

REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POPULAR DISCOURSE

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Lay Abstract

This sandwich thesis of works published from 2010 – 2017 considers how we talk and write about social media in relation to a variety of other concerns: authorship and popular fiction, writing and publishing, archives and everyday life, celebrity and the opaque morality of media promotion. The project addresses social networking platforms (primarily Twitter and Facebook) and those who serve and critique their interests (authors, readers, academics, “everyday people,” national archives, celebrities and filmmakers), often focusing on the “meta” of the media they take as their focus: “extratexts,” reviews and interviews, tweets about books and books about tweets, critical reception, etc. By examining writing on and about social media, this work offers an alternative, context-specific approach to new media scholarship that, in its examination of things said and unsaid, will help inform our contemporary understanding of social media and, by extension, our social media experience.

Abstract

This sandwich thesis of works published from 2010 – 2017 takes up the discursive articulation of “social media” as a mobilizing concept in relation to a variety of other concerns: authorship and popular fiction, writing and publishing, archives and everyday life, celebrity and the opaque morality of media promotion. The project addresses social networking platforms (primarily Twitter and Facebook) and those who serve and critique their interests (authors, readers, academics, “everyday people,” national archives, celebrities and filmmakers), often focusing on the “meta” of the media they take as their focus: extratexts, reviews and interviews, tweets about books and books about tweets, critical reception, etc. It considers “social media” as an idea or, more accurately, a system or constellation of ideas, a discourse or discourses beyond the mere technological. It examines the authority and impact of these discourses—not the use or usefulness of social media, but the ways these media are taken up, avoided, buttressed and manipulated in the most casual to the most politically contingent venues. In order to better comprehend and articulate the ideas, investments and ideological frameworks grounding social media discourse, this collective work traces and critically assesses the comparisons we make in an effort to render these media familiar and readable; the genealogies we construct in an effort to contextualize them and make their meanings legible; the stories we tell and the venues in which we tell them, to harness their creation and existence for other means, to authorize and deauthorize, to empower and disavow. By examining writing on and about social media, this work offers an alternative, context-specific approach to new media scholarship that, in its examination of things said and unsaid, will help inform our contemporary understanding of social media and, by extension, our social media experience.

Acknowledgments

I will let this monument
Represent a moment of my life
("Monument," Röyksopp & Robyn)

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* Photographs by Pamela Ingleton

Declaration of Academic Achievement

All chapters were written by Pamela Ingleton, with the exception of Chapter 5 (“From Clooney to Kardashian: Reluctant Celebrity and Social Media”), which was undertaken as a collaboration with Lorraine York and to which both parties contributed equally.

All previously published material (Chapters 1-4) has been reproduced with permission, with permission pending for Chapter 5, accepted for publication in *Celebrity Studies* and forthcoming in early 2018.

Introduction: Navigating Social Media Discourse



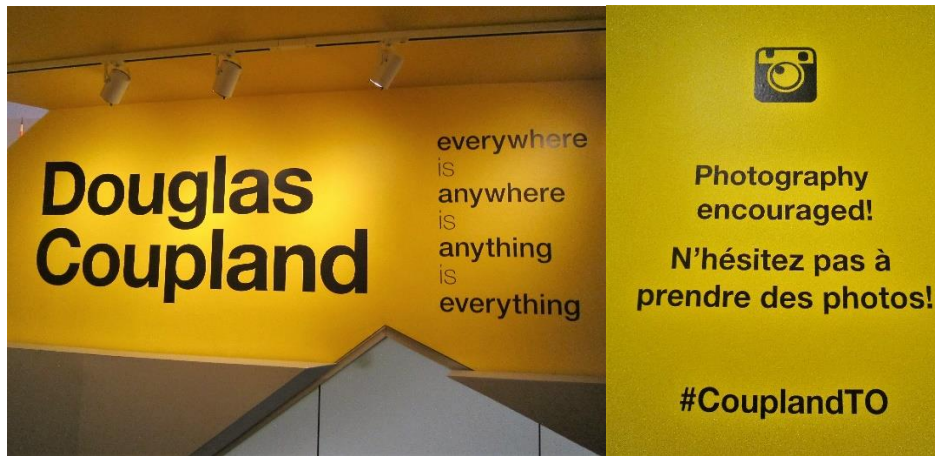
I can think of no better artifact with which to introduce this dissertation than Douglas Coupland's "Slogans for the 21st Century" (2011 – 2014). I first encountered this piece in *everywhere is anywhere is anything is everything*, the accompanying volume to the first major survey exhibition of Coupland's artwork curated by the Vancouver Art Gallery. I had the opportunity to view the exhibit in person when it visited the Royal Ontario Museum in March 2015. "Slogans" is so many things: vibrant, hip, commercial; unsubtle, reiterative, overwrought. Produced within the same timeline as the work included in this thesis, it captures

the discursive life of social media as I have attempted to trace it across popular culture, journalism and social commentary, not only within its statements but also in the manner of its utterance. While the placard description for the ROM's exhibit suggests that it targets the effects of the "omnipresence of technology" more generally, I cannot help but see this piece as Coupland's rather grim summation of the (perhaps not so) social experience of social media: ALL CAPS, bold, black letters of blatant, unrepentant messages signaling hollow social feeling—or a lack thereof.



His piece assumes a certain legibility on the part of both its creator and prospective audiences, relying on an assumed social media shorthand. When we read these statements, we are supposed to “get them,” resonating, as Stephen Colbert’s character would say, in our “gut.” Their presentation, towering as they

do from floor to ceiling, in rows of contrasting and assaulting colour schemes, is intended to overwhelm, because, you know, we are being overwhelmed—consumed, even—by social media. Get it? We are not supposed to leave feeling good, unless, of course, we count ourselves amongst the offline holdouts who have staved off the social media onslaught. Because if “Slogans” is meant to represent a vision of life with and within social media, well, it ain’t pretty, even if the colours are.



In *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, Nancy K. Baym, referencing the work of Marita Sturken and Douglas Thomas, proposes that “[t]he messages we communicate about technology are reflective, revealing as much about the communicators as they do about the technology” (23). Who, then, is Douglas Coupland, sloganist of 21st century technology? According to Sarah Hagi’s review of the Toronto exhibition, Coupland’s visual phrases are “meant to be provocative, but come off as something out-of-touch parents think navel-gazing young people tweet about,” a sentiment echoed in John Semley’s *Globe and Mail* review of Coupland’s *Kitten Clone: Inside Alacatel-Lucent*, a deep dive into the

“mundane,” “unsexy” world of routers and cable that support Internet

functionality:

It's this sort of totally meaningless statement that typifies Coupland's dusty media guru philosophy, reading like a Twitter spambot spitting out sub-McLuhanist pith. Coupland is a lively, sharp, and occasionally very funny writer. But this sort of techie-transcendentalist Zen koan stuff is embarrassingly Web 1.0, and accomplishes little beyond making him sound like an anxious, 19th-century Chicken Little who thinks electricity is some kind of sorcerer's trick. (Semley)

Ouch. Both Hagi and Semley target Coupland's age and out-of-touch-ness, and while I have no interest in setting up a full-scale examination of social media along generational lines, taken together, their critiques and Coupland's work do a fine job of outlining the primary scope of this dissertation: popular social media discourse(s), fed by (aesthetic, moral, etc.) judgments of technological change and innovation, laced with fear and anxiety and chock full of a bunch of stuff that sounds meaningful but ultimately says very little. Coupland's manipulation of ideas related to the human and “humanity” (e.g. “Humanity hasn't been as mentally homogenized since the last ice age” and “I would like to speak with a human being please”), the severity of which is likewise mimicked in the critiques of his work, represents a gesture of discursive manoeuvring found in contemporary social media commentaries that I elaborate on throughout this thesis and particularly in its concluding chapter. Commentaries like Coupland, Hagi and Semley's and the discourses used therein are precisely what are under consideration here, as opposed to the media they take as the objects of their analyses. This project is all about talking about how we talk about social media.

During an interview to promote *Kitten Clone*, Coupland recounts trips to Berlin and London and the scenes encountered there with tech-savvy youngsters in “egregiously hip hotels:”

I would walk through the lobby and everywhere I looked, in every chair and every table, there would be a twenty-eight-and-a-half-year-old holding a MacBook Pro and probably an iPad and had buds in their ears—sort of like pigeons on a telephone line—but everyone was doing their own thing but they were all doing it together. I think maybe this is some new form of socialization where, okay, you *could* be up in your room doing whatever you’re doing, but it’s still somehow a little bit nicer to be down here in my own bubble but surrounded by other people just like me inside their own bubbles. And then I realized, you know, maybe it’s always been that way it’s just that you’ve never seen it expressed this way before. (“Douglas Coupland”)

I am appreciative of this anecdote, operating as it does somewhat in opposition to the bold statements and sentiments of “Slogans.” While the scene’s depiction of a group of people “alone together” recalls the phrasing of another frequent new media commentator (and one decidedly pessimistic about social media’s ever-increasing social integration), Sherry Turkle, Coupland’s subtle transition away from the doom and gloom of Turkle is significant, opening up the possibility of interpreting things anew. After all, if Chicken Little can pause for a moment to reflect a little more deeply on the status of the falling sky, then the rest of us can, too. I open with these contrasting Coupland cases because both Couplands are relevant to this study, and in fact their duality and interrelation offer a useful framing of the discourses and analyses to come.

In the days since I first began working on this project I have borne witness to the first American president with a Blackberry and a subsequent American

president with Twitter-based foreign and domestic policy (among other things); the rise and fall, belief in and critique of “social media revolutions;” a rapidly expanding subculture of online bullying and “trolling;” a new generation of “millennial” “digital natives,” permanently armed with smartphones (a contributing factor to the escalating digitally driven violence); Twitter hashtag conversations and segments on television news programs devoted to social media coverage; the new (Facebook) ceding ground to the newer (Twitter) ceding ground to the newest (Instagram and Snapchat) in the social media popularity wars; iPods, iPhones and iPads EVERYWHERE. Welcome to the so-called social media age, caught somewhere between the suggestion and realization of that moniker. Regardless of whether social media will come to be known in retrospect as the defining phenomena of our time,¹ as Crispin Thurlow notes, “[i]t certainly seems that everyone and everything is nowadays positioned in relation to social media. We are everywhere incited to use them, and to reconceive our lives around them” (225-226). Indeed, *social media are all around*, and increasingly, the stakes of social media are high, much higher than the endless cracks about expressing what one had for breakfast suggest (Arceneaux and Weiss; Carr; Rosenberg; Thompson). Social media have become lightning rods for debates on everything from politics and democracy to security and privacy to community and sociality to the overly invested catchall of our (possibly thriving, possibly withering)

¹ In 2006, Time named “You” (i.e. web users) person of the year, citing the influences and successes of YouTube, Wikipedia, MySpace, Facebook and other Web 2.0 hotspots as the reasoning for their selection (Grossman).

humanity. Where society (and here I am primarily invoking a Western society with access to the technologies that enable social media participation) locates itself is frequently a rehearsal or reiteration of where “social media,” both the operating principle and the media to which the term refers, locate themselves: what they can and cannot do, how they are benefitting and destroying “society,” and so on.

What are social media? What is a social network? What does it mean to be part of the social media age or generation? The terms “social media” and “social network” have become ubiquitous within popular discourse, generating over 1.2 billion and 190 million Google hits, respectively. Previously, the “it” term used to refer to these media was “web 2.0”: coined as early as 1999 and most closely associated with “buzzwordophile” (Morozov) Tim O’Reilly, web 2.0 essentially refers to user-generated Internet content and media, a presumed shift in the approach to the World Wide Web by both producers and consumers that corporate media (Fuchs) was quick to sell as “*alternative and progressive*” (Manovich 321). The meaning and origin of the term are contested, and some have dismissed it altogether.² Likewise, the categorical distinctions between what might constitute the original web (or web 1.0, a “phantom term” [Hinton and Hjorth 12] retroactively applied to earlier Internet culture [Dahlberg] in a manner that itself highlights the discursive construction and comprehension of these media) and the web to come (web 3.0, which some argue is already here [Nations]) are equally up

² World Wide Web creator Tim Berners-Lee, for instance, considers the term to amount to little more than jargon (Anderson).

for debate, though these debates have more to do with branded nomenclature than a definitive means of accounting for the supposed evolution of the Internet.

For the purposes of this investigation, social media refer to relatively recent technologies, the most oft-cited of which include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Snapchat, etc. (quite literally to the point of hundreds more). Much like “web 2.0,” the “meaning” of “social media,” a term that might actually predate web 2.0 by several years,³ is similarly contested, but a recent definition from Graham Meikle manages to incorporate several of the most oft-cited characteristics: “social media are *networked database platforms that combine public with personal communication*” (Meikle 6).⁴ While social media and social networks may be “new” (though increasingly less so), they are, of course, not entirely novel, at least in the sense that “social network” predates the advent of Facebook or even MySpace. In the years before the social media boom, it would not be unusual for one to speak of one’s own or someone else’s “social network”—the resonances of their reference would simply be different than they are today. We have existed within social networks of various shapes, sizes and forms for a long while (Baym; Bolter and Grusin; boyd; Gitelman; Kember and Zylinska). Likewise, technological innovation has supplied us with diverse and ever-evolving social media: the one-to-one, long-distance communication made possible by the telephone, for instance, or the

³ While many have thrown and continue to throw their hats into the ring, Jeff Bercovici traces its first published use to a paper written by Darrell Berry in 1995 (Bercovici).

⁴ Meikle’s definition captures danah boyd’s “networked publics,” Jean Burgess’s “platform paradigm,” where user-generated content and social networking converge (Burgess 282), and social media’s simultaneous public and privateness cited by José van Dijck (2013) and others.

simultaneously shared and individual viewership enabled by the television. Not to mention (as many have), *all* media are social (Bruns; Kember and Zylinska; Papacharissi, “We Have”), even if not all media can and should be considered “social media” (Meikle x).

According to the OED, a “network” is many things, including “[a]ny netlike or complex system or collection of interrelated things,” “[a]n interconnected group of people,” as well as more context-specific definitions relating to computing, broadcasting and electricity. Networks are complex connections. Networks bridge gaps. The social network, as it has come to be called, is likewise complex, and more often than not relies heavily on this idea of bridging gaps, of bringing people together, of connecting the heretofore unconnected. The goals of a social network are lofty, appealing and, perhaps most of all, sellable. A social network, thus, is that most efficient contemporary space for facilitating human interaction and sociability, for potentially reaching the largest number of people in the shortest amount of time and with the least amount of effort...or so the story goes. Of course, the use and function of “social network” is much more fluid and complicated than this. Is it a site, a service, a program, a platform? A network of ideas, of computers, of people? A meeting place, an aggregator, a creative space? Is it “in there” or “out here”? Is it a process or a thing, an idea or an actuality—or something in between? Instead of a precise definition, terms like social media and social network have amassed discursive constellations of ideas about our relationships with technology, our world, each

other and ourselves.⁵ A social network is what we say it is, and folks have had a lot (of very different things) to say. In the process of becoming through how it is envisioned, it is envisioned in large part through what it becomes. It is a utopian promise for some, and a dystopian nightmare for others.⁶ It is as serious and superfluous as these interpretations. In other words, it is many things, and it is also not many of these things, but it is certainly a conversation in which we continue to be engaged, constituted within diverse signifying practices grounded by diverse investments.

My work considers “social media” as an idea or, more accurately, a system or constellation of ideas, a discourse or discourses beyond the merely technological and towards what some have called the “technological imaginary” (Lister). I examine the authority and impact of these discourses—not the use or usefulness of social media, but the ways these media are taken up, avoided, buttressed and manipulated in the most casual to the most politically contingent venues. Who “authors” the social media narrative, how and for what purposes? How do we read the resultant social media story? And as these terms/concepts become more naturalized, what about social media do we take for granted? With

⁵ Among those to explicitly consider the discursive construction of social media: Andrew Chadwick, Dahlberg and Stine Lomborg in the inaugural issue of *Social Media + Society*; Nick Couldry and van Dijck, in relation to the semantic normalization of the “social;” Meikle, in relation to Facebook’s targeted self-representation to users vs. stakeholders; Richard Rogers, in relation to an articulated lineage of revolutionary technologies; Adrienne Shaw, in relation to feminist theory; and Michael Stevenson, in relation to the “cybercultural moment.”

⁶ Zizi Papacharissi explains how technological discourses, particularly those articulated in relation to democratic politics, become situated within this inherent opposition: “Usually, these discourses are framed within utopian and dystopian polarities that represent hopes and fears projected onto these newer technologies. It is not uncommon for people to make sense of the new by categorizing it as positive or negative, as a way of relating it to their everyday lives and goals” (*Private Sphere* 3).

these questions in mind, this dissertation traces the tenets, rhetorics and discourses produced by, within and beyond various social media, critically assessing the discursive formations that shape subjects' engagements with these media, as well as our investments, assessments and overall critical understanding of these engagements—what Milad Doueihi refers to as “the interdependence of the technological and discursive in the constitution and formation of the production, distribution and reception of both identities and knowledge” (56). In order to better comprehend and articulate the ideas, investments and ideological frameworks grounding social media discourse, this collective work traces and critically assesses the comparisons we make in an effort to render these media familiar and readable; the genealogies we construct in an effort to contextualize them and make their meanings legible; the stories we tell and the venues in which we tell them, to harness their creation and existence for other means, to authorize and deauthorize, to empower and disavow. These discourses both are influenced by the media in and around which they are produced, and, in turn, influence and alter those media that produce them. In other words, my work posits neither a strict technological determinist nor social constructionist consideration of the relationship between social media and discourse (or, more expansively, media and society⁷); rather, my project assesses the dialogic or *two-way* relationship between text and technology, a process elsewhere referred to as “social shaping” (Baym;

⁷ The distinction made here represents an increasingly prominent gesture in the field to consider the relationship and interactions between society *and* media, as opposed to their discursive conflation as occurs with “social media” (Bruns; Couldry and van Dijck; Katrin Weller et al.).

boyd; Papacharissi, *Networked Self*) or “domestication” (Baym 24). My interest lies not purely in the ethics of this relation but in the very discourses that constitute and buttress the ethical debate surrounding their interaction. I consider the text/technology (society/media) relationship through critical readings of the present social media moment and its manifestations, related new media scholarship and popular commentary, as well as the means by which we construct, accept, grant and refuse authority in a technological landscape of protocols and networks (Galloway). In *Technological Visions: The Hopes and Fears That Shape New Technologies*, a collection of essays that analyzes the language and images used to represent emergent technologies (up to and including the Internet), editors Sturken, Thomas and Ball-Rokeach acknowledge technological development as

one of the primary sites through which we can chart the desires and concerns of a given social context and the preoccupations of particular moments in history. The meanings that are attributed to new technologies are some of the most important evidence we can find of the visions, both optimistic and anxious, through which modern societies cohere. (1)

As its intervention into the field, my project similarly attempts to take a step back from assessments of social media’s virtues and vices, instead engaging in a close analysis of the discussion itself and how popular social media discourses affect both social media and the issues explored in social media in interesting, compelling and complex ways.

What follows is a “sandwich thesis” of works published from 2010 – 2017 that all in some way or another take up this question of the discursive articulation of social media as a mobilizing concept in relation to a variety of other concerns:

authorship and popular fiction, writing and publishing, archives and everyday life, celebrity and the opaque morality of media promotion. The project addresses social networking platforms (primarily Twitter and Facebook) and those who serve and critique their interests (authors, readers, author/readers or fanfic writers, academics, “everyday people,” national archives, celebrities and filmmakers), often focusing on the “meta” of the media they take as their focus: extratexts, reviews and interviews, tweets about books and books about tweets, critical reception, etc. Specifically, much of the material that comprises the individual case studies could be classified as promotional material, which is inevitably engaged in discursive representations of prominent ideas of and associations with social media. Because the chapters are self-contained, brief literature reviews and summaries of critical precedence are correspondingly embedded in individual chapters. Most notably for the context of the overall project are the critical frameworks of chapters two and six, which, respectively, attempt to set up a chronology of hypertext and digital writing in relation to the emergence of Twitter and a categorization of new media criticism through the lens of critical discourse theory (most notably that of Michel Foucault) in relation to representations of Facebook. Additional chapters draw on work from authorship theory (chapter 1), archive and everyday life theory (chapter 3) and celebrity studies (chapters 4 and 5). The case studies that provide the material for analysis are diverse and variously gathered and thus the expressions they render of “social media” writ large are necessarily and inevitably imperfect or, at the very least, incomplete,

offering somewhat contingent provocations of larger social media questions.

There are many other examples that could have been used to further explore the various dimensions and operations of and within social media discourses; one hopes such examinations can and will continue beyond this project.

The first chapter takes an extended look at *Harry Potter* author J. K. Rowling and the storied history of her series since the publication of the final official novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Beginning with her public outing of character Albus Dumbledore as a gay man, the chapter explores Rowling's attempts to establish and retain control over her narrative, characters and fictitious world in interviews, public statements and post-*Potter* creative output—efforts that extend to social media in later years as Rowling becomes more comfortable with Twitter and releases her own online *Potter* hub, the interactive website Pottermore. As the introductory note to this chapter (originally published in 2012) points out, Rowling's actions in 2007 immediately following the publication of *Hallows* seem to anticipate the social media culture that would follow shortly thereafter, and only intensify once she immerses herself more fully within it. With Pottermore, Rowling can gesture to a more open, participatory culture of storytelling, while policing that participation at every turn.

Chapter two explores the relationship between authorship, print culture and social media, particularly in its analysis of *Twitterature: The World's Greatest Books in Twenty Tweets or Less*. This novelty publication written by then-college students Alexander Aciman and Emmett Rensin, which adapts

classic works of literature into series of tweets, functions as a jumping-off point for deeper explorations of an ongoing reliance on print discourses and their corresponding comprehensive frameworks, as well as a sense of how the authority linked to print publication is buttressed in *Twitterature* and beyond. While several of the examples cited in this chapter have since become somewhat outdated (the piece was originally published in 2012), the chapter's meta-reflection on the phrasings and framings we take for granted in our transmedia assessments of texts and the power accrued in their production, promotion and consumption is subsequently taken up and updated in different ways in the chapters that follow.

The third, brief chapter and the first published (2010) of the dissertation proposes the consideration of social media and specifically Twitter as a form of contemporary mass-observation along the lines of Britain's (and *Britain's*) Mass-Observation project begun in the 1930s. Drawing on the work of Antoinette Burton, Arjun Appadurai and, most centrally, Henri Lefebvre, it gestures to a consideration of social media as a potential site of (more) transgressive, (more) democratic archivization in the capture and representation of the thoughts, experiences and declarations of everyday Twitter users. This potential is set up in opposition to the more top-down archivization practices of the Library of Congress (following that body's accrual of the complete Twitter archive), but is also independently critiqued given Twitter's tendency to reproduce the conditions and constraints of capitalism: while Twitter does open up a space for recording lives lived beyond those of the most privileged and elite, the preponderance of

attention remains focused on the latter, throwing into question the potentiality of this everyday archive altogether.

By the time we get to chapters four and five, the landscape of Twitter has evolved, and visions of capturing and archiving “the people” begin to be dismissed as the platform becomes dominated by celebrity figures. The full spectrum of contemporary celebrity interactions with social media (from the social-media-saavy microcelebrities to the social-media-resistant A-listers) is considered across these two pieces, as well as an interrogation of the signifying practices of social media usage in relation to both these celebrity categories and wider distinctions regarding the meaning(s) attached to using social media. These arguments are cast against a landscape where the distinctions between social media, eager (and therefore vulgarized) celebrity (of the likes of reality television star Kim Kardashian) and even politics (embodied by blink-of-an-eye candidate-to-president Donald Trump) merge and blur. The second of the two chapters, then, targets such casual equivalencies and the process by which they are established, probing for what they could and do work to obscure.

Finally, the sixth chapter of this thesis (and the only chapter not previously published) shifts the focus away from Twitter and onto Facebook, considering how the most populated social media platform represents itself and is represented in contemporary popular culture. Readings of the promotion and reception of *The Social Network*, the 2010 film written by Aaron Sorkin and directed by David Fincher, and Facebook’s first “brand video” or commercial, “The Things That

Connect Us,” directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, draw out the clearest articulation of “social media discourse” offered in the dissertation, exploring how both pro- and anti-Facebook contingents weave their arguments through assumedly self-evident deferrals to the “humanity” at stake in social media’s rise and perpetuation. Just as Coupland’s work relied on affective, knee-jerk reactions, these directors and promoters bank on reactions that surpass reflection, while nonetheless inspiring deep-seated feelings of hope and possibility or fear and denunciation.

I blame myself for taking so long to get here (to the end, and to so many new beginnings) that I now face the unfortunate task of wrapping up a dissertation that tracks and explains the discursive machinations in popular representations of social media one year into a Donald Trump presidency. It is useful, perhaps, to think of Presidents Obama and Trump as bookends to this dissertation, attached as they are to two very different (and yet immanently related) versions of a social media society. In 2007, amid calls of change and “Yes we can,” Barack Obama was dubbed the first “social media president”⁸ and was lauded for a campaign that made use of social networking platforms to (re)energize a base and reach new groups of voters (Papacharissi, *Private Sphere*). This title, which one could argue was garnered as much through timing as through a cutting-edge media strategy,

⁸ A few years later there was similar talk up north here in Canada, where #elxn41 became colloquially known as the “social media election,” with media outlets eager to cover the new influence of Facebook and Twitter on contemporary politics. Research on social media’s *actual* effects on the election itself suggest a significantly less impactful role than media coverage initially suggested, with significantly more one-way communication than two-way, and outcomes that were “impressionistic rather than substantive” (Taras and Waddell 96-98).

may have stuck had it not been for the antics of his successor. The Obama administration's attempts to cement his legacy as a presidential digital innovator⁹ by releasing the first (partly crowdsourced) presidential social media archive (Bogost; Miller) were quickly overshadowed by the Trump campaign, the first months of the Trump presidency and *all those goddamn tweets*.

By 2017, politicians have joined journalists, comedians and other celebrities as the most prominent participants on social networking platforms. Arguably Trump, at least as he would tell it, straddles all four of these roles. It would take at least another 250 pages to even attempt to account for Trump's use of Twitter before and during his presidency. A recent CNN special, "Twitter & Trump," consistently failed to air, disrupted, ironically enough, by the "breaking news" of the president in question's persistent tweeting and massive Friday night news dumps. The special would have chronicled "the marriage of man, message and machine" (Weir), focusing on Trump's history of using Twitter from the early days of his @realDonaldTrump account (initially used solely to tweet quotations from his books [Barbaro]), to more recent tweets while president, attacking political figures on both sides of the aisle, goading North Korea and enacting surprise policy in 140 characters (including a recent ban on transgender military service people). As CNN host Bill Weir points out in a short piece introducing the special, Trump's Twitter story begins much earlier than most would think; the day

⁹ The scope of this "innovation," however, is limited. In *The Social Media President: Barack Obama and the Politics of Digital Engagement*, James E. Katz, Michael Barris and Anshul Jain point out that "the Obama Administration has readily embraced social media tools to advance preexisting objectives, but it has not used the technology for any true exercises or experiments in large-scale pure democracy" (166).

after Obama's second successful election in 2012, Trump took to Twitter to assert, "We have to make American great again!" The rest—unfortunately—is history. Despite his 15 years on Coupland, Trump has become "an improbable virtuoso of the tweet," who claims that he would not have won the presidency had it not been for Twitter (Weaver). Although, for all his praise of the platform and the direct access it permits him to "the people," he nevertheless chooses to compare "his Twitter feed to a newspaper with a single glorious voice: his own" (Barbaro)—a newspaper presumably outside the bounds of "the media" whom he so relentlessly mocks and disavows.

Trump's "glorious" vision of a monolithic messaging machine is vexing for many reasons, but it is the partial anachronism of Trump's view of Twitter as the realization of some sort of William-Randolph-Hearst-meets-Joseph-Goebbels propagandist spectacle that is particularly provocative in the context of this dissertation's arguments. I picture Trump picturing his Twitter feed as a newspaper without editors and co-authors that operates as a megaphone; I see Weir promote his special on CNN seated behind his enormous bound volume of all of Trump's tweets, printed as if their heft and might can only be truly apprehended if made manifest in this way;¹⁰ I hear pundits unfailingly search and reach for historical precedence even if, increasingly, it is difficult to find. Conversely, there is also endless talk about "never before" and "uncharted

¹⁰ Similarly, *The Daily Show* set up "The Donald J. Trump Presidential Twitter Library" in New York City, a parody of traditional presidential libraries and an actual, physical gallery that fans could, for a short time, visit.

territory”); hearing this I cannot help but remark that a white, privileged man attaining and abusing power through strategies of casual to pointed racism and naturalized misogyny sounds more normal than living it might feel. With Trump we see just how much Twitter has entered the mainstream, all while what is consistently framed as Trump’s inappropriate and exceptional (mis)use of the platform is simultaneously decried. The discourse of exceptionalism (reminiscent of the discursive excess of Never Better/Better Never/Ever Waser formulations cited later in this dissertation—Never Worse vs. Ever Worse?) pervades not only discussions about Trump, but discussions about social media, and perhaps is revealed most expressly when the two are considered together. Recently, Twitter co-founder Evan Williams spoke about social media’s central role as what Jacob Grosheka and Karolina Koc-Michalska have termed an “ideological horseshoe” responsible for “dumb[ing] down the entire world...[,] reinforcing dangerous beliefs and isolating people and limiting people’s open-mindedness and respect for truth” (Weaver).¹¹ Notably, Williams’s newest venture, the social media platform Medium, is exempted from this harsh critique and positioned instead as an “alternative”¹² to competitors like Twitter. Medium, says Williams, is better because it is bigger, unlike the short-form content generated on Twitter that he claims operates as “just noise” (Weaver). Trump and Williams are basically

¹¹ Williams previously apologized to the world for Twitter’s role in Trump’s election, citing concern over how the platform rewards extremes (Weaver).

¹² As a prominent creator of and contributor to all of Blogger, Twitter and Medium, I am not sure how scholars like Robert Gehl, who distinguishes between “corporate social media” and “alternative” media production that “challenges concentrations of media power” (Gehl), would feel about Williams positioning himself as in any way “alternative.”

newspapermen, you see, entitled to the respect that role traditionally commands, much like fictional patriarch Will McAvoy of Aaron Sorkin's *The Newsroom*, which is discussed briefly in chapter six. All of which is to say: every time we talk about social media, we find ourselves inevitably talking about something else, with a casualness that operates as if the two are unmistakably equivalent. Rarely, however, do we pause to interrogate these connections and to ask what we assume and elide in the process of making them, and what structures and frameworks we might come to reinforce in the name of a noble critique. As Tim Highfield points out, we "should not ignore how the platforms used are themselves parts of the political debate" (*Everyday Politics*) but this does not mean they are the sum or equivalence of that debate.

In "The Library of Babel," Jorge Luis Borges traces the "extravagant happiness" and "excessive depression" (55) of those who encounter a library—or universe—that is "unlimited and cyclical," a world where "everything has been written" (58) but cannot possibly be read in its entirety. This is our contemporary data-driven experience, online and increasingly mobile, and, truth be told, it is likewise reflective of the experience of this research, conducted across years of significant technological change and its accompanying discourse, desperate to articulate that change and give it meaning and context. By examining writing on and about social media, my work offers an alternative, context-specific approach to new media scholarship that, in its examination of things said and unsaid, will help inform our contemporary understanding of social media and, by extension,

our social media experience. In his own short story response to “The Library of Babel,” “The Net of Babel,” David Langford writes, “The Library...does not assert; nor does it deny. It simply is...[I]t is not...a mere mirror that reflects whatever we offer up to it” (35). Langford’s characterization—or, rather, resistance to characterization—of the Library reflects the fruitless dichotomies that much of the writing on new and social media trades in and the ways in which we look to the Internet and social media for reflections of some true meaning(s) when meanings are instead more productively understood as they are constructed and consumed through discourse; like language more generally, we are bound to this discourse, but this does not prevent us from being attentive to and critical of it. Assessing the seemingly perennial newness of discursive reactions to new media and specifically discourses surrounding social media and democracy in Obama’s first presidential campaign, Zizi Papacharissi proclaims, “[m]yth does not operate without metaphor” (*Private Sphere* 8). Whether through the bright, bold posters of Douglas Coupland, the sentimental salesmanship of Alejandro González Iñárritu, or even Donald Trump’s inelegant, offensive tweets (and corresponding reactions to all of the above), it is clear that we find ourselves immersed in processes of social media meaning-making that influence and impact, and are influenced and impacted, by other, greater forces and ideas of contemporary life. The goal of this project, then, is to better understand our interactions with and framings of social media by critically reading the

negotiation of textuality and authority, the relationship of text and technology and the discourses produced therein.

**“Neither Can Live while the Other Survives:” Harry Potter and the
Extratextual (After)life of J. K. Rowling**

Introductory Note

“Like her fictional uber-villain Lord Voldemort, Rowling’s biggest fear appears to be death—in this case, the death of the author” (Ingleton, “Neither Can Live” 176). There is perhaps no greener—and, coincidentally, possibly no older—line in the dissertation than this one, which likens J. K. Rowling’s extratextual efforts to enhance, edit and enlarge the *Harry Potter* canon during and after the publication of her seven *Harry Potter* novels (and their film adaptations) (and their prequels and pseudo-sequels) to her character Voldemort’s determined efforts to achieve immortality through the production and dispersion of horcruxes. Naturally, this line—which now elicits a half-shudder from its author—has emerged as the select soundbite of those who have referenced this chapter in various contexts since its publication. Originally appearing¹³ in the volume *J. K. Rowling: Harry Potter* (2012) edited by Cynthia Hallett and Peggy Huey (which *Times Higher Education* called “exquisitely written,” “engaging” and “rigorous” [Ellis], if you will pardon the not so #humblebrag), this chapter has since been taught in undergraduate courses,¹⁴ referenced in articles, monographs and theses¹⁵

¹³ The first iteration of this piece was actually composed in 2008 as the final submission for a graduate course on authorship and/as industry.

¹⁴ Over the past few years it has been included in the syllabi for English 4CB3: Contemporary British Fiction and English 1CS3 Studying Culture: A Critical Introduction at McMaster University.

