demand, constructing needs and fantasies through advertising and entertainment" (p. 95). At their core, industrial concerns are about furthering economic goals, and regardless of the media environment, industry concepts of the audience will always be about size, demographics, and revenue. Like all

industries, those in media are seeking to create profit, and thus the concern with audiences is the ability to extract value from the construction, participation, labor, and affect of the consumer. Interactivity becomes the lens through which the nature of contemporary audiences and industries both are put into action.

Interactivity: Use and definitions

It has become a common contention among media scholars that the concept of interactivity, and its strategic deployment by members of the industry and individual consumers and non-users alike, is a deliberate defensive strategy. Suzanne Scott (2010) describes the rise of transmedia storytelling and adoption of content on ancillary markets as a "two-pronged industrial attack on the current drive towards time shifting" (p. 31); Jennifer Gillan (2011) categorizes the new media model of network television "Must-Click TV," and argues that this model "seemed like a way for broadcast television to stay viable in an environment in which viewers could choose" (p. 5); and Sundet and Ytreberg (2009) likewise note that industry discourse of interactivity appeals to users' desire for emotional engagement and socializing in order to build up "industry strategies for future expansion, revenues and loyalty" (p. 384).

One of the major frames in theorizing interactivity to this point, therefore, has been to cast it as a tactic of industrial entrenchment, a practice meant to maintain existing economic models and power dynamics in the face of technological and cultural changes. In her analysis of shifts in how television is made, distributed, watched, and perceived, Amanda Lotz (2007a) characterizes the push toward interactive possibility as effective spin and marketing strategy that are becoming necessary for traditional media to survive.

Lotz argues that the transition to a post-network era of fragmentation and specialization in the television industry ushered in fundamental upheaval in existing models of funding, programming, marketing, and distribution (p. 28); from an industrial perspective, therefore, interactivity is a means of selling that shift as an idealized evolution in entertainment.

According to this model, interactivity is an "enabler or facilitator" that assimilates users into the process of creation and therefore prolongs their attachment to it (Marshall, 2009, p. 85). Mark Deuze (2009) notes that the possibilities for users to participate with media texts have increased, but that this increase is framed by media industry rhetoric as one "demanded" by consumers who are then "rewarded" with increased agency and participation; Deuze is careful to point out that this understanding of audience interactivity is, like all other notions of the audience, a construct, and one that has been produced by the entertainment industry in order to serve its interests (p. 477). Cultivating interactivity in user/consumers is a technique for increasing loyalty, affinity, or attachment users feel toward the content, in order to further its viability in the face of increased competition and technological shifts.

The other dominant rhetorical frame used to characterize audience/industry interaction is rooted in the notion that participation creates opportunities for increased agency. This frame owes a great deal to the construct of media fans as consumers deeply invested in productive engagement with texts; the increased centrality the fan identity in academic, mainstream news media, and industrial perspectives of the audience means that interactive participation has often been characterized as a struggle for control. Depicted in this way, interactivity is the means by which users can have some measure of

control over, or provide commentary on, existing cultural texts – Jenkins describes convergence culture as a moment in which consumers "are asserting a right to participate in the culture, on their own terms, when and where they wish" (2006, p. 175). The feedback, agency, and involvement of interactivity can alter the flow of content and meaning from traditional broadcast models, and thus interactivity is idealized as a moment of opportunity.

Derek Johnson notes that fans, via fan fiction and other modes of productivity and appropriation, can "challenge corporate producers by constructing interpretive consensuses that delegitimize institutional authority over the hyperdiegetic text" (2007, p. 291); Genette Verstraete (2011) makes a similar observation, arguing "not all of these flows of content can be controlled by companies and thus new modes of participation and co-production on the part of consumers do become possible, often against the interest of the producers" (p. 536). These perspectives indicate that, concurrent with the possibility of increased agency, this frame presumes interactivity is a means by which consumers are able to wrest some degree of power from media institutions. Cultural shifts and new technologies mean that savvy participants can claim some creative control, thus challenging corporate interests (Consalvo, 2003); Axel Bruns terms this type of "user-led content production" "produsage" (2006, 2008a). He argues that "the development of user-led distribution networks…can be seen as a reaction against some of the most acutely felt negative effects of network bias" (2008b, n.p.), framing interactivity as a grassroots movement to claim power by activist-audiences, one that forces industry interests to take notice and make accommodations (Bird, 2011, p. 506-507).

Rob Cover (2006) argues that the rise of interactivity is a "strongly-held and culturally-based desire to participate in the creation and transformation of the text that has effectively been denied by previous technologies of media production and distribution" (p.144). He therefore resists the notion of interactivity as a product of the evolution of audiences and borne anew from recent technological developments, and marks the rise of interactivity as one that has made existing practices more accessible and prominent. New media technologies and transmedia storytelling, according to these narratives, have made it increasingly possible for consumers to become producers, to circulate content, and to contribute to the flagging dominance of traditional entertainment media industries. At the same time, a newfound (or latent) desire by consumers to be ever-more part of the text is given means by industrial and technical shifts. Thus interactivity is framed as a relationship between industries and audiences that is framed as simultaneously dangerous and powerful, with the potential to be profoundly disruptive.

The trouble with interactivity

I do not wish to suggest that theories of audience participation, convergence culture, and interactivity are necessarily idealistic. Even as these perspectives temper optimism with cautiousness, they are subject to the same challenges as are analyses of industry practices and considerations of the audience, which both must negotiate between close-in and long-range perspectives that account for individual variance and aggregated generalizability at once. As a result, it is important to remember that there are limitations and consequences to existing definitions of interactivity. For example, the construct definitions of interactivity outline of its players can over-represent some participants

while leaving others behind entirely; additionally, the audience/industry binary often does not allow for the appropriate nuance of lived interactions.

One consistent challenge raised at research into interactive audiences is whether they enjoy a disproportionate amount of attention from scholarly and industrial interests alike. It can be challenging to not allow particularly visible consumers to act as stand-ins for an entire construct of media audience. Productive fans, for example, create, record, and chronicle the process of being a consumer to such a degree that they have often been used to illustrate audience activity, and such research potentially falls victim to the assumption that fans are the only truly active consumers, relegating other viewers to more closely resemble the undifferentiated malleability of earlier theories of passive viewership (Davisson and Booth, 2007). "In the case of new media," Nico Carpentier cautions, "'regular' audiences have also remained underresearched because of the emphasis on active use" (2009, p. 411). Nick Couldry (2011) shares this reservation; he takes issue with Henry Jenkins' assessment that the productive, invested early adopters Jenkins features in *Convergence Culture* are ultimately the forward guard of wider audience practices. Jenkins does outline the ways in which his subjects are not necessarily representative of all consumers (among other aspects, these participants are largely more white, more male, more wealthy, more educated, younger, and in possession of more leisure time than "typical" audiences; see Couldry pp. 492-493 for a more complete assessment). Couldry argues, however, that the ways that these consumers are atypical could result in a more widespread adoption of convergent practices than Jenkins envisions – and, indeed, that the approach could be far more conservative and less revolutionary than early visions indicate (Couldry, p. 497). In short, focusing on the

interactive as a representation of consumer impulses of a broader audience can easily skew the accuracy of more long-range perspectives.

In addition to privileging the most active, constructs of interactivity encourage only certain types of engagement. Kristina Busse argues that interactivity that is celebrated by industrial sanction is *affirmational* rather than *transformational* involvement (2013, p. 82). Drawing from terms coined by fan writer obsession_inc, Busse describes affirmational participation as taking place on official sites and respectful of the authority of the original producers. On the other hand, obsession_inc's use of transformational participation is meant to describe activity that is potentially more subversive or critical, and that takes place in fan-operated sites and archives. These particularly appealing forms of interactive engagement, additionally, are performed by users who are also particularly desirable, according to traditional metrics – those, for instance, who fit Jenkins' model of ideal early adopters of convergence. The rhetoric of consumer agency, technological democratization, and niche media that are able to be customized and appropriated by a variety of users does not necessarily tell the whole story. Speaking particularly of the practice of narrowcasting and the apparent opportunities for agency and audience capital it presents, Beretta Smith-Shomade (2004) draws a conclusion that offers a bracing assessment of interactivity as well:

> Narrowcasting appears in many aspects a way to keep the marginal as marginal. It encourages a center – a space where the really important demographics reside. Within this space, those who know how to behave, assimilate, and look live. Unfortunately, this space also harbors those who produce, distribute, exhibit, manage, and control. (p. 78).

Interactivity, it seems, has room for the most desirable exemplars of its possibility, but this is hardly inclusive; those who do not fit the model can remain marginalized or left out all together.

For example, Catherine Driscoll and Melissa Gregg point to "the relative absence of gender in *Convergence Culture*" (2011, p. 572), which has had the unfortunate effect of perpetuating the same absence of gender considerations in much of the research that has followed. This is not necessarily unusual; fan objects that are coded "masculine" have more social acceptance than those that are coded "feminine" (Busse, 2013, p. 75). Additionally, whereas interactive participation is meant to be liberating for male practitioners, Laurie Ouellette and Julie Wilson (2011) argue that, for women, participation can extend the existing "second shift" in the home to include relentless labors in the interest of idealized self-empowerment. Interactivity that is actually transgressive, rebellious, or too far from the norm can be quashed or ignored; this can mean that women and queer readings coded forms of participation remain invisible within constructs of interactivity (Scott, 2010).

Hills (2010) addresses many of these same characteristics (particularly age and market desirability) in considering "invisible" television fans, but also addresses the role of content in the privileging of certain audiences. Time and technology, he argues, are important factors in structuring a "momentary" fandom, in which neither the content nor the participation overflows into transmedia or convergent practices; in this concept, liveness and the contained nature of the program, existing only in one medium and not extending beyond that, are the very foundation upon which the fan engagement exists (p. 106). These are also, of course, characteristics that leave this particular approach to media consumption outside of constructs of interactivity; "overflow-poor" content remains largely unrecognized in industry rhetoric, just as the relative inattention by scholars to popular television programming ultimately results in those texts, and their audiences,

being left out of academic canons and of the history that scholastic focus brings to the medium (Mills, 2010).

Existing constructs of interactivity do not adequately account for the complexity of viewing patterns, consumption preferences, and modes of participation. They privilege viewers who are also users; content that is primed for transmedia content, co-production, and ancillary revenue streams; and participation that leaves a record and, as will be discussed later, is easily monitored and tracked. I argue, however, that the individuals who get "left behind" by definitions and practices of interactivity nevertheless represent a vital lynchpin to fully understanding the underlying functions, experience, and consequences of interactive constructs. How these outliers are frustrated by the interactive parameters put in place at sites of contact, or how they are hailed, effectively or otherwise, to become part of the system is a means for considering what manifests where industry and consumers come into contact with one another as part of popular media participation.

Challenging the field

This project is situated firmly within existing debates about the characterization and practices of audiences and industries in contemporary media. Throughout the case studies, I focus on how audiences and industries are each characterized, defined, and perceived, thus deconstructing the assumptions at play when these two constructs come into contact. Though existing rhetoric offers a vocabulary for approaching contemporary interactive practice, the focus here is to consider how existing approaches perhaps elide, simplify, or organize media engagements in ways that do not reflect the complexity of

everyday participation. As indicated by the brief overview of relevant literature outlined above, these two forces are often approached independently: Simone Murray notes that industry-centered work is often missing from research on audience cultures (2004), and scholarship with an industrial focus constructs a homogenized, audience construct. Jermyn and Holmes (2006) are likewise optimistic that contemporary media contexts provide the opportunity to reconcile existing splits between political economy approaches and consumer experience (p. 51). This project answers these calls for reconciliation and integration by putting existing perspectives of the audience and the industry into conversation with one another. Putting these two elements together with equal significance into a single study is meant to highlight how the interests and practices of each influences how interactivity manifests, and the relevance to contemporary media culture.

When media audiences and industry interests are considered via their relationship to one another, the existing constructs of each come into play. It is important to note, therefore, that both the frame of interactivity as industry tactic and as consumer power-grab structure a binary division and oppositional relationship between industry and audience. Sara Gwenllian Jones (2003) insightfully notes that this type of organization "assumes the mutual exclusivity of the culture industry and fan culture, constructing an antithetical relationship in which the former is constituted as unequivocally exploitative and the latter as a species of resistant folk culture" (p. 163). This assessment easily extends beyond the fans-as-folk heroes characterization she outlines to include the productive, invested, and technologically savvy participants of the interactive frames outlined above. This characterization, as Gwenllian Jones describes, thus articulates an

issue with existing definitions of interactivity: these frames reduce interactivity to a site of struggle or reconciliation between opposing forces, and characterizes collaborative elements as tactics of appropriation or survival.

This deployment of interactivity makes ample use of existing assumptions: The audience is constructed as engaged, resistant, participatory, and actively cultivating agency; the industry is invested primarily in owning participatory practices and in implicitly or explicitly limiting the power of aggregated consumers, and is therefore ultimately fearful and uncertain when these are not possible. Scholars have often complicated the notion that audience resistance is an all-or-nothing prospect; these assertions point out that a dominant/oppositional model is not able to adequately account for the range of interests at play within corporate media and entertainment systems (Sandvoss, 2005), and commonly seek to incorporate negotiation with, rather than straightforward opposition to, the practices of active viewers (Sinnreich, 2010; Gray, 1999). However, even in this approach, though individual interpretations and behaviors are understood to reflect a complex web of motivation, the relationship between the broader constructs of audience and industry is treated as a contest, complete with winners and losers. In other words, though there are a range of rewards and benefits addressed in how interactivity is articulated, within them, gains by the audience are perceived as losses by the industry, and vice versa. Participation has been lauded as a new frontier of opportunity for the consumer, but Carpentier (2009) cautions that it is still constructed within existing frameworks of media ownership and control, thus raising the possibility that participation without authority is little more than a gesture. Shimpach is careful to note that industrial overtures acknowledging the value of audience practice does not

necessarily equate to taking the rights and needs of those audience members into greater

consideration (2005, p. 353). This characterization of the media consumer wielding some

inalienable aspects of cultural power, as progressing inevitably toward ever more

engagement, agency, and power, pits the audience against the industry.

This project proposes to take an alternate perspective. Matt Hills (2002) contends

that fan cultures are best situated "squarely within the processes and mechanisms of

consumer culture, given that fans are always already" willing to buy as well as watch or

read (p. 27). This aligns with the previously discussed idea that the contemporary

definitions of fandom are irretrievably shaped by commercial culture. Fan practices

existed before consumer culture, but modern notions of fandom did not, and fans are

therefore understood as consumers. Hills argues that the idealized version of fandom as

simply anti-consumerist overlooks the more complicated truth: that these cultures depict

the "potentially curious co-existence…of both *anti-commercial ideologies and*

commodity-completist practices" (p. 28, italics in original). Gwenllian Jones (2003)

reaches a similar conclusion: elevating television fans "to the status of modern-day Robin

Hoods, folk heroes busily snatching back 'our' popular cultural texts from the greedy

global conglomerates who claim to own them" (p. 163) misses the enthusiastic

complicity of these supposed rebels. According to Hills, fan consumption – even resistant

or critical forms – is a process that necessarily adds value to media culture, and that

active engagement not just with textual meaning, but with the economic marketplace in

which those texts are situated, is foundational to the lived experience of fandom (p. 35).

Gwenllian Jones explains it thus: "Fandom needs to be understood as a liminal,

fetishistic, and highly engaged consumer culture that is both born of and fully implicated

in the cultural processes it supposedly 'resist'" (p. 165). My purpose is to do precisely

that, to consider the role of interactivity as part of ongoing negotiations of power,

hierarchies, and participation, both with media content and with that content's position

within corporate media culture. This perspective, therefore, contributes to my argument

that interactivity is a means by which consumer audiences, agent audiences, and industry

interests align in order to redefine and reinforce the roles of media citizenship. There can

be elements of exploitation and restriction when these forces are incongruent, but

interactivity can also involve asymmetrical alignment, professional training, or a push to

matter within existing systems of operation.

By default, points of contact between "the industry" and "the audience" become

sites of struggle for dominance; given the persistently uneven economic and power

dynamics at play, interactivity is therefore presupposed to be a process of appropriation.

The narrative is familiar, if often lacking in complexity and critical perspective: User-

generated efforts are authentic labors of love motivated by emotional attachment and a

desire for agency; soulless corporate interests swoop in to overtake a successful

consumer-created venture, rendering it a pale imitation of its original self as it serves a

ruthlessly economic purpose.

This description is perhaps somewhat exaggerated, but take, for example, how

efforts by content owners to make use of consumer efforts are described: Simone Murray

refers to New Line's efforts to foster a relationship between fans of J.R.R. Tolkien and

the studio during the production of the *Lord of the Rings* films as an attempt "to harness

this early-adopter group's natural curiosity and fierce proprietorialism to drive a multi-

format marketing campaign" (2004, p. 8). Suzanne Scott argues that *Battlestar Galactica*

fans who took advantage of the SciFi (now Syfy) television network's offer of raw material from the show to create videos, and then were obligated to turn over the product to the network for use in promotional efforts, "traded ownership over their finished products in exchange for heightened visibility and an aura of professional validation" (2010, p. 33). The dominant narrative for industry forces engaging with audience ventures is one of takeover and co-option.

To dismiss interactivity as friction between the top-down economic interests of a corporate industry force and bottom-up efforts to claim agency and affective ownership by a homogenized consumer audience is ultimately reductive. This project attempts to answer the call for a need to reconcile constructs of audience and industry in a more productive manner than opposition (Jermyn and Holmes, 2006), and uses interactivity as a broad theoretical approach to do so. In previous research, interactivity has been idealized, demonized, thrown about as a buzzword, and used to characterize convergence, co-production, transmedia, and participatory contexts, but how it manifests and operates on the ground at individual sites of contact is often under-researched. This project, therefore, aims to parse those forces, and consider the varying interests that comprise constructs of industry and audience, but also to evaluate how those efforts may not be always moving in opposition to one another.

Nick Couldry (2011) argues that there is a need for an account of the wider forces that connect "pockets of talk and action" on convergence into "wider mechanisms of social change" (p. 496). Focusing on specific case studies where industry practitioners and economic interests come into contact with consumers, participants, and viewers provides the means to delve into contemporary popular media. This project considers

specific case studies of interactivity that have ended, that never fully took off, that are in

transition, and that are just emerging; these case studies approach interactivity differently

and find different modes of success and frames of alignment among them. Taken

together, these cases are moments of contemporary media in capture and, perhaps more

importantly, connect the threads, challenges, and negotiations that take place in the lived

experience of interactivity into a comprehensive look at the manifestations of media

practice.

Chapter II

Appropriation Without Pity?: Theory and practice of interactivity-as-takeover

As argued in the previous chapter, characterizing media industry and media audiences along a binary, as two cohesive groups with an oppositional relationship, effectively determines the nature of interactivity. The goal of this project is ultimately to move beyond the narrative of interactivity as media industry appropriation of consumer investment. In the interest of doing so, however, I begin by acknowledging that the presumption of appropriation is not entirely a myth, but became a dominant narrative for a reason. Interactivity has been and can be practiced as a mode of appropriation and a means to monetize affective engagement, and here I illustrate the process – and pitfalls – of that particular approach.

This chapter considers interactivity as industrial co-option, as both a theoretical approach and actual practice, in order to identify how the narrative does reflect elements of industry/user participation, and so that this narrative can be complicated in later chapters. I take as my example Television Without Pity, a user-created television fan website that was purchased by a major media conglomerate, underwent several significant transformations, and was ultimately closed down. The key transformations in the site – some the result of deliberate changes made as a result of the corporate takeover, some inevitable shifts with the new institutional role – mark the tension points in the process of appropriation.

Within this chapter, I outline the significant transformations that took place over Television Without Pity's nearly fifteen-year history, focusing in particular on the changes in its structures, users, contributors, and purposes before its purchase and after.

These transformations also illustrate the relevant theoretical frames that tie together the analyses of interactivity that comprise the rest of the project. With its purchase, Television Without Pity transformed from scrappy outsider to corporate insider, from a site of affective labor to one of media work, from user governance to administrative control, and from substantive community to, in the end, a defunct web address. These transformations speak to the nature of co-creation, labor, and community engagement in contemporary media, and the failure of Television Without Pity illustrates both the perils of interactivity as appropriation, and the significance of user/industry alignment as a necessary component for any sustainable interactive venture.

Television Without Pity serves as a case of particulars: Its users, television fans and early adopters of new media participation, negotiate a relationship with media giant Comcast, and their interest in an online portal that could funnel interest toward broadcast and cable television ventures. The specifics of Television Without Pity, however, also indicate generalizable negotiations that take place when industry takes on existing individual consumer practice and attempts to transform it into a valuable audience market. Television Without Pity is an example of co-option by industry forces in which the misalignment between those interests and consumer investment ultimately led to its closure. By beginning with a study of interactivity that largely follows a common narrative of interactivity as a process of corporate appropriation, I intend to create a baseline for interactive practice, one that is challenged and made more complex by the manifestations of interactivity that are explored with the subsequent chapter case studies. In doing so, I will show how the practice of interactivity is a context in which individuals

must re-negotiate their status and position as and within groups, even as it can be used to reify existing hierarchies and power dynamics.

Watching television, pitilessly

Television Without Pity's history reads like a typical success story of dot-com capitalism. Two women met in an internet chat room in the late 1990s. In 1998, they set up Dawson's Wrap, a site dedicated to dissecting the latest episodes of *Dawson's Creek*. The website quickly expanded to include discussion of other programs, and was renamed first Mighty Big TV before settling on Television Without Pity (TWoP) in 2002. Though in current models, TWoP's structure and practices may perhaps seem out of step with the instantaneous, short-form, social network and app-based approach to internet content, its early adoption of Web 2.0 practices, user-generated content, and feedback and discussion pathways make it a very early – and very influential – example of user participation online.

The site consisted of two parts, the recaps and the forums. Recaps were written by staff members, and are long analyses of recently-aired television episodes meant to be at once descriptive, informative, and skewering. The level of detail involved in these recaps is rather staggering, in particular given their genesis before the widespread adoption of personal DVRs and, in some regions, even high-speed internet: It was not unusual for a single hour-long drama (in its early years, the site rarely covered half hour sitcoms) to have a recap that spanned 15-25 web pages, complete with direct quotes, scene-by-scene commentary, and tongue-in-cheek humor. The recaps were not typical reviews, though they did feature grades by the recapper and voted on by users, but they were also often

quite critical. The site's motto was "Spare the snark, spoil the network," and it took the notion of watching television, but without pity, quite seriously. Recaps were meant to be humorous for their own sake; though they fully detailed the events of each episode, readers were often avid viewers themselves, and were not necessarily reading to get caught up, but to be entertained by witty, biting, writing about television.

In the beginning, recapped shows were commonly one-hour dramas and reality programming of varying quality; shows could be quite good, quite bad, or could fluctuate in between, as these made for the most entertaining recaps. Beloved shows were called out when they made no sense, followed poorly-regarded storylines, or aired a lackluster episode; programs that participants either genuinely disliked or loved to hate could be just as entertaining, as recappers derided the characters, the storylines, and the writing, and readers joined in the mocking tone. Procedurals and sitcoms were generally found to not fit the formula; the former were considered repetitive and straightforward, the latter were attempting to be funny themselves, and so neither was particularly conducive to the
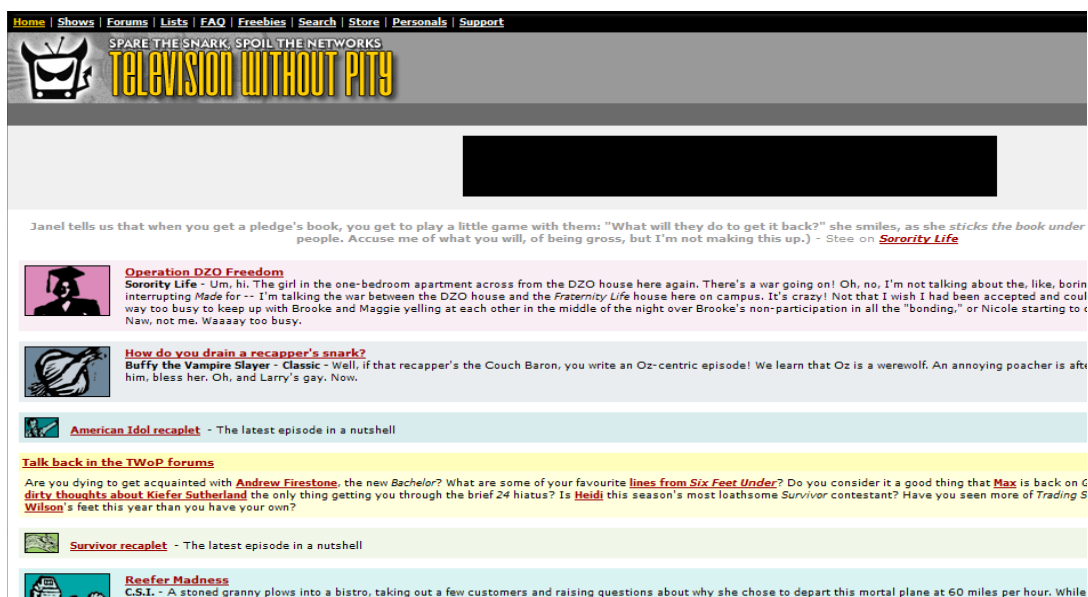

Image 2.1: *Television Without Pity, 2004*

biting humor of the recap style. Other types of programming, including sports, news, instructional, and children's shows, were simply not a part of the recap lineup which, for the site's early years (approximately 2002-2007), were dominated by broadcast networks' primetime lineups and major cable programming [see image 2.1]

The forum section, though entirely user-created, shared much of the same tone, in which thoughtful analysis intermingled with biting witticisms, and participants dissected television episodes to their most minute details. TWoP supported full forums for the shows recapped, including sub-boards for the characters, marketing and promotions, actors, costumes, spoilers, and other aspects of show content and production, all in addition to a dedicated thread for each episode. Shows not covered by recaps had space in the boards as well, though each non-covered program only had a single thread. The so-called "basement forums" were organized according to program genre, which contained threads for shows, past and present, as well as for television in general, including threads for commercials, industry developments, films, and discussions that crossed between individual genres and programs. All told, after more than a decade of user contributions, these forums encompassed thousands of threads, and each thread itself could contain anywhere from a few dozen posts (for unpopular, short-lived topics) to hundreds of thousands of replies.

The TWoP boards were a vast landscape of television viewer productivity; combined with the recaps, the site forged a sprawling but cohesive community of participants who loved to revere and revile television, at times simultaneously. There were strict rules of posting, including requirements to read others' posts, to reply only after having watched the full episode, to keep conversation on topic, to always use correct

capitalization, grammar, and spelling, and to post about television, not about one another. Recappers cultivated individual style, and were likewise kept to strict posting deadlines to ensure content was available to readers on an orderly, predictable schedule. The details of the site were such that its content, community, and tone were very much the product of its structure and its user contribution working in tandem with one another.

The rich field of user investment, feedback, and interpersonal bonding that made Television Without Pity somewhat of an internet destination for snarky television consumers has also not gone unnoticed by scholars. In "Watching Television Without Pity: The Productivity of Online Fans" (2008), Mark Andrejevic considers the site as one in which "invites viewers to adopt the standpoint of producers, and thereby facilitates the conversion of viewer feedback into potentially productive marketing, and demographic information" (p. 27). The structure, rhetoric, and profile of TWoP made it a site that long invoked the promise of interactivity, as television fans connected with one another and were drawn to the sense of collusion, whether real or imagined, between the TWoP's users and creators and the producers of the television shows they discussed. The productivity, Andrejevic argues, generated both affective investment for its participants and real economic value for content producers and advertisers within the television industry, a combination that marked the site's position, from its earliest days, as one balanced between exploitation and opportunity of agency.

Jonathan Gray (2005) approaches Television Without Pity less from an industrial perspective, and instead focuses on the practices of its participants as a performance of taste. In his analysis of antifans and those who present critical feedback on media content – and perhaps greatly enjoy doing so – Gray considers how the participants of the TWoP

boards helped construct a self-reflexive image of the site's users as more hip, more discerning, and more articulate than the average mainstream television viewer. Though TWoP was never the sole site available for consumers interested in dissecting media content, Gray points to its focus on television broadly, as opposed to a particular show or genre, and its emphasis on community building, user discussion, and critique as well as praise, as elements that set it apart from others.

The Television Without Pity user audience was constructed by their activity on the site: They read and wrote recaps, posted to the forums, and, as will be discussed in a later section, self-identified as part of a community of TWoPpers. As users, though their activities, built a discerning, bonded audience community, they also formulated the interests of the site. This chapter, therefore, focuses on how the interests of Television Without Pity were constructed by its participants, and how, in co-opting them, industrial forces ultimately failed to meet those interests any longer.

Corporate ownership, corporate end

In 2007, Television Without Pity was purchased by Bravo Media in a substantial buy-out, rendering the site a cog in Comcast's multinational media conglomerate, along with NBC, a host of cable networks, and cable distribution systems. This step was, in many was, a long time in the making; Andrejevic, collecting data in 2003, reports posters' concerns that the site "might be reduced to one more marketing strategy" (2008, p. 28). Going from private to corporate ownership brought about dramatic changes for Television Without Pity, in personnel, content, and aesthetics. Many longtime recappers did not make the transition to Bravo, and the site's owners – who never disclosed dollar
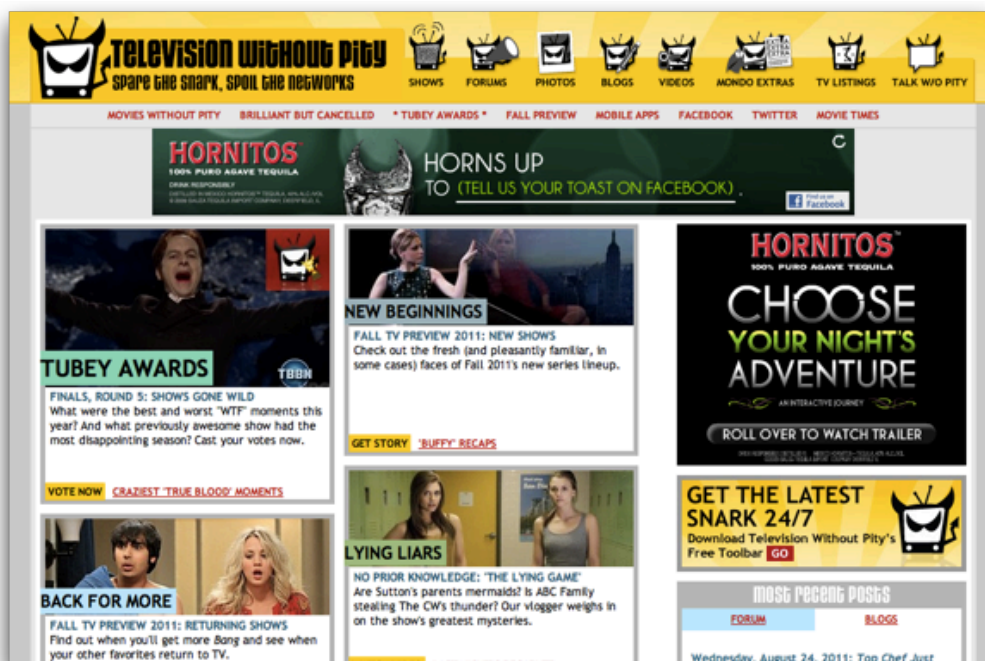
Image 2.2: *Television Without Pity, 2011*

amounts, but alluded to making a considerable profit with the purchase – all went to work

for TWoP as a corporate entity, and all left within a year. The site began covering a

broader range of shows, including sitcoms, basic cable shows, and other programs

previously considered to be ill-suited to the TWoP format. And even though the page had

always been updated, slick, and well designed, with new ownership, its aesthetics shifted

to accommodate more ad space, larger headlines, and less content [see image 2.2].

Other major transitions in the site were less apparent, and perhaps not even

deliberate. The site's overall organization and function were largely unchanged; on the

surface, and for a time, the constructs built by user participation, and their perceived

value as a site, remained intact. However, the tone, practices, and underlying purpose of

TWoP were inevitably altered. As will be outlined in more detail below, what users and

contributors did on the site, how their activity was regulated and incentivized, and what

participation meant was transformed with the Bravo purchase. The change in ownership

was a shift in the balance of the site: capitalist practices eclipsed affective investment, and no longer was Television Without Pity a place of user-generated, freely-given productivity that engaged like-minded television viewers in discussions of beloved or ridiculous television shows for the sheer joy of doing so. The site was now a transmedia marketing venture.

Then, in March of 2014, it became a defunct marketing venture: Bravo announced that it would be closing Television Without Pity the following month. The announcement generated a number of personal and industrial post-mortems on the site, its influence, and its place in participatory media. Because the site, at the time of the announcement, still maintained archives of recaps and forum posts that dated back to 2002, part of the upset was the potential loss of a massive repository of user productivity. The possibility of losing thousands of pages of recapper creations, and exponentially more posts and contributions by members on the message boards, brought to the fore the ephemeral nature of the internet, and reminded participants of content ownership structures that often remain implicit: users often have no say in what happens to the content they create via their participation. Bravo Media ultimately bowed to requests, and announced that the forums would close, but the archive of recaps – a chronicle of how a particular viewing community approached television for more than a decade – would remain online.

Even with Television Without Pity being preserved as a sealed archive, the closure of the site represents the end of an era of media participation. The shift in the site from user-created to corporate-owned to historical artifact, I argue, is one that exemplifies the complexities involved in contemporary interactive practice. Changes in Television Without Pity made participation in the site, in its purposes and goals, and in its

culture undergo significant transformations as well. The theoretical frameworks for what

constitutes participation on a user-created site such as Television Without Pity are broad,

and encompass theories of co-creation, labor, and community, which all contribute to the

nature of interactivity. By examining the nature of participation at this particular site, and

the marked changes undergone after TWoP was purchased by Bravo, this chapter

illustrates the underlying complexities of interactivity in popular media, and how those

indicate its ultimate failings.

The feedback narrative

Television Without Pity provides a baseline for further case studies in part

because, particularly before its sale to Bravo, it was more emblematic than unusual.

