**Seriality and Transmediality
in the Fan Multiverse:
Flexible and Multiple Narrative Structures
in Fan Fiction, Art, and Vids**

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This article explores new forms of serial structure found in transmedia story worlds, with particular attention to the innovations of amateur transmedia works. Although the term transmedia has most often been associated only with corporate media at the center, taking amateur works as the paradigmatic example produces new insights into the affordances of digital technology, beyond the industry's limitations, namely how transmedia creativity can function in the absence of the need to remain marketable, to maintain a coherent brand, and to work within a corporate family of conglomerated media companies. This study thereby focuses on fan fiction, art, and "vids", a form of remix video collage, to demonstrate how contemporary amateur production interacts with professional content, but also produces its own type of complex narration through unique forms, aesthetics, and story structures, likewise encouraging alternate reception practices as a result. This article identifies at least three types of transmedial seriality elucidated by studying amateur fan media. First, fan works emphasize the increasingly complex nature of seriality in all transmedia and the way in which serial effects do not vanish, but increasingly depend upon the viewer's choices. Secondly, fan works create their own kind of flexible and multiple serial effects wherein meaning does not depend on consuming a specific sequence of narratives, but instead upon reading any collection of narratives within larger cycles or tropes to assemble a sense of flowing norms, genres, and preferences. Finally, fan works also uniquely analyze and reconfigure the serial effects of tropes found not only across the transmedia components of individual stories, but also across the breadth of popular culture. By remixing and reimagining repeated structures of representation, fan works often call attention to latent forms of seriality within popular culture as a collective whole.

D on't stop me if you've heard this one before. Serial forms of repetition fundamentally structure the audience's experience of popular culture on numerous levels, from the hit-hit-miss "rule of three" in slapstick comedy, to the cyclical nature of beats and arcs in serialized television. Yet the incorporation of transmedia elements within an overall story world requires essential reassessment of how seriality has changed in contemporary digital culture, especially when professional and fan-produced transmedia each contribute to the overall narrative whole. Thinking about fan works as transmedia equalizes all narrative investments and promotes the freedom of any audience member to author their own interpretations and desires into the official text. At the same time, accepting fan works, including fan fiction, fan art, and fan video collage or "vids", as legitimate and equal parts of transmedia networks also requires reassessment of the limits and effects of the serial narrative form

in contemporary transmedia environments. Fan works thus elucidate and complicate the picture of seriality within professional transmedia franchises, while also introducing their own unique processes for constructing a serial narrative backchannel and interpreting and processing the underlying serial nature of representational structures across history and media.

1. Authority, Ownership, and Legitimacy: Fan Works as Transmedia

Before dealing with the serial character of fan works, the ontological status of various transmedia components must be addressed to resolve how fan production of fan fiction, art, and video relates to the larger narrative whole[1]. Taking fan works seriously requires challenging the authority of both authors and copyright holders to determine a story's meaning and legitimacy. The boundaries and components of corporate transmedia narratives most often result from a combination between money and power, making fan works a grassroots alternative that places emphasis on the audiences' preferences, contributions, and control. Many recent changes in contemporary transmedia narration can be attributed to the shifting social and legal meaning of authorship, and the industry's evolving business models, rather than any inherent artistic properties of new media. Yet, the industry's turn toward telling stories that take place across a variety of mediated formats is often framed as a new development caused by the possibilities within web 2.0. As noted by Marie-Laure Ryan, story worlds that multiple authors and artists interpreted in many media trace their history far further back than the social web, at least to classical Greece and perhaps even before[2]. Even if the definition of transmedia is restricted to stories that incorporate so-called "old and new" media forms, fans as well as independent authors and artists have been exploring the possibilities of on-line multi-media storytelling since the very beginning of the internet. Nevertheless, often discussions of transmedia only incorporate consideration of corporate forms of transmedia narration, ignoring or sidelining independent and fan-produced material. In comparison to such non-commercial material, hallmarks of early corporate

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[1] It should be noted that this article primarily addresses the production of transformative works by organized groups of fans who see themselves as part of a community. Some of these conclusions may apply to other types of fans and other fan practices, especially at the level of metaphor, but they are grounded in the reflexive circulation of fan fiction, fan art, and fan vids.
[2] Marie-Laure Ryan, "Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality", *Poetics Today,* Vol 34, No. 3, 2013, p. 361-388.

transmedia like *The Matrix* (1999-2003) and *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010) arrived to the internet fairly late in the game. Rather than unique moments in the history of narrative, these series pinpoint important landmarks in media industry history because they mark changes in corporate strategy.

Ryan recounts a conversation between scholar Henry Jenkins and an unnamed film maker that encapsulates this change. The film maker explains that the mainstream media's historic preference for strong stories shifted over time toward strong characters, around whom a series of stories might be told, and then shifted again to a preference for fictional worlds, within which numerous characters and stories might develop. However, many fans, genres of literature, and alternative media have long treated stories as narrative worlds that could be rewritten and expanded in multiple directions. For the industry this transformation revolves around changing strategies for ownership, requiring cross-platform conglomeration, marketing, and licensing. Because it makes little business sense to construct transmedia narratives unless the same parent corporation owns all the necessary platforms, a conglomeration strategy was necessary to first ensure that a single media corporation could simultaneously produce and distribute or narrowly license TV, film, video games, comics, and web content. Furthermore, a flexible approach to authorship and licensing was required to dissociate these multiple story products from a single author so that each medium can tell the stories most suited to its own format without diluting the authority of those stories told in other media. This requires either a reinvestment in the notion of a single authorial mastermind who oversees every aspect of the project and from whom studios take all their cues, or a collaborative ethos in which the studio itself transparently becomes the proxy author within which many artists, authors, producers, and technicians work together.

These alterations in corporate strategy strongly influence the meaning and legitimacy assigned to various components of transmedia narratives. Some franchises cling to the central function of the author to provide overall coherency and limits to their story world. Thus, for example, the boundaries of *Harry Potter* are determined by J.K. Rowling's somewhat dubious "intentions" and showrunners, like *Battlestar Galactica*'s Ron Moore or Joss Whedon of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly*, and *Dollhouse* fame[3], can also take on this function of embodying the ultimate authority over the narrative's purpose and meaning, even

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[3] *Harry Potter* (2001-2011), *Battlestar Galactica* (Sci-Fi Channel, 2003-2012), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (20th Century Fox and the WB, 1997-2003), *Firefly* (20th Century Fox, 2002-2003), *Dollhouse* (20th Century Fox, 2009-2010).

when the studio acts in contradiction to the author/auteur's stated desires[4]. Yet increasingly studios more and more transparently treat transmedia narratives as a piece of their own corporate intellectual property over which no author holds an ultimate authoritative vision, as in the recent decision by Alloy Entertainment to fire the original author of *The Vampire Diaries* (The CW, 2009-) and continue publishing books under her name that were actually written by a ghost writer[5]. Thus it becomes increasingly obvious that the limits of transmedia narrative worlds are imposed by legal questions of ownership and licensing, not by the inherent creative integrity of the story itself. The process of determining whether a particular story should be considered a legitimate extension of a transmedia world often has little to do with the ever illusive "intentions" or imagination of the author, and more to do with the purely market considerations of corporations who grant legitimacy through licensing agreements and deny official legitimacy to all those creative projects that exist beyond the reach of their money-making preview.

Thus, because the limits and ontological status of transmedia story worlds become increasingly muddled the more obviously corporations

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[4] While the author's ideological authority creates a sense of coherence across multiple storylines and media platforms, their public skirmishes with the media corporations who actually own and produce these media often undermines that illusion, as do the author's momentary lapses and mistakes. Rowling's book and film publishers often acted against her fans on matters of intellectual property in contradiction to her own stated wishes, while Rowling's contradictory statements about the characters' ages and retroactive back stories also internally destabilize a unitary vision of the *Harry Potter* universe. Similarly, Joss Whedon's very public disputes with his television series' networks over decisions that seriously alter his intended storylines leverage the author's authority not to provide overall coherence to a fragmented story world, but to further delegitimize the published text.
"J. K. Rowling at Carnegie Hall Reveals Dumbledore is Gay; Neville Marries Hannah Abbott, and Much More", 2007, Hosted by *The Leaky Cauldron*. http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/2007/10/20/j-k-rowling-at-carnegie-hall-reveals-dumbledore-is-gay-neville-marries-hannah-abbott-and-scores-more, last consulted on May 10th, 2013.
"JK Rowling World Book Day Chat", 2004, Hosted by *Mugglenet*. http://www.mugglenet.com/jkrwbd.shtml, last consulted on May 10th, 2013.
Stanford Center for Internet & Society, "Harry Potter in the Restricted Section, NoticeID 522", 2002, Hosted by *Chilling Effects*.
http://www.chillingeffects.org/fanfic/notice.cgi?NoticeID=522, last consulted on May 10th, 2013.
"Writers Cannot do Math", hosted by *TV Tropes*.
 http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/WritersCannotDoMath, last consulted on May 10th, 2013.
Bernard Zuel, "Not So Shiny: Plenty of drama for Buffy creator Joss Whedon", in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Entertainment Section, August 25th 2010.
http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/not-so-shiny-plenty-of-drama-for-buffy-creator-joss-whedon-20100825-13r81.html, last consulted on May 10th, 2013.
[5] Maria Lindgren Leavenworth, "Transmedial Texts and Serialized Narratives", *Textual Echoes*, special issue "Transformative Works and Cultures", Vol. 8, 2011. <doi:10.3983/twc.2011.0361>.

