The fan-historian

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[0.1]   Abstract—The compound term fan-historian may be used to describe fans who engage in a wide range of memory, archival, and other past-focused fan work, which helps make sense of the past and makes it usable for their communities. Fan-historians may thus be described in an inclusive way that recognizes the common practices that exist between the work of fans and historians; both take curatorial and transformative approaches to knowledge. This formulation also emphasizes the fact that fans are participants in historical work, not merely its subjects. Fan-historians thus work as both fans and historians to produce fan-historical work. This labor is centrally important to fan communities and vital in light of the established links between history and power.

[0.2]   Keywords—Acafan; Fan labor; Historiography; History

1. Introduction

[1.1]   This article builds on our previous work, published in 2020 as part of the *Historia Ludens* edited collection, in which we explored the historical practices of video game fans and sought to understand the extremely close relationship between historical work and the creation of fan works. Throughout that exploration, we asked whether or not it was possible to distinguish between the two, coming to the realization that many forms of fan labor "demonstrate practices which we can recognize in historical work, and behaviors which we might think of as 'historical.'" Much like historians, fans use available scraps of information to produce new work, new ideas, and new interpretations. More specifically, with reference to the past, "an overlap exists between the practices of history and fandom, personified by *fan-historians* in some of their approaches to knowledge and in some of those activities which bring together player experiences with the strictures of lore" (Webber and Stevens 2020, 198; emphasis added). There was also something important about the contextualization of this work within a community: without that context, this was neither history nor fandom; with it, it had claims to both (Webber and Stevens 2020).

[1.2]   Subsequently reflecting on these ideas, and in light of this special issue, we realized that we had more to say on this matter and that some avenues benefited further exploration. It is these routes onward that are the subject of this article. First, important for a special issue focused on fans and history, we want to return to the idea of the fan-historian and bring some precision to a discussion about what the term fan-historian does, and can, mean. Who are fan-historians? Where do they sit in relation to long-

standing discussions and debates in fandom and historical work about, for example, acafans or historians of fandom on the one hand and public or quotidian histories on the other?

[1.3]   Second, to more effectively articulate the relationship between the work of fans and the work of historians, we want to further theorize those approaches and practices which are common to both. Here, we are concerned with the relationship between the work of historians and the work of fans in terms not only of textual productivity (in a traditional fandom studies sense) but in terms of enunciative productivity as well (Fiske 1992). We contend that fans and historians have similar approaches to working through evidence to produce their different outputs, and both can be understood to produce affective interpretations of past events. Fans and historians engage in similar practices throughout their work: attending to the ordering and preservation of information, addressing the gaps in this information, and weaving complex chains of reasoning, story, and meaning to fill the spaces and silences of fictional and historical worlds (Webber and Stevens 2020, 197). The questions we explored previously—are they the same, and how are they the same?—must now give way to a more robust understanding of the common context in which the knowledge practices of both history and fandom sit: epistemology, but also methodology. Such an approach allows us to step past or perhaps beyond the "boundary-work" (Gieryn 1983) performed around the disciplines of both history and fandom—which we explain in more detail below—to focus instead on the value of both at the expense of neither.

[1.4]   History, as Greg Dening (1996, 36) observes, "is a human universal […] in which the past experience of oneself or of others in an environment outside oneself is transformed into symbols which are exchanged." Yet, historians have often sought to limit the terms within which history is or can be universal and whose pasts can be transformed in the way that Dening suggests: such "people without history" have included "'primitives,' peasantries, laborers, immigrants, and besieged minorities" (Wolf 2010, xxvi). To marginalize or deprecate the work of fans in pursuit of their own historical interests would be to make similar mistakes, to prejudge what and whom history is for; to let "fan" stand simply as a qualifier that diminishes the respectability of "history." We might also note that large parts of Dening's description could quite readily be applied to fandom more broadly, particularly its emphasis on experience and the production and exchange of symbols (and thus meaning). In a similar vein, the presumed white, anglophone universality of fan experience has acted to limit what is understood as fandom (Wanzo 2015; Pande 2018).

[1.5]   In what follows, therefore, we seek to bring together principles from both historiography and fan studies to contribute to the exploration of fan engagements with the past. We argue that the labor of fan-historians is significant and that their fan work is meaningful for other fans. As such, it deserves attention; thus, in their role as workers supporting their communities, fan-historians deserve recognition. This recognition is part of a critical process of valuing the social and cultural labor that sits at the heart of the daily life of so many fans and reflects long-established practices of past-focused meaning making.