TWoP was, in many respects, the paragon of user-generated interactivity in convergence

culture; this certainly contributes to its many mentions within media scholarship – and,

likely, to its appeal for corporate enterprise. Nevertheless, this aspect is the site of the

first, and perhaps most significant, point of transition for the site. Whereas Television

Without Pity was built as a user-created site of contribution for television fans who,

through substantive discussion, were able to position themselves as discerning viewers

who could provide valuable feedback to producers and industry executives, the purchase

by Bravo made this outsider, feedback narrative impossible.

The TWoP approach to television consumption, with its valorization of viewer-

recapper analyses and extensive user message board responses, fostered an ongoing

rhetoric of feedback; Television Without Pity used its outsider status to position itself as a

source of meaningful, authentic, and important feedback directed at ongoing televisual

texts. This is the underlying principle of the ideal of co-creation: That a television text is constantly in progress, and interactivity is the means by which viewers have a say in its outcomes (Holmes, 2004). The site, at least in theory, provided the opportunity for users to become involved in television industry operations, and allowed posters to communicate to television (and to media producers who were paying attention) what they thought.

Andrejevic contends that Television Without Pity offered the promise to realize the full potential of interactivity. TWoP offered "the promise of virtual participation in the production process," he argues, which "invites viewers to adopt the standpoint of producers, and thereby facilitates the conversation of viewer feedback into potentially productive marketing and demographic information" (2008, p. 26-27). Television Without Pity was fun, interesting and, ultimately valuable because it seemed to offer ordinary users the chance to be involved in television creation. Andrejevic describes instances, made legend and oft-circulated by TWoPpers, of the time *The West Wing* incorporated a spat between show creator Aaron Sorkin and show recapper Pamela Ribon into a snide comment in the program text, of television writers frequenting the message boards, of shows naming characters for recappers or altering formats based on analysis on the site, and of show producers printing copies of recaps for actors and writers to read over. Irrespective of the actual truth or frequency to these events, they became part of site lore, and these anecdotal examples are used as evidence of Television Without Pity's potential to have an impact on televisual content – to influence, as Su Holmes puts it "the 'production' of the narrative trajectory" (2004, p. 221)

Though early Television Without Pity was a plucky upstart that made no claim to be part of, or have an institutional connection with, major television, participation in the site occasionally yielded opportunities to become insiders in TV production. Some early TWoP recappers worked for the site while trying to break in to writing for television, and ultimately made the jump: Pamela Ribon, previously mentioned for invoking the ire of the show creator when recapping *The West Wing*, worked as a writer on *Mind of Mencia* and *Samantha Who?*, and recapper Stephen Falk became a writer and producer for web series, film shorts, and *Weeds*. Other TWoP writers were not actively attempting to enter the entertainment industry and worked as financial analysts, in universities, as journalists, and as chefs. Nevertheless, some of these ultimately changed jobs via their participation in the site: One recapper for *America's Next Top Model* was actually hired away from Television Without Pity in 2005 to become an associate producer on the show; he has since gone on work as a producer for several long-running reality television programs. Another recapped *Everwood* for Television Without Pity, and was eventually hired as an assistant by the show's series creator. Another, who wrote for the site while living and working as a lawyer in Minnesota, has since become the editor for National Public Radio's pop culture blog and weekly podcast. These anecdotes are not passed as frequently among TWoP posters, but nevertheless lent an air of legitimacy to the site, even before it became a part of a major media conglomerate.

Television Without Pity made no promise of launching careers in traditional media organizations; even after the sale to a media conglomerate, in which some longtime recappers became full-time employees of Bravo and NBC Universal, most who stayed continued to post under pseudonyms and remained freelancers or low-ranking

digital content creators far removed from traditional channels of media production, distribution, and coverage. But its ability to invite ordinary users to participate in television, combined with memorable, if anomalous, examples of meant that it implicitly seemed to offer unofficial professional training and exposure; thus participation became an investment toward a future career opportunity (Baym and Burnett, 2009). Other companies offer access to desirable, difficult-to-launch careers as incentives for co-creative participation, but these leave participants feeling exploited when the promised professional opportunities do not arise in the end (Carah, 2011). TWoP, however, was itself an outsider; it promised no access, but participation could nevertheless be rewarding.

Television Without Pity made available other types of feedback channels for its participants. Even when recappers, suggestions, and critiques are not overtly enfolded into the narrative content of television shows, as Gray (2005) noted, TWoP participants constructed an image of the site as a particularly engaged, thoughtful, and articulate subsection of the television viewing public. The heavily-trafficked public message boards, the depth and visibility of the recaps, the profile of the site within popular culture, and, eventually, the attention with the highly-publicized acquisition by Bravo contributed to the idea that Television Without Pity was a site that mattered. Andrejevic quotes one of the site's recappers, who asserts, "We were a focus group whose comments were heard by the executive brass" (2008, p. 27). Unlike review sites geared at recommending particular programs, or chat rooms (and, later, Social TV apps), which foster synchronous viewing, Television Without Pity was structured to privilege critique and feedback. In the forums dedicated show threads opened only after a show aired in the US, and users were

asked to comment on the episode after, not during, a viewing. Recaps came in the hours and days after show airings; Television Without Pity did not recap off screeners, and it was focused on the continued consumption of television texts, rather than on whether users should decide to pick up a show in the first place. The site housed users who positioned themselves as cultural curators; TWoP housed fans who acted as filters (Baym and Burnett, 2009): self-made experts assess, archive, promote, and filter the occasionally overwhelming flow of information, content, and response to television.

Participation in Television Without Pity, by posters, readers, and recappers alike, was about creating a response that reshaped the meaning of television texts. Andrejevic argues, "Within this context, the show is no longer the final product but rather the raw material to which value is added by the labor – some paid, some free – of recappers and forum contributors" (2008, p. 32). The appeal of this configurability of meaning is that the responses could be heard: The site's channels of feedback were partially directed at industry content creators, aimed at influencing "The Powers That Be." When this actually succeeded, it rippled throughout the site for years. Forms of feedback – professional training, institutional influence and content input – only function as part of TWoP's early participatory promise because the site was only as effective as its users. It could not promise to sway corporate-created television because it was firmly removed from corporate media structures. This marks a transition point in the site that was inevitable: With its purchase by Bravo, TWoP's participatory promise was to be part of an existing, influential media organization, which raises the possibility that feedback is the expectation and not the pleasing anomaly. Television Without Pity's transition from small outsider with valuable potential to small insider with little institutional sway

illustrates the boundaries blurred by interactivity; contributions can be simultaneously user-created and industrially significant. Though the actions remain unaltered, the rewards they offer to participants shift. This becomes important as the new, corporate-owned version of Television Without Pity is unable to offer the pleasures of outsider feedback to its participants.

Co-creation possibilities, imposed limits

Beyond the content of the posts and recaps themselves, participation in Television Without Pity afforded the opportunity for the co-creation of meaning. The feedback generated by TWoPpers was also aimed at other users; as users provided one another information, interpretation, and commentary, they were helping to jointly create a perspective on programming, popular culture, and contemporary television. This form of participation in particular underwent significant alterations when the site changed ownership, limiting the type of meaning possible for its user-contributors.

Scholarship on co-creation is often focused on the technological developments that have allowed user-generated products to stand directly beside industry-created efforts; as a result, considerations of co-creators (and co-producers, and produsers, and prosumers) have emphasized, perhaps overly so, the prevalence of content creation. Though awareness and interest may be on the rise, José van Dijck (2009) points out that content creators are not just a small subset of all consumers, but remain even a rather small segment even of active media participants (p. 44). Emphasis on the optimistic possibility of consumers taking up technology in order to produce media (Jenkins, 2006; Bruns, 2006), in which co-creating content is equated with grassroots democratization

and reclaiming of power, also raises considerable ambivalence about the limits of agency (see, for instance, Bird, 2011).

Here, however, I consider a more cultural approach to co-creation, in which I focus on how meaning and shared perspective are created through participation. Participation on Television Without Pity helped contribute to the creation of a knowledge community; its users "pool their information, shape each other's opinions, and develop a greater self-consciousness about their shared agendas and common interests" (Jenkins, 2007, pp. 362-363). TWoPpers contributed to an ongoing conversation about what particular television shows meant, how they were understood, and their broader cultural impact, while at the same time engaging in feedback about the nature of television as a medium.

From the start of Television Without Pity, the emphasis the site placed on thoughtful, detailed, and frequently derisive commentary fostered an appreciation of the medium as one that was fun, funny, and worth the time spent with it. TWoPpers are viewers who respect television, even if they are not always kind to it: "What TWoP did is insist that television criticism could be both arch and informed, that you could watch a lot of *Roswell*, you could *care* about *Roswell*, and you could still think *Roswell* is dumb garbage" (Lyons, 2014, n.p., emphasis in the original). Despite the site's deliberately lighthearted tone, participants and recappers alike worked together to form a consensus and frame debates about contemporary television shows that promoted value not simply for the content they created, but for the process of creating it together.

With the purchase by Bravo, however, the meaning available to be created by TWoPpers also underwent a shift. As the site lost its status as an invested outsider, the

discussions became always already supportive of television, if only implicitly. This change in how interactivity was practiced on Television Without Pity – and, ultimately, the site's decline and eventual closure – was also an inevitable response to corporate ownership. The role of co-creation on Television Without Pity was different as economic value became an inevitable consequence of site participation; to some extent, the ability of users to be truly challenging became hampered. This is not to say that the site began to curtail outright criticism, but to acknowledge that this type of criticism was happening on a site owned by NBC Universal and, ultimately, Comcast. No longer is the feedback generated by participation on the site an outsider opinion, but it became meaning constructed within the system.

There are specific changes in the site structure that underline this change; for example, after the purchase, Television Without Pity began to provide a wider variety of content, including live coverage of major events, breaking entertainment news, and a section for Movies Without Pity. Even among television coverage, the site expanded– it covered new programs in an abbreviated version, publishing "weecaps" of one to two pages that offered less comprehensive coverage, but also less time commitment for readers; there were more shows with expanded sections in the forums; and, perhaps most significantly, the site covered program genres it previously had not. TWoP offered full recap coverage to sitcoms such as *How I Met Your Mother*, *30 Rock* and *The Office*, as well as to procedurals like *Elementary*; unsurprisingly, the expanded coverage also extended to programs airing on numerous NBC Universal broadcast and cable channels and produced by their production companies. These developments shifted the purpose attached to participation with TWoP, focusing the co-creation toward the production of

feedback that was most valuable and made use of the existing framework of the site to promote user engagement in specific, targeted areas, and to gather feedback for particular programs and events.

Television Without Pity thus illustrates the importance for this project of framing co-creation as a theoretical approach in which participation constructs textual meaning, social capital, and cultural perspective; these are users whose participation allows them to fit, with others, in a shared vision of television audiences. Co-creation can refer to a shared construction of content, from message board posts to recaps to videos, mash-ups and promotional material. On Television Without Pity, the productivity of participants did not change significantly after it was sold to Bravo; what did change was the meaning that was constructed alongside its content, as TWoP made a shift from outsider to insider; no longer was it a site of feedback, but of market response that took on a more explicit economic value for traditional producers and industrial forces. This type of meaning creation is also the focus of later chapters, in which perspective and data comprise the primary products created by consumer participation, and reinforces the notion that co-creation can have a more nuanced relationship with interactivity than just content production. Television Without Pity illustrates how the notion of participant agency can encompass the ability to collaboratively formulate and distribute critical opinions, alternate interpretations, and pushback against meaning; this presents a theoretical construct of co-creation that more accurately reflects the full scope of interactive practice. Participation, in other words, can be seen as making something that matters, even if it does not involve content creation. The question then arises whether manifestations of

interactivity are able to adequately construct sites at which participation is able to sufficiently matter for its contributors.

Interactive labor

Implicit in the theoretical concept of co-creation, and in particular practices of co-producing content, is that users are *doing* something, and that the content created, the act of participating itself, and the traces of that investment can all generate value. As a result, interactivity is frequently framed by questions of consumer labor and industry exploitation, in which the two constructs of audience and industry are once again pitted as oppositional binaries engaged in a zero-sum struggle. Television Without Pity's history offers an illustration of participant labor in transition: For recappers, whose work for the site was always compensated, the shift was from helping create meaning, a shared identity, and community to working as part of a vast marketing and promotional team. For members of the site, whose participation was never compensated, the change in how the labor is framed as more nebulous; it shifted to offer a more explicit economic value for corporate industry purposes, but was meant to retain the affective benefits that motivated the behaviors in the first place.

Media work itself has increasingly become what Mark Deuze (2007) refers to as "liquid": The lived experience of contemporary media work is marked by increased insecurity, precariousness and demands for flexibility, mounting global influence, and more reliance on technologic developments and cultural input. This fluidity is magnified by co-creative endeavors; Deuze and John Banks raise the possibility that shifting trends in how the media operate "turn consumers into workers for the industry, and whether the

labour market for professional producers thus gets diminished" (2009, p. 420). This is the "new mixed models of labour" in which "the sliding scales of voluntarism are inversely proportional to the sliding scales of professionalism" (van Dijck, 2009, p. 50): Skilled and creative work, often highly compensated but increasingly precarious, operates alongside the free labor of participant workers.

It is this free/voluntary labor that offers particular insight into the nature of participation on Television Without Pity. The work of reading, posting, commenting, and generating meaning on TWoP – in short, the work of interactivity on the site – can be characterized as immaterial labor. Immaterial labor, as theorized by Maurizio Lazzarato, represents "a series of activities that are not normally recognized as 'work' – in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion." He refers to this as activity that "produces the 'cultural content' of the commodity" (2006, p. 132). Lazzarato effectively argues that the process of creating meaning also creates value, in both a cultural and economic sense; as a result, these practices can be accurately characterized as a form of work.

Lazzarato's concept of immaterial labor has another key aspect, in which the very act of participation is primary. He argues that despite the immateriality, the work, its results, and the rewards are nevertheless very real:

> The particularity of the commodity produced through immaterial labor…consists in the fact that it is not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the "ideological" and cultural environment of the consumer…Immaterial labor produces first and foremost a "social relationship" (a relationship of innovation, production, and consumption). (2006, p. 137)

The sociality in this type of participation provides a significant portion of its incentive; it can explain, in part, why individuals enthusiastically take part in interactive work that

offers no formal compensation. In other words, it indicates "what motivates people to work for free when the context is leisure, while they demand to be paid for the same work when the context is different?" (Postigo, 2009, p. 466). That participation and shared work help build and strengthen interpersonal bonds is a significant aspect to understanding the nature of how interactivity operates, on Television Without Pity and, more broadly, at other sites as well; this structuring of community is taken up more directly in the next section. This is not, however, the only motivating force. Beyond monetary gain, participants labor within cultural contexts out of a loyalty and affinity for culture itself; in is research on the labor of video game fans, R.M. Milner found that participants "viewed their labor as a service to the text" (2009, p. 499). In other words, the incentive for participation is the promise that the official cultural text (the television show, the convention, the books, the films), or their process of consumption of those texts, could be improved as a result of the efforts of its participants.

Even done for personal enjoyment, labor that constitutes cultural participation is always implicated, explicitly or otherwise, in the corporate/capitalist structures that produce media content. The fact that these practices generate value, in the form of increased consumption, content, advertising revenue, or beneficial cultural meanings, for sites and texts that are owned by corporate entities "places the productive and social endeavors of volunteers and amateurs within the capitalist orbit" (Postigo, 2009, p. 452). As a result, framing participation with the rhetoric of labor also raises issues of exploitation. Tiziana Terranova (2000) describes cultural work that is done by individuals outside of traditional labor structures as free labor "simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited" (p. 33). Terranova situates her concept of free labor

within ongoing shifts that contend not only with the changing role of volunteer

participation, but also in related changes of technology and in knowledge work; this type

of labor is increasingly necessary for the production of culture, but neither its workers nor

the industrial organizations are entirely able to maximize its potential, understand its

benefits, or parse its implications. "Free labor," Terranova notes, "is the moment where

this knowledgeable consumption of culture is translated into productive activities that are

pleasurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited" (p. 37).

Exploitation is a pervasive concern because the value generated by participant

laborers for corporate interests, and the compensation offered to those laborers, has the

potential to be deeply and irrevocably out of balance. Individuals may reap considerable

return from their efforts; in addition to those already mentioned and to be discussed later,

including a shared construction of meaning and of community structures, participants

can, as a result of their work, cultivate a sense of ownership over the text, social status, or

esteem (Milner, 2009, p. 494). In other words, engaging in work motivated by affective

impulses yields affective rewards. On the other hand, this is countered with the potential

value that participant labor offers to corporations, organizations, and industry structures;

they may gain content, feedback and critique, site traffic and viewership that can translate

to advertising dollars, participant organization and regulation, and promotion and

marketing. For much of the labor performed by participants, the same activities would

easily warrant financial compensation, and sometimes a significant amount, if it were

performed by individuals under a formal employment agreement; instead, it is conducted

freely, and often enthusiastically, irrespective of how it may support industry efforts.

In weighing the value provided by cultural laborers against the rewards received, it is critical to note that free labor produces more than content; it also, simultaneously, generates data. These emerging modes of participation offer "a form of productive labor in the ongoing surveillance and construction of the audience" (Shimpach, 2005, p. 352). In the process of creating content, feedback, commentary, meaning, and community ties, participants also willingly submit their practices to being monitored and regulated – by one another as well as by corporate interests. This "work of being watched," according to Mark Andrejevic (2003), is one of the most pervasive forms of exploitation in participatory culture, in which self-surveillance and peer-monitoring become common practice for participants, and self-disclosure is valorized in order to provide industrial owners access to information that previously would have been private, and kept that way. Critiques of, for example, co-production of content often focus on the relative lack of control consumer/producers have in how their content could eventually be used by organizations who hold intellectual property rights and who configure the parameters of produsage in the first place; this approach, in fact, is taken up in chapter five of this work, and applies these issues to the contentious history of production within Harry Potter's fandom. Beyond this, it is critical to consider how little agency individuals have in how data about their participation, usage, and practices is gathered or ultimately used (van Dijck, 2009). Being the subject of monitoring and data collection has become the price of participation, and is part of the value provided to those watching the practices of free labor.

As compelling as it has often proven to be, however, many scholars are reluctant to give over completely to the assessment of free labor as ultimately exploitative. In part,

this is because participants themselves do not necessarily understand it as such; they may cast their activities as fun or play rather than labor (van Dijck, 2009), and consider the surplus value created by their participation to be irrelevant to their enjoyment and perceived benefits. Data gathering of participatory practices, too, can offer individuals a chance to be quantified in the first place; though monitoring may not be ideal, it makes labor a performance and provides the subject a chance to be counted (Coté and Pybus, 2011). Even if participants understand the possibility of their contributions being exploited for industrial benefit, this may simply be par for the course for them, and does not diminish their desire to contribute (Milner, 2009). Of course, Andrejevic is apt to point out that individuals do not have to understand power dynamics as exploitative in order for such exploitation to be taking place (2011), but evaluations of exploitation are necessarily a balancing act; the perceptions of participants do matter if they are not to be cast as cultural dupes. Hector Postigo (2009) researched volunteers for early AOL communities who, as a result of corporate practices and subsequent changes to how the volunteers' contributions were externally compensated and perceived from within, ultimately sued the company for unfair labor practices. He argues:

> The duality of workers'/volunteers'/fans' subject position suggests that labor relations as they exist in cases of co-creative labor are a result of not only the technologies, the post-industrial ideology and its subsequent arrangement of labor, but also of the phenomenology of those volunteers and fans who are doing the working. How they see themselves is as important to co-creative labor as how the structures of capital tend to organize them" (p. 463).

Though ownership structures, legal frameworks, and labor systems instituted by industrial producers certainly shapes the nature of media consumer work and the possibility for exploitation, the intangible rewards perceived by participants contribute as well and must be taken into account. Reducing interactivity to a framework of exploited

labor negates the affective value, social rewards, and perceived benefits of its participants rather than allowing for a more nuanced concept in which the different types of rewards are able to work in concert with one another to offer different types of value.
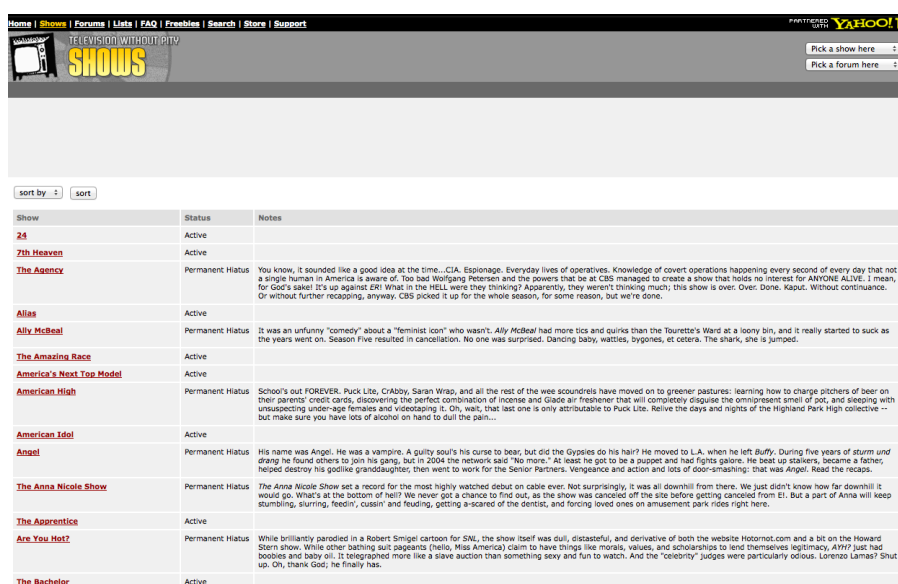
Posting for the me, profiting for the man

Given its origins in chat rooms and evolution from a fan site, Television Without Pity in its way was always a site built on free labor and motivated by affect. These contributions, however, transitioned with the site's purchase to become efforts that remained uncompensated, but took on an entirely different role in cultural production. In essence, when participation on Television Without Pity, including posting, reading, generating feedback and producing meaning, became more like work as the site was appropriated by a major corporation, its social rewards diminished and the site became unable to adequately provide valuable work or engaging play, and became unviable.

TWoP's users posted to the message boards, voted in polls, graded television episodes, and read recaps as part of their role as a television audience commodity, in order to participate in the construction of a shared sense of meaning, and, as will be discussed in the following section, in order to engage as members of a community. What they received in return were social rewards: A sense of belonging to a self-identified discerning and critical television audience community, for instance, and interpersonal bonding with like-minded others. And, though it may be apparent, it is worth mentioning: Television Without Pity's forums and recaps were well written, thoughtful, interesting, and witty. Participation was, primarily, a great deal of fun.

In TWoP's early period, there were also work behaviors that also skirted the boundary between compensated and freely-given labor. The three site creators were always active participants; two were occasional recappers and moderators, forum posters, and editors who inserted snarky notes and responses into the text of others' recaps as "editor comments"; the third dealt primarily with technological aspects, posted direct answers to questions on the message boards, and handled ongoing bug reports. The recappers were paid but were collecting a nominal wage. The economic rewards were generously compensated with social benefits: On the site, recappers were micro-celebrities of a sort, known for their personality, wit, and perspective as much as for their opinion on programs. Recappers were largely friends with one another and the site founders, or became so while working in the expanding TWoP network; the site never advertised for recappers, and discouraged prospective writers from contacting the creators for a job in their official Frequently Asked Questions. Instead, the editors relied on personal recommendations, social capital, and recruitment of a select few particularly diligent, articulate site users to fill out their recapper ranks. For the founders, TWoP was one of a series of internet ventures and more formal employment from which they made their living; for recappers, the site was a freelancing position that offered, at best, supplementary income; for posters, who were offered no financial benefit (and who, in fact, often conducted fundraising campaigns and purchased ad space to keep the site running), the work was for pleasure, social capital, and interpersonal returns.

Television Without Pity's transition from affective to corporate enterprise illustrates participation can remain productive but, as it is appropriated, can offer fewer social rewards, can pit the interests of users against those of the site owners, and can

begin to fit more closely to a narrative of exploitation. If user contribution on the site was initially structured to reward substantive feedback and forge meaningful connections between participants, after the purchase participation was focused on page views; the site, for instance, began updating its front page constantly to reorder articles, so there appears to be always something "new" to read. To access the recaps or forums of a particular show began taking more steps, with each page in between hosting ads and suggested content. The expansion of site features, including weecaps, Movies Without Pity and additional forum types made the content more difficult to navigate; whereas browsing through all shows was once a viable option, that menu eventually spanned 22 full pages. As a result, searching for specific programs and reading the curated top choices were more efficient means of accessing content, but offered less possibility of discovery [see images 2.3 and 2.4]. The site added categories to its poster hierarchy, and privileged posting more and posting often, but did not reward substantive posts in any way and, as will be discussed in more detail below, began to actively discourage users from talking directly with one another.

Image 2.3: *Television Without Pity show listings, 2005*

Image 2.4: *Television Without Pity curated show listings, 2013*

As Television Without Pity's new owners tweaked the site to respond to their interests, they also altered its functionality, its identity, and its user experience. The nature of the site meant that it always fostered cultural labor that had the potential to be exploited. Its shift in practices, however, meant that this potential use simply became actualized and focused on corporate gain. For example, organizing the site to promote page views and make circuitous the routes users follow through the site generates additional data and points of surveillance; altering the shows covered targets feedback toward programs, genres, and cable networks that interest the site owners the most; and valorizing the quantity of posts but not promoting increased substance generates an audience of potential consumers of advertisements without fostering meaningful connections. In other words, the changes in Television Without Pity effectively downplay its affective benefits as a means to maximize the surplus value of participant labor.

In his research on America Online volunteers, Postigo (2009) posits that the growth of the company, shifts in user community, and changes in organizational and pricing structures led to volunteers ultimately viewing their contributions as work that was being undervalued by the expanding corporation (p. 454). Exploitation rhetoric may undervalue the perceived rewards of affective compensation for free labor (fun, social

capital, community building, social status, etc.), and it perpetuates the oppositional binary between producer and worker – or, more specifically, between industry and audience. John Banks and Sal Humphreys (2008) argue that there is an alterative to positioning forces as opposites: "Rather than being a zero sum game where if companies derive economic benefit it negates social benefit to the users (and hence is couched in terms of exploitation), is this instead an example of a new articulation of a cooperative and non-zero sum game whereby different motivations and value regimes co-exist?" (pp. 412-413). Though they acknowledge an inherent imbalance in power in such relationships that means that such situations are not collaborations between equals, Banks and Humphreys contend that it is nevertheless possible for systems of affective work and reward and economic work and reward to operate in alignment with one another. Such an asymmetrical alignment is one in which social rewards are given their own system of values that is not subsumed into a rhetoric of exploitation and economic or political power, but are instead allowed to present authentic and organic benefits and present their own drawbacks and limitations.

Television Without Pity's transition marked one in which the interests of its owners and those of its participants moved out of alignment, and ultimately contributed to its decline. At the site's founding, its status as a user-generated, outsider community meant that the processes of meaning creation, social bonding, and sarcastic television critique could take explicit priority as the purpose of the site. The participation of its users could be put to work in other ways, of course, as show creators, networks, and marketers monitored viewer behaviors and collected feedback, but TWoP remained a community first.

After the sale to Bravo, its status changed; participation was automatically implicated in the economic aims of its now-corporate parent company. The transition is motivated by Bravo's efforts to put the user-generated productivity of early TWoP to work for the Comcast corporation, but was not able to succeed because the added weight of these responsibilities were not balanced by added social rewards – or even a reinforcement of existing ones. Even if the site had remained precisely the same, this shift alters the tenor and purpose of the free labor performed on the site; yet it did change, in its aesthetic, content, and purpose. Thus the appropriation of Television Without Pity illustrates how exploitation plays a part in instances of consumer productivity, co-creation, and interactivity; in examining the modes of labor performed by participants throughout the case studies of this project, my aim is to consider more closely the alignment of social and economic benefits to evaluate how nuances labor and exploitation frame the practices of interactivity

In this interactivity together

One of the most dramatic shifts for Television Without Pity was the way its identity as a community deteriorated after its purchase by Bravo. Community structures, as previously noted, help promote the effectiveness of free labor: social ties can be effective tools in "blurring the perception of work as work" (Postigo, 2009, p. 453), so that activity is fun rather than obligation. Though Television Without Pity's desirability, from an industrial perspective, may well have been in the fact that it housed a particularly desirable segment of the television viewing audience who worked hard to create content and provide feedback, its appeal for participants is that housed a community of viewers.

The transitional moment for the site came when the former began to take priority over the latter.

Community is often used as an ideal of in participatory culture, an easy designation of consumer groups seeking shared entertainment (van Dijck, 2009). The term is frequently invoked to describe social networking, online gaming, and all manner of Web 2.0 involvement; it has also been deployed to describe fan conventions and Comic-Con, Social TV app users, Harry Potter fans, and Television Without Pity and message board participants. For many of these, however, community acts more as an eventual goal than an accurate description; as Nancy Baym points out, "The mere existence of an interactive online forum is not a community, and those who participate using one platform may comprise very different groups" (2010, p. 74). Though community remains a contested term with many different definitions, certain characteristics are frequently used in academic and cultural definitions, including reciprocity, trust, and trustworthiness (Putnam, 2000), a sense of being bound and connected to others (Day, 2006), and a recognition of membership, and of others as members as well (Mason, 2000). Many of these characteristics are defined in such a way so as to differentiate between participation and membership, to raise community to something above merely performing particular behaviors; community is meant to emphasize how behaviors contribute to a shared purpose or identity and construct a sense of belonging. Community is brought into the discussion because it provides deeply felt social rewards that incentivize user participation and promote engagement.

The pleasures of participation produce cohesive communities that order individual experiences and situate interactivity within a larger cultural landscape. Michael Hardt

(1999) contends that "our laboring practices produce collective subjectivities, produce sociality, and ultimately produce society itself" (p. 89), and sociality and affect are "the binding, dynamic force[s] which…provide coherence to networked relations" (Coté and Pybus, 2011, 171). Affect strengthens social bonds, organizes groups, and foster attachment and productivity among users. Andrejevic (2008) notes that TWoP capitalizes on this transformative attachment in order to generate a sense of usefulness and value among participants.

The related notions of affect and of community contribute to the understanding, easily idealized, of how participation once operated at Television Without Pity. The site actively created a sense of community among its users, and participants have been upfront about forging and displaying a shared identity as TWoPers, as membership in the community carried significance. As the site began to close, a former reader and recapper who now works for *Entertainment Weekly* notes that Television Without Pity "engendered a community that so many sites, platforms, and Web Whatever.0 startups have tried, and failed, to replicate. Even as the readership dwindled in recent years, its devotion was no less strong" (Beard, 2014, n.p.). The TWoP community offered the benefits often idealized in analyses of online communities, but also, perhaps more importantly, provided a model for how interactive participation was to be enacted at this particular site. The challenge, of course, was in maintaining that community identity, system of social order, and affective reward once the site was no longer a user-generated group, but rather one constructed – and altered – by corporate interests.

We are TWoP

Affective investment strengthens participation; on Television Without Pity, it is what kept users reading recaps, posting to the site, and generating meaning, productive labor, and value. The community of Television Without Pity was formative and instructive; a former TWoPper contends, "It showed me how to watch television, after a long period when I didn't own a TV set. The prospect of TV-watching being a communal, joyful, sarcastic experience instead of an empty 'couch potato' thing helped bring me back to the medium" (Anders, 2014, n.p.). Even recappers, whose writing for the site was always a form of compensated labor, categorize their involvement with the site as participation rather than strictly work. One former recapper notes that it was never about money or obligation: "It was about getting to sit on your couch and yell at the TV. It was about being paid any amount to write bitchy and snarky. It was about finding a community that loved to hate bad TV as much I as I did" (Lucianovic, 2010). The reward, for recappers and posters alike, came from the process of collectively constituting a subjectivity of television viewing, and enjoying the ability to circulate and reinforce that perspective with others. When TWoP was a user-generated site gaining influence, producing meaning, and providing feedback and entertainment, its value for participants – even those who were present as paid contributors – was in the affective rewards it provided.

In particular in its early years, the work by TWoP's users and paid staff, as it was with other internet groups, was more about creating and maintaining the sense of community than it was necessarily about content creation (Postigo, 2009); for Television Without Pity this meant, in part, fostering a community of best practices that served to

model ideal consumer and participatory behaviors. From the opening of its forums, Television Without Pity had an extensive system of rules and norms to prevent them from devolving into an inhospitable environment. The focus was on cultivating intelligent discussion, and users are required to use correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation in all posts, to write in complete sentences and, to maintain an appropriate tone. TWoP was not shy about placing demands on posters: The 15/15 rule, for example, required posters to have read the last 15 pages or 15 days worth of posts, whichever was shorter, before making comments; the goal was to minimize repetition and grandstanding on the forums. Some seemingly petty rules have had important ramifications; for example, the prohibition against beginning posts with "Um…" might appear trifling, but was actually enacted to discourage comments that could be interpreted, accurately or not, as conveying a tone of condescension or as attempting to railroad a fellow poster. Perhaps most importantly, TWoPers were expected to post substantively; vague "I agree!" posts or those that consist of internet-speak and acronyms could actually get users warned and, eventually, banned entirely. There was a collective denigration of what is referred to as "squee," a somewhat onomatopoetic description of emotionally laden fannishness that lacks substance, significant input, or critical distance.

The demand for respect was one of a variety of ways that Television Without Pity instituted explicit and implicit means of regulating community participation on the site; community members embraced the value of these practices, and worked to perpetuate them. Sal Humphreys (2008) notes that participatory communities on the internet generally involve multiple levels of governance; in one of these, "members institute their own group norms and ways of policing each others' behavior" (p. 161), including

monitoring one another's activities and publish shaming of behavior that breaks the rules. Shaming is particularly effective in arenas such as Television Without Pity, in which reputation and social hierarchies made it possible to have respected, prolific members whose censure carried weight. It also works, however, because of the community identity cultivated on the site; users had a hand in creating what it meant to be a TWoPper, and were therefore invested in maintaining the site standards.

The explicit rules and tacit conventions of the forums encouraged community interaction, and also modeled participant behavior and privileged viewing practices that culminated in intelligent, detailed, and nuanced analyses. "Television Without Pity," reflects a former user, "didn't just pioneer a way of television in a more lively, irreverent fashion – it also showed all of us how we could become more active consumers of entertainment, converting passive viewing into active discussion, argument, creativity, and mockery" (Anders, 2014, n.p.). Governance by members and the site organization is therefore a critical component of how appropriate protocols of interactivity are introduced and reinforced for participants, and helps shape how interactivity manifests at particular locations; for early Television Without Pity, the focus was on community interaction and meaningful discussion. As news of TWoP's imminent closure traveled the internet, professional television critics, writers, and entertainment journalists – most of whom never worked for Television Without Pity, but who had at various points considered themselves participants of the site and part of its community – credit its practices and connections with teaching them to write, helping them get jobs, and showing them how to view television (Reid, 2014).