select official narrative extensions on the basis of profitability rather than artistry or narrative, insisting upon treating unlicensed fan works as legitimate parts of the overall story structure takes on an even more clearly populist political resonance. Who determines characters' personalities, the rules of a fictional universe, and ultimately what "really" happened? While some answers to these questions might be more interesting, convincing, moving, or pleasurable to imagine than others, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that these will always be produced by authors recognized as "original" in the publication process, or by authors contractually licensed by corporations. The "death of the author" settles the moral question of who has the right to tell stories[6]; once it is accepted that everyone has equal authority to participate in the co-creation of culture, and no necessary reason remains to grant greater value to the first version of a story over the many retellings, transformations, and adaptations that follow, the only remaining hurdle to the proliferation of participatory story worlds is the artificial legal boundary imposed by intellectual property law. Similarly, statements like Ryan's consigning fan works to the level of "apocrypha" or Carlos Scolari whose taxonomy would classify fan works as "peripheral" undermine the full potential of fan works to unseat the industry's monopoly on public culture[7]. If fan works are considered fully legitimate and ontologically valid contributions to the overall transmedia narrative, then not only does the practice of transmedia gain a much longer and more democratic history than that provided by corporate transmedia projects, but fan works also significantly complicate the question of how transmedia serial narration can function.

2. Seriality in Professional and Fan Produced Transmedia Narratives

Including fan works, namely fan fiction, fan art, and fan video collage or "vids", within a transmedia story world may at first appear to render sequential storytelling and seriality nearly impossible. By their very nature, transmedia narratives may unfold in different sequences and across a different timeframe for each audience member; yet fan narratives not

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[6] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Image, Music, Text*, New York, Hill & Wang, 1967 (1977), p. 142-148.
Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", in *The Foucault Reader*, Ed. Paul Rabinow, New York, Pantheon Books, 1969 (1984), p. 299-314.
[7] Ryan, *op. cit*., p. 361-388. Carols Alberto Scolari, "Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production", in *International Journal of Communication,* Vol. 3, 2009, p. 586-606.

only publish events out of sequence, but also contain numerous alternate interpretations and versions of the same events. However, these complications need not negate the role of seriality; rather they call for a reevaluation and expansion of the serial form and function. First, fan works emphasize the increasingly complex nature of seriality in all transmedia and the way in which serial effects do not vanish, but more and more depend upon the viewer's choices. Secondly, fan works create their own kind of flexible and multiple serial effects wherein meaning does not depend on consuming a specific sequence of narratives, but instead upon reading any collection of narratives within larger cycles or tropes to assemble a sense of flowing norms, genres, and preferences. Finally, fan works also uniquely analyze and reconfigure the serial effects of tropes found not only across the transmedia components of individual stories, but also across the breadth of popular culture. By remixing and reimagining repeated structures of representation, fan works often call attention to latent forms of seriality within popular culture as a collective whole.

3. Retrospective Baselines and Flexible Transmedia Seriality

The first of three major principles to grasp in thinking about fan works as transmedia seriality is that fan works further complicate the increasingly complex nature of seriality in transmedia narration, emphasizing the mainstreaming of audience agency over the speed and order of narrative events, while adding the option for the audience to intervene and usurp corporate narration entirely. As noted by Ruth Page, scholars have most often identified seriality as a result of the separation of a story into a fixed sequence of installments, and the publishing schedule which requires that audiences wait between installments[8]. The experience of shared waiting has historically performed an important function in terms of narrative and social structure. As a narrative form, the imposition of fixed blocks of time between installments allows for the traditional "beats and arcs" structure of television and encourages writers to increase tension at pre-defined climactic moments that precede periods of shared waiting: before each commercial break, at the end of an episode, and at mid-season and season finales. Such use of shared waiting as a technique to increase narrative tension can also be seen in other serialized forms such as the novels of Dickens. As a social form, shared waiting also intensifies the

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[8] Sara Gwenllian Jones, "Serial Form", in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, London, Routledge, 2005, p. 527. Ruth Page, "Seriality and Storytelling in Social Media", in *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, Vol. 5, 2013, p. 31-54.

audience's sense of themselves as an imagined community, because all experience this period of anticipation together. The uproar over First Lady Michelle Obama's access to an early pre-screening of *Downtown Abbey*'s third season exemplifies the extent to which even contemporary audiences still construct shared periods of waiting for the next narrative installment as a key part of community cohesion[9].

Yet, both physical and social technologies have long allowed at least some segments of the audience to undermine publishers' installment schedule and follow a story at their own pace. Serialized novels were often also eventually published as a compendium, allowing readers to decide the speed of narration, while the arrival of home VHS machines granted audiences an unprecedented level of control over television scheduling. The binge-viewing and time-shifting common in recent years are often attributed to the sale of television on DVD, as well as DVR, digital streaming, and file-sharing technologies; yet in actuality these merely extend the behaviors of fan communities to mainstream audiences. VHS recording combined with international fan communities facilitated broad circulation of media even before the digital age. Because fans distributed taped collections of episodes through the mail and at conventions, they no longer remained at the mercy of the industry's scheduling systems, and thereby claimed the autonomy to rewatch and binge-view television long before the internet. However, now that such practices have spread beyond cult audiences to the mainstream public, serialized television can no longer take for granted that the bulk of the audience will view installments at the same pace.

The fixed sequence of installments may seem like an even more critical characteristic of seriality. It may appear wholly unintuitive and unpleasurable to imagine, for example, reading the chapters of a novel out of sequence. Yet, increasingly, transmedia franchises offer flexible

[9] "Michelle Obama Gets '*Downton Abbey*' Season 3 Early", in *Huffington Post*, November 13th 2012.http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/13/michelle-obama-downton-abbey_n_2124284.html, last consulted on May 13th, 2013.
Lisa de Moraes, "Did Michelle Obama Pull Strings to Get the Third Season of '*Downton Abbey*' Before U.S. Launch?", in *The Washington Post*, November 13th, 2012. http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/tv-column/post/did-michelle-obama-pull-strings-to-get-the-third-season-of-downton-abbey-before-us-launch/2012/11/13/62639cd8-2def-11e2-89d4-040c9330702a_blog.html, last consulted on May 13th, 2013.
Natan Edelsburg, "Why First Lady Michelle Obama Shouldn't Have Watched Season Three of *Downton Abbey* Before it Aired in the U.S.", in *Lost Remote*, December 21th, 2012. http://lostremote.com/why-first-lady-michelle-obama-shouldnt-have-watched-season-three-of-downton-abbey-before-it-aired-in-the-u-s_b35708, last consulted on May 13th, 2013.

narratives wherein pieces remain interdependent, while encouraging the audience to choose their own sequence. In some ways this model is a throw-back to earlier forms of episodic television wherein each episode offered new permutations of the show's themes, but always returned the characters to the same "baseline" so that they could begin the next episode from the same starting point. Such formats allowed viewers to pleasurably watch only a few episodes out of a season, and critically facilitated syndication so that episodes could be rescreened multiple times in any order without significantly disrupting audience interest. Yet, these older episodic structures also inhibited significant growth and change, attributes increasingly vital to the development of "quality television" and most transmedia franchises. How then can a story world simultaneously support both a flexible, user-controlled sequence and radical change in characters, plot, and setting?