2. Conceptualizing the fan-historian

[2.1]   The relationship between fans and historical work has, of course, been considered in the literature beyond this special issue, which features academic historians' perspectives on histories of popular culture and fandom. This broader material sometimes characterizes individuals as fan historians. The individuals labeled in this way are, in general, people such as Laura M. Hale (Coppa 2006), Jack Speer (Pilsch 2014), and Harry Warner Jr. (Fleming 1977)—usually established, sometimes controversial voices contributing to and supporting the investigation of fandom's past. The work of such fan historians is a contribution to fan history, itself "a neglected subdiscipline of fan studies," as Lies Lanckman (2020) notes. Simplistically, then, these fan historians might be understood as applying the skills of the historian (whatever those might be) to the pasts of fans and fandom: they are fans who engage in what Reagin and Rubenstein (2011, ¶ 2.5) call "amateur historical work."

[2.2]   In our employment of the compound term fan-historian, however, we conceive of the relationship between the fan and the historian differently, reflecting the interwoven identities and practices that we see at play. In doing so, we propose a more inclusive definition that captures a broader range of outputs and practices than those that explicitly frame themselves as history. Our conception may well describe those individuals referenced above, but it also emphasizes that the fan is not merely

the subject of the historical work taking place but in fact a participant in it. Outputs from these practices range from Joan Marie Verba's independently published account of *Star Trek* zines (1996), the periods of world history that regularly feature as fandoms in the Yuletide fan fiction exchange, and an extended cut of the *Mass Effect 3* (2012) ending produced in response to vocal fan pressure (Ganzon 2014). In addition, we are reminded of what Matt Hills (2014) refers to as fanfac: autobiographical accounts of memories or experiences produced by fans and often shaped by a concern to entertain other fans. Hills attends to the commemorative, communitarian nature of this work, emphasizing its qualities as memory (rather than history) but also its nature as a site of struggle over ownership, even outside frameworks of capitalist commodification.

[2.3]   It is notable that in his article discussing fanfac, Hills only refers to one person as a fan historian —Stephen James Walker. Walker is the (co)author of a range of books on both *Doctor Who* (2005) and the *Torchwood* (2006) series, addressing production history and character information. Yet he appears in Hills's (2014, 39–40) account as arguing, through the writing of fanfac, for the authority "of *Doctor Who's* elder fan statesmen" (i.e., those like him) over younger *Doctor Who* fans. He therefore represents a range or blend of concerns in relation to his fan practice. He is concerned with the past of the industrial practice that underlies his object of fandom; concerned with the detail—and with the past—of the characters it comprises; and concerned with ownership of the discourses through which these other concerns are brought into dialogue with experience. Walker thus provides an informative example for thinking through a distinction between different kinds of fan historians, or perhaps between fan historians and fan-historians.

[2.4]   The principles at play here rely on ideas of legitimacy and authority and relate closely to debates around the broader relationship between scholarship and fandom. These discussions have turned on Henry Jenkins's (2011) term aca-fan (also aca/fan or acafan), an identification that recognizes that there are fans who are scholars as well. Matt Hills's (2002) distinction between the scholar-fan and the fan-scholar—with different formulations placing the emphasis on different positions—seems broadly to have been eroded over time; he has recently noted that "the sense of any definitive 'inside' and 'outside' to academia has become less clear" (Hills 2020, 163).

[2.5]   Yet the acafan label continues to represent a centrally important site for discussion in fan studies, repeatedly revisited both critically and reflexively since it was coined (e.g., Bogost 2010; Coker and Benefiel 2010; Stein 2011; Cristofari and Guitton 2017). It is thus contentious but also importantly meaningful. Although its meaning can differ between writers quite considerably, it can be variously used, as Rukmini Pande points out, to gesture toward an individual's dual identity, acknowledge a split loyalty, or be taken methodologically to "deemphasize historical tensions around such topics as race, ethnicity, religion, class, and national identity" (2018, 188). While the acafan seems to offer an easily transferable model for thinking about the situation of those fans who undertake the study of fans, such a transfer also brings with it the attendant uncertainties about position and inherits critiques from what Jonathan Gray (quoted in Stein 2011) calls aca-antifandom. These see acafandom as reducing both the critical and professional qualities of scholarship about media, a position explored at length in relation to comics studies by Marc Singer (2018) and firmly rejected by Matt Hills (2020).

