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Homage, Collaboration, or Intervention: How framing fanart affects its interpretation

Jessica Seymour,
HU University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands

Abstract:
Generally, textual analysis minimises the intention of the creator in the conclusions that the researcher draws in order to avoid falling into the 'intentional fallacy' (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1946), which is when a reader expects the author or creator of a text to have had a specific plan for the text's interpretation and succeeded in achieving that plan. The 'death' of the author was said to give more interpretive freedom to the viewer. In fanart, however, the intention behind the work is important because it arguably establishes a point of reference for the viewer to understand the image. The intention of this paper is to propose and model an interpretive methodology for fanart that reflects whether a text falls into one of three categories: homage, collaboration, or intervention. By modelling this method, it is the researcher's hope that other scholars may use and develop it, as well as start a conversation in the scholarly community about how certain fanart works are created, inspired, and received depending on their relationship to the originary text. This paper argues that in order to properly analyse fanart, a recognition of the author's intention and where it stands in the community is necessary.

Keywords: fanart, interpretation, analysis, methodology, fan studies

Introduction

Generally, when engaging in textual analysis, researchers minimise the creators' intention in their findings in order to avoid falling into the 'intentional fallacy' (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946), which is when a reader assumes that the creator of a 'text' had a specific plan for its interpretation and succeeded in getting their intention across. This may not always be the case. The text may, for instance, have one interpretation during a particular historical moment and an entirely different one in another. Or, the author may have set out to create

a text with a particular underlying meaning but failed to express it in a way that would be accessible for the audience.

Fanart is one example of a text that relies on authorial intent for meaning-making. Fanart is the practice of creating artwork inspired by or derived from a piece of media. Since the days of mail-out fanzines, fans have engaged creatively with media. Fanfiction, in particular, has drawn some significant and exciting scholarly criticism (Van Steenhuyse, 2014; Curwood, Magnifico and Lammers, 2013). Fanart as a subdiscipline of creative fan labour has drawn *some* academic criticism, but not nearly as much as other fan labours – a surprising omission, considering the prevalence of fanart in online communities. Scholars tend to explore fanart as a practice, examining how art produced in the fan labour tradition benefits both the artist and culture (Turk, 2014; Manifold, 2009), as well as fanart as art worthy of interpretation and examination in and of itself (Schott and Burn, 2004; Brennan, 2013). Sarah Fiona Winters (2014) writes in her exploration of fanvidding in teaching environments, that art can be read in two ways: 'as creative texts to be analyzed; or as critical analyses of other texts' (p. 239). This paper will look at fanart as creative texts to be analysed, though an argument will be made that analysis of fanart should necessarily include at least a recognition of other texts that the artwork may be critically engaging with.

In fanart, the viewer will often have a point of reference from which to interpret the work; usually this point of reference is part of the work itself. The image, for example, may be of a popular character in a franchise, and so the viewer's point of reference would be popular cultural representations of that character. The artist will assume that the viewer will be able to recognise the image – if not, then they will add information to the metatext (the captions and hashtags associated with the image) to establish that point of reference more clearly. The artist may not intend for the image to be considered 'complete', and that may also be explained in the caption. Fanartists will occasionally post drafts and works in progress for critique, and these are not meant to be interpreted as completely finished works with all intentional meanings present. Fanartists may also post work that has been abandoned or left deliberately incomplete, offering it to the community so that the hours put into creating the image are not wasted, but with the understanding that it will not be considered a true expression of their talent/ability.

This paper explores an approach to interpreting fanart that is dependent on an understanding of whether a fanart text falls into one of three categories: homage, collaboration, or intervention. The intention of this paper is to model this approach so that other scholars may use it, as well as start a conversation in the scholarly community about how the relationship between fanart and originary text can affect interpretation. After a brief explanation of the interpretive method, the paper will explore fandom-specific case studies of artwork that can be classified as homage, collaboration, or intervention, what characterises these classifications, and how these classifications specifically change the reception and interpretation of the artworks in question. This paper argues that in order to properly analyse fanart, a recognition of where it stands in the community and the author's

intention behind it is necessary. Here, the intentional fallacy should not be avoided – it is an integral part of meaning-making.

Fandom, as Mark Duffett points out in his *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* (2013), is not a coherent object. There is no one way to approach the study of fandom and fanworks, as is clear from the hundreds of articles, books and blogs from scholars attempting to tease the phenomenon out. This paper is designed to offer a methodological approach that can be built upon or developed as necessary, or added to the methodological toolkit of interpreters in the fan studies community.

