

**Building Archives Of Our Own:  
Community Repositories for Digital Remix Video**

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Master's Thesis

8/2013

Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program

at New York University

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## 1. Introduction

“The remix is the very nature of the digital.”<sup>1</sup> So wrote science fiction author William Gibson in his defense of the practice of creating new material out of pre-existing works, in a *Wired* article published July 2005 – four months after the launch of YouTube made remixed audiovisual content more widely accessible than it had ever been before.

Only a few years earlier, the idea that someone could possess hours of high-quality audiovisual content stored on a physical medium smaller than their hand, edit that content using only programs available for their home laptop, and share the resulting with with a global audience within minutes might indeed have seemed like science fiction. However, in the era has become known as the digital age, the combination of digital technology and widespread high-speed internet access has fundamentally changed the way that art and society interact. As Lawrence Lessig, another prominent defender of the practice of remix, explains, “digital technologies have democratized the ability to create and re-create the culture around us.”<sup>2</sup> This shift is especially impactful in the area of audiovisual art, which has historically required significant resources in terms of money, time, equipment and/or skill level to create, manipulate and distribute. In the past, these resources have often only been available to commercial enterprises, resulting in a one-way cultural conversation without the possibility of audience interaction or response.

Audiovisual material stored as a pattern of ones and zeros, on the other hand, is infinitely replicable – and, therefore, infinitely able to be excerpted, edited and reused without harming the original. This allows almost anyone to do what journalist Julian Sanchez describes as “using our shared culture as a kind of language to communicate something to an audience,”<sup>3</sup> whether that something is a response to the original work, or a new creation that builds upon its back. And amateur creators are taking advantage of these new possibilities in droves, in the process presenting new questions and ideas about copyright, culture, and collective creativity.

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- 1 Gibson, William. “God's Little Toys: Confessions of a Cut-and-Paste Artist.” *Wired*, 13.07. July 2005. Accessed 4/25/2013. <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.07/gibson.html>
  - 2 Lessig, Larry. “In Defense of Piracy.” *The Wall Street Journal*. October 11, 2008. Accessed 2/7/2013. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122367645363324303.html>
  - 3 Sanchez, Julian. “The Evolution of Remix Culture.” YouTube video. February 6, 2010. Accessed 4/25/2013. <http://www.juliansanchez.com/2010/02/06/the-evolution-of-remix-culture/>

However, for audiovisual archivists, dedicated to preserving cultural history, the rise of remix culture brings up a different question: how on earth is it going to be preserved? Left to its own devices, digital content sourced on the Internet is unlikely to remain usable and discoverable into what digital archivists call “the long term,” due to challenges such as file corruption, format obsolescence, unreliable hosting sites, and insufficient metadata. Transformative works that have been uploaded to third-party sites on the Internet are extremely vulnerable thanks to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which requires internet service providers to take down content when formally notified of a claim of copyright infringement.<sup>4</sup> If that internet service provider is the only place the content is hosted, then a notice-and-takedown can effectually serve as the death warrant for a transformative work. Some digital remix content does survive simply on the basis of its popularity, uploaded and re-uploaded to a variety of sites whenever it gets taken down – as the maxim goes, “lots of copies keeps stuff safe.”<sup>5</sup> However, while these videos themselves may remain available, there's no guarantee that the metadata surrounding them will be accurate, or that they will be presented in an appropriate context. And while some remixes have managed to stick around the internet in some form or another for a decade or more, many, many more have been lost – sometimes not only to viewers, but to their creators as well.

The party line among archivists, as stated in the OCLC's Blue Ribbon Tasks Force report, is that “public institutions are best positioned to ensure the long-term preservation of high-value digital materials.”<sup>6</sup> This may well be true when it comes to materials that are universally agreed to be of “high value.” However, despite the efforts of remix advocates such as Gibson and

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4 Electronic Frontier Foundation. “A Guide to YouTube Removals.” Accessed 2/3/2013. <https://www.eff.org/issues/intellectual-property/guide-to-youtube-removals#why-removed>

5 “Preservation Principles.” LOCKSS. Accessed 12/11/2012. <http://www.lockss.org/about/principles/#decentralized>

6 OCLC. “Sustainable Economics for a Digital Planet: Ensuring Long-Term Access to Digital Information.” February 2010. Accessed 12/2/2012. [http://brtf.sdsc.edu/biblio/BRTF\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://brtf.sdsc.edu/biblio/BRTF_Final_Report.pdf)

Lessig, no such agreement yet exists when it comes to remix video; there is no “canon” of contemporary digital remix, nor any existing institution with a mandate to create one. Moreover, because of the complex rights issues involved, institutions are often reluctant to commit to the preservation of transformative works, especially when their right to provide access to the material may end up in question. Remix video creators, meanwhile, are cagey about the idea of entrusting their work to an institution which may attempt to assert control over a medium that is by nature uncontrolled and operates outside the bounds of conventional legality. While it's theoretically possible for institutions to surmount these challenges, the digital preservation community has as of yet made no attempts to come to grips with the problem of preserving remix video. Meanwhile, an entire generation of artistic content is in the process of burning through its natural digital lifespan.

However, in some cases, the communities that make up the creators and consumers of remix material have started to take their own steps towards curating and archiving the materials that they create. Admittedly, sometimes these are baby steps at best. In many cases, these archiving efforts have begun simply as attempts to collate similar kinds of remix video content in one place for easy access, creating what could be termed basic web libraries. Other groups have made more concerted efforts to ensure the long-term survival of the content created by their community – most notably, the Organization for Transformative Works, which has founded a repository called the Archive of Our Own as an effort to preserve fan content and preserve at-risk remix material, otherwise known as transformative works.

Professional digital archivists often look somewhat askance at these grassroots archiving efforts. They are not official, have no archival certifications, and in most cases do not have the

knowledge or ability to fully follow the rules laid out for proper functioning of an Open Archival Information System, or OAIS.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, many amateur digital repositories have proven their ability to withstand at least the initial test of time. Project Gutenberg, for example, a community-driven digital repository that digitizes public domain works and hosts e-book copies of them for download, has been in existence longer than the World Wide Web. And given the challenges that surround efforts to preserve remix video given current copyright restrictions, attempts at preservation by the people who value this content the most may be the best chance that it has for survival. Moreover, while the community of creators and consumers for any genre of digital media may not be archivally trained for digital preservation, their contextual knowledge and sensitivity to community issues gives them certain advantages over archivists who are technically trained, but unaware of the specifics of the subculture out of which a specific piece of remix content was born.

In short, whether we like it or not, the survival of digital remix video currently rests in the hands of community repositories – a term which, for the purposes of this paper, I am defining as any site or organization that makes an effort to locate material that fits a certain profile and provide access to it for others interested in that kind of material. If the digital preservation community wants this content to survive, it is therefore our responsibility to figure out whether the community repository method of preservation is a viable one for remix video, and, if not, what can be done about it. This study is an attempt to do exactly that.

Over the course of this paper, I will provide a brief history of transformative video, describe the various different subcultures working within this space to create and consume remix

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<sup>7</sup> The OAIS Reference Model, which defines recommended standards and practices for digital archives, will be discussed in more depth in a later section.

content, and demonstrate the ways in which that content is placed at risk within the digital universe. I will discuss the standards by which the digital archiving community weighs institutional repositories, and the ways in which it is and is not productive to consider community digital archives by the same standards, based off amateur digital archives that have proven themselves successful in the past. I will then proceed into an in-depth examination of the way digital remix work is currently cataloged and made discoverable by different kinds of community repositories – including YouTube – by looking closely at their community, history, technology, submission criteria, and cataloging and metadata practices, and evaluating them in terms of their level of digital preservation and their likelihood of sustainability in the long term. Through this examination of how community archives develop and operate, I hope to provide the digital preservation community with some concrete goals for supporting community archives in the task of preserving content that would otherwise be lost.

## 2. Audiovisual Remix

There is currently no official or universally accepted definition for the kind of work I have been referring to as audiovisual remix. “Transformative work,” “culture jamming,” “mash-up,” “political remix video” – all of these terms come out of different communities, but they have all have been used at one time or another as umbrellas to describe all the different variations on the practice of taking existing content and creating something new out of it. The Organization for Transformative Works, perhaps the most organized body attempting to legitimize remix content, defines a transformative work as something that “takes something extant and turns it into something with a new purpose, sensibility, or mode of expression;”<sup>8</sup> for the purposes of this discussion, this definition will do as well as any. Audiovisual remix can serve a number of purposes: celebration, subversion, promotion, critique, commentary, protest or parody, just to name a few. Contemporary audiovisual remix comes out of a number of different traditions, such as political remix, trailer remix, fanvids and anime music videos, all of which will be discussed at greater length over the course of this paper.

However, it's important to note that form and message do not have a one-to-one correlation. Any single work of remix coming out of any of these traditions and genres may be functioning on several levels. For example, in remix creator and historian Jonathan McIntosh's description of his video “Buffy vs. Edward,” which pits the teen action heroine of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* against the vampire hero of the *Twilight* saga, he explains that “seen through Buffy’s eyes, some of the more sexist gender roles and patriarchal Hollywood themes embedded

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8 “Frequently Asked Questions.” Organization for Transformative Works. Accessed 2/7/2013.  
<http://transformativeworks.org/node/6>



in the Twilight saga are exposed in hilarious ways.”<sup>9</sup> The remix functions as a parody, a celebration of *Buffy*, a critique of *Twilight*, and a commentary on gender roles in both. Another example is the anime music video “Hold Me Now,” which sets the obscure ballet-focused anime *Princess Tutu* against dramatic music to create a visually epic, action-heavy piece. The creator described the video as “Princess Tutu explained in 3 minutes;”<sup>10</sup> the video acts as promotion and celebration of the original work, as well as an argument about the action and drama inherent in the way dance is used in the show.

The official terminology used by the U.S. Copyright Office for any of these types of projects is “derivative work,” which comprises:

a work based upon one or more preexisting works, such as a translation, musical arrangement, dramatization, fictionalization, motion picture version, sound recording, art reproduction, abridgment, condensation, or any other form in which a work may be recast, transformed, or adapted. A work consisting of editorial revisions, annotations, elaborations, or other modifications which, as a whole, represent an original work of authorship, is a “derivative work”.<sup>11</sup>

In order for a “derivative work” to be considered as a unique work in its own right, rather than a violation of someone else's copyright, it must fall under the 'fair use' defense – a major factor of which is the 'transformativeness' of the work, as established in the 1994 Supreme Court decision *Campbell vs. Acuff-Rose*.<sup>12</sup> Here, 'transformativeness' refers to whether the re-use of the work “adds value to the original.” “Value” may be defined as “the creation of new information, new aesthetics, new insights and understandings,” or, alternately, may include acts of “criticizing the

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9 McIntosh, Jonathan. “Buffy vs. Edward: Twilight Remixed.” *Rebellious Pixels*. June 20, 2009. Accessed 4/27/2013. <http://www.rebelliouspixels.com/2009/buffy-vs-edward-twilight-remixed>

10 “Hold Me Now.” *AnimeMusicVideos.org*. Accessed 4/27/2013. [http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members\\_videoinfo.php?v=118208](http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=118208)

11 *Copyright Laws of the United States and Related Laws Contained in Title 17 of the United States Code*. 2011. Accessed 2/7/2013. <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/>

12 *Campbell v. Acuff-Rose Music* (92-1292), 510 U.S. 569 (1994)

quoted work, exposing the character of the original author, proving a fact, or summarizing an idea argued in the original in order to defend or rebut it.”<sup>13</sup>

This argument is an important one in the history of copyright case law, but it does not cover many of the potential uses of previously created works in the service of “remix culture.” Perhaps most notably, it emphasizes the idea that the new work created from the the original, specifically must add value *to the original work*, rather than serving as commentary on something else. So, for example, the use of a Nine Inch Nails song to provide a backdrop to CNN video footage of bombings in Iraq would not fall under this defense, because the work created is a commentary on the bombings and not a commentary on the copyrighted song. Moreover, this definition leaves out works that act as pure promotion or celebration of the original work or concept, such as “Hold Me Now.” Do these works, too, count as “transformative?” For the purposes of this discussion, at least, I would argue that yes, they do; they represent a valid response and aesthetically creative use of material.

Of course, transformative works have been around since long before the term “transformative work” was coined – or, for that matter, the term “remix.” Jonathan McIntosh traces the history of reappropriated audiovisual material back to Soviet filmmakers in the 1920s, who would recut Hollywood films and American newsreels in order to provide their own political commentary. The American avant-garde film movement also has a long history of create new “found footage” films out of the cheap prints of “B-films, film waste and ephemeral materials” they were able to easily acquire and appropriate.<sup>14</sup> With the advent of video and the

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13 Leval, Pierre N. “Towards a Fair Use Standard.” 103 Harvard Law Review 1105 (1990). Accessed 2/7/2013. <http://docs.law.gwu.edu/facweb/claw/levalfrustd.htm>

14 Horwatt, Eli. “A Taxonomy of Digital Video Remixing: Contemporary Found Footage Practice on the Internet.” In *Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation*, edited by Ian Robert Smith, special issue,

rise of pop art, new generations of “found footage” artists shifted their focus towards a critical examination of popular culture; Dana Birnbaum's 1978 piece “Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman” still stands as one of the most well-known examples of this body of work.<sup>15</sup> However, whether the medium was film or video tape, the amount of technical knowledge and technical equipment required to create a transformative work kept the pool of transformative moving image works fairly small.

The widespread adoption of cassette video and the VCR lowered the skill threshold for working with video, and it also made it much easier for amateurs to acquire content to remix. Instead of acquiring a pirated film print or a bootleg broadcast master, the aspiring remix artist only had to use videocassettes to tape the desired material off of their own television sets. This enabled the rise of an art form called “video scratching” in the 1980s, which took hip-hop DJs as their inspiration to “sample and scratch” commercial media as an act of cultural and artistic protest.<sup>16</sup> Shortly thereafter, the culture-jamming movement came into being as a push back against the overwhelming cultural saturation of branded images and icons of consumer culture.<sup>17</sup> Although culture jammers originally worked primarily in two-dimensional visual mediums, they eventually began to incorporate counter-cultural video remix into their work as well, resulting in projects such as Emergency Broadcasting Network's musical remix of the Gulf War.<sup>18</sup> Mark

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*Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*, no. 15. Accessed 2/8/2013.

<https://wiki.brown.edu/confluence/download/attachments/74858352/HorwattTaxonomyOfDigitalVideoRemixing.pdf>

15 McIntosh, Jonathan. “A history of subversive video remix before YouTube: Thirty political video mashups made between World War II and 2005.” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, Volume 9, 2012. Accessed 2/7/2013. <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/371/299>

16 “Video Art Kitchen Vol. 1: Scratch Video.” Inter Media Art Institute. Accessed 2/8/2013. <http://www.imaonline.de/content/view/56/39/lang,en/>

17 Pickerel, Wendi, Helena Jorgensen, and Lance Bennet. “Culture Jams and Meme Warfare: Kalle Lasn, Adbusters, and media activism.” Center for Communication and Civic Engagement. Accessed 2/8/2013. <http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/assets/documents/pdf/culturejamsandmemewarfare.pdf>

18 “EBN-Heads: Brian Kane Interview.” Skynoise.net. October 23, 2009. Accessed 2/8/2013.

Dery's 1999 manifesto on the practice of culture jamming would eventually expand the definition of “culture jamming” to encompass all subversive remix practices, from “artistic terrorism” to computer hacking to the “textual poaching” practiced by fan communities.<sup>19</sup> These fan communities had by that point already developed their own forms of remix video. Science fiction media fans, who had first begun to experiment with moving image manipulation in the 1970s by creating slideshows out of images from shows and videotaping them, used VHS television and film footage set to music to create pop culture tributes and counter-narratives which they called fanvids, or vids. Fans of Japanese anime separately developed a similar practice, and coined the term anime music video, or AMV, to describe their work.

However, although it was now possible for non-experts to experiment with remixing moving image material, the actual process of creating a transformative video work remained extremely complex and time-consuming. The process of creation described by early fanvidders, for example, required the use of two VCRs, a stopwatch, extremely meticulous timing, and only one chance to make sure the clips matched the beat of the audio.<sup>20</sup> And after all that effort, there was no way to show the resulting work except at an exhibition or convention, or by dubbing bootleg copies and mailing them out to a small interested community.<sup>21</sup> Some local cable channels, such as Deep Dish Television and Paper Tiger, were able to broadcast their own remixed work of cultural critique, but their reach, too, was limited. In short, although more people were creating transformative video works than ever before, the floodgates for remix video

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<http://www.skynoise.net/2009/10/23/ebn-heads-brian-kane-interview/>

19 Dery, Mark. “Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs.” *The Cyberpunk Project*, 1999. Accessed 2/8/2013. [http://project.cyberpunk.ru/idb/culture\\_jamming.html](http://project.cyberpunk.ru/idb/culture_jamming.html)

20 Coppa, Francesca. “Pressure – a metavid by the California Crew.” *In Media Res*, January 28, 2008. Accessed 2/7/2013. <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2008/01/28/pressure-metavid-california-crew>

21 “Emergency Broadcast Network: EBN VHS copies is back!” 7-12 Hertz Rumbling. Blog post. November 6, 2009. Accessed 7/8/2013. <http://7-12hertzrumbling.blogspot.com/2009/11/emergency-broadcast-network-one-of-ebn.html>

did not truly open until the advent of digital video technology.

Digital video – and the Internet – provided three major shifts that caused the explosion of transformative culture as it exists today. The first is ease of access to the necessary materials. Digital video is infinitely replicable, and takes up no physical space. As Eli Horwatt argues in his “Taxonomy of Digital Video Remixing,” digital video allows for an “economy of moving image storage technology” that allows anyone to acquire the footage they need to create a transformative work with minimal effort.<sup>22</sup> A work created out of multiple sources such as Lim's fanvid “Us” would have required a vast library of VHS tapes to complete in the 1980s, but can today be constructed out of the contents of a single hard drive. The second is ease of technology. Digital video can be edited entirely on a computer, with software that many can afford and anybody can learn to use. Most importantly, digital video can be edited in a non-linear fashion, which means that adjustments are not final, and can be made at any point in the process without requiring the creator to start their project from the beginning.

However, while both of these are significant changes for the process of creating transformative work, perhaps the most important shift doesn't have to do with the work of creation at all. The advent of the Internet essentially revolutionized the process of distribution for transformative work. As more and more individuals found themselves globally connected, creators of transformative works could share their projects with a much larger audience and expect immediate feedback. Works that were particularly clever, or that hit the public at just the right moment, now had the potential to “go viral” and hit literally millions of viewers, as people emailed videos to their friends or shared links on their blogs. As the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement points out, the “core unit” for culture jammers is now “the meme” – a

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22 Horwatt, Eli. “A Taxonomy of Digital Video Remixing: Contemporary Found Footage Practice on the Internet.”

concept that spreads quickly from person to person via the internet.<sup>23</sup>

Some transformative works have become so popular that they rival the original commercial media on which they're based, such as the stop-motion creation “Raiders of the Lost Ark: The Adaptation,” which was praised by some viewers as potentially better than the original.<sup>24</sup> It's important to note that this adaptation was originally screened at a film festival in 1989 – pre-Internet – and, while it received some short-lived acclaim at the time, did not become widely known until it was rediscovered in 2003 and promoted by the owner of the popular website Ain't It Cool News.<sup>25</sup>

Once a viral video becomes a meme, it often inspires a host of responses, sometimes spurring the invention of an entirely new genre of transformative work. The parody trailer “Brokeback to the Future,” created by the Charlotte Cake Comedy Troupe, combined audio from the *Brokeback Mountain* trailer with images from *Back to the Future*; it promptly launched a host of imitators casting characters from a number of different media works as the lead players in a Brokeback Mountain-style gay romance. Several of these copycat trailers were created by video artists coming out of the vidding tradition of fandom; the practice of using remix to re-envision the relationship between two same-sex characters as a queer romance has been a major aspect of fan culture since the first vidded slideshows of the 1970s.<sup>26</sup> However, according to Fanlore.org's history of the copycat trailer phenomenon, many more were created by “ video

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23 “Culture Jamming and Meme-Based Communication.” Center for Communication and Civic Engagement. Accessed 2/9/2013. <http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/polcommcampaigns/CultureJamming.htm>

24 Sandlin, Lee. “Indie Indy.” *Chicago Reader*. May 22, 2008. Accessed 2/9/2013. <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/indie-indy/Content?oid=1109753>

25 Silverman, Jason. “Ultimate 'Indy' Flick: Fanboys Remake 'Raiders of the Lost Ark.'” *Wired.com*. May 17, 2007. Accessed 2/9/2013. [http://www.wired.com/entertainment/hollywood/news/2007/05/diy\\_raiders](http://www.wired.com/entertainment/hollywood/news/2007/05/diy_raiders)

26 Jenkins, Henry. “How to Watch a Fanvid.” *Confessions of an Aca-fan*. September 18, 2006. Accessed 4/26/2013. [http://henryjenkins.org/2006/09/how\\_to\\_watch\\_a\\_fanvid.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2006/09/how_to_watch_a_fanvid.html)

editors from outside media fandom,<sup>27</sup> often as viral advertising for a comedy troupe or web design shop. Remix artists working out of very different paradigms were suddenly using the same language, in what the *New York Times* defined as “a joke that keeps on giving.” It's more than just a joke, though. As the same article points out, academics have based their entire careers on their theses about gay subtext in classic works of popular culture, and the same kind of “thorough close-readings that have refined and broadened Fiedler's argument this time have been provided not by graduate students, but by online pranksters using little more than laptops, a broadband connection and Final Cut Pro.”<sup>28</sup> (Though it's worth noting that the categories of 'graduate student' and 'online prankster' are far from mutually exclusive.)