[2.6]   Concerns about professionalism and/or professionalization are one indication that the acafan model may not be quite what is needed for thinking about the relationship embodied by the fan-historian. As an academic discipline, history is well established, confident (often overbearingly so), and firmly professionalized. Yet to be a professional historian does not require ongoing participation in academic historical discourse or membership in an academic community, although some might see this as preferable. A broad range of individuals earn recognition and an income as historians outside the academy—for example, as popular historians, many of whom are (former) journalists or politicians, as corporate historians, or as schoolteachers. Professional expectations exist in all of these cases, even though some of these historians fail to meet them (Evans 2014).

[2.7]   History, then, lacks the concern of a less-established discipline with its professional standing, even as it recognizes and sustains a host of contributions from those who are not professional historians and yet make valuable contributions to historical work. As Raphael Samuel observes, "If history was thought of as an activity rather than a profession, then the number of its practitioners would be legion" (1994, 17). Local history societies and online genealogical resources rely on the labor of engaged

hobbyists, and the work of wealthy and enthusiastic amateurs has played an important part in the development of the discipline in the past. Many people "do history," and at least some of those are referred to as historians.

[2.8]   As mentioned already, however, this openness is complicated somewhat by the boundary-work that takes place in the academic discipline of history. Much as Gieryn (1983) identifies in the case of science, the boundaries of what is accepted as history are somewhat ambiguous, and their definition is likely to reflect similar issues—expansion and/or monopolization of authority, as well as protection of autonomy. Particularly of note are the ways in which certain historical output has been characterized as not constituting proper history, a position which rejects the historical value of, for example, films and video games because they are not enough like books (Chapman 2012). This is of course a position that has been roundly critiqued (Rosenstone 2006). The significant point, then, is that the label of historian addresses many more kinds of individuals than that of comic studies academic or, indeed, simply academic. This is not to say that there are no criteria that define who is and isn't called a historian, a title that is as much political as it is descriptive. But it is to recognize that historians need be neither professional nor institutionalized to be historians: "what constitutes a professional historian, a historical writer or an amateur historian is somewhat fluid" (Jordanova 2006, 134).

[2.9]   If historian is broad and potentially difficult to clearly define, it has this in common with fan. The opening section to *The Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures* (Duits, Zwaan, and Reijnders 2014, 2–4) includes no fewer than seven chapters that attempt to grapple with this issue, identifying factors such as context- and age-specific practices, a focus on social connectivity, and how fans talk about themselves as important in thinking about who fans are and challenging "the inflation of the fan" in light of the normalization of "participation culture." Boundary-work is taking place here too, for example around shipping (Gonzalez 2016) and vidding (Freund 2015), as well as through the construction of hierarchies (Busse 2010) and the policing of the proper or authentic fan that can be seen in many fan communities (Stevenson 2009; Hynes and Cook 2013; Pande 2018; Pack 2020).

[2.10]   While both fan and historian are open terms (in comparison to academic, for example), they are still bound by expectation. Compounded, they offer a sense of an individual who goes beyond simple affective engagement and beyond participation toward contribution. As has so often been suggested of fans, fan-historians are productive—but in a broader sense than some previous descriptions, which have been criticized for their limiting emphasis on the "overt" nature of this productive activity (Click and Scott 2018, 2). In our interpretation, fan-historians do not necessarily need to write—indeed, many people we might think of as historians (e.g., expert guides or interpreters) do not do so—or to otherwise produce fan work. However, they must indulge in fan labor, and that labor must be historical in nature. They must be fans, and they must also "do history" in a fannish manner. Thus, fan-historians are productive. Given that Dening (1996, 36) talks of history as "symbols which are exchanged," this would suggest that when fan-historians do history, they at least meet the threshold of enunciative productivity (Fiske 1992), with many going further to engage in textual productivity. Importantly, such enunciation must be paired with authority, as we discuss below (¶ 4.5–4.6).