First, a brief explanation of the three categories: homage, collaboration, and intervention. These categories will be defined in more detail later in this paper, but in sum they represent this author's awareness of the most popular ways that fanart can interact with an originary text. An homage text is an artwork that is directly reflective of the original – an image of a beloved character, for example. A collaboration meets the originary creator in the middle, adding additional details to the work without necessarily altering canon. This could be seen in some fanart that visualises written or audio work, as is the case with podcast fandoms. These works may be transformative, but they are not necessarily critical of the initial work – they may remix, but they will not remix for the purpose of reflecting on the original. Collaboration can be intentional or accidental depending on the circumstances around the creation of the work. Intervention, meanwhile, *intervenes* deliberately in a text. Intervention fanart identifies a gap or a perceived shortcoming in the original and works to fix it. This can be seen in slash fanart, or fanart that racebends a character to add more representation to the canon. There may be other categories, but these are what could be considered to be the most the most useful when it comes to interpretation. Whether or not the artist intends for the work to be an homage, a collaboration, or an intervention on an originary text will also affect how others will read and understand it.

How can we know a fanartist's intention? As ED Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation* (1967) notes, authorial intent is a dangerous thing to suppose without evidence. That is not to say that recognising the intention behind a text is impossible, just that it is difficult and requires evidentiary support. When interpreting fanart, it can help to analyse the art with reference to the originary text – judging whether the artwork is transformative or reflective in nature. The degree of transformation/reflection will indicate whether the artwork falls into the homage, collaboration, or intervention classification. If the artwork, for example, portrays two canonically straight characters in a homosexual pairing (a common practice in slash fandom), then the work is an intervention because it is exploring alternative ways of viewing characters. The artist's intention, then, is to portray these characters in a relationship that has not been confirmed in the originary text. Other intentions, such as a desire to promote activism or normalise same-sex partnerships, can be gleaned by examining the metatext: the artwork's captions, hashtags, and the discussion around the art within the fan community. In essence, intention can be inferred by how the image is framed and with reference to the originary text from which the new artwork derives.

In approaching the interpretation of a visual text, this paper draws on and extends the work of Walter Werner (2002), who writes that there are seven ways of reading images: indicative, instrumental, narrative, iconic, editorial, oppositional, and reflective. With regards to fanart, this paper uses a combination of instrumental and indicative readings to provide a structure for judging the complex relationship between fanartist, viewer, and originary text. The other approaches are useful, but Werner appears to have intended them to be used individually and not as a set of practices – what this paper does is combine two of the more useful approaches from Werner's list in order to examine fanart. The combination of indicative and instrumental draws this interpretive method more into the realm of critical discourse analysis (see Kress, 2012) because it relies almost as much on the context of the image as it does on the image itself.

Rather than use all seven of Werner's approaches, which may introduce unnecessary complexity into the examination of individual texts, this paper models a combination of two approaches (instrumental and indicative) as these are the two most appropriate readings when analysing fanart. They cover a broad scope of what an analyst may look for in fanart, and they overlap with other concepts from Werner, such as the oppositional or reflective reading.

An instrumental reading involves essentially breaking down the image into its essential parts, viewing the text as a source of information that is 'assumed to be manifest in the text' (Werner, 2002, p.408). It requires that the viewer identify a) what is in the picture (minor and major details, where they are placed, and what is emphasised) and b) what these details tell (their connotation and denotation). This approach allows the viewer to draw inferences based on the information presented to them by the artist, with the assumption that the artist is aware – through repeated exposure to visual texts in the media – how these images in combination will be viewed. A red rose, for example, has romantic connotations, and if it is presented in the centre of an image between two characters, the romantic connotations bleed into the interpretation of the art. A wilted rose, however, has a more negative connotation – in keeping with the romantic reading, a wilted rose would indicate dying love. In general, most viewers in the 21st century will have been trained to view certain images in combination to mean certain things, and so by engaging in creating a visual text the artist enters a discourse in which certain symbols have certain expected meanings.