¹⁵ Among them Amy Billone’s *The Future of the Nineteenth Century Dream-Child: Fantasy, Dystopia, Cyberculture*, Tess R. Stockslager’s Ph.D. thesis, *The Author Who Lived: Charles*

and, in February 2014, taken up as a critical touchstone when, in a manner that has become her signature, Rowling made a bold pronouncement regarding a hidden “truth” about her series’ characters that was not expressed in the original series itself: that Hermione Granger should have ended up with Harry Potter instead of Ron Weasley. In an interview with Emma Watson (the actress who portrayed Hermione in the eight *Harry Potter* films), Rowling explains,

I wrote the Hermione/Ron relationship as a form of wish fulfilment. That's how it was conceived, really. For reasons that have very little to do with literature and far more to do with me clinging to the plot as I first imagined it, Hermione ended up with Ron...I know, I'm sorry, I can hear the rage and fury it might cause some fans, but if I'm absolutely honest, distance has given me perspective on that. It was a choice I made for very personal reasons, not for reasons of credibility. Am I breaking people's hearts by saying this? I hope not. (Sims)

Rowling’s “I know, I’m sorry” says it all: as she anticipates the “rage and fury” of fans she prefigures the old-hat nature of her protestations, implicitly recalling the countless times she has found herself in a similar predicament of her own making.

When news of this interview broke, I casually tweeted a number of journalists covering the story to let them know about my work documenting Rowling’s impulse to intervene in the consumption and interpretation of her *Harry Potter* narrative post-publication and soon found myself on an international call with *The Telegraph*’s Sam Marsden, attempting to articulate the history of Rowling’s resulting “text in flux” (Ingleton 183) and to situate this latest extratextual commentary within the timeline of her previous authorial

Dickens, J. K. Rowling, *Their Fans, and Their Characters* and Marthe Dahlin’s M.A. thesis, *All Was Well’: The Problematic Representations of Evil in the Harry Potter Series*.

interventions. Marsden summarized my argument thus: “[Rowling] is speaking for the books instead of letting the books speak for themselves... She wants to be the one we depend on for information,” which, I argue, fans interpret as “entering on their territory.” The coverage of *The Telegraph*’s reporting was widespread,¹⁶ and the exposure, in addition to Rowling’s persistent commentary, allowed for one of those rare moments in academic work where you stand back and cautiously wonder, “Am I really onto something?” Rowling has not disappointed in her fulfillment of my theoretical prophesizing. The list of her ongoing efforts to further demarcate all things *Harry Potter*—beginning with her outing of Dumbledore, the impetus for the chapter that follows—is exhaustive and will not be outlined in its entirety here, but includes, since the publication of my article in 2012: new short stories released via Pottermore, including the four-part “History of Magic in North America,” which was leveled with indictments of indigenous appropriation following its release (Deerchild); numerous tweets offering rationale for various narrative choices (e.g. why certain characters were killed) and additional details fleshing out characters’ backstories and future lives; a new West End play, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, technically written by John Thorne (playwright) and John Tiffany (director) but “based on an original new story by J. K. Rowling” (whose name appears twice as large as the other scribes on the front cover), which premiered July 30, 2016 and was published worldwide

¹⁶ Personally, my favourite coverage came courtesy of the young journalists at the *Phoenix* newspaper out of Hills Road Sixth Form College in Cambridge who, in an article on Rowling’s comments about Ron and Hermione, characterized my *Telegraph* statements as “pessimistic” and unfair to Rowling, which was deeply endearing and perhaps the time I have most regretted not archiving a webpage (it has since disappeared).

as an accompanying “special rehearsal edition script” the following day; a new series of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* films based on the companion book of the same name, the first of which debuted November 10, 2016, with four additional films scheduled to follow; and finally (for now) two new companion volumes, *Harry Potter – A History of Magic* and *Harry Potter – A Journey Through a History of Magic*, to be published in conjunction with a forthcoming British Library exhibition (opening October 2017) (Gonzales; Haysom; Khatchatourian and McNary; Stevens). For those keeping score at home, Rowling told *Reuters* at the premiere for *Cursed Child*, “I think we're done...Harry is done now” (Babington and Maguire). Evidently the accuracy of this statement will depend on one’s interpretation of “done.”

This proliferation and diversification of *Harry Potter*-related texts following the publication of the original seven novels led a group of Potter scholars with the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association to develop a five-part categorization system of Rowling’s extratext. As this group contends, “The Harry Potter fandom and HP Studies is highly inclusive and widely interdisciplinary. Limiting the canon question to the traditional ‘is or isn’t’ distinction violates the fundamental nature of HP Studies and what the series means to fans” (Camacci). As a result, they have concluded that the five facets of the *Harry Potter* canon should be articulated as: 1) “canon” (consisting of the original seven novels); 2) “alt-canon” (the eight *Harry Potter* and five *Fantastic Beasts* films); 3) “para-canon” (a riff on Gérard Genette’s “paratext,” including

the *Cursed Child* play/transcript, illustrated editions of the *Harry Potter* novels, all of the film scores, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme parks in Orlando, Osaka and Hollywood, *A Very Potter Musical*, academic work on *Harry Potter*, etc.); 4) “fanon” (fan-related content, such as fan and slash fiction and cosplays); and finally 5) “meta-canon,” which is essentially what I refer to throughout this chapter as “extratext” (including the companion books, *Fantastic Beasts* screenplays, Pottermore content, Twitter content, interviews, etc.) (Camacci).

With a scholarly group so deeply engaged in the project of merely sorting all *Harry Potter* output, it would be easy to conclude my chapter’s premise a success. However, despite being “right” on several fronts, I would be the first to admit that my account of Rowling’s efforts falls short. The most obvious oversight of the original article is quite simple: capital. When I point out that the experience of *Harry Potter* has, in essence, become hyper-“individualized” (Ingleton 183), I have set the stage for but failed to execute the argument that this tiered pseudo-individualization of the *Harry Potter* experience is characteristic of a more widespread mode of cultural production under neoliberal capitalism. What results is more than a differentiated reading experience for any and all potential readers, as I argue in the chapter itself (183); more than this, encounters with the *Harry Potter* official/alt/para/meta-canon become a matter of what text can you *pay for*. I do touch on this—highlighting, for instance, Henry Jenkins’s caution that Pottermore’s pay-to-play fandom works to “capture and commodify

participatory culture” (qtd. in Ingleton 189)—but do not explore it in any depth. Presumably there are economic dimensions, too, to Rowling’s determination to “constrict the ability of a fan/reader to engage with the text” (Ingleton 190), at least as it relates to production (of “fanon”) and, more importantly, to profit. Ultimately, Rowling’s protectionist tendencies overlook how “the information we access is refracted through a social and cultural mechanism that inevitably pushes some sites and ideas to the forefront while burying others” (Szeman and O’Brien 332), something I explore in greater detail in my co-authored chapter on reluctant celebrity and social media. We will always listen to—and buy from—Rowling because Rowling is Rowling: authorized, official, known, famous.

In this way (and others), Rowling’s is a particularly contemporary phenomenon, driven by the new norms, logics and frameworks of hypermediated social media.¹⁷ As Bond and Michelson note, Rowling’s outing of Dumbledore and all the details that she has offered since are “actually indicative of the way popular fictional narratives might be understood in the age of Web 2.0: as ever-expanding networks of story” (qtd. in Ingleton 187). Even if her earliest extratextual—or metatextual—revelations were not facilitated by social media, they serve as precursors to the culture to come and into which Rowling has eagerly immersed herself. Somewhat ironically for Pottermore, there could be no better tool to facilitate Rowling’s impulse to share than Twitter, given the

¹⁷ Likewise, “Rowling’s fame is of a quintessentially late 20th and 21st century nature, especially in that it is often played out and is constantly proliferating on the internet, through digital media” (Martin and Miromohamadi 140).

unprecedented immediacy of social media as an extratextual space. For these reasons, this chapter on Rowling and *Harry Potter*, a chapter not specifically about social media, offers a useful entry point into an extended consideration of how social media is represented, experienced and mediated in our contemporary moment. Finally, my husband insists I cannot conclude an introduction to this piece without first acknowledging a small but significant anecdote from my own past. In 2007, when Rowling released the then “final” *Harry Potter* book I was...a rather enthusiastic fan. So enthusiastic, in fact, that after finishing the novel (in one sitting, as only a true fan would), I raced to my computer, desperate for collective mourning and commiseration, and created the Facebook group, “PPD: Post-Potter Depression.” At its height, the group had over 14,000 members, and facilitated daily reflections, musings and analyses of all things *Harry Potter*. There is something of prophecy in there, my husband claims. I am less inclined to think of it in those terms, but it does seem to bring my own journey from Potter to Facebook and back again.

**‘Neither can live while the other survives:’ *Harry Potter* and the Extratextual
(After)life of J. K. Rowling**

Ingleton, Pamela. “‘Neither Can Live while the Other Survives’: *Harry Potter* and the Extratextual (After)life of J. K. Rowling.” *J. K. Rowling and Harry Potter*, edited by Cynthia Hallett and Peggy Huey. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. pp. 175-193. Reprinted with permission.

Introduction: J. K. Rowling and The Extratextual (After)life of *Harry Potter*

On June 23, 2011, a week after initiating a countdown somewhat cryptically heralding the advent of a new web-based *Harry Potter* project, J. K. Rowling released an online video officially announcing “Pottermore”: an interactive online interface facilitating an “online reading experience unlike any other,” the content of which, Rowling claimed, would come to be provided by both Rowling herself and fan participants. In the video, Rowling suggests that fans and readers will build Pottermore, though she quickly adds, that her presence will be obvious as she shares information about *Harry Potter*’s world that she has been hoarding since she started the series. While this latest *Potter* project seems to have been designed at least in part to traverse the presumably discrete realms of author and reader, as I will argue in the following pages, Pottermore, rather, is simply the latest example of Rowling’s insistent need to constantly assert and *reassert* (authorial) control over her text(s) and carefully monitor and indeed police her

brand and literary universe. In the following chapter, I situate the release of Pottermore, Rowling's *Harry Potter* addenda or supplementary publications and especially her controversial "outing" of the Professor Dumbledore character back in 2007, alongside various authorship theories, in an attempt to offer some tentative conclusions about the ways and means of Rowling's authorship and the anxieties informing the management of authority in our contemporary publishing landscape.

Amidst the hype surrounding the *Harry Potter* series, the personal story of author J. K. Rowling has become as well-known and as oft-quoted as Harry's own; one would be hard pressed to find any Harry Potter fans completely unaware of their fetish's auteur. Since rising to prominence with the unprecedented success of *Potter*, Rowling has been the subject of several biographies (e.g. *J. K. Rowling: The Wizard Behind Harry Potter*, *J. K. Rowling: A Biography*), documentaries (e.g. *J. K. Rowling: A Year in the Life*, *J. K. Rowling: The Interview*) and television specials (e.g. "J. K. Rowling: One-on-One" on NBC's *Today*, "Oprah and J. K. Rowling in Scotland" on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*). Several of Rowling's television appearances occurred (well) after the release of the seventh and final instalment of the *Harry Potter* series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*; much of the content of these post-*Hallows* interviews reveals an impulse on Rowling's part to ensure that her work, and her control and authority over it, remain intact now that the Harry Potter saga has (presumably) drawn to a close. Challenged by pre-publication speculation like that of *Maclean's* columnist Brian

Bethune who examined the possibility of “killing the main character to control his afterlife,”¹ Rowling was forced to consider the future of Harry—and her *own*—beyond, or *post*-publication, when there would be nothing more to reveal and no more books in which to reveal it. Or so readers thought. On the contrary, in the time since *Hallows*’s publication, Rowling has been anything but quiet. In fact, she has had much to say.

Like her fictional uber-villain Lord Voldemort, Rowling’s biggest fear appears to be death—in this case, the death of the author. One might say that, in the face of Barthesian assaults on conventional notions of authorship (further outlined in the subsequent section of this chapter), Rowling refuses to die. While critics such as Suman Gupta have claimed that Rowling “ceases to be the author of the phenomenon and simply becomes part of the phenomenon as author,”² Rowling has instead actively and continuously worked to reaffirm her control over the *Harry Potter* series, an inclination reflected in her publication history and publicity appearances. For example, she published the final book with an epilogue, positioning her characters “Nineteen Years Later” and solidifying, to a certain extent, their post-textual existence. Moreover, she produced realizations of three of the fictional books mentioned within the *Harry Potter* series, further extending—and *demarcating*—the description of her fictitious world: *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*,³ *Quidditch Through the Ages*,⁴ and *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, the original copy of which sold to Amazon.com for four million dollars in December 2007, and was later mass-produced in time for Christmas

2008.⁵ Finally, Rowling welcomed a media circuit following the publication of *Hallows* that had her filling in the holes and answering unanswered questions about the final volume and the series as a whole. Enter Rowling the “secret keeper,” a role now extended beyond the final textual revelation; apparently there is *still* more to know, and once again readers must turn to her—author and creator—to find it out. What follows is an attempt to begin to trace this “extratextual” existence, Rowling’s “extratextual conversations” in the form of interviews, documentaries, supplemental publications, etc., and to interrogate the ways in which they function to affirm her position as creator or traditional, original genius in a postmodern framework that implicitly denounces such a possibility.

J. K. Rowling and The Death of the Author

First broached most notably by Roland Barthes in his now canonical essay, “The Death of the Author,”⁶ the notion of author as original genius has been interrogated and largely replaced, at least within academia, by critical deconstructions, re-evaluations and demystifications of the role of the contemporary author within concepts like Michel Foucault’s “author function”: that which “does not refer purely and simply to a real individual,”⁷ but rather invokes “the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse.”⁸ Or as Barthes more apocalyptically puts it: “writing is the destruction of every voice.”⁹ With such potent, prolific statements working to remove the author from the text—or suggest, perhaps, that the two were never as inextricably linked as

traditional notions of authorship might assume—to where has the author been displaced? And how do contemporary authors, in light of such theories, configure or *reconfigure* themselves?

J. K. Rowling is, in Barthes's term, Potter's "final signified,"¹⁰ or at least she is very concerned with establishing herself as such. In her remarks to director James Runcie in an interview for his documentary, *A Year in the Life of J. K. Rowling*, she insists that everything to do with Potter needs to be her version, as the official version, since it all comes from her imagination.¹¹ With this statement Rowling extends the boundaries of the "official version" of the *Potter* story to include that which she has "not written" within the books themselves: the comments she makes *now*, *post*-publication, outside of the text, or her extratext or extratextual conversations. Perhaps the most interesting and critically rich post- or extratextual comment was the shocking and controversial "outing" of Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore at Carnegie Hall in October of 2007.¹² To quote Rowling's statement directly, "Dumbledore is gay [...] I would have told you earlier if I knew it would make you so happy."¹³ I would have told you earlier? Earlier *when*? Perhaps in the texts themselves? The ambiguity of what exactly in this statement might constitute "earlier" is intriguing and institutes a timeframe that extends the author's participation with the text beyond the moment (or moments) of writing. While this ambiguous timeframe alongside the amorphous, perpetually changing details of the Harry Potter world seem to propose a certain openness to the texts, Rowling's need to assert these details herself and assert the

prominence, as she emphasizes, of *her* version of *her* world,¹⁴ paradoxically negates the process and effectively *closes* the text.

As Barthes writes, “To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text [...] to close the writing.”¹⁵ If the creator of Dumbledore claims that Dumbledore is gay, Dumbledore is then refused to be anything but—or is he, if such a claim were made outside of the text? Are authorial “extratextual conversations” part of universal understandings of the texts themselves, or are they to be disregarded? *Can* they be disregarded? And what constitutes a “universal” understanding of a text in the first place?

According to Catherine Tosenberger, Rowling’s specific phrasing suggests that she would not actually consider her comments on Dumbledore’s sexuality to fall within the realm of an “extratext,” and that they belong, rather, to the text proper: “Rowling appears to believe that her announcement of Dumbledore’s gayness is not, in fact, extratextual. During a press conference after her Carnegie Hall appearance, she indicated that she felt the nature of Dumbledore’s feelings for Grindelwald was evident within the text.”¹⁶ In “Is Dumbledore Gay? Who’s to Say?,” Tamar Szabó Gendler (2010) offers a slightly different take on the matter, proposing that the extratext is not only recognizable but endorsable from the perspective of the reader, and though extratextual, the information obtained therein is no less legitimate for it: “for most Potter fans, Rowling is the patented owner and creator of the Potter universe. She’s the master storyteller who has the right—indeed, the unique prerogative—to authoritatively fill out, embellish, and

continue her story.”¹⁷ Gendler’s essay also asks how readers are to interpret what she refers to as “extra-canonical”¹⁸ commentary, reading the difficulty with the extratext in relation to the philosophical problem of “*truth in fiction*.”¹⁹ If Rowling’s Carnegie Hall comments are indeed extratextual (in that the information provided at that time, i.e. Dumbledore is gay, could not have been ascertained solely from the original seven novels), and if readers accept the legitimacy and recognize the authority of extratextual commentary, the *Harry Potter* text can then be said to have entered a state of flux in which presumably stable details may be changed, supplemented or highlighted in new ways at any time. The source of these details, however, according to Rowling, *remains* at all times Rowling herself.

J. K. Rowling and The Intentional Fallacy

Responding to the claims of Barthes and others concerning the (theoretical) death of the author, Foucault briefly takes up similar questions of authority in his essay, “What Is an Author?” Unlike Barthes, Foucault attempts to extend the argument beyond what an author or a text is *not*, to what it is or has become. Of interest to this investigation is Foucault’s claim that, “[e]ven when an individual has been accepted as an author, we must still ask whether everything that he wrote, said, or left behind is part of his work.”²⁰ Foucault’s problematic assumption is that the author exists only in the past tense—has left, is dead—and that the body of his/her texts and/or extratexts is thus static insofar as it can no longer be expanded upon or added to by the author, whomever or whatever that

may be. Rowling, on the other hand, is very *literally* alive, a barely middle-aged woman and a very public one, whose body of work remains exposed to fluctuating media discourse and potential future continuation, as text or otherwise. It does appear, however, that Foucault has not *discounted* extratextual commentary from his consideration of what constitutes a body of work, concluding simply that “[a] theory of the work does not exist.”²¹ In other words, there is little critical precedence for contending with the extratext, what it means and the degree to which it informs more conventional texts (in the case of Rowling, the *Harry Potter* novels themselves).

M. C. Beardlsey and W. K. Wimsatt’s “intentional fallacy”—and the discussion and criticism it has engendered—is perhaps a relevant entry point to critically position the potential of an *extratextuality*.²² Their argument, which they funnel through a discussion of poetry and poetic criticism, is essentially that “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art”²³—clarified by George Dickie and W. Kent Wilson (1995) to imply the following:

To commit the intentional fallacy seems to mean something like thinking that an artist’s intention is *relevant* to the meaning of the artwork. However, [...] a narrower notion [...] is [...] to think that “the meaning of the work itself” and “the meaning that the author intended to express in the work” *are identical*.²⁴

Dickie and Wilson’s distinction between the meaning of the text (which is itself a fairly ambiguous concept) and the apparently irrelevant (and separate) meaning “intended” by the author introduces the question of how meaning is produced by

and within texts: whether it is inherent to the text itself as the swish-and-flick product of the author's wand/pen, or is externally created, produced through the reader's *interaction* with the text. Addressing this question, Beardsley and Wimsatt assert that "[t]he poem belongs to the public,"²⁵ a view since adopted in the privileging of "readerly" or fan involvement, as outlined, perhaps exemplarily, by Henry Jenkins: "fans cease to be simply an audience for popular texts; instead, they become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings."²⁶ The configuration of the reader/fan within the framework of Rowling's extratextual conversations is an interesting and increasingly tenuous relationship.

The subject of authorial intent and the intentional fallacy is particularly relevant to Rowling's conversational, extratextual outing of the character of Dumbledore. If Rowling "intended" throughout the composition of her novels for Dumbledore to be gay but did not explicitly (and textually) address this intention within the novels, does this make him so? Many fans claim not and those in agreement with Beardsley and Wimsatt would assert that Rowling's comment has no bearing (and should *not* come to bear) on readers' own perceptions of the character's sexuality. Consequently, Beardsley and Wimsatt (1976) *do* (if indirectly) address the possibility of an extratext in their original article, if only by *negating* its possibility:

There is a difference between internal and external evidence for the meaning of a poem [...] [W]hat is [...] external is private or idiosyncratic; not a part of the work as a linguistic fact: it consists of revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations) about how or

why the poet wrote the poem [...]. But the [...] types of evidence [...] shade into one another so subtly that it is not always easy to draw a line between examples, and hence arises difficulty for criticism.²⁷

While “external evidence” could certainly be said to be ‘idiosyncratic,’—the extratext, after all, is in a permanent state of flux, perpetually changing, multiple and different for all—the absolute refusal of the extratext as “not a part of the work” seems far too definite, especially when reconsidered in the postmodern, plural framework. Conversely, their suggestion that the extratext presents a “difficulty for criticism,”—much like the statement cited earlier from Foucault—better characterizes the text-extratext conundrum in its complexity, along with the one concession that “[t]he use of biographical evidence need not involve intentionalism, because while it may be evidence of what the author intended, it may also be evidence of the meaning of his words and the dramatic character of his utterance.”²⁸ It is my contention that the extratext cannot be denounced, at least not entirely. Once made, it cannot be unmade through selective acknowledgment. The question of *how* to acknowledge it, however, is an entirely different matter and one that extends beyond the scope of this investigation.

Having provisionally accepted the extratext as somehow relevant (if nothing more) to the original or initial text, an examination of Gregory Currie’s (1991) essay “Interpreting Fictions” offers a rather congruous comparison through which one might consider Rowling’s particular extratexts, especially the outing of Dumbledore. His case study not only highlights the potentially absurdist nature of

the adoption of the intentional fallacy, but is also particularly applicable to the context of Rowling and *Harry Potter*:

[I]t is a fallacy to suppose, if anyone does, that something can be true in a fiction just because the author intends it to be [...] Indeed, the author may intend a proposition to be true in a fiction *without* it thereby being true in the fiction. Suppose [Sir Arthur Conan] Doyle had peculiar beliefs about alien beings and their infiltration of our world, and thought of Holmes as a fictional representation of this race of beings [...]. [E]ven if Doyle's private correspondence revealed this intention we should not want to conclude that it was true in the story that Holmes is an alien being. This is just not a reasonable way to read the story that Doyle actually wrote, since Doyle's (hypothetical) intention did not, in this case, find expression in his text.²⁹

Currie has a point, though his emphasis on the *written* as designating the “reasonable” limitations of what constitutes a text remains difficult to fully endorse. After all, if a document were to surface containing equally ridiculous information to that cited above, it is rather unlikely that it would be so casually and carelessly overlooked by Holmes scholars. The trials of Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes offer a particularly apt comparison to Rowling and the *Potter* texts in terms of their shared mass popularity, serial production, and the predicament of how to maintain authorial control over a popular character post-publication. In fact, prior to the release of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, some critics explicitly compared the two, speculating on whether or not Rowling would *take the plunge*, so to speak, as Doyle did, to ensure that Harry remained within her control:

Conan Doyle killed Holmes essentially to keep his wildly popular character under control [...]. Rowling evidently has control issues, too [...]. [S]he [...] commented sympathetically on her predecessor's impulse. “I can completely understand the mentality of an author who thinks “Well,

I am going to kill them off because that means there can be no non-author written sequels, as they call them, so it will end with me.” [Otherwise] after I am dead and gone, they would be able to bring back the character and write a load of’ That, of course, is exactly what happened to Holmes after Conan Doyle’s death [...]. Rowling must know the same will happen to Harry regardless of what she does.³⁰

Here, Bethune once again addresses the authorial concern over control and ownership. His mention of the reality of Holmes’s post-Doyle-mortem—and the coincident reality Rowling may face (or eventually will not be around to face) in the coming years with Potter—reunites this discussion with the inevitable uncertainty of authorial intention. Intention aside, *in* control or not, Rowling will not always be around to protect, control and police her creation, which is inevitably bound to become less and less *hers*.

J. K. Rowling and The Authorial Chamber of Secrets

As I have discussed, since the release of the final *Harry Potter* volume, the content of the *Potter* extratext has expanded considerably. While, as Mark Harris mentions, Rowling’s conversations used to consist of “unveiling the *occasional* tantalizing nugget about her decision-making on her website or during an interview or public appearance,” Rowling is now, presumably, at liberty to “spill the many-flavored beans herself.”³¹ The revelation regarding Dumbledore’s sexuality was merely one of many during Rowling’s post-publication media frenzy, including several additional “nuggets” about other characters and plot points in the narrative past, present and future. Philip Nel, an associate professor at Kansas State University who has written fairly extensively on the *Harry Potter* texts and phenomenon, in addition to his involvement with *Potter* pedagogically,

writes, “All good writers know a lot more about their characters than they tell you...readers are only told what they need to know.”³² However, based on Rowling’s unfolding authorial strategies, “needed” information appears to be linked to some sort of slow-release timeframe, becoming progressively relevant as time goes by—or as media attention and product sales wane. Gina Elliott, having attended the Carnegie Hall presentation during which the now infamous Dumbledore remark was first made, states: “Rowling reminded us that there will always be something new to discover about the series. The beauty of the Harry Potter books is that she has it all worked out—she knows everything there is to know about the world she has created, so no question will stump her,” claiming, too, that such commentary provided an “entirely different dimension [...] to the series.”³³ However, what *is* this dimension and how do critics define and understand it? In addition to the structural and technical problems it provokes, this concept of text in flux—with Author (capital “A”) at the helm overseeing the change—also implicates issues regarding who has access to the emergent extratext and who does not. What of those without access to the Internet, television or print media (an issue brought to the fore in the case of Pottermore)? If the extratext is to gradually inform the original text in some pivotal way, are these readers missing out? The text via extratext becomes a multitext, with endless possibilities for each individual reader. Granted, the reading experience is always individualized—but should the text be too?

Continuing in the vein of individualization, nowhere is such a concept more apparent than in Rowling's extratextual conversations themselves. It is not only the actual information she reveals each time that is of interest, but also the way in which she rhetorically codifies it as would a protective parent with a child. Rowling's rhetoric betrays a sense of possessiveness, of ownership. In her coverage of Rowling as runner-up for *TIME* magazine's "Person of the Year," Nancy Gibbs comments,

she will never really be in control of Harry again. She knows he's bigger than she is now and not always in ways she likes [...] you can feel her ambivalence—or even something more fierce and protective—at the prospect of legions of writers who want to take up Harry's story as their own. One declared at last summer's biggest Potterfest that, as Rowling had left the sandbox, it was open for all to play in.³⁴

Similarly, in a press conference held days after Carnegie Hall, Rowling responded to the many inquiries regarding her purpose in having outed Dumbledore by saying, "He is my character. He is what he is and I have the right to say what I say about him,"³⁵ reiterating this response a few months later on the subject of the character of Harry:

He's still mine [...]. Many people may feel that they own him. But he's a very real character to me, and no one's thought about him more than I have [...]. No one has mourned more than I have. [The characters were] inextricably linked with my life for 17 years. No one else has that association with Harry. They may remember where they were when they read it. But to remember where you were when you created it is, I'm afraid to say it, a different experience.³⁶

Rowling's assertion here of the legitimacy of authorship and her own authority is fairly self-evident. She has placed herself in a position of privilege over her readers, perceptible, as she claims, in the very "different experience" of writing a

text over reading one. Bearing in mind her self-proclaimed close relationship with her texts and characters in addition to her desire to remain in control of extratextual, post-publication details, it is clear that Rowling does not consider herself a casualty of the assault on authorship, but an opponent to its pretence.

Many people have, nevertheless, attempted “to play in Rowling’s sandbox,” perhaps most notably in online Harry Potter-inspired fan and slash fiction. While Rowling—as Wallace Koehler and Simon Newman explain—“generally tolerates fan fiction making use of her *Harry Potter* characters and settings,”³⁷ a dispute with fan Steven Vander Ark and his publisher, RDR Books, over a formerly forthcoming Harry Potter lexicon to be penned by Vander Ark once again demonstrates Rowling’s need to police such activities closely and to maintain her authorial control—as one sees in her claim that *she* was planning to write such a text *herself*. After filing a lawsuit against Vander Ark and RDR (a lawsuit Rowling since won), Rowling reflected on the potential consequences for the Harry Potter fan community with the following statement:

If RDR’s position is accepted, it will undoubtedly have a significant, negative impact on the freedoms enjoyed by genuine fans on the Internet [...]. Authors everywhere will be forced to protect their creations much more rigorously, which could mean denying well-meaning fans permission to pursue legitimate creative activities [...] I find it devastating to contemplate the possibility of such a severe alteration of author-fan relations.³⁸

Notice the rhetorical strategies at work in Rowling’s statement: the concern over the “freedoms” of “genuine” or “well-meaning” fans, the need for “permission” and the question over what constitutes a “legitimate” creative activity. These

descriptors are vague. How is a well-meaning fan discerned from a fan with malicious intentions? What, according to Rowling, is a legitimate creative activity? How do such activities differ from her own? What type of permission would she expect to bestow? How, exactly, would she go about bestowing it? With the counsel for RDR claiming Vander Ark's project "a very legitimate activity. Like a reference book or guide to literature"³⁹ and copyright law as it relates to such activities as fan sites and fan fiction remaining somewhat fuzzy, how has Rowling managed to retain such influence? While intellectual property and copyright scholars like Kembrew McLeod⁴⁰ and Tim Wu⁴¹ acknowledge the ultimate illegality of much fan production (especially online fan production), they also acknowledge the practice of what Wu refers to—in relation to the Harry Potter fansite *The Leaky Cauldron*, for instance—as the phenomenon of "tolerated use": a practice, as Wu describes it, "that declares many inoffensive activities illegal, with the tacit understanding that the law will usually not be enforced, leaving sanctions hanging overhead like copyright's own Sword of Damocles."⁴² Certainly, Rowling has not pursued legal action in response to every fansite and/or fan project that appears and circulates online, thereby, perhaps, implicitly permitting their existence and continuance. That having been said, she is also clearly invested in limiting the terms of this engagement, as evidenced here in her remarks concerning Vander Ark and RDR, and in the design of Pottermore—a topic to be explored more fully later in this chapter.

J. K. Rowling and The Negotiation of Author/Reader Interaction

In order to offer some tentative conclusions on the status of contemporary authorship (theory) as it can be read through the case study of Rowling and the *Harry Potter* novels, I would first like to address the role of the reader or “fan” in slightly greater depth, particularly how one might theorize the production of Harry Potter fan and slash fiction in relation to the Rowling-centric extratext(s) discussed thus far. Following the enthusiastic response to her comment about Dumbledore’s sexuality that October afternoon at Carnegie Hall, Rowling humorously and suddenly exclaimed, “Oh, my god, the fan fiction!”⁴³ Her explicit linking of this (and other) extratextual revelation(s) to the Harry Potter fan community is interesting, likely pointed and certainly prescient, especially given the diverse fan responses to the incident that would follow. Broadly speaking, the reactions of Harry Potter fans/readers to Dumbledore’s outing can be grouped into four categories: those excited to learn something new about their beloved headmaster, whether specifically because of his queering, or more generally; those offended, disappointed, or even disgusted by the possibility of Dumbledore as a gay man; those who immediately dismissed the suggestion on the grounds that it was not included or suggested in/by the original novels; and perhaps most passionately, those who were not offended by the content of Rowling’s comment, but, rather, by what the comment implied, and what the comment prevented: namely the primacy of *Rowling*’s interpretation over the infinite, individual

interpretations of any and all *Harry Potter* readers, and the implicit denial of alternative interpretations.

In the hours and days that followed Rowling's Carnegie Hall appearance, the blogosphere alighted with fan reactions to Rowling's comment, staking claims to its (il)legitimacy. Romance author Brenda Coultter, for instance, soon posted on her blog, "To insist on ownership (as she has done) and the right to define or re-define those characters as she sees fit after the fact, is to insist on absolute control over the literary experience of her readers she cannot possibly have."⁴⁴ Coultter's response is exemplary of this fourth type of fan response, outlined above. Where *Harry Potter* readers such as Coultter formerly counted themselves among Rowling's truest and most supportive fanbase and, before the publication of *Hallows*, were bound to *her* final say, many now became reactive and resistant, denying the very source they had so fully endorsed in months previous.

More pressing than the matter of the limits and limitlessness of the a/Author for many distressed *Harry Potter* fans, however, was and remains the concern that Rowling had not only overstepped her authorial bounds but had, in fact, intruded on the territory of *the fan*: if Rowling believed Vander Ark had transgressed "the role of the reader," so to speak, many fans, especially those fan producers (e.g. writers of fan and/or slash fiction), felt Rowling, by outing Dumbledore in an "official" public announcement, had done the reverse, particularly given what was considered by many to be her casual appropriation of the queer. Harry Potter fan/slash fiction communities are employed by their

participants as spaces for subverting and, quite literally in some cases, “coming out of” hegemonic ideas of gender and sexuality via the appropriation of Rowling’s characters, settings, and overall Harry Potter universe, often by the adolescents who make up the core of Rowling’s fanbase—a potentiality *reappropriated* or taken back by so definitively claiming Dumbledore’s sexuality.

Angela Thomas, one of the few critics—along with Jenkins⁴⁵—to explicitly address the production and consumption of adolescent fan fiction, suggests that teenage users are adopting spaces of especially online fan communities as sites of identity exploration: “Cyberspace has been credited with opening up new and liberating spaces [...] to explore aspects of identity [...]. Such uses of cyberspace are also thought to have been a catalyst for challenging the artificial boundaries of the subject as defined by dominant cultures.”⁴⁶ Fan/slash fiction participants find in these communities the potential for play or performativity of identity, perhaps, as notes Sheenagh Pugh, “because they wanted either ‘more of’ their source material or ‘more from’ it.”⁴⁷ According to Pugh, Harry Potter fan/slash fiction writers either respond to an absence of queer characters or write to extend the queerness they interpret in the texts and would like to perpetuate. Having constructed an entire participatory realm around the queering or “slashing” of Rowling’s texts and characters, many found and continue to find Rowling’s extratextual note on Dumbledore’s sexuality to be running unwanted interference. Of course, not all critics/fans frame the reception and incorporation of Rowling’s extratextual comments in terms of what they

prevent or deny. Ernest L. Bond and Nancy L. Michelson, for instance, characterize the outing of Dumbledore as “a rather big incentive for new riffs on the Harry Potter storylines,” adding, “it is actually indicative of the way popular fictional narratives might be understood in the age of Web 2.0: as ever expanding networks of story.”⁴⁸ Either way, Rowling’s Carnegie Hall comments certainly serve as a useful site for exploring the relationship between the author and his/her reader(s), and the shifting understandings of who “owns” the right (and the means) to production in contemporary culture.