3. The labor of the fan-historian

[3.1]   What, then, is the nature of this labor? As Walker's example demonstrates, it is manifold. The pasts at play for fan-historians include not only the pasts of the huge variety of their objects of fandom—important and worthy of attention in themselves—but also the pasts of their communities, their publics, in which they might serve as "public historians of fandom who also retain the quality of being fans" (Webber and Stevens 2020, 193). To be a historian is to be an intermediary, "an interpreter who stands between past events and our readings of them" (Jenkins 2003, 14): between a community and its own past, certainly, but also between that community and other, more disparate pasts—the pasts of a franchise, character, or idea. And more: to be a historian is to be a "present-minded worker" (Jenkins 2003, 31) concerned with creating a history contextualized within present ways of thinking and being. When historians, and fan-historians, act as public historians, this often means creating a "usable past" (Jordanova 2006, 131–34), one that can be put to work (or, indeed, exploited by others). This public address can be seen in fan vids, which collect, curate, and interpret clips from past media for an engaged community of viewers (Stevens 2020); this is sometimes overtly critical and/or reflexive (Freund 2010;

Stein 2014; Svegaard 2022). It can also be seen in efforts to collect merchandise and memorabilia "to connect with the histories of [fans'] favourite media texts" (Geraghty 2014, 2). We must therefore consider how fan-historians conduct their labor and their approaches to their fan work.

[3.2]   Given the variety of fan-historians captured by our definition, it would be surprising to discover extensive theorization of fan-historical work in the literature. Much as with other historical forms, the work of fan-historians is communicative and produced for an audience; consequently, it is shaped by the concerns of that audience. Producers of fanfac, Hills (2014, 38) observes, "make factual, personal claims to authenticity, but such claims are ultimately unverifiable, and the stories recounted are required to be meaningful to other fans rather than being wholly personal or idiosyncratic." Where academic fan-historical work is published and valued, it has tended to be contextualized within fan studies (or, relatedly, literary, film, or media studies). With rare exceptions, then, while it is situated within rigorous critical frames, these are not typically spaces of historiography (historical theory). Even when they are, there is likely to be an absence of in-depth theorization of the historical dimensions at play. As John Tosh (2000, 1) suggests, "Historians in general are not much disposed to reflect on the nature of their craft."

[3.3]   Perhaps as a consequence, fan work with a historical focus or theme is sometimes discussed in ways that suggest conflicted attitudes toward the past and history, echoing similar issues in related fields (e.g., game studies). There is in the first instance a desire to distinguish between more traditional historical approaches to the pasts of fandom itself or of fan properties, and fan work focused on fan experiences that took place in the past. As Jan Švelch and Tereza Krobová (2016, ¶ 2.1) indicate, the latter is constructed and labeled as memory—variously genealogical (Reagin and Rubenstein, 2011), collective (Payne 2008), and/or public (Heineman 2014)—with its recognizably historical qualities downplayed. As we have already remarked, this is a construction that Hills (2014, 32) repeats in terms of fanfac, which he describes as "factual memory-work and fan autobiography" and "fans' factual writings about their own fan experiences, memories and communities."

[3.4]   In this manner, the space for history is portrayed and understood as limited and further circumscribed by a conservative interpretation of what historical work is and what historians do, characterized by Švelch and Krobová (2016) as historicism. Here, historians become something of a caricature, concerned only with objectivity and facts, evoking E. H. Carr's (1964, 10–16) depiction of a historian who takes facts from "the limbo of unhistorical facts about the past" and "processes" them into "historical facts." In this conception of history, which resembles nothing more than scholarly necromancy, "the facts speak only when the historian calls on them"; and while "the facts without their historian are dead and meaningless…the historian without his facts is rootless and futile" (Carr 1964, 11, 30). Accounts of fan experiences are understood, not unreasonably, to present quite different sensibilities from other forms of fan work that deal with the past. These include "quasi-professional historiographies" like fan wikis, including but not limited to Fanlore.org, which offer "a mere chronicle" of the "great events" from which a unified, historicist history can be built (Švelch and Krobová 2016, ¶ 8.1).

[3.5]   We would argue strongly, however, that the labor of fan-historians need not, indeed should not, be understood within this constraint. The perspective on history that Švelch and Krobová (2016) describe and critique, which limits itself to factuality at the expense of experience, is outdated. Throughout the modern era, chronicles have been disdained—"the backward, lumbering poor cousin of a slicker, more literary form of historical narrative" (Woolf 2011, 185)—and the old historicism has long since been replaced with the new. Our attention has turned instead to a distinction between facts and events, largely because, as Michael Bentley (2014, 43m06s–11s) puts it, "postmodernism theorized historical facts to death." Nick Webber (2016) argues at length that contextualized accounts of the experiences of video game players are one of a range of discourses of player history and thus constitute historical work. This is very visible around the game *EVE Online* (2003), where the True Stories website drew together player-written accounts of events and experiences within and around the game, bolstered by claims by the game's publisher that this was "a place where people can read the history of our Universe, as told by those that inhabit it" (Ólafsson 2013). The resultant debate in the player community attended to matters of detail and also to issues of truth, bias, and propaganda, underscoring the nature of this as historical work written by players deeply invested in and knowledgeable about the game and its community.