The next stage in this interpretive method is to analyse the artwork's indicative meaning. The indicative meaning allows the viewer to 'infer the implied social conditions that may have given rise to the image' (Werner, 2002, p.410). Fanart is reflective; it reacts to its originary text either as a celebration or as a critique. It exists in the context of a wider artistic and fan discourse, and so some familiarity with the originary text and the fandom is useful when trying to determine what the fanartist's goal is within their work. Wider social discourse can change over time; the popular Pepe meme, for example, became a symbol for Donald Trump supporters during the 2016 American presidential elections, which changed the discourse around the artwork and how it was used in other online spaces. It is therefore

important when interpreting fanart to take historical/social and fandom context into account, as that will affect how certain symbols may be read. To remix Werner's work so that it is more appropriate for examining and interpreting fanart (as opposed to visual texts in general), an indicative reading of the work involves a) establishing what the image is representing (the connotations and denotations based on the fandom context in which the artist is working), and b) examining whether the image is reflective or reactive. Does the image serve to record and reflect some element of the originary text, or does it remix it in order to draw attention to a gap or push the artist's perspective? This will indicate whether it is a homage work or an intervention, or some combination thereof (collaboration).

Indicative reading allows the interpreter to gain a sense of how the image may be designed to draw on the assumed viewer's knowledge and fandom context. It is this context which allows the interpreter to recognise whether the artwork falls into one of the three categories explored in this paper. Those viewers with a certain level of knowledge of the fandom's community, as well as any political issues that are important in that fandom's metatextual discourse, will have a privileged position when it comes to meaning-making.

Homage

Homage, in the context of fan labour, is a fanwork that celebrates an original work. Much fanart and prosumer labour in general can be considered homage because it is driven primarily by the artist's desire to share their love of the original text: the book, graphic novel, movie, TV show, etc, that inspired the art. Marjorie Cohee Manifold's (2009) work on fanartists and their motivations shows that often fanartists do not expect to pursue careers in the arts, nor are they expecting any profit from their work. Instead, they create their art out of a desire to celebrate the originary text through a tributary act that will be recognized and appreciated by other fans and (occasionally) the creators of the original work themselves. These artworks may be drawn to highlight a character or scene, perhaps to reinterpret it in a different style, but not change it enough for the artwork to be considered 'new'. It does not remix or fundamentally alter the originary text in a meaningful way.

In some cases, creators will solicit homage work in the form of competitions and awards for the most creative or talented fans to compete in. These kinds of events have two effects: they establish a warm relationship between the fandom and the creator by demonstrating to fans that creators are aware and supportive of their efforts, and they create more user-generated marketing content because fans will often share their work online – either separate from the competition or as part of it. In 2016, to celebrate *Game of Thrones*'s sixth season, the creators launched a fanart competition that gave fans the chance to see their art displayed in a special exhibition in London (McCreesh, 2016). This competition drew interest from hundreds of artists and the competition entries (those that did not win) are still displayed on the HBO website (HBO.co.uk, 2016).

The fanart in these cases is almost always homage work; the artists produce and submit work that celebrates the canon as opposed to work that explores potential remixes or fandom theories. This could largely be the result of fans wanting to avoid offending the

creators by not attempting to impose their ideas onto the work. Or, perhaps, it could be a recognition that creators are more likely to privilege and showcase works that support the canon (though, as will be discussed in the Collaboration section of this paper, this is not always the case). As discussed above, the primary intention behind Homage work appears to be a desire to share the artist's talent and/or interest in the fandom.

Homage work could be inspired in large part by the sharing economy of the internet – the idea that fans produce work for other fans, but not for profit. A popular way for fans to share content, particularly audio-visual content, is through gifs. Gifs are animated images that repeat on a loop, usually lasting a few seconds, and are particularly popular among social media users as 'reaction' images. They take characters and scenes from visual media like television and film, occasionally adding text if there is dialogue that the viewer needs to be aware of to understand the visuals that they are seeing. This is particularly the case in gif sets that reproduce entire scenes. They are primarily produced so that fans can share important plot points or their favourite scenes with others. Their shareabilty can muddy the waters of attribution; unless they are watermarked it is often impossible to track down their creators.

A good example of gif sets in the internet's sharing economy comes from the *Hamilton: An American Musical* fandom. *Hamilton* is a musical about the American founding father of the same name. As the musical is a live stage performance, it is geographically limited, so during its initial Broadway run fans had to rely on details of the show from secondary sources, cast interviews, and the cast album. As film footage of the stage performance began to disseminate through news platforms and other sources, fans quickly transformed the footage into gifs to be shared more widely.

Transforming audio visual content into gifs serves two purposes: first, it keeps the footage in the hands of the fans. YouTube and other video sharing platforms have been known to remove content that breaches copyright or which is not approved for viewing in certain countries, but gifs stay online and can be shared across borders. Second, gifs bring more people into the fandom by saturating other content when they are used as reaction images. If, for example, a fan from the *Homestuck* fandom posts a comment on Tumblr, only to have it reblogged by a *Hamilton* fan with a gif of one of the characters from the stageplay, then this creates a new connection between the two fandoms and allows others to see the *Hamilton* content. This homage content does not change the originary text, but it does allow others to enjoy the work.