It is useful at this point to turn briefly to Joe Moran’s work in *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America*,⁴⁹ and more specifically his responses to the treatises on authorship by Barthes and Foucault formerly discussed in this chapter. Moran, transitioning the argument from the “academic” realm to the “popular,” points out that “while academic criticism has formulated theories about the death, disappearance or absence of the author, this figure still seems to be very much alive in non-academic culture,”⁵⁰ quoting Malcolm Bradbury’s contention that we now live “in two ages at once: the age of the author typed and promoted, studied and celebrated; the age of the author denied and eliminated, desubjected and airbrushed from writing.”⁵¹ Rowling very definitely fits the scenario articulated here by Bradbury/Moran. However, while Moran proposes that “[t]he author becomes gradually less in control not only of her work but also of her image and how it circulates, at the same time as the machinery of celebrity asserts what literary critics call ‘the intentional fallacy,’ which assumes that she is wholly

in control of it,”⁵² in terms of Rowling, many would not entirely agree. Or at the very least Rowling would not. For it is not only the machinery of celebrity but Rowling herself perpetuating this control or the *appearance* of it. She has now come to transcend the machine, or, perhaps, make it do her bidding. Her control, too, seems to surpass (to some degree, at least) mere appearance. As seen with the case of Vander Ark, Rowling is not afraid to test her authorial control, even if doing so means taking a fan to court.

Finally, and somewhat unrelatedly, one might also argue that she has benefitted considerably from the sequel format in which the books were composed; as described by Hope Apple and Merle Jacob, sequels are those “books that satisfy both our need to know the outcome and our desire to know more.”⁵³ In fact, it may be the very format of the books which brought these contemporary extratextual conversations into existence. In sum, readers have come to expect that Rowling has secrets to share, and she has perpetuated such expectation post-publication via media incidents such as Dumbledore’s outing.

J. K. Rowling and The Ongoing *Harry Potter*(more) Saga

And then, of course, there’s Pottermore: Rowling’s latest pseudo-extratextual Harry Potter incarnation, and the presumed equalizing project of author/reader relations. In the aforementioned online video introducing the project, Rowling highlights Pottermore’s capacity to allow for a unique reading experience of the *Harry Potter* series in a safe Internet environment. Two things stand out in Rowling’s phrasing. First, somewhat paradoxically, the primary

adjective she employs to describe an innovative and interactive web experience is “safe”; second, while no doubt self-evident, throughout the short video Rowling once again repetitively insists on the primacy of the original texts: Pottermore is entirely built around and based upon all of the *Harry Potter* books, and therefore all creativity and/or interactivity it begets remain secondary to Rowling’s oeuvre (notably available for purchase—and, for many, *repurchase*—in e-formats through the site itself).

Rowling’s statements in the Pottermore introductory video have left the author of this chapter somewhat uneasy, and I am not alone in my slight discomfort and disconcertion over Rowling’s descriptions of the Pottermore project, the project itself and the *reality* of the space it opens up for reader/fan involvement—or rather, the space it *fails* to open up. It was not particularly surprising to see Henry Jenkins among the first critical respondents to Pottermore. As both a theorist of fan relations and himself a self-professed Harry Potter “fan,” the promise of Pottermore certainly suits Jenkins’ purview; not to mention, as Jenkins himself points out in the opening lines of his blog response to the project,⁵⁴ Pottermore “may be the most highly visible transmedia project to date”—transmedia having been the focus of Jenkins’s most recent research (transmedia, convergence culture and, forthcoming in 2012, what Jenkins refers to as “spreadable media,” or meme culture). While the Pottermore project certainly seems to hold critical and personal interest for Jenkins, his response to Pottermore’s content is less than enthusiastic. He likewise finds concern with the

characterization of Pottermore as “safe,” referring to the site (based on Rowling’s description of it and early glimpses of its content) as a “walled garden.” “the term, ‘safe,’ is a red flag [...] ‘safe’ in those terms means censored, regulated, or policed. So, the promise is that ‘You,’ ‘Us,’ will help shape the future of the franchise but only in terms specified by Rowling and by the companies involved in overseeing this site.”⁵⁵ As someone deeply invested in the possibilities of participatory culture and user and community-generated media, Jenkins takes issue with what he considers to be Pottermore’s—and, by extension, *Rowling’s*—attempt to “capture and commodify participatory culture,” or the static establishment of “the terms of our engagement with the storyworld,”⁵⁶ instead of those terms being established individually at the level of the user(s)/reader(s).

The tendency identified here by Jenkins in Pottermore, as he goes on to say, is not unique to the Pottermore project; Jenkins, too, finds many instances of control and restrictedness under the guise of freedom and openness elsewhere in Rowling’s *Harry Potter* franchise. Drawing from the work of Suzanne Scott and Julie Levin Russo on transmedia and the ways in which some “transmedia practices tend to privilege [sic] some kinds of fans over others,”⁵⁷ Jenkins contends:

Rowling [...] has shown many signs that she wants to continue to shape and control how fans respond to her work well after she finished writing it. We can see this in the epilogue to the last novel, which seems to pointlessly map out futures for all of her characters, including shaping the “ships” (relationships) between them, in what amounts to spraying her territory. Many fans would have preferred a text which was more open ended on that level and allows them more freedom to speculate beyond the ending. She decided to “out” Dumbledore not through the books but via

her own discourse around the books. She tried to shut down the Harry Potter Lexicon. So, it is abundantly clear that she likes some of her fans more than others and that any effort to facilitate fan interactions also represents an attempt to bring fandom more under her control.⁵⁸

As I have outlined throughout this paper, Rowling has been and continues to be rigorously concerned with legitimizing her own authority when it comes to all things Harry Potter—a trait no doubt betraying anxieties that such authority is only ever precarious at best. After a lengthy site construction time, and limited Beta release to a select number of fans Pottermore is now available to everyone. Harry Potter fans/readers can only wait to see which creative allowances will be bestowed and which will be denied within the so-called interactive online reading experience. As Jenkins writes, “She’s been surprisingly supportive of fan culture in the past, but on a selective basis, which does not give us much guarantee on how this one is going to shape out.”⁵⁹ Years after the publication of *Potter*’s final volume, it seems, the life-and-death battle of a/Author Rowling and the Harry Potter world rages on—all is not *entirely* well.

Conclusion: J. K. Rowling and The *Harry Potter* Past, Present and Future

As if aware of Foucault’s statement of impending doom—“The work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author’s murderer”⁶⁰—J. K. Rowling has strategically manipulated her text via her star text and extratextual conversations to avoid, to the best of her abilities, the postmodern sentence of the death of the author and the impossibility of authorship. Rowling returned to the question of the future of Harry Potter (and *Harry Potter*) as recently as October 2010 when, in a special hour-long interview

with Oprah Winfrey at the Balmoral Hotel in Scotland, she responded to Winfrey's query about the possibility of subsequent *Potter* volumes by indeterminately stating that she could write more, and she might, but she might not—a comment that once again reaffirms Rowling's right to (the) rei(g)n(s). For the most part, I have merely presented questions relating to the contemporary status of authorship and Rowling's brand of authorship in particular—many remain unanswered, most importantly, the question of whether or not to accept or acknowledge the extratext, and if so, *how* to acknowledge it. Additionally, more questions need to be asked, especially further investigation into fan fiction and fan involvement more generally, as well as the degree to which authorial strategies such as those enacted here by Rowling constrict the ability of a fan/reader to engage with the text. To a certain extent, only time will tell if Rowling outlives her text or if the text outlives Rowling—realistically speaking, the latter scenario is likely to prevail.

Notes

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2. S. Gupta, *Re-Reading Harry Potter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 34.
3. N. Scamander [J. K. Rowling], *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2001).
4. K. Whisp [J. K. Rowling], *Quidditch through the Ages* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2001).
5. J. K. Rowling, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008).
6. R. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (Glasgow: Fontana Collins, 1977).
7. M. Foucault, "What Is An Author?" in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984): 101-20, at 113.
8. *Ibid.*: 118.
9. Barthes: 142.
10. *Ibid.*: 147.
11. J. Runcie (dir.) *A Year in the Life of J. K. Rowling* (2007) RDF Television.
12. See James Daem's essay titled "'I Knew a Girl Once, whose Hair...': Dumbledore and the Closet", Chapter 12 in this book, for further information on this topic.
13. Quoted in BBC News Online, "JK Rowling Outs Dumbledore as Gay," October 20, 2007, available at:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/7053982.stm> (accessed November 10, 2010).

14. Runcie, *op. cit.*, emphases added.
15. Barthes: 147.
16. C. Tosenberger, ““Oh my God, the Fanfiction!’ Dumbledore’s Outing and the Online Harry Potter Fandom,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 33(2) (2008): 200-4, at 201.
17. T. S. Gendler, “Is Dumbledore Gay? Who’s to Say?” in G. Bassham (ed.), *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy: Hogwarts for Muggles* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010): 143-56, at 152.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*: 144.
20. Foucault: 103.
21. *Ibid.*: 104.
22. M. C. Beardsley and W. K. Wimsatt, “The Intentional Fallacy,” *On Literary Intention: Critical Essays Selected and Introduced by David Newton-De Molina* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976): 1-13.
23. *Ibid.*: 1.
24. G. Dickie and W. K. Wilson, “The Intentional Fallacy: Defending Beardsley,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53(3) (1995): 233-50, at 234.
25. Beardsley and Wimsatt: 3.
26. H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fandom and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 24.
27. Beardsley and Wimsatt: 6-7.

28. Foucault: 7.
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How Do You Solve a Problem Like *Twitterature*? Reading and Theorizing

“Print” Technologies in the Age of Social Media

Introductory Note

The ethereal, digital replacement technology for the printing press happens to have come of age in a time when...[a]uthorship—the very idea of the individual point of view—is not a priority of the new ideology. (Lanier, *Gadget* 47)

Not that we are witnessing a rerun of the print revolution. All revolutions are different (which is only to say that all surprises are surprising). (Shirky, *Surplus* 51)

Just yesterday, someone pointed out to me that I have written well over a thousand messages on Twitter. When multiplied by Twitter’s 140-character limit, this is basically a novel of some sort, a new genre impossible to imagine even a decade ago—neither blog, nor diary, nor bulletin board, nor...well, that’s the whole issue: because it’s new, it’s not like anything else. (Coupland, *Kitten* 71)

Partly in its composition and partly in its frantic efforts to take stock of extensive, multiple bodies of work, I consider this chapter to be weaker, or at least less sophisticated, than other dissertation chapters, and yet its analysis of the similarly fevered attempts to discursively situate emergent social media within legible, relatable paradigms aligns with one of the driving questions of the overall project: the introduction of the new, as it turns out, is the advent of a process of reconciling it; of coming to terms with this new thing using the only terms we have on hand.¹⁸ While the article itself might lack some nuance (I still think it is fair to point out how often digital/online scholars defer to Gutenberg; however, I

¹⁸ As David Weinberger writes in a book that depicts the inevitable failings of systems of classification and nomenclature (*Everything is Miscellaneous*), “We have a remarkable vocabulary for talking about bookish things” (123), no doubt in part because we have been engaged in their production and consumption for centuries, thinking through and with them.

am arguably just as guilty of a limited scope in my hyper-focus on that fact and insistence that they adjust their discourse to suit their media), by broaching the “negotiation of textuality, authority and control in an increasingly web-dominated society” and exploring how “[t]he Internet and social media are changing the ways we write and read, as well as the ways we think and talk about writing and reading” (Ingleton, “How Do You Solve”), it sets up many of the primary concerns of the rest of the dissertation. These concerns are well captured by the opening quotations serving as epigraphs for this introduction and the chapter that follows: the new as disruptive and destructive (where technology stands trial for the liquidation of the individual, of texture, of transcendence, as in Lanier’s lamentation); the new as redux of the old (where each new technology stands in for the one that came before, as in the position against which and yet somehow also through which Shirky historicizes); the new *as* new, but exhibiting unspeakable newness (where technological emergence is a matter of comparison, as in Coupland’s self-depiction as classicist turned reluctant innovator). Similar *a priori* reactions to the emergence of social media are subsequently taken up in the dissertation’s concluding chapters (on reluctant celebrity and representations of Facebook) by way of reference to a cheeky *New Yorker* piece by Adam Gopnik from 2010 that glibly summarizes social-media critical positioning; Gopnik’s “Never Betters,” “Better Nevers” and “Ever Wasers”—those who look to social

media hopefully, warily and unremarkably¹⁹—are easily sought here and throughout the pages and case studies of this dissertation.

I wonder, though, how well these epigraphic claims and categorizations and my own interventions have weathered the past five years. Is it still true that “the ideas and norms attributed to more traditional print publication remain at the forefront of how all forms of writing and publishing, including web-based and digital writing and publishing, are currently being understood and interpreted” (Ingleton)? Do we still “navigate the digital revolution by way of turning back to the media—and literature—of the past” (Ingleton)? I am now less inclined to say yes. We are exceedingly more comfortable in a digital mode than we were in 2012, and so it is important to reflect on the transition of time and transformation of social media norms and practices since this article’s publication. I spend a great deal of time and effort in the original article attempting to make *Twitterature* mean something beyond itself, when ultimately its existence amounts to little more than the marketing of a fad.²⁰ But in retrospect, this, in and of itself, is

¹⁹ The “two Couplands” from the introduction’s opening anecdote are relevant here, with Coupland presenting himself first and foremost as a Better-Never in texts like “Slogans for the 21st Century” and *Kitten Clone*, while challenging himself to embrace at the very least an Ever-Waser mentality in his consideration of the tableau of tech-connected youngsters “like pigeons on a telephone line” (“Douglas Coupland”).

²⁰ If I were to rewrite this piece (or one with similar considerations) in 2017, a much more compelling and complex case study would be the recent bestselling “adaptation” of “instapoet” Rupi Kaur’s bestselling *milk and honey*, *milk and vine*. Composed by two college freshmen (sound familiar?), *milk and vine* was written in a few days, published with Amazon Kindle’s publishing platform, tweeted about and viral within the week. The text enacts cultural appropriation twice over, parodying in a manner that diminishes the contributions of both Kaur and Vine’s most prominent content creators, black youth. Meanwhile the authors, Adam Gasiewski and Emily Beck, have positioned themselves as cultural innovators and archivists, claiming, “We’re redefining the meaning of poetry... We’re just trying to get this book into the hands of as many people as possible, to preserve the culture that Vine fostered” (Esposito).

interesting: that commitment to a project like *Twitterature* (an unabashed flight of fancy, a book of amusements destined to inhabit coffee tables until the joke wears off) assumes the same of the platform from which it takes its form. Perhaps what matters most is not the depiction of *Twitterature* throughout its release but the depiction of Twitter inherent to it. The Twitter of *Twitterature* is the Twitter of “what you had for breakfast,” denigrated on account of its faddishness and superfluity—something I outline in greater detail in the introductory note to the subsequent chapter.

Not long after the publication of this piece, more voices and views like Lanier’s emerge and flourish (e.g. Nicholas Carr, Sherry Turkle, Mark Bauerlein, quoted elsewhere in this dissertation); critiques of Twitter’s fluffiness cede ground to the threat of Twitter as a potential site of a total reduction of human capacity. In other words (and in their own way), Twitter and social media become very serious stuff indeed. Which is not to suggest the critical transformation is complete: while traditional journalism has progressively made its peace with citizen journalism (Jenkins, “Rethinking” 271), referencing tweets as information sources (mostly) without wincing, one of the most prominent critiques of the Trump presidency has been of his use of Twitter, an activity deemed beneath his office (and set up in stark contrast to Obama’s “vigorous battle” to maintain limited and controlled use of his Blackberry in 2009 [Zeleny] at a time when even *having* a cell phone was taken to be unpresidential). Alongside (and throughout) this evolving relationship of Twitter and politics, we find a flourishing but

esoteric and even loopy “irreverent Internet” of “ritualized, recurring practices, themes and content” (Highfield, “Parody Accounts” 2032): memes, hashtags and inside jokes filtered through humorous expressions of rage and crisis, where favourites/stars are made likes/hearts, square avatars become circular and a 140-character limit originally linked to an outmoded text limitation is cautiously doubled (future papers on the implications of Twitter’s recent announcement regarding the extension of platform communications to 280 characters no doubt lie in wait).

In addition to serving as a historical marker of the evolution of Twitter, this chapter also introduces many other threads of the dissertation. For instance, the possibility first explored in the opening chapter of *Harry Potter* as a “text in flux” re-emerges and is in many ways energized by the Twitter/social media dynamic and the “perpetually changing, multivocal collaborative text” (Ingleton) created therein. However, just as the introduction of Pottermore into an otherwise fan-dominated Potterverse signaled how the reach or range of this “flux” could become subject to hierarchical control, the fixed interventions of the *Twitterature* authors and Dom Sagolla’s Twitter “style guide” likewise seek to limit rather than invite unauthorized expansion. There is something, too, to the invitation to “participate” that amounts less to creation and more to recycling: Pottermore is more webstore than it is virtual, artistic playground; meanwhile Twitter has quickly become a landscape of the reiteration of content and the generation of hits and revenue via retweets and reposts. Additionally, the insistence of established

forms and discourses (explored here in the way social media is understood through print culture) is prevalent throughout, with resistance—or reluctance, to reference a key concept from a later chapter—to social media expressed by Coupland in the main introduction, A-list celebrities like George Clooney and Julia Roberts in the second-to-last chapter and comfortably self-assured auteurs Aaron Sorkin and David Fincher in the concluding chapter, who seek to bring a sense of authenticity and class to their depiction of Facebook mostly by avoiding Facebook wherever possible. We find this reluctant tendency in academia, too, where, despite the proclamations of the final section of the chapter introduced here, the social media revolution has been rather slow to take hold, at least in certain disciplines; even in 2017, five years after the original publication of this piece, it is not uncommon for attempts to generate digital excitement at conferences to mostly fizzle, with conference hashtag conversations inevitably dominated by an enthusiastic but limited minority (meanwhile “serious” academics are being driven off sites like Academia.edu by privacy and copyright concerns and bold monetization schemes). All of which is to say: while some of the tentative answers of this chapter may now read a tad off, its questions continue to hold deep relevance.

I began this introductory note with reference to some of the voices I felt were missing from its analysis, but there is something to be said for those that did make the cut, too. I can sense my struggle at the time to position my early research, drawing from scholars of digital writing and hypertext (Aarseth, Bolter,

Douglas, Hayles, Landow, McGann), participatory and convergence culture (Jenkins) and Marxist analyses of power and control within information networks (Castells, Galloway). I recall a related struggle to determine where best to present this work, opting to share the *Twitterature* case study (as I mention in the article itself) at the Northeast Modern Language Association Conference, early work on digital authorship at the Midwest Popular and American Culture Association Conference (Minneapolis, 2010) and the work on social media and academia at a special meeting of the Texas Institute for Literary & Textual Studies at the University of Texas at Austin (2011). It was at this last conference that I was first introduced to the field of “Digital Humanities,” and, consequently, quickly learned that I was not, as it turned out, a digital humanist. I was not aware, at the time, of the history of Humanities Computing (Digital Humanities’ predecessor), and the primacy of data accumulation and visualization within the field that did not sit so well with my own critical approach, grounded in media and cultural studies. I wrote about this experience years later in a short piece for *MediaCommons*, “The ‘Make or Break’ Mentality of DH: An Outsider’s Perspective,” challenging the way “digital humanists legitimiz[e] their work, in part, by way of claims to the science of building, making, doing” and asking, “does theory not involve ‘making,’ too?” It signals an arrival of sorts, a declaration of what my research and writing is (cultural studies and critical theory) and is not (Digital Humanities) that I think was crucial in redirecting the

trajectory of the project (towards Foucault and others; towards celebrity studies)

moving forward.

**How Do You Solve a Problem Like *Twitterature*? Reading and Theorizing
“Print” Technologies in the Age of Social Media**

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In April of 2010, at the Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA) conference in Montreal, Quebec, I presented a paper¹ on *Twitterature: The World’s Greatest Books in Twenty Tweets or Less*, a Penguin novelty book composed by nineteen-year-old college students Alexander Aciman and Emmett Rensin, released in December 2009, which aims to condense over eighty literary works into series of tweets. A few days after I returned home from this conference, I tweeted about NeMLA and the paper I had delivered there, only to receive a Facebook message hours later from Rensin (one of the book’s authors) inquiring about the conference, my paper and how exactly it came to be.² Curiosity brought me to his Facebook profile page where, upon “friending” him, I noted his status thus: the title of my paper, followed by the comment, “That is an actual paper, presented at an actual university.” Rensin learned of the existence of the paper from my tweet, which had been tagged with his @AcimanandRensin Twitter account. Needless to say my tweet, and the academic study to which it referred, both surprised and perturbed him.

The personal and unexpected interaction with *Twitterature* co-author Emmett Rensin described above serves here as the impetus for further study of the constellatory relationship between new and especially social media, academia and (print) publication. While ever-growing sales of tablet and e-reader technologies and e-publications have no doubt changed and continue to change the landscape of contemporary publishing, this essay argues that the ideas and norms attributed to more traditional print publication remain at the forefront of how all forms of writing and publishing, including web-based and digital writing and publishing, are currently being understood and interpreted. To this end, this paper examines an oft-noted impulse on the part of academic scholars to theorize online and digital writing and publishing and its corresponding technologies within a material *print* continuum, rendering understandings of these texts and technologies by tracing their evolution as far back as the advent of the printing press.³ Much of the scholarship on digital/online writing, in adopting a persistent rhetoric that frames its analyses within print paradigms, seems unwilling to engage with such sites independent of their print predecessors. Likewise with *Twitterature*, Rensin and his collaborator had produced one of the first “books” to adopt the then relatively novel Twitter form, and yet Rensin seemed surprised that such a form, and his interpretation of it, could be taken up as a “legitimate” site of study.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first offers some tentative conclusions and commentary on critical, digital/online-writing discourses,

ruminating on what might be at stake in the relentless appeal of these discourses to traditional “print” contexts. A brief overview of new media scholarship from the past decade or so on variously termed “digital writing” exposes the tendency in this scholarship to discursively and theoretically bind digital text to material print. The second and third sections consider the intersection of print and social media technologies as realized in the publication of *Twitterature*: they provide a close analysis of the promotion and reception of *Twitterature* in light of digital/online writing theories, as well as a more general discussion of characterizations of the Twitter short form and the limitations, potentialities and problematics of web-based writing. This paper argues that *Twitterature* attempts to escape a loosely defined sense of the “literary” only to be reinscribed—and to some degree, reinscribe itself—within its bounds.⁴ This investigation of Twitter and *Twitterature*, then, serves as a jumping-off point for a broader analysis of the relationship between traditional print and new media; in particular, the popular and critical discourses amassing around *Twitterature*, relating both to its production and consumption, are all indicative of the greater trend (outlined in the first section) in ongoing new media conversations with regards to writing and publication.

The fourth and final section of this paper extends the analysis of the interacting discourses of print-based and digital writing beyond *Twitterature* and the new media scholarship examined here, assessing the implications of these findings for web-based writing in general contexts (i.e. blogs, social media

platforms like Storify and Medium) and in academic ones (i.e. “academic” blogs and online communities, open-access journals). Contrastingly, it also briefly meditates upon the ways in which online writing in practice can be said to operate in *opposition* to the argument presented here; in other words, it begins to identify those writing spaces and practices that could be said to offer something *new*. In total, this essay will interrogate the increasingly tenuous relationship between print and online composition and publication by way of the *Twitterature* case study, exposing a continued critical reliance on the frameworks of material print in writing produced by and within new media, all in an effort to (re)consider the influence of these discourses on our understanding and production of both print-based and digital texts now and in the future.

Discourses Old and New: Accounting for Online and Digital Writing

Criticism of perpetually changing new media has become limited as scholars continue to rely on a recycled “new media” discourse, forcing, as Marshall McLuhan noted almost half a century ago, “the new media to do the work of the old” (McLuhan 81). Since McLuhan, the new media question has been exhaustively (re)framed within a set of important, but limited qualitative binaries: good versus bad, useful versus frivolous, literary versus illiterate, free versus prescribed, decentralized versus regulated, and so on. Such qualification has become redundant; as Henry Jenkins has noted, “Some fear that media is out of control, others that it is too controlled. Some see a world without gatekeepers, others a world where gatekeepers have unprecedented power....[T]he truth lies

somewhere in between” (Jenkins, *Convergence* 18). Missing from the current new media critical landscape are more self-reflexive examinations of these discourses and various investments (personal, political, economic, etc.) therein, and how they might impede both our use and understanding of these media.

One iteration of this tendency towards reiteration is the persistence of print discourses in discussions of digital writing. In their various attempts to account for those changes brought about by the ever-increasing prominence of digital media, many new media scholars navigate the digital revolution by way of turning back to the media—and literature—of the past. Digital writing scholars seem occupied and even concerned by new media that drift away from familiar structures and/or enact new ones; correspondingly, there is a related interpretive move to equate these new forms of writing/reading with more familiar structures. In the first pages of *The End of Books*, for example, Jane Yellowlees Douglas, in her examination of hypertext or what she refers to as “interactive” narratives, establishes an “interactive narrative timeline” that begins with Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* and works up to Michael Joyce’s *afternoon* and Geoff Ryman’s *253* by way of Joyce’s *Ulysses* and—of all things—Ford Maddox Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, among others (Douglas). Douglas’s timeline opens the book and therefore opens the conversation about interactive narratives within a limited framework, one that assumes these new media texts can be made readable and legible, can be comprehended only in relation to more traditional print counterparts. In a sense, primacy is assigned to those official print classics, while

the digital texts are viewed as reconfigurations of more “real,” more recognizable works.

Where Douglas finds a progression from print to new media-based writing, Jay David Bolter, looking from “our computer keyboard to the books on our shelves” (Bolter 2-3) discovers what he terms “remediation,” or the overlapping and exchange of one medium (print) with another (digital writing) (23). According to Bolter, “The best way to understand electronic writing today is to see it as the remediation of printed text,” contextualising the computer and electronic writing based on its capacity to “improve” upon the printed book (26). Similarly, Jerome McGann asserts, “We are not facing the extinction of a species” but “the historical convergence of two great machineries of symbol production and hence of human consciousness” (McGann 209)—a term (“convergence”) later taken up by Henry Jenkins (and others) to describe the interrelationships within contemporary media culture. Elaborating on the work of Itihel de Sola Pool (“[c]onvergence...operates as a constant force for unification but always in dynamic tension with change” [qtd. in Jenkins, *Convergence* 11]), Jenkins stresses the *process* of convergence—a perpetual, never-ending, ever-changing process (Jenkins, *Convergence* 16). All of these theorists rely on understandings of print texts in their attempts to provide greater understanding of new media texts.

Not all new media scholars endorse a progression, remediation or convergence of the age of print and the digital age, however; others make a point of challenging this adopted practice of reading digitally produced writing in

relation to print culture. Espen Aarseth advocates for a context-specific discourse for the “ergodic” nature of cybertext, explicitly urging literary theorists “to challenge the recurrent practice of applying the theories of literary criticism to a new empirical field, seemingly without any reassessment of the terms and concepts involved”—though he expresses similar frustration with the reverse, technological determinist interpretation of the new media text as radically new (Aarseth 14). N. Katherine Hayles—at one point responding directly to Aarseth—agrees with his contention that new media criticism is limiting itself in its reliance and exhaustive deferral to more traditional literary criticism: “To see electronic literature only through the lens of print is, in a significant sense, not to see it at all” (Hayles, *Electronic* 3); “literary and cultural critics steeped in the print tradition cannot simply continue with business as usual. Needed are new theoretical frameworks...” (Hayles, *Mother* 11); “the criticism is littered with those who have fallen prey to Scylla or Charybdis, ballyhooing its novelty or failing to see the genuine differences that distinguish it from print” (Hayles, *Electronic* 30-1). Hayles’s resistance to such delimiting of the new media conversation is evident across her work as the above citations from both *My Mother Was a Computer* (2005) and *Electronic Literature* (2008) attest.

Even Hayles, however, seems unprepared to forego the new media-literary comparison completely; she qualifies her statements by cautioning against “abandoning the rich resources of traditional modes of understanding language” (Hayles, *Electronic* 24). Hayles’s insistence on the “rich” resource of

print/literature-based textual scholarship is evidence of the seemingly inescapable framing of new media within the conventions—and “traditions,” as Hayles explicates here—of the old. She concludes that the “optimal” approach to reading and studying electronic literature is one that keeps in tension both textual tradition and media/ technological specificity, a call echoed by scholars like Alexander Galloway, who asserts the “*specificity* of the digital computer as a medium, not its similarity to other visual media” (Galloway 19, my emphasis), and Manuel Castells, who claims, above all else, that emergent new media analyses must focus their attention to “the *specific* effects of this *specific* technological revolution” (Castells 16).

Notably, the majority of the case studies taken up by the aforementioned theorists relate to the production of hypertext, where hypertext, the choose-your-own-adventure mode of electronic writing (and reading), comes to serve as the “missing link” between the old and the new—and so it does, I would argue, because to a certain extent it “looks” a lot like it “should.” Bolter concurs that physical, material interaction with the technology—or the concern over how “digital technology changes the ‘look and feel’ of writing and reading” (Bolter 24)—is an integral component of these types of analyses and examinations. Douglas explicitly characterizes hypertext fiction as a continuance and elaboration of print practices: “[h]ypertext fiction...follows and furthers the trajectory of hallowed touchstones of print cultures, especially the avant-garde novel” (Douglas 7). Many scholarly readings of hypertext acknowledge its continuance

of print traditions, while celebrating and praising its novelty. Hayles, for instance, spends considerable time, like Douglas, tracing the introduction of hypertext through its print predecessors, but then concludes that hypertext functions more as a rupture than an extension of this tradition. Writing on Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, Hayles argues that this particular piece of hypertext fiction "can be seen as a contestation of the ideology implicit in the print novel as a literary form" (Hayles, *Mother* 10). Regardless of their final conclusions, the questions that Bolter, Douglas, Hayles and others ask of hypertext tend to restrict the discussion, and any evaluation, assessment or criticism of the (hyper)texts themselves, to the terms of print culture.

Of course, there are politics at play in these critical readings of hypertext and digital works—a desire to re-emphasize the importance and primacy of print in books...books like those cited here. Hayles's insistence on holding onto the "rich" "tradition" of print-based theories of language, for instance, could be in part a safeguarding of her own work and its frequent movement between more traditional "literature" and the digital. In terms of the debate over whether it is worthwhile talking/writing about new media in relation to print-based media, as was noted by Jenkins, I contend that some sort of mediation between the two extremes is most apt: these new media require new discourses, but these discourses will inevitably be influenced and saturated by those discourses that have come before. This interplay of discourses becomes particularly pertinent to a work like *Twitterature*, which explicitly merges the worlds of print and digital.

While these insistent print readings of digital texts prioritize the notion of singular, more traditional authorship (hallowed ground for their purveyors), *Twitterature*, originating as it does from the Twitter form, presumably opens up a space for more collaborative and group-oriented writing/reading, or so it claims.

Literary Rebels at Play: Marketing the Print-Digital Divide with Twitterature

“*Twitterature* provides everything you need to master the literature of the civilised world, while relieving you of the burdensome task of reading it,” or so explains the online blurb for *Twitterature: The World’s Greatest Books in Twenty Tweets or Less*. Criticisms of the project run the gamut from the outrage of the terrified elite to the hyperbole of active Twitter participants: “Do you hear that? It’s the sound of Shakespeare, rolling over in his grave” (Taylor); “Dear god, help us all...I can’t adequately express my outrage at the fact that a social networking tool will now be ruining every single one of my favorite books” (Rebecca); “*Twitterature* makes me want to punch someone, preferably the ‘authors.’ They’re in Chicago. I’m gonna take a road trip...” (@damig). Opting to invert these and other criticisms to serve instead as endorsements for the book (several of the most scathing early critiques were quoted on the book’s website, even before its release), Aciman, Rensin and (publisher) Penguin designed a promotional campaign that attempts to reach the (buying) audience through the rhetoric of rebellion.

But what exactly is being rebelled against? The following examination of the promotion and reception of *Twitterature* considers anew the print-digital relationship discussed thus far, and particularly the book's self-proclaimed resistance to conventional notions of the "literary"—that which, seemingly, has readers ready to punch the book's authors. While the act of adapting largely canonical works into "tweets" is presented (and reasserted in these criticisms) as provocative play on what constitutes "legitimate" engagement with literary texts, the containment of these tweeted adaptations in a published book of print undoes the act of rebellion and reinforces the very culture *Twitterature* is presumably resisting. The published *Twitterature* does not reflect the spirit of the Twitter application, described—somewhat ironically—by the book's editor Will Hammond as "a free-for-all of voices clamouring for a split-second's attention with zero quality control" (*Twitterature*). Instead, it erases the potential for *others* to play, re-establishing the authority presumably removed in the initial act of tweeting, and reducing the collaborative potential of a form of writing designed to be community-driven.

Questions regarding "authority" are certainly common to any discussion of collaboratively produced texts. The negotiation of authority in *Twitterature* is complicated by its collaborative classification on several levels: the co-authorship of Aciman and Rensin; the implied collaboration of adaptation in the re-writing of literary texts; and the collaborative nature of the medium from which it draws its format and style. Understanding and articulating the collaborative potential of

Twitter and the Internet more generally is a task to which scholars of both collaborative writing and cyberculture have been committed. George Landow, in his study of the parallels between hypertext and poststructuralism, suggests that web-based writing is inevitably, inherently and always (already) collaborative in nature: “Within a hypertext environment all writing becomes collaborative writing, doubly so” (Landow 136). Nowhere is this tendency made more manifest than in popular social media/Web 2.0 applications like blogs, wikis and an application like Twitter. As Twitter users come to “follow” other users, their main profile page—or “feed”—emerges as an ongoing conversation; a conversation which, while not always responsively (as in, characterized by responses) dialogic, becomes a perpetually changing, multivocal, collaborative text.

In addition to its presumably inherent collaborative properties, the Internet is also often heralded as being a particularly free or democratic space in which conversations that may not take place in the “real” world are given voice.