Three concepts help explain the way in which both professionally and fan-produced transmedia narratives may maintain both the highly prized markers of "complex narration" and user-controlled, flexible seriality[10]: first, an understanding of narration as a movement from "information-light" encounters to "information-heavy" encounters, rather than movement through a fixed plot; second, the notion of a quantum narrative multiverse rather than a unitary narrative world; and third, consequently foregrounding seriality as an effect experienced by the audience rather than a pre-determined and uniform intention of the producers. In her self-published essay "The Advantages of Fan Fiction as an Art Form: A Shameless Essay", Jane Mortimer describes seriality as a relationship between the baseline and "the momentary focus of intensity on two square inches[11]." In other words, she argues that very small statements, gestures, and moments in serials can carry incredible intensity and payoff for audiences because of their relationship to a pre-existing baseline of

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[10] Jason Mittell's article illustrates the increasing interest among scholars in the emergence of innovative narrative forms on television, marking a shift in the traditional artistic valuation of film over TV toward what is often termed "Quality TV." However, to do so Mittell also discounts the "complexity" of many standard, often feminized TV forms, including the soap opera, which certainly relies on very complex narrative maneuvers. Such works thereby often tie the "complexity" concept to problematic definitions of "quality", cultural value, and classed western expectations about narrative and drama. The type of complexity produced by both fan and corporate transmedia often challenge expectations about "quality" narration both because of their experimental, user-driven form, and by their common refusal of many of the familiar satisfactions of dramatic structure and narrative closure. Cf. Jason Mittell, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television", in *Velvet Light Trap*, No 58, Fall 2006.
[11] Jane Mortimer, "The Advantages of Fan Fiction As an Art Form A Shameless Essay", hosted by AOL, September 20th, 1997, http://members.aol.com/janemort/fanfic.html.

repeated and expected character psychology, behavior, or plot development. One of the chief pleasures of fan fiction, she argues, is that authors may use the audience's pre-existing knowledge of the baseline to cut directly to the pay-off moment of experimentation that becomes resonant in relation to audience expectations and previous story segments. While this theory does explain the pleasures of many transformative fan works, it cannot fully account for the relatively common practice of reading or viewing fan works without having previously encountered the professionally published source, nor transmedia narratives' increasing tendency to start from moments of complex conflict and require the audience to work backwards and build the baseline in reverse.

Different pleasures are at play when an audience enters a narrative already in progress and then must retrospectively move from a position of reading the text as an information-light to an information-heavy interpreter. The narrative question transforms from "what will happen" to "who are these people and why have these things happened", while seriality no longer offers a linear sequence of events, but instead an a-linear flexible sequence of information, each piece of which enriches the viewer, listener, or reader's ability to re-interpret the central events. *Lost* and *Once Upon a Time* (ABC, 2011-) offer paradigmatic examples of this technique as both allowed the audience to slowly piece together the characters' histories and personalities from a transmedia series of narratives presented out of order and on multiple platforms. In fan communities, a game called "Stranger in a Strange Fandom" exemplified the tendency of many audiences of fan works to engage with fan interpretations independent from the professional text[12]. Participants were asked to watch a vid, which is a form of fan remix video, for which they had never previously seen the professional source. Participants then wrote a description of the source material based on what they could piece together from the vid version, resulting in an enormous range from hilarious to shockingly accurate inferences. *Lost*, *Once Upon a Time*, and Stranger in a Strange Fandom all play upon the shifting process of interpretation as audiences slowly gather more information about the narrative world by interacting with more of its components. Importantly, the guesses and inferences made by audiences at the very beginning of this process need not be considered "wrong" or "worse" than those made later in the game by audience members acting with more information. This is a chief point of difference from "Possible Worlds Theory" which postulates that readers and viewers constantly

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[12] Jarrow and Sdwolfpup, "Stranger in a Strange Fandom", 2007-2009, hosted by Livejournal. http://strangefandom.livejournal.com, last consulted on December 15th, 2010.

compare the ontological validity of story segments to the real world and other parts of the story world[13]. As the enjoyment of those playing the Stranger in a Strange Fandom game imply, moving toward an information-heavy interpretative position does not involve discovering the "truth;" there are merely different pleasures available at different stages, and with different informational frames. Yet still, in all of these examples, seriality and narrative continue to function. Particularly as producers move toward a model of transmedia in which audiences are expected to enter a story world from any medium, the primacy of one medium over the others has been displaced by an expectation that audiences will move between different media independently and unexpectedly, constructing their own serial sequence without reference to publication dates. Audiences only access pieces of the narrative world one at a time, and slowly accumulate a greater and greater understanding of the order of events and the characters' lives at their own pace and in their own order. They still encounter the story in serial installments, but the order and speed of their travels, and thus the narrative and serial structures, become self-directed.

In addition, the ability to simultaneously provide flexible forms of transmedia seriality and maintain coherent narratives is facilitated by a transition from regarding the story as one shared narrative world held in common by the entire audience and production team to the notion of a quantum narrative multiverse. In her article "Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality", Ryan considers story segments that modify or contradict character actions, key events, or core characteristics of other segments difficult if not impossible for professional transmedia, and maintains that such internal contradiction must remain the domain of "apocryphal" fan

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[13] Veerle Van Steenhuyse applies Possible World Theory to fan fiction in her analysis of narrative immersion, wherein she argues that readers of fan fiction narratives must find that the characters, settings, and situations ring true and thus remain "possible", in comparison to their own personal cannon and the developing canon of the community. The theory developed here shifts her work only slightly by questioning the hierarchical relationship created between texts by the ontological question of the characters,' settings,' and situations' ultimate "truth", "reality", or relative "possibility" versus "impossibility", replacing these concepts with an egalitarian model of pleasurability, wherein all texts remain valid, even when ontologically contradictory. In addition, this model foregrounds the problematic that members of fan communities never share an identical baseline, and that what "rings true" or feels most pleasurable to one reader will be completely wrong or unpleasurable to many others. This contradiction means that the community as a whole never processes the narrative around one fixed core, but instead becomes a space where numerous contradictory versions peacefully co-exist.
Van Steenhuyse, "The Writing and Reading of Fan Fiction and Transformation Theory", *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2011. http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1691.
Marie-Laure Ryan, "Possible-Worlds Theory", in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, London, Routledge, 2005, p. 446-450.

texts. Yet, this assertion overlooks many genre forms that incorporate multiple timelines, and the narrative possibilities of treating fan works as legitimate parts of the overall transmedia story network, wherein they may either exist in parallel, or actually change and usurp the audience's understanding of the professional text. For example, comic books have long mastered the ability to spin off multiple time lines so that each character may live many different lives, and this tendency only magnified when comics expanded into transmedia via film, television, and on-line components. Many of these function largely by keeping most aspects of the baseline intact, and altering different components for each timeline, creating a series of "what if?" proposals. Although fans of course endlessly debate their preferences, the characters of one timeline are no less "real" than those of any other; yet those who have read how a single character develops and reacts in other timelines approach new storylines in a more information-heavy position because that timeline will resonate and interact with their previous knowledge, allowing them to assemble a much more layered narrative web than a fan meeting a character for the first time. Thus, it does not take very much effort to understand that in almost any Marvel timeline Wolverine is a tough Canadian with the mutant ability to regenerate, and thus to construct a baseline; yet as opposed to new viewers, fans seeing him for the second, third, fourth, or fifth time will receive different pleasures from the first instance in a given timeline that he lights a cigar, or in some iterations, his sudden surprising refusal to don yellow spandex[14]. The long-time fan thus creates a unique serial experience gained through reading across multiple timelines, learning more about the many paths individual characters and plots may take depending on alterations in characteristics of the overall timeline.

Many franchises including *James Bond* and *Star Trek* have sought to duplicate this comics-based multiverse success by rebooting their own storylines and characters along a new, fundamentally altered timeline. Similarly, in short form the film *Clue* (1985) directly demonstrates this principle by providing multiple endings to a murder mystery, each of which reveals a different perpetrator. This fluidity is ultimately undermined by a final ending that the film positions as "what really happened" in opposition to the other endings referred to only as "how it could have happened;" yet

[14] Fans who begin at different points in the multiverse, or who simply prefer different character details, will thus accumulate different baselines. Only some fans will deem yellow spandex or a particular height as fundamental parts of Wolverine's character. The serial narratives these fans collect will therefore resonate differently with the new representations they experience, depending upon both which information they have encountered previously, but also which elements they most value and enjoy.

one might just as easily imagine a narrative structure like that presented in *Clue* without its ultimate surrender to the need for narrative closure and certainty. In the television format soap operas are notorious for illogically changing fundamental aspects of their own previous narration, while the most infamous and transparent of these television devices may be *Dallas*' (CBS, 1978-1991) use of a dream sequence to completely negate an entire season and re-start the narration with a different premise. Many series experiment with less intrusive forms of these devices, such as *Community* (NBC, 2009-) which repeatedly refers to an alternate "darkest timeline", itself a reference to the common trope wherein characters in many series spend one episode locked in a hallucination in which they must decide whether the entire narration up to that point was real, or only a psychotic break in which the real story takes place in a mental institution.

Each of these examples explores some of the potential of the multiverse concept, which allows for the investigation of an infinite variety of narrative adaptations across multiple forms of media. No individual story or sequence need maintain ultimate authority as "real" or "true" in a multiverse-style narrative as none actually negates the others and all remain equally possible. Audiences thereby construct seriality through multiverse transmedia narration in two directions: by creating a sequence of story elements through one timeline that flow across multiple media, and also by creating a sequential path across timelines. Further, in multiverse narration it does not matter if audiences begin with a timeline created by a sanctioned or unsanctioned, professional or transformative author. Wherever each audience member begins becomes their starting point and because all timelines are valid, the audience is not "missing" any information but rather gaining greater complexity no matter which narrative path they choose.