Perhaps most importantly, the internet has made it much easier for the creators of transformative works to build global communities. In many cases, the unprecedented access and connectivity made possible by the Internet has spurred passionate creators of remix video to reach out to other people working within similar paradigms and create Internet community centers that allow them to share tips, techniques, and video recommendations. This has been especially true for communities built around a shared specific passion – and, additionally, communities that have traditionally kept something of a low profile in the non-virtual world. The growth of the fanvidding community provides a textbook example of this kind of community development. Fannish creativity has generally carried no political, artistic, or counter-cultural cachet – although in the past few years vidders and academics both have begun to make the case that it should. Still, it's hard to shake the “image of the fan as an inadequate,

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27 “Brokeback Mountain Parody Trailers.” *Fanlore.org*. Accessed 2/9/2013.

[http://fanlore.org/wiki/Brokeback\\_Mountain\\_Parody\\_Trailers](http://fanlore.org/wiki/Brokeback_Mountain_Parody_Trailers)

28 Heffernan, Virginia. “Brokeback Spoofs: Tough Guys Unmasked.” *The New York Times*. March 20, 2006. Accessed 2/9/2013.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/02/movies/02heff.html?\\_r=2&ei=5070&en=957c0f97ac43e854&ex=1141966800&adxnml=1&emc=eta1&adxnmlx=1141314786-m597BdytqEB1hy3g7bkghA&oref=slogin&](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/02/movies/02heff.html?_r=2&ei=5070&en=957c0f97ac43e854&ex=1141966800&adxnml=1&emc=eta1&adxnmlx=1141314786-m597BdytqEB1hy3g7bkghA&oref=slogin&)

highly neurotic personality,”<sup>29</sup> an image that causes many members of fandom, vidders included, to be cautious about revealing their interests and activities to the wider world. Horror stories about fans who have lost friends, jobs, spouses, or child custody by having their interests “outed” are common in fandom, and it would take an extreme level of trust for many fans to admit to an acquaintance or friend that they spend their free time re-editing footage on the Internet that they don't own out of a sheer love of the material.<sup>30</sup> With the accessibility and anonymity available on the internet, though, fans are able to “speak from a position of collective identity, to forge an alliance with a community of others in defense of tastes which, as a result, cannot be read as totally aberrant or idiosyncratic.”<sup>31</sup>

Obviously, the Internet did not create this sense of collective identity – fanzines and conventions were going on for decades before the Web became generally accessible – but it has made it significantly easier for fanvidders to find and support each other. As Rebecca Tushnet points out, “vidders create and within and for a community of viewers and other vidders.”<sup>32</sup> “Vidding” is now considered a fandom in and of itself, with its own particular customs and boundaries, both for good and ill. One essay by a vidder from 2009 complains about the exclusivity of the “vidding” community as it is often conceived of by self-defined vidders, pointing out that

AMVs seem to get a nod occasionally because people crossover from them to live action.  
A nod, but there is no real integration of the two--they seem to exist in separate bubbles.

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29 Taggart, Eve Marie. “Book Review: *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*, by Cornell Sandvoss.” *Journal of Transformative Works* Vol 1, 2008. Accessed 5/6/2013.

<http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/39/42>

30 “Outing.” *Fanlore.org*. Accessed 2/10/2013. <http://fanlore.org/outing>

31 Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992) 3

32 Tushnet, Rebecca. “Scary Monsters: Hybrids, Mashups, and Other Illegitimate Children.” *Notre Dame Law Review*. Accessed 2/13/2013. [http://www3.nd.edu/~ndlrev/archive\\_public/86ndlr5/Tushnet.pdf](http://www3.nd.edu/~ndlrev/archive_public/86ndlr5/Tushnet.pdf)



And what about all the swathes of Asian vidding communities? What about vidders in other languages? What about all the people on YouTube we'd like to ignore? They are vidders too! There are communities of vidders springing up *constantly*.<sup>33</sup>

But what, then, makes a “community of vidders?” Is it the simple bond of working within a common genre? A centralized location on the Internet where transformative artists working within the same paradigm can communicate with each other? The existence of a collection of works that fall into that paradigm – a digital library or an archive?

It seems clear that a shared genre, at least, is not enough to define a community. Political remix video, for example, tends to be created almost entirely outside of a community context; there is no centralized location for political remixers to congregate, and almost no communication between artists as they work. As Jonathan McIntosh explains, many creators of political remix video decide to create a transformative work because they are interested in conveying a specific message; “people are making it because they're passionate about something, and then they'll put it up on their own channels or blogs and that'll be it, they're not connected.”<sup>34</sup> If these artists are rooted in communities, they are political communities that have no specific focus on the medium of remix. This makes it extremely challenging for people like McIntosh, who are specifically interested in political remix as a medium, to seek out other work that speaks to their interests. Other artists, meanwhile – often those working within the paradigm of trailer remix – are often using the form of remix as a tool to show off their technical skill in video manipulation. They have no specific interest in joining a remix community; their aim is to get noticed by professionals, and, eventually, to parlay their skills into a job. Although there are sites and blogs dedicated to these genres of remix, in most cases these sites are run by one

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33 “On Inclusion and Exclusion in Vidding Fandom: Personal Reflections.” Livejournal post, August 20, 2009. Accessed 2/10/2013. <http://bop-radar.livejournal.com/202771.html>

34 McIntosh, Jonathan. Personal interview. 4/11/2013.

particular individual who is interested in collecting and curating the material, rather than demonstrating a collective investment in a genre of work.

Rotman and Preece's work on YouTube communities defines an Internet community as “a group (or various subgroups) of people, brought together by a shared interest, using a virtual platform, to interact and create user-generated content that is accessible to all community members, while cultivating communal culture and adhering to specific norms.”<sup>35</sup> I would argue that in order to fulfill this definition, an Internet community must not only create user-generated content, but take on a shared responsibility to make it accessible. Moreover, for a community to survive, that work must be accessible over time so that future artists can retain a sense of their artistic heritage and build on what has come before. As Tushnet writes of, “[vidder] Luminosity is one of thousands of artists. She learned from others, and is teaching others with her work. Documenting this artistic heritage, one might hope, will help explain to those unfamiliar with it that remix in general, and vidding in particular, is a legitimate practice, as artistic practices with generally recognized histories are already considered.”<sup>36</sup> A sense of community goes hand-in-hand with a sense of history. This is why preservation must be concerned with the “long term.” While this may not have a specific definition in terms of years, what it means for a community is a timespan long enough that even when the original members of a community are no longer available to explain their motivations to a new generation, their work survives to speak for them.

Communities of transformative video artists, therefore, have the strongest motivation to preserve their own work – but are they qualified to be responsible for its preservation? Of

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35 Rotman, Dana, and Jennifer Preece. “The 'WeTube' in YouTube – creating an online community through video sharing.” *Int. J. Web Based Communities*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2010. Accessed 2/11/2013.  
<http://www.danarotman.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/IJWBC060306-ROTMAN.pdf>

36 Tushnet, Rebecca

course, the answer to this question is far more complicated than a simple yes or no. Certainly, there are some ways in which the communities that create these works have an advantage over any institution, simply due to their awareness of the culture and context out of which they were created. The exhibition history of the fanvid “Us” provides a good example of the ways in which meaning can be lost when transformative work is taken out of its original cultural context and embraced by the ivory tower.

Created by fanvidder lim, “Us” is a work that was essentially designed to be a love letter to the culture of fandom. Rather than using images from one particular source to provide commentary on the text itself, as the majority of fanvids do, it manipulated clips from a multitude of shows popular among fandom for an effect that scholar Kristina Busse has said “thematizes and illustrates how media fans engage with texts – not only the intense love fans feel for the shows and characters, but also how fans appropriate images, characters, narratives, and make them their own.”<sup>37</sup> Busse goes on to draw out the images within the work of “tourists” coming to goggle at fandom, a set of images that “explicitly include[s] academics,”<sup>38</sup> thus directly challenging any attempt to use the work in a scholarly context or, indeed, any context not related to fandom. Nonetheless, when Dr. Michael Wesch, a cultural anthropologist studying new media, used the vid in his presentation to the Library of Congress titled “An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube,” he defined the “us” of the vid to include not just vidders or members of fandom, but everyone who's ever made a remix, or even burned a DVD.<sup>39</sup> While this kind of identification is a valid personal reaction to the piece, it becomes deeply

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37 Busse, Kristina. “Us: A Multivid by Lim.” *In Medias Res*, Feb 1, 2008. Accessed 2/12/2013. <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2008/02/01/us-a-multivid-by-lim>.

38 Ibid

39 Wesch, Michael. “An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube.” YouTube.com. July 26, 2008. Accessed 2/12/2013. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAO-1Z4\\_hU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAO-1Z4_hU)

problematic as an official curatorial interpretation, given how significantly it contradicts the vid's initial intent.

More egregiously, when the vid was featured in a museum exhibit titled *MEDIATIONS* at the California Museum of Photography, the curatorial notes about the exhibit demonstrate a crucial ignorance of fandom culture. The summary introduction to the exhibit archived online proudly announced that *MEDIATIONS* marked lim's first “real life exhibition,” ignoring the fact that vids are generally not intended for museum exhibition and lim's was probably the first to be curated in such a way.<sup>40</sup> In an especially ironic touch, given the way “Us” critiques academic interest in fandom, the description of the video itself focused on the fact that it “was recently included in a Library of Congress address given by cultural anthropologist, Michael Wesch, as well as the subject of recent publications by film theorist Francesca Coppa and professor of law at Stanford, Lawrence Lessig.”<sup>41</sup> In short, the curators of the museum seemed unprepared to discuss lim and lim's work outside of the paradigm of fine art video exhibitions, therefore ignoring important aspects of the work and its original context and intent.

There is a pervasive feeling in fandom that viewers outside of the context of the community simply do not properly understand their work – and, as these examples demonstrate, that's probably not an inaccurate summation. Francesca Coppa and Rebecca Tushnet's article “How to Suppress Women's Remix” details the case of vidders Killa and T. Jonesy, whose vids “went viral” in 2006 and spread across the internet via YouTube, BoingBoing, and Metafilter. The vidders were made uncomfortable by this for a variety of reasons: first, the potential legal

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40 “MEDIATED: Introduction,” *California Museum of Photography*. Accessed 2/13/2013.  
[http://138.23.124.165/exhibitions/mediate/exh\\_essay\\_01.htm](http://138.23.124.165/exhibitions/mediate/exh_essay_01.htm)

41 “MEDIATED: Lim,” *California Museum of Photography*. Accessed 2/13/2013.  
[http://138.23.124.165/exhibitions/mediate/exh\\_bio\\_02.lasso](http://138.23.124.165/exhibitions/mediate/exh_bio_02.lasso)

ramifications if the owners of the original content remixed in the fanvids were to sue; second, the fact that the vids, which were intended for an audience well-versed in the idioms and tropes of fan culture, were now being shared with a mainstream audience that read them as entirely parodic; and, third, the fact that due to their popularity, the vids ended up posted in a wide variety of places and often did not give credit to the initial creators. Killa and T. Jonesy eventually removed all the videos over which they retained control, leaving behind only the copies posted by those who were unaware of or did not care about their decision to remove them.<sup>42</sup> This demonstrates the importance for fanvidders of entrusting their work to a sympathetic archive that understands and respects the concerns of fan culture. It's the creator's right to determine how and when an audience sees their work, but from a preservation standpoint, it's deeply unfortunate that the only remaining copies of Killa and T. Jonesy's vids are contextually removed and lacking in appropriate metadata. This leads to serious problems down the line; Jonathan McIntosh has discussed his difficulties with attempting to contextualize the history of political remix video when so much of his source material “wouldn't have the creator's name, it wouldn't have the year that it was created, it wouldn't have the original place that it was posted ... things you would need to curate this sort of work were clearly missing.”<sup>43</sup>

Vidders are not the only remix artists to have concerns about the appropriation and decontextualization of their work. The “Adbusters” website, which bills itself as the bastion for all things culture jam-related, has come under fire from founding father of culture jam Mark Dery as a sell-out site that has managed to commodify the culture of anti-consumerism. Dery writes, “seventeen years after my manifesto hit indie bookstores, the look and feel of culture

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42 Coppa, Francesca, and Rebecca Tushnet. “How to Suppress Women's Remix,” *Camera Obscura* 26, no. 2: 77 (2011), 131-138.

43 McIntosh, Jonathan. Personal interview.

jamming, at least, have been appropriated by the mainstream, tirelessly promoted by Adbusters (oh, the irony!) and hijacked by guerrilla advertisers to ambush unsuspecting consumers.”<sup>44</sup> For those unsuspecting consumers, it can be genuinely difficult to distinguish an activist work of culture jamming from a commercial remix intended to sell them on a product. This makes it all the more important that that distinction be maintained in preservation – but if the leading culture jam website can't be trusted to present the work accurately, who can be?

Meanwhile, much of the VHS work of culture jammers from twenty years ago has now been accepted into museum collections, which presents its own problems. Although this means that the fragile analog objects will be appropriately preserved, contemporary political remix artists have complained about museum policies of removing extent digital copies from the Internet in order to safeguard what they now consider their intellectual content. This has a double blow for the culture jamming movement. First, it makes the work largely inaccessible to the audience it was originally intended to reach; the goal of culture jam, after all, is to “effect a public discourse,” and culture jammers like Jasper Sanidad have expressed concern that the idea of a work of culture jam “qualifying” to be exhibited might “create a biased oligarchy in access and opinion aesthetic.”<sup>45</sup> Secondly, it contributes to the decentralization and creative isolation felt by contemporary political remix artists. McIntosh relates, “it makes understanding the history of what you're doing harder if you don't have that stuff collected and curated in a way that it is in context, that gives it some metadata, right? It's one of the reasons that I didn't know that this stuff existed, and to what extent it existed, when I started making this work, just because

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44 Dery, Mark. “A Brief Introduction to the 2010 Reprint.” *Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs*. 2010. Accessed 2/14/2013. [http://markdery.com/?page\\_id=154](http://markdery.com/?page_id=154)

45 Sanidad, Jasper. “Culture Jamming Presentation.” December 17, 2009. Accessed 4/28/2013. <http://www.jaspersanidad.com/blog/?p=622>

there was no place for it.” In a rapidly mutating artistic culture largely centralized around the Internet, removing the possibility for a community history to be shared over the Web also seriously affects the future development of the community and the genre of work.<sup>46</sup>

In his study on copying and montage, Montage Boon wrote that “montage is obviously important for cultures that can't afford to buy new things – it is a poor people's art [...] the touch of the *monteur* (DJ or quilter) sends a shiver through matter, marks it temporarily as the *monteur's* own, asserts a kind of freedom within it and a claim to the right to transform it.”<sup>47</sup> The creation of transformative work is a means of asserting individual control over the bombardment of top-down media images; it should come as no surprise that artists can be reluctant to hand that control back to an institution. And after all, in his original culture jammer's manifesto, Mark Dery includes “academy hacking---cultural studies, conducted outside university walls, by insurgent intellectuals” as an important facet of the movement.<sup>48</sup>

However, while metadata and context can and should be supplied by the culture that generated the transformative works, the question remains: are amateurs capable of digitally preserving these works over the long term?

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46 McIntosh, Jonathan. Personal interview.

47 Boon, Marcus. *In Praise of Copying*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2010.

48 Dery, Mark. “Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs.”

### 3. Grassroots Digital Repositories

The leading international standard for a trustworthy digital repository, as created by the International Organization for Standardization, is the Reference Model for an Open Archival Information System, commonly referred to as the 'OAIS Reference Model.'<sup>49</sup> The document states six responsibilities that a digital archive must fulfill in order to be compliant with digital preservation requirements:

- Negotiate for and accept appropriate information from information producers
- Obtain sufficient control of the information provided to the level needed to ensure Long Term Preservation
- Determine, either by itself or in conjunction with other parties, which communities should become the Designated Community and, therefore, should be able to understand the information provided, thereby defining its Knowledge Base
- Ensure that the information to be preserved is Independently Understandable to the Designated Community. In particular, the Designated Community should be able to understand the information without needing special resources such as the assistance of the experts who provided the information
- Follow documented policies and procedures which ensure that the information is preserved against all reasonable contingencies, including the demise of the Archive, ensuring that it is never deleted unless allowed as part of an approved strategy. There should be no ad-hoc deletions
- Make the preserved information available to the Designated Community and enable the information to be disseminated as copies of, or as traceable to, the original submitted Data Objects with evidence supporting its authenticity<sup>50</sup>

Many of these dictates tend to be built into the structure of a digital preservation

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49 "ISO 14721:2012." ISO Standards Catalog. Accessed 4/28/2013.

[http://www.iso.org/iso/home/store/catalogue\\_ics/catalogue\\_detail\\_ics.htm?csnumber=57284](http://www.iso.org/iso/home/store/catalogue_ics/catalogue_detail_ics.htm?csnumber=57284)

50 *Reference Model for an Open Archival Information System (OAIS), Draft Recommended Standard, CCSDS 650.0-M-2 (Magenta Book)* June 2012. Accessed 12/2/2012.

<http://public.ccsds.org/publications/archive/650x0m2.pdf>



repository from the beginning. Gathering information and making it accessible, in particular, are the two most basic features of a repository. The OAIS reference model also places a great deal of significance on the importance of defining a designated community and working within the paradigm defined by the needs of that community. For an amateur community repository, all three of these factors work hand in hand. Community repositories often come into existence because of a perceived need within the community for a centralized location for information and a desire for increased access to it in a way that serves the needs of that specific community. Because founders and decision-makers are members of the community themselves, a community archive has a good understanding of how to meet those requirements, and a powerful motivation to fulfill them.