Homage works usually require at least some background knowledge on the part of the viewer in order to be interpreted, so that they can recognise and appreciate the reference. With that in mind, interpreting texts of this nature can go one of two ways: either the interpreter can read the homage work as separate from the originary text or they can read it as an extension of the originary text. While this use of gif-imagery to disseminate information is technically adding to the fandom experience of *Hamilton* as a text, it could be argued that this is an act of homage on the part of fans who create them. The fans who create the gifs are not remixing or reacting against the originary text – instead, they are

highlighting what they consider to be important elements by sharing these images. In the case of the *Hamilton* fandom, the gifs act as an extension because without context from the originary text a viewer may not know where they came from or their significance. The gifs' meaning is necessarily entwined with the originary play/cast soundtrack. Interpretation without an awareness of these contextual clues is therefore quite difficult.

The *Hamilton* fandom's gif-making also deepens the viewers' experience of the originary text by opening dialogues about character motivation etc, which by extension allows viewers to more critically engage with and interpret the originary text on the back of fans' sharing practices. Creating the opportunity for more scenes to be shared allows more of the performance to be distributed than would otherwise be in the public domain. In the case of *Hamilton*, the fan who listens to the cast album will be aware that Hamilton and Eliza got married at the end of 'Helpless', but as one Tumblr user notes beneath a gif from the original Broadway performance: 'so im pretty offended that im just now finding out that mulligan is the flower girl in helpless. this was important info guys' (baetrice-duke, 2015). The cast album provides audio, but the visuals – how the stage was dressed and how other characters interacted – would have been inaccessible without the sharing economy of the fandom online and add an additional layer through which viewers can interact with the original.

Here, the instrumental reading of the image is: a man in blue American revolutionary soldier's uniform surrounded by other men, similarly dressed, and women in period dress. The gif shows him spotlit, indicating that he is the centre of focus, and he walks forward before tossing red rose petals into the air from a basket in his hand. The caption also includes the information: '[[edit: the gif is from the genius page for helpless, i have no idea whether it came from a legit source or a bootleg]]'. From the instrumental perspective, this caption serves to provide the context in which the image is meant to be read: that it is from the 'Helpless' song. In this context, it is reasonable to conclude that the man throwing flowers is the flowerboy, and *Hamilton* fans will recognise the actor, Okieriete Onaodowan, who played Hamilton's friend and fellow soldier Hercules Mulligan during the play's initial Broadway run. Interpreting the text, in this case, does rely on the awareness that it is an homage work because that will tell the viewer who the performers are in the gif and what their significance is.

Collaboration

Collaboration happens when artists work together to produce a new work. When fans create a new work based on an old one – whether they are remixing the original, or producing AUs that are loosely based on the canon – they are essentially meeting the original text's creator in an 'in-between space', where the fan can take what they consider important elements and then remix them into a new work for a new audience. The new works still rely on the old inspiration, context, and basic information (things like characters, settings, etc) that go into the original – and thus rely on some understanding of the original text for their indicative reading.

When it comes to collaboration, fans have never been better placed to work together on their art. Using instant feedback tools like shared documents, and social networks like Tumblr and Deviantart, and Skype, fans can work together to produce extremely elaborate works of art regardless of physical distance. Groups of artists write comic strips one post at a time on Tumblr. In these collaborations, artists will reblog each other's work and add a new strip to the running narrative – these strips are rarely intentionally collaborative, in the sense that they are not planned and the overall plot is not agreed on ahead of time. Like party games where each player adds a new word or sentence in quick succession, the stories in these online collaborations evolve with each improvised addition. These collaborations may incorporate different techniques that some fans are able to do better than others, or allow fans to work on projects by sharing labour hours and pooling their resources – producing something better than they could on their own with less work.

Occasionally, the collaboration may not even be deliberate. In 2013 John Green, a well-known young adult fiction author and YouTube personality, discovered a fan-produced poster inspired by his novel *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) on Tumblr. This poster was an homage work – it depicted a scene of the two main characters painted against a starlit sky, with a quote from the book superimposed on the top half of the image.