Thinking of serial narration as increasing information acquisition within a multiverse also foregrounds a turn toward considering seriality as an effect experienced by the audience rather than a pre-determined intention of the producers or the publication schedule. In her article "Seriality and Storytelling in Social Media", Page argues that scholars must consider the innovative forms of seriality constructed by new media platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Wikipedia. In a parallel move, transmedia stories form a bridge between older forms of seriality and the new structures described by Page, because while some components of a transmedia story may comply entirely with conventional series television, transmedia multiverses allow individual audience members to assemble their own cross-media narrative sequences, including components with new forms of seriality and both professionally and fan-created elements.

Although unplanned and uncontrolled, the sequence of narrative encounters that each individual audience member collects is experienced by that person as a coherent series that gradually provides them more information, access, and insight into the entire narrative multiverse. One might similarly call the narrative itself an effect rather than an intentional design, by emphasizing the coherence and structure that the audiences provides while interacting with a dispersed network of potential narrative elements and choosing how to navigate, add to, nullify, and/or connect them[15]. In this manner, even contradictory versions of the same events can still function as a series from the perspective of the viewer/reader because each deviation further investigates the possibilities within a given premise. Thus the addition of fan works to a transmedia multiverse provides a serial effect that deepens understanding of the story in multiple segments over time.

4. Information Acquisition in the Fan Multiverse

The second major principle of thinking about fan works as serial transmedia is that fan works create their own unique kind of flexible and multiple serial effects wherein meaning does not depend on consuming a specific sequence of narratives, but instead upon reading any sequence of narratives across multiple media within larger cycles or tropes to assemble a sense of flowing preferences, community norms, interpretive frames, and genres, and thus progressively moving toward an increasingly information-heavy interpretive position. "Misreadings" of fan texts offer a window into the limitations of reading fan works only in relation to the professional

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[15] This definition of narrative remains deliberately ambiguous and loose, partly to reserve space for future narrative experimentation and the diversity of non-western narrative traditions, but also to center the importance of audience interpretation and production in the process of meaning creation. The increasing looseness of transmedia narrative stories emphasize Michel De Certeau's principle that, regardless of authorial intent and artistry, individual viewers, readers, and listeners will cultivate their own unruly investments and narrative paths. Understanding narrative thereby cannot remain at the level of the text's formal properties, but also must account for the way in which people make sense of the world. In this, a very loose definition also follows from theories of narrative as the fundamental structure of human thought whereby people make sense of the world by imposing coherence on the chaos of existence. Notably, this definition refuses any clear separation between narrative and argument, art and rationality, intervening in large-scale struggles about the place of poetics in politics as in Michael Warner's work, and specifically reworking the division between rationality and affect in fan cultures, as discussed primarily by Matt Hills and Henry Jenkins. Within this approach, these divisions become purely artificial, as Mark Johnson might argue that all human attempts to make disparate events and actions coherent involve narrative elements.
Cf. De Certeau (1980, 2011), Johnson (1993), Hills (2002), Jenkins (1992, 2013) and Warner (2002).

source text, or in relation to a singular notion of "fan culture." Instead, working backwards to infer the many different sequences of professional and fan texts that offer increasing layers of meaning to a fan vid dramatizes the process by which individual audience members approach fan texts from multiple serial trajectories, creating their own unique narrative assemblages by reading and viewing across multiple timelines, and multiple forms of fan and professional media.

The flexible transmedia seriality of fan works becomes obvious in those which have "escaped" fan culture to become mainstream successes. Mainstream audiences often attempt to retroactively build a baseline to make sense of fan works' narrative and aesthetic experimentation; yet, without access to the history of other fan works, they start from a much more information-light interpretative position than those within the fan community. Their interpretations are not "wrong", as fan work is itself premised upon audience autonomy and interpretative freedom, but they lack access to the sequence of previous texts against which the fan work gains increased resonance. They thereby read the climax of a serial narrative as if it were a stand-alone statement. In her article "User Penetrated Content", Julie Levin Russo discusses the ideological consequences of how audiences contextualize fan works[16]. Russo recounts the unauthorized uploading of a classic homoerotic or "slash" vid, based on Kirk and Spock of the original *Star Trek* series (NBC, 1966-1969), which resulted in "Closer" by T. Jonesy and Killa going viral on YouTube in 2006[17]. Russo takes care to acknowledge that the problem with mainstream audiences' readings of "Closer", which positioned the video as camp or even homophobic comedy, was not that these readings were "wrong" or usurped the "intended" meaning of the vid, but that these readings often reinforced and exposed mainstream audiences' homophobic assumptions while silencing the underground history of same-sex storytelling that the vid rested upon. It is important to note in this conclusion that fans who watch "Closer" also come from a variety of viewing perspectives. However, no specific group of texts is necessary to understand the vid's narrative; instead, previous familiarity with any number of slash narratives would provide a sense of the many common tropes the vid operates within. Because fan works share no central index or canon and are self-published across multiple platforms and real world locations, fan authors cannot

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[16] Julie Levin Russo, "User-Penetrated Content: Fan Video in the Age of Convergence", *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 4, Summer 2009, p. 125-130.
[17] T. Jonesy and Killa, "Closer" (2004).
http://fanlore.org/wiki/Closer_%28Star_Trek_vid%29, last consulted on May 15th, 2013.

depend on their audience's familiarity with any specific group of previous works; however, because fan works often respond to each other and build upon each other's experiments and insights, knowledge of a fan work's position within larger conversations, tropes, and genre forms appreciably enriches a reader's or viewer's ability to trace the story's baseline and interpret multiple layers of serial narrative interactions. Understanding fan works as the apex of an on-going serial thereby helps to explain why insider and outsider audiences often react so differently, and how fan works can create such a dramatic analytic and emotional impact, due to their often invisible connections to other professional and fan narrative elements.

Unpacking the multiple, flexible series that provide increasing layers of meaning for a single vid demonstrates this process by which transmedia seriality within fan works is no longer strictly about order, but rather an interaction of multiple layers, which the audience may enter and expand in any direction. The vid "Written by the Victors" (2007) by Zulu, if taken on its own, functions as a piece of collage art combining video from the television show *Stargate: Atlantis* (Sci-Fi Channel, 2004-2009) with original text to narrate an intergalactic rebellion using an epistolary frame. Indeed, the vid may be pleasurably consumed from this information-light position; yet it gains much greater intensity and nuance if viewed at the apex of a flexible series of previous texts. Knowledge of the intricacies of the *Stargate* franchise provides important background about the meaning of many of the acronyms that appear in the text, and the original narrative context of the video clips, as well as background for the central four characters, Dr. Rodney McKay, a Canadian physicist, Lieutenant Colonel John Sheppard, an American pilot, Teyla Emmagan, a native of the Pegasus galaxy and leader of the planet Athos, and Specialist Ronon Dex, a native of the Pegasus galaxy from the planet Sateda. Yet most of the vid refers to other fan works, both specific works and larger aesthetic trends as well as fan-constructed genre forms both within and beyond *Stargate: Atlantis* fandom.

Perhaps most importantly, the vid is a direct interpretation of a novel-length fan fiction story of the same name by Speranza[18]. Reading the written version fills in many of the narrative gaps of the vid, includes numerous scenes the vid chose not to dramatize, and further explains the title. As the saying that "history is written by the victors" implies, the novel is constructed by excerpts taken from thirty-six fictitious academic texts as well as several other "primary artifacts" each purporting to tell the history

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[18] Speranza, *Written by the Victors*, 2007, hosted by Trickster,
http://trickster.org/speranza/cesper/Victors.html, last consulted on May 15th, 2013.

of Atlantis Expedition's secession from Earth, which all become unreliable narrators in contrast to the central narrative through line describing events from an omniscient position. Perhaps because of the story's sprawling scope and incorporation of multiverse logic able to handle both expansion and contradiction, the story inspired a multi-authored transmedia story world with numerous fan artists and authors expanding Speranza's narrative through drawings, spoken word, video, short stories, and songs[19]. Each of these expansions and reinterpretations adds to the audience's understanding of the whole. For example, the vid ends with what appears to be an antique scroll telling the genealogy of a great king in verse. This is perhaps one of the more perplexing parts of the vid for someone who has not read the fan fiction story it is based upon. Although set in a futuristic present with space ships and high technology, the story frames our present day in the distant past and constructs Atlantis as a center for cultural exchange between alien people with many levels of technology and social forms, while John Sheppard becomes the city's king. The story ends with a series of histories in various genres and languages written by the descendants of the original Atlantis characters. Thus, many interpreters of *Written by the Victors* create artifacts, ceremonial chants, and historical records in many forms and languages including scrolls and stone tablets, all recording overlapping and sometimes contradictory versions of Atlantis's history.