However, in most cases, these repositories initially spring up to solve the problem of access in the short term. The question of “long term preservation” – in other words, sustainability and survivability of an archive – is a challenge that the field of digital archiving is still in the process of figuring out how to meet, and community repositories are often entirely unprepared for. It doesn't help that digital preservation, as a field, is only approximately as old as the advent of the Internet. No one's really had time to gauge what “long term preservation” even looks like from a digital standpoint, much less what factors will or will not allow it to succeed.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the amount of scholarly attention directed towards the question of success and long-term sustainability of digital archives. However, most of the studies published around this topic have focused almost exclusively on digital repositories affiliated with professional and scholarly institutions. There is a classic and fairly well-

understood model for the failure of this sort of endeavor, which goes as follows: university-affiliated academic professionals have the idea to create a digital repository to collect, preserve, and/or provide access to digital materials relevant to a certain scholarly community; a grant committee, excited by the potential of the repository, provides an initial burst of funding; materials are collected, the repository goes public, the enterprise appears to be a great success – and then the funding runs out. The repositories at highest risk for this kind of failure are “finite, small scale projects, often run by a lone academic based at an institution without the necessary infrastructure to support the preservation of complex digital resources.”<sup>51</sup> In these cases, the projects are not generating revenue on their own and do not have a successful business plan in place to make sure that they can retain staff once the period of the initial grant has ended. The parent institutions with which they are affiliated either cannot or will not take responsibility for their survival, and the projects are left to either “limp along or fail altogether.”<sup>52</sup>

In response to this by-now-common story of the rise and fall of the digital archive, experts have started developing standards by which to evaluate the sustainability and potential for long-term survival for digital archives. The Blue Ribbon Task Force on Sustainable Digital Preservation and Access was created in late 2007, in partnership with Library of Congress, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of the United Kingdom, the Council on Library and Information Resources, and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). The Task Force's goal was to address solutions for what it identified as the most pressing issues

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51 Jones, S., D. Abbott, and S. Ross, “Risk Assessment for AHDS Performing Arts Collections: A Response to the Withdrawal of Core Funding.” AHDS Performing Arts, December 2007. Accessed 12/2/2012. [http://www.hatii.arts.gla.ac.uk/ahdspa\\_collection\\_risk\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.hatii.arts.gla.ac.uk/ahdspa_collection_risk_assessment.pdf)

52 Guthrie, Kevin, Rebecca J. Griffiths and Nancy L. Maron. “Sustainability and Revenue Models for Online Academic Resources.” May 1, 2008. Accessed 12/2/2012. <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/sustainability-and-revenue-models-online-academic-resoues>

surrounding digital preservation: what digital information should be preserved, who will preserve it, and, most importantly, who will pay for it?<sup>53</sup> Over the following years, the Blue Ribbon Task Force, known as the BRTF, published several studies on sustainability, concluding with its final report in 2010. The criteria that it listed as vital for sustainability included incentives for decision-makers to act in the public interest; a process for selecting materials for long-term value; mechanisms to secure ongoing financial resources; and appropriate organization and governance.<sup>54</sup>

Another recent tool for evaluating archives is the Trustworthy Repositories Audit and Certification (TRAC) Criteria and Checklist, which was developed by the Research Libraries Group (RLG) and NARA to expand upon the OAIS reference model by providing a set of criteria by which to measure compliance with OAIS standards. The TRAC document sets forth detailed, specific metrics for evaluating the “trustworthiness” of a digital repository in terms of its “governance; organizational structure and staffing; policies and procedures; financial fitness and sustainability; the contracts, licenses and liabilities under which it must operate; and trusted inheritors of data, as applicable.”<sup>55</sup> In addition to examining organizational methodologies, TRAC also provides more technical audit and certification criteria in sections titled “Digital Object Management” and “Technologies, Technical Infrastructure, and Security,” but for the course of this study we will focus on the section titled “Organizational Infrastructure.” TRAC's criteria for organizational sustainability include the presence of short and long-term business practices; annual review and adjustments of those business practices; an ongoing commitment to report on risks, benefits, investments, and expenditures; and a commitment to monitoring and bridging gaps in funding.

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53 OCLC. “Sustainable Economics for a Digital Planet: Ensuring Long-Term Access to Digital Information.” Final Report.

54 OCLC. “Sustaining the Digital Investment: Issues and Challenges of Economically Sustainable Digital Preservation. December 2008. Accessed 12/11/2012. [http://brtf.sdsc.edu/biblio/BRTF\\_Interim\\_Report.pdf](http://brtf.sdsc.edu/biblio/BRTF_Interim_Report.pdf)

55 RLG – National Archives and Records Administration Digital Repository Certification Task Force. “Trustworthy Repositories Audit and Certification: Criteria and Checklist.” Chicago and Dublin, OH: Center for Research Libraries/OCLC, 2007. Accessed 12/2/2012. [http://www.crl.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/pages/trac\\_0.pdf](http://www.crl.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/pages/trac_0.pdf)

While these tools are extremely useful, they are also focused very much on institutional archives that assume a certain kind of organizational structure – a structure that has a clear chain of command, with paid employees that report to “decision-makers” who direct the focus of preservation. In a traditional scholarly archive, it is certainly essential to have a driving force at the top who recognizes the benefits of preserving a certain kind of material; they then go out and collect the material from the creators, and hire experts to do the work of preservation. Relatively little study, on the other hand, has been made of grassroots archives that spring up out of a content-creating community itself, without the benefit of partnership with scholarly institutions, or with organizations such as NARA or JISC. The BRTF Final Report does acknowledge that grassroots efforts have often been invaluable in preserving content that would otherwise have been lost, and remarks that “the same spirit of collective action that created such sites will be effective in preserving the sites, at least for the near term,” but goes into no details of what has made these kinds of efforts effective so far, or could make them more effective in the future so that the “near term” can potentially extend to the “long term.” Instead, it immediately turns to a discussion of the role that public institutions can play in developing partnerships with these grassroots sites.<sup>56</sup> It’s certainly important to encourage public institutions to support community archives, and there is much more that the digital preservation community can and should be doing on this account. However, this treatment of the topic does little to provide concrete sustainability recommendations for grassroots repositories endeavoring to preserve their own content – assuming they would like to do something for themselves besides wait for a public institution to reach out and lend a helping hand.

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56 OCLC. “Sustainable Economics for a Digital Planet: Ensuring Long-Term Access to Digital Information.” Final Report.

Nonetheless, despite the lack of standards and recommendations geared towards their needs, several independent archives have managed to root themselves in the digital landscape for something that at least starts to resemble the fabled “long term.” On first glance, most independent, community-driven archives do not much resemble the ideal archive sketched out in the Blue Ribbon Task Force and the TRAC reports – but this is because their model of operation is based on profoundly different principles. Community archives tend to run largely on volunteer resources and donations, and generally encourage their volunteers and members to become personally involved in the decision-making process surrounding preservation and access. In many cases, they make an active effort *not* to have a top-down structure and to allow members of the community to pursue their own interests, thus maintaining their passion for the project.

The continued survival of Project Gutenberg, the oldest digital library in existence, proves that this kind of community archive can function over an extended period of time without sacrificing its grassroots community spirit. Project Gutenberg was founded in 1971 – which means that it predates the World Wide Web as we know it by approximately twenty years, and certainly puts it well in advance of most serious considerations of digital sustainability.<sup>57</sup> This makes it all the more notable, then, that the repository has not only survived, but thrived into the present day; a project that at first consisted of a few hundred e-texts keyed in by founder Michael Hart now provides availability to over 40,000 free e-books, with an average of fifty being added to the collection each week, in a variety of digital formats that include HTML, ePub, Kindle, QiOO Mobile, and Plucker as well as the plain ASCII text that makes up the baseline file.<sup>58</sup> However, Project Gutenberg's success was never assured. The endeavor went through a number of challenges over the course of its transition from one man's pet project to the vast and reliable

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57 Thomas, Jeffrey. “Project Gutenberg Digital Library Seeks to Spur Literacy.” 20 July, 2007. Accessed 12/11/2012. <http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2007/July/2007072015113311CJsamohT0.6146356.html>

58 “Project Gutenberg 40,000th eBook Milestone.” PG News. 8 July, 2012. Accessed 2/23/2013. <http://www.gutenbergnews.org/20120708/project-gutenberg-40000th-ebook-milestone/>

digital resource that currently provides free e-texts to millions of users. The repository's struggles to develop a successful and independent infrastructure that would allow it to continue growing while maintaining its mission and principles provide a potentially useful model for other independent community archives.

At first glance, Project Gutenberg's mission seems a simple one: “to encourage the promotion and distribution of ebooks.”<sup>59</sup> This premise grew out of founder Michael Hart's revolutionary (in 1971) realization that digital copies are infinitely replicable, and therefore “everyone in the world, or even not in this world (given satellite transmission) can have a copy of a book that has been entered into a computer” – in essence, a policy of ultimate access.<sup>60</sup> This kind of populist sensibility is essential to the organizational structure of the site. The Interim Report published by the BRTF explains that “it is often the case that those who create and use digital information are distinct from those who serve as its stewards and support its preservation and access,” which creates problems when the interests of preservationists and the user base are misaligned, or when responsibility for preservation is not clear.<sup>61</sup> This is adamantly not the case with Project Gutenberg, which places all responsibility for preservation squarely in the hands of the public. From its foundation, Project Gutenberg has been an explicitly volunteer-centric organization. The administrative structure operates under the policy that “less is more,”<sup>62</sup> and consists only of a CEO and three board members:

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59 Hart, Michael. “Project Gutenberg Mission Statement.” Updated December 25, 2007. Accessed 12/11/2012. [http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Gutenberg:Project\\_Gutenberg\\_Mission\\_Statement\\_by\\_Michael\\_Hart](http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Gutenberg:Project_Gutenberg_Mission_Statement_by_Michael_Hart)

60 Hart, Michael. “The History and Philosophy of Project Gutenberg.” August 1992. Accessed 12/11/2012. [http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Gutenberg:The\\_History\\_and\\_Philosophy\\_of\\_Project\\_Gutenberg\\_by\\_Michael\\_Hart](http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Gutenberg:The_History_and_Philosophy_of_Project_Gutenberg_by_Michael_Hart)

61 OCLC. “Sustaining the Digital Investment: Issues and Challenges of Economically Sustainable Digital Preservation.” Final Report.

62 Lebert, Marie. “Project Gutenberg (1971-2008).” May 2008. Accessed 12/11/2012. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/27045/pg27045.html>

The holders of these positions have traditionally been with us for a period of over 10 years and understand the Project's history and the developmental process that has taken place since its origin; none of them have any political or financial aspirations via their work with Project Gutenberg and they unanimously agree that there should **not** be power of that nature connected with Project Gutenberg.<sup>63</sup>

In this way, the selection of the Project Gutenberg administration guarantees long-term investment with the project as an idealistic effort rather than a funded initiative. While, as studies from Ithaka S+R have discovered, institutional archives often face situations where “a project team disbands and the resource languishes, available to those who may know where to find it in the short term, but at risk in the long term,” community-driven archives such as Project Gutenberg minimize that risk by ensuring that long-term involvement in the archive is a passion project for all concerned.<sup>64</sup>

While an audit along the lines of a TRAC checklist would ask to see business plans, contracts, selection criteria, and organizational charts plotting out the responsibilities of various personnel, Project Gutenberg's organizational structure considers excessive bureaucracy a hindrance to its operation rather than a help. Instead, the organization places its trust heavily in the ongoing involvement of its volunteers, who are encouraged to focus their interests on projects in which they have a personal investment. This creates an informal selection policy, in which the only criteria for inclusion in the archive is a.) that the book be out of copyright and b.) be of enough interest to one of the volunteers that they choose to spend their personal time working with it. As Michael Hart stated in another essay, “we have found the best thing Project Gutenberg can do to achieve the mission is often to simply get out of the way and let our volunteers do what they like best.”<sup>65</sup>

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63 Hart, Michael. “Administrivia.” Updated October 23, 2004. Accessed 12/11/2012. [http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Gutenberg:Administrivia\\_by\\_Michael\\_Hart](http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Gutenberg:Administrivia_by_Michael_Hart)

64 Maron, Nancy L., and Matthew Loy. “Funding for Sustainability: How Funders' Practices Influence the Future of Digital Resources.” June 14, 2011. Accessed 12/2/2012. <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/funding-sustainability-how-funders%E2%80%99-practices-influence-future-digital>

65 Hart, Michael, and Greg Newby. “Project Gutenberg Principle of Minimal Regulation/Administration.”

This may seem likely to lead to disorganized or redundant efforts, but the policy of allowing personal passions to guide the process of digital archiving has clearly resulted in the creation of a solid base of workers who double as users of the material. According to a study performed by the Electronic Resource Preservation and Access Network in 2004, many Project Gutenberg volunteers also have affiliations within the “cultural heritage, government and higher education” sectors and use their expertise to form informal collaborations on best practices and make sure Project Gutenberg stays current and viable.<sup>66</sup> As a result of these collaborations, Project Gutenberg has consistently made intelligent decisions from a preservation perspective to ensure that its digital content remains accessible in the long term. Most importantly, Project Gutenberg has chosen to make sure that all e-books are available in plain text as well as a variety of other digital formats. The reliance on ASCII text as a baseline format for all content, which can be read and searched by “99% of the hardware and software a person can run into,”<sup>67</sup> allows content contributed back in the first years of Project Gutenberg's founding over forty years ago to remain accessible today.

On the other hand, despite the volunteer program's apparent success in providing Project Gutenberg with accurate information for long-term preservation, there is no way to measure the level of expertise involved in the project at any given time or make sure that educated personnel continue to remain involved with Project Gutenberg. Still, the culture of volunteerism is so central to Project Gutenberg that the idea of maintaining control over trained staff by hiring them in a formal capacity seems unlikely to gain any ground. Another one of the prolific Hart's essays about the project proclaims that even if the

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Updated October 23, 2004. Accessed 12/11/2012.

[http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Gutenberg:Project\\_Gutenberg\\_Principle\\_of\\_Minimal\\_Regulation\\_-\\_Administration\\_By\\_Michael\\_Hart\\_and\\_Greg\\_Newby](http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Gutenberg:Project_Gutenberg_Principle_of_Minimal_Regulation_-_Administration_By_Michael_Hart_and_Greg_Newby)

66 Erpanet. “Erpanet Case Study Project Gutenberg.” 2004. Accessed 12/11/2012.

[www.gutenberg.org/files/14585/14585-d.doc](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14585/14585-d.doc)

67 Hart, Michael. “The History and Philosophy of Project Gutenberg.”



organization were to receive a billion dollars out of thin air, that money should only be used to further support volunteer efforts. The essay continues: “if we do receive large grants or donations, these should not change the nature of Project Gutenberg in any manner that would prevent any of us from continuing Project Gutenberg if the money disappeared. No one should be able to threaten Project Gutenberg financially.”<sup>68</sup>

This is a wonderful ideal, and one that many more formalized digital preservation projects would no doubt wish to emulate. However, total independence is easier said than done; the base requirement for Project Gutenberg, as for many independent archives, is server space, which requires money. Hart first came up against this harsh fact in 1997, twenty-six years after initially conceiving of Project Gutenberg in 1971. The project began when Hart essentially lucked into a free operator's account at the Materials Research Lab at the University of Illinois, which included what he defined as one hundred million dollars' worth of free computing time – a windfall he decided to pay back by creating electronic e-texts for the public benefit.<sup>69</sup> A quarter of a century later, Hart had recruited volunteers and widespread support for the project, but was still using donated computer equipment from the University of Illinois and his own salary from Benedictine University to keep the actual site running, along with a meager revenue from the sale of e-books on CD. When the University of Illinois decided it wanted to sever all connections with the project, and Benedictine University stopped paying Hart's salary, the future of the site suddenly seemed to be in serious peril.

Nevertheless, Hart's passion for the project convinced him to keep going, essentially jettisoning the rest of his life in order to put more energy into the project. In a lengthy emailed plea for aid, he spelled out the issues he was facing, writing, “I was not able to continue to work as a consultant AND Gutenberg all at the same time, and Project Gutenberg was too important,

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68 Hart, Michael. “Administrivia.”

69 Hart, Michael. “The History and Philosophy of Project Gutenberg.”

IS too important, to let go of. It is VERY hard to stop--when I think of the fact that if I can just hold on 1 more year. . .we can possibly create an independent institution that can soon get to the point it can and will survive me.”<sup>70</sup> His plea was successful; Carnegie Mellon University, convinced of the value of the project, agreed to help administer their finances, and Project Gutenberg gained enough of a financial base from donations that in 2000 Hart was able to incorporate the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation as a formalized nonprofit.<sup>71</sup>

Even with these changes, Project Gutenberg still doesn't technically make enough money from grants and donations to cover its bills. 501(c)(3) information shows that Project Gutenberg's expenses continue to exceed their income, with most of the money going to pay the salaries of its two employees and to cover office supplies and domain name registration.<sup>72</sup> Their server space is not in any danger of getting yanked away from them, however; Project Gutenberg's data is hosted primarily by the ibiblio, an online public library which offers “hosting services at no charge and in the spirit of open information exchange” and is supported by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.<sup>73</sup> Backup service is provided by the Internet Archive. Although all of the books available at Project Gutenberg are also available at the Internet Archive, however, there is little likelihood that the Internet Archive will supplant Project Gutenberg as the primary provider of e-book service. Project Gutenberg's mission includes providing a degree of readability and reliability through its network of volunteer proofreaders that the Internet Archive, which does not have a similarly robust volunteer program and does

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70 Hart, Michael. “Project Gutenberg Needs You!” November 4, 1997. Accessed 12/11/2012. [http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/bparchive?year=1997&post=1997-11-04\\$2](http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/bparchive?year=1997&post=1997-11-04$2)

71 “Michael Hart.” Telegraph Obituary. September 8, 2011. Accessed 12/11/2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/technology-obituaries/8750768/Michael-Hart.html>

72 “990 Form Filed for the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.” Guidestar.org. 2011. Accessed 12/13/2012.

73 “For Contributors.” Ibiblio. Accessed 12/13/2012. <http://www.ibiblio.org/help/faq/contributor>

hire employees, cannot commit to. As a result, e-books that the Internet Archive acquires through its own text-scanning digital library services are often riddled with typos and textual errors. Because a user downloading a book from the Internet Archive has no way to tell whether it is a high-quality proofread text from Project Gutenberg or an auto-scanned text from the Internet Archive's other sources, Project Gutenberg's own site is likely to remain the first choice for those looking for free, readable and reliable e-book content – thanks largely to its committed volunteers.

Throughout most of Project Gutenberg's history, it has been personal passion that has kept it alive – most visibly Michael Hart's near-fanatical determination to make sure that it survived through the teething stages of the Internet. On the other hand, “one man's passion project” is not a description that conjures up images of long-term stability and sustainability. Project Gutenberg came up against another major milestone in terms of its continued existence when Hart passed away in 2011. Without the guidance of a strong leader, the site might have been expected to fade away into irrelevance; however, two years after Hart's death, Project Gutenberg is still going, and still growing. 4000 new books were added to the repository over the course of 2012, and the site continues to add new features, such as additional languages and e-Book formats.

Despite Hart's initial anti-bureaucracy stance and stated desire for independence, Project Gutenberg has over the years officially incorporated as a nonprofit and forged partnerships with academic institutions in order to provide a consistent and dependable backbone to its volunteer-based structure. Still, the organizational structure of the institution itself remains as free-form as it ever was, and it still relies almost entirely on the interests and investment of its volunteers to

keep the site running, provide new content, and ensure that Project Gutenberg remains relevant despite the existence of other digital repositories that could potentially fill its niche. As of right now, it is not just the longest-running community repository, but perhaps the oldest digital archive that exists today.

Obviously, not all other amateur digital repositories are going to look exactly like Project Gutenberg, nor should they. However, like Project Gutenberg, most amateur projects do run entirely on donated time and money, and would consider monetizing their content a breach of their mission and institutional ethics. In judging an archive's financial sustainability and trustworthiness, TRAC requires proactive and sustainable business plans; it also requires proof of designated staff with requisite skills and training.<sup>74</sup> An archive organized entirely around the work of volunteers has no contracts, no performance goals and training budgets to prove its institutional reliability. It cannot hold its labor force accountable to internal or external standards, and therefore cannot be considered “trustworthy,” as TRAC would define it. It does not have a top-down structure in which dictates issue from “decision-makers” described by the BRTF, who can take responsibility for making appropriate decisions around preservation.

Instead, for many community archives, the greatest reliable asset they are likely to have going for them will be the sense of personal investment in a project and a community that Project Gutenberg has been so successful at harnessing. The BRTF defines three stakeholder positions in digital preservation – the creator, the archival organization, and the user beneficiary.<sup>75</sup> In many of the organizations studied by the BRTF, those “stakeholders are often diffuse among different communities,” which requires the archival

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74 RLG – National Archives and Records Administration Digital Repository Certification Task Force. “Trustworthy Repositories Audit and Certification: Criteria and Checklist.”