[3.6]   Furthermore, since the 1980s, memory has lain at the heart of much historical work, very visibly in the field of cultural history, as a result of the epistemological impact of the thinking of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Hayden White, which "took the past away altogether," leading historians to look outside history for the medium of the past (Bentley 2006, 354). This is not to say that memory and history are the same thing but to suggest that to do memory work is also to do historical work, to do history as previously discussed by E. Charlotte Stevens (2020). As Hills (2014, 32) acknowledges, fanfac is one means through which "fans produce individually and communally historicizing narratives of their fan culture(s), as well as their fan object(s)." Thus, the authors of fanfac set fan culture into history and speak back to their community, doing fan-historical work.

4. Engagements with the past

[4.1]   To this point, we have touched on some of the different kinds of engagement with the past that occur in the space of fandom. In claiming that all of those doing such work can be thought of as fan-historians, we suggest that fan-historians work in a variety of ways—as public historians, as we have already suggested; as cultural historians, in their concern with memory; as new historicists, concerned with the textuality and discursive nature of history; as what we might call traditional historians, concerned with chronologies and detail; and, most importantly, as intermediaries, constructing fans'—and fandom's—relationship with the past. There are two main modes of work here, which we have previously classified as curation and interpretation/transformation (Webber and Stevens 2020), mapping roughly to the affirmational versus transformational division proposed by fans obsession_inc and Skud (Pande 2020) and elaborated on by fan studies scholars (Russo 2010; Scott 2013; Kohnen 2018). While there is a sense in which these modes are gendered within fan work, we would expect fan-historians to concern themselves with aspects of both—to address what we claim to know and the gaps and absences between those things.

[4.2]   In the first of these modes, we recognize that fan-historians remain concerned about facts and details. Such facts (historical and otherwise) are produced through discussion and ideally consensus within the fan(-historical) community, and fan-historians participate within that community in producing those facts. These are not absolute truths mined from the past but are instead accepted judgements about the past: more particularly, about events in the past. As suggested by Švelch and Krobová (2016), fan-historians then participate in further curatorial processes of selection and arrangement of these facts and events in a manner that renders them more comprehensible to their audience. White (1973, 5) calls this "chronicle" (where the arrangement is chronological) or "story" (where the arrangement concerns a "process of happening"). There are numerous examples of fans producing collections of facts about characters, from floor plans of 221b Baker Street published in an interwar Sherlock Holmes fanzine to a multipage footnoted concordance about a character from *Starsky & Hutch* (1975) in a 1982 issue of *S&H Letterzine* (Stevens 2021), through to fandom-specific wikis (Mittell 2009). The purposes of these fannish outputs include demonstrating mastery over a topic, providing a resource for fans to achieve a similar level of mastery, and constructing a reference point for fic writers to draw on so that their elaborations on a fictional canon feel real because they align with a consensus.

[4.3]   Even with established facts and events identified and ordered, gaps and absences remain; indeed, they are necessitated by what we do and can know. Paul Veyne (1984, 260) suggests that "we have no complete knowledge of everything; the event with which we are most personally involved is still known to us only by traces," and Lubomír Doležel (1998, 794) reminds us that "both fictional and historical worlds are by necessity incomplete…[and so] gaps are a universal feature of their semantic macrostructure." It is in the second mode—of transformation and interpretation—that fan-historians construct bridges across these gaps. Here, they answer questions such as "what happened next?"; "what else *could have* happened?"; and "how did it all come out in the end?"—which historians typically answer, according to White (1973, 6–7), through emplotment, argument, and/or ideological implication. Answering these questions is the core of fan fiction's appeal; such work involves identifying, reflecting on, and extrapolating from established facts to offer speculative outputs that fill in some of those gaps.