While all these fan works reflect upon each other and become interdependent, each also caters to different desires and interests. One of the most obvious differences between the various versions is the prominence of the relationship between Rodney and John. Speranza's novel melds at least three primary subjects: political intrigue including a post-colonial critique, anthropological or sociological analysis of multicultural traditions within speculative history, and interpersonal dynamics including homoerotic romance. These overlap and interact in Speranza's text, especially when John and Teyla marry each other for political reasons (i.e. to solidify intercultural alliances and provide a clear line of succession), while remaining romantically involved with their other two teammates. The primary romance of the story is between Rodney and John, although it often takes place between the lines as most of the excerpts of "official" history omit or remain ignorant of this relationship underlying the public royal marriage. As an indication of the story's

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[19] "Victorsverse Art and Artifacts: Including the Ars Atlantiadae as well as Earth Documents", hosted by Speranza, via Trickster, http://trickster.org/speranza/cesper/victorsverse.html, last consulted on May 16th, 2013.

recognition as a slash romance within fan genre markers, *Written by the Victors* won an award for "Best Canon AU" in 2007 from the "Mackay/Sheppard Awards", an annual contest for outstanding fan fiction featuring a homoerotic relationship between Rodney and John[20].

Yet most works within the *Written by the Victors* story world focus only on "two square inches", minutely exploring or riffing off of one aspect of the overall narrative. Thus, of the four official "book covers" for *Written by the Victors*, one features all four primary characters, emphasizing their collective impact on history, one shows only John in front of Atlantis with text in an alien language that stresses his ascension to the throne and unification of Earth and alien cultures, and two show only John and Rodney in front of scenes of conflict, highlighting the dramatic political context[21]. Yet, although the latter covers could be understood solely in relation to the war of secession, the choice to illustrate only John and Rodney gains much greater resonance when set in relation to their romance in the novel, and their larger popularity as a commonly slashed couple who star in thousands of other slash stories and pieces of art. The vid version, like the two cover illustrations, can also be interpreted primarily in terms of a political narrative; yet it too contains traces of the John/Rodney romance for audience members interpreting it from an information-heavy perspective that includes knowledge of slash. The middle of the vid portrays a meeting between representatives of the newly independent Atlantis and an envoy from Earth, signaled by overlays of several historical excerpts about the summit. The arrival of Earth personnel in Atlantis is followed by a shot of John surrounded by pageantry and Teyla singing with the subscript "pure political theater", indicating Atlantis's attempt to present itself as strong and independent to the negotiators. To the words "promise after promise" the vid then shows John's stern face followed by a group of Teyla's people presenting ceremonial gifts. This sequence of words and images marks this section of the vid as entirely about political staging to solidify the new government's legitimacy and this theme is important for interpreting the next two video clips, the first of which shows John and Teyla kissing, and the next focused on a reaction shot of Rodney cringing. These two shots are the vid's only indication of the interpersonal plots of the novel, which includes a romantic relationship between Teyla and

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[20] Forcryinoutloud, "2007 Winners: McKay/Sheppard FanFiction & FanArt Awards", 2007, Mcshep-Awards, hosted by Livejournal.
http://mcshep-awards.livejournal. com/41522.html, last consulted on May 16th, 2013.
[21] Sleepwalker Fish, Monanotlisa, Astrid V., and Averillovessev, "Victorsverse Art and Artifacts: Including the Ars Atlantiadae as well as Earth Documents", hosted by Speranza, via Trickster. http://trickster.org/speranza/cesper/victorsverse.html. Last consulted on May 16th, 2013.

Ronon as well as the John/Rodney narrative and the political marriage. The vid provides enough visual information for a very attentive viewer to grasp that the kiss should be interpreted within the "pure political theater" frame and that Rodney's pained expression indicates some kind of discontent with the situation; however, previous general knowledge of slash allows a viewer to infer that Rodney's discontent arises from his love for John and likely feelings of insecurity, while previous specific knowledge of the plot of *Written by the Victors*, whether through reading the novel, listening to the spoken audiobook, or viewing art and artifacts, allows a viewer of the vid to read a much richer depth of emotion into that moment and feel Rodney's fear for the future of his relationship with John in a much more profound manner than viewers seeing the story for the first time in vid form.

In this manner, the "Written by the Victors" vid may include a serial narrative back channel that incorporates elements from many other fan works. Having read any slash story before experiencing a version of *Written by the Victors* creates a flexible serial narrative as the stories overlap and enrich each other, while reading any collection of stories or vids within the Rodney/John pairing significantly intensifies and expands the meaning of later stories as each refracts slightly different yet entwined sets of events, emotions, and character choices. Watching Rodney stand aside while John and Teyla marry, even just for show, feels differently dramatic for an audience member who has read about John and Rodney's epic true love hundreds of times and believes in their destiny together, than for someone experiencing the idea of their relationship for the first time. In this manner, serial repetition of the premise inherently changes its impact and meaning.

These serial elements need not be restricted purely to overtly narrative elements but also include aesthetic, stylistic, and thematic components, many of which may function only on a subconscious level. For example, the primary coloration of "Written by the Victors" is blue or blue-green, a palate shared by many vids based on *Stargate: Atlantis* including most notably a vid simply called "Blue" by Kiki Miserychic, partly because this color spectrum echoes the primary locations and visual effects of the show, namely the ocean, the lights on many key pieces of alien technology, and the wormhole that transports the characters between planets (and occasionally galaxies)[22]. At every level, "Written by the Victors" rewards greater knowledge as even the song choice offers special pleasures to those approaching the vid from an information-heavy position. The vid's

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[22] Kiki Miserychic, "Blue" (2008).

soundtrack is the theme to the Canadian television series *Traders* (Global Television Network, 1996-2000); a double reference for those with fan knowledge, it highlights the shared media space of Canadian productions, since *Stargate* was also produced in Canada, and the actor David Hewlett played both Rodney in *Stargate* and Grant, one of the primary characters on *Traders*. The vid then becomes linked to two more chains of seriality: one about Canadian media and the other around David Hewlett's star text[23].

Furthermore, the "Written by the Victors" vid, like all the transmedia components of the multi-authored and open-ended *Written by the Victors* serial multiverse, helps to emphasize or reinterpret key parts of the novel, and connects with longstanding narrative interventions into real world politics common within *Stargate* fandom. Although filmed and produced in Canada with a mostly Canadian cast and revolving around an international expedition featuring characters from across the globe and eventually the universe, the *Stargate* franchise also maintains close ties to the USA military and has been granted permission to include real US Air Force planes in several episodes[24]. In addition, the series often thematized current events from contemporaneous developments in the "War on Terror", including an episode dealing with the morality and efficacy of using torture against prisoners of war, which coincided with public discussions surrounding the American military's use of torture on political prisoners in Iraq[25]. Many fan works thus engage with the relationship between *Stargate* and contemporaneous US military policy and American foreign relations. Thinking of these works as a series allows audience members to weigh a range of characters' decisions, feelings, and actions, comparing the varying accounts and perspectives of many stories and works of art to determine their position about the morality and practicalities of the real world political situation, as well as their

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[23] Because fans frequently branch off from one media text to explore an enormous range of related media, history, hobbies, and practices, it was common for fans of *Atlantis* to view the complete filmography of the series' actors, and that information was widely available and discussed in *Atlantis* fan spaces. Thus it is not a stretch to assume that at least some fans who viewed "Written by the Victors" had also seen *Traders*.

[24] Air Force News, "Stargate SG-1 Movie - Cast filming with the U.S. Air Force" (2007), hosted by YouTube, uploaded by EMS808. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyBs_aGa7-0, last consulted on May 16th, 2013.

[25] The episode aired nearly one and a half years after torture by the American military against prisoners of war in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq came to light; however, because official policy on torture, or "enhanced interrogation", had not changed, vigorous public debate on torture continued even in that period, placing the *Stargate* storyline into direct dialogue with current events. Carl Binder, "Critical Mass", Andy Mikita (dir.), #213 *Stargate: Atlantis,* December 5th, 2005.

preferences and expectations about specific characters' behavior. Thus interacting with a series of narratives, including the official *Stargate: Atlantis* episode, creates an open-ended conversation unimpeded by the normative effects of narrative closure.

The *Written by the Victors* novel engages with two primary forms of real world politics: closeting and colonialism. Both of these had already been represented by fan works numerous times, in every shade between outright critique of *Stargate*'s position on these issues to pure reproduction or even intensification of *Stargate*'s sometimes homophobic and racist tropes. The novel takes a strong position against many of *Stargate*'s neo-colonial discourses of conquest by directly incorporating native people into the new independent Atlantis government, and connecting Atlantis to the cultural and economic life of the Pegasus galaxy, undermining its function in the aired series as merely an outpost of Earth, parasitically funneling knowledge, technology, and resources to the Milky Way without giving much of anything in return. Yet, because of its multi-vocal form, told through many conflicting historical accounts, this anti-colonial critique may become muddled in *Written by the Victors*' written form. Partly because the vid version cuts many of the novel's events and focuses almost exclusively on the political plot, the multicultural message of the story becomes much more strikingly central. One of the key artistic choices creating this effect is the vidder's use of descriptions emphasizing intellectual talent paired with images of Teyla and Ronon, the team's two alien members, portrayed by actors of color. Especially for Ronon, these descriptions, including "visionary", "brilliant", and "impeccable political judgment", reverse the stereotypical portrayal of these characters as primitive warrior figures in the original series, reiterating over and over that they have more to offer than brawn. Taken alone, the vid reverses common Western structures of representation by repeatedly associating characters of color with intellectual attributes. Experienced as a serial installment in relation to the *Written by the Victors* novel, the vid selects and intensifies the impact of the novel's anti-colonial themes and reinterpretation of Ronon's characterization. Connected to a larger series that includes the original *Stargate* episodes and other fan works, the vid functions as a critique not only of common cultural tropes, but of the specifically painful way *Stargate* has repeatedly cast characters of color to play the same primitive stoic warrior role, and resonates against the many ways that fans have reproduced, critiqued, and reinterpreted those characterizations across time and across many forms of media.