75 Eakin, Lorraine, Amy Freedlander, and Roger Schonfield. “A Selective Literature Review on Digital Preservation Sustainability.” Blue Ribbon Task Force. Accessed 12/11/2012. [http://brtf.sdsc.edu/biblio/Cost\\_Literature\\_Review.pdf](http://brtf.sdsc.edu/biblio/Cost_Literature_Review.pdf)

institution to step in and act as a “proxy organization to represent the demand of their stakeholders over the generations.”<sup>76</sup> For an amateur repository like Project Gutenberg, however, the stakeholders in the project are almost always all represented within the community of volunteers that run the organization. While technically the “creators” of Project Gutenberg content are long-dead authors whose works are out of copyright, the person doing the actual work of creating the digital text is also a part of the archival organization. Those same creators are also the users of the repository, who wish to be able to enjoy both their own finished product (which has been selected by them *because* they have an investment in having it available) and the products of the labor of other members of the site. In short, the organization is not a proxy for a diffuse set of stakeholders, but is directly represented and controlled by the stakeholders themselves. A community repository does not have to do the same kind of work of outreach and negotiation with its “designated community,” because the community has already begun the process of defining itself by acting to create the repository. This holds even more true for repositories of remix video, which are directly controlled by the creators of unique artistic content. These creators therefore have a vested interest in making sure their works remain accessible to a wide audience.

At the same time, while passion, volunteerism and a sharing economy can go a long way, the example of Project Gutenberg also shows that, practically speaking, the BRTF has a point when it suggests that it's hard for independent repositories to get by without a certain degree of support from organizations that have established resources. Finding the balance between independence and practical partnerships is likely to be a serious challenge for online repositories

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76 OCLC. “Sustaining the Digital Investment: Issues and Challenges of Economically Sustainable Digital Preservation.” Final Report.

– especially remix repositories, which have a strong sense of investment in their own independence.

Still, it's important to understand that many techniques that may be helpful for assuring long-term sustainability in professional and academic repositories will not necessarily be relevant for a grassroots model. Amateurs and creators looking to ensure continued accessibility to their own work are driven by essentially different incentives than professional preservationists are. As Mizuno Ito has pointed out in her work on anime music video culture, “people do not contribute to the AMV scene simply based on diffuse volunteerism and commitment to a cultural commons [...] Unlike professional practices, driven by financial incentives and formal institutional structures, communities like what we see at anime conventions and at the org are driven by different kinds of motivations and rewards. [...] The value people get out of participation is a complex alchemy of community participation, recognition, and the pleasures of creation and connoisseurship.”<sup>77</sup> Similarly, many scholars have attempted to analyze the “gift economy” of fandom, which emphatically resists monetization in favor of a “larger reputation system in which an individual's contributions to the group are ultimately recognized and respected.”<sup>78</sup> Larry Lessig, in his work on remix, discusses at length the ways in which this kind of economy relies on trust-based implicit agreements, which can be complicated or damaged once economic incentives come into play. In researching methods of maintaining volunteer investment in a grassroots digital repository, these studies of “gift economies” may be more relevant than the more traditional examinations of financial investment and sustainability that the

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77 Ito, Mizuno. “The Rewards of Non-Commercial Production: Distinctions and Status in the Anime Music Video Scene.” *First Monday*, Volume 15, Number 5 - 3 May 2010. Accessed 3/8/2013.

<http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/rt/printerFriendly/2968/2528>

78 Jenkins, Henry. “If It Doesn’t Spread, It’s Dead (Part Three): The Gift Economy and Commodity Culture.” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*. February 16, 2009. Accessed 4/28/2013.

[http://henryjenkins.org/2009/02/if\\_it\\_doesnt\\_spread\\_its\\_dead\\_p\\_2.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2009/02/if_it_doesnt_spread_its_dead_p_2.html)

digital preservation community has previously focused on.

Henry Jenkins explains, “we start from the premise that consumers only help facilitate the circulation of media content when it is personally and socially meaningful to them.”<sup>79</sup> For “circulation,” we can also read “preservation;” consumers and users act to preserve content that is personally meaningful to them. This is the central fact that must be leveraged when considering how to support grassroots repositories, and is important to keep in mind throughout the next chapter as we examine the different models of digital repositories that have sprung up around digital video remix.

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79 Ibid

## 4. Transformative Video Repositories

### 4a. Ourmedia.org

It would be remiss to talk about communities of transformative work without addressing the elephant in the room: YouTube, which accounts for almost 75% of videos watched online,<sup>80</sup> and has become the most important distribution model for remix video today. However, before launching into the YouTube discussion, it may be worthwhile to first briefly discuss the site that almost beat it to the punch – Ourmedia.org, a spectacular example of a repository for transformative work that failed.

Ourmedia.org launched in March of 2005, under the aegis of Marc Canter and J.D. Lasica, both outspoken advocates for the power of digital communities and free, open media<sup>81</sup> Ourmedia was intended to be a “grassroots media” site that would allow the creation of “an ecology where people create, share, remix, and distribute original content--perhaps not to millions, perhaps only to dozens.”<sup>82</sup> In other words, Ourmedia was meant to provide a home for the “long tail” of digital content, the material that would never be picked up by a broadcast network because of its extremely niche appeal and its home-brew quality – specifically including works of digital remix. As Lasica said in an interview when the site was launched, “Remix culture has been kept underground where only the cool kids get to see it, we're saying everybody should have access to this kind of stuff [...] Here's a place for us, here we're creating a place for

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80 Rotman, Dana, and Jennifer Preece. “The 'WeTube' in YouTube – creating an online community through video sharing.”

81 “About J.D. Lasica.” J.D. Lasica. Accessed 2/28/2013. <http://www.jdlasica.com/about/>

82 Korman, Richard. “An Interview With Ourmedia.org's J.D. Lasica.” O'Reilly.com. July 15, 2005. Accessed 2/28/2013. <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/network/2005/07/15/ourmedia.html?page=1>



us.”<sup>83</sup>

The central principle of Ourmedia.org is that everything uploaded to the site becomes part of “a public commons of shared creativity,”<sup>84</sup> a community of open media in which members are encouraged not only consume to each other's work, but to actively engage with it, even to the point of reusing it and transforming it. A draft of the organization's Wiki front page that lists two main goals for the project: “to create a vast, easily accessible commons of citizens media,” and “to create a Learning Center to help individuals, educators and businesses learn how to create citizen's media.”<sup>85</sup> If you were not already a remix artist, Ourmedia.org wanted to provide you with the tools to become one, including instructions and accessible material. One factor of a digital community of transformative work, as we will see throughout these case studies, is that remix culture always wants to propagate itself. As David Gauntlet argues in his book about do-it-yourself culture and Web 2.0, “making is connecting,” and, conversely, connection happens through encouraging others to make.<sup>86</sup>

Of course, even with this remix-friendly policy, Ourmedia as it was envisioned could not be entirely an intellectual property free-for-all; Lasika and Canter had to make at least a token effort to respect traditional copyright. The terms and conditions that users agreed to stated an affirmation that “you own the rights to the material you are placing on the Ourmedia site, have obtained the proper clearances to do so, or have the right to share it under well accepted fair use

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83 Kaye, Doug. “Ourmedia's Launch With Mark Canter and J.D. Lasica.” Archive.org. Audio interview.

Accessed 2/28/2013. <http://archive.org/details/DougKayeOurmediaslaunchwithMarcCanterandJDLasica>

84 Lasica, J.D. “Six years ago today, a video revolution was born.” Socialmedia.biz. March 21, 2011. Accessed 2/28/2013. <http://socialmedia.biz/2011/03/21/six-years-ago-today-a-video-revolution-was-born/>

85 “Ourmedia: Revision One.” Socialtext.net. Accessed 3/1/2013.

[https://www.socialtext.net/ourmedia/index.cgi?action=revision\\_view;page\\_name=ourmedia;revision\\_id=20051002041015.00000](https://www.socialtext.net/ourmedia/index.cgi?action=revision_view;page_name=ourmedia;revision_id=20051002041015.00000)

86 Gauntlet, David. *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*. Cambridge, Polity Press: 2011.

standards.” In addition, Ourmedia gave everybody uploading media onto the site the option to select what level of copyright protection they wished to adopt for their own works, from a direct donation to the public domain all the way up to full and traditional copyright license, with every kind of Creative Commons license included in between.<sup>87</sup> Ourmedia clearly hoped that its users would subscribe to the community sentiment and take advantage of the opportunity to add to the “rich archive of freely accessible audio, video and photos,” thus enhancing the resources available for transformative work on the site. However, the terms of service also advise creators that “regardless of which copyright choice you make, you recognize that others may access, view, copy, store or redistribute your work.” This is all part and parcel of the sharing economy that Canter and Lasika hoped to create; the site warns that “if you’re looking for a storage space for your private photos or video, Ourmedia is not for you.”<sup>88</sup>

Given Ourmedia's explicit friendliness towards transformative work and active media intervention, the site's owners were reluctant to use too much of an iron fist to police these copyright policies, but they also had strong concerns about the possibility of legal reprisals. After all, Ourmedia was the first video site on the internet to allow content to be uploaded instantly to the site, with only a volunteer team of twenty moderators policing for abuses of the terms of use. The FAQ rather disingenuously addressed the issue with a question asking whether it would be possible to upload pirated material to the site: “we’ve reduced the barriers to entry to almost zero. So what would be the point? It would be like knocking over the neighborhood kids’

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87 Designed to contribute to the digital commons, Creative Commons licenses allow content creators to set specific permissions for use of their work without relinquishing all rights. For details on the available license options, visit <http://creativecommons.org/choose/>

88 “Terms.” Ourmedia.org. Accessed 2/28/2013. <http://ourmedia.org/node/4975>

lemonade stand.”<sup>89</sup> This appeal to human charity relies on the kind of trust-based sentiment of social responsibility that is a hallmark of the sharing economy; it also only holds water if one assumes that the point of uploading pirated material is to get Ourmedia in trouble, rather than simply for the sake of having access to the pirated media. In a retrospective interview, Lasika explained,

We had to figure out stuff like: “What constituted a transformational work? We were surprised at the torrent of mashups – a new form of digital creativity – streaming through our doors. Mashups of Japanese anime reedited and underlaid with a Madonna track. CNN footage of US fighters carpet-bombing targets in Iraq done to a furious, pulsating Nine Inch Nails audio clip. *Astonishing* — and arguably a copyright violation. In the gray zone between copyright and fair use, which I had just written about in my new book “Darknet,” we erred on the side of the users. We were vigilant and extraordinarily cognizant of rights holders. In stark contrast to YouTube, which was swimming in pirated material, during the three years I was at Ourmedia, we received only two take-down notices (one for a vintage “American Bandstand” clip).<sup>90</sup>

It's unclear exactly how the Ourmedia team could both “err on the side of the users” while remaining “extraordinarily cognizant of rights holders” – this seems a bit like having your cake and eating it too, especially for a site that touted itself as being remix-friendly. Then again, this article was written six years the foundation of Ourmedia.org, and four years after its failure; hindsight might make any policy seem rosy.

The same retrospective article also reveals how seriously the founders of Ourmedia were thinking about considerations of long-term preservation. Archivists, according to Lasika, were involved in the conversation from the beginning, especially when it came to discussions about metadata capture. Discussions from the Ourmedia wiki back end demonstrate the course of this

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<sup>89</sup> Lasica, J.D. “Six years ago today, a video revolution was born.”

<sup>90</sup> Ibid

battle in progress, with some arguing that it was most important to “allow users to create their **own** metadata schemas and then allow for interoperation between them [...] we must enable a bottoms-up approach.” Others, such as e-book publisher Jon Noring, recommended a fully descriptive metadata capture process from ingest on to increase the usefulness and linkability of the repository: “we should require that any songs appearing in the multimedia in any fashion be identified by title and composer in the metadata. And if it is a video multimedia, if there are fair use snippets of film/video from other sources (such as old movies), that they be identified in the metadata.”<sup>91</sup> Noring's recommendations were prescient; eight years later, when asked what he considered the most important metadata to capture for preservation of a remix video, Jonathan McIntosh made an identical recommendation, stating “source material would be critical [...] that's something I try and encourage everyone to list no matter what.”<sup>92</sup>

Unfortunately, due to the presence of a robots.txt file within Ourmedia<sup>93</sup>, the pages as they looked in 2005 were not crawled, and so it is not possible to see what Ourmedia's upload page eventually looked like when the site was first launched. The latest comment posted in the metadata discussion states, “at this point it is not clear whether Ourmedia will ultimately be viewed more as a highly organized and well-structured media database, or as a fun, casual place for artists to share their grassroots media with a large global audience.”<sup>94</sup> It seems, therefore, that metadata capture remained largely optional in order to retain the low entry barriers for joining the community while Ourmedia figured out exactly what it wanted to be. In order to enhance the findability of content on the site, the site's volunteer editors, which were “really

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91 “Metadata Central.” Socialtext.net. Accessed 3/2/2013. <https://www.socialtext.net/ourmedia/metadata>

92 McIntosh, Jonathan. Personal interview.

93 A robots.txt file gives instructions to web-crawling 'robots' harvesting sites that they should not visit any pages on the site to gather information from them.

94 Ibid

curators”<sup>95</sup> in Lasika and Cantor's vision, would go through and select works of especial interest to showcase and highlight. Of interest to whom, exactly, was never specified.

While arguments about metadata raged, Lasika and Cantor had little concern about the preservation of the content itself due to the site's early partnership with the Internet Archive. Ourmedia became a reality when Lasika and Canter convinced Brewster Kahle, the digital millionaire who founded the Internet Archive and has continued to act as a kind of fairy godfather to efforts of digital preservation, to allow the media files uploaded through the Ourmedia.org front-end site to live on the Internet Archive's servers. This had the effect of putting Ourmedia, as a functional repository, entirely at the mercy of the Internet Archive and of Brewster Kahle's purse-strings. When asked “who's going to pay for that?” in an early interview, Lasika and Canter answered “well, let me tell you about a guy called Brewster Kahle.”<sup>96</sup> Ourmedia depended on the free storage and bandwidth provided by the Internet Archive – which itself, as a repository, relies heavily on Kahle's millions to keep it functional, although it also receives income from “from grants made by foundations and from libraries that pay it to digitise their books.”<sup>97</sup> Obvious sustainability issues arise from relying too heavily on one source of support, but this doesn't seem to have been too much of a problem for the Internet Archive, which has only grown more robust as the years go by, and which does continue to host the content uploaded through Ourmedia's front end. As it turned out, Ourmedia had more serious problems to face.

Storage and bandwidth are not the only requirements to keep a digital repository running;

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95 Kaye, Doug. “Ourmedia's Launch With Mark Canter and J.D. Lasika.”

96 Kaye, Doug. “Ourmedia's Launch With Mark Canter and J.D. Lasika.”

97 “The Internet's Librarian.” *The Economist*. March 5, 2009. Accessed 12/11/2012.  
<http://www.economist.com/node/13174399>

it also needs human resources, and Ourmedia, as previously described, relied heavily on the volunteer efforts of its moderators and editors to keep the site functional. However, as has been shown through the example of Project Gutenberg, in order to maintain a volunteer staff to perform what is essentially free labor, those volunteers need to feel a deep personal investment in the project. Ourmedia, I would suggest, was simply trying to be too many things to too many people to really retain that level of dedication. Was it erring on the side of users, or of rights holders? Was it hosting media to be used *for* remix art, or providing a place for people to *find* remix art? All of the above? Who, exactly, were the volunteer curators trying to appeal to when they selected work to highlight? The user community was “everyone” – and that meant it was simply too broad.

The Blue Ribbon Task Force describes the problem of “free riding,” in which responsibility for preservation is unclear, and therefore the cost of preservation is unfairly born by one organization while most of the users who benefit do not feel invested enough to contribute.<sup>98</sup> Most smaller community sites can rely on their stakeholders realizing that the work can't be “somebody else's problem,” because nobody else will care enough to do it. However, when it comes to an organization as diffuse as Ourmedia, any individual stakeholder can have, at most, a personal investment in only a portion of the content represented. And that is, unfortunately, not quite good enough to count as a passion project – especially since another site was, all too visibly, covering the same ground, although it wasn't coming at it with anything like a preservation mindset. Because, of course, in May 2005, two months after the launch of

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98 OCLC. “Sustaining the Digital Investment: Issues and Challenges of Economically Sustainable Digital Preservation.”

Ourmedia, YouTube went live and changed the face of the Internet.<sup>99</sup>

At first glance, it might seem surprising that Ourmedia didn't have enough of a starting edge on YouTube to at least remain a competitive player. After all, Ourmedia launched first; it was run by a pair of fairly prominent digital entrepreneurs, while YouTube, like so many early tech companies, was launched “out of a garage” by a trio of young PayPal employees;<sup>100</sup> and, Ourmedia was affiliated, with the already-successful Internet Archive and Brewster Kahle, YouTube had no credentials or affiliates to speak for it whatsoever. Nor did they have any high-flown ambitions to act as a nonprofit for the greater good, to create new metadata standards or preserve content for the long term. From the beginning, although framed rather disingenuously as a “community,”<sup>101</sup> YouTube was intended to be a business – a commercial site that would intended to generate profits for its owners. On this basis, YouTube acquired an initial 11.5 million dollars' worth of funding to allow it to pay for its servers and continue developing new features.<sup>102</sup>

Ourmedia.org, without any kind of tight community focus, was playing in exactly the same sandbox with zero resources besides the support of the Internet Archive. As Lasica admitted later, it simply couldn't compete. Two years later, Ourmedia had grown from its initial six thousand members to 145,000 members; YouTube, meanwhile, was having 65,000 new videos uploaded daily by the end of 2006 and was achieving billions of views per day.<sup>103</sup> It was

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99 Sanger, Steve. “The YouTube Success Story And How It All Began.” WorldTVPC.com. July 15, 2008.

Accessed 3/2/2013. <http://www.worldtvp.com/blog/youtube-success-story-how-did-it-happen/>

100 “The Founding of YouTube.” The Utube Blog. October 15, 2006. Accessed 3/2/2013.

<http://theutubeblog.com/2006/10/15/the-founding-of-youtube/>

101 Snickars, Pelle, and Patrick Vonderau (eds), “Introduction,” *The YouTube Reader*. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009.

102 Sanger, Steve.

103 “Google to Acquire YouTube for 1.65 Billion in Stock.” News From Google. October 2006. Accessed

no wonder that, while YouTube made a triumphant 1.65 billion dollar sale to Google in October of 2007, Lasika and Canter counted themselves lucky to pass the Ourmedia.org site off to the media tools company Outthink Media, which paid off Ourmedia's \$5,200 debts and made a \$7500 donation to the Internet Archive to complete the transaction.<sup>104</sup> Outthink hoped to turn Ourmedia into an advocacy site for environmental issues, but that plan never took off.

The site is still theoretically active, and the content posted in the early days is still hosted through the Internet Archive's servers to anyone who is dedicated enough to hunt through Ourmedia's old listings for it; in that sense, the material remains preserved. However, its content is no longer discoverable due to lack of curation, poorly organized metadata, and a flood of advertisements and spam posted since the site's demise, making it nearly impossible to find legitimate content unless the user already knows exactly what they're looking for. In contrast to Project Gutenberg, which also relies on the Internet Archive's servers for backup but continues to provide strong community value, Ourmedia.org is officially an ex-repository. Eventually it seems inevitable that it will disappear from the Internet entirely – and, since there is no clearly defined Ourmedia section in the Internet Archive, even if the content itself survives on the Internet Archive servers, nobody will ever know that it's there.

#### **4b. Youtube and YouTube-Sourced Repositories**

Unlike Ourmedia, YouTube was not originally intended to support remix. In fact,

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3/2/20013. [http://googlepress.blogspot.com/2006/10/google-to-acquire-youtube-for-165\\_09.html](http://googlepress.blogspot.com/2006/10/google-to-acquire-youtube-for-165_09.html)  
104 Gannes, Liz. "Outthink and Ourmedia Merge, Will Create Bid4Vid." Gigaom.com. December 14, 2007. Accessed 3/2/2013. <http://gigaom.com/2007/12/14/outthink-and-ourmedia-merge-will-launch-bid4vid/>



YouTube's original "Frequently Asked Questions" page from April 2004 specified explicitly that "you may upload any kind of personal video that you shot, or that features you. [...] Videos which violate these rules will be removed."<sup>105</sup> Although there is no explicit engagement with the ever-present issue of copyright, the site is very clear that it is only intended to host videos that were personally *shot by* amateurs – not *created by*, which would include remix video. Interestingly, the fourth question on the FAQ (the second and third deal with file size and format) asks, "How can I make my videos more entertaining?" The answer is, "We encourage you to spice up your videos by using simple video editing software such as Windows MovieMaker (included with every Windows installation), or Apple iMovie." There was, of course, no altruistic motive involved in this question-and-answer – the more entertaining the content available on YouTube, the more visitors will be driven to the site and the more profitable the page will become – but all the same, knowingly or not, these FAQs provided users with the tools to create their own remix work even as YouTube publicly disavowed any responsibility for it.