Alexander Galloway in *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization* traces—and himself opposes—the history of this supposition:

Critics love to exclaim that “everything has changed!” They write that advances such as new media, new technologies, new and faster methods of transferring information, democratization of technological luxuries, diversification of access to digital networks, the standardization of data formats, and the proliferation of networked relations will help usher in a new era marked by greater personal freedom, heightened interpersonal communication, ease from the burden of representation, new perspectives on the problem of the body, greater choice in consumer society, unprecedented opportunities for free expression, and, above all, speed. (Galloway 60)

Galloway goes on to largely deconstruct the promise of this kind of one-sided exclamatory praise, counteracting idealizations of the unlimited capacity of new media, or the view, as Galloway writes, that “the late twentieth century is a moment of transformation from a modern control paradigm based on centralization and hierarchy to a postmodern one based on flexibility and horizontalization” (158).

By contrast, writing on hypertext and collective authorship, Florian Hartling counters Galloway’s argument in his brief examination of what he refers to as “open source” programs with the ability to “self-produce”—gesturing towards, though not explicitly referencing Web 2.0 technologies (Hartling 293). In his discussion of the collaborative potential of the Internet, Hartling claims, “[d]ue to its structure, a new quality of collaborative and cooperative authorship is being created on the fringes of the Internet *dispositif*,” rendering “contents...without hierarchy” (293). Galloway, too, discusses Hardt and Negri’s *dispositifs* or apparatuses of control, but where Hartling asserts their authorial potential, Galloway insists that “[a] distributed architecture is precisely that which makes...control of the network so easy” (Galloway 25).

Galloway’s extended discussion of control is relevant here in relation to Aciman and Rensin’s pretence of rebelling against the canon in a space that has somehow permitted them to do so. Implicit to their project is the suggestion that *Twitterature* necessarily follows Twitter; that it could not have existed apart from the application, and that it is in some way the technology’s next logical step. In an

interview with *The Irish Times*, Rensin claims that “the internet is a forum for the id, and Twitter encapsulates that....[I]n terms of content you can say anything” (McCann). Here, Twitter is characterized as a space in which anything can be said; or, as Rensin puts it, “anything can be tweeted” (Lang). Following from Galloway, this essay argues that Rensin’s contention is not necessarily true. On the contrary, Twitter and *Twitterature* especially may be read as sites that reflect and reinforce a system of control, rather than oppose it.

Generally speaking, Aciman and Rensin’s own position on *Twitterature*, as evidenced in interviews given in the months just before and just after the book’s release, can be summarized thus: they consider the project to be funny; they consider the project to be “rebellious;” while somewhat in opposition to the previous claim, they also consider the project to honour or pay homage to the canon. The first claim is made clear by Rensin’s comments in various interviews, elucidating *Twitterature*’s existence by observing, “all comedy proceeds from the pun” (Cowan); “Great literature has always benefitted from the humor of commentary” (Lang). In other words, *Twitterature* is funny and there is precedence for this type of humour. Secondly, the authors clarify the “joy” of the project to be “saying inappropriate things” (Lang), and the work has been labelled in reviews as “irreverent” and “profane” (Cowan). When questioned about some of the negative reactions to the book, Aciman and Rensin, in the book’s introduction, respond, “we prefer to think of ourselves as modern day Martin Luthers” (xiv). In other words, *Twitterature* is breaking the rules. Finally, both

Aciman and Rensin tackle the concern of canon-crashing by antithetically reasserting the *primacy* of the canon. Claims Aciman, “We’re making available the idea behind great works of art” (Cowan); “We’re not taking Shakespeare off the shelves...[a lot of people who seemed upset] will be able to appreciate the humour while not fearing for the canon that they revere” (Cowan), adds Rensin. They go as far as to claim that *Twitterature* “brings out the sublime essence” of the works “better than most college papers” (Lang), and one reviewer’s comment that “*Twitterature* is a celebration of the novel” (The Blob) is certainly reiterated by the links conveniently provided on the book’s website to all those works “adapted” in *Twitterature*—Penguin editions available, of course, for purchase.

Before debunking Aciman and Rensin’s insistence on *Twitterature* as (hyper)textual rebellion, it is useful to look at another component of the promotional framing of the book: recalling their editor’s definition of Twitter, the contention that both *Twitterature* and Twitter are represented as products of *play*. Critical attempts to define or signify what it means to collaborate have largely overlooked the consideration of collaboration *as* play, with a few exceptions. Carol J. Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, for example, writing on feminist collaboration, invoke Bakhtin’s work on heteroglossia, identifying the way in which “interacting voices ‘play,’ emphasizing that textual authority is shared rather than centralized” (Singley 68). While not referencing Bakhtin directly, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford also pick up on this characterization of collaboration in

Singular Texts/Plural Authors, drawing similar though slightly different

conclusions:

The dialectical tension between hierarchical and dialogic modes of collaboration mirrors the historical tension between the individual and society; the pragmatic tension between goal-directed work and process-oriented play...[T]he phenomenon of collaborative writing calls up all of these dialectical tensions....What seems...powerful to us...is to allow the free *play* of the *paradoxes* animating collaborative writing to raise questions of power, politics, historiography, and ideology... (Ede 136, emphases added)

While Singley and Sweeney's Bakhtinian definition might readily endorse the aforementioned view of the Internet as free and democratic, Ede and Lunsford's reference to the "paradoxes" of collaborative writing reveals reluctance in line with that of Galloway to *idealize* such collaboration.

In emphasizing the dynamics of play (or no) within collaborative writing, we might consider the self-re/presentation of authors Aciman and Rensin. Would the *Twitterature* authors characterize their project as "playful"? Is *Twitterature*, according to Aciman and Rensin, "serious" business? The image provided on the Penguin website of *Twitterature*'s authors is telling:



Here they are, the tweeting twosome; arguably the only nineteen-year-olds in America to have detailed knowledge of the works of everyone from Cervantes to Pushkin, Sophocles to Proust. In this photograph (which appears both on the book's website and the back cover of the book itself), Aciman, on the left, appears mid-laugh, casually dressed in a polo shirt, seeming carefree and, well, *young*. Rensin, on the right, is too cool for school, so to speak; laidback (literally), eyes closed, above it all. Their bios include talk of card magic and dreams of owning John Lobb shoes. In sum, there is a concerted effort to appear not only apart from the publishing world, but in opposition to it. Here the modern literary rebels at play.

In *The Rebel Sell: Why the Culture Can't be Jammed*, Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter tackle marketing schemes and product classifications similar to those incorporated by Aciman, Rensin and *Twitterature*, exposing their sub/countercultural attempts as fraudulent—or at the very least misinformed. Heath and Potter write how “[i]n the countercultural analysis, simply having fun comes to be seen as the ultimate subversive act,” but oppose this claim by asserting that “[h]aving fun is not subversive, and it doesn't undermine any system” (Heath 9). To apply this argument to *Twitterature*, we see how Aciman and Rensin's pet project performs rebellion against and subversion of some kind of assumed, legitimate “literariness” in order to undermine the system, but in the end does no more than reaffirm it. *Twitterature* is not operating at the margins of the cultural sphere; in fact, as a published *book*, it is operating at its centre.

For that matter, the idea behind *Twitterature* is nothing new. Adaptations, (satirical) reinterpretations, reworkings, (unauthorized) sequels, prequels, fan fictions...“literature” could be said to be in the process of being rewritten from the moment it is published. Various forms of adaptation as commentary are practically the groundwork for all of postmodern fiction, where a hyper-aware intertextuality becomes a playground of “adaptation, translation, parody, pastiche, imitation, and other kinds of transformation” (Oxford). *Twitterature* seems to implicitly proclaim its removal from this tradition of adaptation, but the persistence of the “literary” clings, not least of all because of its explicit adaption of “the greatest works of western literature” (*Twitterature*).

Perhaps the most necessary challenge to the *Twitterature* project is the question of whether a tweet is really a tweet if it has never been tweeted. Thus far this discussion has been reliant on *Twitterature*’s relation to new and particularly social media—to the Twitter application, to the free (or not), democratic (or not) space opened up in which Shakespeare’s longest play might be reduced to a few lines for *all* to read and retweet and respond to. But save for a few example tweet series of *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *The Da Vinci Code*—are these really canon fodder?—*Hamlet* and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *Twitterature*’s tweeted adaptations have not actually *been tweeted*. In fact, the @AcimanandRensin Twitter account was only established as yet another promotional tool *for the book*. It did not even exist before Penguin agreed to publish the manuscript. Put simply: these tweets are cheats! Reviews like that of Jerry Langton writing for *MSN.ca*

claiming, “what the authors...must do [is] convince people to pay for something on Twitter when Twitter is free” (Langton) are unfounded—because Aciman and Rensin’s *Twitterature* is not actually on Twitter.

Twitterature, therefore, represents an odd straddling of the realms of print and web. Despite invoking a form of writing born in and (presumably) reserved for the Internet, it exists only on the same pages as the eighty or so written and printed works it attempts to adapt. In so doing, authors Alexander Aciman and Emmett Rensin have delimited the critical commentary they set out to provide *and* unintentionally exposed the limitations, as well as the structures informing social media/Web 2.0. Even if we endorse the collaborative potential of Twitter and the Internet more generally, based on the “play,” provocative or otherwise, which may ensue in this conversational space, this potential is in many ways reduced the moment *Twitterature* is published instead of tweeted, denying the community access and solidifying a final and authoritative version of the text.

Twitterature’s privileging of the printed form evident in both its reverence for those texts it seeks to adapt and in its own publication format, recalls the persistence of print (as both a format, and as a discourse) interrogated in the opening section of this paper. Like those critical works by Hayles et al, *Twitterature* exposes the insistent transitory nature of so-called “new” media (and their related, emergent forms of writing) in its frequent recollections of the prominence of print-based media. Would our reading of *Twitterature* be any different were it a web-based work? To begin with, it would certainly make

Penguin considerably less money. Its media exposure would be greatly reduced as it would not, as some reviewers suggest, have made the transition to a form that *matters*: “Twitterature, unlike other Twitter incursions into high culture, is making its way into the real world—published in proper book form, and by Penguin no less” (The Blob). According to this comment, only as a printed book⁵ does *Twitterature* become “real” and “proper.” Is there a possibility, then, for sub/countercultural rebellion if *Twitterature* were composed solely via a Twitter account? Or, is there a certain power latent in this reversal of publishing influence: the appropriation of a web-based format in a print-based publication? The previously referenced arguments put forth by Galloway and Heath and Potter suggest that this is not necessarily the case.

Twitter and the Politics of Short-form Writing

Twitterature is not the only publication to take up the tweeted form in a printed book—though, unlike *Twitterature*, most Twitter books actually *are* collections of previously tweeted material. Around the same time as *Twitterature* was released, *New York Times* technology columnist David Pogue published *The World According to Twitter: Crowd-sourced Wit and Wisdom*, a work comprised of the responses of numerous Pogue “followers” to various questions he had tweeted across a single year. While Pogue refers to his work explicitly as collaborative, it is his name and not “Twitter community at large” or “Pogue followers on Twitter” that appears on the cover—and it is Pogue who profits from the book’s royalties. In a similar vein, Nick Douglas’s *Twitter Wit: Brilliance in*

140 Characters or Less, identified as “An Authorized Collection of the Funniest Tweets of All Time,” collects and categorizes tweets from Twitter’s early days of popularity and from some of Twitter’s most (in)famous participants. Other Twitter-based works include *The History of the World Through Twitter*, co-written by Jon Holmes and Mitch Benn, and *My Shorts R Bunching. Thoughts?: The Tweets of Roland Hedley*, a collection of tweets composed by fictional Doonesbury character, reporter Roland Hedley. There are hundreds of other Twitter-related titles, published over the past few years,⁶ most frequently those works offering how-to Twitter help and innovative suggestions to the business-minded.

Among the most interesting early print releases to emerge from the Twitterverse was Twitter’s “official” style guide: *140 Characters: A Style Guide for the Short Form*, written by one of Twitter’s co-creators, Dom Sagolla. The guide is sold in both print and digital formats; the application/hypertext edition is available for Apple’s iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad and is, according to the website, updated frequently with new content (currently operating as version 1.5). The following section analyzes the precepts of Sagolla’s guide, a guide that claims both to *inform* and *be informed* by the tweets of the greater Twitter community. The stated goals and style suggestions of *140 Characters*, interestingly enough, align suggestively with the implicit goals of *Twitterature* outlined earlier in this paper. Just as *Twitterature* is presented and marketed to highlight its humorous, subversive and yet canon-endorsing qualities, likewise

140 Characters proclaims a Twitter standard that is defined by both movement within, and the rigidity of,⁷ a standard form. According to Sagolla's guide, there is room for humour and subversion, but only within agreed-upon bounds—bounds Sagolla continuously (and somewhat ironically, given the nature of the *140 Characters* project) asserts need be and are established democratically.

The purpose of *140 Characters*, as explained on *140charaters.com*, is “to document and standardize this new language as a short form of communication.” As a component of this standardization project, Sagolla welcomes the input of the Twitter community, stating, “we’ve only described 1% of this new medium. The remaining 99% is up to you. Everyone is welcome to participate in the definition of *short form*” (Sagolla). Sagolla claims the challenges facing the short form are unique to the form itself: “Short-form communication is ubiquitous and instantaneous. Those same features are also the bane of the medium. Interruption and distraction can appear at any time, and anywhere. The weakness of short-form communication is the need for filters” (1). Here “interruption” and “distraction”—arguably two touchstones of subversive artistry—are deemed “weaknesses” and are consequently disposed of. Instead, the “need for filters” becomes the guide's working mantra, which, while perhaps a necessity to the construction of any style guide, seems an inappropriate stipulation given a medium/space frequently heralded (as has already been discussed) for being free, democratic and conducive to collaboration.

In doling out his restrictions, Sagolla is quick to assert the “we” of the project, displacing arguments that might suggest that a filtered “free-for-all”—to return to Will Hammond’s description of *Twitterature*—is, in fact, a paradox: “We build our own short code collaboratively. The French call this Oulipo: a loose gathering of writers creating works using constrained writing techniques. We decide *together*, in small groups at first, what is acceptable according to the constraints. When an innovation appears, it takes the form of a pattern” (76, emphases added). That Sagolla chooses to compare the short-form writing of Twitter to such an elite and context-specific writing practice like “Ouvroir de littérature potentielle” or Oulipo,⁸ a practice literally defined by constraint, is revealing. *140 Characters* appears in these and other descriptions provided in Sagolla’s book as the new media city upon a hill: “We stand at a frontier in writing. This wilderness grows wilder and less civilized as more and more writers create more and more content. We must establish a form to this frontier, and develop 140 characters as a standard worthy of literature” (1). Sagolla’s constant reassertions that this city/standard will be built *ensemble*—“we...can...invent a potent new language *together*” (1, emphases added)—do little to assuage the uncomfortable, unspoken connotations that this work, like the American Dream haunting the margins of such grandiose exclamations, must come at the expense of the voices overwritten in the process.

Sagolla argues for a hierarchy within the short form he aims to standardize, or attempts to imply that such a hierarchy is already in place and in

need only of being recorded or rendered official. Aciman and Rensin similarly position their project, engaging with, but stressing their position as well apart from, the medium of Twitter (thus placing themselves atop the hierarchy). It is interesting, then, that Sagolla references *Twitterature* in his style guide, in a sense authenticating it as a legitimate contributor to the formation of an acceptable short-form standard:

Folks, the short format does not leave room for the epistle. You won't be writing a novel, a epic poem, or a canto. There is no room for foreshadowing, allegory, or subplot. Do not burden the reader with embellishment or exaggeration. Paraphrase instead. It's become hip to rewrite a longer work in 140 character increments. A pair of college freshmen have dubbed this "*Twitterature*." (75)

Taking up perhaps the most common comparison proffered in reviews of *Twitterature*, Sagolla then asks, "What is *Twitterature* if not the Cliff's Notes of Cliff's Notes? I submit that it is much more than that; many distinct and persistent literary forms may be reduced to 140 characters without dissolution of their essence" (76). In his characterization and contextualization of the *Twitterature* project, we see Sagolla both assert a compositional directive (i.e. "paraphrase" and "reduce"), but also, much like Aciman and Rensin, he couches this directive within a framework of traditional literary touchstones (genres and patterns). Sagolla's approach to formulating his style guide (and the very existence of a "style guide" in the first place) once again harkens back to a more literary tradition,⁹ a move made here, even in its simultaneous distancing from the forms of such a tradition, to legitimize the emergent short-form. The tweet, a form of communication borne of the text message, becomes the counterpart of the novel,

the poem, the pretentious experimental writing. The very frequency of print-published Twitter material (*Twitterature* included, as well as the additional texts listed earlier) suggests a continued critical reliance on the frameworks of material print in writing produced by and within new media.

As Sagolla continually asserts is true in *140 Characters*, Twitter participants are sold on the idea that one can say or type/tweet anything on Twitter. However, this is not to say that tweeting is entirely undirected. The 140-character “update” box that constitutes the Twitter application was originally designed to function as an answer space for the question, “What are you doing?” This question appeared at the top of each Twitter homepage, indicating that all tweeting was to proceed from this question. On 19 November 2009, Twitter changed this leading question to “What’s happening?” in response, according to Twitter co-founder Biz Stone’s announcement on Twitter’s official blog, to participants’ habitual reinterpretation or manipulation of the original question and thus the application more broadly:

People, organizations, and businesses quickly began leveraging the open nature of the network to share anything they wanted, completely ignoring the original question, seemingly on a quest to both ask and answer a different, more immediate question, "What's happening?" A simple text input field limited to 140 characters of text was all it took for creativity and ingenuity to thrive...The fundamentally open model of Twitter created a new kind of information network and it has long outgrown the concept of personal status updates. Twitter helps you share and discover what's happening now among all the things, people, and events you care about. "What are you doing?" isn't the right question anymore—starting today, we've shortened it by two characters. Twitter now asks, "What's happening?" We don't expect this to change how anyone uses Twitter... (@BIZ)

Stone's comments ring uncannily similar to those quoted earlier from Sagolla. The same anxieties are there, with Stone continually reinforcing the "open nature" and "fundamentally open model" that (presumably) defines Web 2.0. Stone feels the need to reassert himself as authority on Twitter in response to the subversive manipulations of its original incarnation, broadening the question to account for the diversity of tweets that have occurred regardless, independent of such cues. But why the need for a question at all? If Twitter creators "don't expect this to change how anyone uses Twitter," what does this say about the question, and Twitter more generally? By representing the innovation as having organically emerged out of everyday Twitter participation, just as Sagolla claimed a similar organic materialization of a short-form style, Stone stakes a claim for democracy—and in the process ironically proves the verity of Galloway's control model.

All things considered, in examining these discussions of Twitter and *Twitterature*, it becomes more and more evident that we lack sufficient critical means for articulating—and thus for comprehending—the advent and impact of the communicative functions of new media technologies. As a result, critics, authors and new media creators can be witnessed sifting through old models and drawing endless comparisons, all in an effort to legitimize, authorize and revolutionize these spaces and practices. As new forms of offline-oriented online writing and online-oriented offline writing continue to emerge, these discourses

must be attended to in order to better understand the negotiation of textuality, authority and control in an increasingly web-dominated society.

The Question of Authority: Online Writing and the Academic Imperative

I feel it is important at this point to own up to my own involvement in perpetuating these discourses, reverting back to old forms in order to critically address new ones. Consider my reaction to Rensin's initial Facebook contact: somewhat taken aback by his message and eager to determine what it might critically *mean*, I tweeted the following: "Why my work is different: Odds are Shakespeare, Austen, Eliot et al will NOT add you to Facebook upon discovering you've written about them." While my comment was intended as a joke, now that I reflect on it further, I wonder what Rensin and *Twitterature* really have to do with that particular smattering of "L"iterature. Why are we—and why was *I*—unable to talk about or conceive of online writing apart from offline writing, the digital apart from more traditional print, and what might we be able to accomplish—both in terms of criticism and new forms of writing—if we could?

As has been alluded to already, the perpetuation of more traditional discourses on writing has a lot to do with permitting only the same kinds of arguments about authority and how it is constructed. There is considerable overlap between the anxieties of social media and those of the figure of the author or of authorship more generally—regarding identity, freedom and control, authenticity and legitimacy, copyright and ownership, "quality" and value, both in an economic sense but also in more abstract senses (e.g. moral value). By no

means distinct, these concerns speak to each other and are complexly interwoven, and are certainly to be found in the study of both new media and authorship. The desire or imperative to retain a concrete conception of “The Author” stems from concerns regarding the authentic and legitimate voice of a text—a frequent concern in academia, and gradually of greater concern in the realm of social media.¹⁰ Attentiveness to these discourses recalls the manifold ways that academic authority can be instated, complicated and even denied in social media, as well as the residual reliance on the concept of authority in an academic system where the link between the author and his or her name as realized through publication remains paramount to individual success—a link many fear is weakened in virtual space.

We might ask, therefore, how the tendencies identified throughout the body of this essay relate to current academic social media projects explicitly attempting to bridge the gap between print and the digital, like those of Gary Hall, Clare Birchall and others’ open access *Culture Machine* and *Liquid Books*, academic blogs like Henry Jenkins’s *Confessions of an Aca-Fan* and group blog *Crooked Timber*, or Facebook-inspired academic applications like Academia.edu and Alan Liu’s forthcoming RoSE, or Research-oriented Social Environment? In its brief description of its innovative open access journal, *Culture Machine* seemingly cannot help but temper its call for “open-ended and experimental” writing with the need to be “useful” and “practical” (*Culture Machine*); in their first post, the blogging cohort known as *Crooked Timber* oddly bind their “new

enterprise” to “the approval of readers of judgment and taste” (*Crooked Timber*); in his oft-blogged urges to “[take] down the walls...that isolate academic research from the larger public conversations about media change” through social media participation (Jenkins, “YouTube”), Henry Jenkins ultimately locates this participation in, and is himself supported by, the “university” proper; and Alan Liu draws his own literary parallels when he asserts that social computing and social reading amount to “studying literariness” in the digital age; that social computing can and should become an “object of literary study,” and that the “computer can help us discover what we’ve been doing all along” (Liu)—in other words, digital or online writing is different, but one can overlook or overwrite this difference as is convenient to render it simply more of the same in order to critically address it as such. I do not line up these examples merely to denounce them. But it certainly seems that the inevitable outcome of attempting to reconstitute disciplinary modes of production is the perpetual maintenance of the actual and assumed schism between “new” media and old, or in this case, digitally produced text and print literature. Furthermore, those explanations and analyses provided by academics attempting to account for social media given their embeddedness in the still largely print-based world of academia are, in part, just that: the clinging justifications of an older world faced with the onset of change. How can we trace/account for change with discourses that are always already insufficient? How might we avoid “rearviewmirrorism” (Fiske and Hartley 3) given our own inevitably limited perspectives? These questions/tasks are not

simple, and most usefully begin with a recognition and persistent awareness of discursively bound disciplinary anxieties.

While Aciman and Rensin and the various scholars addressed here can be found reverting back to more traditional frameworks for understanding digital/online writing (themselves armed with particular investments in these more established, arguably more marketable forms), their commentaries are not necessarily representative of or equivalent to working understandings of digital forms as they are experienced and interacted with online. Blogging (on sites like WordPress and Blogger) and microblogging (on Twitter and Tumblr) and everything in between (newer social media start-ups, like Medium and Storify), after all, increasingly need be classified as distinctly “new” forms of writing, marking decided and significant ruptures with more traditional, literary forms. One of the latest applications to appear on the social media scene, Medium (created by Blogger and Twitter co-founder Evan Williams and his team), openly addresses the reluctance on the part of both the Internet and its critics to think beyond a print-based world in the process of being transformed: “some things haven’t evolved as much as we would have expected...And in many ways, the web is still mimicking print concepts, while not even catching up to it in terms of layout, design, and clarity of experience” (Medium). In framing the introduction of his latest social media venture in this way, Williams appears perceptive and keenly aware of the remediation (to return to Bolter’s term) of social media and the longstanding history of literature and print. He is not discouraged, nor

surprised by this tendency; if anything, he seems buoyed by it. Perhaps, then, it is the coming days of applications like Medium and the continuance of Twitter and other short-form, microblogging platforms that will demand and evince more context-specific discourses, and new ways of conceiving and articulating digital/online writing.

The Internet and social media are changing the ways we write and read, as well as the ways we think and talk about writing and reading. Which is not to say that the space between something like the print tradition and digital media is an easy one to solve...or dissolve. After all, when Emmett Rensin, the author of *Twitterature*, private messaged me on Facebook, asking for a copy of the paper I had delivered at the 2009 NeMLA conference, I decided, in the end...not to give it to him. This was a paper I had worked on for a whole term and submitted for grading in a course on (ironically) collaborative authorship, a paper I hoped to adapt into a journal length article and one day publish. This was “serious business.” Mr. Rensin may have composed *Twitterature* on a whim, but he was certainly *not* going to see my critical reading of his experiment. After all, what might he do with it? And how could his exposure to my criticism jeopardize my attempt to market the paper for academic capital? I was able to speak on Rensin’s work but he was never exposed to mine, merely tempted with the suggestion of it. Our interaction was brief and, ultimately, shut down by me.

This paper has attempted to reveal and critique the persistence of literary and print-based discourses in discussions of emergent digital/online writing and

its criticism/theorisations, as well as the more general tendency in new media scholarship to constitute the innovative within the bounds of the old, the former, the past. As it turns out, even—and perhaps especially—my own work remains caught between the traditions and innovations of my discipline and of writing more generally. That having been said, I hope by examining the relationships between these two modes of production, these two technologies, more closely, we can amplify our understanding and employment of them.

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Notes

1. “Community, Rebellion and the Reinforcement of Authority in @AcimanandRensin’s *Twitterature*”
2. It is interesting to note that I had, in fact, attempted to establish contact with the authors using the @AcimanandRensin Twitter account while preparing the paper in the hopes of conducting an informal interview, but the only response I receive directed all queries to their publicist.
3. Of course, reading new media alongside print culture is by no means the only comparative approach adopted in new media scholarship. For example, James Bennett and Niki Strange’s anthology *Television as Digital Media* (2011) “analyze[s] digital TV as part of digital culture...to understand the relationships between television and digital media” (Bennett and Strange).
4. Bearing in mind that the “literary” clings in part in this particular case as a result of Aciman and Rensin’s explicit adaptation of literary works.
5. Granted, since *Twitterature*’s initial publication, it has appeared not only as a paperback, but also as an e-book. However, even as an electronic copy, the *Twitterature* manuscript is unalterable and must be purchased to read.
6. To give a better sense of the overall timeline, Twitter celebrated its six-year anniversary in March of 2012.

7. Sagolla's website even provides guidelines on how one might "properly" tweet or retweet about *140 Characters* on Twitter.
8. Interestingly enough, Oulipo is frequently referred to in criticism of digital/online writing as another of its many proto-texts.
9. Sagolla brands Twitter "a new genre of literature" (Sagolla xv) and a "literary movement" (75).
10. For example, on 11 June 2009, Twitter introduced a "Verified Account" option for well-known and celebrity tweeters. Verified accounts were from this point forward literally branded with a "Verified Badge" (it appears as a checkmark beside the users' names), "to establish authenticity of identities on Twitter. The goal of this program is to limit user confusion by making it easier to identify authentic accounts on Twitter" (Twitter). This is a salient example of the drive to authenticate and legitimize the authorial voice outside of the academy.

“Mechanisms for Non-Elite Voices:” Mass-Observation and Twitter

Introductory Note

This short essay is technically the first to have been published of the dissertation, appearing in a special issue of *Flow* on “The Archive” in May 2010. Originally this work on the Twitter Public Timeline (a now obsolete webpage previously maintained by Twitter, designed to generate a random selection of twenty tweets from all Twitter content every sixty seconds) was part of a graduate archival project involving “snapshots” of the Timeline at regular intervals over an established period of time, essentially producing an archive of an archive. While any “conclusions” were tentative at best (some interesting stats: over 40% of the 400 captured tweets were composed in languages other than English; only 9% of tweets were retweets, 38% were direct responses signaled with “@” and 12% included hashtags—a different time indeed²¹), the project’s inescapable framing, manipulation²² and intent to produce meaning out of the resultant content recalled the work of the British Mass-Observation project, and so a connection was

²¹ In a study that examined a dataset of over 37 billion tweets between 2006 – 2013 (a significantly more impressive archive than the one curated for my project!), Liu, Kliman-Silver and Mislove draw a number of conclusions about the evolution of Twitter from its earliest days to its more integrated presence, including a significant rise in retweets and related decline in direct responses: “we can see a rapid adoption of the reply mechanism, peaking at almost 35% of all tweets in 2010...likely due to the native retweet support that many Twitter clients provide. In fact, in late 2013, the percentage of retweets is larger than the percentage of replies. Overall, the decline in replies indicates that there is declining person-to-person communication on Twitter, suggesting significant changes in users’ tweeting behavior.”

²² In *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age*, Maggie Jackson connects the contemporary adoption of web 2.0 technologies and platforms to the Mass-Observation project, noting how “the insatiability of the omnipotent gaze led Mass Observation to slip from observation into manipulation” (144) and proposing similar risks for the “gaze” created and promoted within social media.

established between the two and the possibility of reading Twitter as a contemporary form of “mass observation”²³ was explored in the essay itself.

The Twitter Public Timeline no longer exists, likely at least in part because Twitter content is now searchable (both on Google and Twitter itself) and, beginning in 2012, Twitter users have been able to download their complete, personal Twitter archives—in addition to the acquisition and organization of Twitter content by the Library of Congress,²⁴ which serves as the essay’s inciting incident. I would argue that what is lost in the move away from random aggregators like the Twitter Public Timeline and towards much more structured, formalized and proprietary aggregation methods like Google and the Library of Congress database is the truly random, democratic capture of the cacophony (and as my project demonstrated, at times surreal symphony or serendipity²⁵) of any and all possible voices and the experiences, lives, cultures and contexts attached to them. Twitter has tended this way, too, employing an algorithm to prioritize popular tweets both within individual feeds and in its spotlighting of “top tweets”

²³ As it turns out, Mass Observation has had its own official Twitter account, @MassObsArchive, since March 2010. The account tweets out random tidbits and ephemera from the historical Mass Observation archive, sharing “air raid precautions for cats and dogs” on #NationalPetDay, for example, as well as more contemporary selections like personal writings on the United Kingdom’s recent “Brexit” from the European Union (@MassObsArchive). Certainly the existence of the account and the way the goals of the original project merge with current social media practices cements the connection between the two, as Mass Observation’s curators and historians become “#Twitterstorians.”

²⁴ As per the Library of Congress’s most recent update on its Twitter Archive in January 2013, the content that has thus far been collected remains inaccessible to outside researchers while the Library attempts to address “the significant technology challenges to making the archive accessible to researchers in a comprehensive, useful way” (Allen).

²⁵ The idea for the project originated out of an experience I had on Twitter where I tweeted lovingly about having cottage cheese for breakfast—take a swing, Carr—and discovered another person (also female, similarly aged and a graduate student, no less) tweeted a similar cottage cheese appreciation tweet in the UK at the exact same time. I observed similar resonances in the tweets I curated.

and “trending topics.” In many ways this has allowed dominant voices to (re)assume prominence on Twitter (a trend explored later in my co-authored article with Lorraine York on celebrity tweeters); likewise, the potential built into this model to influence the tide of Twitter opinion—and influence outcomes beyond the platform itself—has certainly come to the fore in recent days as various governmental bodies investigate the effects of Russian trolls, bots and hackers on the 2016 presidential election in the United States (Calabresi).

Although the article that follows is quite short, its premise can be and has been taken to be somewhat provocative; to refer to the products of social media interactions as archives is in and of itself a contestable statement, depending on the qualities attributed not only to “legitimate” archives but also to social media.²⁶ Additionally, many have questioned the *value* of the content of this “archive” (and, of course, of social media applications like Twitter more generally). This line of critique is epitomized by an oft-quoted turn of phrase from Nicholas Carr—“Shall no fart pass without a tweet?” (Carr, “Zuckerberg’s Second Law”)—and formalized in early market research on Twitter by Pear Analytics (covered by the BBC), wherein it was concluded that “Twitter tweets are 40% ‘babble’” and “only 8.7% of messages could be said to have ‘value’ as they passed along news of interest;” the research explicitly describes tweets of the

²⁶ On its website, the “archivefutures research network” has prepared “a curated list of journals from outside the field with special issues on archival themes,” including *Flow*’s special issue in which my short essay was originally published. They note my work on the Twitter Public Timeline and Mass-Observation as “[o]f particular interest methodologically” in its framing of social media and/as archivization. Somewhat in contrast, a comment by user “alex” on the original piece on *Flow*’s website claims, “in many ways it’s a misnomer to call the internet an ‘archive,’ given that it lacks dust, a magistrate, and a nation.”

“‘I’m eating a sandwich’ type” as “pointless babble” (“Twitter tweets”). Douglas Coupland (to return to this sometime social media artist/critic first discussed in the introduction) similarly tells CBC’s Anna Maria Tremonti, “Everything that is going on...it’s all been archived forever...So, most of our contemporary life is not being lost, but it’s also not very interesting. Why would anyone want to go back and look at someone’s groceries from 2014?” Coupland, like Carr, acknowledges the archival dimensions of social media, but questions the value of the archives produced (for his part Carr is far more concerned with the risks than the superfluity of what he refers to as the “exponential growth in our release of intimate data”).

This assertion that the archivization of the flatulence and food habits of everyday people has no value and is not important or “of interest” certainly contradicts the work of those ethnographers involved with Mass-Observation and presumably a healthy percentage of doctors and dieticians, not to mention the cultural studies theorists (among others) who look to everyday sites of production and consumption to better comprehend the mechanisms and flows of power in contemporary society—a practice of increasing importance in this particular instance if, as Barry Wellman and Caroline Haythornthwaite have argued, “[i]t is the boringness and routineness that makes the Internet important because this means that it is being pervasively incorporated into people’s lives” (Wellman and Haythornthwaite 7). It seems unfair, however, to single out the above-mentioned indictments of minutiae microblogging; as Clive Thompson has noted, “Who

cares what you ate for breakfast? That question has become a cliché of Internet criticism, the go-to response to social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter” (209). Instead Thompson acknowledges a great deal of potential in the “ambient awareness,” a term he borrows from social science, made visible by and within these sites: “taken together over time, the snippets coalesce into a surprisingly sophisticated portrait of your friends’ inner lives, like dots forming into a pointillist painting...Before modern technology, this type of awareness wasn’t possible” (211). Similarly, Michael Strangelove takes up the rhetoric of everyday life theory and practice in his hopeful reading of YouTube “as a repository for idiosyncratic behavior, local culture, shared experiences and collective memories” (40), ultimately “providing us with new insight into everyday activities” (15)—reasoning that seems to bring the debate full circle if we consider it alongside social media skeptic Sherry Turkle’s assertion that such “archiving might get in the way of living” (305). Can we learn more about ourselves by observing our lives on social media? Does “social media [operate] as a barometer of the politics of everyday life” (Hinton and Hjorth 136)? Or do the modes and structures of social media deny or perilously alter the experience of the everyday? Even if we accept that social media are capable of enacting or representing “everyday” “moments” as I cautiously propose in this article, does the utter unmanageability of the resulting information or archive render it nevertheless useless? And what happens when that which “was ephemeral, transient, unmappable, and invisible bec[omes] permanent, mappable, and viewable” (Manovich 324)?