John Green has shown his appreciation for fan-produced work several times on the YouTube vlog channel he shares with his brother, Hank. The Green brothers have historically been fairly lenient with potential copyright and intellectual property infringements on their community's shared ideas because they do not want to selectively enforce trademark. Their community's catch-phrase 'Don't forget to be awesome' often makes its way onto merchandise sold in etsy stores and in fanart produced by fans of the vlogs. Unfortunately, the community's catchphrase has also made its way into 'legitimate' retailers who co-opted the phrase without the consent of the fandom that popularised the phrase and therefore retain a sense of intellectual property over it. These include retailers such as Urban Outfitters, Kate Spade, and Hobby Lobby. While the Green brothers *could* trademark the phrase to keep retailers from making a profit off their community, that would mean penalising fanartists who are producing work that is, in John Green's words, 'awesome': 'I don't want [to stop people using our catchphrase] because I don't want that stuff to stop existing. In fact, in many cases I want to personally buy it' (Vlogbrothers, 2013a). This indicates that the Green brothers are serious about allowing prosumer fans to engage in creative fan labour.

When John Green found the fan-produced poster inspired by *The Fault in Our Stars* on Tumblr, he'd intended to sell it legitimately through an online store and split the royalties with the artist. He quickly learned that tracking down a fanartist is harder than expected; the poster had, in fact, been produced in an accidental collaboration between two 16 year-old fans: Ashild from Norway and Nica from the Philippines. Nica had painted the original homage image and posted it on Tumblr, where it was discovered by Ashild who then remixed the image by adding a quote from Green's book.

As Green explains in a YouTube video, titled 'Across Three Continents: A Tale of Tumblr, Copyright, and Excellent Posters' (Vlogbrothers, 2013b), technically this collaboration violates intellectual property on several levels:

> … neither Nica nor myself gave permission to [Ashild] to make the poster. But we both love the poster. So the three of us on three different countries came to a royalty agreement… international copyright law just isn't ready for that kind of thing.

By 'that kind of thing', he means the fandom prerogative of drawing inspiration from others' work, remixing, repurposing, sampling, and creating entirely new works of art from the old. The unintentional collaboration from Green (the originary text's author), Nica (the artist behind the homage work), and Ashild (the remixer), is an interesting insight into the kinds of relationships that can form within fandom communities. People *share* as their primary method of engagement, and that sharing creates a space in which technical breaches of copyright law can actually be a source of exciting new work. As long as everyone is attributed and credit is given where credit is due, the community continues to grow happily. The internet has helped to broaden the transnational connections between fans that allows these like-minded communities to strengthen despite limits of geography (Jenkins, 2006; Thomas, 2007).

The instrumental reading of the *Fault in Our Stars* poster is: two people sitting on a bench – one is wearing a blue dress and nasal cannula, while the other is wearing a suit. The two are leaning into each other, and based on the directions of their gaze, the posture of the male with his arm slung around the other, and heteronormative expectations of romance, the connotation of this image is that the pair are engaged in a romantic relationship. The background of the image is reminiscent of the night sky, though the white lines could also be considered creases – as though the paper had been folded over and over again. The colour scheme is unobtrusively grey scale, which focuses the reader's gaze on the full-colour characters in the foreground. At the top of the image is the phrase: 'I cannot tell you how thankful I am for our little infinity'. The phrase is split over two lines, with a line break before 'for'.

The indicative reading is that these characters are Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters, the main romantic pairing in *The Fault in Our Stars*. The night sky in the background could be read as a reflection of the title. Hazel's nasal cannula are a recognisable visual marker for the character – her blue dress and Augustus's suit places the image in Amsterdam, where the characters famously enjoyed a romantic date in the city. The quote is from Hazel's eulogy to Augustus after he died.

The fact that the quote was added by a second person after the poster had been created has interesting connotations for the interpretation of this piece. While the image is an homage snapshot from the book, the text gives the image a reflective, mourning tone. The pair in the image are happy but the text indicates that they will not be so for long –

which is likely not the original intent of the first artist, and only came through in the collaboration. The writing itself, being split into two lines, guides the reader to pause after the feeling of gratitude to read the phrase 'for our little infinity' on its own. This emphasises the brevity of the time that the pair in the image had. There is irony in the fact that it is the (visibly) healthier of the two who will die first, and a member of the fandom will recognise that.

As discussed in the Homage section, there are occasionally cases where creators will encourage or solicit fanart. In some cases, however, the creator soliciting the work specifically requests remixes. In this case, it could be interpreted as even more strongly driven by collaborative and repurposing ideologies because the originary creators are encouraging the fanartists to add or develop concepts.