Unsurprisingly, despite their lack of official recognition of transformative work as valid and valuable content, YouTube even in the early days was promptly flooded with re-purposed commercial material. By September of 2005, the FAQs had been expanded to include a section on copyright, which read, "YouTube respects the rights of copyright holders and publishers and is only accepting video uploads from persons who hold all necessary rights to the uploaded material. Our policy is to respond to any notices of alleged infringement that comply with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). If we receive a notice or otherwise have reason to believe that content you submitted infringes another party's copyright, your account may be

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105 "Frequently Asked Questions." YouTube.com. April 28, 2005. Accessed via the Wayback Machine, 3/2/2013.[http://web.archive.org/web/20050428200548/http://www.youtube.com/help\\_faq.php](http://web.archive.org/web/20050428200548/http://www.youtube.com/help_faq.php)

terminated and the video removed from YouTube.”<sup>106</sup> Despite this seemingly strong stance on behalf of copyright owners, which makes no exceptions for fair use or transformative work, by 2006 YouTube was “most famous for propagating viral videos, short clips of the amusing, odd or amazing that get spread through blogs and e-mail inboxes.”<sup>107</sup> Many of these viral videos were, indeed, simply straight-up pirated portions of commercial content. However, others, such as trailer remix videos – a form of remix art that Eli Horwatt traces back to “Shining,” a 2005 re-imagining of *The Shining* as a romantic comedy<sup>108</sup> – were legitimate transformative works. It's important to note that the annual Association of Independent Creative Editors “Trailer Park” competition for which Robert Ryang created *Shining* had been ongoing since 2001, but it took the power of YouTube to send *Shining* viral and turn the art form of the trailer remix into what Horwatt calls one of the two “dominant modes of digital remixing.”<sup>109</sup> In other words, YouTube can essentially be said to have created the genre of the trailer remix as popular media. Other forms of pre-existing transformative video art, such as political remix videos and AMVs, were likewise able to be shared virally with a mass audience for the first time, which led to a subsequent exponential growth in the numbers of works being created.

In 2007, Viacom launched a lawsuit against YouTube for its copyright violations, claiming that YouTube had “harnessed technology to willfully infringe copyrights on a huge scale.”<sup>110</sup> ‘Willfully,’ of course, is the key word in their case. While YouTube presumably

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106 “Frequently Asked Questions.” YouTube.com. September 13, 2005. Accessed via the Wayback Machine, 3/2/2013. <http://web.archive.org/web/20050923182608/http://www.youtube.com/help.php>

107 Bowman, John. “Catching the Viral Video.” CBC News. March 10, 2006. Accessed 3/2/2013. [http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/tech/viral\\_video.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/tech/viral_video.html)

108 Horwatt, Eli. “A Taxonomy of Digital Video Remixing: Contemporary Found Footage Practice on the Internet.”

109 Ibid. For the record, Horwatt's taxonomy, while making important points about the formats of remix that it discusses, is limited in scope and leaves out several important remix genres.

110 Versteeg, Russ. “Viacom vs. YouTube: Preliminary Observations.” North Carolina Journal of Law and

believed they had covered themselves from a legal standpoint by clearly stating their unwillingness to host copyrighted content – by this point “Copyright FAQ” had a full page to itself on the site, which stated the correct procedures for sending copyright infringement notices and counter-notices – Viacom asserted that YouTube was deliberately turning a blind eye to the instances of infringement that it hosted, and, moreover, that drawing in new viewers using stolen copyrighted content was “a critical part of their business plan.”<sup>111</sup> The battle waged back and forth in the courts for years – to the bafflement of some onlookers, who pointed out that Viacom was not only still hosting official content at YouTube, but moreover was making a rather nice profit off of YouTube and the YouTube business model themselves<sup>112</sup> – but regardless of the outcome, it became powerfully necessary for YouTube to appear to be taking a strict stance on copyright infringement.

And this, in turn, became a serious concern for creators of transformative work. As discussed above, YouTube's policies provide no official fair use harbor for transformative work, and many users found their content summarily blocked and a strike added to their YouTube account when a DMCA complaint was filed. If the creator no longer had a copy of the content stored on their hard drive or backed up with another site, this could lead to the disappearance of that content altogether. In 2009, the problem was common enough that the Electronic Frontiers Foundation published a “Guide to YouTube Removals” that warned that “if your video incorporates copyrighted material owned by someone else (like a clip taken from a movie, TV

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Tech 50 (2007-2008.) Accessed 3/2/2013.

[http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/ncj19&div=6&g\\_sent=1&collection=journals](http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/ncj19&div=6&g_sent=1&collection=journals)

111 McDonalds, Paul. “Digital Discords in the Online Media Economy.” In: *The Youtube Reader*, Snickars, Pelle, and Patrick Vonderau, eds. Stockholm: National Library of Weden, 2009.

112 Goldman, Eric. “Second Ruling in Viacom v. YouTube is a bummer for Google and the UGC Community.” Blog post. Technology & Marketing Law Blog. April 5, 2012. Accessed 3/2/2013. [http://blog.ericgoldman.org/archives/2012/04/second\\_circuit\\_3.htm](http://blog.ericgoldman.org/archives/2012/04/second_circuit_3.htm)

show, or song performed or written by someone else), the copyright owner could sue you at any time,” and that, while sending a counter-notice to dispute the takedown is an option, it's also a “higher stakes game [...] because the copyright owner does not have a cheap and fast way to keep the video down, short of suing you.”<sup>113</sup> In short, the document advises, proceed at your own risk.

The Organization for Transformative Works has published a document listing the pros and cons of available streaming video hosting sites from the perspective of a creator of transformative work; it currently describes YouTube as “still biased towards corporations and against fair users. YouTube is also known for prohibiting uploads as well as for its many takedowns.”<sup>114</sup> One highly publicized example of a YouTube takedown is chronicled through political remix artist Jonathan McIntosh's discussion of his efforts to get his remix video “Buffy vs. Edward” reinstated, a work which he and his legal team describe as “about as clear of an example of fair use as exists.”<sup>115</sup> In McIntosh's case, both the offending video and his YouTube account were reinstated approximately 48 hours after he published about the issue, but McIntosh is a well known figure who has access to a level of publicity that is simply not available to the majority of creators of transformative work. McIntosh also maintains a blog on which he collects other examples of political remix, and at a recent count he estimated that fifteen or twenty percent of the videos collected had disappeared from YouTube in the time since he posted about them. “It's typically not a real copyright violation,” he explains, “but typically it'll be a match and the video will be automatically removed, and people don't know so much about

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113 “A Guide to YouTube Removals.” Electronic Frontier Foundation. March 1, 2009. Accessed 3/2/2013. <https://www.eff.org/issues/intellectual-property/guide-to-youtube-removals#background>

114 “Options for Hosting Streaming Video.” Organization for Transformative Works. Accessed 3/2/2013. <http://transformativeworks.org/projects/hosting-fan-video>

115 McIntosh, Jonathan. “Buffy Vs. Edward Remix Unfairly Removed By Lionsgate.” Blog post. Rebellious Pixels. January 9, 2013. Accessed 3/5/2013. <http://www.rebelliouspixels.com/2013/buffy-vs-edward-remix-unfairly-removed-by-lionsgate#respond>

fair use and they won't try and contest it.”<sup>116</sup> McIntosh's personal archiving efforts therefore currently include a program on his computer that automatically downloads every video he “likes” on YouTube – an act specifically forbidden by the YouTube Terms of Service, which forbids downloading any content that is not specifically labeled as downloadable by YouTube itself, although this ban is not generally enforced. This way, if McIntosh happens to have a copy of a disappeared video in his personal possession, he can re-upload it and use his own knowledge and resources to defend it against notice-and-takedowns. Still, for every video that has a fair-use godfather like McIntosh, another hundred, or even thousand, are likely to disappear for good.

Another concern raised by McIntosh and other transformative artists is YouTube's increasing focus on content monetization. YouTube now allows video creators to earn money off their content by including ads from Google AdSense around the video, which creates multiple potential minefields for remix artists. For a start, YouTube's Copyright ID program now allows copyright owners to assert their claim over a remix video and monetize it, rather than take it down. While this might seem beneficial in the short term – enough so that many remix creators, worried about losing their content, may greet the option with a sigh of relief and choose not to protest the claim – as McIntosh points out, it still allows copyright owners to have ultimate control over a video. “At any point,” McIntosh explains, “Lionsgate or Warner Music can decide, oh, you know what, I don't like YouTube anymore, we're taking it all down. And when they own everybody's work that uses any piece of work, they can just flip a switch and it all goes away.”<sup>117</sup> YouTube's system for copyright claim also provides enormous opportunities for fraud; there are a number of 'rights collecting companies' that exist solely to file illegitimate claims on

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116 McIntosh, Jonathan. Personal interview.

117 Ibid.

the content of remix videos for the purpose of monetizing them. An article on the phenomenon at Techdirt points out that often, neither YouTube nor transformative artists will feel they can challenge these fraudulent claims – YouTube because they have to err on the side of rights holders, and remix creators because they themselves do not own the content.<sup>118</sup> In this case, this essentially places control over the original content in the hands of con artists, which is hardly an ideal scenario for preservation. Finally, remix artists are sometimes tempted to monetize their content themselves, which YouTube's policies strictly forbid, and which can lead straight back to a notice-and-takedown, or even a potential account termination. “When you put your videos on Youtube, you are putting them in the mouth of a lion,” warns video game remix artist Bay Sweetwater, “who will eat them on a whim, and you will never see them again.”<sup>119</sup>

Copyright claims, however, are not the only concern that transformative artists have about hosting their work on the site. Ironically, the very ease of use that tempts transformative artists into playing the risk-benefit game and sharing their potentially infringing works of transformative art on YouTube also means that others can easily come along and repost those works without proper credit or context. On the one hand, this means that popular work is likely to survive in one form or another; on the other hand, as has already been discussed in this paper, preservation is rendered exponentially more difficult without accurate metadata. If there is a platonic ideal of desirable preservation metadata, a reposted work of remix art on YouTube is often about as far from that ideal as it's possible to get. Fanvidders, especially, have serious

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118 Cushing, Tim. “YouTube's ContentID Trolls: Claim Copyright On Lots Of Gameplay Videos, Hope No One Complains, Collect Free Money.” TechDirt. February 28, 2013. Accessed 5/3/2013. <http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20130227/20563322144/youtubes-contentid-trolls-claim-copyright-lots-gameplay-videos-hope-no-one-complains-collect-free-money.shtml>

119 Bay Sweetwater. “Monetize a YouTube video? Careful...” Blog post. Second Living. October 8, 2012. Accessed 5/3/2013. <http://baysweetwater.com/2012/10/08/monetize-second-life-youtube-video/>

concerns about YouTube as a site for hosting their videos for this very reason. As fanvidder Shati stated in an interview, YouTube is notorious among vidders for its cases of “people reposting other people's vids and taking credit there.”<sup>120</sup> Killa and T. Jonesy's “Closer,” discussed earlier in this paper, provides a good example of what can happen when a vid goes viral without the consent of its creators. The most-viewed copy of the video on YouTube states simply “Star Trek + Nine Inch Nails = Closer,” with no mention of the names of the creators, the original date it was created, or the context in which the creators wished it to be viewed.<sup>121</sup> As Killa has also pointed out, most of these uploads of the work are also monetized on YouTube. Not only does this mean that somebody unknown is making money from Killa and T. Jonesy's work, the very idea of monetization itself goes against the fan ethos, which is emphatic on the point that creators of transformative works should not profit from their creations.<sup>122</sup>

Moreover, due to the degree of compression in the proxy video that YouTube creates of the original footage uploaded to the site, a work posted to YouTube loses a significant degree of visual quality. “No matter how much you work and fuss with your video's settings, there's a limit to how good your YouTube video will look,” warns a typical vidding tutorial.<sup>123</sup> For these reasons, YouTube has grown increasingly unpopular among self-identified serious fanvidders. “No respectable vidders only host their videos on YouTube anymore,” states vidder beerbad, in 2008 YouTube clip titled “Vidding on YouTube.”<sup>124</sup> Beerbad, with a certain degree of elitism,

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120 Shati. Personal interview. 11/12/2011

121 “Star Trek + Nine Inch Nails = Closer.” Accessed 8/28/2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uxTpyCdriY>

122 Laccetti, Jessica. “Remix Culture: Tensions in Vidding.” *New Media Narratives: Writing and Publishing in a Developing Field*. April 5, 2012. Accessed 5/3/2013. <http://nmnonline.blogspot.com/2012/04/assignment-3-remix-culture-tensions-in.html>

123 “Fan Vidding Tips.” Foolish Passion. Accessed 3/3/2013. <http://www.foolishpassion.org/vidding-tips/video-quality-xvid-youtube-dv.html>

124 “Vidding on YouTube.” Online video. December 7, 2008. Accessed 3/4/2013.

goes on to add, “so many crappy, crappy fanvids are found on YouTube – these vids are poorly made and they're done by people who aren't part of the larger vidding community or just aren't aware of the vidding community.”

On the other hand, to return to an LJ post I quoted in a previous section, “What about all the people on YouTube we'd like to ignore? They are vidders too!”<sup>125</sup> In spite of beerbad's self-identification with the so-called “larger vidding community,” there are probably many more people posting fanvids on YouTube than off of it – not to mention AMVs, machinima, political remix videos, comedy trailer mashes, and all the myriad other forms of transformative work. And while it may be easier to track the cohesiveness of the vidding community that inhabits the vidding livejournal/dreamwidth message boards and attends the annual summer Vividcon event, YouTube's transformative artists are not merely lonely amateurs shouting into a void. Jean Burgess and Joshua Green's work on YouTube points out that YouTube is designed much more as a broadcaster than a community-interactive site; “there are no *overt* invitations to collaborate with other users, or to remix or quote each other's videos.”<sup>126</sup> Still, the urge to community-build consistently overcomes the technological limitations that stand against it. As Rotman and Preece have concluded in their study on community interactions on YouTube, “YouTube users seem to be almost unanimous in their feeling about the nature of YouTube. To them, it is a community that serves as a platform for communication and interaction rather than a broadcasting application.”<sup>127</sup>

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYCEuYvnB84>

125 “On Inclusion and Exclusion in Vidding Fandom: Personal Reflections.”

126 Burgess, Jean, and Joshua Green. *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.

127 Rotman, Dana, and Jennifer Preece. “The 'WeTube' in YouTube – creating an online community through video sharing.”



Obviously no community encompasses the whole of YouTube, any more than any one community encompasses the entirety of remix culture, but – as with the sub-groups of transformative artists – within YouTube, “subgroups of smaller communities are created within the larger scope of the larger site, enabling users to find kinship and cultivate relationships.”<sup>128</sup> Some communities have also done their level best to use the YouTube infrastructure to collate and curate their content, however poorly-designed for the purpose it may be – and in some cases, the act of curation itself builds or strengthens the community around it. For example, one user account titled “The Growing Repository of YJ,” collects fanvids centered on the television cartoon *Young Justice*, with the stated goal of allowing users “to find fanvids a lot faster than having to scour pages of youtube search results. It also helps new editors to advertise their videos, and get more into the fandom.”<sup>129</sup> The account has a sum total of 92 playlists, sorted by character and theme as well as date posted, and comments from other users repeatedly show appreciation, not only for the work of curation, but also for community-building: “you were the one who introduced some of us to each other. And the person introducing the people to each other should at least get some credit.”<sup>130</sup> However, “The Growing Repository of YJ” eventually found that YouTube was not sufficient to serve its needs and created a supplemental Tumblr blog, explaining, “The repository is mainly based on youtube, but I made this here to also interact with fellow fans, and spread the videos here too!”<sup>131</sup> This has allowed the blog to become a community center as well as a repository, providing news and links to other blogs, while still serving the primary function of making the YouTube videos desired by a certain

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128 Ibid

129 “The Growing Repository of YJ.” YouTube.com. Accessed 3/7/2013.  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/YJFanVids>

130 Paulbro94. YouTube comment. “The Growing Repository of YJ.” YouTube.com. Accessed 5/4/2013.  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/YJFanVids/feed?filter=1>

131 “About.” YJfanvids.tumblr.com. Accessed 5/4/2013. <http://yjfanvids.tumblr.com/>

community discoverable.

Jonathan McIntosh's YouTube channel, "Subversive Remix Video," works along a similar principle. McIntosh uses the YouTube channel to repost videos to YouTube that he feels fall into the category of political remix videos, with as much metadata as he can discover. In most cases, these are videos that have already been taken off the web; if they are hosted by the original creator, but without the metadata that he considers essential for curation, he will turn off ratings and commenting, and point viewers back to the original creator to ensure that they receive full credit for their work. In addition, McIntosh curates a blog at [politicalremixvideos.com](http://politicalremixvideos.com), where he "aims to showcase some of the best, most innovative and inspiring examples of political remix video on the net."<sup>132</sup> Each blog post contains an embedded video from YouTube and a short curatorial commentary from McIntosh, generally featuring creator name, date, and source, as well as a description of the context and purpose of the video's creation and McIntosh's own curatorial rationale for including it as part of a repository of political remix video.

From an archival viewpoint, McIntosh's curation efforts contribute much more to the long-term discoverability of the videos than the work of collation performed by the Growing Repository of Young Justice. McIntosh's blog and YouTube channel provide backup postings for remix videos, with great care taken to ensure that accurate metadata survives to provide context for the works in the long term. However, in one respect, McIntosh has been unsuccessful – his efforts, to date, are largely solo. The Subversive Remix Video YouTube channel has comments turned off and, unlike the Growing Repository of YJ, offers no

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132 McIntosh, Jonathan. "About Political Remix Video." Political Remix Video. Accessed 5/4/2013. <http://www.politicalremixvideo.com/what-is-political-remix/>

encouragement to other creators of community members to participate in a dialogue with the site's host and submit further videos for inclusion. McIntosh's blog does allow comments, but the vast majority of posts have no comments on them; where there are comments, there is no discussion. And, while the blog does have a link to a "Submit" page that requests suggestions for political remixes that should appear on the blog, where a submission form should be there currently only exists a message: "COMING SOON!"<sup>133</sup> Due to the lack of community involvement, the work of curating political remix video and making it discoverable falls entirely on McIntosh's head – and it's a fairly heavy load; McIntosh admits that he no longer has the time to dedicate to trawling YouTube to discover political remix video that he once did. It's possible that the addition of a submission page, and further opportunities for outside involvement, will encourage the further growth of a political remix community. Without this additional community growth, the work of curation will last only as long as McIntosh's resources allow for it.

A similar situation is presented by another YouTube-sourced repository, known as "The Trailer Mash." The Trailer Mash has no dedicated YouTube account or channel; its main interface is a website which, like the Political Remix Video blog, updates regularly with embedded videos from YouTube that fit within the genre of the mash-up trailer first inspired by "Shining." The site was co-founded in 2005 by a pair of college students named Tom Johns and Dominic Grant in order "to index these videos, allowing users to watch trailer mashups, share their creations and vote for their favorites."<sup>134</sup> Dominic Grant appears to have faded into the

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133 "Submit a Remix." Political Remix Video. Accessed 5/4/2013.

<http://www.politicalremixvideo.com/submit-a-remix/>

134 Burns, Kelli. *Celeb 2.0: How Social Media Foster Our Fascination with Popular Culture*. Praeger: Santa Barbara, 2009

background sometime over the past eight years; the site is now entirely maintained by Tom Johns, who described it in an interview as “just a bit of an internet hobby on the site (one of many sites I have).”<sup>135</sup>

Unlike McIntosh's Political Remix Video blog, The Trailer Mash does have an active submission form, and relies on community involvement to ensure that the site consistently updates with new videos . Johns describes the “vast majority” of the videos listed as added by their own creators, although it is possible for consumers of trailer remix to submit their favorite videos to the site as well, so long as they list “the original creator, their URL and properly list all movies used.”<sup>136</sup> Although the FAQ states that the site updates as often as it gets “quality submissions,” there is no screening process before submissions appear on the blog; all submissions are automatically posted, accompanied with the name of the creator and the films used in making the mash-up, as well as a brief description of the work if the submitter has chosen to include it. Anything that proves to be an active video that fits within the definition of trailer remix gets to stay up, and if it's a “bad submission” then Johns will take it down. A page labeled “Archives” provides a listing of all the trailer mash-ups posted on the blog, arranged by the date of the posting. A sidebar provides the option to search by the genre of the work (for example, comedy, romance, musical, or modernized) or jump straight to one of the ten most popular mash-up trailers of all time.