Even after its eventual closure, participants on Television Without Pity look back on its early years as an environment in which contributions were pleasurable, valuable, and rewarded. Users were self-selecting and like-minded, engaged in an organization in which their participation primarily functioned to perpetuate the same behaviors in others. There were, of course, valuable byproducts to even the earliest TWoP feedback, but these were neither the most prominent purposes or rewards in user accounts, nor were these the results the site was structured to maximize. Before its purchase, therefore, TWoP users were valued as members of a community, and able to reap the affective rewards associated with that position.

Corporate governance

Television Without Pity's transitions under the new ownership structures were at times, as has been mentioned, inherent in a shift to corporate property. In other instances, however, the changes were deliberate alterations in the site—including new content, different rules, and different enforcement—that altered how participation was framed and what interactivity meant at this venue. Whereas early TWoP was primarily a community of users who were constructed by their own activities, participants became members of a potentially valuable audience market constructed as part of Comcast's corporate domain. Changes to the site became a means of structuring activity, restricting behaviors that were not directly beneficial to the site's role as marketing agent for television programming and network platforms. The result were shifts that may have been beneficial to the industrial interests at play, but which increasingly did not adequately serve the social

Image 2.5: *Television Without Pity help topics, 2013. Posting regulations are far down the list, with guidelines for how to perform other forms of consumption taking priority.*

benefits which brought users to the site, helped forge a community, and promoted

participation.

For example, though rules were always enforced and explicit, when Television

Without Pity became a Bravo property, forum behavior became much more codified [see

image 2.5]. Longstanding rules that remained, in content, the same as previous years

were enforced differently – and much more strictly. The prohibition, for instance, against

"talking about the boards on the boards" was initially instituted to prevent squabbling in

which users attacked one another or devoted posts to dissecting another's argument. In

early years, this meant that users were discouraged from explicitly discussing the nature

of TWoP, its participants, and its perspectives on the site itself, while at the same time

were supposed to have read the contributions of others, reply to them, and forge a strong

sense of community. As the forums conformed to corporate standards, however, critics

and disaffected users contended that the forums became policed too harshly (Mullaney,

2014), and enforcement became unproductive. This same boards-on-the-boards rule,

therefore, became a means to quell dissent and restrict participant discussion: Moderators

began issuing warnings to users directly disagree with others, those who attempt to

reroute thread discussions, or those who frame positions as contrary to the majority

consensus. The explicit purpose is still to minimize disagreement, and according to the

letter of the rule, all of these could be interpreted as instances of "talking about the boards

on the boards." However, this type of enforcement simultaneously minimizes user-to-user

interaction; if users disagree with one another, according to this interpretation of the

forum rule, they were talking about other posters rather than about the show itself. While

this may be strictly true, it was the direct, interpersonal connections that allowed TWoP

to form a sense of community in the first place. Moreover, this interpretation is difficult

to enforce with any uniformity across the vast labyrinth that constituted TWoP's forum

structure; as a result, warnings became capricious, and enforcement took on a tone of

retribution. When forum threads were shut down, when users were banned, or when

moderators put discussions in a "time out," and the reason offered was widespread

discussion of the boards on the boards, disaffected community members would voice

concerns that the harsh, unpredictable governance of the site had become deeply personal

and mindlessly corporate at once; after all, it was dissent that was quelled, never effusive

praise. Changes in the site after its corporate purchase meant that community was simply

not the valorized element that it had been previously.

As these incidents indicate, the increase in monitoring the specific nature of user-to-user interactions also shifted the primary source of governance from other users to the site's moderators. While early TWoP relied on recappers to act as moderators for the dedicated show forums, the expansion of the site with Bravo's purchase also meant the introduction of professional moderators. Culled from active posters, former staffers, and outsiders, the dedicated TWoP moderators took over all moderating duties – and dealt harshly with both offending posters and fellow community members who attempted any form of peer governance. In early days of TWoP, warnings were rare and limited to notable flouting of the rules; most correction was done by editing problematic posts and with public reminders, by TWoP staff and other users alike, of the practices of the site. Official warnings by staff members, however, have a different implication; they are policing done by those in charge, and reinforce a perception of hierarchy and of parameters that are meant to be heeded, rather than community conventions established through common practice.

Governance on Television Without Pity became understood as codes and rules set out by management, management that was now part of a corporate enterprise. Humphreys clearly indicates the implications of such a system: "The control exerted by the publisher in implementing its own version of a healthy community must be understood as an exercise that ultimately will target the most profitable outcome rather than the most equitable social outcome" (2008, p. 158). In other words, community was a means to an end – of economic value, of productive content and feedback – rather than an end in itself, of affective attachment and interpersonal bonding.

While the television, and indeed much of the content produced by the site's writers, remained unchanged, the type of engagement, involvement, and interpersonal connection available to the users was altered. Changes in governance became emblematic of a site that simply did not offer the same pleasures as it once did, and was being regulated as part of a massive multi-national media conglomerate rather than an internal effort to maintain community structures and create a cohesive identity for a discerning television consuming audience. In short, the prominence and importance of order, governance, and economic interests transformed to take priority over the social rewards offered its members.

Future of snark

During its decade-and-a-half tenure on the internet, Television Without Pity served a variety of functions. It helped cultivate a site at which participants generated meaning, a shared perspective, and a way of watching television; it provided an opportunity for community and for feedback; and its protocols and practices made it an early example of interactivity. Perhaps one of TWoP's most significant features, or at least one that persisted even after the site's significance and social impact began to wane, was its role as an archive. The detailed recaps of the site covered not simply the show text, but the experience of viewing as well. It was not uncommon, for example, for recappers to include commentary on commercials, promos, and ongoing events during recaps. This contextualized coverage of the programs offered a comprehensive overview to the show itself, and also to its position within a particular moment of popular culture; the TWoP archive, therefore, offers more historical perspective on television content than

might an episode in syndication, streaming, or on DVD. The recaps also offer a detailed illustration of how the writers watched television. When news came that Television Without Pity would close, it was the loss of the archive that former recappers, readers, and cultural critics bemoaned first and foremost.

That Television Without Pity had shifted from pop culture touchstone to historical artifact indicates the position this case study serves in the context of this research. The transition of Television Without Pity from user-generated television fan site to corporate-owned marketing technique provides a concrete illustration of the assumptions within a dominant narrative of interactivity. This case is one of corporate takeover and appropriation: As the ownership of the site changed, the meaning its users were able to create, the work they performed by participating, and the community ties all changed in tone and nature. Whereas these were initially affective practices that offered social benefits, they ultimately became valuable insofar as they offer feedback, data, and promotional efforts for the site and its new owners. It is also a narrative of failed appropriation: Despite efforts to monetize the perceived value of Television Without Pity, Bravo and its owners, NBC Universal and Comcast, ultimately determined that TWoP was an experiment not worth continuing. If Television Without Pity had as-yet-untapped corporate value in its system of participation and co-creative labor, its owners were no longer interested in attempting to extract it.

Some of the decline of TWoP is a direct result of changes wrought by its corporate ownership. The potential value of the site may have been fundamentally squandered by changes made in its new corporate incarnation: The limitation of co-created meaning, the de-emphasized community ties, and the expansion of the site toward

more economically valuable – but not necessarily more desirable or interesting – media properties were all deliberate choices made in the site's construction that made Bravo's treatment of the site "the business of turning it into just another entertainment portal" (Reid, 2014, n.p.). On the other hand, other elements of TWoP's transition were more inevitable; the work involved in writing for the site and participating in its practices inevitably take on an economic lens when the site is owned wholesale by a multinational media conglomerate. Simply by the fact that it is corporate, Television Without Pity lost its outsider status, and became implicated into industrial systems rather than a channel through which participants could provide feedback and response to those systems.

Other theories of Television Without Pity's decline point to a change in the culture of the internet, and to its shifting relationship with television. TWoP was an incredibly early adopter of second-screen viewing practices, of television viewer participation, and of user-generated transmedia content; even its purchase by NBC Universal in 2007 comes only months after Twitter launched and Facebook became open to all users. The site pioneered long-form recaps and the construction of viewing audience communities through thoughtful, thorough, and meaningful user discussion. In an interview for the internet site Buzzfeed – itself a prime example of contemporary trends toward short-and-immediate online content – TwoP co-founder Tara Ariano reflects that the long, detailed television recap "feels like a relic of a time when there wasn't video online – they really served a functional purpose. In some cases, we would hear 'I'm overseas, I can't watch *Angel*!' Their only recourse was the recaps" (qtd. in Shafrir, 2014, n.p.). In the years since TWoP's founding – and, not incidentally, in the years since its purchase by Bravo – recaps have become a mainstay of online television

criticism; discussion of television episodes has moved to real-time reaction via Twitter hashtag, and the potential value of consumer involvement has become a potential for messiness and contention that is difficult to monetize and control. There was perhaps the potential to re-direct the efforts of participants to new strategies that more suited contemporary use patterns of second-screen television activity, ones that may have even offered more return on social rewards than a post-Bravo TWoP was doing otherwise, but this was never a realized experiment. Television Without Pity had to adapt or fold; ultimately, it was the latter.

TWoP is a recent one, but a historical example nonetheless; its significant changes, and their implications, have already taken place – and of course participation in popular culture has already moved on. Interactivity of the sort enacted at TWoP has moved on to other sites, other modes, and other opportunities; in fact, the three co-founders of Television Without Pity started Previously.tv, a new outsider site of snarky television participation, just a year before Bravo announced TWoP's closure, and Social TV apps, discussed in the next chapter, represent a mode of interactivity that acts very much in response to the complexities and issues presented here. The remaining case studies in this project feature participants still in the process of negotiating how interactivity manifests and is enacted. This chapter, therefore, serves to parse the necessary definitions, issues, themes, and theories that persist throughout the project. The struggles to navigate the changes in interactive practice on Television Without Pity underscore the complexities with which issues of co-creation, labor, and community will present going forward.

Television Without Pity is significant both because it provides an illustration of interactivity, that of a corporate takeover of a user-created system, and because that takeover did not succeed in the long run. This case reveals the different interests that come into play when industries and consumers come into contact: The community structures, opportunities for feedback, and co-created meaning that are key aspects to incentivizing participation and that generate social value for users are difficult to monetize successfully, and can lay the foundation for tensions over ownership, agency, and control. TWoP illustrates the necessity for interests from varying sides to be in alignment, if not necessarily in balance, in order to manifest a sustainable site of interactivity.

Chapter III

Where are you on television? Social TV and viewers that count (and are counted)

The relationship between television and new media is not necessarily an easy one. Television Without Pity's corporate owners were ultimately unsuccessful at extracting value from user participation, but the attempt to do so indicates an ongoing effort to capitalize on – and control – new media interactivity. In *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins (2006) outlines burgeoning possibility in consumer involvement and industry innovation, but nevertheless acknowledges that, in practice, "old media" powerhouses, television distributors among them, are "sweating bullets" at the demands of navigating technological and cultural shifts (p. 9).

New media interactivity poses some significant potential benefits for the television industry, including opportunities for affective connections and co-creation with viewers, targeted advertising, and access points for user engagement across media platforms. At the same time, however, these same developments have the potential to be deeply destabilizing and to undermine the economic and cultural systems of television. Compounding the uncertainty brought by new media is the upheaval that has faced the television industry for the past several decades. First the spread of cable and the fragmentation of the television viewing audience marked the end of the network era, and more recently the rise of DVRs, streaming content, and alternate distribution changed viewing practices; television producers and distributors have had to struggle to redefine their roles – and revenue streams – in an environment in which they no longer dominate.

Social TV refers to efforts to merge new media and television into second-screen, enhanced viewing opportunities. These apps and programs, emerging as they do from an

environment of uncertainty, mark an industry effort to exert control over television viewers' online participation. Social TV programs structure opportunities for users to engage with television and with other viewers by building activity around a presumption of the audience; users are pre-determined industry constructs, ones who can be rewarded and motivated to use apps – and therefore watch television – in particular ways. This chapter, therefore, takes on Social TV as a corporate ideal of interactivity, one that structures interactivity as incentive.

This chapter looks to a prevailing trend in Social TV, apps that use game mechanics, check-ins and virtual rewards systems in an attempt to gamify television viewing. The structure and design of Social TV apps represent efforts to incorporate new media technologies into the television industry in such a way so as to retain the primacy of television content, reward particular viewing practices, and steer user participation towards behavior that is easily monitored and counted. The name suggests that Social TV also offers its users affective rewards, and indeed these apps are about connectivity, linking users to specific shows, to the television medium more broadly, and to one another. The sociality on offer, however, is a somewhat ambivalent collectivity, one that fosters co-viewing rather than communal entertainment and has little provision for forging a sense of community for its users. Instead, the game systems and interpersonal connections incentivize participants to being monitored, surveilled, and counted. The interactivity promoted by Social TV reinforces, rather than challenges, traditional modes of television viewing, industry structures, and power dynamics.

Social TV apps have not, in the four years since their launch, really taken off; even if re-designed attempts to construct a form of Social TV application with long-term

viability do succeed in the coming years, this is not a narrative of tech genius that taps into an unknown need in the market. Industry rhetoric from entertainment and tech circles point to specific problems in existing Social TV apps, issues with technology, user interface, and market demand, but remain optimistic about the revolutionary potential of Social TV in the coming years. On the other hand, I argue that these early instances already act as illustrations of the components necessary for a sustainable, engaging second-screen interactive TV viewing experience, and mark the unintended consequences of such an application that does not align the industry benefits with user rewards.

Industry and interface in Social TV

Social TV has become something of a buzz term in trade circles that operate at the juncture of the entertainment and tech industries. Since its adoption into these circles in around 2010, Social TV has been the subject of numerous articles on cutting-edge trends in television and media, new technology, and advertising, and has become the tag line of LostRemote.com, an industry analysis site that bills itself as "The Home of Social TV."

In effect, Social TV does operate as something of an umbrella term, meant to refer to a phenomenon of television/new media interactivity rather than any specific site. Social TV has been applied to a variety of second-screen applications[1] that are designed to accompany television viewing in some way. Social TV has therefore been used to refer to mobile television viewing apps, including proprietary subscription-based platforms created by cable providers or, in the case of HBO Go, by the cable networks themselves;

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[1] All Social TV programs exist as apps for smartphones and tablets. Though some are also websites, most are designed to be used with mobile devices, and some can only be accessed this way. I will therefore refer to these collectively as "apps," even when it includes the websites.

it applies to apps that act as interactive programming guides and universal remotes; and to third-party platforms that attempt to filter out existing television conversation taking place on Facebook or Twitter and re-direct them through the app. There are also a growing number of networks, most notably basic cable channels, who have launched apps for particular shows or for the entire lineup, apps that create supplemental content and activities for viewers to engage with before, during, and after watching television. And, of course, social media platforms like Facebook and, in particular, Twitter actively position themselves as Social TV options, with live, event, and pre-recorded programs alike incorporating official Twitter hashtags into the content or offering the opportunity for actors, producers, or on-air personalities to respond directly to viewer questions.

My use of Social TV, however, is a bit more specific, and I refer to a particular manifestation of the television/new media sociality. I use the term to refer to free, downloadable apps for smartphones and tablets that offer check-in services and game-like rewards for users. I look to these in particular for several reasons; while social television, in general, indicates the phenomenon of interactivity, Social TV, in specific, is a term that grew around these particular applications; apps such as these represent the most pervasive trend in Social TV's short history. The variety noted in the previous paragraph represents outliers, exceptions, or very recent developments. On the other hand, between 2010 and 2013, at least two dozen Social TV game/check-in apps launched in an effort to connect viewers to their television. Though the term may have expanded to refer also to Twitter chatter or mobile viewing, Social TV began as an effort to make television viewing into a playable, rewardable, trackable game.

An exhaustive and comprehensive list of Social TV apps is largely impossible[2], because in way of start-up technology and venture capitalism, dozens of small companies can make and lose money in an effort to capitalize on the newest trend (Thielman, 2013b). For this project, I downloaded, registered for, and used eleven of the Social TV check in apps that were operational for some period between 2011 and 2013; these include GetGlue, Miso, Tunerfish, Viggle, theChanner, yap.TV, ScreenTribe, TVfriend, Philo, Peel, and TV.com's Relay service. During and subsequent to data gathering, some of these, including Philo and ScreenTribe, were closed outright; yap.TV, theChanner, and Peel experienced extensive re-designs to adopt different trends in Social TV; Miso, TVfriend and Tunerfish ceased receiving new updates; and GetGlue was purchased by i.TV and, in March 2014, was rebranded as TVtag. Though there are numerous other Social TV apps that, for purposes of time and simplicity, were not part of this study, the ones with which I did engage were the most popular (assessed by numbers of users and rankings in the iTunes Store and Android Marketplace); the earliest and/or most longstanding; and representative of the features of Social TV apps (assessed by short-term use of several other applications that do not appear here). In the illustrations to follow, I will draw examples from four apps as illustrative of the commonalities, distinctions, features, and limitations of Social TV: Tunerfish, Miso, Viggle, and GetGlue/TVtag.

Many Social TV apps are largely third-party ventures that are linked to the television industry by content rather than integrated ownership; others, however, have a

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[2] The milieu of tech startups and free, on-trend apps is ephemeral; the information in this chapter is current as of June 2014, and is based on app use and data gathering between 2010 and 2013. All images are captures from my use of the programs.

more direct link to corporate media structures. For example, GetGlue found early success

through investments from Time Warner and branded partnerships with HBO, Fox, PBS,

and Universal Pictures (Rao, 2010), before its purchase by i.TV, which itself had

partnerships with several entertainment journalism outlets. An influx of capital from

Google Ventures and Hearst put Miso on the map (Rao, 2011; Patel, 2011a), and though

Miso remains an independent company run by Bazaar Labs in San Francisco, it has major

technology partnerships with DirecTV and a content-sharing arrangement with the USA

cable network. Tunerfish, on the other hand, is a beta site created and operated by the

cable media giant Comcast. Social TV apps therefore mediate the second screen

experience of television viewing. Though they are pitched to users as fun, free, and

engaging, these apps are implicated in the capital streams of the television industry, and

ultimately are selling their services – and their users – to television distributors and

advertisers.

Social TV apps are structured to "locate" users on the television schedule via a

system of user check-ins. Just as with physical check-ins on FourSquare, Yelp, Facebook,

and other social media, users of Miso, Tunerfish, and GetGlue select the show they are

currently watching from a full programming schedule, a list of trending programs, or by

searching by show name. On Viggle, the check-in is the same, but the process is

different, as this application uses sound capture technology rather than searches; users

hold up their phone or tablet and the app identifies the program based on the dialogue

[see image 3.1]. Users are rewarded for their check-ins; on GetGlue and Tunerfish,

check-ins earn virtual stickers, awarded for checking in to particular shows, for a certain

number of check-ins, for watching in a particular genre, or for any number of other
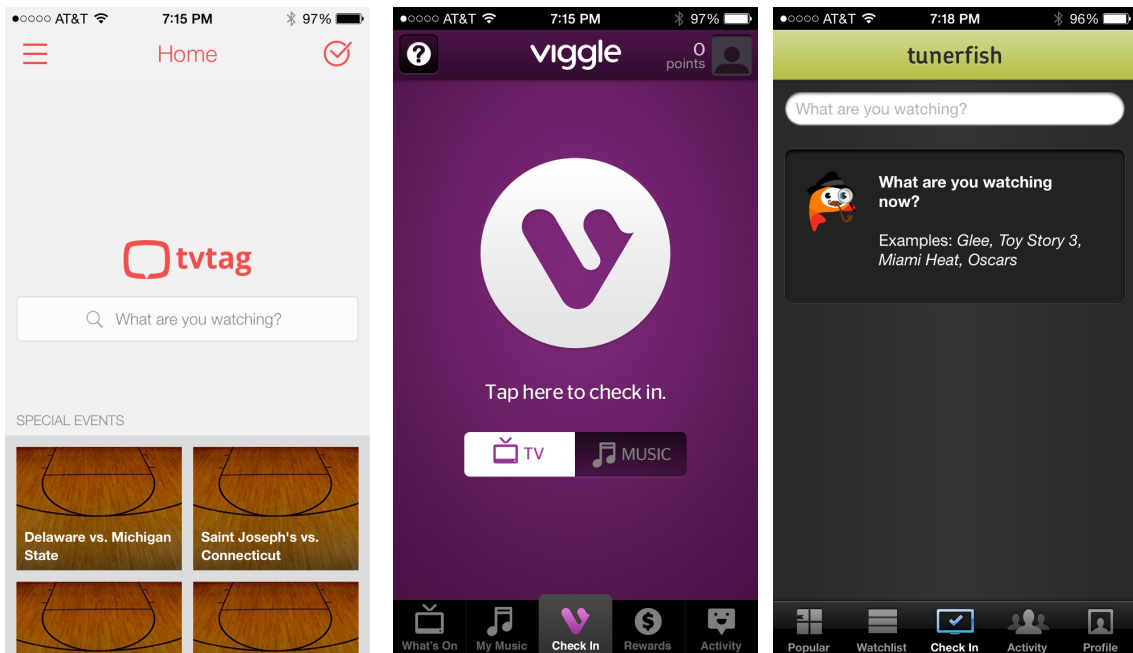
Image 3.1: *Check-in screens: TVtag (L); Viggle (C); Tunerfish (R)*

viewing patterns. On Viggle, users are rewarded with points, with different points

assigned for watching promoted programs, watching live, or for other particular

behaviors. On Miso, the rewards are a combination of both; each check-in earns a point,

but also the opportunity for badges.

Other features of Social TV are designed to connect its users to one another. All

check-in apps tell users how many others are currently watching the same program, and

all offer ways to integrate with Facebook and/or Twitter, to allow users to broadcast their

check-ins and badges to those in their feed. On Miso and GetGlue, after a check-in, the

screen shifts to a comment field that allows users to annotate their check in (though only

Miso awards an additional point for doing so). Tunerfish has a discussion page for those

checked in, and Viggle also offers clips, games, and trivia for users checked in to featured

programming, allowing users to play against fellow viewers [see image 3.2]. Because
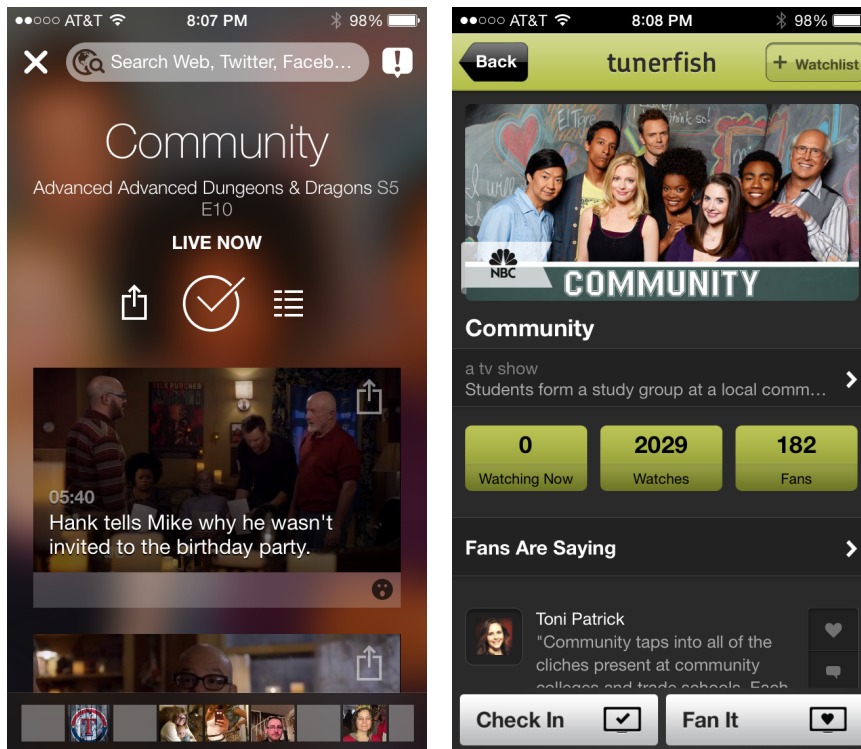
Image 3.2: *Checked in: Viggle (L); Tunerfish ®*

Viggle and Miso have points systems, they also feature leaderboards to connect fellow users to one another via competition.

Social TV apps are not particularly complicated in design or function; in part, their simplicity allows them to engage users while not distracting them from their roles as TV viewers, and the television program itself retains its significance as the main focus of attention. The app designs, on the other hand, can be quite varied, with some (see, for instance, Viggle) offering sophisticated pathways and polished user interfaces, while others (particularly Tunerfish) make use of more basic design features and a stripped-down interface. The simplicity of these apps, however, belies the complexity of their implications. Participants are asked to do very little, but these actions are situated within a mode of interactivity that incentivizes small behaviors to have specific value returns for the industry interests involved.

Television: Gamified

Social TV is an instance of interactivity as incentive, and how these apps motivate particular behaviors is by structuring a system of rewards as though users are players in a game. More precisely, Social TV reconstructs existing practices of television viewing as a game in which the winners are participants who engage with television in the most valuable ways.

Gamification, or the application of game design elements to non-game structures and situations (Deterding et al., 2011), is a means of fostering customer interest, consumption, and loyalty by incorporating elements that are at once fun and addictive. So-called "funware" provides the foundation for location-based social media check-ins, as well as for addictive, unskilled social games such as Farmville and Candy Crush. The strategies of gamification are particularly appealing because they are designed to be incorporated within everyday life, exist in tandem with established interpersonal interactions, and provide incentives that allow companies to motivate and modify consumer behavior. Gamification, according to the most enthusiastic marketing rhetoric, takes up where loyalty programs and frequent customer punch cards leave off: While those early strategies foster passive loyalty, funware can encourage particular consumer behaviors and "turn… customers' everyday interactions into 'games' that serve your business purposes" (Zichermann and Linder, 2010, p. 20).

Games have long been a means of integrating learning, skill development, and behavior into play. Games have a role in education (see, for instance, Whitebread, 1997; Williamson and Facer, 2004; Gee, 2003), and legitimating games has often meant directing game play toward modeling user behavior to activities with established social

benefit (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009). These "games with a purpose" (Deterding et al, 2011) offer entertainment while simultaneously training users. Gamification also builds on the fact that games are themselves a commodity, and have, in the past, been successfully "created specifically to host a procedural rhetoric about the claims of a product or service" (Bogost, 2007, p. 200).

The purpose of gamification is to break down that procedural rhetoric to its most basic components and orient them directly toward specific consumer behaviors. According to Gabe Zichermann and Joselin Linder (2010) in their manual on game-inspired marketing strategies, successful gamification makes use of particular game components: It requires rules, to offer some sort of structure; points or any in-game currency; and a hierarchy of status, along with leaderboard to chart progress – "making all these components *demonstrable* is what gives marketers the power of status persuasion" (p. 43-44, emphasis in the original). These are the elements that provide the structure of incentives that can be used to promote and incentivize particular actions. Funware also attempts to extend the game beyond its boundaries by incorporating timing structures that reward play on pre-determined (but often arbitrary) schedules. This creates appointment dynamics (Man, 2011, p. 9) in which the game offers rewards to users who incorporate casual play into their everyday lives. Appointment dynamics, from a business perspective, create a schedule – one that can be manipulated and adjusted by altering the structure of game play – that influences the level and frequency of engagement between the player and the game, and between the consumer and product or business.

The challenge of successful gamification, however, is that individual game components are not sufficient in themselves to create a fun, addictive, and compelling

games. Bogost (2007) argues that games created to promote specific features of a product, to create associations with a brand, or as incentives for purchasing particular items, are at their most successful when the game's procedural rhetoric models a logic system that normalizes a set of practices beyond a specific product or brand (p. 203). In-game currency, too, has value only if it offers something meaningful to its players (Zichermann and Linder, 2010). Without resonance for the consumers, all gamification constructs are hoops and obstacles and, in the end, a reward that is nothing more than what one critic termed "the Mayor Badge of Meaninglessness" (Haque, 2010).

The particulars of gamification's components indicate how these structures can be used in a broad array of contexts to engineer customer behavior toward economically valuable outcomes. Gamification has been hyped by marketers who argue that the incentives provided by funware can encourage users not just to check in while getting coffee, but also to decide to get coffee in the first place. Social TV is structured to apply those same incentives to viewers looking to reap some reward for their Sunday night TV-viewing patterns. Social TV incorporates a system of rewards, emphasizes appointment dynamics, and encourages competition and behavior reinforcement between users in order to foster vender/customer business models in television that have the potential to create monetary returns.

Social TV apps incentivize checking in, fostering the habit of use by rewarding the practice with in-game benefits. Most commonly, as with GetGlue/TVtag, Tunerfish, and Miso, these rewards take the form of badges that are awarded for various activities. Users can be rewarded for account activities, such as signing in, a first check-in, or linking an account to an existing one on Facebook or Twitter; for frequent check-ins or
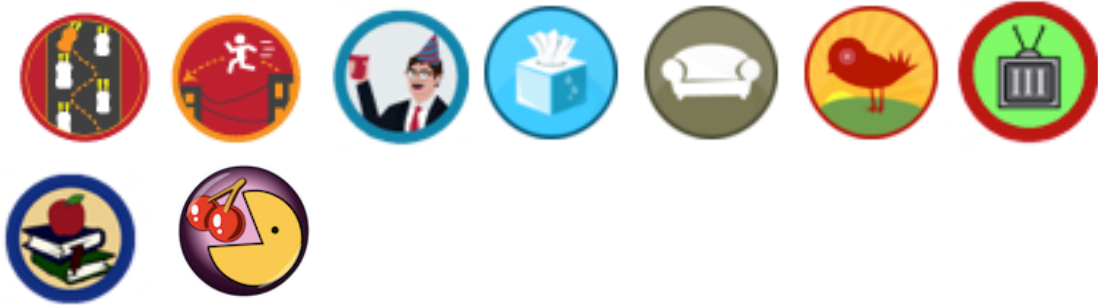
Image 3.3: *Assorted badges*

the number of check-ins in a day; or for checking in to a particular genre or programming type, such as detective shows, cartoons, movies, and so forth [see image 3.3]. TVtag, for instance, often partners with networks and show producers to offer exclusive badges for high profile new or returning shows, so watching the return of *True Blood* on HBO or the premiere of *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* on ABC unlocks a special badge for the user. The badges are heavily featured within the apps; account pages on Tunerfish, Miso, and TVtag each include an inventory of badges earned, and users can likewise post "winnings" to Facebook or Twitter to encourage others to check in and earn the same rewards. Though badges are often the prize themselves and cannot be redeemed for any additional incentives or out-of-game rewards, these apps nevertheless structure them as meaningful within the game. The particulars of how to earn badges, however, is kept rather opaque, without clear instructions to users on any of these platforms of how to go about earning badges at any particular time. As a result, Social TV incentivizes all check-ins, but rewards them according to its internal algorithms.

For Miso and other point-based systems, those points are used to create leaderboards for each show. On Miso, checking in to an episode gives a user a point for that show and adding a comment scores another point. Those episode points accumulate in a program-based leaderboard that ranks everyone who has ever checked in, from the

user leading the *Breaking Bad* board with 2285 points to those tied for 11,000th place with one and two points. The points do not have any direct purpose or compensation, however; instead, the points and leaderboards seem to be their own purpose – as Zichermann and Linder note, people are inordinately fond of winning, but also enjoy watching others win and lose (2010, p. 23).

Viggle, however, takes a different approach with its reward structures. While it, too, operates on a system of points awarded for check-ins, these points can be traded in for out-of-game rewards, including gift certificates to places like Starbucks and Foot Locker, or coupons to services like Gamefly. Extending the reward system beyond the confines of the game may create added incentive, and users can be particularly inclined to participate in these arrangements if they consider the rewards to be commensurate with, or even to exceed, the amount of effort they are expected to exert. There are, however, issues with a system offering real-world rewards with monetary value; these arrangements are less cost effective, as virtual points and coins are free, but gift certificates are not – and also involve ongoing relationships with other retail organizations that must remain on board with the arrangements.

However, rather than simply following game mechanics by creating an environment of incentives, real world economic rewards effectively compensate behaviors, thus potentially altering the relationships between users and the game. Games broadly may offer pleasures and benefits in play that do not directly generate capital for a corporation, but still reward players. Gamification, however, forges a transition from games to become immaterial labor, in which the game play creates value that for the company that sets up the game, irrespective of whether there is value for the player as

well. Real-world financial rewards further solidify this relationship, tacit throughout

gamified environments, that play and labor are intertwined and simultaneous, and bring

to the fore expectations that are created when the rewards of the game become

compensation for player efforts. Viggle launched in January 2012, and within a year,

users already noted a decline in the ability to redeem points[3]. In feedback forums and

customer comments in the iTunes store and Android Marketplace, users note that the app

now offers fewer opportunities to earn points, requires an increased number of points to

earn rewards, and offers a more limited selection of rewards. These users have been cast,

by their own actions and the construction of the points/redemption system in the app, as

workers rather than game players; because the incentives are not structured within the

game itself, the funware alone does not motivate user behavior, but it is instead

compensated by the gift cards available in exchange for game points. As a result, the

question arises as to whether this type of system can be effective in the same manner as a

basic game structure, or whether these arrangements represent instead an

employer/employee relationship with additional game elements.

     The elements of gamification employed in Social TV attempt to construct a

system of rewards so that check-ins are made habit and that users can ascribe meaning to

the badges, points, and leaderboard status within the apps. If successful, these Social TV

strategies are meant to establish and reinforce practices of television viewing that have

direct value for app creators, advertisers, and television distributors.

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[3] Retrieved August 24, 2012 and March 13, 2013 from iTunes and Android Marketplace
user comments.