What Mass-Observation could never have foreseen is the sheer mass of data made possible by the capacity of contemporary technologies. My former colleague Jennifer Pybus, who has written extensively on the collection and profit of this data, makes an important and useful distinction between our conceptualization of “archives” pre- and post-Internet: “we are no longer living in a society that uses digital archives, rather, we are living in an information society that is a digital archive” (141). Within the information society the question of the “value” of the archive becomes a question of its economic/exchange value (Andrejevic 85), where “businesses can increasingly capitalize on a user’s immaterial labour and effectively ‘put consumers to work’ as ‘prosumers’” (138); or, to use the terms of Michel de Certeau’s theorizations of everyday life, “the logic of tactics has now become the logic of strategies” (Manovich 324). Within this framework, the social media archive, which Pybus, working from Ann Cvetkovich in a manner that echoes earlier comments from Carr, describes as an “archive of feeling,” becomes a site where “capital meets life” (148), facilitated by the “de-differentiation of sites of labor, domesticity, social life, and consumption” (Andrejevic 82).

It is at this juncture—where “capital meets life”—that I would like to conclude this prefatory note. I admit I am willing to concede that my original article largely overlooked (perhaps necessarily, in the interest of limited time/space) the Marxist dimensions of Lefebvre’s argument and ended up somewhere a tad too rosy for a society whose practices are (arguably

increasingly) premised on human alienation. And I certainly do not wish to be naïve to or disregard the escalation of algorithmic persuasive architecture and design²⁷ and how “[f]irms like Facebook are free only because they carefully collect our ambient signals, the better to sell us to advertisers” (Thompson 237) as Thompson suggests, in a move that likewise complicates his largely hopeful social media analysis. That having been said, as Lefebvre himself writes, “the critique of everyday life involves...criticism of the trivial by the exceptional—*but at the same time* criticism of the exceptional by the trivial” (251). I still believe his argument allows for the possibility—or potentiality, to use his term—of the recognition and affirmation of individual lives lived in every tweet, even and perhaps especially in those tweets about the most banal, most basic of everyday activities...like eating a meal.

²⁷ In her reading of “the place of the algorithm in shaping and engaging with the contemporary everyday” (Willson 137), Michele Willson argues that “algorithms...need to be recognised more broadly as situated artefacts and generative processes” (141) that “epitomise and encapsulate a growing tendency towards atomisation and fragmentation” with significant implications for the social and ethical relations between people and the platforms through which they function (149).

“Mechanisms for non-elite voices:” Mass-Observation and Twitter

Ingleton, Pamela. ““Mechanisms for non-elite voices:’ Mass-Observation and Twitter.” *Flow*, 21 May 2010, www.flowjournal.org/2010/05/mechanisms-for-non-elite-voices/. Reprinted with permission.

On 14 April 2010 the Library of Congress announced its acquisition of all Twitter content since Twitter’s inception in March 2006. Librarian of Congress James H. Billington characterized the donated material as offering “extraordinary potential for research into our contemporary way of life”, and Director of Communications Matt Raymond blogged, “it boggles my mind to think what we might be able to learn about ourselves and the world around us from this wealth of data”. These statements focus on the seemingly limitless “potential” of this once and future archive to provide unique and privileged social insight, suggesting that Twitter-and specifically the Library of Congress’s archivization of tweeted material-has the capacity to, in essence, teach us about ourselves. Such hopeful investment in a project that proposes we can learn most about who we are by watching what we do is reminiscent of similar claims made over fifty years ago with the advent of the British Mass-Observation project in 1936.

Charles Madge, Tom Harrisson and others at the helm of what would come to be known as “Mass-Observation” believed that the collection, consolidation, organization and publication of public surveys, testimonies, diary

entries and structured (though presumably unscripted) mass responses in Britain before, during and after the Second World War could achieve what, in their opinion, both Surrealist art (too bound up in aestheticization) and ethnographic studies up to that point were unable to achieve, and what the mass media was in the process of overwriting: namely a view of the people, by the people, or a democratic “surrealist ethnography”. The call-to-arms in the opening section of *Britain*—arguably Mass-Observation’s most successful publication—reads, “This book aims to give the other side of the picture—to give both ear and voice to what the millions are feeling and doing”. With a mind to produce material that would embody “the urgency of fact,” redeem “the voicelessness of everyman” and counteract “the smallness of the group which controls fact-getting and fact-distributing”, Mass-Observation’s “collaboration with the Man in the Street” would bring democracy home again—or this was the intent.

Bearing in mind these lofty ambitions, in the current moment we might look to the Internet as a potential space of contemporary mass-observation. It is, in fact, the Internet’s very propensity to permit observation that is the ever-increasing concern of so many, based on the related space it opens up for pervasive surveillance. Regardless, the Internet is emerging—or has already emerged and continues to emerge—as a massive archive of information, both to some degree constructed, and experienced, by “the man in the street”—or in this case, the user at the computer. Antoinette Burton proposes that “[t]he availability of archival sources of all kinds online arguably makes us all archivists now,”

adding, “What Wired magazine has called ‘Googlemania’ is thus at least partially akin to Derrida’s archive fever”. Masses of information are uploaded online every day, every second. Web 2.0, in particular, has been framed as, perhaps, the fullest realization of the democratic potential of the Internet. Highly contested, the term, generally speaking, implies user-generated media: microblogging services, for instance, like Twitter. The aspirations of its creators or disseminators—those who have etched ever-widening corners of the web with applications that permit their users the creative space to give them shape—reveal utopic visions of social knowledge and understanding, reminiscent of the Mass-Observation ideals outlined above. Unlike Mass-Observation, however, Twitter (or equivalent) requires no formal structure of initiation, nor mechanism of observation to permit observation to occur: it exists, in a sense, already as a supranational “panel of part-time observers”.

The Twitter Public Timeline might be considered as an attempt to capture the potential of such observation, as well as the magnitude and randomness of all of the information on Twitter at any given moment. The timeline, a web page maintained by the Twitter team, cycles every sixty seconds to produce a random selection of twenty tweets taken from all across Twitter. These twenty tweets are determined algorithmically, presumably allowing for completely random sampling. The result is, for lack of context-specific terminology, a “snapshot” of Twitter; a single iteration of an almost infinite possibility of iterations of all the information streaming through Twitter in that instant. Thus, critically, we might

say that any cycle of this page contains within it both a specific, relatively arbitrary moment of/on Twitter and the possibility of all of the other moments on Twitter that might have been-as well as their corresponding moments in everyday life.

I make reference to the Twitter Public Timeline in order to propose that we read Twitter, in light of Mass-Observation, as what Henri Lefebvre refers to as “an endless appeal to what is possible”; or, what Michael Sheringham identifies in his explication of Surrealism as “the possible contained in the actual; what might be is always already present within what is”. It is thus, as I have said, not the content of any snapshot of the Twitter Public Timeline that is most important to our critical understanding of Twitter, but the (almost) endless potential content of all that could have been said, and might have been said, but is missed in the moment of capture. I use “moment” here purposefully, recalling Lefebvre’s use of the term in relation to his exploration of the everyday and of alienation. For Lefebvre, the “moment” is a remainder; a crystallization of the everyday and a critique of it; “a function of...the history of an individual”. We might interpret this crystallization or function as occurring at the moment of a tweet, or at the moment a tweet is read. We might also think of tweets as representations of moments-problematic or limiting, perhaps, but suggestive, as Lefebvre writes, of “the attempt to achieve the total realization of a possibility;” as Lefebvre notes, “[t]he real can only be grasped and appreciated via potentiality, and what has been achieved via what has not been achieved”. Lefebvre’s notion of potentiality might

be the most favourable reading one can assign Twitter and the individual Twitter experience, bearing in mind this potentiality is not without a critique of its own. Based on this reading, Twitter might be considered an expression of the possibility of community, but also a literalization of the alienating impersonality of the life of the individual, and the corresponding need, resulting from this alienation, for what Lefebvre terms “leisure machines”. (Twitter-and the Internet more generally-might be thought of as just such a machine.)

Of course, one of the most notable differences between the Mass-Observation project and Twitter (beyond the implicit classification of the former as a project and the latter’s designation as a social networking tool) is the explicit association of Mass-Observation with nationalism and nation (re)building. How does Twitter fit into this schema in its occupation of (presumably) nationless web space that is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere? Such a question is precisely what makes the official archivization of tweeted material by the Library of Congress so interesting...and potentially problematic. Twitter already exists as an archive online; all tweets-unless protected-are already available for public consumption, and they were never otherwise. Thus, the Library of Congress’s ownership and re-archivization of tweeted material, in a sense, functions to claim said material for the national body it represents: the United States. In addition, in their use of this material, the Library of Congress has begun to apply values and qualifications to it, highlighting seminal tweets to be featured in the archive, such as “the first-ever tweet from Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey” and “President

Obama's tweet about winning the 2008 election". Already we see the distortion not only of the rules governing ownership of specific tweets, but also the biased, structured assessment of their value.

In a short piece on the archive, Arjun Appadurai calls for imaginative archives and their proliferation online. Appadurai suggests that the Internet has rendered "the archive of possible lives...richer and more available to ordinary people than ever before". I am reluctant to endorse Appadurai's "capacity to aspire" (19) with regards to the Internet, a pleasant, though perhaps unsustainably positivistic, theory. It is therefore best to conclude by challenging the depiction of Mass-Observation-and Twitter, too-as "alternative mass media," or "mechanisms for non-elite voices", as I reference in my title. Reading Twitter in relation to Henri Lefebvre's theories of the everyday and everyday "moments" and the implications of the Library of Congress's acquisition of tweeted material, both the possibility and inevitable limitations of Web 2.0 applications are laid bare. As a form of mass-observation, Twitter occupies the aporia described by Lefebvre, in that it functions in, within and as the everyday, while simultaneously negating the everyday in its alienation from it.

Notes

1. "Twitter Donates Entire Tweet Archive to Library of Congress." Library of Congress blog. 15 April 2010.
2. Raymond, Matt. "How Tweet It Is!: Library Acquires Entire Twitter Collection." Library of Congress Blog. 14 April 2010.
3. Highmore, Ben. *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2002: 82
4. *ibid* 107
5. Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, *Britain*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1939: 9
6. *ibid*
7. *ibid* 11
8. Burton, Antoinette. Introduction. *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*. Ed. Antoinette Burton. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005: 4
9. Highmore 76
10. Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*. Vol. 2. Translated by John Moore. London: Verso, 2002: 45
11. Sheringham, Michael. *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*. London: Oxford University Press, 2006. 67
12. Lefebvre 342

13. Highmore 116
14. Lefebvre 342
15. Lefebvre 46
16. Lefebvre Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*. Vol. 1. Translated by John Moore. London: Verso, 1992: 33
17. Raymond , Matt. "How Tweet It Is!: Library Acquires Entire Twitter Collection." Library of Congress Blog. The Library of Congress. 14 April 2010. 15 April 2010. Web
18. Appadurai, Arjun. "Archive and Aspiration." 2003. 22 March 2010. Web
19. Highmore 85-6

Celebrity Seeking Micro-Celebrity: “New Candour” and the Everyday

in the *Sad Sad Conversation*

and

From Clooney to Kardashian: Reluctant Celebrity and Social Media

(co-authored with Lorraine York)

Introductory Note

Archivists. Statisticians. Fans of truth. Academics. The literal-minded.
That’s who. “@michaelianblack: @JoshMalina Who cares?”
(@JoshMalina)

@PamelaIngleton @JoshMalina This made me squeamish.
(@MichaelianBlack) (in response to reading my article, “Celebrity
Seeking Micro-Celebrity”)

The approved long proposal for this dissertation did not include any chapter(s) on social media and celebrity; while personally I consider myself to be something of a popular culture obsessive, I had originally planned to focus on social media’s intersection with authorship and politics. Now in its final form, it appears I swapped much of the more strictly “political” explorations for focused work on celebrity and micro-celebrity. Which is not to suggest an absence of the political within this investigation; on the contrary, politics insist and persist throughout, particularly through what John Storey has termed the “politics of signification” or, as was referenced in my main introduction, “the struggle to define social reality; to make the world (and the things in it) mean in particular ways,” including the ways in which “particular meanings acquire their authority

and legitimacy” (Storey ix).²⁸ As has been alluded to at several points in this dissertation (including in the second of the two chapters introduced here and the penultimate chapter of the thesis), politics and celebrity—and social media, for that matter—are increasingly discussed as if they are, if not indistinguishable, then at the very least significantly enmeshed and intertwined. Additionally, the shift in the thesis “away from the political” and towards the popular (noting, as I have above, that the popular *is* political) is likely in part, as my colleague Lorraine York and I point out, because the social media that were founded on the premise of providing public space for social interaction were quickly overtaken by dominant figures, platforms and voices already positioned to be heard, with “celebrity,” broadly taken, leading the charge (McMillan; Fuchs; Marwick). And so an intended emphasis on elections and democracy gave way to a more representative study of dominant political ideologies as they are expressed and experienced through popular cultural forms and the subjects who embody them.

I have opted to introduce these two publications together even though the first was undertaken solo while the second was written collaboratively with Lorraine because, in many ways, the considerations of the first inform those of the second. Both papers explore shifting notions of “celebrity” in the age of social

²⁸ I am reminded of a comment from Storey’s *Culture and Power in Cultural Studies: The Politics of Signification* on the role of “meaning” in cultural studies: “Cultural studies has never really been interested in the meaning of a cultural text; that is, meaning as something essential, inscribed and guaranteed. Cultural studies has always been more concerned with the meanings of texts; that is, their social meanings, how they are appropriated and used in practice: meaning as ascription, rather than inscription” (50). This subtle but crucial difference comes to mind whenever I am casually asked—as a social media “scholar” or “expert”—what I “think” about social media; what I think, of course, is that the meanings and uses of “social media,” as Storey suggests here, are deeply contextual and contingent, as evolving and as mobile as the technologies through which they function.

media, and how these media are used (as touchstones) in the service of celebrity self-management and negotiation. I first shared my work on the *Sad Sad Conversation* at the meeting of the Canadian Sociological Association at Congress in Waterloo, ON in 2012 on a special panel, “Representations of the Internet in Popular Culture.” My paper, “‘New Candour’ and Affective Discourses in Social Media,” explored the ways in which the *Sad Sad Conversation* (an ongoing video conversation produced in 2011 – 2012 orchestrated through YouTube and shared on Twitter between dozens of self-identified B-list celebrities) reveals the potential for connection, intimacy and revelation afforded by social media technologies and platforms, at the same time as it exposes the limitations of this still-structured space, navigated at times successfully and at other times unsuccessfully within a particular merger of celebrity and micro-celebrity, the exceptional and the everyday. This work was driven by an interest in challenging critical understandings of both celebrity and social media given *Sad Sad*’s resistance to easy classification of both its genre and participants, striving, as it did, to articulate conflicts between “authorial authority” and fan creativity (in a case not entirely dissimilar to that of Rowling’s relationship to her fans), but also to reduce the space between “celebrity” and “not celebrity” through a sustained emphasis on mediocrity: Joshua Malina, one of the two creators of the *Sad Sad Conversation*, notes at one point, “we’re getting literally tens of views,” and he and his *Sad Sad* associates record themselves in

fairly standard homes and vehicles, musing on the most banal, habitual concerns of everyday life.²⁹

In many ways, the *Sad Sad Conversation* and my analysis of it function as a link between the previous paper on Twitter and Mass-Observation³⁰ and the collaborative chapter introduced here on reluctant celebrity and social media. In this regard, we might think of Mass-Observation as an attempt to “celebritize” everyday people and their lives and experiences, while acknowledged celebrities rely on a reverse public (re)presentation—a *decelebritization*, if you will—to render their star text proximal and relatable (with contributors to the *Sad Sad Conversation* falling somewhere in between, attempting to draw from both framings in a paradoxical maximization of affective resonance). Certainly there is room to consider danah boyd and Alice Marwick’s concept of “micro-celebrity” (“a quantifiable metric for social status” that “replaces ‘friends’ with ‘followers’” [127]) and Joshua Gamson’s articulation of the “lionization of the ordinary” (“ultimately part of a heightened consciousness of everyday life as a public performance—an increased expectation that we are being watched, a growing willingness to offer up private parts of the self to watchers known and unknown, and a hovering sense that perhaps the unwatched life is invalid or insufficient” [1068]) in relation to Marxist articulations of alienation, a possibility recently

²⁹ I would be remiss if I did not draw attention to the career arc of one particularly notable Sadster: how funny to think this is how Lin Manuel Miranda was representing himself a few years ago, contributing 23 separate vlogs to the *Sad Sad* efforts in 2011 only a few years after first performing the “Alexander Hamilton” rap for Obama and his guests at the White House in 2009, and four years before *Hamilton* debuted on Broadway in 2015.

³⁰ In the introductory video Malina jokes that he hopes the group will “come to be known as the New Candourists, kind of à la the Dadaists” (Malina).

explored in the first episode of the third season of *Black Mirror*, “Nosedive,” where a woman labours to ascend and transcend her social status and class through an assiduous commitment to social media self-archivization, only to run up against the inevitability of immobility and a harrowing, progressive exposure to her own lived estrangement.³¹ Taken together, what all of these texts (the original Mass-Observation project, Twitter as contemporary “mass-observation,” the *Sad Sad Conversation*, the “fictional” world of “Nosedive” and the machinations of the celebrity publicity machine) ultimately expose is the constructedness of the “everyday,” even as these texts seek to legitimize themselves through it. Michael Ian Black makes this connection explicit when he points out, “This medium allows us to ostensibly speak to each other, but really what we’re doing is speaking to ourselves, knowing that we’ll have an audience” (Black), a knowing wink to a “conversation” that is as much if not moreso a performance staged with an audience in mind.

As I would later discover, the term I needed to best represent the activities of the Sadsters was “reluctance,” or so I quickly determined upon commencing a research assistantship with Lorraine in preparation for her monograph on reluctant celebrity. While her work focused mainly on individual celebrity case studies and the manifestations of a reluctant affect through celebrities like John Cusack and

³¹ When we are first introduced to Lacie Pound (the character in question, played by Bryce Dallas Howard), we see her go to great lengths to generate digital goodwill on the omnipresent Rate Me social media app, which encourages users to rate other people on a five-point scale. When an opportunity presents itself to significantly increase her rating—to enter the “social media class,” if you will, and become eligible for all of the perks entitled to a prime “influencer,” including the right to rent a state-of-the-art condo—one wrong move commences the titular “nosedive,” ultimately resulting in Lacie’s social alienation and literal imprisonment.

Robert DeNiro, I was struck by the resonance between the questions that had been raised in my investigations of the *Sad Sad Conversation* and how this critical articulation of “reluctant celebrity” was being realized by celebrities in their interactions—and particularly their first interactions—with social media. A number of discussions ensued as we merged our formerly independent interests and entered into a new study of social media and reluctant celebrity. We first synthesized the outcomes of those early conversations at the Popular Culture Association Conference in Niagara Falls in 2015. Our paper, “To Tweet or Not to Tweet: Reluctant Celebrity and Social Media,” focused primarily on celebrities’ first tweets and articulated a hierarchy of social media participation that we would later complicate with the Kardashian case study. A second conference paper, “‘I’m Not a Kardashian:’ Framing Celebrity Reluctance Towards Social Media,” was presented at the International Celebrity Studies Conference in Amsterdam in 2016 with a new emphasis on the inverse of reluctance, embodied, we claimed, by the Kardashian family and especially by Kim Kardashian. An extended version of that paper was accepted by the *Celebrity Studies Journal* for their special conference issue, “Authenticating Celebrity,” forthcoming Fall/Winter 2017.

On a final, personal note: Dr. York’s graduate seminar on Celebrity Culture was one of the first courses I took in grad school during my M.A. To get to work with her on this topic for over two years and publish a collaborative piece with her (Women’s Collaborative Writing, as it turns out, was another of her influential seminars during my Ph.D.) brings my graduate experience full circle,

and is incredibly fulfilling. I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to explore and create with her. She has been a mentor in the truest sense of the word. Thank you, Lorraine.

**Celebrity Seeking Micro-Celebrity: ‘New Candour’ and the Everyday in the
‘Sad Sad Conversation’**

Ingleton, Pamela. “Celebrity Seeking Micro-Celebrity: ‘New Candour’ and the
Everyday in the ‘Sad Sad Conversation.’” *Celebrity Studies*, vol. 5, issue 4, 2014,
[dx.doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2014.981372](https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2014.981372). Reprinted with permission.

I’m not an unemployed actor. I just don’t play one on t.v.
(@JoshuaMalina, 23 May 2011, 21:33,
<https://twitter.com/JoshMalina/status/72882782807928832>)

In April 2011 Joshua Malina (*Sports Night* 1998-2000, *The West Wing* 1999-2006) tweeted a short YouTube video to friend Michael Ian Black (*Ed* 2000-2004, *Celebrity Poker Showdown* 2003-2006) with the express hope, he quipped, of becoming ‘video pen pals’ and producing a ‘treasured archive’ should either or both of the men become suddenly famous ... er (‘Josh 4-15-11’, *Sad Sad Conversation*, 2011). Several video responses later, Malina and Black’s correspondence, available for all to view on YouTube and actively publicised by the pair on Twitter, became the *Sad Sad Conversation* (2011). It thereafter expanded to include dozens of self-identifying B-list celebrity participants (the ‘Sadsters’) including Steven Weber, Martha Plimpton, Phil LaMarr and Lin-Manuel Miranda, its own Twitter account, Tumblr and YouTube channel and over 500 video submissions. These submissions were short, confessional videos composed by largely middle-aged, middle-class to upper-middle-class actors and

artists dry-testing new material, voicing past and present embarrassments, trials and tribulations, talking and not talking, before a small but loyal audience of followers and each other; granted, amid the misery, the Sadsters did not fail to recognise that their lives are not particularly sad, their careers not especially pathetic and their finances not quite as dire as the project's title suggests. Working from Malina's own characterisation of the resulting archive as indicative of a 'new candour', this paper examines the converging discourses of celebrity, 'micro-celebrity' and the ordinary or everyday in the Sad Sad Conversation, revealing the potential – and potential limitations – of the social media 'third space'.

danah boyd and Alice Marwick refer to 'micro-celebrity' as the 'directed friendship model [that] replaces "friends" with "followers"' – a model, they claim, which 'can be seen as inauthentic', 'a quantifiable metric for social status' (Marwick and boyd 2010, p. 127). The 'micro-celebrity' is retweeted, followed, liked, poked and instant messaged – and they draw satisfaction and fulfilment from this process. Joshua Gamson has suggested that this formation of celebrity is somewhat new and medium-specific, claiming that 'the Web has ... generated a sort of bottom-up, do-it-yourself celebrity production process that is partly autonomous from its predecessors' (2011, p. 1065). Within this emergent framework, Gamson discerns what he refers to as 'the lionization of the ordinary': 'a rapid increase in the spectacle of ordinary people becoming celebrities and of celebrities being shown as entirely ordinary' (2011, p. 1067) – a proposition

certainly relevant to, and further complicated by, the Sad Sad Conversation. It is seemingly counterintuitive that a ‘celebrity’ would crave and seek out ‘micro-celebrity’, and in reality Sad Sad participants are not limited to the celebrity (micro or otherwise) garnered through their participation in the video project; they have all already established some measure of notoriety in more traditional celebrity venues. In his introductory video Malina informs viewers that, ‘If you want to record your own response videos, please do. We of course won’t show them here ‘cause you’re not at all famous, but I guess we can link to them or something’ (‘Welcome’). Thus, the Sadsters could be said to appeal to what Elizabeth Ellcessor refers to as ‘illusions of intimacy’ (2012, pp. 51-52), or ‘the notion of the accessible, interactive and potentially contactable star that best represents the Internet star’ (2012, p. 45) – all while that star remains as inaccessible as ever before. Here we find the simultaneous denial (along the lines of, ‘I don’t have a job’, ‘My career is a failure’, ‘I can’t afford x’, and so on) and reinforcement (Malina’s announcement that only celebrity friends can post to the channel) of the celebrity of Sad Sad’s participants.

Atau Tanaka and Petra Gemeinboeck contend that within new media technologies one may find the potential for a ‘third space’ that ‘operate[s] in the paradoxical space between two antagonistic forces: the bottom-up approaches of collaborative spaces and collective interventions and the top-down strategies of centralized power and remote control’ (2009, p. 176-177). Certainly the Sadsters seem to have discovered a sort of ‘best case scenario’ in the ‘third space’ enacted

as their celebrity and micro-celebrity collide. However, as Gamson reminds us, in our contemporary mediascape, despite new, emergent forms of celebrity, '[t]he interests of those with the capital to give celebrity its value remain primary' (2011, pp. 1067-1068) – in other words, web or micro-celebrity still does not possess the same cultural capital or commercial value as conventional celebrity. We might conclude, then, that the Sad Sad Conversation announces the emergence of celebrity via online celebrity as the neoliberal ideal realised: as Ellcessor notes, 'the Internet has become, in essence, the perfect vehicle for later capitalism's obsession with reinvention and flexibility on the part of its products, the works that produce them and the public that purchases them' (2012, p. 56). The integration of social media into more traditional publicity models has only intensified since the heyday of the Sadsters: for instance, Malina himself can be found live-tweeting the latest episode of his new hit *Scandal* every Thursday night.

Although the Sad Sad Conversation was not necessarily intended to be 'sad', sadness, disappointment, failure and general malaise emerged as the most common discussion topics between Malina, Black and their compatriots. The video archive includes a four-minute record of Steve Agee with a gun to his head ('Steve 5-31-11', Sad Sad Conversation, 2011), an outpouring of Jane Wiedlin's grief following the suicide of her nephew ('Jane 9/4/11', Sad Sad Conversation, 2011) and a never-before-shared confession of childhood molestation by Samm Levine, a video he removed shortly after posting it due to the intense reactions it

provoked. Some recognition of the construction and performance of their celebrity, as well as the media that facilitate their ongoing discussion is likewise a frequent feature of many of the contributions. The primary tenor of the content is without question Josh Malina's 'new candour', a 'sort of self-obsessed, semi-self-loathing honesty about the state of one's crushed hopes, dreams and ambitions' ('Welcome'). Such openness appears to afford a markedly new shared sense of sociality for both the participants and their viewers. Fan reactions illuminate the 'very relatable' and 'comforting' aspects of the project, identifying with the everyday concerns and fears of the recognisably 'successful' (Mills 2011). Not to mention, while each of the participants is already 'known' and to varying degrees 'famous', here they are schlepping their wares, desperate for their little grassroots project to take off. The frequently un-hired, insecure actors and comedians find in social media a much desired, sympathetic audience hanging on their every word, with Twitter and YouTube serving as the 24-hour stand-up stages that never close.

The Sad Sad Conversation presents a complicated case in terms of celebrity. There is something undoubtedly remarkable and oddly charming about a group of not entirely unknown actors coming together to share their failures and letdowns, to admit and attempt to overcome their sub-celebrity in the age of prosumers and do-it-yourself. While Gamson and Ellcessor write of the illusion of closeness in (online) celebrity, for the Sadsters and their followers there is some sense of proximity to each other, both in terms of shared affect and, in some ways, shared life struggles. That having been said, it would be naïve not to at least

permit the possibility that this ordinariness, this relatability is consciously buttressed by Sad Sad participants as a fauxganic publicity tool. The Sadsters speak into the camera as if they could be the everyday viewer's next-door neighbours – but they are not. The Sad Sad Conversation reveals the increasingly complex social constellations arising out of our increasingly complex, technological society, and both the facilitations and impediments to production and connection in an ever-changing social media landscape.

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From Clooney to Kardashian: Reluctant Celebrity and Social Media

Ingleton, Pamela and Lorraine York. "From Clooney to Kardashian: Reluctant Celebrity and Social Media." Accepted for publication in *Celebrity Studies*.

In a short piece entitled 'Web 2.0 Is Dead—Is Celebrity the Future of the Internet?' Graeme McMillan (2011) heralds the present and future 'Hollywood phase' of the Internet, claiming: 'Whereas the internet used to make celebrities of the people who used it, now it seems that the future of the internet will be reinforcing the celebrities that we already have.' Christian Fuchs (2014) corroborates McMillan's hunch in *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*—one of the first social media-centric textbooks—signalling its own shift in the critical landscape of media studies: '[t]he statistics show that Twitter topics are dominated by entertainment' and that '[c]elebrities [...] dominate attention' (p. 190). Celebrity scholars such as Joshua Gamson (2011), Alice Marwick and danah boyd (Marwick 2010; Marwick and boyd 2011) echo McMillan and Fuchs' contention that social media rarely fulfil the democratic promise of 'Web 2.0.' Instead, Twitter and other social networking tools become vehicles for the reinforcement of more traditional hierarchies. As Marwick notes, '[p]eople can spread ideas and creations to a formerly inconceivably large mass audience, but in ways bounded and influenced by the confines of modern neoliberal capitalism' (p. 11). This eulogy, for the democratic potential of social media that has fallen

victim to overarching external frameworks, and especially to the logics of neoliberal capitalism and the free market, has become quite commonplace in social media research. Whilst social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter rose in prominence, so too did indictments of their pitfalls, even—perhaps especially—amid opposing characterisations of their virtues.¹ Alongside the laudatory rhapsodies of the so-called ‘Twitter revolutions,’ critics quickly began to decry and challenge presumptions of the radical power of social media. In a frequently cited article, Malcolm Gladwell (2010) pronounced that ‘the revolution will not be tweeted,’ arguing that the weak ties of networked platforms such as Twitter would only ever be useful for ‘helping Wall Streeters get phones back from teen-age girls’—a slight on social media evangelist Clay Shirky’s (2008) opening anecdote about how a network of social media users restore a phone left in a New York cab to its owner in *Here Comes Everybody* (a mostly celebratory take on the emergence of social media). Gladwell’s dissection of social media as a(n effective) tool for activism is similar to criticisms that both preceded and followed, as social media naysayers worried about everything from our relationships to our brains, spiralling outward to treatises prophesising the end of our humanity and, of course, our democracy.²

Social media’s role as a lightning rod for moral panics certainly persisted into 2016 with the American presidential election and the rise of Donald Trump from unlikely Republican nominee to president. In a piece entitled ‘How Social Media is Ruining Politics,’ Nicholas Carr (2015) refers to Trump as the ‘Snapchat

candidate' (he was also called the 'reality show candidate' and even the 'Kim Kardashian candidate' by Ted Cruz [cited Beamon 2016]), proffering an assessment of both Trump and social media as 'passionate yet hollow'—a description that no doubt harks back to Gladwell's 'weak ties'. Carr argues that the Trump phenomenon is indicative of a larger social change defined, and in many ways perpetuated, by social media—a change he describes as formulaic, 'pernicious' and superficial (2015), judgments captured in the dog-whistle signalling of 'Snapchat,' 'reality TV' and 'Kardashian'. For Carr, in contemporary journalism '[r]ather than narrating stories, anchors are reduced to reading tweets,' whilst in the realm of democratic politics '[o]ur political discourse is shrinking to fit our smartphone screens' and '[i]t's worth asking...what kind of democracy is being promoted.' With regard to discourse more generally, Carr maintains that '[s]ocial media favors the bitty over the meaty, the cutting over the considered.' Here Carr makes use of a common, seemingly unquestioned, yet uneasy alignment of politics, popular culture and social media, which he frames as a coalition of social evils. Addressing Trump's ever-escalating antics during CNN's primary election coverage, regular CNN political commentator and former Obama advisor Van Jones (2016) similarly proposes that 'the reality TV-ization, the Kardashian-ization of the culture is almost complete [...] This is a very, very bad moment in American politics and culture'—and this *before* the election of Trump. The critiques proposed by Carr and Jones reveal the discursive collision of social media, pseudo-populist politics,

and popular culture, which taken together are clearly intended to be interpreted as an amalgam of ‘bad’—an abrupt rebuke of the hope, change, and promise that were claimed by many to have been signalled by these media just years before (with the Arab Spring; with #elxn41—the ‘social media election’—in Canada in 2011; and with the first ‘social media president’ Barack Obama, whose own discursive evolution can be similarly mapped).