In one interview, Johns, when asked about his reason for creating the site, explained, “There was a hole in the market. Trailer mashes were springing up all over video sites, but no one was going to any effort to put them all together. We decided to give it a go and instantly

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135 Johns, Tom. Personal interview. 3/12/2013.

136 Burns, Kelli.

found our niche.”<sup>137</sup> “Market,” “niche” – these sound more like phrases to describe a for-profit company than a community repository. Although the submission model relies on a community, the mode of interaction available on the site is focused relentlessly outward rather than inward, promotional rather than interactive. The available ways to “interact” with a Trailer Mash on the site involve rating it, “mash it to the world” (via Facebook, Digg, Reddit, or any number of other social media sites), “mash it to a friend” (via email), and only finally and lastly “leave a comment.” Unsurprisingly, this last option does not appear to be taken advantage of very often; a sum total of two comments have been left on videos since January of this year. Although the site did at one point include forums for community interaction, those forums were taken down after about a year, with no announcement or explanation. Johns explains, “There was never a big takeup in the forums, I didn't have the time to promote them, or keep them up to date, check for spam.”<sup>138</sup> Perhaps if Johns had recruited additional assistance to aid in these efforts, the community take-up might have been stronger. As-is, although Johns does receive submissions of videos from community members hoping to make their videos more discoverable, that's the full extent of the outside involvement in the site; he receives no financial donations to help make The Trailer Mash sustainable, nor any volunteer commitment of time to prove that the community has an investment in the site's survival. Unlike McIntosh, Johns does not create playlists with full metadata on YouTube, so all of the work of curation performed by the site over the years relies on The Trailer Mash platform itself remaining in existence to be of long-term value – which relies on Johns continuing to support the site. “The site is fantastic at making no money,” Johns said, when asked about his vision for the long term, “but it'll probably still be

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137 “The Brains Behind...The Trailer Mash.” Jstewartdesign.com. August 6, 2007. Accessed 3/7/2013.  
<http://www.jstewartdesign.com/everyones-a-winner.pdf>

138 Johns, Tom. Email interview.

up in 10, 15, 20 years.”<sup>139</sup> That 'probably' is not particularly reassuring.

An alternate model for a YouTube-sourced repository is provided by the large community that has grown up around the creation of “YouTube Poops,” an art form “which utilizes the editing of video sources to create humor, new context or more bizarre emotions and meanings” (but which is emphatically not the same, YouTube Poopers state, as “YouTube Poop sources set to music a la AMVs.”)<sup>140</sup> A blog post at Yale Law and Technology admirably describes the meme-based YouTube culture of YouTube Poops:

Fans answer the question 'What else can you do to this 21-second clip?; by providing response after response after response. It's here where the community behind YouTube Poop is in full force. It's best to consider YouTube Poop as an art, a collaborative medium in which video culture is the hero, reinterpreting a source to often hilarious effect. Yes, it's bizarre, but it's a wonderful example of the sharing culture that YouTube has created, the cross relation of obscurities and tropes.<sup>141</sup>

However, there's no need to simply take the author's word for it; the strength of the YouTube Poop community is most strongly evidenced by the slew of responses the post invoked from YouTube Poopers themselves, often complaining that the blog post crucially misrepresented them and that better knowledge should come from within the community itself. One such comment reads, “Do not, repeat do NOT search for ytp by typing youtube poop into the search bar on YouTube. You will be inundated with horrible videos. Not all poop is equal. To find the good stuff you will either have to know where to start or wade through a veritable flood of

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139 Ibid.

140 “YouTube Poop.” Chewiki. Accessed 3/3/2013. [http://youchew.net/wiki/index.php?title=YouTube\\_Poop](http://youchew.net/wiki/index.php?title=YouTube_Poop)

141 William A. “Meme as Art, Community.” Fair Use & Remix Culture: Yale Law and Technology. November 3, 2012. Accessed 3/3/2013. <http://www.yalelawtech.org/fair-use-remix-culture/youtube-poop-meme-as-art-community/>

videos that will turn you off forever.” Another comment recommends, “For more informative information about the community actually WRITTEN BY US, you should look here

<http://youchew.net/wiki/index.php?title=Chewiki>.”<sup>142</sup>

This recommended site for Poopers, by Poopers, defines itself as “pretty much the hub of the pooping community. It is a discussion grounds where poopers can talk to each other about poops, share good (or bad!) ones, and even give advice [...] In addition, there are many news articles, events, and other things that occur, and some things occurring in the past have become landmarks and fondly-remembered parts of poop history.”<sup>143</sup> Unlike “The Growing Repository of YJ,” which is operated solely by one person, the Chewiki has a full staff of system operators who keep the site running – working, of course, on a fully volunteer basis. The domain name itself was purchased by Conrad Slater, who explains his motivations as born out of a desire to establish YouTube Poops as something more than a flash in some kind of nonsensical pan: “everyone I spoke to about it seemed to treat it like some overnight meme, yet the videos back then seemed to date back a couple of years. After attempting to make a poop myself, my sense of inadequacy motivated me to instead chart the progress of this genre and make it as an online champion for an art movement, rather than a mere fad.”<sup>144</sup> Once again, the founding of YouChew shows how the act of curation goes hand-in-hand with a sense of community; the existence of a community site that provides context and relevance to a genre of work legitimizes and justifies the community in and of itself.

The site includes, among other things, a list of “Poopers” listing “everyone that is anyone or no one” in the Pooper community; “if you think you should be in there,” says a link on the

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142 Comment on blog post, William A. “Meme as Art, Community.”

143 “YouChew.” Chewiki. Accessed 3/6/2013. <http://youchew.net/wiki/index.php?title=YouChew>

144 “Conrad Slater.” Chewiki. Accessed 3/7/2013. [http://youchew.net/wiki/index.php?title=Conrad\\_Slater](http://youchew.net/wiki/index.php?title=Conrad_Slater)

main page, “then feel free to add a page for yourself.”<sup>145</sup> Right off the bat, the Chewiki defines its user community as reflexive and self-inclusive: if you self-identify as a creator, you should be invested in contributing to the repository. These introductory Pooper pages make up by far the bulk of the site, and hold exhaustive, generally self-supplied information about each Pooper, including the categories “History,” “First YouTube Poop seen,” “First YouTube Poop created,” “List of Poops,” “Style,” “Preferred Tech,” “Preferred Sources,” “Dislikes,” “Reception,” “Criticism,” “Achievements,” “Influences,” “Fans,” and “Trivia.” When all of these sections are filled out – as they are, in full and great detail, for many of the Poopers listed on the site – the result is more metadata than you might see in an average MARC record, albeit specially tailored for the uses of an audience of Poopers rather than scholars or the general public. (Though, from an archival standpoint, the nod towards technical metadata with the “Preferred Tech” section on each page, detailing whether the Pooper is more likely to have used Windows Movie Maker or Adobe Premiere to create their work, is a pleasantly unexpected touch.) It’s important to note while a simple curation site like the Repository of Young Justice aims primarily to make content discoverable, this level of metadata goes to the next level, aiming to provide, as Conrad Slater intended, a sense of history and context for YouTube Poop as a movement.

In addition, many pages include specific links to all of the videos created by that Pooper, and all the pages – of course – link back to the Pooper’s YouTube account. The Poopers can also be searched by style, nationality, gender, era, activity level, or account status, with separate categories for “The Founders” and “The Boomers.” Even if a video has been pulled from the Internet, this fact is likely to be commemorated somewhere on the creator pages. One portion of the site proudly commemorates “KO’ed from YouTube: those that gave up their names in the

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145 “Chewiki.” Chewiki. Accessed 3/6/2013. <http://youchew.net/wiki/index.php?title=Chewiki>



Poop,” granting these fallen heroes banners to wear in their profile that read, “The account [name] has been suspended from YouTube for crimes against copyright. YouTube Poop salutes you!” Another section provides a list of “Closed Accounts;” on the biography pages of these ex-Poopers, helpful fans have often marked cases where their works have “yet to be reuploaded/found/updated.”<sup>146</sup> That optimistic 'yet' implies a certain idealistic belief within the community that, by their powers of Internet searching combined, no YouTube Poop need ever be lost for good.

In addition to this wealth of information about the people, culture and history of YouTube Poops, the site forums provide lists of “Recommended Poops,” and the wiki itself contains pages for “Notable Poops.” However, only a few, rare works are granted the privilege of having a full wiki entry to themselves. “With YouTube Pooper pages dedicated to talking about some of their poops, plus a healthy description on YouTube, there is often no need to create an entire entry on here talking about a specific poop,” the “Notable Poops” page warns, and the “Rules” page agrees that “it is far better just to supply a YouTube link to the poop itself on a different page.”<sup>147</sup> In order to be considered “notable” enough to earn its own page, a work must be so obviously influential – by visible criteria such as multiple references from later creators citing it as being formative in their own work, or, more pragmatically, having a million views on YouTube – that it forms part of the history of the YouTube Poop culture. In short, while the Chewiki is a valuable source for authorial and anthropological metadata, and provides a starting point and place of guidance for community members, it does not serve the function of an archive. Users are expected to discover videos by trusting the self-identification and curation skills of other

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146 “Link123456.” Chewiki. Accessed 3/6/2013. <http://youchew.net/wiki/index.php?title=Link123456>

147 “Help: Rules.” Chewiki. Accessed 3/7/2013. <http://youchew.net/wiki/index.php?title=Help:Rules>

## YouTube Poopers.

Like other art forms, every form of remix art has a 'canon.' Whether you're looking for “the good stuff,” or simply something that falls within the parameters of your specific community, the contents of YouTube are simply too vast – and YouTube's metadata, as already discussed, too inadequate – to easily allow searchers to find what they're looking for. A similar problem arises in the vidding community, hence the complaints about “crappy, crappy fanvids.” In short, one of the first things that community members coming out of YouTube generally want is a community *library*: not necessarily a preservation repository, but a collection of sources, resources and content tailored to their interests that will remain easily navigable and accessible to them. Burgess and Green have pointed out that YouTube communities tend to develop “plug-ins,” supplementary technologies that serve their needs as a community in ways that YouTube is not designed to do.<sup>148</sup> In their studies, they have largely focused their examination on additional social network technologies for community-building, but within creative communities, the desire for this kind of rudimentary archive is often equally important.

Physical public libraries have historically played important roles as community centers; When successful, these kind of digital community libraries should evolve the same way, growing beyond their initial mission as repositories in order to provide information, history, and a gathering space for the community. This is an important benefit to consider for sustainability of community archives, as it contributes to the community's ongoing investment in the repository. The work that Jonathan McIntosh and Tom Johns have done in collecting and defining videos within a certain genre is important, but also completely reliant on one individual deciding to

continue their investment of time or money in the project. The Chewiki, on the other hand, encourages the efforts of an entire community in continuing to make the content of that community findable.

Relying on these kinds of listings and repositories to serve as archival “plug-ins” for YouTube is obviously inadequate from a preservation perspective, for all the reasons discussed above – but for all the drawbacks, it's not difficult to understand why using YouTube as a de facto repository becomes the starting point for many online communities. Relying on YouTube protects the repositories that link to the videos when they haven't accumulated the financial resources to host video on servers of their own. As the Trailer Mash explains in an FAQ: “Using YouTube allows us to withstand huge spikes of traffic, as well as allow the video creators to track video views.”<sup>149</sup> Moreover, YouTube is popular with creators themselves, and for good reason. For all its caveats, the Organization for Transformative Works also admits that it YouTube is “still the best known video hosting and streaming site.”<sup>150</sup> Even with all the other options currently available for hosting streaming video on the Internet, YouTube allows video creators to track views, receive comments and “likes,” and promote themselves more quickly than they would be able to on a more reliable and remix-friendly but less popular site. “If it's important to you for people to watch your videos and share them,” says Jonathan McIntosh, “then it just has to be on YouTube. There's just no other way to do it. Unless you have a pre-built community and you just want those people to see your work.”<sup>151</sup>

When the community is strong enough, however, sourcing videos at a private site

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149 “Frequently Asked Questions.” The Trailer Mash. Accessed 3/5/2013.

<http://www.thetrailermash.com/faq/>

150 “Options for Hosting Streaming Video.”

151 McIntosh, Jonathan. Personal interview.

maintained the community itself does become an option. The next example demonstrates the kind of options that become available when a community commits itself to having control over its own work – an important step on the road to taking real responsibility for long-term preservation.

#### **4c. AnimeMusicVideos.org**

The mission statement of AnimeMusicVideos.org – henceforth known as AMV.org – looks reasonably similar those of YouTube-sourced repositories such as the Chewiki: “my goal with this web site,” writes founder Phade, “is to create a place where people who enjoy and create anime music videos can get together, share ideas, learn from one another, and ultimately have everyone creating and enjoying better videos.”<sup>152</sup> However, two significant factors set AMV.org apart from other remix community centers. The first is that the site predates YouTube, and has managed to survive into the present day; the second is that it possesses its own servers and uses them to host anime music videos for the convenience of its user base.

AMV.org's development owes a great deal to the fact that – as with many genres of remix work that grew out of fandom – the creators of AMVs already had a strong incipient sense of community at the time when the creation of digital repositories first became a possibility. Up until quite recently, the act of consuming anime in and of itself required participation in a community; commercially published English translations of anime were virtually nonexistent until the 1990s, and so fans of the form therefore began to dub tapes and add subtitles themselves

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152 “About Us.” AnimeMusicVideos.org. Accessed 4/10/2013.  
<http://www.animemusicvideos.org/home/about.php>

to share with other like-minded persons, creating what Brent Allison describes as “a decentralized, non-commercial anime distribution network” that subverted traditional means of media distribution and consumption.<sup>153</sup> Remix was, perhaps, the inevitable next step. As Ian Roberts, otherwise known as AMV artist AbsoluteDestiny, points out in his history of the form, “the technology used for tape distribution was the same technology fans used to make their own music videos.”<sup>154</sup> Early AMVs were distributed as extras along with the original television content, filling the minutes left at the end of a dubbed VHS tape that wouldn't fit a full episode. In the 1990s, AMVs also started to be shown at conventions, and the competitions that grew up around this practice spurred further developments in the form, including a shift to digital effects.

As Internet access became more widespread, AMV makers began to create their own websites to host their videos online. In 2000, an AMV artist known as Phade founded AMV.org to serve as a central community location. Mizumi Ito describes how “the org quickly become a central clearinghouse for editors to upload their videos and to communicate with one another and their audience.”<sup>155</sup> However, uploading videos was not initially part of the site's capabilities. As envisioned by Phade, the ultimate goal of the website was not only to provide a community center for AMV creators, but “to make a database of every Anime Music Video ever made.”<sup>156</sup>

This description may imply that AMV.org makes a curatorial effort to seek out information about AMVs and include them within the site, but in fact AMV.org relies on the same community-sourced model as the Trailer Mash and the Chewiki, with content being

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153 Allison, Brent. “Anime Fan Subculture: A Review of the Literature.” University of Georgia. Accessed 5/4/2013. [http://www.corneredangel.com/amwess/papers/anime\\_fan\\_subculture.html](http://www.corneredangel.com/amwess/papers/anime_fan_subculture.html)

154 Roberts, Ian. “Genesis of the Digital Anime Music Video Scene, 1990–2001.” In “Fan/Remix Video,” edited by Francesca Coppa and Julie Levin Russo, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 9. 2012. Accessed 4/11/2013. <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/365/293>

155 Ito, Mizumi.

156 “Site FAQs.” AnimeMusicVideos.org. Accessed 4/14/2013. <http://www.animemusicvideos.org/help/>

contributed by creators. Therefore, Phade's stated ambition for universal coverage depends entirely on the entire AMV community making the choice to participate in the site – a goal that, at the time when the site was founded, might not have seemed entirely implausible. Originally, videos could be made available by directly linking them for download through the creator's own website, or indirectly linked through a third-party service. Including a download option was not mandatory, though, and still is not today; the site is just as interested in capturing listings for works that the creators do not choose to make available for download online, and has a rich metadata submission form, including source material, song and musical artist, title, category, file format, premier date, and convention participation.<sup>157</sup>

However, although information about AMVs was now far more discoverable than it ever had been before, finding the AMVs themselves could still be a challenge. For AMV creators, finding or purchasing server space on which to host their work was a constant struggle. Community server space would clearly provide an important benefit, and AMV.org encouraged the community to rise to the challenge. By 2003, the site had raised enough funds through donations to acquire a local server known as the Dangling Carrot, which was then replaced with a larger server called the “Golden Donut.”<sup>158</sup> Now, AMV creators had the option to upload their videos to the site itself, videos to the site itself, either as their primary copy for access or as a backup option in case their own site went down.. By 2005, half of all the listings in the database were locally sourced on the Golden Donut, making AMV.org even more of a central location for AMV acquisition and discussion.

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157 “Super Search.” AnimeMusicVideos.org. Accessed 4/14/2013.

158 Forum post. “Re: The History of the Org.” AnimeMusicVideos.org. Dec 10, 2010. Accessed 4/14/2013. <http://www.animemusicvideos.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=91946#p1200258>

In acquiring community servers, AMV.org also acquired community responsibilities to keep those servers running and continue making the work stored on them available – which, of course, requires community investments of time and money. In order to make sure that these investments continue, AMV.org runs itself on a membership model. Any casual visitor can browse the forums, read the technical how-to guides available on the site, and search the listings of AMVs and download videos hosted through the creator's site or through a third party such as mediafire. However, only members can create new directory entries, upload and download videos through the site's own servers, and post to the forums to join in the community conversation.<sup>159</sup> Membership is free – joining up requires only a username, email and password – but the very act of becoming a site member implies a level of commitment in the community not required to benefit from a more open repository such as The Trailer Mash. As Ito points out, “AMVs that are submitted to animemusicvideos.org or to a convention screening are designed to circulate among a community of peers who share similar subcultural, niche interests, rather than being media works that are meant to circulate to broad and undefined audiences.”<sup>160</sup> In addition, activities of benefit to the community are incentivized by the site's infrastructure. For example, all members are encouraged to provide ratings on videos they have downloaded to the site; after downloading ten videos, a user cannot download any more until they have rated the ones they have already viewed. These ratings help to serve as a guide to other users in deciding what videos they should prioritize.

In addition, AMV.org runs frequent fundraising drives, and confers additional benefits on members who contribute financially to the site. These benefits include “the ability to turn off

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159 “Member's Main Page.” AnimeMusicVideos.org. Accessed 4/14/2013.

[http://www.animemusicvideos.org/login.php?s=2&redir=members%2Fmembers\\_main.php](http://www.animemusicvideos.org/login.php?s=2&redir=members%2Fmembers_main.php)

160 Ito, Mizumi

ads, improved search options, a download queue, [and] access to an off-topic forum.”<sup>161</sup>

Contributions run on a pledge system, in which a member first commits to donating a certain amount of money through the site, and then follows up within twenty-one days. Users are given the option to have their donation level displayed in their profile – which provides another incentive to donate, allowing donating members to increase their social capital in the community. Failure to fulfill a pledge within the given amount of time results in the removal of certain member privileges, such as the ability to download videos, until the pledge is fulfilled or a year has passed from the time the pledge was originally made.

The pledge feature allows members to access their benefits immediately after deciding to contribute to the site, without having to wait for a mailed check to make it through the system. However, at this point, electronic funds sent through PayPal have almost entirely supplanted physical checks within the organizational infrastructure, and in fact the organization's P.O. Box was entirely out of commission for a period of several months. A look at the forums dedicated to the topic of “How to Resolve Donation Problems” reveals frequent questions about returned checks, PayPal errors, and unprocessed donations.<sup>162</sup> The rather haphazard manner in which donations continue to be processed is clearly a serious problem for the site's sustainability and organizational structure. Even more concerning is a statement made on the site's FAQ, in response to a question about what benefits can be gained by donating: “most importantly,” the answer begins, “by donating, you help assure that the site will be around next month.”<sup>163</sup> This is hardly a shining vote of confidence in the institution's longevity.