It's not the player, it's the game

The structures of Social TV, if widely adopted, have the potential to offer profound benefits to television industry. The strategies outlined above turn television viewing into a game, one in which the app developers can manipulate the rules, parameters, and rewards. Though these apps are created by small, third-party start-ups, venture capital, research investment, and financial support frequently comes directly from media conglomerates (Patel, 2011a; Rao, 2010; Rao, 2011), in large part because Social TV apps are structured to further the interests of television distributors and advertisers. These apps are designed to increase points of interaction between consumers and commercial institutions; motivate user behavior toward practices that are economically valuable; and ultimately, create a system of willing surveillance and market research. From an industry perspective, Social TV incentivizes participation that is easily monitored, easily counted, and easily directed at desirable behaviors.

Industry rhetoric touts the benefits of Social TV as a means to influence the cultural significance of viewer participation. Media and tech trade press champion Social TV as "directly shaping television viewership" (Turner, 2013, n.p.) and providing the opportunity for "networks and advertisers to get to know their audience individually and interact with them" (Weill, 2012, n.p.). Television advertising, in particular, "stands to gain a step change in value through the second screen" (Schmitt, 2014, n.p.). These celebrations of the potential inherent in the Social TV phenomenon indicate that second screen platforms' most significant appeal is the increase they offer media institutions in access to and engagement with the television viewing audience. An executive of the USA Network, who has both created Social TV apps to complement its original programming

and partnered with Miso to offer similar functions, declares, "I don't care where people engage with our content as long as I can be the curator of that conversation" (qtd. in Thielman, 2013b, n.p.).

Social TV apps encourage particular user behaviors through a variety of features. Users are rewarded with badges for tuning in to particular programs, for sharing their viewing habits with others, and for becoming regular viewers. The apps, for example, offer greater incentives for check-ins that coincide with network schedules and live airings: They offer extra points for verified live check-ins; create exclusive badges for live viewing; foster a sense of collective viewing for users checked in simultaneous with others, which is maximized during premieres and new episode airings; or create content, such as trivia or polling, that offers paratextual entertainment on top of the show content. Users are certainly free to check in to shows on their own personal schedules, and in this sense, the apps do little to directly prevent the customized viewing patterns. However, the apps are constructed to incentivize, often implicitly, television viewing that happens on or near network schedules. Social TV is designed not to interrupt the schedule, flow or primacy of television or its content. The interactivity and participation promoted by Social TV reinforce, rather than challenge, traditional modes of television viewing, power structures, and industrial dynamics.

The fact that Social TV apps create systems of restrictions in the game that, for example, limit how often one can receive points for check-ins – checking in to three different shows only minutes apart is impossible on some apps, and is not awarded points on others – offers structure by creating rules and reducing the sense that Social TV can be illicitly "gamed" itself. These systems are also internally beneficial: Restrictions on

check-ins foster the appointment dynamics embedded within the game, integrating the habit of checking in and of television viewing into quotidian practice and emphasizing the design of Social TV to be an activity performed simultaneously with television viewing. It is these mechanics that could be used, for instance, to create incentives for live television viewing. Social TV does not prevent check-ins for watching shows on a delayed schedule, but the game design of the apps is such that they do not reward this practice as fully. Technological and cultural shifts have made appointment television a historical artifact rather than practical reality; gamification is one strategy designed to motivate television viewers to return, to a small extent, to a fixed television schedule by dangling the incentives of being able to earn extra points, be awarded a virtual badge, or reclaim a leaderboard. If Social TV can drive such behavior, it can offer a bulwark against timeshifting.

Users of Social TV are also encouraged to offer up their friends and social connections as well. Whether they build upon existing Facebook or Twitter networks, or whether they are created by the system of friending and following that exists within the apps, Social TV is, as the name suggests, dependent on interpersonal connections between users. As check-ins are announced and shared on Facebook and Twitter, as Miso or Tunerfish users follow one another and make viewing recommendations, as Viggle users can send viewing reminders to friends in their network, interpersonal relationships between users are being cultivated by Social TV apps – and ultimately by entertainment and high-tech corporations – to offer a "return on investment" that benefits the larger economic structure more than its participants (Andrejevic, 2011). As Alice Marwick (2012) notes, individuals participating in any type of social media often care more for

their existing interpersonal relationships than they do about being watched by a "nebulous corporate entity" (p. 383), and Social TV, like many social networking sites, takes advantage of these preferences by making use of both the data gathered via surveillance and the allegiance to existing networks of partners, friends, and family members. Some of Social TV's institutional appeal is as an influence engine: "It will become easier for us to see what our friends are watching, in real time, and what they like and don't like. Many of our TV viewing choices will, therefore, be based on our friends' viewing habits" (Leboff, 2012, n.p.). While this account is perhaps as overly simplistic as it is optimistic, it does account for underlying idea that friends, on Social TV, perceived to be useful for promoting television viewing and motivating check-ins.

Participation in Social TV's systems of check-ins simultaneously generates a wealth of information that likewise supports and benefits economic interests in television consumer practices. The viewing habits chronicled by Social TV offer detailed information on the television viewing practices of its users. Check-ins, in specific and in aggregate, indicate the order of shows users watch, whether users create marathons by viewing multiple episodes in succession, or if viewers adhere to any pre-existing programming schedules or create their own sense of flow. Social TV users – and, in particular, habitual users – generate a complex web of who they are, what they watch, what they are doing before, doing, and after, and what they might do instead; more than existing empirical measures, check-ins are situated in a landscape of general media use and provide the context of television viewing.

Social TV, therefore, operates as much as a tool of surveillance as it does an example of convergence. This system of check-ins records use patterns and constructs an

interactive log of television viewing that is created by users but useful to the app creators and to the economic viability of the television industry. Already, large data mining companies match followers of a particular product or company with commenters on a particular television show to help those companies decide where to best spend their advertising dollars (Patel, 2011b); Social TV offers a more sophisticated and accessible means for the traditional ratings system to be updated to reflect new media usage. More than simply calculating the number of viewers and time of viewing, Social TV's monitoring can record how many users are tuned in, what they might think of the show, how invested they are, and in what context they were prompted to watch. Viewing data can be combined with content from Twitter feeds or Facebook posts, with comment contents, and with a broader picture of taste, preference, and recommendations to offer consumer measurement that is enhanced by close monitoring. Thus, as Social TV participants are active contributors to their own surveillance, being watched is part of how individuals contribute to how they are constructed as an audience of television viewers (Shimpach, 2005).

Put plainly, television networks display a considerable interest in Social TV, as evidenced by trade press mentions, business partnerships, and in-house beta ventures into creating Social TV systems, because these apps motivate consumer activity that does not threaten the longstanding structures of medium, seek to destabilize existing economic models, or challenge audience/producer relationships. By setting the stakes for check-ins so low – do a quick search, tap one of the trending programs, or hold your phone up during some dialogue – these apps encourage viewers to reconfigure behaviors that could be a distraction, like surfing the web or playing with their smart phones, into ones that

ultimately reinforce the dominance of television viewing. At their core, these apps are

about encouraging television viewing and reinforcing the behavior in other users to do

the same; Tunerfish, for instance, touts itself as a "social discovery engine" for television,

and underscoring this and other programs is rhetoric that indicates that there is always TV

worth watching, you simply have to find it. Social TV drives activity; unlike lurkers to a

message board who simply read what others publish, there is no way to check-in to these

apps passively, and thus Social TV has a reliable means of motivating measurable

activity in its users. A core tenet of the move toward media interactivity, after all, is that a

user is more immersed, invested, and closely tied to a product than is a simple viewer,

thus increasing the influence (and return on investment) for the show creators and

distributors (Gillan, 2011), and Social TV is able to convert viewers into users without

diminishing the primacy of television content.

Social TV is constructed around promoting viewer activity, and the behaviors

rewarded and encouraged within the structures of Social TV apps reinforce the practices

of television viewing and promote behaviors that have economic benefit to production

and distribution arms of the industry. The surveillance and monitoring, though willingly

constructed by user check-ins, is specifically designed to create data as a byproduct of

participation.

Social rewards checked out

Gamification is a marketing strategy, developed by industry forces and in their

interests. However, these are systems interactivity, and attempt to motivate active

participation on the part of the users. Social TV apps, since the first wave were launched

in late 2010, have not gained significant popularity with their target users. Industry critics – and as Social TV apps fold, are bought out, or completely overhaul their designs in order to avoid either of these, the number of critical mentions in trade publications grows – blame the specifics of Social TV applications, not their underlying functions.

One analyst, for example, refers to Social TV apps as "a solution in search of a problem," one that created more advertising opportunities, when users want fewer; offered second-screen content that distracted from rather than augmented the television viewing experience; and that was not adaptable to viewing practices like binge-watching programs on Netflix (Roettgers, 2014, n.p.). An analyst for *AdWeek* (2013) argues that Social TV activity is currently too unbalanced to be productive: For "massive watercooler moments" and synchronous live viewing events, the activity on Social TV becomes an echo chamber that, without effective curation and filtering, is too overwhelming to foster meaningful connectivity; for weekly episodic TV, the programming content does not effectively lend itself to online chatter (Copeland, n.p.). Social TV apps, according to trade analysts, do not completely integrate with existing social media participation, thus taking away from backchannel chatter that is already taking place (Roettgers, 2014; Thielman, 2013b). For these industry observers, the issues with Social TV reside in the specific ways in which they approach structuring behaviors within the applications, and contend that success of this mode of interactivity can be found in applications that join more seamlessly with existing viewer behavior.

Sustainable modes of interactivity, however, depend on users gaining rewards that they find meaningful – if not outright compensation, then affective benefits such as status, social capital, interpersonal connections, or co-creative investment. Critics of

gamification contend that this type of system is simply not able to provide meaningful reward: In a talk titled "Gamification is bullshit," game designer and scholar Ian Bogost charges that gamification's purpose is to "cynically ensnare" customers and would be accurately titled "exploitationware" (Tanz, 2011, n.p.). Social games and gamified contexts, he argues, do not offer meaningful play, learned skill, or competition and social connection; instead, he argues they do no more than suck up time during gameplay and the embedded appointment dynamics destroy time spent away from playing by calling users back to task (Bogost, 2010). These game elements do reward participants, but critics contend that gamification used for consumer engagement is little more than thinly-veiled commercialism. Social TV apps, therefore, would be inherently flawed, in that their industry-level support means that rewards are based entirely on behaviors as app users and desirable television viewers, not on behaviors that boost investment with content, the game, or with other users.

Social TV records metrics that are empirically quantitative. Check-ins are made to be habitual, rather than evaluative, therefore allowing Social TV to act as an objective record: users check in to a show whether they are devoted to it or not, have seen it before or not, or enjoy it or not, which separates it from the message boards that are populated by the most invested of viewers. Whereas reactions on Television Without Pity, feedback on message boards, and even Twitter commentary are largely driven by qualitative responses, so that the archives combine the volume of response with the impression and reaction to the content, Social TV does not chronicle tastes, only behaviors. Check-ins are precisely the same whether the user likes or dislikes a program. Therefore, though the surveillance made possible by Social TV is in many ways more empirically sophisticated

– offering an account of viewer activity as well as context, response, and, at times, ongoing interactions – it is also flattened out. Social TV does not allow for qualitative nuance in its records, and can only relay the facts of watching, including the when, where, and in what order; what it is not able to offer is an alternative means of viewer response, connection, or creation.

The surveillance possibilities of Social TV, too, are skewed such that the value generated by user behaviors outweighs the rewards offered to participants for them. Data mined off check-ins, comments, and user behavior have ramifications that extend far beyond the control – or even knowledge – of the average participant. As Christian Fuchs (2011) notes, "commercial social networking sites are keen on storing, analyzing, and selling individual and aggregated data about user preferences and user behavior to advertising clients in order to accumulate capital" (p. 289). In the era of participatory internet, in which monitoring is a common concession made by users who accept Terms of Service agreements, Fuchs points out that mass surveillance of internet users is "fine-tuned in order to detect and store the individual differences and to target each user with a separate mass of advertisings," rendering the process a "form of mass personal dataveillance" (p. 302). This is monitoring that renders valuable not just the content of the user posts, activity, and preferences, but the meta-data of participant behaviors as well (Leistert, 2012), which generates value for companies who can use or sell the information to a variety of businesses. In Social TV, all the badges, leveling up, and fun trivia are deployed to make users engage in this surveillance willingly, and to helpfully generate useful and economically beneficial data; the customer "is now enticed into participating in being monitored" (Man, 2011, p. 2).

Social TV is designed to capture empirical data – check-ins, number of viewers, number of comments. Because the activity promoted by the apps' infrastructure is that which is determined by and suited for the needs of its creators, and not its users, Social TV users are evaluated by their preferences, tastes, and actions, rather than by data that was previously thought to be the most important, such as age, race, or education (Man, 2011). Social TV collects information on the complex context and patterns of users' media consumption behaviors, and has the potential to generate from that a more sophisticated understanding of the empirics of user viewing patterns. But Social TV users are removed from their data, and are positioned as participants by the way they are able to generate useful information, not for contributions or active engagement. Social TV not only chronicles these behaviors, but also reinforces them. Social TV apps not only monitor, surveil, and chronicle the habits of television viewers , but they also reinforce them, providing incentives for watching live programming. They do not, however, create systems in which this data is generated through behaviors that build affective engagement, community ties, or social capital.

Aggregated viewing

Part of Ian Bogost's objection to social games is their allegiance to utility and user exploitation: "There's something particularly insidious about enframing games – taking even the contexts of interaction that don't have to do with work, stripping them of enjoyment, and imbuing them once more with the spirit of potential use. In social games, friends aren't really friends; they are mere resources. And not just resources for the player, but also for the game developer" (2010, n.p.). Interpersonal relationships can lend

a sense of meaning and purpose to game dynamics, and provide additional motivation for users to make participation a habit that is integrated into their daily patterns. Affective connection to other participants, even in the context of competition, can engender a sustained and deeply embedded sense of engagement among consumers. But when we consider how Social TV apps approach participation, do these apps create a meaningful sense of togetherness and collectivity in television viewers, such that users can forge connections, engage in conversation, and build a sense of loyalty? Put simply, is Social TV sufficiently social to benefit its users?

Social TV apps are modeled on the sociality of social media; many, in particular TVtag and Viggle, attempt to integrate directly with participants' existing social networking use, announcing check-ins, badges, points, and earned rewards to Facebook feeds and Twitter streams. Social TV attempts to piggyback on the existing interpersonal networks of its users in order to offer incentive and validation for its in-game rewards, and to maximize the social elements of participation. Doing so, however, also means that Social TV apps are subject to the limitations of these platforms. As Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2010) illustrate, Twitter users may be honest and open in their posts, but they also tend to not view it as a reciprocal medium, considering tweets to be something like a diary or a broadcast, but rarely a conversation (p. 122). Social TV actively connects users to one another, but the connections are more similar to those forged through social networking sites than through online communities: interpersonal connections are loose, fleeting, and undemanding, without provisions to create a sense of reciprocity, trust, or connectedness. Because of the attachment to existing social network structures, the emphasis of Social TV's interpersonal connection is on transmitting information to as

many followers and online friends as possible, rather than on forging new connections or deep bonding among users.

Social TV apps may provide the means for user interaction, but these provisions are minor and limited, and do not even allow for users to expand them into more meaningful points of connection. On Miso's app, for instance, users are awarded additional points for posting a comment with a check-in, but those points are awarded regardless of whether the comment is substantive or complete gibberish – and thus there are both. TVtag offers a dedicated comment screen during the check-in process, but this appears before the user completes the check-in; the only way to read or respond to comments is to proceed through two more steps to complete the check-in. Those who check in at the start or during a viewing, then, cannot comment on the content at all, and it is only those who check in after viewing or upon re-watching who can offer commentary. Users who want to avoid spoilers are therefore actually de-incentivized from visiting the conversation page. Participants interested in the comments of others are likely to find discussion only for live events and trending shows with new episodes; comments on programs that air in syndication, are less popular, or that are being watched at an alternate time are a hodgepodge of viewing schedules, episode listings, and re-watchings. As a result, comments on TVtag are infrequent, brief, and lack substance; the fact that the typing can only be done on a phone or tablet, and that tweeting or sharing comments via Facebook is a feature embedded into the comments screen, indicates the type (and length) of feedback normalized by the app structure. Though the specifics of TVtag's constraints and affordances are unique, its tendency to create space for

comments that could promote user interaction without actually fostering or encouraging that interaction is not.

Social TV apps do structure internal networking practices as well, ones that theoretically create opportunities for sociality as well. TVtag, Miso, and Tunerfish have internal follow functions and create newsfeed-like updates within the app that show users what other participants are viewing and what badges they have earned. Though these features are ones that would seem to capitalize on the type of personal influence that makes Social TV a desirable commodity, internal personal connections and sociality are not incentivized by these apps. TVtag does offer a badge for linking to a Twitter account, and Tunerfish rewards users for being followed, none of these apps create benefits for seeking out or following fellow users; as a result, users of Social TV seem less likely to take it up themselves. Across the board, users of TVtag, Tunerfish, and Miso take part very little or not at all with the follow functions; interaction with the app and its features far outstrips any limited interactions between participants. With the search functions, guides, leveling-up, and checking in, Social TV can be experienced fully by users playing on their own, unlike social games in which users reach a point at which progressing without help from fellow players is nearly impossible. Viggle does away entirely with the idea of a follow function, and instead prioritizes interaction with the app by creating trivia questions and quizzes administered by Viggle staffers to those checked in to a show. Users can see others are checked in, but other participants are neither competitors nor teammates – they play the same game simultaneously, but not together.

This indicates an important means of characterizing the type of interactivity available to Social TV users: They are co-viewers, forming a collective viewership by

watching the same programs at the same time, but not actually a cohesive sense of audience. In the heyday of broadcast television, it was the dominance of the television networks and their unassailable control over the programming schedule that constructed a national viewing community. Viewers knew that others were watching simultaneously, even if far apart geographically, because there was simply no other option. This is, of course, no longer the reality, but Graeme Turner argues that a sense of co-presence created by the imagined simultaneity of a vast, if unidentified, fellow viewing audience is augmented by new media. This co-presence, he says, "has a feedback loop that is potentially more immediate and extensive than the water-cooler conversation, and relies far less upon an imagined presence of other users than is the case with the simultaneous consumption of broadcast content" (2011, n.p.). Users checking in to Social TV do not need to imagine fellow viewers, because they can instantly see them – sometimes merely dozens, other times many thousand – who are not only visible, but are able to be counted, identified, and even contacted directly through the app. Though it does not have the means to create a sense of affective cohesiveness, Social TV revives the idea of a collective viewing experience and imbues it with a sense of camaraderie, similar to being one of a million followers of a Twitter celebrity or one of a million likes on a Facebook page, with co-users joined by common practice if not actual interpersonal involvement. This is the means by which the sociality of these apps, according to their own rhetoric, is able to offer connection to make television viewing "better."

By valorizing collectivity, Social TV makes a further effort to engineer and reward particular viewing habits. Water-cooler chatter, in which viewers share the experience of television viewing, is most notable with live television events, in particular

sports, politics, and first-run drama and reality TV (Harrington, Highfield & Bruns, 2013). While users can, of course, check in to programs on their own schedule, the watching-with-others sensibility is most profound if they stick closely to the network's programming schedule. It is not simply major live events – such as the Olympics, Super Bowl, or presidential debates – that promote collectivity on the networks' schedule; popular drama shows have similar schedules. Watch the season premiere of *Walking Dead* on the Sunday night when it airs, and check-in with several thousand others; wait and watch it mid-week, and watch with perhaps a few hundred at most.

Without a sense of connection to other users and their contribution, Social TV does not offer its users the opportunity to become emotionally attached to the practice of participation. Check-ins are the same regardless for how thoughtful or invested a viewer one may be, and are valued (and valuable) because of the check-ins themselves. The responses cultivated by Social TV are those that motivate users to view their fellow participants as competitors or co-viewers, rather than as collaborators or community members. Interactivity here, therefore, is an individualizing agent rather than a linking one: Social TV may be constructed to be networked, habitual, and able to be counted, but it is not necessarily truly social. The focus on driving and reinforcing particular behaviors among its users casts those participants as data rather than true contributors, thus potentially limiting the investment, satisfaction, and pleasure in its use and introducing an element of ambivalence into practice of interactivity. In effect, the sociality on offer is that of quantity of use rather than quality of contribution, and Social TV is focused on driving user activity toward those behaviors that can be more easily counted, monitored, and exploited.

What counts (and doesn't) in Social TV

Social TV is not structured such that its users have a hand in generating cultural meaning, either from their own participation or for television more broadly. The apps are designed to motivate behavior, but the apps cultivate a flattened form of participation and reward users only for particular activities. As a result, there are entire television viewing practices – and viewers themselves – who are left out of Social TV all together.

There is little latitude available in how users are able to "play" Social TV. Social TV users are valuable and desirable because they check in, generate a record of viewing patterns, and willingly allow Social TV apps to monitor participation; behaviors that fall outside the boundaries of what is considered within the mechanics of the app are simply not recorded by the platforms. As Mark Andrejevic notes, social network monitoring systems actively work to "subsume the potential diversity of social life to narrower commercial interests" (2011, p. 83) and therefore thwart variety of behavior so that the data collected are relevant and economically valuable.

There are relatively commonplace viewing practices that Social TV apps are not able to accommodate. For instance, neither TVtag nor Tunerfish is able to capture binge-watching activity. On both of these apps, users check in to the program, not to a particular episode; as a result, one check-in can mark viewing a single episode of *Mad Men*, or an entire season. There is simply no way for these systems to log, or offer rewards for, marathon viewing. Watching partial episodes, watching promotional content, or watching on unsupported or illegal streaming platforms are similarly viewing behaviors that one or more Social TV app can neither record nor reward.

Similarly, there are programming types left out of Social TV apps' program archives and check-in procedures. Viggle, for instance, has no search function; it identifies shows only via sound recognition software. There are, of course, programming options that the program does not recognize and is not able to identify, a situation that arises most frequently with less mainstream viewing options, such as classic films, non-narrative programming, and new, less publicized, works. If a user tries to check-in to something Viggle cannot identify, he or she can attempt to find the program on the app's customized viewing guide – which only includes current and immediately upcoming programming, and only for broadcast and major cable channels. Users watching a show that cannot be captured while timeshifting, streaming, or on a less popular channel are simply not able to check in. TVtag invites users to check in via list of shows that are trending, using a curated list of upcoming or promoted programming, or using its search function. Despite the greater variety of search options, the app is not necessarily better at accounting for unexpected programming types: If a TVtag user searches for a show and is unable to find it, there is no way to add it – or check in, or be rewarded. Watching older, obscure, unexpected, streaming, proprietary, or more specialized programming is simply not part of the activity recorded or promoted by Social TV.

Rewards systems of Social TV apps are also constructed to reward specific programming types, and prioritize them above others. Even if they can be entered into the app's system, viewers who watch a program not listed in the app do not gain points or badges. Programs that commonly earn the most points, unlock exclusive badges, or have featured rewards are television's most popular, prestigious and profitable shows, including network dramas and sitcoms, major sports, live events, and high-profile cable
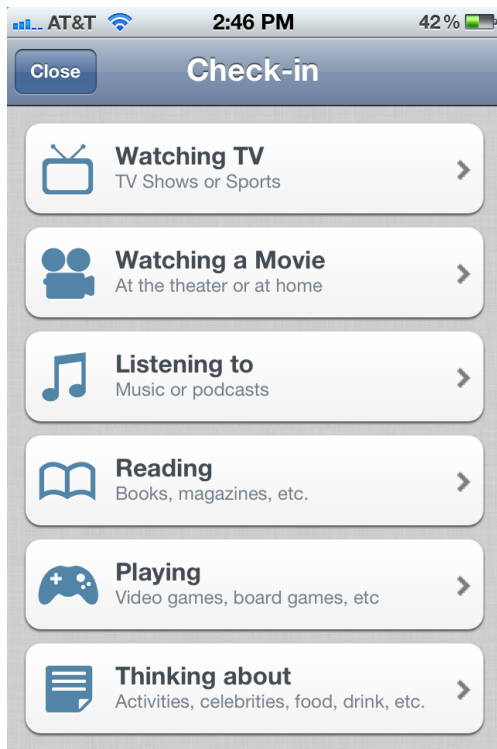
Image 3.4: *Check-in options, GetGlue*

shows. GetGlue, before its purchase by TVtag, offered check-ins in a variety of

categories, from television to books and online videos to celebrities and food the user is

"thinking about" [see image 3.4]. Not all of these are rewarded equally, however;

GetGlue had few badges available to those thinking about "cats" or "breakfast," and few

that were available to viewers checked in to programming that is less popular or lower

priority. Similarly, Viggle and Miso feature trivia questions and character- or show-based

opinion polls for users checked in to some programs. These features extend the

interaction process with the app beyond a single check-in, but are only a feature for some

programs. Programs that are not commercial, have not partnered with the app creators, or

are not part of corporate sponsorship deals do not warrant extra content or points of

contact between users and creators or advertisers.

Check-ins also offer no qualitative variance, such that all check-ins are created (or at least recorded) equally. Social TV check-ins have a presumption of approval attached to them that is not necessarily accurate. Industry rhetoric assumes that check-ins translate to engagement, and Social TV and its follow and discovery features presume that check-ins are akin to recommendations. User activity is recorded the same way – as a check-in, one that is rewarded with points or badges – whether the user loves the show, really dislikes it, or is distracted and not really watching. Nuance, variation, and distinctive participant response, therefore, are likewise flattened in Social TV check-ins; Social TV data is more concerned with popularity than with viewer preference or meaning and interpretation. Social TV can therefore be seen as a continuation of longstanding efforts to calculate and count television viewers in complex ratings system; as such, as has long been the case, certain viewing patterns and participants themselves count more than others.

In terms of popularity, however, Social TV might be an appropriate measurement tool, at least insofar as they are able to capitalize on social media as an alternative gauge of popularity. Twitter in particular has been cultivated as a means of using second screen social activity to record and promote viewer enthusiasm. In 2013, Nielsen, the television ratings company, launched "Twitter TV ratings," in which they aim to measure the "total activity and reach of TV-related conversation on Twitter" by measuring both the number of people tweeting as well as the audience size of those tweets (Nielsen, 2013). User engagement via social media is also a solid predictor of a program's popularity and success (Dumenco, 2011); check-ins and comments on Social TV offer similar means of gauging the popularity of a program and monitoring viewer behavior. Broadcast networks

who have experimented with hashtag campaigns for event programming and special

weekly episodes have also enjoyed a surge in both social media mentions and viewership

(Turner, 2013). Internet use studies have also indicated that, though the number of

viewers who are also actively connecting to it via social media or third party apps

remains small, the ones who do are the "super-connectors" who are early adopters and

active participants in online networks (Thielman, 2013a). There is a demand for users to

engage in second screen activity while watching television programming, and emerging

metrics, from Nielsen to third-party Social TV apps, designed to capture the empirical

data about popularity and interest that arrive out of this demand. The challenge, however,

is to have those numbers indicate the relationship between television viewers and second

screen activity more clearly. Does social media attention generate popularity, or are

popular television programs popular across platforms? And further, because the metrics

of social media, Social TV, and second screen use are neither able to capture the full

scope of television use, nor are the users necessarily representative of viewership,

popularity on two presumably connected screens may be all these measurement strategies

can gauge.

Social TV apps are designed such that user behaviors that are not valued (or

valuable) are effectively rendered invisible. These apps do not impose restrictions or

forbid particular user practices that are less beneficial; nor do they take the approach of a

site explored in another chapter, Pottermore, and strive to make these actions redundant.

The apps simply make it, at best, less rewarding and, at worst, impossible for viewers to

watch unprofitable, unpopular, and timeshifted programming. As a result, there is less

diversity of user behavior as Social TV apps record, reinforce, and reward a particular

brand of viewer activity, and drives all users toward those actions that can be accounted for within the confines of the game design.

Social TV's mined data of viewer interactivity and consumption patterns captures those viewers who are willing to be monitored, who find satisfaction in the game dynamics, and who watch mainstream programming – and who might be lured by incentives to watch live. Those who are not predisposed to be interactive, who watch less-popular programming, and who are not influenced by the prospect of collective viewing and the sociality it can potentially provide, these are not merely less important in Social TV's structures; these are individuals who are left out entirely of participation and its subsequent monitoring. For some sub-groups, exclusion from the type of interactivity that counts in Social TV is understandable: Viewers who cannot afford consumer electronics are less desirable for advertisers, and those who use television as a means to watch unedited classic film don't even see ads during the content; if these groups are left out of Social TV's construct of the audience, from a strictly economic perspective, it is not an issue. From a cultural standpoint, however, the social implications of undesirable and economically compromised audiences left out of metrics, and conversations, about popular culture is a great deal more troubling.

The archive created by Social TV's data, therefore, is inherently incomplete: It often cannot account for viewers who watch several episodes in a row, or who watch some niche or specialized programming, or who watch things like classic movies on television. Social TV does not solicit feedback that can distinguish between viewers who like what they see and those who do not, and does not motivate users to offer qualitative responses beyond the empirical fact of their check-ins. These apps do not differentiate

between users who check in to their favorite programs and those who check in to a show they cannot stand and enjoy deriding. These viewers are not a part of Social TV's engaged audience, nor are purists who prefer to avoid distracted viewing and who elect not to have a phone, tablet, or computer nearby to perform their check ins; the technologically resistant who are wary of or behind on adding an online component to the traditional practice of television viewing; or those consumers who simply cannot afford the smartphone, tablet, or high-speed internet connection these platforms require as standard.

Social TV does not account for all types of user behavior, and in particular those that do not further the aim to cultivate idealized viewer practices. Because Social TV's structures limit investment and the systems do not lend themselves to modification, their use is not expanded in unexpected ways as can happen with user-generated content, and they are not able to offer insight into popularity beyond pure numbers. The archive created by its data is incomplete and, once again, interactivity is structured in such a way that certain consumer behaviors are valorized and noted – and, in this case, reinforced and encouraged – while others are counted less or left behind completely.

The future of the second screen social

Social TV is a mode of interactivity that has a rather short history. The check-in apps that marked the earliest trend of Social TV, in their first four years, experienced a great deal of proliferation, capital investment, and industry aggrandizement. Despite significant support and partnerships with broadcast and cable network and programming, in the first four years, these apps simply did not immediately resonate with users. This

does not, however, make Social TV apps a failed experiment, and it is too early to predict whether the mode of interactivity produced within them will ultimately prove to be sustainable.

It does present the opportunity to consider how industry perspective on Social TV's hits and misses is reflective of a construct of interactivity. Redesigns, rewards programs, and new players in the market have the potential to revitalize the promise industry analysts touted when the first apps reached launched, but only if they are able to avoid existing issues and capitalize on what industry analysts touted as a vast store of potential. There exists little consensus as to whether this is even possible. *AdWeek* published two articles on Social TV; the first proclaimed "Social TV use appears to be growing" (Thielman, 2013a), while just four months later, the same analyst laments that "Twitter killed all of these second-screen apps" Thielman, 2013b). Social TV is either dead (Roettgers, 2014); is going to "explode," whether in 2013 or beyond (Copeland, 2013, n.p.); or going to bring television its "biggest renaissance in 50 years" and make the immediate future "riveting" (Schmitt, 2014).

Of interest within the conflicting reports from analysts is the consensus for the types of strategies that are on offer to salvage Social TV, which include, as mentioned previously, more meaningful game structures, better integration with the existing second screens taking place on social media and, perhaps most significant, more robust sociality for its users. Analysts indicate, for example, that innovations in Social TV are attempting to offer more than co-viewing, and instead "build social experiences around TV that involve actual people who watch TV together in the same room" (Roettgers, 2014, n.p.). Alternately, these platforms may take grater advantage of new media technology and

recreate that experience rather than simply encouraging it: "Users will be able to form 'viewing circles' where friends and family anywhere in the country can get together to watch their favorite TV programs in real time" (Turner, 2013).

Whether Social TV does develop into successful apps that create communal viewing experiences – or whether it becomes a means to curate trending Twitter conversations (Hardawar, 2014), or a means for celebrities to interact with television viewers during program airings (Edelsburg, 2014) or integrates talk-back capabilities into the program to talk to friends about a show as it airs (Flomenbaum, 2014) – is, in most respects, unimportant. It is not the specifics of these possible developments of Social TV that bears interest, but the fact that they attempt to increase opportunities for users to build social connections and strengthen interpersonal bonds. If what is missing from existing Social TV apps is sufficient affective rewards to effectively motivate users into desirable behaviors, then it is notable that strategies for future endeavors are aimed at offering benefits for participants that extend beyond co-viewing and virtual badges.

Conclusion

Social TV is an attempt to create economic value by shaping the interaction between television viewers and creators, distributors, and advertisers, with the apps acting as the intermediary that drives particular behaviors. Interactivity here manifests as an effort to create more points of engagement between viewers and television while maintaining the primacy of television as the provider of entertainment content. The apps deploy game mechanics to motivate viewers to check in to shows, effectively recording patterns and preferences and incentivizing users to become subjects of surveillance. Thus,

Social TV generates economic value and aggregated user data as part of its effort to encourage and reinforce particular modes of television viewing behavior.

The motivating and restrictive elements of Social TV can be understood as a manifestation of ongoing efforts – at times productive, at times contentious – to negotiate the evolving relationship between television and new, digital media. As previously discussed, digital content and internet-based activity have frequently been used to supplement and integrate with television viewing to render the experience one that can be accomplished on multiple screens. Social TV is an industry-generated effort, though one whose genesis largely resides within the technology field rather than in entertainment, and thus its focus is to increase the points of contact between consumers and producers. These points of engagement – that allow users to be tracked, communicated with, and be subject to more targeted advertising – as well as Social TV's capacity to encourage live television viewing are what makes these apps economically valuable. Social TV games offer incentives to users, but these incentives are designed by the economic bottom line rather than education, cultural purpose, or even fun. These apps support behaviors that financially benefit those corporations; they don't offer badges for check-ins based on what users want to do, but based on what the mechanics of the game want them to do.

As a result, with a predominantly business-minded approach, interactivity manifests differently with Social TV than with other options. Social TV apps promote interaction of the sort that is most valuable to its purposes: Comments are meant to be easily distributed through social networks, and are thus dependent on existing personal connections and basic character limits. Strong investment in community, detailed commentary, and the possibility for users to create deep connections with one another are

not valued or necessary for Social TV's continued utility, and thus not sponsored or supported within their structures. Users are offered a sense of collectivity and a construct of a simultaneous viewing audience, but this collectivity has its limits. Rather than working to create a greater sense of engagement and emotional attachment, interactivity here is focused more on tangible results, such as leaderboards and points of contact that connect viewers to television producers and advertisers via a third-party app. Social TV is interactivity that focuses on the empirical results of behaviors rather than the more ambiguous, internal connections that comprise the rest of this project, and thus provides a means of considering the purposes of interactivity that are practiced from a primarily business perspective and based on the formation and reinforcement of habit. These practices, therefore, may be rich in data and useful for creating economic value for the companies behind the apps, and for television producers and distributors, but they do not necessarily enact a version of interactivity that offers equivalent advantages to its users.