[4.4]   Each of these approaches attempts to make meaning from historical facts and events, providing essential connections between, and pathways onward from, the established chronicle or story. Importantly, although Doležel (1998) suggests that gaps in fictional and historical worlds are different in

character—ontological and irrecoverable in fictional worlds and epistemological and amenable to repair in historical worlds—and treatments vary accordingly, this division plays out differently in fandom and thus for fan-historians. When Veyne (quoted in Doležel 1998, 795) compares history to a palace "whose full extent we do not discover…and of which we do not see all the suites at once," we are conscious that many fans view the objects of their fandom in the same way. Fan-historians are thus able to intervene in debates about both histories of their fandom and its lore in a similar manner, holding even official contributions to the fictional world to a "requirement of adequacy" akin to that proposed by Doležel (1998, 795–96) for the "critical historian." To give one example, the Bioware-approved novel *Mass Effect: Deception* (Dietz 2012) fell short of this requirement, and *Mass Effect* fans not only expressed their dislike for the book but produced a fifteen-page, evidence-based critique of it on Reddit, with the result that the book is "effectively regarded as non-canon by the greater *Mass Effect* universe" (Beahm 2021). More than half of this document was concerned with enumerating how *Deception* failed to accord with what was currently known about the past of the *Mass Effect* universe—its lore (Webber and Stevens 2020).

[4.5]   Both of these modes, and all of these processes, are thus at play in fan-historical labor. The expectations not only of fan-historians but also of their audiences—the fandom—mean that to perform their historical activities successfully, fan-historians must also claim the authority to speak on their subject, a status closely connected with authenticity. Yet this fan-cultural authenticity sits alongside a form of historical authenticity that may also be important in the work of fan-historians. Historians happily acknowledge that history is creative: it involves "invention" (White 1973, 7) and over time has contained a great deal of fiction and myth. This connects us more or less directly to ideas of cultural authenticity invoked through witnessing, with the presence of imagination in historical work represented, in Michael Bentley's (2006, 356) words, as "an act of witnessing the unwitnessed." The idea of witnessing constructs imagination as grounded in the world, and this may have particular implications for distinguishing between fan-historical and more ordinarily fannish interventions in lore; it requires interventions to keep with that world. Thus, Bentley quotes Temperley's guidance to historical novelists: "not to create characters or to imagine events out of keeping with the age they describe" (2006, 356–57). Fan-historians must work, therefore, to build and maintain their authority in parallel both as authentic, proper fans and authentic, and doubtless critical, historians.

[4.6]   We asked at the outset who gets to be a fan-historian, and this is directly connected to how this authority is built and maintained. Fan-historian is a term we use here as a descriptive label for certain forms of participation in a fan community. Arguably, any fan could be a fan-historian, but much as with other forms of participation in fandom, claims to authority—and thus to authenticity—are policed in a number of ways, as we signal above (¶ 2.9). Given the gendered nature of the discussion around so-called proper fans, recognition for fan-historical contributions is likely to be governed by the existing hierarchies and inequalities within fandom, compounded by race-based boundary policing and class-dependent access to leisure time and capital. Thus, while authority can be established through contribution and participation, in a similar manner to other forms of fan practice, there is still evidence (e.g., Stephen James Walker) that in some cases authority is claimed and reinforced. Viewed externally, however, and incorporating a scholarly perspective on what constitutes history, it is evident that fan-historical work is conducted by many fans to differing degrees. By practicing their authenticities in combination, fan-historians lend legitimacy to their work.

[4.7]   It is important not to lose sight of the conception of fan-historical practice as work, as labor. The affective and productive engagement characteristic of so many fans has been widely recognized for its role in the development of the conceptual and economic value of a range of intellectual property (e.g., Fiske 1992; Terranova 2000; Gregg 2009; Fresco 2020), drawing on theories of immaterial and affective labor articulated by Lazzarato, Hardt, and Negri, among others (for a useful summary, see Dowling, Nunes, and Trott 2007). In short, fan labor adds to fan properties, extending and developing content and providing spaces for ongoing engagement for other fans (Busse 2015). Framing fan activity as labor is not uncontroversial, and certainly spaces like the Archive of Our Own (AO3) have a history of resisting practices that render the ongoing exchanges of social, cultural, and fan capital (De Kosnik 2016) into economic (i.e., monetary) terms.