YouTube personalities, Daniel Howell and Phil Lester (danisnotonfire and AmazingPhil) enjoy drawing attention to their fans' art. They have produced Tumblr tag videos where they showcase artwork, they included a fan-craft segment in their stage show and, for many years, Phil presented fanart in his videos during the 'Draw Phil Naked' segment. There are unsolicited remixed works in the fandom as well, particularly in the vidding subcommunities where fans often sample and remake videos with the pair of them, usually to draw attention to potentially romantic subtext that they believe is present in the pair's relationship.

Daniel and Phil are interesting content creators because they actively collaborate with their fans to produce and celebrate remix work. The pair built a website to promote their second book, *Dan and Phil Go Outside* (2016), which allowed fans to remix the front cover ('Dan and Phil Go Outside', 2016). These remixes were featured in a video as well, titled 'Dan and Phil React to #DAPGO Memes!' (AmazingPhil, 2016). This hyper-awareness and celebration of fan labour is an exciting element of the YouTuber/viewer relationship. Other YouTubers, like Gabby Hanna (TheGabbyShow) and Colleen Ballinger (Miranda Sings), use fanart to decorate their walls and then perform their videos in front of those walls so that the fans' work is showcased. This may not be considered an active collaboration because the fans, while no doubt excited to see their work in a video, are not invited to 'collaborate' in the way that Dan and Phil's fans are. Similarly, when they were publicising their co-authored book *The Amazing Book Is Not On Fire* (Howell & Lester, 2015), they wrote fanfiction of themselves and their 'relationship', which the fans illustrated. They then read these works out loud during videos with the fans' art running concurrently (danisnotonfire, 2015; AmazingPhil, 2015) to give the impression of an animated short video that was collaboratively produced by them and their fans.

Daniel's video, 'The Urge' (danisnotonfire, 2015) is captioned: '"The Urge" written and narrated by Dan Howell. Illustrated by you!' The caption also includes a Tumblr post that credits specific fans with specific images, but the initial caption's identification of 'you' invites any viewer to feel as though they are part of the experience of the text. The fact that the images were created based on the written text indicates the intention of the artists – these are homage works – as well as the intention of the story's originary author. As the one

who chose which images to use alongside his words, Daniel acts as the ultimate meaning-maker in this text.

The instrumental reading of this video is complex, but this is largely due to the fact that the text itself is not a single image: it is a collection of images that make up a story with narration to connect them. It falls short of animation, since the transitions between the images are not moving rapidly enough to imply movement. For simplicity, we will focus on the image shown between 0.44-0.46 as a segment of the larger text, which is shown while Daniel narrates: 'Dan had time to think about this journey, time to think about the night before.'

This image is of a face – typified by the hair and ears on either side of it – but instead of features, the outline of the face is filled with hand-written text. The text reads as a stilted stream of consciousness with very short sentences strung together in capital letters, such as: 'I'm so sorry. Too fast. My friend is dead.' The text also makes reference to blood, suddenness, and the name Phil. These details can be read together to imply a person whose mind is occupied with the sudden loss of a loved-one; specifically, a 'Phil'.

The indicative reading is reflective of the fandom context and the author's (Daniel's) intension for the narrative that the image is illustrating. The hairstyle shown in the image is a well-known silhouette that Daniel and Phil use in their joint merchandise – it, and the whiskers that they draw on each other's faces, are recognisable within the fandom. Even if the text within the silhouette did not identify Phil as someone that the person in the drawing is *thinking* of, rather than the person in the drawing, fans would recognise the hairstyle in the silhouette as Daniel's.

The image also recalls themes and discussion within the fandom. A common theme in fanfiction is loss and grief. In this community, fans will often write stories that kill off one of the men in the slash pairing – usually Phil, though Daniel is also killed in fanfiction – to explore how the other would cope with the loss. During a video in which Dan and Phil reacted to Tumblr posts from the Phandom community, Dan asked the audience to 'stop killing Phil', though he was laughing at the time, indicating that the request is not meant to be taken seriously. In 'The Urge', Dan has chosen to adhere to fandom tradition by killing Phil.

On the one hand, Dan's image is being appropriated in the fanart, but on the other hand Dan himself is appropriating fandom culture by drawing on the themes in the community as well as illustrating those themes with the artwork. The relationship between collaborators and originators is blurred in this example, and conclusions about who is being appropriated and to what end are elusive.