Chapter IV

Fannification: The practices of incorporation at Comic-Con

San Diego Comic-Con is the largest media convention in the world. It is a celebration of popular culture that gathers together fans and professionals, producers and consumers of everything from comic books to television, games to films. The power of Comic-Con is generated by its organizers, attendees, and fans, and by industry, retailers, and vendors; it is a site at which the variety of interests at play influence its increased prominence in contemporary popular culture and how the event manifests practices of interactivity.

Comic-Con is a site of interactivity that involves the negotiation of physical space, as downtown San Diego plays host to five days of promotional events, panels, parties, shopping, and lines. In recent years, Comic-Con has undergone a significant transformation. Though not the result of a corporate purchase, as with Television Without Pity, the transitions have been no less dramatic: The convention is considerably larger; it hosts increasingly prominent figures from the Hollywood entertainment industry; and thus is also the focus of national entertainment press during the event. Changes in the event itself and in technological developments have also meant that the geographically-convention has expanded into a significant transmedia presence as well.

This chapter considers the integration of fan convention and industry venture that takes place at Comic-Con. In one respect, the event is a user-created manifestation of media consumption, and attendees perceive significant benefits to participation: Comic-Con affords the opportunity for commerce, provides privileged access to industry figures and beloved media texts, and fosters an environment for the building of intimacy, community, and social capital. At the same time, Comic-Con is an industry event, one in

which television producers, film distributors, video game developers, comic book creators, and others engage a captive, enthusiastic market demographic in speculative consumption and paratextual promotion. After detailing the interests at play, I then consider how these come together in participatory forms that navigate the space of the convention, involve labor and commercialism, and yet strike a balance in which the forces of industry and of consumer align with one another.

Analysis of these interests and approaches to participation was cultivated from, along with other methods, four years of participant observation and convention attendance, from 2010 to 2014. In addition to attending the event and experiencing the spaces and features Comic-Con has to offer, following Twitter feeds and unauthorized blogs, and participating as an attendee myself, I also conducted nearly 100 anonymous semi-structured interviews with participants. The interviews, conducted with the approval of Rutgers' Institutional Review Board, includes speaking with attendees, both new and returning; convention organizers and volunteers; industry professionals; bloggers; vendors and retailers; and non-attendees in the neighborhood surrounding the convention. It also includes interviews with a small snowball sample of former and non-attendees who do not attend the yearly event.

From these methods, I argue that Comic-Con practices interactivity as incorporation. In order to negotiate the pressures of the changes in size, scope, and demand it has undergone in the last ten to fifteen years, the convention has worked to interpellate a broader range of individual consumers into a specifically constructed identity of geek and fan. This mode of incorporation structures the type of participation at and surrounding the event, and influences strategies deployed to face the challenges of a

convention in transition. The protocols of interactivity here are invested in maintaining the benefits that industry and attendee interests currently cultivate at Comic-Con, and efforts to content with changes attempt to extend those benefits to an increasing number of participants without diluting or sacrificing their meaning. But given that San Diego Comic-Con is still in the midst of a major point of transition, it remains to be seen whether future strategies for negotiation will maintain an alignment of interests or will ultimately privilege one at the expense of others.

Comic-Con: A user's guide

San Diego Comic-Con began in 1970 in the basement of the US Grant Hotel, when some 300 attendees gathered for three days of sci-fi panel discussions, comic art displays, and cult celebrities signing prints and answering questions. It was not the first convention of its kind: Comic book conventions had emerged with increasing frequency across the country throughout the 1960s, and those gatherings themselves evolved out of science fiction conventions that began in the 1930s (Coppa, 2006). According to the official institutional history, "from the start, Comic-Con embraced science fiction/fantasy, film, animation, and comic strips, along with comic books" (Comic-Con, 2009, p. 23), and found success by focusing on a niche market of audience members who were passionate about a subset of media texts and were interested in gathering with others. Even though Comic-Con had a broad media focus, it was very much a fan convention: The exhibition floor was a place to buy and trade comics, get autographs, and make friends with fellow fans; panels presented interactive Q-and-As with artists and celebrities, and the entire conference centered on a loyal and growing group of attendees

(Comic-Con, 2011). Subsequent years saw the convention drawing in larger crowds and moving to different locations in the downtown San Diego area to find a suitable home that could accommodate the growing numbers.

Today's convention has many of the same features, affordances, and events, but has undergone a stunning expansion within the last decade. Comic-Con is filled to capacity every year, hosting over 125,000 attendees (Comic-Con, 2010), a number that swells when accounting for the vendors, exhibitors, volunteers, panelists, support staff, and press who come for the convention and its peripheral events. The Comic-Con trade floor now takes up nearly 500,000 square feet of space in the convention center's exhibition hall [see image 4.1]. Here, small-press comic vendors set up shop next to sprawling booths from big names like Marvel and DC, all selling comics and paraphernalia; small artists provide custom creations and autographs in Artist's Alley,

Image 4.1: San Diego Comic-Con trade floor, 2011

and big-name stars offer similar opportunities to attendees lucky enough to win raffles or willing to stand in long lines; and vendors of sci-fi collectibles, toys, apparel, books, games, posters, and art all set up impromptu stores for eager audiences. The floor is the site of some of the most visible industry participation: Major Hollywood studios erect elaborate displays to market films and give away free gifts to passersby, and television networks and video game makers offer sneak peeks at upcoming products, all of which provide space for corporate branding and reaching out to consumers [see image 4.2]. The floor is a constant bustle of activity and nerve center of the convention for commercial and social purposes both, with attendees wandering about to shop, visit, people watch, and rub elbows with celebrities both big and small.

Beyond the trade floor, the major feature of Comic-Con are the panel presentations that fill rooms on the convention center's second floor and spill over to adjacent hotels. These rooms range significantly in size – the largest accommodates 6,500 people and the smallest holds around 215 – and at any given time, 14 to 18 rooms host panels, presentations, Q&A sessions, and even an academic conference. In the smallest

Image 4.2: *Trade floor booths for an independent comic book vendor (L) and CBS Television (R), SDCC '12*

rooms are intimate discussions of costumes, the economics of operating a comic book store, and the role of women in fandom; in the largest halls, Hollywood distributors parade out major stars to discuss upcoming films or popular television series. These panels comprise much of the convention's content, and attendees wait for hours in line to see creators, producers, and actors discuss upcoming products, answer questions directly from the crowd, and preview exclusive footage of new releases [see image 4.3].

In addition to the convention center, Comic-Con takes over two adjoining hotels, several movie theatres, and bars and restaurants throughout the city's Gaslamp neighborhood for official events. Unofficial promotional and social events that coincide with the convention are everywhere as well: The cable network SyFy redecorated a local restaurant in the image of a café from its long-running program *Eureka*, and the creators of *South Park* converted an open-air parking lot two blocks from the convention center into a replica of the cartoon town, complete with interactive exhibits, food, and

Image 4.3: *Mid-sized panel room, SDCC '13*

giveaways for Comic-Con attendees. The city of San Diego adapts for the week: The Major League Baseball franchise schedules away games, roads close and traffic is re-routed, public transit alters its existing lines, and hotels block out reservations a year in advance, all to make way for the enormous influx of people to the downtown area. Many local businesses offer special deals to attendees, and after hours, once convention programming is done for the day, the Gaslamp becomes a bustling scene of sponsored parties, attendee socializing, and celebrity spotting. In essence, it is not that Comic-Con takes place in San Diego, but rather, for five days each July, the entire downtown area becomes Comic-Con.

Why we con: commerce, intimacy, community

Comic-Con originated as a fan-created event, and attendance continues to generate a number of rewards, from building collections to building social capital, for its attendees. Though its platform and manifestations of participation are different from something such as Television Without Pity, the convention, too, should be considered a user-generated expression of media consumption practices. The practices here, however, have always been wrapped up with industry interests, and the convention has actively celebrated and promoted widespread media consumption – including film and television – since its earliest meeting. Attendee benefits help structure the event and motivate continued interest, so that the pleasures of participation – most prominently, the opportunity for buying, obtaining industry access, and building community – help form Comic-Con's particular mode of interactivity.

Comic-Con is a non-profit and originally fan-generated, but its economic interests run deep. The trade floor is almost entirely dedicated, implicitly and explicitly, to commerce, and attendees buy, sell, and trade comics, memorabilia, original and fan art, and collectibles. Buying, acquiring, and collecting are ingrained practices in a fan identity (Hills, 2002), and the trade floor, retail spaces, and material giveaways at Comic-Con are dedicated to the commercial aspects of media consumption. In particular, this is a very performative brand of material acquisition in which attendees purchase sought-after merchandise or acquire giveaway items in order to signal to both outsiders and fellow fans that they are media consumers, members of a community, and were present at Comic-Con.

The retail opportunities at Comic-Con allow fans to buy, sell, and trade items in order to build collections. Collecting has long been a foundational activity for fans: John Fiske (1992) argues that fan collectors are motivated primarily by accumulation, contending that they amass cultural capital as their collections grow in size. The process, care, and engagement, both intellectual and emotional, that go into curating a collection of objects are behaviors that historian James Clifford (1988) describes as "a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity" (p. 218). The act of building a collection can serve to perform affiliation, display dedication and knowledge, and establish legitimacy as a fan. Lynn Spigel (2001) also notes that the process of collecting popular culture artifacts involves fans assigning social value to objects that are being re-appropriated for purposes not originally intended by media corporations. Collecting is about fans building their own historical relationship with a text or narrative world, making choices of inclusion and exclusion, devoting time and money, and canon-

Image 4.4: *Assorted promotional swag, SDCC '12*

building and reinforcing the worth of the fannish text. Comic-Con offers attendees an

opportunity to build up collections as they sift through the deals on comics and

merchandise, trade with others, and broker deals to sell pieces that no longer fit.

The booths at Comic-Con are direct-sale outlets that offer many exclusive or

limited edition products available only for the convention, and thus attendees approach

the event as a shopping opportunity – and San Diego's Comic-Con "has more exclusive

stuff than the smaller [conventions] do."[4] Comic-Con is also a veritable mecca of swag

and free promotional material, much of it given away to audiences of the panel

presentations. Attendees show off t-shirts, posters, and even branded pajamas that they

receive "just 'cause [they] sat there"; the "free stuff" is a highlight of participation, or

even why they come in the first place [see image 4.4]. Some are strategic about how they

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[4] Quotes from Comic-Con attendees, workers, and participants are taken from interviews
conducted at the 2011, 2012, and 2013 conventions.

peruse the trade floor, positioning themselves near booths – usually those belonging to television networks and major film distributors – for the scheduled giveaways of posters, buttons, reusable bags, and promotional tchotchkes, all branded with show and movie names, superheroes, and corporate logos. Exclusive swag is a powerful motivator: Lines for Mattel, LEGO, and Hasbro booths are some of the longest at the convention and quite competitive, even in light of the purchase limits those companies place on exclusive items. A mother from Michigan, who enjoys the convention as an opportunity to star-gaze and learn about her favorite TV shows, was particularly excited for her t-shirts from USA Networks' original television series, because "it's not like anyone else has a *Covert Affairs* shirt." Thus, the enjoyment of attending Comic-Con offers extends beyond the convention itself, as attendees return home and show off products not available to all, whether purchased or not.

One section of the exhibition floor is a dedicated space called Artist's Alley, a row of booths along which attendees can view and purchase artwork, commission original pieces, and meet and converse with new and emerging visual and comic book artists on an individual basis. Artist's Alley represents a link to Comic-Con's history, and for many, it is the core of the convention: "If you go through Artist's Alley, you'll see some of these kids damn near in tears, getting to see somebody that drew the comic book they grew up with, and then to actually see them do it." In this space, attendees can engage in activities similar to those offered throughout the exhibition floor, expanding their art collections and accessing exclusive works that are not available elsewhere. Spaces like Artist's Alley, however, do more, also offering an intimate space of interaction between creators and attendees.

Part of Comic-Con's appeal is that the event incorporates opportunities for fans to meet comic artists, workers, and creators (Comic-Con, 2009). Attendees mix with industry insiders and media workers, everyone from the low-end laborers in the comic industry – such as inkers, retailers, and in-house stock artists, who may not have name recognition or enjoy an elevated social status except among only the most devoted fan bases – to famous, high-profile stars. The opportunity for interactivity at Comic-Con to translate to direct engagement is a profound motivator for attendee participation.

Moments of access and interaction between convention-goers and members of the creative and business ends of media industries have been integral to the formation of Comic-Con's identity, as it has built its reputation as an event that has consistently attracted a wide-ranging array of top names that drew in attendees. The first convention featured science fiction author Ray Bradbury and legendary comic artist/writer Jack Kirby, and within its first decade, the convention hosted an impressive array of celebrity talent comic books (*Spider-Man* creator and former Marvel Comics president Stan Lee), science fiction (author Robert A. Heinlein), animation (Mel Blanc, the voice of Looney Toons cartoons), comic strips (*Peanuts* creator Charles Shultz), film (director Frank Capra), and television (*Batman* actor Adam West). Not only did these figures speak in panel sessions, but many were also on hand for autographs, impromptu photo sessions, or to create quick sketches to attendees. This contact with actors and creators involved in beloved media objects makes the effort and ordeal of the convention worthwhile, as indicated by the group of enthusiastic *True Blood* fans waiting for several hours in line to get tickets to a lottery that, if they won, would allow them the opportunity to get cast autographs. Despite the arduous process of whittling down several thousand in line first

to 500 people for lottery tickets, and then to 100 for the signing, it was worth it, "just to see their faces."

In this regard, Comic-Con is an opportunity to stargaze, to wander the exhibition floor, attend panels, and spend after-hours time in the Gaslamp neighborhood in the hopes of spotting a famous actor or scoring a candid photo opportunity. One attendee, in describing the convention, clearly views it not as a fan convention, but more in line with celebrity and studio tours in Los Angeles: "You can do the NBC tour...it's low cost, but you don't actually see anyone. In order to do the Warner Brothers one, what is it like $200? And then of course, Paramount doesn't do a tour. You want to come [to California] and gave the star experience, and this is the only way you can really do it." The access to high-profile "media people" is a major draw of San Diego Comic-Con, and often one that sets it apart from other conventions that are not only smaller in nature, but offer fewer celebrity sightings from a narrower range of media prestige.

Comic-Con attendees continue to see it as fostering personal contact: "Because it's not just about the comics any more, it's really easy to run into writers and artists that I admire and enjoy, and actually have like one-on-one conversations," noted one young woman who steers toward smaller panels with fewer crowds. Another similarly-minded convention-goer observed that even at the television panels, new programs that had not yet built up a fan base could offer unheard-of levels of access and interaction: "A show called *Lost Girl* is out; I know SyFy picked it up…but not a lot of people knew that, so no one paid attention to it. So there I was…with 50 other people in a room that held 400. If I ask a question, get an answer, I get right back in line and ask another question." It is worth noting that attendees describe these desirable moments of contact and intimacy as

increasingly rare and only available off the beaten track at Comic-Con, a reflection of the shift in the convention's identity that I will explore in more detail later. However, in its current state, the convention still maintains the image that anyone from a loyal fan to a movie star to Stan Lee himself might be wandering the floor, the promise of which itself serves as a perceived benefit for its attendees.

One of Comic-Con's most profound functions, and one that is often at the fore for attendees, professionals, and organizers reflecting on the event, is that it creates a space that fosters and strengthens community bonds. This is wrapped up in its identity as a fan convention; in the days before the internet, when fan groups communicated and connected with one another largely on the pages of fanzines, through letters and mailing lists, and small local clubs, conventions offered far-away fans and enthusiasts a means to connect with other like-minded individuals by sharing the same geographic space, at least temporarily (Bacon-Smith, 1992). Even now, conventions offer a chance for like-minded individuals to socialize, interact, and connect, without necessarily explicitly relating to a media text. Bacon-Smith contends that fan conventions, for instance, create a "mobile geography," as the shifting location and dates of the convention create a community of regulars who have an evolving community that moves through space and re-forms at each meeting point (p. 9). The physical site of Comic-Con offers a location of fan community, a space dedicated to the notion of sharing individual affinity with others, forming interpersonal bonds, and performing consumption and affinity, even in an age in which fandom has embraced the power of the internet and digital connectivity.

Though its users recognize that Comic-Con simultaneously performs multiple functions and serves the interests of its various participants, for many the convention

remains primarily this space of community and shared identity. Attendees enjoy Comic-Con because it is a time to engage with their "people." It is an annual meeting of like-minded geeks, nerds, and fans who may, in other groups, be a minority, but who find at the convention a sense of normalcy and good company. One young woman, reflecting on her first time in attendance, recounts what she says epitomizes Comic-Con: "A guy walks up to his friends and goes, 'This is the place for the dorks!' And they looked so happy and excited." Attendees meet others on the convention floor, at panels, and, perhaps unexpectedly, in line – though panel lines be several hours long, hold thousands of people, and offer no guarantees that those standing in them will make it into a given panel, there are relatively few tensions in them, and mostly attendees find them a place of "camaraderie" with others with a shared understanding and sense of purpose. Because Comic-Con happens every year, regulars have ongoing meet-ups with fellow enthusiasts, creating a community of friends who only socialize in person on an annual basis. Attending Comic-Con takes a great deal of dedication, effort, and investment; as a result, even arriving in San Diego or approaching the convention with a badge in hand represents a performance affinity, one that attendees use to shorthand a sense of commonality and build quick connections with one another.

Conventions also provide an entry point for non-members, a way for them to demonstrate interest, gain a sense of authenticity and credibility, and make contacts that draw them further into fan communities. There are attendees who question their own legitimacy at the convention, noting that they are "pretty geeky," but not in comparison to other attendees, or reflecting that they are new to comic books, or "maybe 35% geek." For those who feel as though they may not belong as deeply as some others, the

convention offers a means to a greater degree of community affiliation, not only educating newcomers and providing the opportunity to gain information or objects that hold cultural significance within fan communities, but also to present an identity of fan that can be validated by continued affiliation with community practices. At Comic-Con, as in other fan pursuits, participation is motivated as much by interpersonal bonds, a sense of community, and engaging with others as it is about textual affinity (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007).

Though fandom is something that is frequently integrated deeply into the daily lives of its participants (Brooker, 2002), the all-consuming nature of Comic-Con also offers the antithesis: An experience so focused on media consumption, fan activity, and popular culture that it becomes a vacation from the everyday, one that may or may not include fannish pursuits. The performance of community and identity at Comic-Con offers some attendees the opportunity to act out a particular mode of fandom, and find it welcomed by others: "[At Comic-Con], you get to relate to other people just like you. You don't feel like the awkward one anymore, which is great. Everybody has a little geek in them, but at least these people want to show it." The convention offers community as a sense of freedom, a place in which even a "closet nerd" can come and "do whatever," where someone who has toys on his desk that puzzle his coworkers in his everyday life can not only buy more toys to build that collection, but also meet others who understand it. A longtime attendee, who also works in the comics industry as a cover artist, reflects on the power that the gathering can have in the lives of the attendees, as the community is an enduring an significant feature of the convention that sets it apart from the mundane: "These people probably work 9-5 jobs in accounting...or who knows. We have doctors,

we have pizza delivery boys. And they have to be this thing, they have to be in this box. And for one weekend, these four days, they can be whatever they want to be. And it's freeing to be with people who are like-minded. It's something special." Comic-Con, therefore, constructs a particular time and place at which individuals can both proudly self-identify as geeks, and simultaneously develop a sense of camaraderie with others who are like them.

Why we're conned: paratextual promotions

Media industry interests invest a great deal of time, money, and attention in their participation at Comic-Con, taking advantage of the prospect that efforts at audience construction and engaged marketing will return direct and indirect financial benefits. Industry participants at Comic-Con include those the range from small, independent comic book publishers and vendors in Artist's Alley to the largest multinational media conglomerates in the world. Industry here involves video game creators, broadcast networks and cable television properties, and film distributors, as well as toy companies, book publishers, comic book presses, and memorabilia, collectibles, and merchandise. Successful long-term participation for industry contributors at Comic-Con, therefore, means promotional and retail work that both maximizes the social rewards, affordances, and benefits sought by attendees, and extracts a viable return on investment.

For retail outlets on the trade floor, whether selling comic books, t-shirts, or exclusive toys, the economic purpose of the event is quite straightforward: The booths make sales, and reinforce practices of collecting and material acquisition as appropriate modes of media consumption. For many of these vendors, Comic-Con, along with other

similar conventions, comprise a significant opportunity to reach new buyers and make a significant percentage of their annual sales numbers. By Sunday afternoon, vendors across the convention floor are running low or are out of stock entirely as they strive to meet the buying appetites of attendees.

Other industry presence at Comic-Con, however, has economic motivation that is not as clear-cut. Comic-Con acts as a marketing event, a way for media distributors, especially of film and television, to promote products that are slated for upcoming release or return. Jennifer Gillan notes that one of the key goals for industrial marketing and interactive events of television is "to keep the TV franchise always in circulation and keep the audience always interacting with the show before and after its initial and subsequent broadcast airings" (2011, p. 4). Comic-Con provides a scheduled, synchronous moment of convergence in which film studios make highly-publicized announcements on casting and future releases, screen exclusive footage, and bring out its biggest stars. Television distributors use the convention in much the same way; as it takes place amidst the summer break in broadcast schedules, the convention is where they screen pilots of new shows and preview material for returning series. Comic-Con is a hugely hyped event, dominating the entertainment news each year, and even poor fits and sparsely-attended panels can benefit from the red carpet photos, paparazzi shots, and word of mouth that stirred by a convention appearance; a disliked product at Comic-Con is still a heavily talked-about one.

Comic-Con is used for promotions by industries asking attendees to engage in what Jonathan Gray refers to as "speculative consumption" (Gray, 2010, p. 24). Here, consumers consider the potential pleasures and issues that may be present in the complete

text and offering information that, ideally, will allow consumers to feel comfortable

making the sacrifice of time and/or money to take up the film or television show. This is

achieved by making use of paratexts – previews, exclusive footage, merchandising, swag,

interviews, attendee question-and-answer sessions – which Gray argues serve to create

texts, manage their meanings, and shape the experience of media consumption (p. 6).

Industrial involvement at Comic-Con is an opportunity for distributors to both craft and

reach their viewing audience by use of paratexts, promotions and marketing: Taken

individually and by their very inclusion at the convention, these paratexts instruct

attendees as to the type of viewer, the type of enjoyment, and the type of engagement that

is suitable for upcoming media properties.

Comic-Con is an attractive promotional site because it provides industry access to

a particularly invested segment of consumers. These are fans who have the potential to

consume rapaciously and promote content, and whose own interests in the convention

make them eager to be marketed to. By using Comic-Con as a test market for their core

audience, television and film studios can take in negative or critical responses and have

the potential to adapt advertising campaigns, or even content, in the hopes of securing a

more favorable results during wide release.[5] In this way, the convention is a promotional

tool that responds to swelling costs and increased risk in media production by turning to

existing franchise properties with built-in audience bases. At their core, industrial

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[5] For instance, one of the most spectacular Hollywood flops in recent years was *John Carter* (2012), a Disney-distributed film based on a classic set of sci fi books that seems ideal to be featured at the convention. Comic-Con audiences never had the chance to provide critique or feedback on the film that may have ameliorated some of the film's issues – Disney never brought it to the convention. Perhaps this is an indication that Disney did not really understand the property or its audience, and could predict some of the challenges it would face in box office receipts and critical acclaim

concerns are about increasing rate of profit, and thus the participation of major film studios, television networks, video game manufacturers, and comic book publishers in an event like Comic-Con is advantageous as a means to increase visibility, loyalty, audience numbers, and/or revenue streams.

But marketing at Comic-Con should be understood as something more complicated than a hard sell, aggressive, or direct form of promotions; instead, it is a complex system of establishing, maintaining, and reviving viewer enthusiasm, validating user investment, strengthening consumer intent and reward, and incorporating an ever-increasing cross section of the public into the Comic-Con audience. The convention creates meaning for its attendees, and instructs them as to what media properties are to be most anticipated, most worthy of excitement, and, hopefully, most worth spending money on as they are released. Promoting appropriate products, to willing attendees, is necessary for the speculative consumption at the convention to translate to actual consumption at a later date. "The industry desperately needs its paratexts to work," Gray points out, "since both industry and audiences habitually count on paratexts' relative success or failure as an index to the success or failure of the text as a whole" (2010, p. 39). This indicates what is at stake for entertainment corporations at Comic-Con: Studios shell out money on booths, bring in celebrities, and beckon attendees to try the newest release of a video game in order to build excitement, but also to gauge response. Comic-Con acts as an ongoing test market of a very loyal and enthusiastic audience and an unofficial proving ground for new and upcoming releases, one that creates a symbiotic relationship in which access to a consistent stream of media products raises the convention's status, and the

known, reliable identity of Comic-Con lends standards and credibility to the media texts that advertise there.

Successful Comic-Con presentations, however, do not necessarily translate to guaranteed market success. The purpose of promotional efforts in general, and industrial involvement in Comic-Con in particular, is to generate interest that translates directly into quantifiable monetary gains, via television viewers, box office receipts, or video game sales. Despite the money and effort media corporations invest in a Comic-Con presence, there are significant examples of properties that do extremely well at Comic-Con but falter at the box office (e.g., *Cowboys and Aliens* (2011), *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (2004)), just as there are success stories of properties that did not create an initial buzz at the convention. As one attendee points out, "A lot of studios…are also realizing that, from a marketing standpoint, if you do well at Comic-Con, it doesn't translate into actual box office numbers all the time. However, if you do badly here, it will actually really hurt you, and you'll have to work really hard to overcome it."

Ultimately, industry marketing efforts at Comic-Con can involve speculation themselves. The social rewards for attendees at the convention, in particular community ties and the promise of industry access, may make them idea consumers at Comic-Con, but less enthusiastic when it comes to actually purchasing a movie ticket or tuning in to a television show. Comic-Con participants may enjoy marketing texts for reasons that have little to do with the product itself, but is instead derived from the cachet of viewing or playing it before other audiences; thus speculation and early access itself may skew the popularity and revenue of the main release by overstating textual enjoyment. For industry marketing ventures to make the most out of their interactions with consumers at the

convention, therefore, it is important that the social rewards promised to conference attendees align with those that help generate interest in the media properties on display. When these interests align, attendees enjoy the convention and media corporations make money.

Space, place, participation, reward

Comic-Con is certainly the longest-running site under investigation in this project, and its continued popularity and rise in prominence indicate that it has been able to maintain a mode of interactivity that suits the needs of its participants for more than four decades. Comic-Con illustrates, therefore, that interactivity is not a product of new media technologies; though there is a digital component to the convention, the interactivity that manifests in this case study is grounded in a particular geographic space and a shared time. San Diego Comic-Con is a site of interactivity that explores the particularities of space in order to foster significance for its participants.

Much of the research on media spaces has concentrated on places that perform a role in traditional production/exhibition functions of mass media; this would include, for instance, the role of place and neighborhood in movie viewing and perceptions of community (Longhurst, Bagnall & Savage, 2007), as well as on spaces of exhibition and viewing (e.g., McCarthy, 2001; Silverstone, 1996; Spigel, 1992); and on fans coming together (often repeatedly) to rewatch favorite texts as a communal experience in a shared space (Brooker, 2002). Brooker also considers how this type of repeated viewing constitutes a form of symbolic pilgrimage that returns fans to the work (2007), linking it to the space-based practice of fan and media pilgrimage, in which consumers visit sites

featured in film or television, or sites of production, in order to foster a sense of intimacy with a media text or its creators. Nick Couldry, for example, considers viewer pilgrimage to the actual street from the long-running British soap opera *Coronation Street* (2000) and to New Jersey locations made famous in *The Sopranos* (2007) to connect a physical presence with an internal sense of nearness. Fans make trips to Jim Morrison's gravesite, follow the path made famous in James Joyce's *Ulysses* on Bloomsday, and visit Graceland (King, 1993; Norman, 2011), all places that are given power and meaning by their connection to media significance: These are "often mundane places that fandom has made sacred and special," (Brooker, 2007, p. 149).

Comic-Con is a powerful media space not because it is the site of exhibition, of production, or of symbolic stand-in for a media figure, though of course the convention at times plays many of these roles. Instead, Comic-Con is significant because it represents a physical space at which a mode of fan participation, media consumption, and interactive engagement is privileged for a few days each year. Though it is a physical, shared space, Comic-Con is also a space of the imagined collectivity of fan communities, creating a compromise of sorts between "fandom as a mundane, yet spiritually significant, realm of everyday life and the importance of place within fandom" (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 63). The shared value placed on Comic-Con by the various interests at play help shape the nature of participation that takes place at and surrounding the event.

Interactive participation at Comic-Con takes on a variety of forms. Comic-Con participants work booths or manage people as part of an official job; shop, attend panels; cosplay; collect advertising paraphernalia; bond with others; ask questions; acquire autographs; and, perhaps most common of all, stand in line. Some attendees spend time at

the convention as official volunteers, helping manage crowds and answer questions in return for access to the convention, but others participate in more unofficial forms of uncompensated labor, much of which has spread well beyond the physical confines of the convention space. As Comic-Con sprawls, it becomes increasingly impossible for any one person to take it all in, and it is the attendees who do the work of scouting, curating, and chronicling the convention for others, to preserve and spread the experience of the convention to others and preserve it for themselves. Additionally, as tickets have become more difficult to attain, it has helped create an aftermarket demand online for news, reports, videos, and photos from the convention for those not in attendance. Even those individuals at the convention who miss a panel due to scheduling or, more likely, spending the time in a line make use of the internet to get a more complete experience, as presentations are often uploaded within a day.

Throughout the year, there are blogs, websites, and online communities dedicated to deconstructing the recent convention, anticipating the next year's, and following the roving network of other, smaller, and more focused comic and media conventions that take place at other times across the country.[6] During the convention, a significant amount of information and bonding takes place in various places online: Twitter feeds help convention goers share information about line lengths, room capacities, and star sightings; FourSquare and RF readers, both accessed via smart phones, allow users to check in for information or free gifts at various spots at the convention itself and around San Diego; and numerous websites offer up-to-the-minute, unauthorized information on panels, events, and insider information.

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[6] See, for instance, http://sdccsurvivalguide.com/, http://sdccblog.com/, and http://sd-comic-con.livejournal.com/

Comic-Con is a site of interactivity that is grounded in a specific physical geography that has simultaneously evolved into a collective, transmedia experience. The internet is a dynamic site for attendees and enthusiasts to reconstruct the convention by sharing information, responses, reflections, and insights from the panels and the exhibition floor, offering maps, guides, and insider tips, and even loading full audio/visual footage of much of the convention. This curation and archiving of Comic-Con is necessarily a collective endeavor, and the convention experience that is archived is archived on the internet is greater than any one attendee's exposure. Nevertheless, no amount of collected information can fully capture the experience of the convention: It must be shared with others at the same place and time to really be experienced and to have that emotional bond. Being at the convention necessarily means making choices between simultaneous events – at any moment, are you walking the exhibition floor or in a panel, in line or at an off-site event, getting an autograph or an advance screening? These choices create gaps in the narrative experience of Comic-Con, ones that are filled in by other participants working to enhance the ideal of the event. Comic-Con represents an argument, therefore, that convergence does not happen on the internet, but instead takes place at the merger of on- and off-line experiences.

Attendee participation contributes to an ideal of what the convention is meant to be: Participants take up an array of tasks that reveal care and devotion the convention and to one another, so that fellow geeks "get to experience Comic-Con for the first time…and be blown away by it all" (Kline, 2010, p. 5). There is a sense of mentoring of new attendees that echoes the role of fan conventions as entry points for new members. The rhetoric of devoted attendees is akin to that which R.M. Milner (2009) found in his

consideration of co-creation on a video game fan site: users participated not because of

loyalty to producers or owners, but out of a loyalty to the text. Similarly, those

enthusiastic of Comic-Con display their allegiance to the convention itself, not its

organizers or the industry workers who participate. The fans in Milner's study "were

knowledge workers; only their allegiance was not to a corporation, it was to an ideal," (p.

500). In the interest of making a better text, though they were aware of the possibility –

indeed, the likelihood – that their efforts were being exploited for corporate profit, they

were not bothered enough to cease their activities. At Comic-Con, the devotion and

affinity attendees display is to the convention itself, and their practices and participation

are done in order to make the experience for themselves, friends, those they meet, and the

imagined flock of newcomers and returning attendees who read the blog, follow the

Twitter feed, or stand behind them in line With a few notable exceptions[7], there is a

remarkable lack of strife at the convention; though lines are long and waits offer no

guarantee of getting into a particular panel, attendees form friendships in lines rather than

rivalries[8]. Participants do as they are told, don't challenge volunteers or convention center

management, and follow directions in panels and on the exhibit floor; the shared sense of

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[7] The most notable tensions were spurred by properties at the convention perceived not to fit, and that brought out ardent fans in droves. *Twilight* and *Glee*, which first attended in 2008 and 2009 respectively, have been met with disgruntlement and outright protests, and have been blamed for making tickets harder to get, though that is questioned by many Comic-Con bloggers. These tensions, however, are actually more representative of constructs of geekdom and fandom, to be discussed in the next section, that have a long history of being unwelcoming to alternative gender practice and the idea of the Bad Text.
[8] As an example, in my research, I would frequently approach individuals in line for interviews, and took pains to explain to others in line that I was not sneaking in or cutting ahead of them, and would not be taking up a seat in the panels. I found it interesting that those in line seemed wholly unconcerned by me entering the line, even though some had been waiting for hours, and seemed to regard my assurances as unnecessary.

camaraderie, and interest in not sullying the playground everyone shares, trumps individual interests.

Attendee participation at Comic-Con, however, takes place within a very specific context. Frequently, this freely given, collaborative work ultimately serves to further Comic-Con as a media industry event. Comic-Con participants, from convention workers and attendees and, to some degree, even those who check out the blogs, updates, and videos from far away, are engaging with the convention in ways that largely uphold the models of existing entertainment media power and economic structures. Curating, publicizing, and archiving of the convention can all be regarded as consumers adopting the role of marketers for corporate entertainment industries. These are also consumers who have subscribed to the notion that access to celebrities, industry insiders, and media workers and advance access to promotions and information on content is sufficient reward for their efforts, and thus the affective compensation for their efforts strengthens and reinforces existing industry positions.