In the other direction, the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" or DADT policy of the American military also strongly influenced fans' explorations and

interpretations of the *Stargate* franchise. Despite the international character of the expedition and the presence of an often antagonistic organization called the International Oversight Advisory (or IOA), most professional versions of *Stargate* repeatedly emphasize the importance of keeping the titular Stargate under American control. Its location in Colorado inside an American military base thereby sets an expectation that although the Atlantis mission includes personnel from around the world, American law and culture still hold considerable sway, presumably including the DADT regulation which at the time that *Stargate: Atlantis* aired supposedly allowed LGBTQ people to serve in the military if they remained closeted, but in actuality resulted in a higher rate of military discharge on the grounds of sexuality than the previous policy which completely forbid service by LGBTQ personnel[26]. In addition, none of the characters on *Stargate* overtly identified as LGBTQ, although after the series ended producers retroactively classified two secondary characters as gay and lesbian[27]. Numerous slash stories and vids set within the *Stargate* multiverse such as "Dreams" by Newkidfan thereby explore the pressures and dilemmas faced by LGBTQ personnel of the Atlantis expedition living under DADT, and how such individuals might navigate relationships both with colleagues and potential lovers[28]. The political marriage that became the public mask of John and Rodney's relationship in *Written by the Victors* thereby resonates against multiple real-world and fan written histories and stories of closeting, and the vid's micro-citation of those dynamics acts as both a reference and performance of the closet since it only identifies the John/Rodney relationship to those already in the know.

Furthermore, "Written by the Victors" can also be situated within an artistic movement in vidding toward increasingly experimental aesthetics combining words, manipulated images and video, as well as increasingly original storylines and artistic positions vis-a-vis the published material. To some extent this movement can be observed in many fandoms, but it

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[26] Anuradha K. Bhagwati, "Sexism and Racism Lurk in Don't Ask, Don't Tell Enforcement ", in "It's a Free Blog", *WYNC, New York Public Radio*, 2010. http://www.wnyc.org/blogs/its-free-blog/2010/nov/30/sexist-and-racist-lurk-dont-ask-dont-tell-enforcement/, last consulted on May 15th, 2013.
Nathaniel Frank, "Research Note Assessing 'Homosexuals and U.S. Military Policy: Current Issues' a Congressional Research Service Report for Congress", Palm Center Whitepaper, 2005.
Gary J. Gates, "Discharges Under the Don't Ask/Don't Tell Policy: Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities" The Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Law and Public Policy at UCLA School of Law, 2010.
[27] Meredith Woerner, "So Who's Gay On Stargate Atlantis?" hosted by *io9*, December 12th, 2008. http://io9.com/5107866/so-whos-gay-on-stargate-atlantis, last consulted on May 14th, 2013.
[28] Newkidfan, "Dreams" (2006).

became a particularly important strand within *Stargate: Atlantis* vidding, which one might even call a coherent artistic "school." Once again, one need not pin down a definitive timeline or canon since seriality in this sense does not require a single linear progression; yet several vids became important touchstones within this stylistic turn, any constellation of which could enrich and contextualize "Written by the Victors." For example, the John/Rodney vids "Scrapbook of my Life" by Mamoru22, "My Brilliant Idea" by Lim, and "2 Atoms in a Molecule" as well as "Absolutely Cuckoo" by Zoetrope, make extensive use of computer generated, drawn, and manipulated images, to the degree that many frames consist mostly of original rather than repurposed content[29]. Kiki Miserychic's "Blue", "Ambushed" by Newkidfan, and "Wallpaper" by Lim create a kind of visual poetry employing thick image overlays and repetition[30]. They utilize a series of largely static images and words to meld the fiction and video formats, developing a kind of word and image collage form, especially promoted by the Art/Word challenges which asked fans to transcend the limiting separation between written and audio-visual media[31].

In addition, many vidders increasingly also used external video to construct narratives that confront the storytelling limits of the footage provided by the source. For example, "Mission Report" by Lim uses primarily nature footage and words, and "Dreams" by Newkidfan also uses nature footage as well as other films to reexamine the kinds of stories that can be told in a fan vid[32]. In addition, Newkidfan's John/Rodgey vid "The Tree" became perhaps the most well-known of this experimental school of *Stargate: Atlantis* vidding[33]. In "The Tree" Newkidfan constructs extensive animated original material and uses a primarily white frame to isolate only select images from the source. Over the course of the vid the largely black, white, and blue images show Rodney increasingly alone as he is dwarfed by the empty white frame after John rejects him. In desperation and sadness he becomes a tree, watered by oppressive rain that mirrors his own tears, rooted to the spot where his lover abandoned him. In the last frame a retreating John is slowly engulfed by the roots and branches growing from Rodney's sorrow. The aesthetic choices in "The Tree" become additionally

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[29] Lim, "My Brilliant Idea" (2007). Mamoru22, "Scrapbook of my Life" (2008). Zoetrope, "2 Atoms in a Molecule" (2008). Zoetrope, "Absolutely Cuckoo" (2006).
[30] Lim, "Wallpaper" (2006). Newkidfan, "Ambushed" (2007).
[31] Newkidfan (founder), "Art/Word", 2006, hosted by Livejournal.
http://fanlore.org/wiki/Artword, last consulted on May 20th, 2013.
[32] Lim, "Mission Report" (2006). http://fanlore.org/wiki/Mission_Report, last consulted on May 20th, 2013.
[33] Newkidfan, "The Tree" (2007).

resonant for audience members who view it in a sequence with a pair of other Canadian productions: the film *Nothing* (2003) directed by Vincenzo Natali and also starring David Hewlett, which utilizes aesthetic minimalism through which the protagonist's emotional state erases the world, dominating the frame with white emptiness, and *Treed Murray* (2001), directed by William Phillips, in which David Hewlett's character spends the bulk of the storyline stuck in a tree after climbing there to escape an assault.

Watching any series of these vids and films provides viewers a sense of the developing aesthetics within *Stargate: Atlantis* vidding in particular, and the broader vidding culture as well. That sequence of serial encounters provides audience members with an information-heavy history within which "Written by the Victors" gains increasing complexity; unlike most academic interest in complex "Quality TV" focused on the vision of a central showrunner, complexity in fan narratives, and perhaps all transmedia narratives, develops in cooperation between the individual fan artists' and authors' design and the audience's active construction of connections between media, as well as the community's facilitation of a space where the publication and discussion of interlinked amateur content becomes possible. However, viewers with less information can still interact pleasurably with individual fan works like "Written By the Victors", and regardless of the probability, "truth", or compatibility of various narrative elements, some viewers may choose to disregard some of the information they've encountered in order to retain a more pleasurable viewing position. For example, rather than import the real world injustices of the DADT regulation into a fictional galaxy, some fans prefer to discard that interpretive lens and construct Atlantis as a utopian haven for free sexual expression and experimentation. Indeed, some fans deliberately cultivate a series of interactions with fan and professional texts that reinforce the interpretative framework they find most pleasurable. They are not "wrong" to do so, but instead exploit an open narrative system's ability to support numerous expansions, contradictions, and investments. Fans thus exert control over a flexible, multiple transmedia narrative by choosing how to navigate its many timelines and forms of media, and additionally by deciding which information from those encounters to incorporate into their own unique serial trajectory. A full understanding of fan works therefore requires consideration of their construction and function at the apex of multiple flexible serial readings.