We prefer to circumvent the two deceptively straightforward—and diametrically opposed—claims made about social media: that they are spaces of renewed democracy, and that they are not. We opt instead to further investigate the role of celebrity in the media-politics-culture trifecta identified above, examining social media forms in relation to similarly multimodal, contingent understandings of contemporary celebrity and the politics of what we term ‘celebrity reluctance.’ Adopting a method of analysis reminiscent of both Gamson’s (1994) concept of celebrity as a space of fluid negotiations or ‘skirmishes’ amongst various agents (p. 79) and Marwick and boyd’s (2011) concept of celebrity as ‘an organic and ever-changing *performative practice*’ (p. 140), we examine celebrities’ first tweets on, and commentaries about, Twitter, as a means by which to demonstrate how celebrities—who hold varying types of cultural capital—negotiate their degree of reluctance to engage with the complex fields of power at play in social media interactions.³ In the second half of the paper, we argue that such wary positioning needs to be read alongside its celebrity social media ‘other:’ the enthusiastic, entrepreneurial adoption of social media

(often characterised as shameful, unseemly, or vulgar), best exemplified by the Kardashian family and their manifold social media endeavours (Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat accounts, subscription-based apps, #BreaktheInternet viral campaigns, etc.). In their self-characterisation as social-media-made celebrities and, perhaps more importantly, external characterisations of them as the *de facto* media sell-outs against whom other celebrities (often explicitly) position their own social media (non-)involvement, the Kardashians, as *unreluctant* celebrities, become the exception that proves the rule, inversely defining the privileged reluctant expressions of more ‘accepted’ stars.⁴

When Twitter launched a new feature in March 2014 allowing anyone to search out Twitter users’ first tweets, celebrity websites and publications rushed to showcase the best and worst nascent tweet-attempts of the rich and famous. Whilst many were quick to point out the tweets’ lack of quality (consider *Huffington Post*’s [2014] ‘Your First Tweet Was Probably Better Than These Celebrities’ and *Celebuzz*’s [2014] ‘Check Out These Celebrities’ Embarrassing First Tweets’), upon closer examination, another notable aspect becomes evident: a disinclination to participate, or at least a concerted effort to appear hesitant or uncertain:

Fine...you got me. (Drake @Drake, 3:18AM, 28 Mar 2009)

Well I’m finally on here. First...<shudder>...tweet...from Atlanta. Big thanks to PBS for a great trip. 961 followers...lets get to work. (Josh Groban @joshgroban, 4:50PM, 5 Jun 2009)

This is my first tweet! Oh lord what have I done? (Andy Cohen @Andy, 8:23PM, 17 Jun 2009)

I just signed on to Twitter today. Don't want it or need it, but don't wanna be out of the action! (Stan Lee @TheRealStanLee, 1:55AM, 13 Aug 2009)

I hemmed. I hawed. I joined Twitter. Alas. Reason? I saw 'The Cove' this weekend and it blew my mind. Everyone should see this movie. -zd
(Zooey Deschanel @ZooeyDeschanel, 10:30PM, 17 Aug 2009)

These tweets, just a few of many other similar examples, convey everything from resignation to embarrassment and back-peddalling. All are characterised by a sense of uncertainty and a need on the part of their authors to account for and justify their participation in this new medium. Whilst any first-time tweeter is liable to exhibit discomfort with, or uncertainty about this new medium, the discomfort and uncertainty of celebrity tweeters provoke that need for justification and its affective companion—shame—precisely because they are performed for the gaze of a large audience and because celebrities' 'asymmetrical status' distinguishes their use of Twitter and 'necessitates viewing followers as fans' (Marwick and boyd 2011, p. 144).

Neophyte celebrity tweeters' wavering response to social media is indicative of a larger affective phenomenon that we will refer to as 'celebrity reluctance'—a simultaneous, double-facing mode of celebrity performance in which the celebrity is disinclined to perform, yet performs nevertheless. This reluctance lies at the very heart of the complexities and contradictions that celebrity theorists have discerned within the celebrity text, beginning in the late 1970s with the influential work of Richard Dyer. Reluctant celebrity is, however, markedly different from the celebrity resistances that Dyer (1986) himself studies

in *Heavenly Bodies*. It is not, first and foremost, a gesture of refusal. Reluctance marks an ambivalence rather than a rejection: a condition of sustaining simultaneously positive and negative reactions whilst acting in a way that suggests apparent compliance. For this reason, reluctance should be distinguished from reclusiveness, even if, in popular discourses of celebrity, the two are taken to be equivalent. Although the renunciations of the recluse have their complexities and can never be taken solely as evidence of the abandonment of the public sphere, there is generally little doubt as to what the recluse's objective is, whatever its motivations or degree of success: to withdraw. Reluctance, by comparison, registers ambivalence at the site of celebrity subjectivity: it exists at, but never crosses, the threshold of withdrawal. This classically ambivalent reluctance does not lead to rupture, but instead sustains an ongoing affective 'spinning of wheels.' Gertrude Stein's (cited Jaffe and Goldman 2010) epigram—'I do want to get rich but I never want to do what there is to do to get rich' (p. 103)—could therefore be considered a classic statement of celebrity reluctance.

Since reluctance is not the unravelling of willing eagerness, but, instead, the simultaneous presence of feelings of willingness and disinclination, reluctance is not a counter-feeling to another. Instead, what is generally thought socially positive ('getting on with it') and negative ('not getting on with it') are already circulating and sparring within this very feeling. Reluctance is therefore closer in its workings to what Sianne Ngai (2005) calls 'fundamentally ambivalent "sentiments of disenchantment"' (p. 5), 'marked,' that is, 'by an ambivalence that

will enable them to resist...their reduction to mere expressions of class *ressentiment*' (p. 3). As a result of this simultaneity of feelings, reluctance can be socially understood in a multitude of ways; it can mark the celebrity subject as a difficult, ungenerous player of the game, or one rich in exclusive cultural capital for courageously playing the game differently—as long as they are in possession of some form of privilege that allows them to bypass disapproval. Reluctance, therefore, offers a theoretically rich means of accounting for the multiple layers of performance involved in celebrity self-fashioning, particularly in its relation to questions of power, privilege and performance. After all, to occupy a position of reluctance or hesitation is to have the privilege to be reluctant—to be able to pick and choose one's affective engagements. Furthermore, if expressing reluctance might be considered as an indicator of privilege, it follows that one might adopt or perform reluctance in the hope of securing—or as is more likely, being recognised as occupying, as if almost by accident—the privilege with which it is so intertwined.

The privilege conferred by a convincing performance of reluctance is, of course, connected to larger discourses and expectations of celebrity authenticity that Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2011) and Sarah Thomas (2014) have explored extensively in relation to celebrity practices on Twitter. They agree that authenticity is present in those practices more as a performance than as an inherent quality. As Thomas observes, 'Twitter reveals...the diversity that exists within conceptions and representations of the star-figure' rather than 'decisively

and monolithically offering a presentation of celebrity self that is more authentic, democratic and interactive than other models' (p. 243). Marwick and boyd explore the various ways in which authenticity in relation to celebrity Twitter accounts is a fraught concept that nevertheless 'creates pleasure for the celebrity-watcher on Twitter' (p. 144). Reluctance can similarly be deployed, to adopt Marwick and boyd's terminology, as one of many possible '*signals* of authenticity' (p. 149), although fan responses to those signals can vary widely on a spectrum of belief to disbelief. As Marwick and boyd point out, 'fans carefully evaluate the sincerity of celebrity accounts' (p. 149). Our interest in the deployment of reluctance on Twitter has more to do with its appeal—often via authenticity—to perceived power and privilege. Reluctance bears a complicated relationship to the perceived social power of the celebrity: it may as easily signal the lack that incites a desire for power, as the confident inhabiting of that power.

The relationship between reluctance and power or privilege offers a particularly useful framework for the analysis of celebrity interactions with social media. It seems likely that most celebrities in 2016 would prioritise the need for a social media plan: an agreed upon response to, not only the use of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and so on, but also to the very *idea* of these media forms. After all, defining one's relationship to social media is as much about deciding how and when to use them as it is to enter into debates of their merits or pitfalls. This pressure to assert a position on social media is intensified by two factors, the first being the celebrities' heightened visibility and related demands for

accountability (i.e. to ‘answer for’ their actions and interests). As P. David Marshall (2006) explains, ‘celebrities, via journalistic reportage, have become the effective conduit for discourses about the personal: celebrities have become the discursive talking points for the political dimensions of a host of formerly private and personal concerns’ (p. 322). In this way their actions have not only become the object of intense scrutiny on the part of audiences, but also of rationalisation and justification on the part of the celebrities themselves. The second factor draws upon a thread of celebrity theory that sees disclosure of information as a negotiated management of publicity. Writing well before the advent of social media, Joshua Gamson (1994) depicts the celebrity industry as a tug-of-war between professional celebrity publicists, their clients who wish to control the amount and types of disclosures that are made to the public, and media professionals whose job it is to find the next ‘scoop’ and claim the rights to its disclosure. These needs sometimes appear to be competing, whilst at other times they appear complementary. More recently, and very much in the same mode as Gamson, Muntean and Petersen (2009) examine ‘Celebrity Twitter’ as characterised by ‘strategies of intrusion and disclosure.’ They argue that the history of North American celebrity has oscillated between celebrities’ agents’ managed disclosure of information on the one hand, and media outlets’ intrusion into this attempted image management in search of unauthorised ‘scoops’ on the other. Currently, they argue, ‘celebrities have attempted to counter these new logics and strategies of intrusion through a heightened commitment to disclosure,

principally through the social networking capabilities of Twitter.’ Disclosure, then, as a fundamental practice in the celebrity industries, embodies reluctance: one discloses, yet that act of disclosing, of offering information, is always structured by the concomitant—though silenced—act of not-disclosing (something else). Disclosure is, in terms of celebrity information production, both a participation and a disinclination to participate in a knowledge exchange, essentially saying: ‘here, you can have this, but you cannot have that.’

Within this perfect storm of expectation, there have emerged a range of celebrity reactions to social media, offered up both by those who make use of them, and those who do not (and who are often quite vocal as to why not). Every celebrity seems to have his or her ‘social media story,’ ranging from endorsement to justification, from criticism to dismissal. Celebrity endorsements of social media tend to play out as rather mild and understated—with the notable exception perhaps of Ashton Kutcher, who seems to fancy himself a second-rate Steve Jobs both on- and off-screen. When interviewed on the subject of social media, Kutcher enthusiastically praised its potential in deference to the tech start-up gods:

...I realized what could be done inside real-time shared media...I thought that was pretty powerful...It’s almost like a manifestation of God...I try to use it to share interesting things with people. Tony Hsieh, who created Zappos.com, said to me, ‘Everything I post on the Web has to be ICEE’—it has to inspire connect, entertain, or educate (Weiner 2011).

Meanwhile, although celebrities like Rihanna and Ashley Judd do acknowledge social media’s potential for connection (both with fans, and more broadly), they

also express concern regarding its harmful potential. Speaking during the ‘Taming the Trolls’ event at the Women in the World Summit in New York in 2015, Judd suggested that she wants to stay on Twitter ‘to be connected and real,’ but cautions that such a connection tends to come at a cost: ‘the dehumanization of me’ (Lee 2015). Others, such as the model Jourdan Dunn and actor Hugh Grant, by their own admission join in order to set the record straight in a bid to counter rumours and redress the paparazzi and fake accounts.⁵ As Rihanna observed in an interview with *Cosmopolitan* in 2011:

I was so against Twitter. I couldn’t understand how people were supposed to care what I was doing at any given moment. Then I started to figure out you can treat it like a giant chat room. I can respond directly to people’s questions. It makes it easier to deal with the flak around you because now people have a sense of who you are (Spines 2011).

The appeal of Twitter, according to this argument, lies in its ability to confront and mediate competing constructions of the star persona in the name of preserving a preferred version (or as Rihanna says, ‘who you are’), which is of course no less carefully managed.

For other celebrities, justifying or explaining away participation in these spaces is the name of the game in the face of everything that Twitter and social media⁶ have come to commonly signify, i.e. the reality-show, Kardashian-esque over-self-promotion that is quintessentially shameful. Some novice tweeters claim technological ineptness as a means of cushioning their fall into social media, a response not necessarily attributable to their generation. For instance, both Selena Gomez and Danny DeVito in their first tweets caution, respectively: ‘I’m not even

sure if I'm using this correctly haha' (Selena Gomez, @selenagomez, 8:24PM, 8 Mar 2009); and, 'I don't really get this site or how it works' (Danny DeVito @DannyDeVito, 4:43PM, 5 Sep 2009). Others blame pressure from other, more social-media-savvy celebrity colleagues. Ed Sheeran, Aaron Paul and James Cameron tell such tales in their first tweets:

just joined tiwtter [sic]at mr @jakegosling house, he said its [sic] a good idea, do you agree? im [sic] not convinced yet (Ed Sheeran @edsheeran, 7:58PM, 26 Oct 2009)

ryan seacrest told me I had to get on Twitter. So here I am. First tweet. I feel younger already. (James Cameron @JimCameron, 12:04PM, 28 Jan 2011)

Hello twitter. @BKBMG and @mattgoss talked me into joining twitter. Hope I don't bore everyone with my tweets. (Aaron Paul @aaronpaul_8, 1:49PM, 26 Oct 2011)

Many of these first tweets display classic reluctance: 'I don't want to join Twitter—but look, I just have.' Amid these reluctant explanations and justifications, so-called 'A-list' celebrities often emerge as the most frequent social media denouncers. Amongst others Scarlett Johansson, Robert Pattinson, Will Ferrell, Emma Thompson, and Louis C.K. have all at one point or another conveyed their disdain, disinterest or disavowal of what are variously seen as superfluous, silly and even dangerous online spaces, deeming them boring, dehumanising and self-aggrandising, and critiquing the overexposure and lack of privacy they (presumably) promote.⁷ In a 2013 *Esquire* interview George Clooney makes an explicit connection between his fame and his aversion to Twitter:

If you're famous, I don't—for the life of me—I don't understand why any famous person would ever be on Twitter. Why on God's green earth

would you be on Twitter? First of all, the worst thing you can do is make yourself more available, right? Because you're going to be available to everybody' (Junod 2013).

Tina Fey, adopting a tone of *de-haut-en-bas* criticism, pronounces: 'I think you should have to get a license to use Twitter. Because most people are so fucking boring that they should shut up' (Gennis 2013). Whilst Julia Roberts resorts to a corrupting candy-cum-disappointing-sexual-encounter metaphor: 'It's kind of like cotton candy: It looks so appealing, and you just can't resist getting in there, and then you just end up with sticky fingers and it lasted an instant' (Marie Claire 2013). Kutcher's 'ICEE' mantra is long gone; for these celebrities, Twitter is stupid, cheap and unsophisticated, a diversion for those who have time to waste—ironically reminiscent of commonplace criticisms of celebrity itself.

It is striking how so many of these A-list indictments position Twitter, and social media more generally, as displaced sites of superficial, corrupt celebrity that these stars, by implication, both exempt themselves from, and rise above. Take, for instance, the attack on Twitter as self-aggrandisement. In a 2011 *Glamour* interview, Blake Lively recounted: 'People ask me why I don't tweet. Honestly. I'm so sick of myself' (Shapiro 2011). Notably, three years later Lively would set up a personal lifestyle website, *Preserve*, which rivalled Gwyneth Paltrow's *Goop* for mindlessly privileged self-indulgence. Similarly, Emma Stone's characterisation of social media as proceeding from 'that need to be liked, that need to be seen, that need to be validated, in a way, through no one that you know' (EPIX 2014), could easily apply to the condition of self-aggrandisement

that we call...well, *celebrity*. This denial of the suggestive links between the multiform visibilities of social media and celebrity reaches its zenith in Keira Knightley's denunciation of 'the Internet,' in which she declares: 'I am not a celebrity. I don't go home or out with my friends saying I'm a celebrity, and I don't ask to be treated like a queen' (The Telegraph 2009). While this position initially appears to be quite a different take from Clooney's denunciation of social media *because* he is a celebrity and is therefore already overinvested in a visible performance of self, both Clooney and Knightley eschew online presence because they are seeking to protect a realm of identity that they understand as inviolate and separate from celebrity performances of the self. So, whether proceeding from denial or acknowledgment of their celebrity status, A-listers may denounce, à la Julia Roberts, the spun candy of social media, but their own clear and inevitable participation in the economy of social hypervisibility leaves them with sticky fingers.

Vanity Fair (Duboff 2013) characterised and categorised these types of responses in an article entitled 'Why I'm Not on Twitter: Every Movie-Star Reason for Shunning Social Media,' suggesting a correlation between not participating on social media and 'being a movie-star.' According to Sarah Thomas, staying off Twitter allows 'the biggest modern stars [to] maintain the traditional classical star's aura of distance,' in order 'to remain elusive and extraordinary' (p. 245). This is Clooney's rationale, and we find it echoed in other A-list celebrities' Twitter-reluctance. Chris Hemsworth observes: 'There's a

danger of being overexposed with that stuff [...] The mystery of who you are is what keeps people interested in wanting to see you on the screen' (Hemsworth cited Duboff 2013)—a sentiment shared by fellow actors Bradley Cooper and Daniel Radcliffe.⁸ Emma Stone carries this logic further, suggesting that if celebrities lose their lock on the right to privacy, they will become indistinguishable from their fans: 'And so people ask the question about fame, or what it feels like, and it seems like everybody knows what that feels like. It seems like everyone's cultivating their lives on Instagram or on different forms of social media' (Duboff 2014). A-listers, then, may not particularly feel the need to be 'like everyone else,' as classic celebrity theory like Richard Dyer's suggests, although claiming such difference and privilege always runs the danger of alienating them from their fans. Twitter non-participation, therefore, offers them a relatively acceptable way to claim their place in the celebrity-fan hierarchy. As George Clooney declares of his fellow famous friends: 'I don't see Matt [Damon] or Brad [Pitt] or myself wanting to get our thoughts out in a 140-character-thing at 3 in the morning' (Setoodeh 2014). Because that would be so needy.

Given the range of these celebrity social media narratives, and particularly the persistent sense of reproach provided by many of the A-listers, we suggest that it is useful to think of celebrity engagement with social media in three overlapping, permeable moments, conditions or processes.⁹ First, there is a stance of privileged denunciation that one sees frequently performed by A-listers; second, an embrace of various platforms by the so-called micro-celebrities or

subcultural celebrities (those DIY, grassroots, everyday-to-everywhere upstarts about whom much of the work on celebrity and social media is focused); and finally, a position that affectively mixes or travels back and forth between distancing criticism and selective embrace. This latter, *reluctant* positioning is often adopted by the loose ‘category’ of celebrities who are neither A-list nor ‘Internet celebrities.’ After all, it is this group for whom social media offers a navigable, negotiable landscape of subject positioning, in contrast to the A-listers (who do not need it) and the micro-celebrities (who have *only* it). For the more middle-ground celebrities, their frequent deferral to reluctance allows them to inhabit something not entirely dissimilar to ‘*noblesse oblige*’ in their acts of connecting with fans, whilst simultaneously maintaining some sense of division between those who are celebrities and those who are not. As Pamela Ingleton (2014) has written elsewhere on the subject of Joshua Malina and Michael Ian Black’s largely B-list YouTube experiment the ‘Sad Sad Conversation,’ these celebrities enact a ‘simultaneous denial(...)and reinforcement’ (2014, p. 526) of celebrity in many ways made possible by the ‘third space’ offered up by the Internet and social media in particular.¹⁰ These celebrities ‘could be said to appeal to what Elizabeth Ellcessor refers to as “illusions of intimacy” [...] or “the notion of the accessible, interactive and potentially contactable star that best represents the Internet star” [...]—all while that star remains as inaccessible as ever before’ (p. 526). Social media is a space to claim and navigate reluctance, tied to the power and privilege that permit it, and the cachet reluctance possesses in

contemporary star texts. Lest we appear to propose a definitive hierarchy that cannot be transgressed, we emphasise that reluctant stances on social media, as well as denunciations and embraces, are less associated with celebrity identity categories and are instead more productively thought of as permeable, changeable positions based on related investments that are similarly in flux.¹¹

As we have noted, those who denounce social media create and police various cultural hierarchies that distinguish between celebrities who are serious-minded as opposed to trifling; who are creators of, as John Mayer would say, ‘lasting’ as opposed to ‘disposable’ ‘art’ (Enlow 2015). Such moves require a field of crass, grasping, degraded celebrity against which these celebrities can position their superior accomplishments and labour. One of the most frequently invoked examples of this debased celebrity activity that is rarely even accorded the status of ‘labour’ is the work of the Kardashian family. The name ‘Kardashian’ functions as the ultimate signifier of excessive, shameless celebrity—and, as we outlined in our introduction, not only of celebrity, but of a distinctive (and distinctively unfavourable) cultural shift, defined, in Nicholas Carr’s view (2015), by hollowness and superficiality.¹² As Adam Tod Brown (2015) outlines in ‘The Real Reason Everyone Hates the Kardashians,’ ‘hating that family has become a quasi religion. We don’t see the Kardashians as people. We see them as a soulless entity that exists for no other reason than to make money, take selfies, and get famous.’ The Kardashians (whose origins as ‘television’s most famous family’ can be variously traced to the O. J. Simpson

trial; Kim Kardashian's sex tape with ex-boyfriend Ray J; Kim's role as Paris Hilton's stylist; and the family's E! reality series, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*) have been endlessly identified as the quintessential celebrity sell-outs, who are, as the new saying goes, 'famous for being famous' or 'famous for (doing) nothing.' They do not sing (but make the odd music video appearance, particularly since Kim's marriage to Kanye West). They do not act (provided you discount the suspiciously scripted nature of many of the incident-of-the-week, OMG moments of their reality show and a few cameos by Kim in films like *Disaster Movie* [2008] and *Temptation: Confessions of a Marriage Counselor* [2013]). Neither do they write (again, overlooking their seven likely at least partially ghost-written books and considerable social media output, which at present consists of everything from frequent participation on the most popular social media platforms, including Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, as well as customised, paywall, lifestyle apps and corresponding websites for each of the Kardashian and Jenner women—Kim, Kourtney, Khloe, Kendall and Kylie—which, it should be noted, have experienced a great deal more success than Lively's *Preserve*).¹³ Whilst they are increasingly involved in various productive outputs—clothing, makeup and hair lines, mobile gaming apps and even personalised emojis ('Kimojis')—they face constant scrutiny over the degree of their actual involvement, despite their frequent assertions that they do contribute labour to these projects.¹⁴ Despite their detractors, many of their enterprises have achieved significant financial success, and they remain at the forefront of popular

discourse, both good and (perhaps especially) bad.¹⁵ As the saying goes, no publicity is bad publicity, and even the most aggressive efforts to clear the airwaves of Kardashian content tend to have the opposite effect, resulting in increased attention.¹⁶

Kim Kardashian—arguably the clan’s ‘queen bee’—was in many ways ‘made’ by the Internet (i.e. her sex tape and her subsequent social media accounts). As a result, she is one of a rare breed of celebrity social media evangelists; the anti-Clooney, if you will (and we are certain he would). Kim is anything but ambivalent when it comes to social media. In a recent series of tweets that, taken together, serve as an informal declaration of her ‘social media strategy,’ Kim exclaims: ‘I love social media! #SocialMediaAppreciationPost’ (Kim Kardashian West @KimKardashian, 3:28PM, 14 Mar 2016); and, ‘Twitter is where I can freely talk and have conversations with anyone and everyone! I feel such a connection on Twitter’ (Kim Kardashian West @KimKardashian, 3:26PM, 14 Mar 2016). Kim knows better than to bite the hand that feeds, and unlike most of the other celebrities we have examined thus far, is not afraid to proclaim that she has a ‘major love relationship with social media’ (Swisher 2016). That said, whilst she may have been introduced in tech-centric interviews with *Adweek* and *Recode* as everything from a ‘social media pioneer’ and ‘superstar in the tech world’ (Johnson 2015) to an ‘entrepreneur’ and ‘digital kingpin’ (Swisher 2016), she has not been received quite so generously or with such seriousness and legitimacy within the tech world itself. Consider for instance the considerable

blowback when she was announced as an invited speaker at the Code/Mobile 2014 conference and the Inforum speaker series at the Commonwealth Club in 2015. As Jennifer Maerz (2015) reports on the latter event in *Rolling Stone*, '[p]eople protested the event on the Facebook page of the public affairs forum, calling out the non-profit for promoting a celebrity they deigned to be too superficial for the speaker series' (Maerz 2015). Considering these rebukes in the context of so many celebrities' conflicted relationships with social media, one cannot help but feel it is a tough go indeed to not be accepted as the face of media that others have accused of 'degrading our society and civilization' (Schilling 2012).

If the social media/tech world refuses to take the Kardashians seriously, their celebrity and social media/mobile endeavours are even more intensely snubbed by their 'peers;' Kardashian 'hate' is doubly evident amongst 'fellow' celebrities. Targeting everything from their intelligence (or supposed lack thereof), life choices, bodies/penchant for nudity, and of course their social media proclivities, celebrities like Bette Midler, Reese Witherspoon, Pink and many more have all proclaimed loud and clear their disdain and disapproval of everything the Kardashians represent.¹⁷ Zach Braff explains with a single, short tweet to a fan inquiring about why he does not post photos with his girlfriend: '@mourya_vardhan I'm not a Kardashian. My relationship is private. Xo' (Zach Braff @zachbraff, 3:00PM, 25 Aug 2012). Likewise, in an interview (Hubert 2012) where Jeremy Renner is identified as having successfully transitioned from

‘character actor’ to A-list star no fewer than three times and is praised for being ‘charmingly candid’ with ‘no media-trained platitudes or overly-supportive spew in sight,’ Renner is quick to respond when goaded into a game of word association with the Kardashian name: ‘Oh, all those ridiculous people with zero talent who spend their lives making sure everyone knows their name. Those stupid, stupid people.’ (Renner would also respond to Pink’s indictment of Kim Kardashian’s nude selfies with the painfully patronizing retweet: ‘Strength and honor my lady! #stregnth #honor’ [Jeremy Renner @Renner4Real, 7:05PM, 9 Mar 2016]). Just as A-list celebrities mobilise their responses to social media as a means of establishing distinction, so, too, do they mobilise the Kardashians as the personification of the degraded, limelight-seeking celebrities from whom they wish to distance and distinguish themselves.

The fact is, the two tend to merge and blur. For example, consider how Jon Hamm (*Anderson* 2012), as he puts it, became ‘involved in a ‘Twitter feud’ despite not being on Twitter’ (because of course he is not) over a comment he made to *Elle UK*: ‘Whether it’s Paris Hilton or Kim Kardashian or whoever, stupidity is certainly celebrated...Being a fucking idiot is a valuable commodity in this culture because you’re rewarded significantly’ (Hamm cited Cronin 2012). When asked to clarify his comments on Anderson Cooper’s short-lived daytime talk show, he avoided a direct response before concluding: ‘I like the shows where they *actually* make something...It’s fun when they *actually* do something’ (Hamm cited *Anderson*, emphasis added). You might say the ‘actuallys,’ here,

have it. The Kardashians, according to Hamm, are not ‘makers’ or ‘doers,’ instead wasting their time with reality TV and Twitter, spaces from which he purposefully and magnanimously exempts himself.

In a condemnation reminiscent of George Clooney’s dismissal of social media, Daniel Craig attacked the Kardashians in an interview with *GQ* (Naughton 2013) as the embodiment of all that is crass in celebrity culture:

I think there's a lot to be said for keeping your own counsel...It's not about being afraid to be public with your emotions or about who you are and what you stand for. But if you sell it off it's gone. You can't buy it back—you can't buy your privacy back. ‘Ooh I want to be alone.’ F--k you. We've been in your living room. We were at your birth. You filmed it for us and showed us the placenta and now you want some privacy? Look at the Kardashians, they're worth millions...I don't think they were that badly off [financially] to begin with but now look at them. You see that and you think, ‘What, you mean all I have to do is behave like a f--king idiot on television and then you'll pay me millions?’...I'm not judging it—well, I am obviously.

Craig’s comments are drenched in gendered assumptions: this most ‘manly’ of British actors (not unlike Renner and Hamm), speaking to *GQ*, criticises a form of celebrity gendered female, associated both with the feminised domestic space (the living room), and with the biological markers of female lives (birth, placenta). His comments also need to be read in the context of his own star text as a reluctant celebrity. *The Guardian*’s Steve Rose (2015) dubbed him a ‘reluctant Bond’, and he has often been described as a quality actor who brought a touch of thespian class to the Bond franchise. Craig justifies his participation in that highly successful commercial venture by repeatedly laying claim to his dramatic credentials: ‘When I am cast in something, it is not because I am famous,’ he

pointedly informed one interviewer; ‘It is because I can act’ (S. Marshall 2012, p. 41). Craig’s take on social media similarly privileges embodied qualifications over what he sees as a disembodied, virtual emptiness: ‘I’m not on Facebook and I’m not on Twitter either! “Woke up this morning, had an egg?” What relevance is that to anyone? Social networking? Just call each other up and go to the pub and have a drink’ (S. Marshall, pp. 259-60). Once more, Craig rejects an enervated, female-gendered domestic realm of social media in favour of a hardier, laddish, embodied mode of being. If such denunciations of the Kardashians and social media as the epitome of an improper oversharing of affect sound like self-justifications, it is because they are. Indeed, the public performance of reluctance requires justification by recourse to an unseemly non-reluctant—and therefore non-legitimate—claiming of public visibility and worth. As a reluctant celebrity himself who has, after all, assumed the mantle of 007 amid continuing public displays of his uneasiness about doing exactly that (‘I’d rather break this glass and slash my wrists’ [Calhoun 2015]), dizzily alternating with claims that he eagerly embraces the role (‘I’m very excited about the idea of going on and doing another [Bond] movie’ [Lindrea 2006]), casting out Kardashian celebrity is arguably, for Craig, an act of exorcising the more eagerly assenting portion of his own mixed reluctant affect.

In our analyses of celebrity tweets and commentary we have attempted to show how Twitter in particular, and social media more broadly, serve as sites where notions of celebrity subjectivity are claimed, denied, and often reluctantly

both claimed *and* denied. This reluctance, we argue, is much more than a monolithic instance of celebrity hypocrisy or bad faith; it is crucially caught up in questions of relative privilege and status within celebrity. The analyses we have offered here of social media denouncers, advocates, and the ambivalent in-betweens, allow us to see how social media operate as grounds upon which privilege and cultural capital are claimed by public personalities by referencing a digital space that performs a visible sociality within which celebrities are fully implicated, whether they admit it or not. Arguably, no one understands this better than the Kardashians, who have fashioned an entirely new market from their own celebrity, taking self-branding to a whole new level. Their celebrity identity and social media seamlessly and, more importantly, shamelessly weave and merge—they are not in the business of justifying themselves. However, there is a trick to their positioning that might very well reveal an insider's skilful sense and acceptance of the game. Kim observes:

Social media works when you're open, when you're honest and people want to feel like they're getting a little glimpse into your life. It's not that I brand myself like I'm a celebrity. It's just I'm living my life and sharing a part of my life with the world (Johnson 2015).

This statement is less a cautious treading of a middle ground (like A-listers Knightley and Craig, for instance), and more like a knowing wink to the processes of an increasingly mediated industry. Still, the impulse to establish distance between her brand and 'celebrity' sounds very familiar, and we might very well conclude that the latest Kardashian strategy—in light of their increasing success and, by extension, increasing power and privilege—might be reluctance: premised

on striking a balance between (as Kim says about the Kardashian empire) relatability and vicarious living, building a ‘strong bond, closeness,’ but always in the name of ‘tell[ing] *our* story *our* way’ (Swisher 2014, emphasis added).

In her most recent interviews, Kim acknowledges her desire to ‘tak[e] more control of [her]self’ (Swisher 2016), praising the role her app plays in allowing her to ‘explain what’s true’ in a section called ‘Facts.’ Yet when she is asked if ‘every aspect of your life is shareable,’ she is quick to respond in the negative (Swisher 2016). One can only imagine how she would respond now, following the incident in Paris in October 2016 when she was bound, gagged, put in her hotel suite’s bathtub and robbed at gunpoint (Nessif 2016). For three months following that episode, Kim Kardashian, the celebrity who literally wrote the book on social media selfies, did not post a single thing on any of her social media accounts. In the wake of her social media silence, however, others had *a lot* to say, including Karl Lagerfeld: ‘If you’re that famous and you put all your jewellery on the internet... You cannot display your wealth and then be surprised that some people want to share it with you’ (Samuel and Allen 2016). Lagerfeld’s accusations join a chorus of others chiming in about how a star like Kim—a reality star, a social media star—‘had it coming.’ As a critical assessment, this statement not only brings us discursively full circle, but its gendered resonances would also take at least another paper to unpack. Whilst Kim’s newfound reluctance towards social media in light of recent events may be all too clear, in order to better understand the fluid peregrination of celebrities towards or away

from reluctance, we need to bypass both the stern cautions offered by Gladwell, Carr, and Jones about how social media is eating away at the foundations of All That We Hold Dear, and the opposing boosterish celebration of social media as the Great Good Thing. We need to tell a less frequently told story about social media and the operations of power, and one way to tell that story is to study the way public personalities—celebrities—perform reactions to social media, from eager embrace to horrified denunciation, to the queasy reluctance that lies in-between and within those two extremes, detecting as we do so the fluid mobility of privilege itself.

Notes

¹ Adam Gopnik (2010) offers a somewhat cheeky categorisation of the range of social media respondents, describing them as the ‘Never-Betters,’ the ‘Better-Nevers’ and the ‘Ever-Wasers.’

² Consider, for instance, Gopnik’s ‘Better-Never’ stalwarts Nicholas Carr (2012) and Sherry Turkle (2011; 2015) and many others, including Mark Bauerlein (2008), Siva Vaidhyanathan (2011) and, of course, Jaron Lanier (2010; 2013).

³ In their study, Marwick and boyd (2011) account for both the producers and consumers of media and celebrity. Whilst we have opted to focus mainly on the productive processes of celebrity, we are also attentive to how much more could be said about the affective resonances of the consumption—the reception, the interpretation—of reluctance.

⁴ When asked by *Paper*’s Amanda Fortini (2014) whether ‘Kim Kardashian would exist without social media’ Kardashian responds: ‘*I don’t think so...* I don’t think social media was that heavy when we started our show, but I think we really evolved with social media.’ More recently in an instalment of the podcast *Recode Decode* Kardashian tells Kara Swisher: ‘I feel like [social media] really furthered my career... Without social media I don’t know what the lifespan of the show would’ve been, what our careers would be’ (Swisher 2016).

⁵ Concern over ‘fake accounts’ has diminished in recent years with Twitter’s introduction (and progressively more careful management) of verified accounts, but would have been relevant to Dunn in 2011: ‘ok..... So i kind of got tired of people telling me to jump on twitter and the fake accounts were annoying me soooooo HERE I AM BITCHES!’ (Jourdan Dunn @missjourdandunn, 5:20PM, 1 Sep 2011). Grant, by contrast, positions his participation as counter-move against the more traditional celebrity foe of the tabloids: ‘#Leveson reports tomorrow and tabloids still printing nonsense so @hackinginquiry got me on Twitter. Am told #FF & “pls RT” are correct terms’ (Hugh Grant @HackedOffHugh, 9:44AM, 28 Nov 2012).

⁶ Such navigation is not exclusive to Twitter. In fact, we might think of Reddit’s ‘AMA’ (‘Ask Me Anything’) as the perfect expression of the meeting of celebrity reluctance and social media, where celebrities talk ‘directly’ to their fans—albeit in a carefully constructed, monitored setting where they can pick and choose which questions to answer and someone else types the answers on their behalf. While we focus almost exclusively on Twitter, there is certainly more that could be said on the intersection of social media and celebrity (reluctance) with regard to the particular valences and effects of other platforms, applications and sites like Reddit.