Intervention

As with homage and collaboration, intervention requires a certain amount of knowledge of the originary text on the part of the viewer – otherwise, they will not recognise what changes have occurred, where, or the potential reasons behind the change. Some interventions are well-known in certain fandoms and are easy to identify; slash pairings, for

example, are common in the *Star Trek* fandom. An interpreter will be able to recognise an image of Captain Kirk kissing his Chief Science Officer, Mr Spock, as an intervention because the pairing is not canon in the television series or films. In some cases, however, fandom intervention may not be as recognisable if the viewer is not privy to the series canon. In *The 100* fandom, for example, slash fanart of Clarke Griffin and Lexa was an intervention during the first two seasons of the show. However, the pairing was made canon in season 3, so an interpreter would need to know when the fanart was created in order to judge whether the art is an intervention or an homage.

Genderbending is an intervention strategy in fanart and visual mainstream media that draws attention to the cultural and political socialisation of binary gender performance. Genderbending involves drawing a character with their gender reversed. Genderbending characters from mainstream media is a common practice among fans, particularly when the narratives in question have an unequal ratio of male to female characters. It is worth noting that genderbending is not just limited to turning male characters into female characters; genderbending can also be used in instances where the ratio of female to male is higher. Fanart explores the aesthetics of genderbending and how gender changes are expressed both physically and narratively, while other fan labours like fanfiction and fanvidding explore the effects of gender on narrative and character expectations.

Genderbending can also draw attention to troubling social and cultural expectations of gender. Women in comics, for example, tend to be drawn in revealing poses and dress, taking on secondary roles in the structure of the page (posed in the background, crouched down so that they are shorter than the male characters, etc) and fighting stances that are apparently drawn with the intention of showing their bodies despite the fact that their poses could not reasonably be considered appropriate in a battle context. These poses are known as ‘brokeback’ poses. They are used to show off the female characters’ breasts and lower body in a single frame. It is a hyper-sexual form of artmaking that renders the female characters in physically impossible poses for the benefit of the male gaze, while the male characters are shown in more physically likely poses – bearing their muscles and bodies in a way that supports a hyper-masculine power fantasy without rendering them unrealistic (McGee, 2015). Traditional comics authors and artists assume the maleness of readers, and so by portraying women in contorted poses which display their bodies, these images give the male viewer ‘a sense of privileged access and power’ (McGee, 2015, p.34).

In response to the portrayal of female characters in these comics, fanartists in the comic book community began to intervene and remix the originary texts by drawing new art that exposed what they considered to be the unnecessary sexualisation and absurdity of gendered poses leading to the genderbending movement within the comic book community: the Hawkeye Initiative (Scott, 2015; Kirkpatrick & Scott, 2015). For this initiative, fans would draw the male character, Hawkeye, in the positions typically reserved for female characters in order to demonstrate this absurdity. The Hawkeye Initiative, while exciting from a prosumer engagement perspective, has been explored adequately in other scholarship. It is therefore beyond the scope of this paper; it is mentioned hereI mention it

only to give an indication of the political motivations that have driven genderbending in the past.

Genderbending is not limited to the comics community. Take, for example, anerdquemoraaolado's gif set on Tumblr, which genderbends Bilbo Baggins from *The Hobbit* film franchise (anerdquemoraaolado, 2015a). The gif set uses Nathalie Dormer to stand in the gifset as Bilbo Baggins – or 'Billa', as anerdquemoraaolado has dubbed the female version of the character. The instrumental reading of the set is that this is a series of six images – three of a male and three of a female, both of whom are in period dress. In the first image, the male character is surrounded by gold and in the process of looking up at someone off-screen. The second image shows the female looking distressed, her hands behind her back, and she appears to be shouting. The third shows the male looking to the side and speaking, though his brow is furrowed, while the fourth image shows the female walking forward, with tears in her eyes, speaking in the direction of the third image. The final two images are of the male and female character respectively, looking at the viewer. Running beside these images is the following text:

> ***What are you doing here?***
> *Trying to bring you some sense*
> ***I'm doing this for them***
> *This is not what we want you to do for us. Be Thorin Oakenshield, the leader we swore our loyalty*
> **Billa tries to talk to Thorin about his goldsickness** (emphasis in the original)

The use of Bold/Italics, Italics, and Bold indicates a separation of dialogue – instead of the traditional gifset with words running beneath the images, the text alongside reads as a script that can be read concurrently with the images. The Bold/Italicized text is for the male, assuming that the artist uses the Western reading system of left-right, and the Italicized text is for the female. Since there are only two characters but three variations on font, the Bold text at the end can be read as stage directions or clarification.

The connotations here are quite clear when taking the characters' body language into account. The pair are arguing – with the female apparently becoming more emotionally invested in the argument than the male. The final two images can be read as the pair coming to an understanding because they are performing very similar gestures.