Even the attendee interest in access can align with industry purpose. The entertainment industry hierarchy creates – somewhat arbitrarily – a qualitative separation between "media people" and "non-media people," and the practices of Comic-Con maintain this distinction; participants eagerly seek out access to industry producers, not an opportunity to topple, supplant, or join them. In further considering the relationship between media, space, and power (2000), Couldry also relies on a distinction between "media people" and "non-media people," as a difference that is inherent and runs deep; it is not that the chasm between the two is insurmountable, but there is an interest in

preserving the separation, because it is in getting close to – but not superseding – these icons that attendees gain a feeling of nearness to a figure of cultural significance.

Participants at Comic-Con are enthusiastic, engaged, and productive, but in ways that cohere to industry standards and do not offer resistance or repudiation. Behaviors expected of attendees, as structured by the convention, focus on signals such as attendance, applause, enthusiasm and demand for giveaways and meet-and-greet events, and on the few pre-screened questions from audience members at each panel. There is certainly space for criticism as well as appreciation in the specific products that are brought to the convention – not all panels are equally popular, some media texts do not return to the convention after a poor showing, and reception at the convention does not consistently translate to financial success. However, despite their power as consumers, Comic-Con attendees retain little control over the content being created, or even the type of content brought to the convention.

The interactivity on site at Comic-Con and within its transmedia spread is significant for how these behaviors reflect ongoing efforts to navigate the relations between attendees and industries, such that engagement in the convention is consistently rewarded with interpersonal bonds, affective benefit, and both social and economic capital. This approach to participation acknowledges the importance of tradition and history at Comic-Con, which will come to be important as the convention navigates its ongoing transformations as an event and as a site of interactivity. The ways in which the interests and behaviors of its contributors are given meaning illustrates how the materiality of a city, a hotel ballroom, or a convention center is raised up to offer considerable significance in contemporary media culture.

Mainstream niche: Incorporation into practice

Interactivity at Comic-Con has thus far been able to align interest of both industry and fan contributors and navigate the already considerable changes that have taken place at and surrounding the convention. In part, this is because of how the convention structures participation and constructs an identity for its attendees that has expanded and shifted with the convention's development, and which attempts to disseminate but not dilute the social rewards experienced by longtime participants.

Comic-Con has adopted a subtitle that labels it a celebration "of the popular arts" [see image 4.5], yet its roots as a comic book convention with ties to science fiction television, genre film, and early fan culture make Comic-Con a convention for geek culture; it is, as quoted earlier by an attendee, "the place for dorks." With the expansion of the event, however, Comic-Con has been offering programming for increasingly diverse tastes, effectively speaking to an audience that is more broad and far-reaching rather than its original niche focus. At the same time, however, it maintains the rhetoric

Image 4.5: Downtown San Diego signage during Comic-Con, 2012

and signifiers that the event continues to celebrate geeks. Put simply, Comic-Con continues to offer popular media for geeks, but at the current convention, everyone and anyone can be (and maybe already is) a geek.

Like other audience and subcultural identities, what it means to be a geek – or a nerd, or a fan – in contemporary culture is dependent on the discursive practices that craft the behaviors and on the implications of adopting such a label. Though in contemporary parlance, there is somewhat of a colloquial separation in identification between geeks, nerds, and dorks, and all of these have some amount of crossover with fans, at Comic-Con, all types are welcome. Along with fan, the label of nerd, dork, or geek carries with a traditional presupposition of social awkwardness and pejorative overtones that speak to the longstanding consideration of members of these groups as "social outcasts." However, in contemporary use, and at Comic-Con in particular, these labels are being re-claimed and removed of their derogatory contexts and worn with pride (Wiltse, 2004).

It is, of course, a very particular performance of geek identity that is celebrated at Comic-Con. The convention presents an inviting image, but resistance against particular modes of participation – most notably, the squealing fangirls of *Twilight* – indicates that there are ways of performing fandom that are codified at Comic-Con. The geek is often gendered male, and there exists a significant tradition of industry acceptance of fanboys and their pursuits while women are relegated to support figures or left out all together (Busse, 2013). The push for purchasing at Comic-Con, along with the ancillary expenses of the event itself, has ramifications for class, as the convention celebrates geeks with discretionary income as the ideal consumers. At Comic-Con, the geek is depicted as trailblazer to the most loyal, enthusiastic, and engaged of audiences, and this construct

certainly has its benefits. For one, it makes the geek identity one worth reclaiming, and offers benefits to individual consumers to become a part of fandom. The construct also allows for aggressive industry marketing toward geeks to be characterized as giving back to the demands of an eager audience, rather than mere commercialism. And, of course, the specific mode of geek identity normalized at Comic-Con gives industrial and convention forces control over the activities, media texts, and behaviors that comprise the identity, and the means to expand the notion of the fan to interpellate and instruct new participants in the appropriate modes of interactivity.

In part, Comic-Con is able to remain successful and exist as a desirable commodity while incorporating increasingly broad audience interests into its identity because the role of the geek also shifted to become a more central consumer segment. Simultaneous with the incorporation of more consumers into Comic-Con's target is the shift of that same target within contemporary media and the popular press. J.A. MacArthur argues that geeks have transitioned from social isolation to experience a "resurgence in popularity" (2009, p. 61), and have likewise become a feature in the popular press and a common retail market. Those involved in this shift note and remark upon their own changed position: "In the past few years, the whole "geek" culture has become more mainstream, and it's just general popular culture…You have people who were like 'Comic books are for nerds,' and then see *Iron Man*, and '*Iron Man*'s awesome!'" Comic-Con as an event has been at the center of this shift – as geeks become a more central and profitable focus of popular culture, the convention, as one of the subculture's central gathering points, becomes the focus of more attention for marketing, press coverage, and participation alike.

Incorporating a wider swath of audiences into a niche identity has a clear marketing function: The greater the number of people who identify a geek, fan, or similar, the larger the audience reached at events like Comic-Con. It also permits industrial forces to exert more control in the particular type of geek consumption that is normalized and codified. But expanding the scope of Comic-Con is not merely an industrial marketing push; as entertainment conglomerates increase market exposure, the convention incorporates new members into the community and shares the norms and knowledge of the fandom. Individuals are not just interpellated into a market segment, but into the identity and performance of the fan culture. This too, of course, can have a marketing aim – fans make excellent media consumers, and as individuals adopt fan practices, they may also adopt the norms that encourage viewing, reading, playing, and purchasing. Attendees are, of course, consumers, both current (spending time on the exhibition floor purchasing t-shirts and figurines and original art and hard-to-find small-press books) and prospective. This latter designation is important for corporate entertainment interests at Comic-Con, as virtually none of the major Hollywood film, television, and video game studios have anything for purchase. Instead, they give away swag and freebies, make soon-to-be released video games available to try, or host actors and famous figures for autograph signings, all of which cannot be purchased but only gained by waiting in long lines or winning lotteries with daunting odds. In other words, Comic-Con works to funnel attendee interest into activity that adds value within traditional and convergent media practices: watching television, buying video games and film tickets, spreading word of mouth, and raising buzz in advance of traditional release windows. The goal of the interaction at Comic-Con is to commodify these individuals not

for their immediate buying power, but for their participation in a more standard media viewer model. Interactivity at Comic-Con helps interpellate attendees as a particular mode of fan practice that aims for the highest rate of capital return in existing pathways of economic value in entertainment industries.

This is not an entirely unusual phenomenon; Jenkins notes, rather matter-of-factly, that "to be desired by the networks is to have your tastes commodified" (2006, p. 62), and Nico Carpentier (2011) argues that a consequence of audiences engaging in converging media practices is that their very identities ultimately become commodified. S. Elizabeth Bird similarly notes that "marketers have simply found creative ways to harness the enthusiasm of active media audiences in order to sell to them more effectively" (2011, p. 507). But Jenkins also discusses how the commodification of consumers who are deemed to "matter" by media industries presents an inevitable paradox, as this commodification is a form of exploitation, but at the same time it is an indication of the economic value and larger cultural visibility of group (p. 62). As such, it is very possible to consider Comic-Con, and in particular its move to incorporate an increasingly broad market segment into its target audiences, as a soulless barrage of advertising, with little function beyond its transparent marketing schemes – and indeed, those who criticize the convention most aggressively often use this type of language. However, Comic-Con, and the specific niche of audiences it targets, has always had a significant commercial component. The convention's emphasis on buying and trading merchandise; the celebration of film, television, animation, and comic book consumption; and the cachet of exclusive products, prime swag, and collection development all situate the convention, as with fandom, as always-already commodified (Hills, 2002). This is

not, therefore, a change that has diluted the convention or marked a corporate co-option of a fan event, but one in which the performance of fandom, to fellow attendees, to industrial forces, and to outsiders, implicates material possessions as signifiers of status (Brown, 1997; Fiske, 1992).

Attendees and non-attendees alike recognize and acknowledge that the convention is, for media corporations, a business venture dedicated to promotions and commerce. Rather than view the evidence of industry commodification at Comic-Con as an indication of exploitation, many attendees find power in their role as consumer and cultural critic. Even supporting major Hollywood producers has benefits that are shared with attendees, as the more beneficial industry involvement is perceived to be from a business perspective, the more properties are likely to make an appearance and thus enhance the convention experience. Fans are, at their very core, invested consumers, but long ones who had been marginalized as audiences and completely ignored as media subjects, so the fact that they are being marketed to – even aggressively, even perhaps crassly – is evidence that they matter. At Comic-Con, this formerly invisible, powerless faction is being celebrated by constantly being presented products geared to their tastes, offered desirable places to spend discretionary income, and solicited for feedback, criticism, and response.

Comic-Con attendees are not unaware of the promotional function served by the convention, but have constructed this pursuit as a benefit, rather than a negative: "That's the thing that Comic-Con is really all about; it's a lot of giving. It's a lot of the industry giving us sneak peeks, vendors giving us special swag, and a lot is put into this for the fans. Because 364 days out of the year, we're giving to them, we're giving our time and

our dedication and our money, so this is the one time that we as a group get to reap the benefits." Though attendees recognize they are consumer markets who are at the convention in order to have their interests commodified, the social returns that are perceived as available at the convention make it a genuinely rewarding mode of interactivity. While the power dynamics may remain asymmetrical, the relationships at play at Comic-Con are far more in alignment and mutually beneficial than in narratives of co-option and exploitation, in effect at other sites of interactivity.

The economics of expansion

The idea that Comic-Con celebrates and cultivates the most energetic, enthusiastic, and devoted of consumers is deeply embedded in the convention's rhetoric, as is industry projection that these are media producers who invite collaboration and response. This construct has helped frame the interactivity at Comic-Con as a practice that has, thus far, largely managed to offer rewards to its industry participants and attendees that at least do not distract from one another, if they are not able to act as direct complements. However, the convention is currently undergoing a transition, one that may challenge its strategies for economic rewards, social benefits, and interactive practices of incorporation. In this section, I consider the implications of expansion for its attendees and for the entertainment companies who use Comic-Con as a marketing venue, and illustrate how these industrial and cultural shifts increasingly place demands on the convention to define its identity in a shifting landscape. The question that arises, then, is whether the interactivity that manifests at the event can remain sustainable and in alignment.

The convention has a larger audience, and more potential to benefit industries, if it offers something for everyone, even those that may not have previously self-identified as part of the geek audience or as a member of the fan community that comprised Comic-Con's original focus. However, it also makes for negotiations that must take place along the fringes of fandom; there are, of course, some individuals who do not and would not consider themselves part of the Comic-Con fan community, and there are those whose dedication and legitimacy are not in doubt. In between, however, are gray areas of individuals who may have their roles and identities influenced. These are the ones with the potential to be most significantly affected by the push to expand the event and incorporate others into the Comic-Con fold, and who could carry with them the potential for ideological upheaval by altering or diluting the meaning of the convention.

Though they may attribute it to different causes, offer a variety of consequences, or single out different moments that exemplify the shift, longtime attendees, journalists, and industry workers alike describe with unanimity[9] changes in Comic-Con that have rendered it a fundamentally different convention than the ones held five or ten years ago; some of them are uncertain how to feel about those perceived changes. Addressing this ambivalence reveals a great deal about the different interests attempting to fulfill their needs at Comic-Con, and the difficulty in establishing an identity that can be sustained within the structure of contemporary media.

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[9] I use this superlative deliberately. In four years of attending the conference, I have conducted nearly 100 interviews and spoken with over 130 attendees, vendors, volunteers, journalists, observers, organizers, and panelists. I asked every informant how long they had been attending/working the convention; any who had experienced the convention more than five years prior to the interview, whether continuously or not, I asked if the convention had changed. While descriptions and reactions were more varied, every single interview subject who had experience with the convention prior to 2007-2009 felt that it has changed considerably.

Comic-Con's most apparent change has been its staggering expansion in size. Whereas attendees could once purchase day-of tickets, Comic-Con is now an exercise in planning and logistics, featuring a long series of crowds, lines, and high demand for limited supply. According to convention organizers, 120,000 tickets are sold for the event each year, plus additional passes for professionals, vendors, and the press (Comic-Con, 2010). Increasing the number of attendees is impossible, as the convention center and neighboring hotels are already filled to capacity[10]. Tickets, therefore, sell out rapidly; sales for Comic-Con 2011 crashed servers three times before they were successfully able to manage the influx of interested buyers; changes in sale procedures in the later years have essentially slowed down the process of actually purchasing, so that all tickets are sold in about 90 minutes, but to attendee hopefuls who clicked the sale link at the precise second tickets became available.

Attendees are, unsurprisingly, often frustrated with the size; they regularly call attention to the "insane" lines, the difficulties in finding parking or a hotel, and the challenges of actually getting in to desirable panels or meeting artists and industry figures. Comic-Con is now "vastly large, frustratingly large," making it difficult to navigate, find desirable programs and products, and connect with others. For those who would self-identify as geeks but nevertheless resist San Diego Comic-Con, or who perhaps once attended but no longer feel the need to do so, the size and scope of this convention is prohibitive: "I don't like paying for a ticket that allows me to stand in line, but doesn't guarantee me a seat, which typically means only seeing a fraction of what I

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[10] Comic-Con's lease at the convention center was set to expire in 2012, but the organization signed a deal in 2010 to keep the event at its current location until at least 2015.

want to see…I think that any exciting news I can learn in a crowded room is just as exciting twenty seconds later when someone tweets about it." Though the increase in size has meant welcoming greater numbers of people to the event each year, it also turns some away.

Comic-Con once offered participants a means to engage with professionals on a personal level, this creating a space that engendered feelings of belonging (Brooker, 2007) and attachment (Hills, 2002). The exponential growth of the convention, challenges the ability for the event to continue to offer the same degree of access. This is a recognized drawback for many: "The intimacy of the show is gone," replaced by a more dominant commercial presence and a less community-oriented event. Though attendees see personalities and industry figures who continue to appear at Comic-Con, participants also contend that the media people are more shielded, sign fewer artifacts, and are less willing to meet with the fans. Even those who contend that one-on-one interactions are still available at the convention maintain that this happens largely in places like Artist's Alley and smaller panel rooms, not in the massive auditoria or on the bustling, commercialized segments of the exhibition floor.

It is important to note, however, that though the increase in size is remarked upon with startling frequency, it is not always met with frustration or negativity. Some functions of Comic-Con are better served by an increased size: A larger convention is more accessible to others, and attendees seeking a community of others like them have the advantage of meeting even more like-minded individuals, with the additional bonus of watching the tribe of geeks and nerds grow as well. The higher profile also brings in more prestigious professionals and celebrities, so those seeking access to more desirable

properties benefit from the larger event. Corporate interests are able, with more attendees, to bring more properties, reach more potential consumers, and increase their marketing push as the convention grows; in economic terms, the costs incurred for participating in a convention of thousands do not exponentially increase for a convention of more than a hundred thousand, even as the pool of speculative consumers does. It is common rhetoric to greet the growth of Comic-Con with annoyance, and point to all the challenges it brings, but the convention has expanded with good reason. To a point, the increase in size is able to better meet many of the varying interests at the convention.

Expansion of the convention can be a mixed blessing for industrial interests as well. A vendor of a mid-level anime merchandise and publishing company acknowledges that a significant percentage of her company's annual revenue comes from Comic-Con sales, yet nevertheless considers this "explosion" of the Hollywood influence, and the change in attendees that accompanied it, a "terrible thing…A lot of the small press vendors, like the actual people who make comics, and are making it on a small budgets and are self publishing, a lot of those people have been priced out." Other longtime attendees were surprised to find regular publishers or vendors, for years a mainstay on the exhibition floor, absent from their usual spot, because they had less time to secure a booth – and pay for it – as demand raised for the space: "It seems like, every time [the convention] expands, it's for [video games], and all the other stuff kind of gets pushed out."

Industry efforts to incorporate more consumers into the audience construct of Comic-Con are also apparent in the expansion of the convention's programming schedule. Comic-Con's original focus – the "science fiction/fantasy, film, animation, and

comic strips" (Comic-Con, 2009) the convention embraced right along with comic books – may seem broad itself, but the expansion of the event is nevertheless tied for attendees to the perceived influx of mainstream, A-list Hollywood films, television series, and video games, courtesy of increased involvement by major entertainment media conglomerates. One longtime attendee believes the pivotal year for Comic-Con came in 2002, with the promotion and subsequent major box office success of Sam Raimi's film adaptation of *Spider-Man*, though another gives the "old" Comic-Con one more year and marks the shift with Angelina Jolie's visit to the convention to promote the second *Tomb Raider* film in 2004.

Comic-Con hosts displays and presentations for high profile and hotly anticipated genre offerings, such as the newest superhero films from Marvel and DC and HBO's fantasy series *Game of Thrones,* and panels for longstanding cult favorites with devoted fan bases, such as *The Simpsons*, *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek*. Other presentations can be connected to Comic-Con's original core focus, albeit in a somewhat roundabout manner: The hit sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* has appeared at Comic-Con since 2008. Though the show does feature some very enthusiastic geeks, the program itself is decidedly mainstream; not only is it regularly among the highest rated sitcoms on television (Bauder, 2011), but it is also more likely to explain Comic-Con culture to its viewers than to celebrate it directly. On the other hand, *Castle*, a rather straightforward police procedural drama, is a panel best justified by behind-the-scenes connections rather than onscreen content: the show's star, Nathan Fillion, previously starred in a number of celebrated texts of the science fiction, fantasy, and geek canon; *Castle* itself does not uphold the tradition of Comic-Con, but its star does. Other programming choices at

Comic-Con are even more disconnected from the convention's original identity. USA
Network hosted a panel for its girl-power espionage action show *Covert Affairs*, CBS
fielded a star-studded panel for *NCIS:LA,* and Angelina Jolie returned in 2010 to promote
her action thriller film *Salt*. ABC devoted their 2012 booth space on the exhibition floor
to a segment of an airplane fuselage and a bevy of attractive women in perky pillbox hats
to promote of the short-lived series *Pan Am* [see image 4.6]. Thus the incorporation
practices at Comic-Con have are a part of a deliberate interactive strategy: Reaching out
beyond its original core fans to feature content that only somewhat fits the convention's
traditional brand reflects a vested media interest in maximizing markets and influencing
consumer identity behavior.

Image 4.6: ABC network's Pan Am booth, SDCC '11

Comic-Con's interactive future

The expansion of the Hollywood presence and the perceived impact this has on the panels and exhibition floor hint at the tensions that can arise between industry purpose and attendee interest. Currently, these changes are met with ambivalence, and understandably so: In one respect, as previously noted, increasingly high profile guests, even those who may not "fit" with the convention, can raise the profile of the event itself and its attendees as a viable test market. This is, however, the approach to interactivity at Comic-Con: raise interest, market awareness, and future consumption by expanding the types of people and types of texts that are considered geeky, fannish, and desirable.

At the same time, however, content changes in Comic-Con represent the potential for a change in meaning. Comic-Con is built in large part on expectations: Attendees purchase tickets, secure hotel reservations, and make travel arrangements months in advance – and months before they have any information on the programming lineup for the convention, as event schedules are only released two to three weeks beforehand. Attendees willingly make these plans because they are secure in the assumption that the schedule and the events will adhere to the shared construct of what Comic-Con is and does. In order for Comic-Con to maintain significance, desirability, and meaning for its participants – and so that those participants, in turn, remain a viable, desirable market for the massive industry marketing push at the convention – Comic-Con must retain a consistent identity. Though there are economic motivations that underpin the interest in keeping Comic-Con's meaning consistent, recognizable, and appealing to its participants, that meaning is something that is in constant negotiation among the various interests that come to play at the convention.

Though Comic-Con has been built into a massive event that is able to engage its participants simultaneously as a marketing event and a fan convention, its approach to interactivity illustrates why the alignment of its interests nevertheless do not offer a long-term solution. Comic-Con is undergoing a slow, dramatic transformation in which it is, increasingly, a victim of its own success; the convention is currently in an untenable situation in which solutions to the growing problems are temporary and makeshift. Incorporation has meant that the convention has grown to its maximum size, and any potential means to address the current challenges faced by Comic-Con have the potential to prioritize industry interest or attendee rewards, and thus irrevocably alter the current state of alignment.

Since 2007, the convention sells out every year. Its popularity shows no signs of waning, nor does its profile within the industry and popular press look to lower any time soon. With this demand comes logistical problems that are becoming too significant to ignore: interest in tickets crashes servers and creates huge lines, a full convention makes for an exhibition floor that is difficult to navigate, and demand for panels is frequently several times greater than capacity will allow. Once the convention began to push capacity limits, organizers began exploring options for alternate locations to hold a larger event, entertaining proposals from Las Vegas and Anaheim in addition to San Diego (Comic-Con, 2010). The choice to move the convention would be a major one: As one attendee and comic book artist notes, "I feel like moving it means that you sort of have to figure out what you want the identity to be." A move would signal a break from the convention's history as a fan-created meeting based in San Diego, and would solidify its identity as a business convention structured to maximize hotel and exhibition space,

rather than a community fan convention grown considerably. "There are bigger convention centers and venues in LA. But…it's always been here, and it's like the heart of Comic-Con in San Diego. If we move to LA, it's going to be one more nail in the coffin [of the comic convention role]." A move to Los Angeles means prioritizing access for Hollywood figures over the storied history of the San Diego-based comic book convention.

An exhibitor who has been to Comic-Con for sixteen years as an attendee and an exhibitor argues that, "at some point [Comic-Con] will reach its maximum where they will say that something has to give." He offers that this may mean a change in venue, but it could also mean breaking the convention up into separate days – some for professionals, some for fans, and exhibitors present each day, a solution similar to the one adopted by the Electronic Entertainment Expo, the video game convention, when crowds grew to unmanageable sizes. Of course, this type of solution does not necessarily counteract the issue of public demand outpacing capacity on days in which the convention is open to the fans. Beyond that, this type of solution likewise would privilege commercial demands in such a way that the convention values of community, camaraderie, and industry access have the potential to be sacrificed to varying degrees.

Though dramatic changes of this nature may have the potential to negatively impact the perceived benefits of Comic-Con for its attendees, the strategies to maintain the status quo are not necessarily better ones. Efforts to ease the process of ticket sales, for instance, have resulted in alterations nearly every year since 2010, and a shift towards more lottery-based systems. Often, these changes allow for new participants to come each year, and for fewer technical glitches along the way. On the other hand, these practices do

little to allow individuals who have, perhaps, been coming to the convention for decades to continue the practice, and this has been noted by longtime attendees: "Every year, they make more changes that makes this move difficult for people who've been coming here for years to [continue to] come." Even relatively small changes in the method, timing, and location of ticket sales can have significant impact on the convention and how it is perceived, and offer points at which convention organizers are compelled to choose whether they will advance the practices of incorporation in preference to the fan-based interests.

It's still Comic-Con

In its nearly 45-year history, San Diego Comic-Con has negotiated cultural shifts and navigated major changes in media industry, technology, and audience behavior, and has emerged as the largest and most prominent media convention in the world. As a celebration of popular culture, each July it takes over downtown San Diego, entertainment journalism coverage, corporate entertainment industry focus, and the Twitter feeds and YouTube viewing of geeks everywhere. As a site of interactivity, it can be seen as distinct from others within this project because it is, first and foremost, an offline event that takes place in a fixed time and space – though of course it spills readily into the transmedia realm, thanks to contributions from its consumer participants and to further the interests of industry marketing. Comic-Con is also distinct because it has, thus far, offered a site of participation in which the social rewards, perceived benefits, and affective returns for attendees are generally aligned with the marketing, promotional, and economic-based investments of the entertainment industry. It is interactivity as

incorporation that has worked to extend, rather than curtail or alter, the pleasures of participation.

In its current incarnation, Comic-Con has become a place of incorporation, a site at which an increasingly broad swath of audience consumers are incorporated into a particular identity – that of geeks and fans – so that they are better positioned to appreciate the convention and benefit from its aims and goals, and are ultimately more likely to behave as such at the box office or at their television set. This move to bring audiences into the fold as fans is an effort to minimize those who might be left behind or left out of Comic-Con, and to indicate that, if there is something appealing at the convention for you, then you may already consider yourself a geek. As a result, the relationship between audiences and industry at Comic-Con is not one of corporate takeover, as with Television Without Pity, or even one of incentive and motivation, as with Social TV; rather, it is a nuanced relationship in which the position sought by attendees as desirable is one that supports and upholds the power structures at place within popular entertainment. For these participants, at this space, Comic-Con is a means of incorporating the special attachment of fandom into the mundane locations of a convention center, getting closer to beloved media texts and media people in a way that honors those texts, and themselves for their continued devotion.

As Comic-Con continues to negotiate strategies for the future, however, it is increasingly faced with a choice – in the end, who owns Comic-Con, and whose interests should be served as primary? To arrive at such a resolution would mean smoothing out the multitude of threads from various sources that converge at Comic-Con: the commerce, community, access, and intimacy valued by attendees from the convention's

earliest days as a true fan-organized event; the marketing and promotions valued by

media industries hoping to use the event as a springboard into long term economic

benefits; and the participation generated by attendees and structured and appropriated by

professionals that foster user engagement and point it toward productive ends.

Chapter V

No creativity beyond this point: Pottermore and the boundaries of interactivity

Interactivity can pose challenges when the interests involved are out of alignment: As consumers are encouraged to become invested in popular texts, their drive for social rewards can drive them to cross boundaries of use and to upset comfortable notions of ownership and economic value that comprise the capitalistic approach to corporate pop culture. Never is this more the case than with fans, who embody the most loyal and engaged segment of media participants. Fans are a boon to the economic success of popular texts, as they are avid consumers; dedicated viewers, readers, and listeners; creative producers; and energetic proselytizers and petty marketers in their own right. But fans' affective investment often comes at a price, as economic and legal systems of media industries can prove incompatible with consumers who seek to exert their own control over textual meaning and cultural brand value.

This chapter introduces the notion of interactivity as containment. Earlier examples discussed in this dissertation introduce sites that incorporate protocols of behavior that influence participant behavior. Television Without Pity and San Diego Comic-Con, for example, both model appropriate participant behavior, and the system of rewards in Social TV deliberately incentivizes specific actions. Interactivity at these sites, in other words, is commonly a strategy for promoting involvement providing examples and structural encouragement turn consumers into invested participants. It is possible, however, that promoting interactivity can work too well, and that participation can involve wayward activity that requires corrective action. This chapter identifies an instance in which interactivity is deployed primarily to delineate maximum levels of

involvement, rather than encouraging minimum conditions of activity, and thus is a response to previous instances in which fan involvement led to tensions and outright legal battles.

The Harry Potter franchise extends across a vast transmedia empire, and Pottermore, an internet-based interactive reading experience, is an inherently cross-platform experiment that investigates the limits and possibility of transmedia interactivity in engaging fans. Though Pottermore introduces to new readers of the books a level of involvement meant to promote interactivity, its primary function is focused on fans – devoted, productive, fans with a long-term and high-profile engagement with Harry Potter and all its adaptations and paratexts. There are fans who have, in the rather extended history of Harry Potter's cultural significance, transgressed boundaries regulated by the corporate stakeholders involved – from author J.K. Rowling, to film distributor Warner Bros. to theme park operator NBC/Universal. As a result, when Sony entered into a venture with Rowling to create Pottermore, an online Harry Potter experience designed to perpetuate the relevance of Harry Potter's cultural brand value and to engage readers in an immersive world, it constructed a version of interactivity that both models appropriate fan behavior and restricts errant productivity.

In this chapter, I consider how Pottermore represents an effort to learn from previous experiences: Existing clashes in legal and public relations arenas have fostered an environment in which there is considerable incentive in creating a site of interactivity that eases tensions rather than creating new ones. After considering the existing fraught fan/industry relations, this chapter illustrates how Pottermore works to recreate fan activity: The site first constructs its audience in an idealized form of fan/participant,

projecting who the readers, viewers, and consumers of Harry Potter and meant to be and how they should approach interaction with the text. In an attempt to promote fan investment, the site mimics fan involvement, obviating the need for fans to create original derivative works themselves and channeling fan interest into canonical readings. I argue that Pottermore, as a late-arriving offering of original and derivative Harry Potter material, seeks alignment in its interests by creating a very specific guided path along which users participate. This represents a form of interaction between consumers and (at least one set) of corporate owners that can both perpetuate the economic interests of those owners, while providing a guide to appropriate fan interaction that reins in transgressive and potentially damaging forms of engagement.

Harry Potter and the global phenomenon

Since the publication of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*[11] in the United Kingdom in 1997, Harry Potter has exploded into a massive transmedia franchise. The official Harry Potter universe includes seven books and eight major film releases, but also encompasses three companion guides by the series author, J.K. Rowling; video games for computers and consoles that tie into the books, the films, and LEGO; official websites for the books, the films, and the games; extensive merchandising and branded material; an international traveling museum exhibition; a "Making of Harry Potter" tour as part of the

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[11] Though in the United States, the book (and later film) are titled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, in nearly all other countries, it retains the original *Philosopher's Stone* name. Because fandom and digital participation are generally international in nature, most discussions use the *Philosopher's Stone* title; Pottermore, however, still retains *Sorcerer's Stone*, at least for users in the US. For the purposes of simplicity and consistency, I will refer to the first book and film by their international title throughout – *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.*

Warner Brothers studio tour in London; and the Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme

park, a component of Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida. Extensive though the reach

of Harry Potter's presence across media platforms has been, however, it pales in

comparison to the extraordinary volume of fan output and amount of consumer

productivity. In the past decade and a half, fans have formed bands, written fan fiction,

written and performed original plays, created original art, started international charity

organizations, organized intramural Quidditch leagues, and created myriad websites to

discuss, dissect, celebrate, and explain the Harry Potter universe.

Between officially sanctioned creations and fan-generated texts, the sheer volume

of transmedia material has meant that, for many, Harry Potter is an inherently interactive

experience. Starting with the books and extending into the films, the Harry Potter saga is

an effort at world-building, and many para- and extra-textual creations are designed to

blur the lines between the real world and the more magical one in which flying, spells,

and potions are part of every day life, thus allowing the Harry Potter universe to become

an inhabitable world. In London's King's Cross rail station, there is a plaque for Platform

9 ¾, and at the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, visitors can be assigned a wand and

sample food that mimics the fictional creations in the novels; whether user-created or part

of the official transmedia empire, these efforts indicate the appeal of extending the Harry

Potter universe both online and off so that participants can immerse themselves in the

narrative beyond the words on a page or images on a screen.

Pottermore can be understood as an extension of this impulse, an effort at

interactivity that is meant to extend the blockbuster success of Harry Potter as a "branded

media property" (Grainge, 2008) into the internet and beyond the release of new film and

book properties. Announced in an extensive internet campaign in June 2011 and launched as a beta venture to a small number of early registrants beginning in August 2011, Pottermore is a joint venture between Rowling and Sony, touted as an "exciting online experience" (Pottermore, 2011) that, three years later, is still unfolding its interactive journey through the events and locations in the Harry Potter series of books. From an industrial standpoint, it is important to note that Pottermore is not entirely about content; pottermore.com also plays host to the "Pottermore Shop," itself a testament to the tangled web of industrial interests and economic strategizing of the franchise. There are spaces in within the shop to purchase Sony Playstation Harry Potter games; Warner Brothers licensed clothing, costumes, and props; and, perhaps most importantly, ebooks and digital audio copies of the Harry Potter saga and the companion books. Because Rowling retained the rights to digital publishing of her work, the versions available on Pottermore are not locked into a particular format, so readers can access them on all major eReaders and tablets, and Pottermore effectively controls both price and access (Gladstone, 2012). Though the focus of Pottermore here is largely as a content producer, it is important to remember that it also functions for many as a book publishing and retail site.

Pottermore represents a specific instance of transmedia interactivity that has broad repercussions for how brands, narratives, and economics play out between corporate producers and interested consumers. The Pottermore site and its affordances, along with the rhetoric of its press coverage and promotional material, are an effort to perpetuate the economic viability of a wildly successful brand when the books and film adaptations have all been released. But more than this, Pottermore also serves as an indication of how interactivity can be used to restrict transgressive fan behavior as much as it is a tool to

promote contact and mutual influence between consumer and producer. Pottermore offers interactivity with instruction and restriction and, in doing so, provides clear indication of what makes for appropriate, productive participation for Harry Potter fans while limiting or disregarding less suitable behaviors.

Pottermania and the limits of legality

Launched fifteen years after the first Harry Potter book was published, Pottermore entered into a transmedia franchise that already navigated a long and messy history of complicated relations between fans and multiple corporate producers. Part of this derives from the Harry Potter franchise's startlingly numerous owner stakes; despite trends toward synergy and integration of economic interests in a single media conglomerate, Harry Potter is supported by many varied and far-reaching industry players. In the UK, the books are published by Bloomsbury, and by Scholastic in the US; Warner Bros. purchased rights to produce and distribute the films in theaters and on DVD, and the London branch offers a studio tour of Harry Potter sets and artifacts. The Wizarding World of Harry Potter is operated by Universal Studios, a part of the NBC/Universal empire owned by Comcast, and Disney purchased airing rights for the films for their Disney and ABC Family cable networks in the US. EA Games publishes video games based on the books and their film adaptations, but Warner Bros. Interactive publishes the LEGO Harry Potter game version. And retail and merchandising rights have been parceled out and subdivided between these interests, in addition to being sold to independent vendors as well. Pottermore, as a venture constructed jointly between J.K. Rowling and Sony, adds one more corporate hand sharing the pie.