⁷ Scarlett Johansson asserts that she ‘can’t think of anything I’d rather do less than have to continuously share details of my everyday life’ (Huffington 2011); Robert Pattinson deems Twitter ‘the worst invention ever’ (Robstenville 2012); Will Ferrell bemoans ‘another thing that you have to deal with’ that ‘feels like an invasion of privacy’ (FHM 2015); Louis C.K. quit Twitter, saying, ‘It made me feel bad’ (Blistein 2015); and Emma Thompson proclaims, ‘I’d rather have root canal treatment for the rest of my life than join Twitter. I can’t bear the thought of being connected all the time. God knows what it’s all doing to us’ (Miller 2014).

⁸ Bradley Cooper argues: ‘If I know so much about you and you’re playing a character in a movie then that’s a lot of work I’m gonna have to do to forget who you are so that I can believe the character and therefore enjoy the movie’ (Duboff 2013). Daniel Radcliffe’s qualm is more personal: ‘[I]f you go on Twitter and tell everybody what you’re doing moment to moment and then claim you want a private life, then no one is going to take that request seriously’ (Suchet 2013).

⁹ Again, we are cognisant here of the work done by Marwick and boyd (2011), who argue that celebrity, particularly at the moment when it is constructed with and in light of new media, ‘has become a set of circulated strategies and practices that place fame on a continuum, rather than as a bright line that separates individuals’ (p. 140). We likewise strive to promote an understanding of a continuum of celebrity reluctance, as opposed to discretely categorised celebrity.

¹⁰ Atau Tanaka and Petra Gemeinboeck (2009) contend that within new media technologies one may find the potential for a ‘third space’ that ‘operate[s] in the paradoxical space between two antagonistic forces: the bottom-up approaches of collaborative spaces and collective interventions and the top-down strategies of centralized power and remote control’ (pp. 176–177).

¹¹ This permeability is reinforced by the phenomenon of the so-called ‘Twitter quitter:’ a star whose position on Twitter—or other social media platforms—undergoes evolution from participation to withdrawal—and often, as news accounts take pleasure in reporting, back to participation again. Included here are Miley Cyrus (who announced that she was quitting Twitter with a YouTube rap that proclaimed ‘I want my private life private. I’m living for me’ [Enlow 2015]), Courtney Love, Alec Baldwin, Jennifer Love Hewitt, Kanye West and John Mayer, whose four-year leave of Twitter was heralded by a denunciatory blog post worthy of Clooney et al. in its artistic hierarchies: ‘It occurred to me that since the invocation of Twitter, nobody who has participated in it has created any lasting art’ (Enlow 2015). However, the ever-growing assemblage of Twitter quitters turned Twitter returners (Mayer included) suggests that the (strategic) management of restricted disclosure is never entirely off the table.

¹² Even Kim is aware of her particular signification as a cultural figure, noting in several interviews that ‘reality TV hasn’t typically been the most respected form of television’ (*Recode Decode* 2016).

¹³ Kim, Kourtney and Khloe Kardashian (2010) were the first to release a book, followed by memoirs from matriarch Kris Jenner (2011) and Khloe (2015); science-fiction novels (2014; 2016) by sisters Kendall and Kylie; a cookbook (2014) by Kris; and a book of annotated selfies (2015) by Kim.

¹⁴ When it comes to the *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* mobile game Kim frames her involvement as ‘an everyday job’ of ‘approving everything’ (Swisher 2014), stressing that she and the developers ‘talk daily’ (Johnson 2015). Niccolo de Masi, CEO of Glu Mobile (the company that develops the game), has likewise highlighted Kim’s ‘deep involvement’ (Ziegler 2014).

¹⁵ Amongst the most successful projects of the Kardashians/Jenners, Kim’s mobile app/game *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* is believed to have made over \$150 million since its release two years ago, with Kardashian herself pulling in as much as \$20 million in 2015 alone (Robehmed 2016).

¹⁶ In August 2015, Florida news anchor John Brown (2015) walked off the set of *Good Day Orlando*, exasperatedly asserting: ‘I’m having a good Friday, so I

refuse to talk about the Kardashians today [...] I can't do it. I've had enough Kardashians.' Less than a week later Perez Hilton announced a 'Kardashian kleanse' on his website, opting not to provide any coverage of the family for a whole week in lieu of 'highlighting DAILY inspiring stories about amazing women from all around the world!' (Hilton 2015). Both stories were widely covered.

¹⁷ In response to Kim posting a nude (censored) selfie, Bette Midler chides: 'If Kim wants us to see a part of her we've never seen, she's gonna have to swallow the camera' (Bette Midler @BetteMidler, 10:47AM, 7 Mar 2016). Meanwhile, in an acceptance speech at the MTV Movie Awards, Reese Witherspoon cautions young girls: 'When I came up in this business, if you made a sex tape, you were embarrassed and you hid it under your bed' (Witherspoon 2011). Witherspoon does not address Kardashian directly, a subtler approach shared by Pink: 'Shout out to all of the women...using their brains, their strength, their work ethic, their talent...It may not ever bring you as much "attention" or bank notes as using your body, your sex, your tits and asses, but women like you don't need that kind of "attention"' (Pink @Pink, 6:35PM, 8 Mar 2016).

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**“Humanity” as Discursive Crux: Disturbing “Familiar Transparencies” in
Popular Representations of Facebook**

Introductory Note

This is the only chapter of the dissertation containing work that has not been previously published. The original work on *The Social Network*, the 2010 film written by Aaron Sorkin and directed by David Fincher, was presented at the Cultural Studies Association Conference in Chicago, IL in March 2011 in a paper entitled, “Putting a Face to the Facebook: Humanizing Social Media in *The Social Network*.” The original work on “The Things That Connect Us,” Facebook’s first “brand video” released in 2012, was presented at the meeting of the Communication Studies Association at Congress in Victoria, BC in June 2013 in a paper entitled, “‘The Things That Connect Us:’ Interrogating the Sociality and ‘Humanity’ of Facebook’s Brand Video.” A few weeks before my panel I was invited by the Congress Media Team to be part of their media outreach program, culminating in an interview with Tristan Hopper of the *National Post*. Hopper’s feature, “Facebook isn’t robbing the world of its decency, it’s showing us what humanity really looks like: researcher,” appeared in the *Post* on June 5, 2013, days before I delivered my paper. I was subsequently contacted for follow-up radio interviews with *The Todd Veinotte Show* (Halifax, Saint John, Moncton) and *The Rob Breakenridge Show* (Calgary). Needless to say, it was the most fanfare I have ever received for a conference paper, particularly one that had not yet actually been presented.

The phone interview with Hopper lasted over an hour, during which time I learned a great deal about the soundbite-driven nature of journalism and how what one intends to say does not necessarily translate to the page (something that served me well when I was interviewed about *Harry Potter* and J. K. Rowling the following year). As I would tweet (@PamelaIngleton) later to clarify:

Edit: Facebook is an idea as much, and perhaps moreso than it is a platform, and that idea is interacted with in a multiplicity of ways.

Edit: Facebook is not revealing our “humanity.” I have no idea what “humanity” means.

Edit: Facebook can, through the discourses that circulate around it, inform us on issues that extend beyond the platform itself.

Extension: “Social media elections” can be buttressed to convince us of a democracy that may not actually be as functional as the idea of social media politics suggests.

The second “edit” is of particular consequence to the context of the full article; based on the pages and argument that follows, one can only imagine my frustration at being associated with the byline that Facebook is “showing us what humanity really looks like.” Nevertheless, despite my inconsistent attempts to frame my research for a non-specialist audience, I still somehow managed to articulate a statement of some import: “The ways we talk about social media reveal how we feel about these kinds of bigger ideas [like democracy].” This statement embodies the original conceit of the dissertation and, consequently, building on arguments put forth in the previous chapters, this chapter provides the

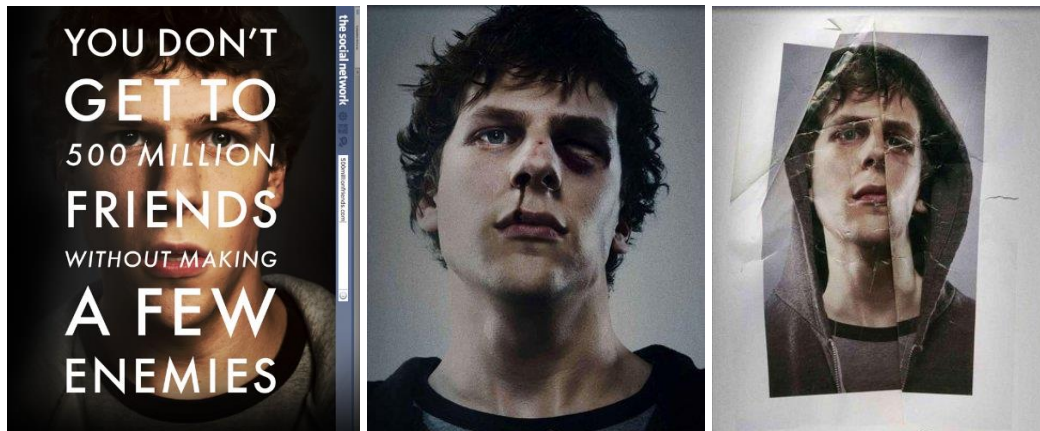
fullest articulation of that original idea: in its explicit analysis of discourse,³² confrontation with the representativeness of social media (i.e. both how social media is represented and how it lends itself to representation) and collision with larger social/philosophical constructs (i.e. humanity, democracy).

The texts discussed here—*The Social Network*, Malcolm Gladwell and Adam Gopnik’s *New Yorker* pieces, “The Things That Connect Us”—are tied to a specific point in the evolution and integration of social media into the public consciousness and cultural lexicon (for instance, in advance of its release *The Social Network* was often referred to as “the Facebook movie” to capture both its novelty and the incredulity of viewers and critics regarding the film’s subject matter; cut to 2017 and the release of *The Emoji Movie*, its actual, straight-faced title). When I first presented on *The Social Network*, I focused a significant portion of my analysis on the visuals incorporated into its promotion, analyzing the discursive reverberations of the posters created by artist Neil Kellerhouse³³ to advertise the film. Beyond popularizing the aesthetic of bold white text superimposed on somewhat awkward close-ups, these images also put a face to the Facebook: Kellerhouse’s work focuses on a series of stark and fragmented images of Jesse Eisenberg, the “face” or portrayer of Facebook founder Mark

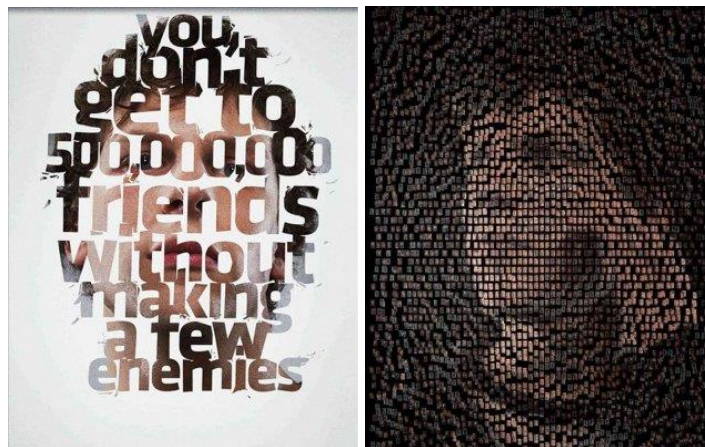
³² Although discourse remains a central if at times unspoken critical touchstone for all of the chapters of this dissertation.

³³ Neil Kellerhouse has produced similar graphic designs for many other films, including Lars von Trier’s *Antichrist* and re-releases of Marco Ferreri’s *Dillinger is Dead* and Terrence Malick’s *The Thin Red Line*, and was also responsible for some of the publicity material for Casey Affleck’s crazed faux-documentary of Joaquin Phoenix’s crazed faux rap career, *I’m Still Here*—a film that, arguably, reveals more about the effects and influence of social media in its production than Sorkin and Fincher’s in its narrative.

Zuckerberg and the film's star, working to signal the viewer's attention to the man behind the myth. Despite never experiencing any form of physical violence in the film itself, several of these images depict Eisenberg/Zuckerberg with visible bruising and even a bloody nose:

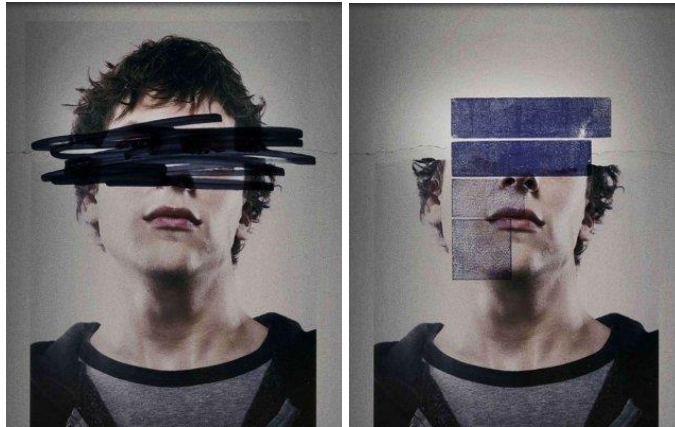


Additional images fragment his face, or appear fragmented, as composites of other images, possibly images of other people, possibly Facebook users:



Other images still reveal Eisenberg/Zuckerberg in the process of being erased or scratched out, in one quite literally being overwritten by an emblem of his own

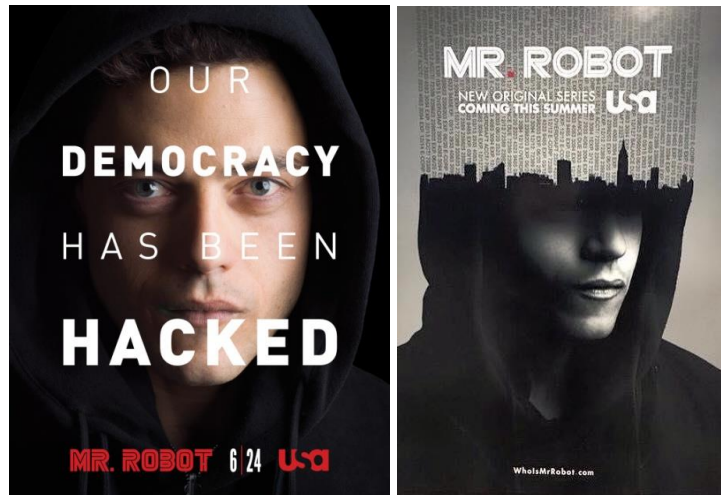
invention (an “F” for “Facebook”)—and here social media sceptics would add, a platform equally at risk of overwriting the personalities of all of its participants:



Instead of focusing on the technology of the “facebook,” the film’s promotion, especially those images depicting Eisenberg as bruised and bloodied, renders *The Social Network*, and the social network it depicts (i.e. Facebook), readable, familiar, *human*, side-stepping the film’s own anxieties about the web-based origins of its subject matter (something I elaborate on in the article itself). These images are physical, visceral. We are reminded that this subject has a body and that he is limited by that body. No cyborgs, here. Somewhat conversely, the emphasis on fragmentation and composition in the other images revokes or overwrites Eisenberg’s “humanity,” as he becomes less himself and more an abstraction of something else (other people, Facebook, etc.). In the first case, we have an emphasis on his vulnerability; in the second, a different kind of vulnerability, defined by his proliferation and dispersion, and the same of his social network, Facebook. I would argue, however, that in both cases the impetus of the design is the same: to draw attention to the relationship between man and

(his) machine and emphasize the Turing-esque concern over the process by which one is distinguished from the other.

I include these images in this introductory note first to demonstrate how the discourses outlined in the chapter that follows might be said to extend to the visual components of the film's promotion, and not merely the textual, but more importantly to further contextualize my argument in light of a reproduction and revision of *The Social Network*'s marketed aesthetic in the promotion of the USA hit *Mr. Robot*: a dramatic television series centred on Zuckerberg-esque computer whiz kid Elliot Alderson and his efforts to hack and ultimately overthrow fictional conglomerate E Corp. While there are several comparisons between these two texts that could be explored, I think it is useful to briefly consider how the series was promoted in advance of its first season premiere in 2015:



In response to a *Deadline* article revealing these promotional posters, user “juliejewl” remarks, “Neil Kellerhouse should sue them for so blatantly ripping off his work” (28 Apr 2015, 8:08pm). It is difficult to disagree. The key visual

signifiers first identified in Kellerhouse's work for *The Social Network* are repeated here: emphasis on a human face at risk of being consumed by/in a data-driven world. Meanwhile the "hoodie," signifying as it does in North American culture (typically racialized) "hoodlums," recalls the post-violence portrayals of Zuckerberg (note: he, too, is wearing a hoodie in one of the images depicting him as wounded).

There is a final element to *Mr. Robot*'s promotion, however, one arguably absent from the corresponding visual for *The Social Network*:



While the advertisements for *The Social Network* certainly gesture to edgier and more dramatic subject matter (i.e. “you don’t get to 500 million friends without making a few enemies”), these images from *Mr. Robot* are outright hostile, given the combination of the ad’s anti-establishment messaging, explicit language and suggestive male aggression. However, at the risk of sounding like a social-media defender (or “Never-Better”), one of these things is not like the others. While there is no doubt that especially the major social media players like Facebook engage in and recreate the conditions of the neoliberal market, to equate them so directly with “the system” and its iterations (i.e. Wall St.) seems, at the very least, incommensurate; there is a macrocosmic/microcosmic relationship between “society” and “social media” that is transgressed by the assumed equivalence of these images. What this legacy of visual discursive representation amassing around social media does demonstrate is the persistence of a particular type of social media discourse, which I explore through one discursive lens—“humanity”—in this chapter.

**“Humanity” as Discursive Crux: Disturbing “Familiar Transparencies” in
Popular Representations of Facebook**

As I outline in the introduction to this dissertation, “social media” are variously defined as simultaneously public and private tools, applications and/or platforms permitting some measure of community sharing. However, “social media” is also emerging as an increasingly pervasive and complex idea or constellation of ideas and interpretations of the various media to which it refers, and “social media” the concept has provoked no shortage of responses and assessments. In fact, it is rare if not impossible to encounter analyses of social media tools, applications and platforms that do not at some point weigh in one way or the other on social media’s broader implications, possibilities and/or limitations. “Social media” has become a lightning rod for grander evaluations of the perennial big questions: (what is) humanity, democracy, freedom, morality, community, and so on. If it is increasingly common for discussions of social media to at least gesture towards such grandiose (and frequently loosely defined) concepts, it is likewise true that even seemingly unrelated discussions of these concepts more and more tend to intersect with considerations of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the thousands of other online and mobile applications broadly taken to be “social.” This chapter takes up one such intersection of big think and social media: “humanity,” a disturbingly ill-defined but affectively effective catch-all, and Facebook, specifically as it is explored in Facebook’s first brand video, “The Things That Connect Us,” released shortly after its initial

public offering (IPO), and in the promotion and reception of Aaron Sorkin and David Fincher's dramatic retelling of the founding of Facebook, *The Social Network*. Working from these examples, this chapter proposes a consideration of social media in light of Michel Foucault's articulations of "discourse" whereby either the benefits or ills of social media are used in the service of promoting versions/visions of more abstracted grand narratives, obscuring both the media and the ideas in question in the process, whereby Facebook becomes discursively intertwined with various iterations of "humanity." I argue that "humanity" emerges as the battleground over Facebook's presumed inherent "goodness" or "badness," a mobilizing retort used both against and in support of widespread critiques of social media. In other words, Facebook's value becomes a matter of its humanity, where "humanity" can imply simultaneously very little and almost everything, but always *matters*.

I am invoking a Foucauldian understanding of discourse and not, for instance, "discourse analysis," a research method increasingly applied³⁴ to studies of social media stemming from the social sciences. Foucault articulates his theory of discourse and discursive formations first in *The Order of Things*, and later more thoroughly in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. As Stuart Hall summarizes, Foucault uses discourse to help ascertain "where meaning comes from" (Hall, "Foucault" 73), or, more specifically, to refer to "a group of statements which

³⁴ See, for instance, the work of Crispin Thurlow (including "Fakebook: Synthetic Media, Pseudo-sociality, and the Rhetorics of Web 2.0") and Michele Zappavigna (*Discourse of Twitter and Social Media: How We Use Language to Create Affiliation on the Web*).

provide a language for talking about—a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Hall, “The West” 291). As Hall attests, “Foucault shifts our attention away from the grand, overall strategies of power, towards the many, localized circuits, tactics, mechanisms and effects through which power circulates—what Foucault calls the ‘meticulous rituals’ or the micro-physics’ of power” (Hall, “Foucault” 77). We might think of these “circuits, tactics, mechanisms and effects” as the frameworks and flows of social media—social media’s networks, logics, platforms and content. Furthermore, if, as Foucault suggests, discourses are those “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, *Archaeology* 54), then any analysis of an object (in this case social media, and particularly Facebook) must take into account the process by which that object is brought into language.

The desired outcome of any analysis of this process is not, according to Foucault, “a matter of rediscovering some primary word that has been buried in [language], but of disturbing the words we speak, the myths that animate our words, of rendering once more noisy and audible the elements of silence that all discourse carries with it as it is spoken” (Foucault, *Order* 324). It is this element of Foucault’s theory of discourse that is so crucial to this reading of the use(s) of “humanity” as a mobilizing term and concept in relation to social media. In attempting to define the “statement” (groups of which, as Hall alludes to above, Foucault later equates with discourse and discursive formations [Foucault,

Archaeology 125; 129]), Foucault asserts, “it is like the over-familiar that constantly eludes one; those familiar transparencies, which, although they conceal nothing in their density, are nevertheless not entirely clear” (Foucault, *Archaeology* 124). I argue that the use of “humanity” in relation to social media by various parties operates very much as a “familiar transparency” that is “not entirely clear,” and as a “myth” that must be disturbed in order both to better understand its assumed content and meaning and the content and meaning of those media with which it is increasingly conceptually aligned. In his reading of Foucault, Hall proposes that any study of a specific discourse of a thing must include statements about that thing; “the rules...which govern what is ‘sayable’ and ‘thinkable’” (and not); “‘subjects’ who in some way personify the discourse”; “how this knowledge about the topic acquires authority” and becomes “truth”; and institutional practices for regulating/organizing the conduct of subjects (Hall, “Foucault” 73-4). This chapter, then, is an attempt to account for various statements, rules, subjects, authorities and practices that comprise discourse(s) belonging to or stemming from social media, in this case those discourses of “humanity” that work around and through popular representations of social media like Facebook’s brand video and *The Social Network*.

Among the few scholars to examine the discursive entanglement of larger, more abstracted ideas and social media and to engage this broader notion of “social media discourses” that I gesture to in my introduction are Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylińska. In *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process*, they

identify and examine a number of media-related discourses—media coverage and catastrophe (29), Ambient Intelligence (101) and mediation through cosmetic surgery (129), to name a few—and specifically the processual co-production of humanity and media. Drawing from critical work on the cyborg, they stress the importance of seeing “the human...as having always been technological, or having always been mediated” (194), concluding that “the things that we are making are also making us” (204). While they do not directly tackle the discursive operations of “humanity” as they are expressed in relation to social media, in their chapter on Facebook and the ethics of mediation they do argue for “how media issues and platforms play a key role in shaping the dominant moral discourse in society” (156). While I would certainly endorse this observation of the relationship between media and larger ideological social issues, echoing my earlier contention regarding the intersection of “big think” ideas (like humanity or, in this case, morality) with media and especially emergent media forms, I find this declaration limiting in its scope. I am more compelled by a multidirectional conception of this relationality, where dominant discourse shapes as it is shaped, as are individual media—and, in fact, the valences of these operations between multiple media forms and multiple discourses are far more complex. But I agree that we cannot have a discussion about contemporary media without also taking into consideration contemporary discourses and vice versa, a contention that is, it should be noted, not universally shared across new media criticism.

I am also indebted to Kember and Zylinska's suggestion that, methodologically, it is "perhaps more productive to analyze Facebook as simultaneously a process and an entity" (159), something I attempt to do in this chapter and a practice very well-aligned with Foucault's articulations of discourse and Hall's list of considerations regarding the study of the operation of discourses that I outline above. Kember and Zylinska catalogue the statements and subjects of Facebook—or what they refer to as the "ontology of Facebook"—by acknowledging texts like *Catfish*, *The Social Network*, newspapers and magazines (specifically *Time*, likely in part due to its "Person of the Year" features on Mark Zuckerberg in 2010 and "You," the social media user, earlier in 2006) and the blogs, Twitter comments, Google searches and even Facebook content that compose the Internet more broadly (158), as well as authors like David Kirkpatrick (whose *The Facebook Effect: The Inside Story of the Company That is Connecting the World* is marketed as "The Real Story Behind The Social Network") and D. E. Wittkower (whose edited collection, *Facebook and Philosophy: What's on Your Mind?*, is critiqued by Kember and Zylinska for using "Facebook's media environment" to "make things mean *what we want them to*" (156)—a direct quotation from Wittkower's volume that reveals both a failure to attend to the idiosyncrasies of Facebook, as per Kember and Zylinska's argument, as well as yet another identification of Facebook as a site of meaning-making) and the role they play in our everyday understanding and articulation of Facebook.

In a very Foucauldian way, Kember and Zylinska propose that media, much like discourses, are “dynamic processes of emergence in time” (155), with Facebook being “always inevitably mediated via other media” (158) and particularly those media examples and forms outlined above. In keeping with Hall’s paradigm for studying individual discourses, for Kember and Zylinska the “rules” presiding over what is “sayable” and/or “thinkable” centre around what they refer to as a “*counter-McLuhan*” “*demediation*” (158) or the “familiar gesture of humanizing technology by reducing it to the question of (human) use” (157): “[t]he ethical problems that most frequently get raised with regard to Facebook predominantly concern individual human behavior: that of its founder, financial backers, and users, respectively, and with other media (film, journalism, blogs) often mobilized to set up and arbitrate over the moral debate” (155). Although they are coming at the question of Facebook from a different angle than this study, Kember and Zylinska agree that within popular discourse any assessments of Facebook seep into assessments of Facebook’s humanity, a humanity defined by relatively opaque morality and substance. When pressed, this reflexive association of Facebook and humanity becomes tenuous; yet it often goes unquestioned, as the Facebook-humanity bait-and-switch is facilitated through a subsequent process of erasure: “the layering and interweaving of media forms and narratives in providing an analysis of the moral dimensions of Facebook is interesting; even more interesting is the fact that this multilayered process of mediation involved in the production of what we might call the

ongoing, multisite ‘event of Facebook’ gets erased in such narratives” (155-6). We do not question the questioning of Facebook’s humanity; that association, as Kember and Zylinska argue and as I will argue in this chapter, is naturalized through its iterations. Thus, the purpose of including Kember and Zylinska’s reading of Facebook, ethics and moral discourse in the critical framework of this chapter is twofold. On the one hand, their analysis is used to model the application of Hall’s Foucauldian paradigm, a process I employ within my own textual analyses later in this chapter. On the other hand, beyond this more demonstrative function, I present their reading of the process by which discourses about social media emerge and become naturalized because their reasoned, careful attention to discursive emergence and exposure of that which is taken for granted in popular social media utterances is not altogether common (as we will see momentarily).

On 4 October 2012, Facebook released its first “brand video” (essentially an advertisement) entitled “The Things That Connect Us:” one and a half minutes of images and narration set against something of a creative reimagining of Facebook’s mission statement. The video, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu (*Biutiful*, *Birdman*, *The Revenant*) presents graphic comparisons between so-called “everyday” items and the social media platform; according to the narrator and the words presented onscreen, “Chairs are like Facebook,” as are “doorbells, airplanes, bridges...dance floors, basketball, a great nation.” The video is meant to feel profound, to induce chills, and concludes with the heart-

rending statement, “The universe: it is vast and dark, and makes us wonder if we are alone. So maybe the reason we make all of these things is to remind ourselves that we are not.” In short, as the title of the video lets on, Facebook, like the innovations that have come before it (e.g. while not mentioned explicitly, there is a shot of a telephone), brings people together and transcends its technological use value in order to become something *beyond*. Facebook is more than it appears; it is a feeling, a lifestyle, an impetus, an idea.

The perhaps misplaced sincerity—verging on absurdity—of the video solidified its meme-worthy status and quickly spawned numerous parodies, including the video “*Toilets are like Facebook*,” which *TechCrunch* described as “ironically more accurate and insightful than the original.” “The Things That Connect Us” was produced by the Portland-based ad agency Wieden + Kennedy, perhaps best known for their work for Nike and Old Spice. In part marking Facebook’s one billionth user milestone (enough to render the social networking platform the third most populated nation on the planet, were we to consider it in such terms), Mark Zuckerberg introduced the video with a short message extolling the virtues of Facebook for the greater human good:

For the first time in our history, we've made a brand video to express what our place is on this earth. We believe that the need to open up and connect is what makes us human. It's what brings us together. It's what brings meaning to our lives. Facebook isn't the first thing people have made to help us connect. We belong to a rich tradition of people making things that bring us together. Today, we honor this tradition. We honor the humanity of the people we serve. We honor the everyday things people have always made to bring us together...[N]ow Facebook is a part of this tradition of things that connect us too.

Facebook, argues Zuckerberg and company, is quintessentially “human,” the latest in a long line of social tools facilitating human connection. Facebook’s brand video serves as both a response to and catalyst for a more widespread trend in assessments of, and broader arguments against, “social media,” whereby these media are characterized as disingenuous spaces lacking a rather vaguely delineated “humanity.” Under consideration here is what might be at stake in commentary on social media’s relationship to “humanity” and the forms of sociality it (presumably) permits and denies. What, according to Facebook, constitutes the “humanity of the people we serve”? What, in Facebook’s terms (and, more broadly, in the persistent terms of social media discourses), “makes us human,” and how do Facebook and others claim this humanness is encouraged or repressed, created or destroyed by and within social media?³⁵ These questions are integral to any critical understanding of Facebook’s self-representation and beyond, and will be explored later in the chapter.

“The Things That Connect Us” is not alone in its discursive lauding of the Facebook application and the utopian, democratic, freedom flag-waving virtues of social media and, more broadly, the Internet. Within Internet and new media critiques at times it seems as if there is only ever room either for such effusive praise or utter condemnation—what Evgeny Morozov has termed “the enduring

³⁵ Writing in 1998—long before the arrival of Facebook—Steve Jones similarly questions the assumptions behind a press release announcing the introduction of email to the White House that claims the new email capabilities “will bring the Presidency and this Administration closer and make it more accessible to the people.” Jones asks, “What is meant by ‘closer’? What is meant by ‘more accessible’? Our hopes and expectations for community are evident in these terms, and in the everyday discourse on-line” (Jones xiii).

emptiness of our technology debates” (Morozov). Writing for the *New Yorker* in 2011, Adam Gopnik neatly summarizes what he claims are the three default positions of new media commentaries (about “the Internet”) put forward by what we might refer to as the new media public intellectuals: those who classify new media as a positive trend (whom he refers to as the “Never-Betters”), those who classify new media as a negative and debilitating trend (whom he refers to as the “Better-Nevers”) and those who conclude that new media is simply the latest trend to operate on and change us as all trends, innovations and media have always done (whom he refers to as the “Ever-Wasers”). We might think of Gopnik’s positionings as the discursive formations assembling around social media, both as media and collectively as a broader concept. Gopnik’s proposed taxonomy is catchy, certainly, but it also effectively communicates the limited, reductionist tendencies of a good deal of popular writing on new and social media.