The indicative meaning of the gifset is made explicit in the final line of the caption: 'Billa tries to talk to Thorin about his goldsickness'. In *The Hobbit* franchise, goldsickness is a type of madness that affects dwarves when they are surrounded by gold, and Thorin Oakenshield is a character who suffers from this condition. Bilbo Baggins, in the originary text, does try to speak to Thorin about this sickness, but he is not as passionate about it as the gifs of Natalie Dormer would suggest. The text, or 'script', is not from the originary text. It is an invention of the artist, a way to account for the speaking in the gifs, and it hints at the larger thread of loyalty and fidelity that runs through the franchise. This conversation

also harkens back to the fandom theme of Bilbo curing Thorin's goldsickness with love – either in a slash pairing or in a genderbent heterosexual pairing usually played out in fanfiction.

Anerdquemoraaolado has produced a series of gif sets that cover a number of scenes between Billa and Thorin, including a scene where Thorin's nephews call Billa 'auntie' (anerdquemoraaolado, 2015b), and another where Billa is pregnant (anerdquemoraaolado, 2015c). Natalie Dormer is used as the female face-claim for all of these scenes, providing continuity to the series and allowing the viewer to infer that, even though the goldsickness scene is not given closure in this particular gifset, there is an expectation that Thorin is cured and the two have a future together.

It is clear that Anerdquemoraaolado was creating an intervention work in this gif set. Other intentions are more difficult to discern. There are gender politics at work that may be implicit or intentional; one could, for example, conclude that the genderbent character's more emotional response to the situation is indicative of a gender normative representation of female characters. One could also explore the potential philosophical implications of eros love and its represented relationship with mental health, or how the feminist care ethic is developed through young women inserting themselves into dominant narratives in order to affect the outcome. When it comes to intervention work, interpreting the effect of the *new* text is up to the scholar's expertise.

Conclusion

The intention of this paper was to model an approach to interpreting fanart that takes into account the author's intention and the conception of the artwork – what traditions are at work in the fan community, whether the originary texts' creators are aware of and celebrate the work, et cetera. Simply, without knowing whether the artist intended the work to be an homage, a collaboration, or an intervention, the interpreter or analyst can't then know whether to approach the work as a stand-alone text, or whether additional information is necessary to understand the thematic depth in the work.

The three categories of fanart that identified herein – homage, collaboration, and intervention – is designed to help streamline the process of determining how the fanart texts in question can be approached by scholars. In fanart, the intention behind the work affects how it can be interpreted because it establishes how the art is responding to the originary work and thus whether it should be read for socio-political themes, community and media standards, et cetera.

Homage work, for example, acts as an extension of originary works and so it would encourage scholarship from the realm of participatory culture and media studies. In the *Hamilton* examples explored above, scholars could explore how the digital space has affected the accessibility of geographically-limited artforms. The collaboration between Daniel Howell and his fans bring into question the nature of ownership and appropriation; who, and what, is being appropriated in this collaboration? Daniel has the ultimate power over meaning-making because he put together the final work, but he was limited in his

ability to create the final video by the types of fanart that were submitted. The social relationship between fans and creators can be explored in this collaboration, as well as in others, and brings with it questions of legality and intellectual property. Intervention lends itself to particular disciplines of scholarship depending on the type of intervention being performed: genderbending lends itself quite readily to a gender studies reading, slash fanart can be explored from the perspective of queer theory, while racebending (the act of reinterpreting characters as different races) has postcolonial implications.

The instrumental/indicative reading is a visual text-specific approach to critical discourse analysis that combines connotation and denotation with an awareness of fandom context. This approach allows scholars to do two things: identify which category the fanart in question falls into, and how to approach the text with an awareness of fandom discourse in mind. If a scholar knows that a fandom has a particular interest in exploring certain themes – death and loss in Daniel Howell's fandom, for example – then the scholar can use that to identify whether the artist may be attempting to explore, react, reinterpret, etc. This, in turn, allows the scholar to better place their own understanding of the work.

This paper is intended to act as a starting point for discussion. It is hoped that other scholars will build on this work. Fan studies scholars should feel free to remix this methodology, adapt it, and improve it so that we have a more rigorous approach to analysis.

Biographical note:

Jessica Seymour is an Australian researcher and lecturer at HU University of Applied Sciences, Utrecht. Her research interests include children's and YA literature, transmedia storytelling, and popular culture. She has contributed chapters to several essay collections, which range in topic from fan studies, to *Doctor Who*, to ecocriticism in the works of JRR Tolkien. Email: jessica.seymour@hu.nl.

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