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161 “Site Donations.” AnimeMusicVideos.org. Accessed 4/14/2013.  
<http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/pledges/>

162 “How to Resolve Donation Problems.” Forum page. AnimeMusicVideos.org. Accessed 4/15/2013.  
<http://www.animemusicvideos.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=89437&start=30>

163 “Site FAQs.” AnimeMusicVideos.org



In other words, even for a site that avoids the inherent danger of sourcing its work at YouTube, there are still significant challenges in complying with the OAIS Reference Model's requirement that a repository ensure that the information is preserved against all reasonable contingencies – including the demise of the archive itself.<sup>164</sup> AMV.org exists essentially under a hanging sword. The site does its best to maintain community involvement and thus minimize the danger, but when the day comes that the community is no longer able to sustain the server through donations, then the Golden Donut and all the AMVs stored on it may well disappear.

Still, at the very least, the Golden Donut does provide a viable, user-controlled backup to YouTube videos for AMV storage and archival master copies – if the users would consider it as such. Unfortunately, AMV.org has traditionally seen YouTube more as a competitor to its own functions than as a service with which it can work in partnership. In 2006, as YouTube was beginning to soar in popularity, AMV.org founder Phade made a post that began, “from the day I first visited YouTube, I knew it was going to be bad for the AMV community.” Phade went on to discuss his concerns about the increased visibility and ease of access to AMVs, and his worries that with YouTube acting as a commercial site in cooperation with the music industry, record labels might decide to crack down on the “hundreds and thousands of other little similar websites that do the same(ish) thing as YouTube.” Obviously, AMV.org's hosting services do not, in fact, do the same thing as YouTube, as Phade demonstrates through his explanation of the consequences of losing the Golden Donut: “No more decently high visual-quality videos on your computer to view whenever you want. The only way to view an AMV would be low-quality streams, no wide-screen, nothing to take home, and no core community making sure AMV credit

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164 OAIS Reference Model.

is given where due.”<sup>165</sup> To this, one might add the other previously discussed archival downsides of YouTube in comparison with an independent community-run repository, including inaccurate or unreliable metadata, a lack of contextual traceability, and the risk of videos disappearing due to copyright concerns or coming under corporate control.

On the other hand, as we have already seen, YouTube does also provide unparalleled benefits to creators by allowing easier, more widespread distribution of remix works than any other site. Moreover, the lower entry barriers on YouTube and the easy 'like' and 'comment' functions provide new creators less embedded in the community with more immediate – and less critical – feedback. By 2010, traffic around AMV.org had decreased from 500 new videos uploaded a month to 30 new videos a month, and site administrators were seeking out help on how they could improve their user services to make the site appealing to a new generation of AMV creators. A forum post in another AMV community on the topic “Why does animemusicvideos.org suck? Why don't you go there? What are they doing wrong?”<sup>166</sup> garnered a number of responses, including complaints about the difficulty of using the server compared to the ease of uploading a video on YouTube, and concerns about the perceived elitism of AMV.org members. This is, perhaps, unsurprising, given the nature of a community; Mizumi Ito quotes AbsoluteDestiny's remark that “I think it's the point in which any community becomes a real community is when a selection of that community gets accused of being elitist.”<sup>167</sup> However, it nonetheless provides a problem for the site's stated goal of cataloging all AMVs ever made if a significant proportion of AMV creators avoid the site for fear of being snubbed.

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165 Forum post. “A note about YouTube.” October 20, 2006. Accessed 4/15/2013. <http://www.animemusicvideos.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=73475>

166 Forum thread. “Why does animemusicvideos.org suck?” AMV Hell. November 3, 2010. Accessed 5/6/2013. <http://www.amvhell.com/showthread.php?2889-Why-does-animemusicvideos-org-suck>

167 Ito, Mizumi

“AMV.org,” concluded one commenter, “doesn't seem like a place for the casual not so great AMV creator.”

AMV.org did take this feedback to heart, to a certain extent. As of 2012, videos began to appear on YouTube explaining the process of uploading videos to AMV.org, presumably an attempt to reach out to the YouTube AMV-creating community. Whether this strategy will be successful remains to be seen. What seems clear is that if AMV.org is going to survive the advent of YouTube and streaming video, it's going to have to reach out to the new, more diffuse community of AMV makers and make it clear what the benefits of hosting videos on the Golden Donut are. One plaintive post on the AMV forum illustrates the danger: “I recently uploaded one of my AMV's (a work I'm EXTREMELY proud of) onto YouTube. But seeing as I'd like for more people to see it, I figured I would share it here. However, shortly before I discovered this website's mere existence, I deleted my video's .wav file in order to save space on my computer.”<sup>168</sup> If this poster had uploaded the .wav file to AMV.org's available servers before deleting it, they would have an accessible copy that they could re-download if needed; instead, they are currently at the mercy of YouTube, making this AMV of which they are extremely proud unfortunately likely to vanish from history.

#### **4d. The Organization for Transformative Works and The Archive Of Our Own**

If AMV.org is the oldest contemporary community repository of remix work to host its own videos, the “Dark Archive” project planned by the Organization for Transformative Works is

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168 Forum post. “Putting My YouTube AMV Onto the Site?” March 14, 2013. Accessed 4/15/2013. <http://www.animemusicvideos.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=112366>

perhaps the furthest advanced, and the one with the greatest claim to archival status. The Organization for Transformative Works, henceforth known as the OTW, was formed on May 17, 2007 by prominent fan and bestselling science fiction author Naomi Novik, with a mandate to

serve the interests of fans by providing access to and preserving the history of fanworks and fan culture in its myriad forms. [...] The OTW represents a practice of transformative fanwork historically rooted in a primarily female culture. The OTW will preserve the record of that history as we pursue our mission while encouraging new and non-mainstream expressions of cultural identity within fandom.<sup>169</sup>

The OTW's most visible and successful project to date has been the creation of the Archive Of Our Own, a text-based digital fanfiction archive that is eventually projected to become a multi-format repository for the preservation of fan-created media in all its forms, including fan essays, fanart, and fanvids. The archive currently hosts 514,584 works created by 94,190 registered accounts, although not all of the accounts signed up with the AO3 necessarily represent unique individuals. As with most of the other sites that collect transformative material, content is not curated by the site's managers, but is uploaded by users who wish to have the benefit of a central repository for their work to make it more discoverable by other fans. Although many of the communities that come under the umbrella of fandom have yet to fully embrace the AO3, its reach continues to grow. The site has a reputation for hosting high quality work, which draws users as well as creators to create accounts so that they can consume and comment on works. Users also cite searchability, lack of censorship, organizational trustworthiness, and the ability to download content for easy access as reasons to prefer the repository over other distribution options for fan-created works.<sup>170</sup>

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169 “Archive FAQ.” Archive Of Our Own. Accessed 12/11/2012. [http://archiveofourown/archive\\_faqs/1](http://archiveofourown/archive_faqs/1)

170 Sockii. “Fanfiction.net vs. Archive Of Our Own: A Comparison of Two Fan Fiction Archives.” Squidoo. March 19, 2013. Accessed 5/5/2013. <http://www.squidoo.com/fanfictionnet-vs-archive-of-our-own>

Accounts with the AO3 are free and open to come by, but as long as the site is in beta an invitation is required to join, so that the site can ensure that it does not grow beyond its capacities before its hardware, bandwidth and organization can cope with the increase in size.<sup>171</sup> Once a work has been uploaded to the AO3, it can be accessed through the site itself, or, in the case of text-based work, downloaded in a variety of formats, including Mobi, ePub, PDF, or HTML.<sup>172</sup> Audio and video works can currently only be embedded streaming from other sites, although many creators will include download links from their personal websites in addition to their posts.

Given the large number of works hosted by the site, the AO3's searchability – one of the most important aspects for its user base, which are often looking for very specific kinds of material – is entirely reliant on its complex metadata and cataloging system. This system is designed around terminology used specifically within fan culture, which is not necessarily going to be understood by a casual browser who is not a member of the community. For example, when uploading a work, creators must specify 'fandom' – the source material that their fanwork is based on – as well as selecting categories such as 'gen,' 'm/m,' or 'multi,' which identify whether the fanwork includes the presence of a romantic relationship, and, if so, what kind. Additional curatorial work is performed by volunteer “tag wranglers,” who work behind the scenes to organize and link together the most commonly used tags to create a high-level controlled vocabulary – albeit, again, one that is specifically esoteric to fans. Someone outside the community might be confused to find 24,751 works labeled “hurt/comfort” within the archive, but within fan culture that term specifies a distinct genre

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171 “Archive FAQ.” Archive Of Our Own.

172 “Archive FAQ: Downloads.” Archive Of Our Own. Accessed 4/15/2013.  
[http://archiveofourown.org/archive\\_faqs/27](http://archiveofourown.org/archive_faqs/27)

of work that some users desire specifically to seek out. The OTW describes this system as “a compromise between the two standard tagging/organization models for online archives: a regulated taxonomy, versus a 'folksonomy'.”<sup>173</sup> As the AO3 develops and its user base grows, strong tensions have arisen between users who prefer a more free-form tagging system that allows the author absolute free reign to tag their work however they choose, and users who prefer to have a strictly controlled vocabulary to aid in searching and findability;<sup>174</sup> perhaps only within the archival community would it be possible to find an equal level of passion in debates around metadata. Whatever the eventual fallout of these disputes, however, the AO3 provides the strongest example we have seen of an archive doing its best to fulfill the OAI reference model responsibilities to negotiate information packages from information producers, ensure the information is independently understandable to the community, and provide the information to the community in easily understandable and accessible forms that suit their needs.

Currently, the vast majority of the AO3's holdings consist of fan fiction. However, the OTW has outlined an ambitious plan for archiving fannish audiovisual material, which has been titled the “Fan Video Roadmap.” In designing the Roadmap, the OTW states, their priorities have been “stability and sustainability — we want to build services that will work long-term with our resources, and that will help protect fan videos in a changing legal and economic climate.”<sup>175</sup> As envisioned by the OTW, the Roadmap consists of five main goals: resources for fan video creators; a dark archive of fan video works; a “Torrent Of Our Own,”

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173 “The past, present and hopeful future for tags and tag wrangling on the AO3.” AO3 News. December 15, 2012. Accessed 4/15/2013. [http://archiveofourown.org/admin\\_posts/267](http://archiveofourown.org/admin_posts/267)

174 A summary of some of the debates over the AO3's tagging policies can be found here: [http://fanlore.org/wiki/AO3\\_Tagging\\_Policy\\_Debate#Criticism\\_and\\_discussion\\_of\\_AO3.27s\\_tagging\\_system](http://fanlore.org/wiki/AO3_Tagging_Policy_Debate#Criticism_and_discussion_of_AO3.27s_tagging_system)

175 “Fan Video Roadmap.” Organization for Transformative Works. Accessed 4/17/2013. <http://transformativeworks.org/projects/fan-video-roadmap>

or TO3; an embed code for video within the AO3; and integration of the TO3 into the AO3.

Some of these plans have already been put into practice. The OTW currently hosts how-to guides for vidders hoping to improve on their art, similar to those available at AMV.org. However, the resources available at the OTW also go several steps further, including information on “How To Dispute a Video Takedown,” a detailed evaluation of the available options for hosting streaming video, and a “Test Suite of Fair Use Vids to aid in DMCA advocacy for the right of vidders to extract footage from DVDs. There is also an entire section devoted to assisting fannish scholars, including a bibliography of scholarly works on vidding. Walking the narrow line between fandom and academia, a page on “How to Cite Fan Works” provides technical guidelines for citations, but also provides a list of suggestions on what is considered good ethics and etiquette for academics walking through the private spaces of fandom.<sup>176</sup> The OTW has also announced its plans to compile a “Scholarly Archive of Multimedia Works” by collecting and hosting all vids referenced in all scholarly articles to ensure that, in the future, such articles can maintain consistent and stable links back to their source.

The embed code for streaming video within the AO3 has also been already implemented, which allows vidders to take advantage of the tailored AO3 metadata structure and make their work discoverable by the fan community. However, without the ability to host video, this feature essentially puts the AO3 on the same level as the YouTube-sourced repositories previously discussed when it comes to audiovisual materials – a good source for metadata, and a way to point to works valued by the community, but not in and of itself a

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176 “How to Cite Fanworks in Academic Contexts.” Organization for Transformative Works. Web. <http://transformativeworks.org/projects/how-to-cite-fan-works>

method for preserving the original work.

This is where the Dark Archive and the TO3 come in. The TO3, as envisioned, would be “a bittorrent tracker open to registered users to post torrents for fair-use transformative fanworks, including: vids, fic trailers, fan art, zine pdfs, AMVs, political remix, machinima, and other transformative digital fanworks.”<sup>177</sup> Users uploading works to the TO3 would be required to read and sign a policy expressing their awareness of fair use standards and their judgment that the material being uploaded is, in fact, a transformative work. Violation of these terms of use would result in the user being banned from using the torrent, with a “zero-tolerance” policy. In this way, the OTW hopes to set the proposed TO3 firmly apart from the unmoderated torrents that have drawn the ire of large media corporations. The OTW envisions TO3 users adding their torrent URLs into the AO3 entries along with the streaming video links, thus once again benefiting from the tagging and metadata system provided by the AO3 to make work discoverable by the community. The ultimate goal is to avoid YouTube and other outside streaming sites altogether and stream video directly from the TO3, but, as the Fan Video Roadmap cautions, “this is a long-term plan which would require a high level of stability on the Archive of Our Own as well as a significant amount of resources,”<sup>178</sup> and thus will not be pursued until the OTW is comfortable with the strength and sustainability of all the elements on which it builds.

The TO3 would provide preservation benefits to vidders in much the same way that the Golden Donut does for AMV creators by sourcing videos on a community-controlled server that users could trust. However, it is still primarily a method for access. The Dark

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177 “Fan Video Roadmap.” Organization for Transformative Works.

178 Ibid



Archive project, on the other hand, is explicitly a measure for long-term preservation. As the OTW describes it:

The goal of the dark archive is to store and protect fan videos: a sort of communal video vault. The dark archive will not be online or generally accessible: the goal is for people whose videos might otherwise be lost to have a copy stored in a secure and responsible place come vidapocalypse. If vidders place copies of their videos with us, we could restore copies to them in case of TOSing or computer failure. We will be asking video makers who want to deposit copies of their videos to fill out a form telling us what we can and can't do with them; it is possible that the Dark Archive could at some point be used to form the core of a torrent seeding drive (see #3, #5 below).<sup>179</sup>

In other words, as envisioned, the Dark Archive would serve as a preservation backup to the more visible endeavors of the TO3 and the AO3. If the AO3 acts as something of a library catalog for the accumulated output of fandom, and the torrented vids are the access copies, the Dark Archive is the storage space where preservation masters are kept, designed only to be accessed in worst-case scenarios. This is the crucial archival feature that other community repositories lack.

The Dark Archive is designed to be “dark” specifically because of the inherently at-risk nature of transformative video work. Fair use is a defense, but only a defense. As previously discussed, transformative works can be pulled off of YouTube at any time, and even the hosts of the Golden Donut at AMV.org are worried that someday the might of the media industry might come to bear on their organization and force them to cease operations. For all their precautions and their terms of use, something similar could certainly happen to the TO3 and the AO3 if the media industries of the United States decided they no longer felt inclined to tolerate transformative work. Keeping an offline, inaccessible archive under

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179 Ibid

community control is one surefire way to preserve fan heritage in the case of this disaster. Nobody can pressure for the destruction of something that they don't know exists. Moreover, by requiring users to fill out the equivalent of a donor agreements in order to submit their work the Dark Archive, the OTW ensures both that the metadata around the material remains correct, and that they continue to operate within the bounds of respect and trust necessary to maintain a volunteer, community-driven archive.

Although all material on the AO3 is currently user-submitted, the OTW also has more ambitious plans for maintaining the Dark Archive as a source for the history of vidding culture. Several conventions maintain libraries of works presented at their vid shows. Most notable among these is Vividcon, an annual three-day event focused solely on showing and discussing fanvids, which has a DVD library of over 150+ items that is currently only accessible during the course of the con itself for attendees to sign out and watch in their own rooms. The library also includes some VHS tapes which are no longer accessible at the con, although the con librarian is hoping to create DVD access copies over the next few years.<sup>180</sup> The OTW hopes to partner with Vividcon and other conventions that may have similar libraries in order to digitally preserve their materials and include them within the Dark Archive.

Both the TO3 and the Dark Archive are ambitious projects, and both are designated by the OTW as currently “in progress;” their list of required resources includes, in addition to the physical storage and server space, “catalogers, maintainers, administrators,” and technical personnel.<sup>181</sup> As usual, the OTW is taking care not to commit themselves beyond

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180 Renenet. Personal interview. 12/14/2011

181 “Fan Video Roadmap.” Organization for Transformative Works.

the limit of their resources until they are sure the projects are sustainable.

In its commitment to the sustainability of its projects and its awareness of the benefits of long-term preservation, the OTW comes across as by far the most professional of the organizations discussed in the course of this paper. It also has a much more formalized organizational structure than any of the other institutions – including Project Gutenberg – which it is worth describing here as a demonstration of what can be accomplished within the confines of a self-motivated volunteer organization.

The OTW is currently governed by its nine-person board, including a president, secretary, treasurer and elections officer, and five auxiliary members. Board members serve for a three-year term, with one-third of the board being re-elected every year.<sup>182</sup> All current members of the organization are eligible to vote in the elections. Membership itself is contingent upon an annual ten-dollar donation. This requirement not only helps to ensure continued funding to the organization, but, as the OTW site explains, ensures that members have a personal stake in the organization by giving them a voice in its governance.<sup>183</sup> Although membership conveys no other explicit benefits from the organization – the OTW has committed to keeping all of its other services free – a public commitment to supporting the OTW, and, by extension, the fan community, can carry the kind of social benefits described by Mizumo Ito in her discussion of remix economies. To encourage this kind of social recognition, the OTW has created supporter graphics that members can use on their own blogs to display their commitment.

It's important to note that while founder Naomi Novik served on the board for several years after the organization's inception, she currently does not serve as a board executive. Some

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182 “Organization for Transformative Works / Board.” Fanlore.org. Accessed 5/5/2013.  
[http://fanlore.org/wiki/Organization\\_for\\_Transformative\\_Works/Board](http://fanlore.org/wiki/Organization_for_Transformative_Works/Board)

183 “FAQ.” Organization for Transformative Works.

community members have recognized as an important step in the growth of the organization as an independent entity; “the OTW is an organization that represents a community, and organizations are not actually about individuals,” wrote OTW member oliviagirce in a blog post around the time of the 2011 board elections. “Delegating isn't about stepping back in to take charge, and organizational leadership is not about control; it's about empowering people, and then it's about trusting them to do their jobs.”<sup>184</sup> This emphasis on placing power in the hands of the community, rather than an individual, is one of the most encouraging factors in the OTW's quest for sustainability.

The organization is divided into committees and workgroups that are reorganized each year according to perceived needs within the organization. All committee meetings and communication are carried out online. Of particular note, for sustainability purposes, are the committees dealing with Development and Membership, Finance, Grants, Legal, Strategic Planning, and Volunteer and Recruiting.<sup>185</sup> Despite its volunteer-driven status, the OTW tries to make sure it keeps track of its people and knows that they are in the right place to get the job done. For example, according to the volunteer site, the Legal Committee is “mostly comprised of legal professionals” and the Finance Committee specifies that “prior experience with non-profit financial management and/or accounting is preferred. In order to maintain this effort, the Volunteer and Recruiting Committee “maintains a large database of volunteer records, manages staffing drives, and creates internal reference materials and documentation for OTW projects and

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184 “OTW 2011 Board Elections.” Fanlore.org. Accessed 5/5/2013.  
[http://fanlore.org/wiki/OTW\\_2011\\_Board\\_Election#cite\\_note-17](http://fanlore.org/wiki/OTW_2011_Board_Election#cite_note-17)

185 The current list of committees can be viewed here: <http://transformativeworks.org/how-you-can-help/volunteer>

committees.”<sup>186</sup>

The Development and Membership committee is in charge of maintaining the revenue stream of the organization, which largely comes from membership drives and donations, occasionally supplemented by grants. Like Michael Hart in the early days of Project Gutenberg, Naomi Novik still plays a visible role in raising money for the organization; however, unlike Michael Hart, she has not yet quit her day job, nor has she thrown any personal millions the site's way. Rather, her involvement has taken the form of creating works to be auctioned off, with the proceeds going to support the AO3. Because it's very important in fan culture that transformative works not be used for profit in any way, however, the OTW makes a point of transparency about the use that it makes of the funds that it receives. A recent post from the organization to support its April membership drive entitled “How much does the Archive cost to run?” breaks down all of the expenses incurred by the Archive from its launch in 2009 to the present day. The final annotation in the bill, however, doesn't have a dollar amount attached: “volunteer time. The Archive is entirely designed, coded, tested, and run by volunteers, who give many hours of their time to develop the site, support users, wrangle tags, and manage the servers. Their work is priceless.”<sup>187</sup> As with any community site, investments of time from the community are as important, if not more so, than investments of money.