In this already intricate web of corporate ownership relationships, fan involvement acts as a further complicating factor, as Harry Potter has cultivated a massive fan base that spans age groups, reaches across the globe, and exists on numerous platforms. In the beginning, fan ventures were generally small, non-commercial websites started by and geared toward adolescent readers of the book series. These fan practices were a valuable means of publicizing the book series, helping to persuade American publishers and readers to take an interest in a new series of fantasy books, and, eventually, to continue to engage with the narrative and fellow members of the community in the long stretches between film and book releases (Sutherland Borah, 2004). These early fan creations were focused on encouraging other readers and borne from a genuine affection for the novels, and thus, Rowling adopted a fairly permissive view of fan endeavors that were not focused on commodifying her characters and narrative (Sutherland Borah). Because Harry Potter as a transmedia franchise has always privileged participation in an immersive Potter-themed universe, fan practices were components that signaled that participation and helped construct that universe. As a result, beyond traditional examples of fans displaying their devotion through fan fiction, community creation, and knowledge sharing, the fandom includes books, merchandise, concerts, plays, art, and more. This becomes a challenging arrangement, however, because some creations edge into commercial ventures—and others are aggressively so. As major media conglomerates signed contracts that gave them domain over specific portions of the Harry Potter empire, the lines between industry involvement and fan investment had to be re-drawn again and again, and on shifting terms, leading to an environment in which consumer interactivity in Harry Potter was a minefield to be

constantly negotiated.

Fan participation and the proprietary impulses of entertainment producers and distributors have certainly clashed in many instances in the past. This happens, in part, because, according to Henry Jenkins, fans "reject the idea of a definitive version produced, authorized, and regulated by some media conglomerate. Instead, fans envision a world where all of us can participate in the creation and circulation of central cultural myths" (2000, n.p.). Jonathan Gray notes that *Lost* executives Damon Lindeloff and Carleton Cuse were publicly distasteful of fan practices that involved finding and revealing spoilers of the show narrative, and that reviewers, in particular those in the intermediary status between fan and professional, faced corporate blacklists for publishing negative or too-early reviews (2010, p.164). Regulating creative interactivity in practice, however, poses a genuine challenge, because while institutions might approach restriction legally, ideologically, or commercially (Sinnreich, 2010), this takes into account media content as a branded property meant to generate economic value as it changes hands from producer to consumer.

The challenge, however, is that fans approach texts as one that is also "owned," in a purely subjective and affective way, by them. "The fan's appropriation of a text," writes Matt Hills (2002), "is therefore an act of 'final consumption' which pulls this text away from (intersubjective and public) exchange-value and towards (private, personal) use-value, but without ever cleanly or clearly being able to separate out the two" (p. 35). Paul Grainge acknowledges this dual identity, noting that "branding cannot be defined neatly in 'cultural' or 'economic' terms; it consists inescapably of both elements" (2008, p. 23), and that, from the economic perspective, the value of a brand only persists so long as its

signifiers can be legally defined and protected (p. 31). As a result, there exists a long

history of corporate entities approaching media texts as branded assets to be protected

from fan appropriation via aggressive deployment of intellectual property suits. With

entertainment content, however, intellectual property rights are not an all-purpose safety

net for their owners, as interpretation and perspective can turn the muddled relationship

between fans and producers into one of strife or outright conflict. Both Disney and

Mattel, for instance, are known to ruthlessly protect the trademark of their characters,

particularly Mickey Mouse and Barbie, respectively, and pursue aggressive legal action

in order to do so. The result has been lawsuits for everything from Mattel alleging that

the 1997 pop song "Barbie Girl" constituted a trademark infringement with the potential

to confuse consumers (Gallo, 2003-2004) to Disney's famous lawsuit against a Florida

daycare center with unlicensed Mickey images on its walls (Jagorda, 1999) to the more

recent challenges in keeping Mickey's trademark protected from counterfeiting in China

(Fung, 1995-1996; Hu, 1996).

     Works meant to invoke existing trademarked characters and storylines in a more

deliberate – yet still creative – process are themselves a complicated challenge,

occasionally faced in a courtroom: In 2001, Margaret Mitchell's estate filed a lawsuit to

prevent the publication of Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone*, a "re-imagining" of

Gone With the Wind as told from the perspective of a plantation slave. Rebecca Tushnet

(2007) notes that, though there have not been many high-profile court cases involving

questions of fan fiction (as Randall's work could be classified, albeit fan fiction with an

explicitly political purpose), courts in the United States "have been more willing to

protect 'transformative' unauthorized uses against copyright owners' allegations of

infringement" (p. 61). From a legal perspective, "courts find that a legitimate transformation exists when the new work makes overt that which was present in the original text covertly…transformative fair uses make subtext text" (p. 68). Though there is not a wealth of legal precedent, this approach is one that has the potential to protect many fan practices. Theoretical models of fan creations, after all, frequently construct fan involvement as an act of resistance and reappropriation (Jenkins, 1992; Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005). The value of fan productivity, therefore, is its ability to take control of textual meaning and, often, to bring to the surface meaning that are implicit and, potentially, unintended and undesirable.

This approach is not necessarily the most soothing for corporate trademark and copyright owners; transformative works that bring about those undesirable narratives may be more protected, but also potentially cast negative, critical, or unflattering perspectives on the original text. In this vein, Tushnet notes that European courts have recognized "moral rights," a category of author's rights that have not gained much traction in the American legal systems. "Moral-rights theory," she explains, "posits a deep and unique connection between author and text such that an insult to the text is an assault on the author" (p. 61) According to this theory, then, the transformation necessary to indicate fair use is not sufficient; the distortion that comes with critiques, expansions, and revisions of original texts are likewise problematic. Though this argument has not been particularly successful in making its way into legal decisions, it lends insight into a certain level of protectiveness that is indicated in corporate guarding of texts, characters, and narrative worlds against fan involvement. Whereas the legal definition of ownership provides grounds to take issue with user-generated creations that have the potential to

negatively impact the economic value of the protected intellectual property, the moral sense of ownership offers insight into the potential issue with non-commercial, and even personal, works that expand, alter, demean, or criticize canonical characters and narratives.

A particularly complex – and well-documented – illustration of this relationship is the often-contentious relationship between George Lucas, via his Lucasfilm, Ltd, and *Star Wars* fan creators. In his in-depth analysis of the *Star Wars* fandom, Will Brooker (2002) recounts the perspectives articulated by fan subjects toward Lucasfilm's evolving, occasionally contradictory, and somewhat restrictive approach to fan fiction and fan film. According to fan histories, Lucasfilm's initial acceptance of fan fiction in the late 1970s transitioned, in 1981, to a position with clearly defined boundaries of what constituted acceptable – and unacceptable – fan behavior. In his foundational article "*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten," Henry Jenkins considers a letter in which the director of the *Star Wars* fan club cracks down on *Star Wars* creative work that does not adhere to the values and maturity level of the original work: "Since all of the *Star Wars* saga is PG rated, any stories those [fan zine] publishers print should also be PG" (qtd. in Jenkins, 2000). For well over a decade, this constituted much of Lucasfilm's attitude toward fan works: tolerance of non-commercial, family-friendly creations, moderated by a hard line against those that were not. This led, Brooker recounts, to a great deal of self-regulation within a fandom, in which publishers of zines, reviewers of fiction, and viewers of videos internalized the very real threat that Lucasfilm was prepared to pursue action against violators of their rules and held fellow fans strictly accountable – thus pushing explicit and slash fiction stories firmly into underground branches of the fandom.

In 2000, Lucasfilm announced plans to create an official fan space on the starwars.com website, for fans to house and circulate their work. The catch, however, was found within the terms of service, which included a provision that all work posted to the site became intellectual property of Lucasfilm. Brooker notes, "Lucasfilm had cleverly shifted from repression to containment, drawing fan production into its own fence-ringed area where it could confiscate anything it didn't like – and potentially poach anything it did like" (2002, p. 169). Though Lucasfilm is somewhat more welcoming to fan films – in part, according to Jenkins (2000) the creativity of well-executed fan films can be more easily appropriated into existing systems of production, by hiring the filmmakers and making them "poachers for profit" – Lucasfilm ultimately made a similar move with hosting of fan videos. Quoting a news report, also from 2000, announcing that atomfilms.com would provide fans with official effects, a share of profits, and a hosting service for fan films, Brooker also notes the catch: only parodic and nonfiction documentary creations are considered acceptable. "No attempts to expand on the *Star Wars* universe will be accepted, ensuring that George Lucas and the company he founded remain the only sources for canonical information and stories about *Star Wars* and its characters" (qtd. in Brooker, p. 177-178). The online spaces provided to house fan creations, in the case of *Star Wars*, are also attempts to place limits on fan creativity in content, tone, and genre, limits that are backed by the threatening specter of cease and desist letters, litigation, and restrictive action. The clear message is that *Star Wars* fan creativity is permitted only as far as it celebrates the characters, the narrative, and the saga in precise ways – in short, only so far as it has the potential to benefit future endeavors, but not conflict with or undermine them. As Gray points out, the latitude

Lucasfilm permits its fan creators offers only the permission that is required by law, and no more: Parody is considered protected speech, and therefore Lucasfilm has little ability to restrict this type of work, so its policies are focused on preventing fan creations that "could hijack 'their' text" (2010, p. 165).

Major transmedia franchises with staunch fan investment give rise to messy, complicated, and legally complex relations between the restrictions meant to protect the economic value of copyrighted and trademarked characters, narratives, and stories, and the permissions designed to promote creativity, devotion, and loyalty. Unsurprisingly, Harry Potter – given its long history, multiple platforms, diverse media interest, and staggering fan productivity – has waded many times into similar struggles of perceptions of ownership between industry and audience. Two conflicts in particular – the Warner Bros. "Potter Wars" and the Lexicon court case – leave a legacy of significant influence on how interaction between fans and industry can be a messy practice within the Harry Potter franchise. Though they are not necessarily meant to offer official precedent to govern negotiations between economic ownership and fan productivity going forward, these two incidents - the first a public relations negotiation, and the second a high profile legal case - form the unsteady foundation for how interactivity was defined and practiced within the Harry Potter franchise, and the potential minefield it represented, prior to the launch of Pottermore.

Potter Wars and public relations

The Harry Potter franchise had its first public negotiation between the interests of its fan enthusiasts and those of its industrial owners when Warner Bros. secured rights to

produce and distribute the film adaptations of the first four Harry Potter books. In 2001, in preparation for the release of the first film, Warner Bros. began issuing a series of cease-and-desist letters to operators of websites that were potentially infringing on terms, characters, or phrases that are copyrighted or trademarked elements of Harry Potter. For Henry Jenkins (2006), who chronicles the battle as a quintessential moment of convergence culture being articulated and understood, the Potter Wars represent an instance in which a major entertainment industrial force – in this case, Warner Bros. – doing what they have always done to aggressively protect what they view as their property from the potential "confusion" or unauthorized and encroaching participant interest are faced with a landscape that no longer allows such a clearly delineated approach to ownership and creation. In pursuing their standard practices of intellectual property protection, Warner Bros. came against the unexpected resistance of two teenaged girls: a fifteen-year-old in the UK who involved her parents, lawyers, and the media in an effort to counteract Warner Bros.' cease-and-desist on her fan site, and an American homeschooled teen who spearheaded a fan alliance called the Defense Against the Dark Arts to rally fans into a united front against corporations unfairly throwing around their weight.

The Potter Wars began as a legal procedure that turned into a high-profile public relations negotiation. Despite the fact that the conflict was grounded in legal terms of trademark, copyright, and fair use, both sides invoked the legal standing of these rather obliquely. Instead, it was a moral question of proprietorship that was made to appeal to public opinion. According to Jenkins, "Defense Against the Dark Arts argued that fans had helped to turn a little-known children's book into an international best-seller and that

the rights holders owed them some latitude to do their work" (2006, p. 195). The assertion maintained that championing Harry before he was popular – and, in fact, before he was owned by Warner Bros. – afforded some level of proprietary rights in a moral sense; regardless of how a court might find, fans who had devoted time and energy felt that they had some ownership over the text, its characters, and its meaning, and least insofar as it manifested in things like fan guides and collaborative fantasy newspapers like *The Daily Prophet*. The issue for Warner Bros., and indeed, the interest this holds for Jenkins, is that the moral argument actually works in many ways. Legal action in the form of cease-and-desists, is inappropriate in this venue; fan-created fantasy newspapers and fictional backstories, in particular those run by well-spoken teenaged girls, are interactive, non-commercial, affective elements that function to strengthen and promote the textual brand, not dilute or challenge it. Warner Bros. even attempted to couch its response in a fan-friendly way: The senior vice president of Warner Bros. Family Entertainment stated that the practice was not geared toward halting fan productivity, but it was instead a process of "sorting out" that was meant to separate this transformative, positive (and non-economically motivated) activity from that of "an inauthentic fan" who was causing trademark confusion, diluting the brand, and "exploiting kids in the name of Harry Potter" (qtd. in Jenkins, 2006, p. 194). Warner Bros. is not able to respond to the fan resistance with legalistic arguments, but instead replies with similar moral-value language, explaining their position with as one based on authenticity and motivated by an allegiance to a beloved brand that needs protected.

Perhaps because it was fought entirely in the court of public relations, fans were victorious in the Potter Wars. Regardless of whether Warner Bros. had official legal

standing to exert ownership over every fan website, they were put in the position of

acting as a major multinational entertainment conglomerate sending cease-and-desist

letters to earnest, enthusiastic twelve- and fifteen-year-olds who really loved reading and

wanted to talk about their favorite books (Jenkins, 2006, p. 295; "The Harry Potter

Economy", 2009). Situated in these terms, Warner Bros. could not win, and they instead

moved to adopt "a more collaborative policy for engaging with Harry Potter fans," one in

which, in the studio's terms, "We [Warner Bros.] deputized them" (qtd. in Jenkins, 2006,

p. 196). Warner Bros. essentially admitted missteps in approaching their ownership of

some portion of the Harry Potter franchise, and backed off, sanctioning and sponsoring

fan ventures that were "in the family." Jenkins casts the Potter Wars as an indication that

corporations are moving away from the model of fan productivity in which "fans are seen

simply as 'pirates' who steal from the studios and give nothing in return," and are instead

moving toward a model in which collaborative approaches to marketing and meaning-

creation are reshaping the way corporations perceive the efforts, particularly non-

commercial ones – of loyal fans (p. 198-199).

  Of course, as noted above, the loosening of control is not necessarily motivated

by benevolence: The Potter Wars were not ever fought in court, so there is no guarantee

Warner Bros. would have been found victorious, and legal precedence in favor of fan

ventures would significantly challenge further corporate efforts to control unauthorized

consumer use of intellectual property, and thus keep a tight rein on the brand value itself.

Simone Murray (2004) argues that fans, in the Potter Wars, have "secured a *de facto*,

rather than a *de jure*, victory," (p. 17), a choice toward "selective non-enforcement of

corporate IP in the interests of product publicity and commercial gain…[that] amounts to

the turning of the gamekeeper's blind eye, rather than the legitimating of poaching per se" (p. 14). The potential consequence of this distinction, she concludes, is to the "cultural-morel high ground" occupied by fans protecting their sense of ownership and protectiveness over the non-commercial functions of popular texts. Enthusiastic Harry Potter fans argued, in essence, that their affection for, investment in, and past efforts in support of the Harry Potter saga offered some reciprocal opportunity to explore the meaning and significance of the text on their own terms. By conceding to – and sometimes eagerly taking part in – having these behaviors "deputized," the affective investment and moral sense of ownership are effectively commercialized.

The Potter Wars thus resulted in a landscape very similar to the one constructed by Lucasfilm for *Star Wars* fans: Clear boundaries are set out to designate what is and is not permissible fan behavior, the most beneficial examples of fan engagement are encouraged by providing material, official seals of approval, or benign blind eyes. Lurking at the boundaries of this so-called "collaborative" approach to fan productivity, perhaps precisely because there is no sufficient legal precedent for definitive decrees on the legality of fan fiction and similar ventures, is always the threat of major legal action. Jenkins argues that the Potter Wars resulted in a more balanced involvement between fans and industry, though his teenaged subject is more skeptical; she questions whether the victory represents a real shift in industry thinking or simply a hollow public relations triumph. The Potter Wars indicate that, implicit in these fan ventures is the understanding that corporations are willing and able to instigate legal action when fans step over the line – even a "collaboratively constructed" one – but that the legal action does not always work.

Legal battles and The Lexicon

Unlike the Potter Wars, this next struggle was a conflict that was settled in the courtroom, involving commercial as well as fan-generated content, and setting legal precedent while further reconfiguring the relationship between economic and fan interests in Harry Potter. The ambiguity of the Potter Wars' resolution left the door open for the Harry Potter franchise to continue to negotiate how various property owners would respond to the efforts and products of fan activity, even as that activity became more robust and entrenched as the popularity of the franchise grew. The tensions between the sense of ownership experienced by fans attempting to interact with the world of the Harry Potter texts and the sense of ownership reserved by intellectual property holders once again came to a head in 2007 when J.K. Rowling and Warner Bros. jointly filed suit against a small Michigan publishing house, seeking an injunction against the for-profit publication of a compendium of Harry Potter facts, history, and character studies. Though officially cited as *Warner Bros. and J.K. Rowling v. RDR Books*, as the case progressed through the courts, it became known as the Harry Potter Lexicon case.

In 2000, a librarian and Harry Potter fan from Michigan named Steven Vander Ark launched The Harry Potter Lexicon (www.hp-lexicon.org), an online encyclopedia meant to "provide a reference guide for fellow fans to navigate the [Harry Potter] series" (Siskind, 2009-2010, p. 292). Vander Ark created a site with intensely detailed information on the characters, spaces, histories, and events of the Harry Potter world, both authoring original summaries and explanations as well as including text quoted directly from Rowling's novels. The Lexicon's existence never proved a problem for Rowling or the various corporate interests with a stake in Harry Potter's official

legitimacy, so long as it remained a (rather notable) online-only presence in expanding, fan-generated Harry Potter internet information; in fact, Rowling herself had extolled the Lexicon's comprehensive approach and usefulness and awarded it a Fan Site Award in 2004. In 2007, however, Vander Ark entered into a publishing agreement with RDR Publishing, an independent company interested in compiling and publishing a print version of the website. Vander Ark initially was resistant at the offer of publication, but he ultimately agreed after he was assured by the publisher that it was completely legal: The publishers asserted that the print version of the Lexicon would not infringe on Rowling's copyright, nor would it inhibit any plans she may have had to publish her own encyclopedic accompaniment to the series (Siskind, p. 292). Rowling and Warner Bros. disagreed, however, and issued a cease-and-desist letter to the publisher and, when that received little response, ultimately filed a lawsuit requesting an injunction to halt publication of the printed encyclopedia.

The Lexicon case was closely watched by fans, legal scholars, and industry professionals seeking some clearly defined precedent for ownership rights, in particular as this instance included some particularly challenging elements. As the Lexicon was challenged as it made a transition from new media (in the form of the long-sanctioned online Lexicon) to traditional formats (a traditional book) and from a free resource grounded in a gift economy to a commercial venture meant to be put up for sale, the case became a focal point for negotiations and debates that had taken place within fan/industry relations, but which had little to no official, established rule. The verdict, when it came, was less decisive. Ultimately, Rowling and Warner Bros. triumphed, but the verdict did not offer a sweeping statement on intellectual property ownership rights in instance of

fan-created texts. RDR's defense, and indeed the common argument for those who contend that fan productivity is protected, was that these creations fall under fair use: Though fan products draw from existing, protected material, the argument is that the characters, narratives, and re-appropriated uses of that material is sufficiently transformative to render it a new creative work. The presiding judge in the Lexicon case determined that the Lexicon's use of material quoted directly from Rowling's original work (only some of which offered the proper attribution) to relate the same material, in the same way, and for the same purpose as Rowling's original, meant that the final product was not sufficiently transformative to constitute fair use.[12] This returns again to the earlier, established rule of thumb: Had the Lexicon been more subversive, critical, or challenging, it might have enjoyed more legal protection – but perhaps no more goodwill from Rowling and Warner Bros. It was therefore specifically the version of a print Lexicon proposed by Vander Ark and RDR that was found to be in violation of Rowling's copyright on Harry Potter. Still unclear – and untested – is whether a different encyclopedic companion to existing copyrighted material might warrant a different ruling – or whether the existing internet-based Lexicon, which uses similar material, but has different attribution practices and conveys the information in a different medium constitutes fair use.

The Lexicon case therefore offered a victory for Rowling, Warner Bros., and corporate copyright owners, but not one that put many issues to rest. The Lexicon case,

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[12] Rowling's intention to publish her own encyclopedia likewise strengthened her case. Contributing to determinations of fair use are economic considerations, and fan work generally supports economic success of existing copyright owners' economic interests (thus supporting a fair use argument, at least in part). If Vander Ark's product would take the place of one Rowling had planned, however, that would translate to a significant economic consequence for her as the copyright owner.

when considered with the cease-and-desist Potter Wars, leaves corporate interests in a rather paradoxically vulnerable position: These companies retain ownership over their intellectual property, but exercising that ownership to ensure economic control over the brand has the potential to sacrifice the goodwill and cultural value of that brand. Perhaps even more troubling, corporate control over ownership begins to slip, in a legal sense, the more user-generated content becomes creative, critical, and medium-hopping. Again, it inspires little peace for corporate entities to have the legal ability to shut down celebratory fan sites run by enthusiastic young girls, but to have little to no control over sites that are more damaging or censorious to the original material.

This is the landscape of fan/industry interactions during the height of the Harry Potter franchise's popularity. Rampant and far-reaching interest in the universe meant that clashes, both for legal precedent and public opinion, took place under the scrutiny of the international publishing and entertainment press. It was a fraught, messy relationship in which fan enthusiasm and participation helped build Harry Potter's fame – alongside coverage of cease-and-desist letters, after all, are stories depicting adorable children in homemade costumes lining up for a newly released book or film installment. As the popularity of Harry Potter then faced decline – with no new books in the series and the film adaptations too coming to an end – industry interests and corporate owners of the franchise thus attempted to learn from the previous tensions, battles, and setbacks in designing Pottermore, a site meant to involve readers in fan behavior while setting clear boundaries as to how much involvement is too much.

Harry Potter, more and less

Pottermore, launched in 2011, emerged near the very end of Harry Potter's fame. Part game, part simulated theme part, part abridged storytelling of the Harry Potter narrative, the "interactive Harry Potter experience" is attempting to situated itself in a landscape muddled by years of tensions and enthusiastic, barely-fettered consumption. As an entirely new venture being built from the ground up, Pottermore represents an attempt at interactivity that can perform several functions at once: Supply sufficient social rewards to encourage fan behavior and therefore maximize return on Harry Potter's brand value; situate an entirely new corporate interest – Sony – in this particular transmedia empire; and avoid the pitfalls of previous conflicts and tensions between fans of the series and its owners and creators. Pottermore can be cast as an effort to ameliorate residual tensions between fans and corporate distributors, and to create an aligned relationship between the two that is instructive, productive and, perhaps most important, sustainable.

Pottermore is free, web-based environment that attempts to visually recreate the experience and narrative of the Harry Potter series. Users visit the site (www.pottermore.com) and register, offering up very limited personal information; then, once "approved as magical," they choose usernames from among a handful of selections, and are ready to begin. Users then have two options: they can "explore Harry Potter's story" or they can themselves "become a student at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry [see image 5.1].

In the first, users follow a re-telling of the Harry Potter novels via a series of "moments," stringing together largely static visual representations from the books' chapters meant to offer images that shorthand the events of the full narrative. Within a

Image 5.1*: Pottermore's redesigned home page, 2014, with the tour and explore options listed.*

moment, the user can zoom in and out, click on select objects, characters, and locations for a brief summary or explanation, or collect items for his or her "trunk" – gold coins that act as currency, for instance, or items that can later be used in potions. At pre-determined places in the Pottermore narrative, users must complete tasks in order to progress: Players are given a shopping list to purchase school supplies in Diagon Alley; they answer multiple-choice questions to be matched with "their" wand or get sorted into one of Hogwarts' four houses; they are tasked with making potions or working spells; and can engage fellow players in spell duels. These tasks arise for Pottermore users at the point in the narrative when Harry faces them in the book series, making the site an enhanced accompaniment to the novels, but offering the same story and events, as though each user is experiencing them alongside Harry [see image 5.2].

The second option, which allows users to themselves enter Hogwarts, is not a fully separate option, but rather an abbreviated one. A self-guided Pottermore experience allows users to participate in the activities – shopping in Diagon Alley, making potions, mastering spells and dueling with other players – as often as they would like. Of course,

Image 5.2: *Pottermore moment: Diagon Alley. This is also where users shop for supplies for the game.*

there is an order required here as well, and users can only cast spells once they have been matched with a wand, and can only make potions after purchasing the necessary ingredients [see image 5.3]. These activities are done to accrue points and compete for a House Cup, a contest whose winner is announced periodically and which is played collectively, but again – users can only earn points for the cup once they have been sorted into one of the four houses by the site.
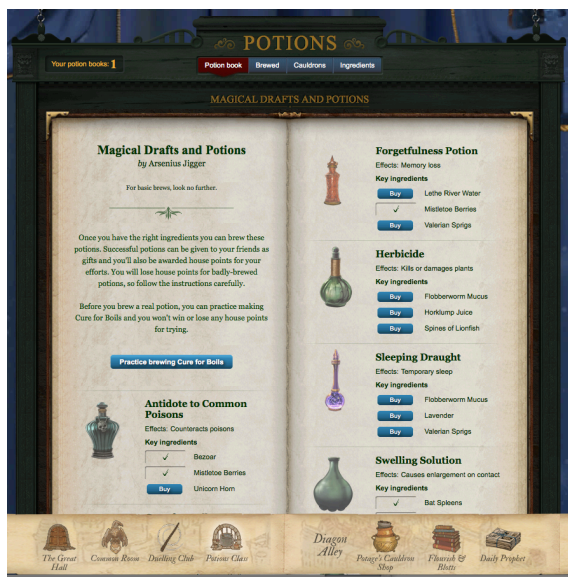

Image 5.3: *Pottermore potion making activity*

One of Pottermore's most significant draws is its original material, written by J.K. Rowling but not previously published or released. Users can also unlock, through thorough examination or clicking around, original material written by J.K. Rowling but not previously published or released. Early marketing announcements focused on Rowling's close involvement, and the site's ability to "inform, inspire, and entertain readers" (Pottermore, 2011) via material that had no other means of reaching the most invested readers. The unpublished original material includes character backgrounds, early brainstorms of character names, and information on minutiae of the wizarding world, things like measurements and currency; for example, when a user arrives at the Hogwarts' Great Hall to be sorted, one of the bonus materials for that moment is background information, including childhood and formative history, for Minerva McGonagall, one of the series' major characters [see image 5.4]. These elements do not include new stories or plot elements, but rather details to enhance and round out existing material from the books and films.
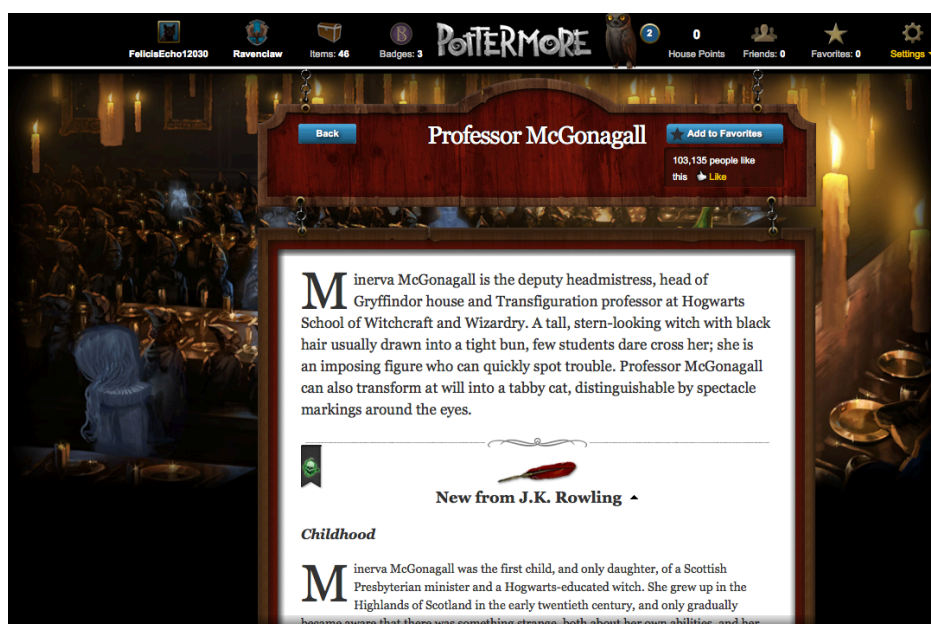

Image 5.4: *New, official content from J.K. Rowling: background on Minerva McGonagall unlocked at the sorting hat ceremony moment.*

There are behaviors, opportunities, and information that Pottermore makes available to its users that cannot be found elsewhere, or are not as accessible to all users. It is a means to visit Diagon Alley without traveling to Florida to visit the one at the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, and they can learn backstories and details of beloved characters from the author herself. There are also social network elements folded into Pottermore's structure: Users are able to friend one another within the game, and track fellow players to experience "moments" simultaneously; at each unlocked portion of material and the end of each chapter, users also have a place to comment on the material or the site, and the message of the site is to "help your house compete; comment wherever you can, and, above all, keep coming back." On the other hand, Pottermore also poses its own set of restrictions: Activities and moments must be unlocked in order, and users cannot select a wand themselves, pick a Hogwarts house to join, or even choose their own "magical" username, beyond the five offered during sign-up. Pottermore is also a closed narrative; though users are asked to comment, share, and provide feedback, the only influence they have over any of the content are the competitions for the House Cup. Though Pottermore offers a new form of transmedia interactivity, it is a very precise and constrained version of participation.

The Pottermore mode of fandom

Pottermore is designed as a paratext, an ancillary experience meant to accompany and enhance the re-reading of the Harry Potter novels, but not to replace or supersede them. This is a particular kind of paratext that differs from the transmedia extensions that commonly define the term; Pottermore is meant to augment a re-use of the original text,

to overlay it with additional meaning, and thus is more like a set of extras and commentary on a DVD release than an expansion of the content in the common use of paratextual material. Pottermore's design, launch, and positioning construct a projection of what its users – and Harry Potter fans – are projected to be, and Pottermore works to perpetuate those roles.

Former Pottermore CEO Charlie Redmayne asserted that Pottermore was "initially built…for hardcore fans," but that the site was ultimately moving to "engage with new fans. There are X million new eight-year-olds who are discovering Harry Potter every year – how do we engage with them?" (Wood, 2013). Despite this mission, and an entry screen during initial registration that gauges user familiarity with the series [see image 5.5], Pottermore is not particularly accessible for entirely new readers; users who have not previously read the Harry Potter books do not have adequate information just on the site to piece together the full extent of the narrative.

Image 5.5: Pottermore's last registration question, to assess familiarity

In addition, the site's rollout and development identify it as meant for already devoted Harry Potter consumers. After the site was first announced, with a great deal of fanfare but few details, in June 2011, it began allowing pre-registration the next month to users on the mailing list. Users who participated in a multi-day pre-launch challenge gained early access to the beta site in August 2011 that was meant to build buzz and work out bugs for the public launch three months later. Public access, however, was ultimately pushed back to April 2012, and the beta stage lasted for nearly two years[13] [see image 5.6]. The protracted launch, and even more long-term rolling out of chapters (*Goblet of Fire* was completed on Pottermore in January 2014, nearly two years after the site went live for public use), made Pottermore an ineffectual marketing tool. Newly enamored readers, after all, can read the full series and watch all the films on demand, but the site remains unfinished many years after the last book's release. The site adds layers of

Image 5.6: *Pottermore's beta progression screen, 2012, with all seven books of the Harry Potter saga.*

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[13] Though Pottermore was noted as being in beta until a home page redesign in late 2013, this seems to refer mostly to the initial number of users, the still-ongoing release of chapters to the story, and some overarching design choices; few user modifications have resulted from the months of beta version.

background, visual representations, and opportunities to interact and participate, but simultaneously encourages users to re-read the original text as they explore the site. Ultimately, Pottermore is designed as an outlet for those who are already fans to continue to engage with the material, and to encourage existing readers who are familiar with the narrative to participate more actively, to make a transition from reader to player, from viewer to fan.

Of course, the structure of Pottermore privileges fandom and participation of a particular variety. The backstories, activities, and additional information that provide the draw for Pottermore effectively extend its canon in ways that had previously been supplemented by fan creativity. Rather than simply promoting fan activity of the same sort that had resulted in challenges in the past, therefore, Pottermore stimulates interactivity while effectively shaping the nature and scope of its involvement. Pottermore models fan behavior, but it also performs fandom for the fans, pre-empting from engaging in ways that involve too much agency, that are too creative, and that are therefore potentially transgressive. The efforts to encourage existing fans and convert new readers into fandom are focused on channeling fan interest away from fanon, creativity, derivative works, and making, and towards a more nuanced and thorough involvement with existing and emerging canonical textual information.

Pottermore is a pathway through the Harry Potter series that promotes a sense of immersion and engagement, but offers little that expands the narrative, and offers little space for users to pursue that expansion. Not quite a game, not quite a virtual world, it is an effort to perpetuate a relationship between Harry Potter consumer and the industry interests who benefit from the interaction, but the distinct, recognizable borders

structured into the type of participation prompted by Pottermore reveal the goals to that

relationship. The game elements of Pottermore share many characteristics with hidden

object and romance games, those that, as Shira Chess (2014) points out, are games that

are typically associated with female players, dismissed as being of lesser quality, and that

effectively limit player subjectivity and identification. These types of games do not offer

options in perspective or narrative path – in Pottermore, users progress through the

narrative concurrent with Harry's perspective, and move through the narrative by virtue

of a "continue" button, rather than by setting a path through independent behavior

choices. This results in a narrative in which there is no possibility of an alternate ending,

an alternate order, or a surprise outcome (Chess, p. 2) This is a mode of play that is linear

in nature, without even offering the latitude of the sort made possible in the "walled

garden" strategies adopted by Lucasfilm and others. Interactivity within Pottermore is a

forward-and-back only approach to participation within the narrative in which users can

read or re-read the books concurrent with the linear release of the chapters on the

Pottermore site in order to maximize the experience.