Gopnik’s “Never-Betters” are those celebratory scholars who praise the potential of new media in the “gee-whiz rhetoric of...*Wired*” magazine (qtd. in Galloway xv). Gopnik’s textbook example of Never-Betterism is writer Clay Shirky who celebrates the collective potential of an increasingly connected world. According to Shirky, “[t]he old limitations of media have been radically reduced” (Shirky, *Everybody* 12) and “new technology enables new kinds of group-forming” (17), which “matters because the desire to be part of a group that shares...is a basic human instinct” (54). Shirky believes in the “social” promise of

social media, confident that “[w]hen we change the way we communicate, we change society” (17): “when we use a network, the most important asset we get is access to one another” (Shirky, *Surplus* 14). Writers like Michael Strangelove and S. Craig Watkins echo Shirky’s hopefulness in their reflections on the “intense emotional experience” (Strangelove 4) and “expressions of intimacy and community” (Watkins xix) made available to “ordinary” people on sites like YouTube, MySpace and Facebook. In a different vein, perhaps the most obvious promoters of the Never-Better spirit towards social media are social media’s *actual* promoters: those in the business world who have taken advantage of the social media moment to tout social media expertise in advertising and promotional contexts, offering up sellable, soundbite-worthy statements like this one from the forward to Shel Israel’s *Twiterville*: “Twitter is not a technology. It’s a conversation” (Li x). Overall, this exuberance over the more utopian possibilities of social media recalls the similar utopic hope expressed about the World Wide Web in the nineties.³⁶ For example, in his 2001 treatise on the Internet, *Cyberculture*, Pierre Lévy anticipates the hopefulness towards new and social media, praising the means by which “participation in [cyberspace]...connects[,]...enables communities[,]...eliminates monopolies” (100), enacting, Lévy claims, “an ideal of deterritorialized human relationship, non-hierarchical and free” (111). Here is humanity as it “should” be: reveling in

³⁶ Jaron Lanier, referenced later in this chapter as a “Better-Never,” might have been said to embody this Never-Better spirit of the early Internet days as a computer scientist and virtual reality pioneer. In *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*, he describes himself as having been “part of a merry band of idealists back then,” referring to the founders of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (or EFF) and, somewhat humourously, *Wired* magazine.

unencumbered sociality and utopian community that is simultaneously transcendent yet somehow also natural and inevitable. The Never-Betters' praise of the "new" is frequently—and awkwardly—buttressed by an alignment with the old, particularly in the characterization of new media as the next step in an ever-extending reformation begun with Gutenberg—a commonly adopted, new-media teleological framework.³⁷

By contrast, the "Better-Nevers" are those more morose, apprehensive counterpoints to the excitable, positivistic Never-Betters, and, according to Gopnik, include the likes of Nicholas Carr, William Powers and Sherry Turkle, a determined contingent working to ward off the evils of social media with titles like Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (2010), Turkle's *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (2011) and my personal favourite, Mark Bauerlein's *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under 30)* (2008). There are increasingly more and more popular journalistic expressions of Better-Neveness, from attempts at hard-hitting exposés like CBC's *Doc Zone* special "Facebook Follies," to long-form journalistic provocations of social media, among the most famous of which is Malcolm Gladwell's *New Yorker* piece "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not be Tweeted," written in response to the (notion of) "Twitter

³⁷ I explore this insistence in digital and electronic lit scholarship to locate emergent writing forms in relation to print discourses, in a sense discursively and theoretically binding digital text to material print, in my previous chapter on *Twitterature*.

revolutions” coming out of Tehran in 2010 (more on that later). I would add to the mix former friend of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) Jaron Lanier, who has since morphed into something of an Internet—and especially Web 2.0 (which he describes as “petty” [Lanier 3])—whistleblower. In his 2010 manifesto, *You Are Not a Gadget*, Lanier positions himself in opposition to what he calls “the latest techno-political-cultural orthodoxy” (22); he is not opposed to the idea of an Internet, but to the way that idea is currently being taken up and, for him, abused: “The way the internet has gone...is truly perverse” (14); “[t]he deep meaning of personhood is being reduced by illusions of bits” (20). Like many Better-Nevers, Lanier is opposed to “computationalism, the noosphere, the Singularity, web 2.0” and their ilk, and is instead interested in bringing about “a new digital humanism” (23), where “humanity” is loosely attributed to some (vague) “deepening of meaning” (192). In *Who Owns the Future?* (2013), he further elaborates upon this dreamed “humanistic information economy” (21), which he promotes in the face of what he refers to as “creepiness,” or “when information systems undermine individual human agency” (305). Again, this insistence on the deterioration of the “human” persists in the literature on social media and digital culture. Carr claims that “[o]ne of the greatest dangers we face as we automate the work of our minds...is...a slow erosion of our humaneness and our humanity” (Carr, *Shallows* 220), a sentiment reiterated by writers like Bill Wasik, who cautions that “the very notion of a ‘social network’ makes us think like marketers, stripping down our sense of community, segmenting ourselves self-consciously into niches, reducing

the unknowable richness of group relationships down to barren trees to links and nodes” (Wasik 142). By equating the social network to the market, Wasik does attempt to articulate what might actually constitute this “deepening of meaning” associated with “humanity” (i.e. some kind of more authentic lived experience apart from capitalism); that having been said, often it is only a vaguely defined notion of “personhood” and of “humanism” or humanity (as expressed above) that lurks behind the Better-Never protestations (and echoes throughout the rhetoric of the Never-Betters).

Finally, for Gopnik’s “Ever-Wasers” (his only example is historian Ann Blair) the goal of new-media criticism is to expose and challenge the collectively perceived, “oddly perennial newness of today’s new media” (Gitelman, *Always* 3). As Lisa Gitelman suggests in her book, *Always Already New: Media, History, and The Data of Culture*, “The introduction of new media...is never entirely revolutionary: new media are less points of epistemic rupture than they are socially embedded sites for the ongoing negotiation of meaning as such” (Gitelman, *Always* 6). Gitelman’s project attends to this Ever-Waser plight, hoping to “oppose some of the exceptionalism of the present” (Gitelman, “What”). There have always been *new* new media, the Ever-Wasers assert, and so will there ever be. Like the Never-Betters, the Ever-Wasers also justify this assertion by positioning new media in a trajectory or progression with the media that have come before: Carolyn Marvin, for example, comments that “the computer is no more than an instantaneous telegraph with a prodigious memory,

and all communications inventions in between have simply been elaborations on the telegraph's original work" (Marvin 3); Espen Aarseth explains that his "cybertext" theory is "not... 'new'" or "revolutionary," but rather "a *perspective* on all forms of textuality" (Aarseth 18); and Kember and Zylinska deem Facebook "the current 'folk devil'" like television that came before it, concluding that it is "too simplistic to see, say, Facebook as just exploitative, immoral, and posing a threat to our privacy and sovereignty," explicitly targeting the Better-Never outcry (166). Drawing from Bernard Stiegler they instead suggest that it is the kind of thing that is "*good, until it's bad*" (166). Of note here is the attention paid to language, to "negotiation of meaning," "perspective" and the discursive components previously discussed in the context of Kember and Zylinska's argument. The Ever-Wasers shift the discussion from an overly generalized assessment of virtue and value to a discursive analysis of meaning and meaning-making: to relational understanding, "the cultural imaginary and the social perception of technologies" (Natale 586; 597), which speaks to the preferred approach of my study. What is consistent across each of Gopnik's categorizations is their persistent concern with questions of humanity (based on new media's arguable benefit or detriment, or, for the "Ever-Wasers," attention to human forms of production defined by making and building), each tackling in its own way the locatability of "humanity" within media.

If "The Things That Connect Us" proudly heralds Never-Betterism, the Better-Never sentiment of a lost or disappearing humanity comes to the fore both

within and without *The Social Network*, the Oscar-winning film chronicling the founding of Facebook written by Aaron Sorkin and directed by David Fincher, released almost exactly two years before Facebook's brand video in October 2010. The film's self-presentation and its characterization by film critics before, during and after its release are noticeably conflicted: it is simultaneously lauded as a film capturing the zeitgeist of the Social Media Generation, while paradoxically equated with more traditional, almost nostalgic narratives and aesthetics of bygone art and time.³⁸ Take, for instance, Sorkin's claim that he was "drawn to the tale because of its Shakespearean themes of friends, enemies and power" (Wilson), or Fincher's soundbite-worthy distillation, "*Citizen Kane* meets John Hughes" (*W Magazine*). Writing for *Rolling Stone*, Pete Travers dubs the film "a modern *Rashomon* that will pin you to your seat" ("The Social Network"). The film's full-length trailer plays to a cover of Radiohead's "Creep" by youth choir Scala, where a chorus of voices trill about the elusiveness of acceptance and control; in another trailer, Kanye West instructs that "No one man should have all that power." Every advertisement includes the film's tagline, "You don't get to 500 million friends without making a few enemies." This is heady stuff: epic, classic. *The Social Network*, a film loosely named after a socially revolutionary technology is, according to its promotional campaign, a tale as old as time: of

³⁸ We might bear in mind: that new guard Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook could possibly represent the end of old guard Columbia Pictures, Sorkin and Fincher, and their critics, too, is perhaps the chief opposition at the heart of *The Social Network*. This was frequently pointed out in reviews of the film with it described as "a movie about 2.0 people made by 1.0 people" (Smith), "a well-aimed spitball thrown at new media by old media" (Harris) and "an old-media collective cultural experience about a new-media collective cultural experience" (Broverman, Brown and Misener).

power and control, of the fracturing of human relationships, of, as Sorkin has suggested many times, “human nature” (W).

Within this uneasy treading between the old and new is a clear disdain for the new; correspondingly, the film labours to avoid its subject matter, to operate, as much as it is able, above it. What *The Social Network* is *not* is a movie about a social network. For a film so often referred to as “the Facebook movie,” *The Social Network* has very little to do with the Facebook platform, which barely makes an appearance. As many have pointed out, Facebook seems to serve merely as the story’s macguffin (Waxman); Sorkin himself has said that “fundamentally, you could tell the same story about the invention of a really good toaster” (qtd. in Harris). The most convenient explanation for the Facebooklessness of *The Social Network* is the Facebookless life of those involved in its production. Neither Sorkin, nor Fincher, nor Jesse Eisenberg (the film’s star), nor the majority of the people involved with the film actually have Facebook accounts.³⁹ Both Sorkin and Fincher remain critical of⁴⁰ and admittedly ignorant about the Internet more generally and its goings-on. In interviews, the film’s creators re-characterize what others critique as inattention to detail (Broverman, Brown and Misener; Carne; Harris; Rushfield; Travers, “Open Letter”) as the film’s greatest strength: the story is universal, the film could be about anything, what matters are the people

³⁹ Sorkin and Eisenberg both claim to have created Facebook profiles in preparation for the film, later deleting them.

⁴⁰ As Mark Harris writes, when Sorkin suggests he is “not a fan of the Internet” he does not intend ambivalence; rather, “‘Not a fan’ is not a euphemism for ‘I’m ambivalent’—it’s a euphemism for ‘I hate it.’” These views, claims Sorkin, “make me sound like a grumpy old man sitting on the porch yelling at kids” (Chivers). Meanwhile Fincher describes himself as having “a healthy disdain for the hypocrisy of the notion of this interconnected world” (Shoard).

involved, and so on. To paraphrase their own Zuckerberg iteration, if they had wanted to make a movie about Facebook, they would have made a movie about Facebook. Instead they have created a film about humanity for a generation presumably losing theirs.⁴¹

Sorkin in particular is quite explicit about his distaste for social media, claiming that the disconnect depicted in the film between the two main characters (Facebook co-founders Mark Zuckerberg, portrayed by Eisenberg, and Eduardo Saverin, played by Andrew Garfield) is meant to be indicative of the alienation and dehumanization of all social media participants: “This brilliant thing which was meant to connect us and bring us closer together has done the opposite...I feel like socializing on the internet is to socialize in [sic] what reality TV is to reality. It’s insincere...It lacks honesty, and it lacks a human quality” (“Social Network – Sorkin Interview”). Sorkin’s critique is the inverse of Zuckerberg’s short manifesto introducing “The Things That Connect Us.” And yet, like Zuckerberg, there is a similar taken-for-grantedness in Sorkin’s phrasing, the vague referral to “a human quality” operating as if that quality can be easily assumed. Sorkin has taken up the rhetoric of Carr, Turkle, Lanier and others—buttressing his argument with the contemporary marker of bad taste and superfluity, reality television⁴²—to frame social media not only as “bad” but also bad for us, on account of social media’s presumed insincerity, dishonesty and

⁴¹ Travers similarly positions Sorkin’s Zuckerberg as the face of “generation now,” which he qualifies as a “generation losing touch with its humanity” (“Open Letter”).

⁴² Lorraine York and I address this discursive relationship in the introduction to our article on reluctant celebrity and social media.

fakeness.⁴³ Anyone who has watched an episode of Sorkin television knows the writer does not exactly trade in subtlety; like a timeworn calling card he persistently hearkens to concepts broadly drawn. By the time we get to Sorkin's more recent HBO drama, *The Newsroom*, he emerges as something of a straw man of social media takedowns. Sorkin's contempt for the Internet and especially for social media is quite blatant and overt in this series; for the ACN news team led by Will McAvoy (played by Jeff Daniels), social media are framed as hellish, akin to the Salem witch trials and run by conspiracy theorists (on Reddit) and mobs (on Facebook) ("Boston"). If the three-season program has a coherent message or vision (and that is questionable) it is arguably to chastise new media and restore the authoritative vision of the male television newscaster, a man who is authentic, learned, talented, experienced and believes in truth and professionalism and the tradition of journalism above all else (qualities, or so the show suggests, directly opposed to those found online). As McAvoy dramatically proclaims at one point, "don't reach for common ground; reach for higher ground" ("Boston");⁴⁴ the team is even described as being "on the side of the angels" ("Run"). The only pro-Internet journalist at ACN, blogger Neal Sampat (played by Dev Patel), is the exception that proves the rule; he is positioned as something

⁴³ The characterization of "human" here from a writer who likened his own work to that of Shakespeare is amusingly contradictory (certainly the "qualities" of insincerity, dishonesty and falsity are hallmarks of the Bard's persistent dramatic impulse to depict characters who pretend, lie, deceive, err; what could possibly be more human than that?).

⁴⁴ One can only imagine how *The Newsroom* would have taken on the Trump campaign and presidency. Its worship of the (caricatured) honourable and trustworthy newscaster and realization of Michelle Obama's dictum, "When they go low, we go high" (echoed here by McAvoy), simultaneously seems even quainter and rosier in our current moment, and yet also captures the at times misplaced nostalgia of better days under Obama that has likewise risen in prominence.

of a noble Internet savage⁴⁵ (racialized connotations withstanding), very much “the other” as both the “tech nerd” and the only actor in the main cast who is not white.

In an extended review of *The Social Network* for *The New York Review of Books*, Zadie Smith, who attended Harvard with Zuckerberg in 2003, targets her scathing critique at her former schoolmate (whom she refers to as “uniformly plain” and “*affectless*”) and the at-risk humanity of the Facebook users beyond the film’s lens. In a manner in keeping with the Better-Never sentiments and spokespersons identified earlier (she actually quotes Lanier at several points), Smith laments the “degradation” of life on and, correspondingly, beyond Facebook: “When a human being becomes a set of data on a website like Facebook, he or she is reduced. Everything shrinks...[W]e lose our bodies, our messy feelings, our desires, our fears.”⁴⁶ According to Smith, Zuckerberg, who stands in here for any social media creator or proponent (i.e. any Never-Better), is either oblivious or indifferent to the destructive outcomes of his social networking platform: “that [weak, superficial connections] might not be an entirely positive thing, seem to never have occurred to him. He is, to say the least, dispassionate

⁴⁵ In the series finale, Neal returns to the ACN newsroom to give an incisive and emotional speech to the newsroom’s new tech team that has him walking a fine line between his belief in technology and his steadfast respect (largely unreciprocated) for his anti-Internet colleagues: “You embarrass me. It took me a long time to build ACN digital. I was laughed at by the people in this newsroom. The people I respect didn’t respect what I did around here but I built this into a tool that gathered, expanded on and disseminated information that’s useful. I kept telling my colleagues and my bosses that the Internet is user-sensitive just like most things and I’ve watched from a thousand miles while you proved that. You embarrass me” (“What Kind of Day”).

⁴⁶ She qualifies this assessment by adding, “Fiction reduces humans, too, but bad fiction does it more than good fiction, and we have the option to read good fiction.” It is unclear how this comment is meant to be read in relation to the work of Sorkin and Fincher, but presumably it exempts Smith herself from such charges.

about the philosophical questions concerning privacy—and sociality itself—raised by his ingenious program.” She borrows this argument from Malcolm Gladwell and his oft-cited diatribe, “Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted,” published just ahead of the Arab Spring amidst the rise of so-called “social media revolutions” and, as it turns out, the same week *The Social Network* was released in theatres. In this piece Gladwell contends that “[t]he platforms of social media are built around weak ties,”⁴⁷ concluding that “weak ties seldom lead to high-risk activism” and “strategic and disciplined...impact.” More than this, he argues, when we participate in social media-sponsored activism, we are able and even prompted to do *less*; while many of us may opt to participate, our participation is achieved “by not asking too much.” This social media critique has persisted beyond Gladwell, Smith and *The Social Network*; ironically such sentiments are the hallmark of the most passionately shared, viral texts on social media themselves, like Jonathan Safran Foer’s *New York Times* essay, “How Not to Be Alone,” wherein he argues how the ease of contemporary communication technologies and platforms allow us “to avoid the emotional work of being present, to convey information rather than humanity,” or the *YouTube* video “I Forgot My Phone,” which depicts a day in the life of the only phoneless person in a sea of screens with insistent, haunting earnestness (now with over 50 million views!).

⁴⁷ The term “weak ties” is not Gladwell’s own. Here Gladwell is perhaps most indebted to the work of Mark Granovetter (1973) and more recent work applying the concept to new media specifically, as in Carolyn Haythornthwaite’s “Strong, Weak, and Latent Ties and the Impact of New Media” (2002).

However, just as Gladwell is eager to expose the “weak ties” of social media, I argue that the discursive positioning of “humanity” in both its positive (Zuckerberg and “The Things That Connect Us”) and negative (Sorkin, Fincher and *The Social Network*; Smith, Gladwell and Foer) formulations is likewise reliant on what we might call weak *discursive* ties. After all, the creators and critics of *The Social Network* are “not asking too much” of the viewers they want to convince of the veracity of their argument, failing to offer a clear, defined vision of what precisely constitutes the humanity they are so keen to defend and protect. Their shared impulse is reactionary, their rallying cries vaguely linked to something “good” and “cherished” but never clearly and coherently articulated. What could be weaker than the way “humanity” acts as an all-purpose placeholder for the utopic? We are meant to fall in line with their (lack of) rationale because who amongst us would question it? Who would refuse to defend “goodness”? Similarly, from the opposing perspective, “The Things That Connect Us” tugs at the heartstrings by offering a pastiche of emotive, resonant, *human* touchstones, anchoring its argument in a list of similes outlining all Facebook is “like”—items it hopes we, in turn, will like enough for its affective connection to take hold. Facebook’s brand video “attempts to use emotion as a way to distract us from what the social network really wants out of us”, mobilizing the skillset and directorial history of Iñárritu to promote such distraction (Greenfield). Wieden + Kennedy’s creative director Karl Lieberman seems to back this up; in an interview with Ann-Christine Diaz of *Ad Age*, Lieberman explains, “We knew we

needed Alejandro to take a simple, logical argument and bring a true sense of humanity to it. We didn't want it to feel critical, as the words are pretty straight, so we wanted him to drop that layer of real human emotion on top of it.”⁴⁸ Behold the discursive “logics” of social media representation. With Lieberman’s words in mind (and those of their “official” iteration, in the message posted by Zuckerberg to introduce the ad itself), it is difficult to disagree with Smith when she warns, “[Zuckerberg] uses the word ‘connect’ as believers use the word ‘Jesus,’ as if it were sacred in and of itself.” “Connection,” here, functions in the mode of Foucault’s “familiar transparency,” as does “humanity,” an echo but also extension of it.

“The Things That Connect Us” anticipates the kind of Better-Never discourse engaged by everyone from Lanier to Sorkin to sometime social media critic Smith,⁴⁹ and attempts to counter it in the form of a pre-emptive strike; in so doing, the video appropriates the contrary discourse of Never-Betterism. As I have demonstrated, the reverse is true as well, with *The Social Network* warding off such positivism in its very serious, judicial deferral to all that might be lost in a world where Facebook is in the process of becoming coterminous with or

⁴⁸ Lieberman’s sleight of hand recalls a scene from Dave Eggers’s *The Circle* where protagonist Mae Holland is trained in the ways and means of the titular corporation: “You should make each response personal, specific. You’re a person, and they’re a person, so you shouldn’t be imitating a robot, and you shouldn’t treat them like they’re robots. Know what I mean? No robots work here. We never want the customer to think they’re dealing with a faceless entity, so you should always be sure to inject humanity into the process” (49).

⁴⁹ In one of the most recent book-length studies of social media, Graham Meikle similarly asserts the interaction and interrelation of (oppositional) popular culture and corporation-sponsored discursive articulations of social media: “Social media have quickly come to animate the plots of dystopian novels, films and television programmes; these mirror the utopian fictions of the mission statements and press releases of the social media firms themselves” (Meikle viii).

mistaken for the human. All of these discourses from social media critics, lovers and haters betray this tendency to gesture to—but never definitively recover—some kind of “pure” or “real” connection, sociality, governing affect, and, of course, humanity, that is claimed to be in the process of flourishing or disintegrating. As a result, the usefulness of a term like humanity is called into question; while not meaningless, per se, its meaning is so obscured and obfuscated, so extensive and not “tied down,” that people on both sides of the debate can use the term to their own ends without ever actually having to define or account for what it means or why it is important. Examining its usage in relation to social media exposes the contingency of such a concept and its discursive—and perhaps even exclusively discursive—perpetuation. Within these discursive contexts, the term floats free, undefined and unarticulated yet central to the definition and articulation of the media with which it interacts.

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate how the ultimately empty—or overfull, depending on how you look at it—signification of a concept like “humanity” has been positioned and manipulated within contemporary discourses on social media to multiple—and conflicting—ends. By tracing its discursive manifestations (as recommended by Michel Foucault via Stuart Hall) through representative statements and subjects (as articulated primarily in “The Things That Connect Us,” *The Social Network* and the reception of these texts), implied rules (identified by Never-Better and Better-Never new media public intellectuals) and the manner by which these ideas acquire authority (courtesy of

award-winning directors Alejandro González Iñárritu and David Fincher, and acclaimed novelists Zadie Smith and Jonathan Safran Foer), the discourse of humanity as it relates to social media is apprehended only insofar as it is exposed as contingent, nebulous and undefined. It is a discourse promulgated by both sides of the debate, buttressed differently for opposing arguments but always surfacing with the connotative cloudiness of a term as at home within the drugstore poetry of a Hallmark card. But is the strategic (mis)use of humanity new or novel, and what does its operation in these contexts occlude in the process? Certainly, there is something deeply familiar about the fear of isolation or alienation expressed by those concerned about a life wired in. These complaints ring eerily similar to the mantras and laments of a hollow modernism (things falling apart, unreal cities, life like a patient etherized upon a table) or even a hyperrealized, pastiche, aporic postmodernism. Perhaps social media has simply become the latest crutch on which we place the burden of our metaphysical and/or existential unanswerables. As Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska note about Facebook (re)presentations (including *The Social Network*), these are the “very same moral dilemmas we know from the pre-Facebook world: honesty versus duplicity; popularity versus success; sharing versus accumulating” (156). Or, to recall a topic explored elsewhere in this dissertation, “I doubt the ambient broadcasting universe is *making* people more trivial. What it’s doing is revealing how trivial we’ve been all along” (Thompson 222). It seems that despite their best attempts at

exceptionalism, social media critics and critiques are at least partially beholden to reiteration.

As for the second question regarding occlusion or displacement, I defer to the work of those scholars attentive—in a manner both the Never-Betters and Better-Nevers seem to lack—to the particularities of personal and individual social media experiences. I am thinking, for instance, of Nancy K. Baym’s seemingly obvious and yet drastically understated call to attend to the “degrees and kinds of interactivity” (7) online or, for that matter, off; as she points out, “even if we accept that face to face communication provides a kind of social connection that simply cannot be attained with mediation, it does not follow that mediated communication...is emotionally or socially impoverished, or that social context cannot be achieved” (57). We might also consider the weight and weightiness of our own critical media assessments and how what we say or claim about social media merges with—shapes and is shaped by—our use and understanding of them, and to acknowledge, as per Kember and Zyglinska, that

media cannot have *effects* on society if they are considered to be always already social. From this perspective, the questions...change from whether, or to what extent, media events integrate (or *disintegrate*) society—as if the latter were something separate, simply existing out there—to how media produce or enact the social. (31)

Facebook, after all, is a medium, with all that title bestows; the production or enactment of sociality *within* this medium, as I have argued, can and does occur discursively, proposed, accepted and re-proposed with each iteration, until the mere suggestion of the thing runs the risk of being mistaken for the thing itself. If

media are always already social, they are likewise always already discursive, rendering discourse a primary site for the kind of Foucauldian disturbance that might help to reveal the interconnected statements and stakes expressed by and through social media.

Conclusion: Sandwich Thesis as Doctoral Portfolio

When I first began to articulate this doctoral project in 2009, it was conceived as a shift in research focus. I originally applied to Ph.D. programs with a proposal on theories of authorship and Canadian literature. However, during a year of work between my M.A. and the commencement of my Ph.D., I discovered a new media fancy: Twitter. As I approached the first day of my doctoral studies I quickly realized that all of the questions I wanted to ask of authorship and authority and discourse (though at that point I did not have that critical concept in my arsenal) in regard to CanLit resonated more strongly and in more interesting ways with this emergent media form of status updates and social sharing. As I mention in the second chapter of this thesis in my analysis of digital and print discourses and the *Twitterature* case study, “There is considerable overlap between the anxieties of social media and those of the figure of the author or of authorship more generally—regarding identity, freedom and control, authenticity and legitimacy, copyright and ownership, ‘quality’ and value, both in an economic sense but also in more abstract senses (e.g. moral value)” (Ingleton, “How Do You Solve”). Correspondingly, there is a great deal of focus throughout this dissertation on the act of authoring by and through social media: with J. K. Rowling and the fluid and adaptable *Harry Potter* text; with *Twitterature*, Twitter forms and their relation to—and reliance on—more traditional “writing,” with the attempted translation of habitual life practices into various mass-observation archives; with the gatekeeping practices within an affective community on

YouTube and Twitter; with the gatekeeping practices within hierarchized celebrity; and with the many claims to what constitutes the human and humanity and who decides. We might say not only authority within social media but also the authority *of* social media is very much what's at stake in this project.

I recall informing colleagues of my decision to change topics and their reacting with some interest, but more with hesitance; I learned from a lot of people that they had “heard of Twitter,” but that they were not familiar with much beyond the name itself. When I officially proposed an examination of social media as the intended topic of my dissertation, I was the only one in the department (faculty and students) taking it up as an object of study. When I attended my first conference and presented my first conference paper (“Community, Rebellion and the Reinforcement of Authority in @AcimanandRensin’s *Twitterature*,” on which the *Twitterature* chapter is based) at the Northeast Modern Language Association Conference in 2010, I spoke on the only panel at that conference to even *make reference to* social media. When I wrote what has now become my first chapter on Rowling and *Harry Potter*, Rowling did not have a Twitter account and, in the article’s initial drafts, Pottermore had yet to be conceived. Needless to say, it was a different time.

At some point things changed, and significantly. Where initially I had been struggling to find academic and critical work explicitly discussing emergent social media platforms (there is some early work on online spaces like LiveJournal, Friendster, MySpace, etc., some of which I cite throughout this

dissertation, but the sense of progression from niche to norm had not yet caught on), suddenly there was an overwhelming abundance of books and blogs and *New Yorker* think-pieces on Twitter hashtags and Facebook algorithms and Instagram selfies and *what it all meant*. Where, originally, I had tried to situate my own work in relation to various cognate theories (e.g. print authorship, Internet and digital cultures, archiving the everyday), now there were significant volumes doing that and more: making connections and theorizing anew as the most prominent social media platforms became increasingly integrated and even naturalized within everyday life. By the time I wrote the penultimate chapter of this thesis with my colleague and collaborator Lorraine York, “social media” had become as commonplace as Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber and the Kardashians—other “trends” to emerge within roughly the same timeline—and Rowling’s prolific tweeting became the latest, most instant venue for her extratextual revelations. In short, the experience of this research has been one where, not only did I end up in a different place than I started, but the object of study evolved at break-neck speed in the process. Social media *became* over the course of my research, with me scrambling to chart and account for and contextualize and comprehend it, as if I were notching its growth in the doorframe of the past seven odd years.

With this context in mind, I think it is useful to consider the potentiality of presenting this project as a “sandwich” thesis and what might be gained through a longitudinal appraisal of this collective work. The sandwich thesis format serves as a means of illustrating the transformation of not only my ideas, but also of

social media forms themselves. If social media, as I have proposed here, are constructed and experienced discursively, the evolution of that discourse is best understood across time; or, to reference Raymond Williams, the “structure of feeling” of social media and of social media discourses is ever-evolving, and therefore any specific social media articulation is embedded within the moment of its articulation. As Williams outlines in *The Long Revolution*, the structure of feeling “appears in the gap between the official discourse of policy and regulations, the popular response to official discourse and its appropriation in literary and other cultural texts...If the term is vague it is because it is used to name something that can really only be regarded as a trajectory” (“Structure of Feeling”). This dissertation operates very much in that gap, caught up in “official” discursive frameworks (e.g. Rowling’s extratext and Pottermore, Sagolla’s *140 Characters* style guide, the Library of Congress’s archive, “The Things That Connect Us,” etc.) and popular representations and appropriations of the social media enterprise (e.g. *Twitterature*, the *Sad Sad Conversation*, Kardashian apps, *The Social Network*, etc.), which, when taken and analysed together, reveal a “trajectory” of feeling and meaning over time. And so, I have made an effort to cite dates and outline the developmental timelines of every chapter in an attempt to better capture this trajectory or progression and render it an additional object of consideration. There may even be an aesthetic alignment in approaching this particular thesis in this way: with fragments and temporal ruptures and archived

musings and a miscellany of social media moments resembling the similarly fragmented feeds and flows of the likes of Facebook and Twitter.

I recently worked as a Professor and Faculty Development Consultant in the Centre for Teaching and Learning at Sheridan College. Within this role I designed and delivered curriculum for and offered a variety of supports to part and full-time faculty to assist them with their teaching and their ability to see teaching—and, more crucially, lifelong learning—as a potential space for research itself. My unit was in the process of developing a new teaching and learning model to assist faculty in evolving their individual pedagogies from everyday teaching informed by best practices to scholarly teaching defined by curiosity and experimentation within teaching to fully developed, inquiry-based teaching research projects, the results of which are shared with a wider community within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (or SoTL). Among the more popular tools to support and facilitate such a developmental, transformational process is the portfolio. Portfolios have been taken up within pedagogy in a number of different ways; as Pat Hutchings points out, the professional or showcase portfolio (used in various art-based disciplines like illustration, photography, animation, etc.) has been adapted for student learning (i.e. learning and reflective portfolios, now commonly integrated within educational contexts as e-portfolios) and even teacher reflection (i.e. teaching portfolios) (Hutchings 13). These documents are intended to capture and represent an individual's creative or productive output and serve as “organized documentation of growth and achievement” (Zubizarreta 7).

Unsurprisingly, then, they are typically capstones, assembled and submitted as a summation of or testament to a history of accomplishment within a certain context (e.g. a specific course, degree, etc.).

Portfolios, however, at least as they are employed within teaching and learning, need not only be conceived as summative; arguably their more important function is formative. There is value in the ongoing process of assembling a portfolio, and in the metacognitive, reflective function of this labour. I am interested in this facet of portfolio production, where “the product is also a process” (Zubizarreta 7). Working from Ernest Boyer’s model of the “scholarship of discovery,” Lee Shulman introduces the possibility of developing a “course portfolio” (just as it sounds, this refers to a portfolio that accounts not for the work of an individual but the collective workings of a course) in a manner that could be used to emphasize the “course as investigation” (Shulman 10), that is ongoing and processual, that is driven by critical inquiry. And because it is inquiry-driven, because it is formative, and not a summative endpoint of a fixed investigation, there is possibility for flux, new findings and even failure. As Shulman writes,

Experience is what you have when what you expected doesn’t happen...[E]xperience is a source of learning, to the extent that when one encounters discontinuities between expectation and reality, between intention and accomplishment, critical learning can take place. The course portfolio might usefully be seen as a vehicle for probing such discontinuities, extracting from them important experience-based learning for future practice. (10)

The course portfolio leaves open the possibility of unforeseen discovery. It also allows for the inclusion of things that do not fit—not only of the unexpected, but more than that, the incongruous. Further, if, when “done well, a course portfolio can also be a way of archiving the experience” of learning (Huber 34), as Mary Taylor Huber suggests, individual components need not necessarily be adapted and rebuilt to “fit,” but can be considered within their archived context, even if they are dissonant with the surrounding material. Within the domain of teaching and learning, these process-oriented portfolios are a pedagogical ideal, aligned as they are with current best practices; or as those involved in building the portfolio-centric Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) program at Sheridan put it, “This orientation reflects the constructionist and emergent nature of learning and supports the notion of ‘becoming’” (Golnaraghi, Grant and Longmore 4)—a process certainly realized across the fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D.

I have already proposed a few examples of how the sandwich thesis offers something more to my study and analysis of social media discourses than a traditional thesis might have. The way in which this sandwich thesis functions as a process-oriented, investigative portfolio is the last and arguably most potent of that justification. The sandwich thesis as doctoral portfolio reflects and enacts the processes of becoming and emergence that have been the evolution of social media discourse *as well as* my critical interventions within it. This dissertation, then, in its own way, is my own unfolding discourse on social media; more accurately, it is several. The discourses I have traced are not consistent; they are,

as the work I have quoted above explores, at times discontinuous and incompatible. While some of my pronouncements have been verified or supported over time (e.g. Rowling's authoritative and protective approach to the management of her authorship), others are notably imprecise (e.g. while Twitter has become more integrated into everyday life, its everyday usage has focused more on the reiterative sharing of content than the expression of unique self-observations, and much of what is shared is initially produced offsite), not to mention other examples and discussions that belong to a time that, if it has not passed, is passing (e.g. the obsolescence of the Twitter Public Timeline). Assuming the value of watching these discourses—and my critical fumbblings with them—unfold in time, what can we conclude has been learned across this particular investigation?

I am reluctant to make grand conclusions, in large part because I have spent years reading endless accounts of them, of how social media is building us up and tearing us down, of how it reflects the very best and the very worst of some innate humanity I had thought we had intellectually and critically disposed of long ago. You might say the appeal of a sandwich thesis on a personal level is being able to put forward smaller, more tentative, more context-specific conclusions on targeted case studies, instead of asserting an authoritative, all-encompassing social media “hot take”⁵⁰ (we have enough of those). Perhaps it is

⁵⁰ The “hot take” is a form born and bred of journalism in the age of Twitter that is hastily composed and dismissive and censorious in content. For a fairly comprehensive history and discursive unpacking of the “hot take,” I recommend Elspeth Reeve's “A History of the Hot Take” for *New Republic*.

that tentativeness, then, that this collective work offers, and its commitment to avoid—whenever possible—deferral to blanket statements, or at least to deconstruct and disentangle their meaning. Not coincidentally, this is characteristic of the new media scholarship I have identified throughout this thesis to be among the most rigorous and critically useful (including but not limited to the work of Nancy K. Baym, Alice Marwick and danah boyd and Joanna Zylińska and Sarah Kember), which I mention not in an attempt to establish myself amongst their company, but to acknowledge the qualities of the critical work to which I have aspired.

Additionally, my approach has encouraged me to not only uphold the best practices of teaching and learning in my development of this “thesis portfolio” (emphasizing process, active reflection and acknowledgment of “failure” as invaluable components of the learning process), but also to align my conclusions with those of my most central critical framework: Michel Foucault’s articulations of “discourse” and “discursive statements.” Foucault stresses that “we must conceive of discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 100), but adds that if we do seek a certain stability or unity in the statements we make, “perhaps one might discover [it] if one sought it not in the coherence of concepts, but in their simultaneous or successive emergence, in the distance that separates them and even in their incompatibility” (Foucault, *Archaeology* 38). Just as Huber, Hutchings and Shulman construct the pedagogical purpose of portfolios around

what does *not* work as much if not more so as what does, so, too, does Foucault assert that it is paradoxically in the missed connections that we come closest to achieving any kind of clarity, meaning or knowing. Not all the individual components of this thesis *add up*, but, in their execution, they inevitably *add*: to a representation of scholarly work over time; to a representation of technological development; and to a representation of social media in popular discourse.

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