5. Latent Seriality and Cultural Critique: Political, Aesthetic, and Emotional Serial Effects

Finally, fan works also uniquely analyze and reconfigure the serial effects of tropes found not only within a particular transmedia multiverse, but also across the breadth of popular culture. By remixing and reimagining repeated structures of representation, fan works often call attention to latent forms of seriality within popular culture as a collective whole. Genres, tropes, and structures of representation are never created in one instance out of whole cloth, but instead are assembled one at a time, and experienced by viewers one at a time in an unpredictable and unique order. Yet, taken together this latent, unplanned form of serial repetition has strong social, artistic, and ideological power. In ideological critiques of the mass media, it is difficult to nail down any one representation to blame for the stereotypical and limited way in which women, minorities, and Othered subjects appear in television, film, and music. Indeed, no single representation can be all things for all people and each fails to fully and realistically represent entire social groups, instead offering a mixed ideological landscape of both regressive and progressive choices. Individual representations rarely become politically problematic or powerful completely in isolation, but instead because they fit within a much larger pattern of serial repetition found across history and across many forms of media. By re-presenting collections of clips and tropes from many different sources, some forms of fan creative work can reframe these isolated moments, narrating them as part of a coherent process of serial repetition, and thereby act as an important form of aesthetic commentary and media criticism.

In many cases, multi-fandom vids that chronicle a series of repeated tropes throughout history have an overtly political purpose and message. Sometimes these collections serve to gather evidence demonstrating just how pervasive a particular plot device has become. Thus, in her vid "Stay Awake", Laura Shapiro brings together clips from nine science fiction series showing at least ten major incidents of forced impregnation, sterilization, and other devices that turned main female characters to incubators[34]. That these examples all come from the period from 1990 through 2010 only further underscores how often series portray pregnancy as a form of horror or torture, and how writers choose to reduce even otherwise strong and prominent female characters to their female biology. Taken separately, each of these series may appear to have good narrative reasons for using

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[34] Laura Shapiro, "Stay Awake" (2010).

such plots, and most of these female characters recovered from their reproductive trauma to continue growing and actively contributing to other stories. Yet isolating and presenting these events as a series allows audiences to experience the cumulative impact of these events throughout time. Watching the bodies of intelligent, competent women turned against them over and over again powerfully argues that the message such plot choices send casts the female body as vulnerable and frightening, making female characters constantly susceptible to the cruel whims of biology in a way that their male counterparts are not, since few if any of these series ever included similar plots involving male impregnation or external forces that steal male characters' reproductive choices. However, without "Stay Awake" the prevalence of these plot structures might easily pass unnoticed because their repetition occurred across the span of two decades. By narrating them together into a single story about what happens to women's bodies on screen, Shapiro lays bare the perhaps unconscious but still powerful cumulative effects of this series[35].

Some overtly political vidding projects simultaneously critique a history of limited and stereotypical depictions while also recovering and collecting counter-images celebrating more affirmative representations. "Space Girl" and "I'm Your Man" by Charmax as well as "Around the Bend" by Danegen each attempt to excavate both histories of silence and misrepresentation, alongside histories of rebellion and affirmation[36]. While "I'm Your Man" charts the history of lesbian representation, both "Space Girl" and "Around the Bend" take up the question of women's mobility, both literally and metaphorically in terms of women's access to transportation technologies, but also the social mobility and independence implied by the ability to explore the world, or even the universe. Collecting images throughout history of female characters from science fiction in "Space Girl", and women primarily with cars but also motorcycles, planes,

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[35] One might question whether "Stay Awake" functions as a narrative or essay; yet its aesthetics and structure borrow from both, creating a hybrid story that argues, or an argument that also evokes corporeal and emotional response. Elsewhere I have argued that fan works make arguments in a "genre commensurate form", meeting the strengths of video with video, and narrative with narrative. By presenting her argument in audio-visual form, Shapiro calls upon the same emotive, narrative, and aesthetic strengths which made the original materials she critiques into powerfully compelling cultural icons. She thereby attacks them in the same language with which they speak to audiences. Julie Levin Russo also takes up this line of inquiry. Kustritz, "Re: Public Sphere Theory", Discussion following "Gender and Fan Culture (Round Thirteen): Anne Kustritz and Derek Johnson", 2007, hosted by Fandebate on Livejournal. http://fandebate.livejournal.com/5330.html?thread=181458#t181458, last consulted on August 31th, 2007. Russo, p. 125-130.
[36] Charmax, "Space Girl" (2011). Charmax, "I'm Your Man" (2008). Danegen, "Around the Bend" (2010).

and spaceships in "Around the Bend", these vids reexamine the popular culture archive to find joyful moments when women and machines interact to produce representations of women with technical skill, expansive lives, and a shared community of other hyper-mobile female friends. "Around the Bend" in particular builds a strong story about an inclusive community of women who love their cars, motorcycles, and planes by incorporating fictional and real life examples of women of all ages and racial or ethnic backgrounds, as well as transwomen. Yet these projects also contain traces of the historical and contemporary limitations that made such images relatively rare and excluded women from technical professions. Near its end "Around the Bend" shows a magazine cover depicting professional race car driver Danica Reys with the caption "Yes She Can." In one sense this image affirms that women can and do drive race cars just as well as men and the subtitle "Danica Reys Up for Indy" attests to women's inclusion at the top of the profession. However, the very need to have a cover declaring "Yes She Can" also brings to mind echoes of the social forces that for so long made "no she can't" the reality of many women. The vid thereby positions its citation of historical and fictional women who love motors, from early aviators to modern "dykes on bikes" groups, against that shadow "no she can't", transforming the vid from a random collection of themed clips into a political statement about the imperative to keep loudly claiming women's right to be in the driver's seat.

"Space Girl" likewise incorporates the history of women's exclusion from both science and science fiction in the lyrics of its soundtrack which repeatedly recount the speaker's mother warning her to keep away from space followed by her refusal to heed that restraint. Thus the song's first lines stating "My mama told me I should never venture into space, / But I did, I did, I did", structures the problematic of the vid's images, which recover a history of simultaneous presence and absence. The dream of mobility and an expansive life full of adventure represented by the female characters of "Space Girl" not only characterizes the desire for more women in science fiction narratives, but may also represent the voice of the female science fiction fan, vocalizing her awareness of social forces that exclusively gender science fiction and science occupations as male pursuits, followed by her insistence on the right to follow her imagination and "venture into space." Thus, like "Around the Bend", "Space Girl" positions its characters and viewers against an implicit understanding that they often disappear from official histories of science and science fiction, making the narration of this series into a coherent collection again not a random assembly of similar images, but instead a strident insistence that these women exist. "I did" in this case speaks against the shadow script "you didn't", which would

argue that women have not been present in the history of science and science fiction and that women inherently have no interest in these genres and pursuits.

Like "Stay Awake", "Around the Bend", and "Space Girl", "I'm Your Man" also identifies forms of serial repetition throughout the history of popular culture, bringing into contact images that had been scattered by the passage of time. "I'm Your Man", also by Charmax, charts the history of lesbian representations, many of which include stereotypes, ranging from the repeated aesthetic characteristics of female cross-dressing to the unfortunate propensity for lesbian characters to die by murder or suicide at the story's close. The vid deconstructs these serial forms as destructive, while at the same time offering the possibility of recognition for people overwhelmingly underserved by mainstream media. Opening with a title sequence culminating in the statement "A Celebration of Media Clichés", "I'm Your Man" attests that, despite their sometimes painful content, some of these stereotypical representations may also offer pleasures because they at least allowed lesbian women to see themselves on screen in some form. Importantly, many of the images collected by Charmax play at the very edge of lesbian visibility and invisibility because within their original narrative context the characters' identities, desires, and relationships remained subtextual. However, by placing them in a series with much more overt scenes, Charmax explicitly positions these fragments as instances of desire between women, visualizing the archive of images reclaimed and eroticized by generations of LBTQ audiences. By reconnecting these cultural scraps and narrating their serial structure, all of these vids allow audiences a unique opportunity to question the collective affects of repeated representations and absences across history, and across media forms.

Yet not all multi-fandom vidding projects contain overtly political messages. Others collect aesthetic or narrative serial structures that would otherwise remain implicit across representations, while some unearth the emotional weight of serial structures that evade articulation in any other form. In "Flow" Lim thematizes the aesthetics of flexible serial transmedia narration[37]. By sampling from several contemporary representations of the detective figure, all of which have cult audiences, Lim exposes a surprising level of underlying similarity. Partly because these all include complex mastermind or puzzle plots Lim is able to meld each series' use of visual information management into one overall conspiratorial collection of ordered and hidden information. She also draws upon repeated gestures

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[37] Lim, "Flow" (2013).

and locations, to the point that in one sequence characters from two different shows appear to catch and throw each other the same rubber ball. Yet in addition to the coincidence of thematic and visual repetition, the title "Flow" also connects the vid to a classic concept in media studies: Raymond Williams' theory that television schedules structure a flow of images that encourages the audience to keep watching one show after another in sequence[38]. The vid performs this sequencing, melding these series together by unifying them artistically and connecting them all within the underlying aesthetic of information visualization wherein all ultimately surrender and dissolve into the 0s and 1s of digital code. These cyberaesthetics partly resonate with the characters' analytic minds and the shows' puzzle plots, but also act as an acknowledgement of the vid itself as digital art and the modern internet fan community as the force that unifies these perhaps otherwise disparate narratives into one overall serial flow. "Filthy Mind" by Sol Se demonstrates a similar principle, following a flow of repeated themes, images, and locations across an enormous array of cultish media sources[39]. The vid works aesthetically because these representations function as one meta-series wherein, perhaps more often than one might expect, characters repetitively scream at locked doors, wear black trench coats, display snake tattoos, dance at the same club, watch themselves on each other's televisions, run their hands along windows, and cringe while it rains blood. The message of "Filthy Mind" contains no clear or obvious ideological slant, but rather echoes the paranoid conspiracy aesthetics of Lim's "Flow" wherein the practice of viewing mass media turns into a kind of pleasurable *déjà vu*. In "Filthy Mind" the flow of televisual images becomes a question not of discrete narratives but of one overall serial multiverse wherein all characters and all stories interact and repeat the same imagery.