[4.8]   This preexisting relationship is nuanced by the work of the fan-historian, focused as it is on the past and directed even more explicitly toward the community than many other modes of fan labor. Far

more than much ordinary historical work, the labor that fan-historians undertake is driven by the need to produce usable pasts for other fans—whether to inform their fan works or their sense of community. We might think of this as a form of participatory citizenship, "the work that goes into making a fandom happen" (Stevens 2021, 33). It is for this reason that we have referred to fan historians as public historians—historians who are not only interested in informing a community about the past but who emerge from and speak back to that public, democratizing their relationship with the past as they do so (Kean and Ashton 2009). In this, they respond to fans' deep affective engagement with their fandom with a form of historical work recognized for its affective qualities (Webber and Stevens 2020). The qualities of this labor reflect those identified in the broader address of recent affective and experiential turns in historical work, which have eroded the boundaries between history and memory and understood the experience of engaging with the past to be intensely affecting, both for historians and for their audiences, their publics (Agnew 2007; Robinson 2010).

[4.9]   We should not overlook the fact that the affective connections between fans and the public historical work of fan-historians often run through the archive, and some scholars have made explicit the connection between the affective turn and an archival turn in the humanities (Long et al. 2017). Collections of fan works, the AO3 among them, play a central role in constituting fan communities, echoing a powerful "will to archive" in contemporary culture that incorporates "attempts to construct archives as prosthetic memory devices for the re-constitution of identity, to invent a place to be at home" (Featherstone 2006, 594–95). Such collections lack the sense of the formal documentary repository and storage that has traditionally been signaled by the term archive, instead acting (in the way of digital archives) as sites of immediate access, engagement, and feedback. Importantly, whether more formal (Einwächter 2015; De Kosnik 2016) or less so (O'Neill 2015), fans' archival practices "are typically directed towards fellow fans interested in engaging with fannish pasts in a variety of forms" (Stevens 2020, 103). They are thus sites that speak to a community and its past, what Sarah Baker (2015, 59) refers to as "affective archives" that go beyond simple preservation to accommodate "the emotional connections that exist between people and things, combined with a communal urge to collect, preserve and archive." We might understand such archival work as historical work and thus understand fan archives as fan-historical work. More specifically, we might see it as a site of public historical work through which the affective qualities of the archive are made manifest (Long et al. 2017) and thus recognize the labor of the creators and curators of fan archives as fan-historical in nature.

5. Conclusion

[5.1]   Fan-historians are the creators of archives and their users; interrogators and producers of fac and of fan works; fans of the past and fans of fandom's past; public historians for fan-publics; and present-minded workers (Jenkins 2003) who through their labor set fan culture into history. They are something both more and less specific than the acafan, producing work for their communities that expresses their authenticity as fans, critical historians, and witnesses. This fusion of practices, of the fan and the historian in the fan-historian, is made possible by the close kinship of these modes of thinking and being: their close, curatorial attention to detail and shared understanding; their inclination and desire to account for the spaces and absences in our stories; and the intensely affective nature of their engagement. Fan-historians therefore play a crucial role in fan communities, articulating a relationship to the past that, in matching the approaches and concerns of fandom more generally, can underpin fan identities and help create a sense of home.

[5.2]   Yet, at the end of a piece like this, which has concerned itself with definition and recognition, it is important to reflect on what has been gained. Where does this definitional work take us? What impact does, should, it have on our thinking about fandom, about history, and about the past? As we suggested at the outset, there is a real importance in thinking through and valuing the practices of fans in relation to the past in their own terms. The definition of the fan-historian that we advance is broadly inclusive, drawing on the wide range of fan labor that takes place in relation to the past to offer a recognition of all of this activity both as fandom and history, bringing the two perspectives together. We have not only sought to recognize the importance of fan-historical work but also to move away from the reductionist characterization of history that can be seen in some of the existing literature. Here, we have been informed by the historiographical developments of recent decades, which have begun to understand history as something more democratic, more literary, and more practical.

[5.3]   We remain very indebted to Western modes of historical thinking, however, and while movements in global or world history have helped problematize these approaches, they have long defined many professional historians' attitudes toward the past and its study. One aspect of such attitudes, of course, concerns who can legitimately talk about the past, who can call themselves a historian, and what is an appropriate subject for history—to return briefly to Carr (1964), which facts should be selected to be made historical and by whom. It is for these reasons that it is important to recognize the vital work that fan-historians undertake and to recognize its fannish qualities alongside its historical ones. While we appreciate the impetus to value memory and memory work, celebrate the archive, and emphasize community, history (as a discipline and practice) continues to represent the institutional recognition that the past has power. To distance ourselves from history, even rhetorically, is to cast ourselves as people without history (Wolf 2010) and to distance ourselves from power. For fandom, fan-historians represent a nexus of this power.

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