Thus the structure of Pottermore reflects an attempt to promote interactivity that

avoids the messiness and potential for conflict that comes from a more expandable

narrative that can be customized and personalized by each individual user. Pottermore is

designed as an immersive, game-like experience, but it is one that, in fact, has very few

options open to the user; in game design, as in corporate media construction, controlling

the game means controlling the players, who become a captive users within the realm of

the game (Turner, 2009). Pottermore is an institutional construct that aims to serve both

constraining and enabling roles (Sinnreich, 2010, p. 59), so that interactive practice

within the site – and beyond – adheres to the behaviors modeled within the game. The multimedia sensorial immersion offered within Pottermore provide a space for fan affection that spills over beyond reading the books, watching the films, and other forms of contained consumption, but the space of the virtual interaction is more tightly controlled than existing fan-driven options that serve the same purpose. Rowling and Sony, as Pottermore's industrial creators, keep a tight rein on the level of agency and control over the narrative that a user of the site is able to exert over the already-completed story of Harry Potter. Pottermore's intrinsic limitations on its users serve to offer a form of interactivity that is meant to illustrate appropriate levels of involvement for its users, an interactivity that serves an ongoing economic and cultural purpose and that offers creative ventures like backstories and missing information as already completed, not work to be done by users.

Branding Potter

The identity, function, and type of relationship fostered within Pottermore cannot be separated from the timing of the site's announcement and subsequent launch. Pottermore was initially announced a month before the final film, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2*, was released into theatres; the site was then meant to be open to the public in October 2011, again, a month prior to the release of the final film on DVD and digital formats, before access was pushed back.

Pottermore is a venture that was deliberately launched at the tail end of the Harry Potter franchise, within weeks of the last official adaptation of the core saga reaching consumers. Without Pottermore, therefore, the narrative would be, for all intents and

purposes, closed – it was available for re-reading and re-viewing, of course, and entertained the promise of peripheral texts, but the franchise faced, for the first time in over a decade and a half, a sense of finality. Pottermore, then, is a very deliberate attempt to extend Harry Potter, to offer it consumers and economic value beyond this end. This extension, however, is not just about additional adaptations or half-hearted spin-offs; it is, instead, about involving invested audiences in the practice of extending the experience of the Harry Potter world in order to perpetuate the meaning and value of the brand.

In contemporary culture, brands, not unlike interactivity, function as a structuring principle that derives economic value from affective involvement by consumers, participants, and fans. Brand value extends beyond the signifier itself – the worth of a logo, for instance, or the iconic thunderbolt font that spells out Harry Potter in recognizable titles across media around the world. Brand value is, in part, its equity: the potential a brand has to generate future revenue streams and provide economic capital (Arvidsson, 2006). As Celia Lury (1993, 2004) and Rosemary Coombe (1998) have both argued, the success of this form of brand value is reliant, on a practical level, on the strategic collection, protection, and use of trademark and intellectual property rights. Securing these rights in a legal and cultural sense – what, for instance, Warner Bros. was attempting to do in the Potter Wars – means that the revenue generated from the protected content is funneled to the correct place: its corporate owners. Paul Grainge (2008) notes as well that the function of brands in this sense is also to normalize and reinforce the relationship between consumers and products – or not even products themselves, but product images. This translates directly into modern Hollywood practice: In an era in which intellectual property is collected and closely guarded by producers and

multi-national media conglomerates, and in which successful (and profitable) media

involve multi-platform franchises and merchandising, branding is a necessarily

collaborative effort, even within the divisions of a single corporation. "Extending the

borders of film to other platforms and commodities," he notes, "either managed by

commercial partners or by other corporate divisions, branding creates the reproducible

iconography that can help extend the 'experience' of consumable entertainment,

transforming film into a 'branded media property' (p. 10).

Brands, however, do not function purely as economic strategies; they are cultural

products with a shared *sense* of meaning and value as well. Adam Arvidsson notes that

"what trademark law protects form 'dilution' is primarily the property over a specific set

of attitudes and associations entertained by consumers; a property over a specific *share of*

mind" (2006, p. 189, emphasis in original). Consumers are key to the process of brand

construction, as their affective involvement, participation, work, and investment of

interest is how the industrial value that is derived from a brand is actualized (Arvidsson,

2008). By contributing to the cultural significance of a brand, and situating themselves

according to that significance, individuals are able to negotiate their own identities as

well; an identity as a fan of Harry Potter, for instance, only has meaning insofar as there

is a shared understanding of what Harry Potter means as a cultural icon. And in order for

Harry Potter to mean something – and the same something – across the books, films,

games, merchandise, theme parks, and online interactive media experiences – it

necessitates an "emotional coherence" to the brand image (Twitchell 2004, p. 44) that can

be replicated, re-experienced, understood, and felt by consumers.

Research on the relationship of brands and media industries are thus often focused

on how the brand empire is built and adapted over time in order to balance the levels of control taken on by marketers, promoters, creators, and brand managers, and the control offered to consumers in exchange for affective investment and economic value (see, for instance, Wasko 2001; Grainge, 2008; Arvidsson, 2008). Brand meaning, however, is about more than simply its construction. In his analysis of brands' takeover of various spaces and systems, Twitchell (2004) points out that, "while a brand can take years to evolve, it can evaporate in just months if it loses its interpretive audience. Or if it gets the wrong audience" (p. 20). Maintenance of a brand, in order to keep a consistent meaning and value in a landscape in which contributing signifiers and contexts shift, is a challenging task, one that requires the participation of consumers as well. This is the effort of Pottermore: Participation in this context is not just about encouraging engagement with the text and world of Harry Potter, but about participation with the perpetuation of Harry Potter's brand value when there are no new official contributions to help construct the meaning and significance. Pottermore is striving to maintain the brand's interpretive audience (its correct audience) beyond the production of the canon. This is done by reinforcing the bonds and brand meaning for existing fans, and encouraging new reads with the branded marketplace for purchasing, among other merchandise, e-books of the full Harry Potter series. Though, as Twitchell notes, the impulse to extend brands into new spaces and for longer time is always present in contemporary culture, success is not guaranteed. The issue is whether users invest solely in the content itself, or more broadly with the brand, and are therefore willing to continue to follow, and construct, its significance; Pottermore is the attempt, by Rowling and one corporate entity, to encourage precisely that investment.

Pottermore and interactive boundary

Pottermore's effort to construct practices of interactivity that respond to and correct previous instances of messy, unsuccessful, or problematic approaches to interactivity means that the site operates differently than others. Pottermore is undeniably about encouraging the investment and continued consumption that provide the economic motivation for moves toward interactivity: By incorporating existing readers to engage more with the existing Harry Potter text, by inviting readers to interact with the Harry Potter world and become, in some way, fans, Pottermore is an effort to generate and extract an economic benefit from these behaviors. This is the common mode of interactivity, encouraging consumers to do more, care more, and act more, as the consumers themselves find means to perform their deep affective involvement. In the case of Pottermore, in addition to this encouragement, the goal is also for restriction, to provide models of behavior and limits on action that instruct and restrict fans from becoming too involved, too invested, and threatening the corporate economic and cultural proprietorship over the Harry Potter brand. In other words, Pottermore promotes investment by fans in the sanctioned canon of the saga, and steers participants away from the potentially too-creative – and difficult to control – user-generated "fanon." Pottermore should therefore be understood as a set of minimum and maximum boundaries to desirable interactive behaviors.

Fan activity is an inherently creative venture. This type of fan interactivity brings to the surface, deliberately or otherwise, the ownership and interpretation of meaning that takes place as part of cultural consumption. Fan texts – fiction, videos, art, costumes, music, etc. – that are the product of creative investment by consumers "constitute the fan

writer's authority over the characters, the story, and her own narrative" (Herzog, 2012, 1.3). Fan productivity presents a means to formulating both an individual identity (Sandvoss, 2005) and a mode of reading and interpreting existing characters and narratives in order to fill needs and desires and complicate understanding. This type of creative interaction exists at margins; texts that create narrative gaps – backstories and subtextual connotations that are not explored within the primary narrative, for instance, or the necessary temporal gaps that exist between weekly airings of a television show or releases of a series of novels. This contributes, as Henry Jenkins notes, to a "falling off" in size and degree of fan investment – once a story is closed and no longer producing new material that "spark playful reworkings," fan memberships decline (1992, p. 75). Fan production and identity formation are also often about supplementing canon: Creative pursuits explicitly or implicitly make selections from the official canon that are included or disregarded within them (Jenkins, 1992; Sandvoss, 2005), and often, the appeal of fandom is the ability to exist beyond the boundaries of the canon sanctioned by authors (Watson, 2010). Fan-created elements that are widely held and that supplement official canon by providing elements that align with the text, even if not explicitly produced within it, is referred to as "fanon" – and the power of fanon is to have a sense of contribution, of shared authorship, and an ability to create meaning. Thus is the inherent risk in creative fan interactivity: It carries, inescapably, the potential for interpretations that challenge and critique the text itself.

Pottermore is structured to minimize this risk by, essentially, obviating the need for autonomous fan creativity. The experience of Pottermore is constructed in such a way that it seeks to close narrative gaps left by the book, and to build up the official canon in

ways that might otherwise be left to fanon. The site's unpublished but author-penned

backgrounds of secondary characters and details about the fictional world of the text fit

the types of gaps and unstated knowledge that comprise the basis for fan creations and

the establishment of fanon. If those gaps are filled in, or if the story is being re-told from

alternate perspectives, then the official canon of Harry Potter is spreading in such a way

that the need for – and appeal of – fan texts that do the same become redundant.

Pottermore recreates, and therefore subsumes, the appeal of creative fan investment in

order to channel that impulse into safer and more easily contained behaviors.

Fan participation likewise is predicated on independent readings and

interpretations of textual meaning, and fan studies scholarship aggressively valorizes

these practices as representative of the power of consumers to forge their own, sometimes

critical and resistive, understanding of media texts. Sandvoss (2005) notes "Textually

productive fans…reformulate the fan text in ways that necessarily move it out of its

industrial framing and thus invite emancipation from, and resistance to, such frames" (p.

29). Fan creations are about taking an active part in not only interpretation of characters

and narrative, but also taking up the practice of constructing and re-constructing those

elements to explore particular characters in greater depths, extend the action beyond the

scope of the original story, and bring background and subtextual elements to the fore.

Often times, this means that fan participation involve legitimate challenges to the

messages and primacy of the media text, pointing out shortcomings and rectifying

perceived errors while simultaneously celebrating favored elements. Jenkins' (1992)

foundational argument of fandom – that it is a practice of "poaching" in which fans

peruse media texts and collect and make use of the portions that resonate with them in

order to create a sense of meaning and textual understanding – is illustrated in his

findings that it is not only meaning that is constructed and specific to the consumer, but

so to is the experience of consumption. In formulating their understanding of inclusion

and exclusion and of significance, fans read and re-read texts, reorder and remix events,

and selectively omit and reinforce elements of the original work that align with their

individual sense of meaning and tastes. As technology has evolved, both practices of

consumption (through devices such as e-readers and DVRs, and through market shifts

such as the compilation of television shows onto DVDs and online streaming, which has

reinforced the possibility of marathon consumption and selective re-viewing) and of

production (through increasing access to professional-grade tools for creating and

circulating writing, videos, music, and other user-generated content) have highlighted the

ability and tendency for fans to vary among them in the characters or elements on which

they focus, the sections that are re-read or re-viewed, and the pacing and rate of

consumption. In short, fan productivity is understood to be inherently proprietary, based

in re-appropriation, potentially subversive, and characterized by consumptive practices in

which the fan him- or herself is in control of the pacing, depth, and order of reading or

viewing.

Pottermore, however, makes a structural end run around this type of fan

participation. The tour through moments of Harry Potter do not allow for flexibility of

order or re-experience: Users are prevented from progressing beyond chapter endings if

they have not completed the necessary tasks throughout, and though they can revisit past

moments, they cannot re-do tasks or collect objects once finished. There is, at a basic

level, no way to bounce around between "moments" in Pottermore. Additionally, the

relatively slow launch means that, in the earliest beta stage in late 2011, the site went live

with the first handful of chapters from the first book; by mid-2014, Pottermore has

available a path through just more than half of the Harry Potter narrative. The site

aggressively tracks IP addresses, logins, and, cookies, such that a user must clear a

significant amount of data and begin again with registration, sorting, and earlier tasks in

order to re-experience parts of the Pottermore narrative. Pottermore's nature of static

images that offer the moments of the story, with different levels of zoom and different

objects to collect, determines the pacing and trajectory of the narrative more than user

preference, and its rigid perspective, neither offering a choice in point of view from

which to view the narrative nor the opportunity to subvert, re-appropriate, or critique its

events. Pottermore's version of interactivity, then, is one in which fans and consumers are

asked to become engaged and remain active, but not to have a sense of agency or

ownership over the progressions of the narrative or, indeed, of its meaning.

Interestingly, however, there is also a tertiary market of fan-generated content

specifically for Pottermore, in the form of discussion forums, wiki, blogs, and YouTube

videos largely dedicated to discussing and offering cheats for Pottermore. The Pottermore

Wiki, for example, is a user-maintained site that seeks contributions from its readers and

offers how-to tips, polls, and advice on how to unlock objects and tasks within the games.

There are many unofficial Pottermore sites that offer walkthroughs of the entire game,

complete with screen shots and information on exactly where money, skills, and

information can be retrieved in each moment.[14] In addition, videos on YouTube use

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[14] See, for instance, http://www.cheatswhiz.com/pottermore/,
http://pottermorefieldguide.com, http://www.pottermoreinsider.com,
http://www.pottermorepointers.com, to begin.

screencasts to illustrate how to execute spells and build potions. Though the official

Pottermore space provides space at the end of each chapter and with each unlocked

passage from Rowling for comments – and, indeed, the official message of the site

entreats users to "comment wherever [they] can," there are few comments on any of the

moments, and most consist solely of feedback such as "wow," "awesome," and similarly

effusive but insubstantial praise. More connections between users happen on these

tertiary sites; Pottermore, for example, makes it difficult to find friends without entering

the Pottermore-specific username that is generated by the game. As a result, wikis,

message boards, and cheat sites offer places where individuals can find one another so

that they can then connect in the game space, in order to duel or collaborate on the few

tasks that permit it, and they keep a running tally of the ongoing House Cup competition

between users. Pottermore itself does not exist as a community, but instead effectively

outsources the community behaviors to existing networks within the Harry Potter

fandom, and allows for these external sites to house some of the behaviors often

attributed to direct fan production.

YouTube also plays host to other Pottermore fan videos, those which feature users

filming and narrating the "reveal" of the process of being sorted into one of the

Hogwart's houses in an early Pottermore moment. Fans structure these videos with a

great deal of anticipation and anxiety, voicing concerns that they may be sorted into the

"wrong" house or, less frequently, that they may be assigned a wand that does not match

their personality. What is important to note about these videos, however, is that they form

a narrative of the user experience of Pottermore, and do not involve altering or

repurposing the meaning. Like the walkthroughs, the tips, the cheats, these videos depict

the process of participating in Pottermore, but involve limited, if any, creativity themselves. They illustrate fan involvement, and normalize it for other users, but do not offer alternative means of playing Pottermore or understanding the meaning of the Harry Potter canon. As these user-created efforts rarely merit the same type of devotion as has been bestowed upon the original Harry Potter texts, Pottermore is, to put it bluntly, successful in channeling the investment of fans into pathways that are structurally resistant to subversion, and that replicate – and therefore make redundant – the pleasures of many of those practices.

Though Pottermore is an important industry-driven component meant to model and constrain fan behavior, it remains one project within the vast landscape of Harry Potter fandom. Given the lengthy history and the breadth of fan productivity, it is impossible for any one element, even Pottermore, to entirely alter the nature of the existing fan/industry relations. It is important, therefore, to contextualize Pottermore within other ongoing efforts and opportunities for fan interaction in order to appraise the success and limitations of this particular venture. From an industrial and economic standpoint Pottermore makes important contributions that make it a valuable endeavor: The store portion, for example, allows for Rowling to retain rights to electronic publishing and to keep the Harry Potter books available in multiple formats, both proprietary and not. And as an effort to perpetuate the existing Harry Potter brand, Pottermore is perhaps at its most successful: The staggered rollout of the chapters, the close ties with the e-books and the practice of reading and re-reading, and the efforts to engage new readers and convert existing fans to ideal users all allow Harry Potter to continue to matter. The Pottermore strategy of expanding the existing narrative world has

also proven successful enough that, in late 2013, Warner Bros. announced plans for a new series of Harry Potter films, based on the ancillary books penned by Rowling and set within the same world. The first, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, will also have Rowling as a screenwriter (Chan, 2013). Though there is no word yet as to whether Sony, too, will extend Pottermore to include this and the other companion texts, it indicates the significance of expansion and creative paratextuality of which Pottermore is a part.

Less successful have been Pottermore's contributions to fans themselves. The content of Pottermore satisfies the fan desire to fill in holes in the plot, offer background on beloved teachers like McGonagall or small characters like other Hogwarts students, and enhance the narratives of the novels with details of life in the wizarding world and how Rowling came to write what she did. However, because the site effectively creates this material for the fans, thus obviating the need for independent fan productivity, it cannot entirely satiate the drive for fan participation. The history of the Harry Potter fandom – and, indeed, examples from other cases within this dissertation, including Television Without Pity posters and long-time Comic-Con attendees – makes it clear that the desire for user activity is not fully motivated by the product, but by the act of engaging itself. Participants, as these examples indicate, gravitate toward community and investment, the possibility of alternative interpretation, and actively producing manifestations of their consumption. Though Pottermore effectively models the ideal process of consumption, it offers interactivity with very little actual activity. Thus, fans participate in Pottermore, but with some reservations: In addition to issues with technical limitations and disappointment at being sorted into an undesirable house at Hogwarts, fan

videos describe Pottermore as beautiful, the new content and written material as wonderful, and the overall site as rather dull. Pottermore may be able to extend the brand and promote appropriate fan behavior for a waning franchise, but there it would not necessarily captivate the more passionate involvement of fans taking part in a text still in the process of unfolding its narrative. As a result, though Pottermore is a result of learning from previous fan/industry interactions and adapting practices to suit, it may not offer a clear solution as of yet; it simply indicates that fan investment can be harnessed for a great deal of gain, but the activity involved cannot be subsumed completely.

Pottermore, therefore, is an attempt to manifest interactivity that is best represented by a new metaphor – it is a guided tour, or perhaps an amusement park ride that offers enjoyment in a pre-determined order by following inflexible rails. This presents it as something other than a creative playground that encourages a sense of ownership over textual meaning: The site effectively invites users into the Harry Potter narrative, encourages investment and interaction, and fosters an environment in which readers become fans and brand co-creators, but at the same time, takes users by the hand and participates for them. Pottermore is an effort for Rowling and Sony to exert some control over the route that consumers take through the Harry Potter narrative, to provide a pathway that appears to be comprehensive and exhaustive, thus rendering deviation unnecessary. It is fandom on autopilot, all the better to keep a tight hold on the passionate and creative approach to fandom that has the potential – and history – of transgressing boundaries of the law and of public opinion. Pottermore may be fun, and users do play; points awarded to users who spend time dueling and creating potions can be well into the thousands, and the House Cup is awarded to the Hogwarts house with hundreds of

thousands of points – no small feat, considering each potion and duel yields only a handful of points apiece. Users create fan art to share on the Pottermore Insider blog, offer tips and tricks to unlock secrets of the game, and duel one another for fun, and to take part in the Harry Potter world. But these actions are guided and driven by the parameters of Pottermore, and are meant to offer interactive practice that is neither creative nor productive, but is instead immersive, social, and heavily restricted.

Conclusion

Pottermore emerged at a very particular time, one in which the Harry Potter franchise, after enjoying a decade and a half of immense worldwide popularity, had reached the end of its release calendar of new books and films. During that time, the Harry Potter franchise had experienced both the benefits and challenges of an invested and passionate interactive fan base. Existing strategies for negotiating fan involvement – from benign indifference to aggressive prosecution in protection of intellectual property rights to public relations-friendly appropriation of fan creativity – all play a part in the history of Harry Potter's audience/industry relations, in part because the sheer number of corporate players involved means that different parties take different approaches to the audience. Being co-owned by Sony, a corporation just entering the fray as a Harry Potter stakeholder, and coming as it does at the tail end of the Harry Potter franchise, Pottermore is an attempt to enact lessons learned in the negotiations of interactivity that came before.

As a result, Pottermore is a paratextual venture in which interactivity is conceived as a guided tour, one that does not focus solely on encouraging user investment and

increased immersion into the world of Harry Potter that Rowling creates through her novels and are furthered through the films. Though promoting interaction, and specifically involvement that allows the Harry Potter brand to maintain meaning and significance – and economic value – in the face of a finished product is one of the functions of Pottermore, it does not stop there. In the process of turning readers into fans and fans into brand consumers, Pottermore also provides maximum limitations to accompany the minimum levels of involvement encouraged by its structure. The site itself enacts the practices of fandom and takes over the processes of canon-building and creativity that are commonplace in fan communities, thus both modeling and obviating the need for this potentially dangerous type of fan productivity.

Interactivity in Pottermore is immersive, thorough, and aims to connect users to one another and more closely to the text itself, but it does so along a strictly guided path in an attempt to limit unpredictability, critique, and transgressive behaviors. It is an industry-created venture with very apparent economic functions, but nevertheless makes overt attempts to align those goals with social rewards made possible by the user experience. Whether Pottermore's approach to interactivity as containment is sustainable for the long term cannot fully be recognized while the site content is still unfolding, but it has, in its early years, structured a potentially viable means to sacrifice the potentially destabilizing force of user creativity in the interest of producer-created content and control.

Conclusion
Where we are, where do we go from here?

When NBC Universal and Bravo Interactive announced in March of 2014 that it would be closing Television Without Pity, it closed the loop on an early example of consumer/industry interaction. TWoP began as a user-generated venture, a site for early adopters of the second-screen experience of television viewing made possible by the internet. The site's early years were marked by a form of interactivity that helped construct a sense of community, a pathway for feedback, and a system of social rewards that compensated users for the work they put into it. These benefits offered industrial value as well: participants acted, deliberately or not, as free focus groups, viral marketers, and critics, and as a result, TWoP was purchased by Bravo Interactive in 2007. The takeover did not increase the site's value; instead, changes in its scope, its system of governance, and its purpose made TWoP into a cog in a marketing system of a vast, multinational media conglomerate – and a cog that ultimately was difficult to monetize. When Television Without Pity was shut down, it marked the end of an early era of media consumer participation; it also brought about an all-too-familiar end to a narrative of industrial appropriation, in which industrial interests attempt to capture the benefits of consumer-created systems of participation, but ultimately render them unsustainable by undermining the authenticity and affect of those systems.

The history of Television Without Pity illustrates the dominant narrative of media interactivity, in which audiences and industrial forces are separated along a binary, and engaged in a constant struggle for agency, power, and value. In this narrative, audiences are genuine, invested, and engaged, perpetually seeking new points of contact with media

texts and turning to production as a means of enhancing consumption. On the other end

of this tension is a ruthlessly economically oriented industrial complex, one that

harnesses existing participatory opportunities or recreates simulations of them, in order to

maximize the value generated by these behaviors while yielding as little power as

possible. This latter aspect is important to the narrative: In considerations of interactivity,

participation is often used to characterize a zero-sum game, one in which opportunities,

agency, and input for consumers indicate a loss of the same for industry, and vice versa.

Interactivity, therefore, becomes a professed ideal that creates a veneer of engagement

over what is actually a struggle to destabilize or reify existing pop culture dynamics.

Missing from this narrative, and this approach to interactivity, is the complexity

that exists in contemporary interactive practice; this project was aimed at indicating that

while industry-as-takeover may be an approach that is not inaccurate, it is a reductive

view of interactivity. Interactivity, as illustrated by this project, can take forms that

extend beyond appropriation. It can be a tool, as it is with Social TV, to motivate

behavior and incentivize practices, even as the system is designed to entice participants

into being monitored and counted in very precise ways. San Diego Comic-Con illustrates

that interactivity can be used as an audience construct, incorporating individuals into a

mode of consumer behavior and interpellating them into a privileged, precise and

normalized participant identity. And, as with Pottermore, interactivity can function as a

form of restraint, restricting participant behavior with the potential to challenge

ownership models or to destabilize brand meaning with transgressive approaches to

creativity. These are the approaches to interactivity that arise from the particular case

studies in this project, and while they are not comprehensive, they do complicate existing notions of what interactivity can – and cannot – do.

This project, therefore, aimed to consider the aspects – and individuals – who are left out of this narrative of interactivity, by parsing the implications, limitations, and relationships that are negotiated at sites of contact between consumers and industrial interests. I begin from a position that is reluctant to embrace the model of resistance presented by both research on active audiences/fans and on structures of interactivity. The industrial interests examined here are fully immersed in the practices of capitalism, and thus industrial concerns are designed to construct sustainable markets and to maximizing the value that can be culled from them. Participants of interactivity, however, are likewise always already invested in the same practices; these are consumers of media, but consumers of commercial culture as well – they watch television, play video games, read books, and see films, and use consumer electronics like smartphones and computers to engage with these texts on privately-owned sites and apps. Sara Gwenllian Jones (2003) points out that resistance models that rely on a binary organization of audience and industry overlook "the extent to which fans, as the culture industry's most voracious consumers, are complicit in the very processes they are supposedly resisting" (p. 171). This project, therefore, does not seek to indicate fissures through which resistant consumers can subvert or upend existing industrial dominance, but instead identifies the strategies, locations, and relationships that individuals and groups navigate within it.

Matt Hills (2002) argues that fans have a process of localized use-valuations that are not able to be reduced to purely economic terms, which allows those fans to, for example, care about items such as free promotional merchandise from a comic

convention or a freely-exchanged item of fan art. "The existence of a marketplace for media-related collectibles," he argues, "is underpinned by the lived experiences of fandom" (p. 35). Similar to how fan perspective can ascribe value to otherwise inconsequential objects, the lived experience of participation can add value, meaning, and importance to interactivity that takes place within existing systems that may, in economic terms, be designed to exploit that participation. These case studies, therefore, offer an illustration of consumers who are carving out spaces of significance that are not fully based in pathways of resistance.

This project examines interactivity through a frame of alignment. Interactivity, therefore, can be such that the misalignment of consumer and industry interests ultimately make it an unsustainable practice, as proved to be the case with Television Without Pity; in that example, as opportunities for consumer contributions and social rewards were curtailed, both by specific choices made by the incoming corporate ownership and by the very fact that the site became a corporate enterprise, the incentives for participation became insufficient for the site to be monetized and continue to offer economic value to its owners. Social TV, by virtue of its position as a site that is created by third-party companies attempting to generate user participation, and Pottermore, as venture by industrial producers attempting to model appropriate interactive behavior, are different from narratives in which industrial interests aim to harness existing participatory practices. Though it is too early to know definitively whether either of these sites of interactivity will prove sustainable or not, successful or doomed—TWoP, after all, spent seven years as a corporate enterprise before being shut down—it is productive to parse whether the assumptions and tendencies unfolding and under negotiation are in a position

to foster an aligned and beneficial interactive relationship. It is difficult to separate, for example, Social TV's reliance on insubstantial game mechanics, push for quantifiable (and easily monitored) participation, and emphasis on co-viewing rather than community from the fact that no Social TV platform has taken off to achieve widespread public use. Pottermore's attempts to limit creativity and excessive behaviors in its users make it a paratextual site of interactivity that cannot be expanded or reconfigured by fans; this may ultimately contribute to its limitations at sustaining the Harry Potter brand in the long term. The spectrum of alignment is particularly evident at San Diego Comic-Con, an event at which current attendees and fans largely indicate an experience in which their participation in the convention – and as consumers of popular culture – is valued by the industrial interests represented there. Efforts to incorporate an increasing number of attendees, and to navigate the desires of those already present, mean that Comic-Con as it is now may be aligned, but is untenable for the long run. As it changes to adapt to limitations of schedule, economics, and space, the convention may privilege the industrial interests over the social desires of its participants, or vice versa. Such shifts in the nature of the event, therefore, must be done in order to keep its interests in alignment, if not necessarily symmetrical, in order for Comic-Con to remain a pop culture pilgrimage for fans, industry, and press.

The case studies featured here also point to the significance of the protocols of interactivity that are put in place for participants, by one another, by the affordances and limitations of technology, and by industrial aims. This includes instances, such as Pottermore, that are designed to provide a model of behavior for users to follow, as well as structured platforms, such as Social TV, that are constructed to explicitly reward some

behaviors while discouraging or rendering invisible activity that is less favorable. These are elements of interactive practice that have been institutionalized and can be officially enforced, but protocols of interactivity also extend to user-to-user enforcement. These socially-constructed codes make use of participant loyalty to the text (Milner, 2009) and rely on shaming, reputation-building, and community identity construction (Humphreys, 2008) to enact interactivity. On Television Without Pity and at Comic-Con both, consumers participate in ways that are moderated and reinforced by other users. It is very deliberate, therefore, that interactivity has been referred to throughout as a practice; in effect, these case studies indicate that interactivity is a site-specific culture and participation is a form of identity construction. This also points to an implicit social reward offered with interactivity: Participants have a hand, beyond the applicable affordances structured by site owners or creators, in constructing the meaning, culture, and identity of a mode of interactivity. In short, interactivity matters because of how it is governed, enforced, and valued by its participants.

Of course, this is not the only value at play. The social rewards for participants are significant, and cannot be reduced solely to how they measure up on systems of power and economy. It is the value generated by interactivity within those power/economy structures, however, that makes interactivity the contemporary ideal in industry circles. Social TV users and TWoP posters generate data on television viewing patterns and media consumption behaviors, while TWoP and Comic-Con both provide the opportunity for participants to provide some form of meaningful feedback and response. Users of Pottermore and Social TV alike are involved in systems that allow them to be monitored, both individually and as aggregates. And all of these sites of

interactivity are also sites of media work: the value generated means that, while it may be uncompensated and immaterial, participation is labor. Turning interactivity into a site of work is, itself, a valuable market: José van Dijck (2009) argues that companies "are not looking to turn every amateur into a professional so much as acknowledging the growing appeal of selling home-made materials to audiences and media businesses" (p. 52). The labor of participation generates value for industrial interests in the work that it does, and in the market it creates for an expanded market of consumption. Interactivity is "world-building for profit" (Gwenllian Jones, 2003, p. 166).

Though this project aims to expand existing knowledge by putting elements into conversation, the site-specific nature of the research does present some limitations in itself. The project design begins with locations at which consumers and industries come into contact, and by investigating how interactivity manifests at each, complicates the existing narrative of interactive media. Because interactivity is enacted differently at each location, there is always the concern that interactivity at each spot is not necessarily generalizable to interactive practice more broadly speaking. The experiences, approaches, and benefits for participants at each site speak to those locations in particular, though similarities between them to indicate the degree to which they are not anomalies or entirely unique. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that, though these specific sites may represent trends, implications, and significant elements of how interactivity is practiced in contemporary popular culture, they cannot, even taken together, offer an exhaustive illustration or definition.

Additionally, this project was designed to account for participants of interactivity, but also those who are left behind by the push for interactive practice. This largely

manifested in an examination of structural limitations: Viewing practices excluded from Social TV, for example, and fan practices obviated by or uninterested in the mode of interactivity modeled on Pottermore. I also considered disgruntled Comic-Con attendees and former TWoP users who left the site behind even before it was shuttered. As Comic-Con is built increasingly to interpellate attendees into the geek identity, it is a very precise version of geekdom that is supported and normalized – leaving those that do not conform outside of the convention's focus, and outside of this construct of interactive audiences. The challenge of those left behind, however, is that they are often invisible: Their consumption leaves little to no trace, they do not generate data, their engagement is not necessarily productive. As a result, though they were a constant consideration in this research, those left out of interactivity may be left out here as well. This project is not designed to account for non-users and non-consumers entirely; however, those media consumers who simply do not resist, critique, or remove themselves, but who instead consume quietly, privately, or differently may not be adequately considered based on the limitations of the project design.

This also indicates one avenue of future research that might address the limitations: Critical discussions of interactivity currently do note that productive, invested, and fannish consumers actually comprise a small percentage of users, but are overrepresented in both industrial and, often, academic rhetoric (see, for example, Bird, 2011; van Dijck, 2009), and that discussions of interactivity privilege a particular type of participant (Couldry, 2011). While this project aimed to address these, more work could be done to align discussions of individuals left out of or marginalized in interactive practices with discussions of those who are underrepresented in audience rhetoric more

broadly. The default interactive participant is an early adopter, young, male, white, educated, and well-off; opening research to interactive practice that takes place in spaces with a different race, gender, class, access, or other demographic norm can, at once, further investigate those left behind in existing research on interactivity and illuminate the existing cultural standards that are reified by maintaining this limited view on the defaults of interactive practice.

In a related way, investigating how interactivity manifests at sites that do not have the high-profile sanctioning of the mainstream entertainment industry – as all of the case studies researched here do – might yield the opportunity to investigate a broader range of participants. Additionally, unsanctioned interactive sites could provide versions of interactivity that are more able to illustrate the modes of behavior for consumer participants, ones who are perhaps attempting to mimic or remain untouched by industry interests. The counter to this are, of course, industry events, ones that rely on presumptions of interactivity and constructs of its participants, but that are not necessarily open to consumers themselves. Though these are specifically not sites at which industry and consumer interests come into contact with one another, and are therefore beyond the scope of this project, research agendas such as these offer the opportunity to expand upon our existing knowledge of how interactivity is enacted, idealized, and practiced in contemporary culture.

The promises of interactivity, whether or not they are realized in everyday practice, have a powerful structuring effect on how popular media is experienced. Interactivity contains the lure of investment and the threat of exploitation, the allure of traditional media ritual and the agency of prosumption, the interests of consumers and the

goals of industry. In its manifestations, interactivity can be deployed as a means to push or to pull, to co-opt or to liberate. It takes, in other words, any number of forms. Interactivity matters, however, because it is a point at which its participants matter: to the text, to academics, to the press, and to one another. Interactivity is a means by which individuals become constituents in a larger system of content, meaning, and relationships and, as such, is a mode for considering contemporary popular culture.

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