Finally, some meta-vids, or vids about vidding and fandom, unearth the serial processes of reception, identification, interpretation, co-authorship, and conversation by which media images resonate with a vast network of collective emotional connections. The collaborative vid "The Long Spear", primarily edited by jmtorres and Niqaeli *et al.*, was published with the eventual byline "Holy cow, it's harder to hear people cry than to hear them laugh", because so many audience members burst into tears while watching[40]. The vid's emotional power derives from its layering of

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[38] Raymond Williams, "Programming: Distribution and Flow", in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, New York, Routledge, 1974, p. 77-120.
[39] Sol Se, "Filthy Mind" (2007).
[40] jmtorres and Niqaeli *et al.*, "Vid Announcement: Star Trek, The Long Spear", 2009, hosted by Dreamwidth. http://jmtorres.dreamwidth.org/1366457.html, last consulted on May 10th, 2013.

many eras of resonant *Star Trek* images over each other, some professionally produced and others fan created, some referencing important plot moments and others referring to important social practices of *Star Trek* fandom. More than anything the vid is a love letter not only to the official texts of the *Star Trek* franchise, but more importantly to the community that collectively invests *Star Trek* with meaning through their shared interpretative practices and relationships with each other.

jmtorres explains that the title describes the way in which fannish or cult media develops emotional weight over time through serialization, noting with regard to Lois McMaster Bujold's Vorkosigan novels, "how the later novels like *Brothers in Arms* and *Memory* are that sharp point on the long spear, they have an emotional impact because of the history of the other novels they carry. I consider the *Star Trek Reboot* movie to be the sharp point[41]." By visually layering the history of older professional and fan created *Star Trek* narratives onto video clips from the new *Star Trek* reboot film (2009) the vidders formally show the way that fans watch cult media, allowing all the connections made by an information-heavy viewer to float to the surface of the screen. At first these images associate the new *Star Trek* reboot actors with the actors who played the same character in the original series, showing the way these images bleed into each other for a viewer who watched these in sequence. Then the vid's premise widens to incorporate not just memory of the same characters' previous lives, but also all the many characters from every version of *Star Trek* who all seem to walk through the bridge of the Enterprise together, followed by integration of other *Star Trek* story world space ships as well, pulling together the many diverse memories and emotional investments of different generations of *Star Trek* fans, so that each may recognize "their Trek" overlapping and joining together into one communal mythology.

Yet fans themselves and fan media are also present from the very beginning of the vid. In her article "Women, '*Star Trek*,' and the Early Development of Fannish Vidding", Francesca Coppa relates the story of *Star Trek*'s original pilot which included a female First Officer who would later be replaced by First Officer Spock because test audiences found a woman in such a position of authority implausible[42]. The actress who played the original Number One, a woman too strong and analytic to be believed at the time, became the voice of the Enterprise, the secondary

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[41] jmtorres, *ibid.*
[42] Francesca Coppa, "Women, *Star Trek,* and the early development of fannish vidding", in *Transformative Works and Cultures,* No. 1, 2008.
http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/44.

character Nurse Chapel, and eventually Mrs. Gene Roddenberry when she later married the creator of *Star Trek*. Coppa argues that vidding echoes this mixed legacy of women in *Star Trek* because as a predominantly female community vidding requires the very technical skill that test audiences found unbelievable in women, and powerfully comments on a genre that marginalized women from its inception by re-centering women's desires and perspectives. This history appears twice in "The Long Spear", as Number One becomes part of the collage of memories haunting the Enterprise, but also in the very opening frames when the vid starts with an argument between Captain Kirk and his misbehaving ship computer, which uses Number One's analytic yet female voice to both compute and sexualize the captain, insistently calling him "Dear" while performing the equations he requested. Just as Coppa described, the vid begins by positioning vidders and female fans in this dual role of analysis and desire wherein technological mastery becomes a tool of communal artistic pleasure.

That this is a communal and collective practice reverberates throughout the vid, not only because it was collaboratively edited, but also because it includes a section sung by a fan, images from fan works, images representing fans, and images of fans themselves. The soundtrack of the vid segues between "The Boxer", "Both Sides Now", and "Dante's Prayer" sung by a digital mix of Simon and Garfunkel, Joni Mitchell, Loreena McKennit, and a fan. At the beginning as Simon and Garfunkel sing about "a poor boy whose story's seldom told" the vid shows an ironic juxtaposition of Chris Pine as the new film version of Captain Kirk interspersed by images of women in 1960s-style fashions reading and writing, an allusion to the many female fans who loved the original *Star Trek* and loved each other's often erotic reinterpretations enough to found the first communities for transformative fan works. These fannish foremothers both loved the text and fundamentally changed it by leaving a legacy of their own desires and dreams layered upon the professional work. Thus the vid frames all that follows through the lens of their passions, as later fans who read fan works knowingly or unknowingly benefit from the community infrastructure and artistic experiments of those original female fans.

As the vid proceeds, the music changes to "Both Sides Now" and the images double, placing a series of small square pictures over the corner of video from the reboot film. The pictures come from "Both Sides Now" by Kandy Fong, the first vidder and one of the first vids ever made, and "Dante's Prayer" by Killa, one of the early vids made on a computer[43].

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[43] jmtorres explains, "Killa's Dante's Prayer, because Killa is a seminal Trek vidder of the modern era (Dante's Prayer has been cited as 'Hey, you guys! We can use those computers things for

These sequences again recall founding moments in the history of *Star Trek,* slash and creative fan communities, not only because they are often remembered as "firsts", but also aesthetically as the frame depicts the slide projector format. Seeing these fan works layered upon the professional film again reinforces the flexible seriality of transmedia narration by visualizing the rich associations that spring out of the image for fans with knowledge of interconnecting webs of professional and fan story components. Such fans situate the new *Star Trek* not only at the apex of the official professional multiverse, but also within a flexible, multiple transmedia multiverse that has been fundamentally reinterpreted and transformed by fan works and practices.

To underscore this point, the vid ends by pulling images of actual fans out of the frame. The section begins with Leonard Nemoy as the original Spock and Zachary Quinto as the new Spock holding up their hands to each other in the Vulcan salute, meaning "Live long and prosper." From within Spock's hand other images emerge of all the *Star Trek* captains making the same gesture. Then between the two Spocks more Vulcan salutes emerge, first by celebrities and President Obama, then a torrent of female fans suddenly fills the screen, all making the gesture for "Live long and prosper", each claiming space within the frame, within the *Star Trek* fan community, and within the ongoing story. The words of the song that play over the shared Vulcan greeting state in a computer-enhanced multiple voice "we are more or less the same", making a strident claim that all these fans, and all these professional and fan images, are unified and equal within the overall multivocal and multi-linear narrative. They all sing *Star Trek* together.

6. Narrative Investments across Media, Space, and Time

Fan works incorporate a layered history of numerous stories, desires, investments, and connections. Considering fan works as a form of transmedia seriality both aids in understanding the styles, aesthetics, and function of modern transmedia serial narration in its corporate and amateur forms, and focuses attention on audiences' role in the construction of serial effects. Coming to grips with fan works' avoidance of any centralized authority or canon that could provide (illusory) coherence and order to the narrative's pathway requires a flexible, multiple approach to

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vidding!'), and Kandy Fong's Both Sides Now, which is, so far as I know, the earliest vid of which we have visual record."
jmtorres, "Vid Announcement: Star Trek, The Long Spear."

serial forms. Thus in a transmedia serial multiverse, audience members traverse narrative strands both across media and across timelines, limited not (or not only) by a principle of realness, truth, coherence, or compatibility, but by cultivation of a serial trajectory that they uniquely find interesting and pleasurable to explore. Fans frequently navigate through and between franchises, and that refusal of boundaries between media properties, and possible and "impossible" worlds, facilitates an additional approach to media analysis as a consideration of the serial effects of representations, stereotypes, and emotional investments across professional and amateur media history. Unpacking the transmedia serial structures within fan works thus reveals the complex narratives constructed by fan communities ever since their "old media" story worlds crossed from slide projector to song to VHS to print to spoken word, and back again, while also demonstrating the vast richness of experience, aesthetics, and affect at play in fan engagement with transformative works.

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