Over the six years since its foundation, the Organization for Transformative Work has overall enjoyed success, with its user base and its volunteer staff growing consistently every year. The process has not been without its setbacks; the Organization's user base reports in consistently and vocally with complaints and criticisms, and one of the landmarks proudly announced by the organization in their recap of milestones from 2012 includes the ten thousandth support request answered by the support team.<sup>188</sup> While, on the one hand, this speaks to a remarkably invested user community, it also requires an astounding level of investment from the volunteer staff, which has led to a high instance of burnout and internal controversy. The Archive itself is still in beta, as it has been for the past three years, and while its projected projects are admirable, it nonetheless is clear that there's a long way to go before

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186 “Volunteer.” Organization for Transformative Works. Accessed 12/14/2012.

<http://transformativeworks.org/how-you-can-help/volunteer>

187 Curtis, Jefferson. “April Membership Drive: How much does the Archive cost to run?” April 5, 2013. Accessed 4/17/2013. <http://transformativeworks.org/news/april-membership-drive-how-much-does-archive-cost-run>

188 “2012 AO3 Milestones.” Organization for Transformative Works. Accessed 4/20/2013. [http://archiveofourown.org/admin\\_posts/271](http://archiveofourown.org/admin_posts/271)

the more complex and ambitious endeavors surrounding transformative video work can be realized. And, as the history of AMV.org shows, an early surge of activity and financial investment in a community site is no guarantee that the user base will not decrease as circumstances within the community change.

Still, if the OTW does manage to achieve all the goals set out in the Fan Video Roadmap, this will provide a significantly enhanced likelihood of long-term survival – for fanvids, and fanvids alone. While the OTW states its willingness to host anything that can be defended as “transformative” in its plans for the Dark Archive and the TO3, its institutional mandate specifically states its responsibility to preserve the history of the *fan* community, not any of the other multitudes of remix communities in existence. This means that, while fan creators reap community benefits from including their work in endeavors such as the AO3, TO3 and Dark Archive – benefits such as recognition and findability within the community – remix video creators working outside the paradigm of fandom have no such motivation to submit their work for inclusion. Even if the Fan Video Roadmap is a solution to the problem of transformative video preservation, it's only a solution for a small subset of the vast array of material at risk.

But even if they do not offer an absolute solution – and in the world of digital preservation, very few things do – the digital preservation efforts planned by the OTW do at the very least provide an opportunity for optimism. It's true that six years is not a particularly long institutional history, but in a digital world where the average lifespan of a webpage is estimated at less than a year,<sup>189</sup> it's nothing to scoff at either. The OTW certainly bears watching from the archival community; if its continues to look as strong as its present, it could potentially emerge as a new model for independent community archival enterprises.

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189 Ashenfelder, Mike. “The Average Lifespan of a Web Page.” *The Signal*. November 8, 2011. Accessed 4/20/2013. <http://blogs.loc.gov/digitalpreservation/2011/11/the-average-lifespan-of-a-webpage/>

## 5. Conclusions

Despite the care that the OTW takes to describe and document its methods and to ensure the sustainability of its initiative, it's difficult to imagine the organization receiving an official seal of approval from a professional standard such as the TRAC Criteria and Checklist. TRAC requires specific competencies, skill sets and training opportunities for repository staff – requirements that cannot be imposed on a volunteer workforce. TRAC evaluates a repository by its ability to “generate income and assets through services, third-party partnerships, grants and so forth;” the culture around transformative works forbids charging access fees for services or leveraging its assets for commercial revenue. Voluntary donations, which serve as the primary means of funding for most transformative repositories, do not even make TRAC's primary list of options. TRAC also states that “a repository does not have sufficient control of the information if the repository itself is legally at risk.”<sup>190</sup> As current copyright legislation stands, any repository that provides access to transformative works is legally at risk of lawsuits from major studios objecting to the use of their source content. Since distribution and access is a crucial factor in communities coming together to create transformative works, this stricture essentially eliminates any community repository focusing on remix from being considered trustworthy by professional standards.

The BRTF, meanwhile, recognizes the importance of grassroots efforts in preserving contemporary cultural content, but still focuses its recommendations on third-party archiving “under the auspices of nationally recognized entities”<sup>191</sup> instead of providing viable recommendations and standards for grassroots archives working without institutional support. While the BRTF's suggestions that the archival community lend support for grassroots archiving efforts are sound in principle, they essentially remove agency from community archives by failing to provide any suggestions for how such grassroots efforts can strengthen themselves in the absence of offers of institutional assistance over which they have no control.

This lack of detailed standards and studies that take the specific strengths and limitations of grassroots archives into account presents a serious challenge for community archives; it also presents a challenge for scholars

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190 RLG – National Archives and Records Administration Digital Repository Certification Task Force.

“Trustworthy Repositories Audit and Certification: Criteria and Checklist.”

191 OCLC. “Sustainable Economics for a Digital Planet: Ensuring Long-Term Access to Digital Information.” Final Report.

in evaluating community archives of transformative work. Although many of the current guides are inapplicable, however, there remains the basic conceptual framework for long term digital preservation and access: the OAIS reference model. By going back to the basic responsibilities of an OAIS-compliant digital archive and comparing them with the repositories currently emerging from remix communities, we can, at the very least, understand whether current grassroots efforts to collect and curate transformative works can be considered to be engaging in preservation activities – and, if not, what next steps need to be taken to increase their ability to do so.

There are several levels on which even the most basic community-driven repositories unambiguously succeed at fulfilling the responsibilities of digital archive. The first responsibility is for archives to negotiate for and accept information from information producers, including “sufficient descriptive information to assist the designated community in finding content of interest.” Community-driven repositories of transformative work are clearly doing this when nobody else is. Even YouTube-sourced community listings such as the Chewiki require members of the community to enter valuable metadata about their work, which helps to preserve the record of its existence for the long term. Because the metadata capture forms are designed by members of the community who understand the community's priorities, they are able to request the metadata that community members find most valuable for identification and discussion of the work. Video producers are willing to provide this information because they understand the benefits that will accrue to them within the community from doing so: their videos become more discoverable by their intended audience, and the creators gain status within the community.

Needless to say, community-driven repositories also succeed better than any institutional repository could possibly hope to at fulfilling the third responsibility – defining a designated community – because, of course, they are the designated community. Remix video creators working within a community context have distinct sets of standards, terminology, and artistic goals. When they create, they are creating with a specific audience in mind. These are all factors that need to be taken into account when capturing metadata for preservation and designing modes of access. To return to the example of Killa and T. Jonesy's vid from “How to Suppress Women's Remix,” a remix video that depicts a romantic relationship between the male leads of a show such as Star Trek would be read as an earnest and emotional act of queering the text within the vidding community, but could easily be misinterpreted by a wider audience as parody. Without knowledgeable insiders to define the community and the parameters of a knowledge base, respectful and accurate preservation of transformative work would be rendered



significantly more challenging, if not outright impossible.

Community repositories also excel at ensuring that the information preserved is independently understandable to the designated community. As the OAIS explains, this entails not just capturing the content information and being able to represent it or play it back, but also clearly documenting the purpose for which the content was created. Again, community archives ensure that this purpose is accurately presented by capturing the appropriate metadata for the community to understand the context. The Organization for Transformative Works provides a particularly strong example of this, with their commitment to creating community-sourced metadata that is accurately indexed and easily searchable, but all of the metadata systems discussed are designed specifically to provide appropriate context to the communities they serve.

Lastly, community repositories are effective – in the short term – at making content available to the designated community; in fact, this is their entire purpose. Without the desire by community members to have a trustworthy resource guiding them to material that fulfills their requirements, there would be no drive to create community repositories in the first place. Although community repositories are often not in a position to host media on their own servers and offer downloads, they do always make the effort to point to locations where the media can be viewed. These community locations are often the main point of access for community members to discover new works that live up to their standards.

However, for all of the important work that community remix repositories do currently do, there are two important OAIS reference model responsibilities that for the most part they are not currently in a position to fulfill. The first is the responsibility to obtain sufficient control of the information provided to ensure long term preservation. The OAIS model defines this level of control in terms of three factors: copyright implications, authority to modify representation information, and agreements with external organizations. As far as copyright implications go, this is currently an insoluble problem when it comes to transformative works. Unless there is a major shift in legislation around the uses of copyright material, the best a repository of transformative work can do is prepare in advance for the survival of the work in spite of potential legal challenges, as the OTW plans to do with its Dark Archive, and learn how best to use fair use as a defense. However, the OTW is the only one of the institutions discussed that has even considered taking this kind of precaution; the rest of the community repositories discussed exist in the legal shadows, and are content to leave it that way.

Community repositories are also not in a particularly strong position when it comes to having the authority to modify content representation. In most cases, they do not have control over the content itself, since it's sourced at an outside streaming video repository such as YouTube, which means that at best they can only guarantee the preservation of a description of the work – better than nothing, but very far from ideal. AMV.org is the exception here, but even the Golden Donut requires creators to upload an original version of the video without granting the repository the ability or authority to migrate it to a new format should this become necessary. This means that older videos may eventually become inaccessible, should the formats in which they were uploaded become obsolete. Again, the OTW may prove the exception to the rule when it opens its Dark Archive, since it specifies that it will be asking for donor agreements to allow for this kind of digital migration procedure. However, for now, control over the information is a serious concern for all community remix repositories.

Finally, community repositories uniformly operate individually, without building any kinds of agreements with other organizations. This is an especially serious concern in the light of the last responsibility defined by the OAIS model – the requirement to ensure that the information is preserved against all reasonable contingencies, including the demise of the archive. As we have seen, many of the community repositories discussed here have serious sustainability concerns, since their operational models rely on donated resources that may not continue to exist in the long term. AMV.org teeters constantly on the edge of not being able to meet its funding goals; the Trailer Mash relies upon a single founder maintaining interest in the site. Even the OTW has faced internal controversies and struggles with volunteer burnout. While Project Gutenberg, the founding example of a successful community-driven archive, has backed its information up at the Internet Archive in case of a site collapse, none of these community archives have developed succession plans to preserve their information in case the archive should fail. This is especially concerning in the case of AMV.org, which hosts a number of AMVs in a server that it may not be able to maintain.

Given these serious concerns, it cannot, then, really be said with confidence that community repositories are effectively preserving transformative video work for the future. At best, they are making it accessible as long as they can – which is not the same thing as 'the long term,' but which I also want to emphasize is an important task, and not one to be disdained. These community repositories are doing the best with the resources they have at hand; they are doing work that nobody else is doing, and work that nobody else *can* effectively do. It is a mistake to say,

as the BRTF Final Report does, that “contemporary creators, users and stakeholders have indicated little concern about or even awareness of issues concerning long term access.”<sup>192</sup> Whether they are dedicated individuals like Jonathan McIntosh and Tom Johns, or passionate groups like AMV.org and the OTW, creators, users and stakeholders have consistently demonstrated serious investment in making sure the art forms they consider their own remain accessible.

What does this mean for digital preservation professionals? It means that, if we want to see this content survive, it is our responsibility to make sure the people who are passionate about this material are able to gain possession of the resources to preserve it – and the most important resource that is currently lacking is information. It is vitally important that digital creative communities be made aware of the current risks to digital creative content, and the ways in which they can best preserve act to preserve that content. Fundamental principles of digital preservation, in easily understandable language – information as basic as “make sure there are lots of copies of your work stored in different places before you delete it off your hard drive” – need to be made easily available on community sites. This is not the first such project undertaken by the archival community; in 2011, Witness created a list of “7 Tips to Ensure Your Video is Usable in the Long Term,” tailored for the activist community and their concerns.<sup>193</sup> As a beginning step, I have created a similar document tailored for the concerns of the remix community, which appears as Appendix A. I intend to make this document available on forums and in chats within remix communities, and reach out to community repositories in the hopes that they will include it among the “How-To” documents hosted by most community sites. Hopefully, not just community members, but community organizations will take this information to heart and start thinking more seriously about the problem of long-term preservation of their materials.

However, it's not all up to the content creators and community stakeholders; digital preservation professionals also need to start focusing on creating guidelines and standards for maintaining a successful community-driven digital repository over the long term. The lack of documentation addressing this is going to become an increasingly serious problem, as community-driven digital archives are going to become increasingly

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192 OCLC. “Sustainable Economics for a Digital Planet: Ensuring Long-Term Access to Digital Information.” Final Report.

193 Ng, Yvonne. “7 Tips To Ensure Your Video is Usable in the Long Term.” Witness Blog. December 8, 2011. Accessed 4/20/2013. <http://blog.witness.org/2011/12/7-tips-to-ensure-your-video-is-usable-in-the-long-term/>

relevant the further into the digital age we get – not just for the preservation of transformative remix work, but for all digital content, as the amount of digital information being produced more and more rapidly outpaces the amount that institutions can conceivably preserve on their own.

Over the course of this paper, I have identified some of the most significant requirements for success of a grassroots repository in the long term:

1. Methods of maintaining community investment and engagement by incorporating non-financial reward and motivation strategies
2. Effective horizontal organizational structures that build on the strengths of a passion-driven volunteer workforce without expecting them to behave in the same ways as a professional, paid workforce
3. Ability to adapt to shifting technical, financial, and community requirements
4. Ability to form partnerships with outside institutions without losing autonomy

All of these topics require further detailed study by sustainability experts, and I hope this initial survey can serve as the jumping-off point for more in-depth research. Some communities are certainly better positioned to launch community repositories than others; shared interests, critical mass, and a history of working together for mutual benefit without financial rewards are all important criteria. A certain distrust of authority and desire for autonomy can also be a key initial factor in spurring a community to take control of their own work by supporting an archive. However, communities can also come together around a repository, as the examples of the Chewiki or even Project Gutenberg itself demonstrate. While it often takes one visible and dedicated figure, such as Michael Hart or Naomi Novik, to take the first step and create the repository, the repository will not survive unless the community comes in to support it and allows the founder to step away. The factor of paramount importance is that the repository and the community are encouraged to grow in tandem. Further studies should provide more insights on the best way to encourage this.

Finally, I also would like to spend a little more time discussing that last point – the ability to form partnerships with outside institutions. Project Gutenberg has been successful by partnering with iBiblio, which is supported by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Internet Archive. For an archive of transformative work, partnering with an academic institution is not currently a viable option, as has already been discussed. Partnering with the Internet Archive might be a possibility, as OurMedia.org did. Jonathan McIntosh

also uses the Internet Archive as a backup for his own works. However, the Internet Archive's visible collections are subject to some of the same risks as any other streaming video site. Moreover, the Internet Archive has been known to remove content due to copyright complaints in the past – sometimes to its later embarrassment, as when it accidentally removed sites critical of Scientologists from the Wayback Machine.<sup>194</sup>

Still, with copyright crackdowns and potential “vidapocalypse” a constant threat – not to mention the sustainability issues surrounding community archives – it seems clear that some kind of backup is necessary for community remix sites if their content is going to survive. The OTW is on the right track; the existence of a protected dark archive to store preservation masters of transformative remix works with appropriate metadata included gives all of the material within it a greater chance of survival. However, the OTW itself doesn't have the mandate or the resources to commit to backing up all of the remix communities out there. This, then, may be an opportunity for the digital preservation community to lend some real assistance. While digital dark archive projects have been undertaken in the past – many supported or partially supported by the Internet Archive, such as HathiTrust's collection of restricted data – none of them, to the best of my knowledge, are currently open to the public for the long-term preservation of sensitive or at-risk material. It may be time for that to change. If the Internet Archive, or another digital preservation initiative, could commit to supporting a dark archive for the public good, this dark archive could serve as a backup for all of the diverse remix repositories in existence, in much the same way that a physical facility such as ReCAP serves as a joint preservation consortium for storing archival formats from several different institutions. That way, losing one community repository wouldn't mean losing an entire community's worth of history and metadata – a fate which now threatens almost every remix community in existence. And unlike the collections of OurMedia.org, which are now intermingled with the rest of the Internet Archive's material in such a way as to be largely undiscoverable, a properly organized dark archive would be able to store different collections of material in such a way as to make sure they could be retrieved by the community later on.

Even with the ability to support and back up community remix repositories, challenges will abound for the preservation of transformative video work. Not all remix video comes out of

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194 Bowman, Lisa M. “Net Archive Silences Scientology Critics.” CNET. September 24, 2002. Accessed 4/20/2013. <http://news.cnet.com/2100-1023-959236.html>

a community that is strong enough to support a repository of its own; political remix video, especially, remains at serious risk, and much of what has already been lost seems unlikely to be ever regained. However, discovering how to better support community repositories is an important first step in making sure that the rich heritage of transformative video remix does not become a casualty of the digital age.

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## Appendix A

### How To Save Your Remix Video

Are you a creator of remix video, such as political remix, trailer parody, fanvids or AMVs?

If so, you're probably aware of how easily remix videos can disappear from the internet. Maybe you've gone back to watch a favorite video, only to find that it's no longer streaming and you can't find a copy anywhere. Maybe you've personally had your account removed from YouTube or another hosting site for copyright infringement, and you don't know how to get it back – or, alternately, you've seen unauthorized copies of your work get posted everywhere, with nobody giving you appropriate credit for them.

Long-term survival is a serious risk for all digital works, and the risks are even higher for digital video. However, there are a few things you can do to help make sure your work stays around and under your control.

1. **Upload your video to more than one location.** Don't rely on just YouTube! There's a technical phrase archivists like to sling around – it says, “Lots of copies keeps stuff safe.” It's always a good idea to have at least one backup copy uploaded somewhere in case something happens, preferably in the original format and resolution. The Internet Archive is a good option for a backup location to store your videos that's unlikely to put them at risk of being pulled down for infringement.
2. **Always include as much information as possible everywhere you upload a video, including your creator handle or signature, the date you made it, and the sources you used.** The more information you add to the video's description, the easier it will be to distinguish between your work and copies that people may post on YouTube or other streaming sites without giving you credit. It will also make it easier for people to watch it. Don't worry that putting information about the sources that you used will put you at greater legal risk – in fact, the more upfront you are about what you're doing, the more likely it is that you'll be able to win a fair use argument if the situation arises.
3. **Embed descriptive information in your video files.** This is especially important if you offer direct download options for your work – that way, you can make sure people will continue to have the right context for it and know to give you credit. If you use Adobe Creative Suite to create your videos, the program includes an application called Adobe Bridge that will allow you to edit the metadata. VLC and QuickTime Player also have this functionality built in. There are also a number of freeware programs that let you edit metadata; you can find a good guide and tutorial at <http://www.videouniversity.com/articles/metadata-for-video/>
4. **Keep track of your original files.** Video does take up a lot of storage space, but many people have lost their work permanently by uploading it to a streaming site such as YouTube, deleting their files, and then having their work removed from the site or their



account suspended. Hanging onto your original files – and, ideally, keeping them in at least two different digital places, like on a hard drive and on another piece of storage media – is a good way to prevent this from happening. Make sure to check your saved files at least once a year to make sure that they haven't gotten corrupted. More information about how to keep your digital video files is available at the Library of Congress' personal digital archiving site, here:  
<http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/video.html>

5. **Use a trusted site to offer your videos for download.** Streaming sites are great for the short term, but they are very susceptible to notice-and-takedown procedures, and they can change their Terms of Service or even shut down with very little notice, taking your video with them. Hosting videos on your own server for download is great if you can manage it, but it can be expensive to keep paying for server space, and it also leaves you open to threats such as DDOS attacks. A better option may be to work with your friends or your digital community to establish a central repository for your work with a hosting server that you can trust. If your video is on a server that is under your control, or the control of a community that understands the importance of remix video, it's more likely to make it in the long term.