Katherine Newbold

Doctor Who
The Transmedia Archive

In September 2006, *The Guinness Book of Records* named British TV series *Doctor Who* as the longest-running science fiction show in television history. The BBC's *Doctor Who* first aired on November 23, 1963,[1] and has since broadcast, in total, over 750 episodes—an impressive feat for a production that weathered considerable downtime from 1989 to 2005.[2] Narrating the adventures of a mysterious alien time-traveler, the titular Doctor Who, and his companions as they travel across time and space, *Doctor Who* the series has likewise crossed national borders to reach millions of viewers all around the world. Currently, the show broadcasts to forty-two countries, including China, Australia, and Iran.[3] It has reached cult status in many nations: John Tulloch has called *Doctor Who* an "institution" in the eyes of the public[4] and the BBC ranks it as the Golden Child among its few coveted Superbrands.[5] With British actor Matt Smith stepping into the time machine to play the eleventh Doctor of the series in 2010, *Doctor Who* remains an "unfolding" text, as John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado describe it, "suitably shifting its ground in response to social and professional pressure."[6] *Doctor Who* prides itself not only on gradually revealing and rewriting its own history, but also on influencing and maintaining its ties with the broader cultural milieu that surrounds it.[7]

Given this illustrious and lengthy history, perhaps the most remarkable aspect of *Doctor Who*'s storied past is the fact that nearly 15% of it remains missing. One hundred and eight episodes from the total 253 that were produced in the series' first black-and-white decade are gone,[8] believed to be wiped in the early 1970s when the BBC lacked proper storage facilities for its videotaped materials.[9] Although an extensive search in the 1990s yielded several full-length episodes hidden in attics and foreign archives, only bits and pieces remain from some of the series' best-known early installments.[10] The BBC provides what information it can on these missing episodes through its website, posting available clips, photonovels, production stills, and audio materials for fans to view and enjoy.[11]

Yet, some dedicated fans do more than just look at these materials. Within the past few years, a growing community of *Doctor Who* aficionados has taken up the task of using the extant media to craft reconstructions, or "recons," of the lost 1960s episodes. Reconstructionist Garrett Gilchrist notes that traditional recons use "still images married to the original audio track to tell the story of a lost episode of Doctor Who."[12] Generally, the images come in the form of telesnaps taken during the series' original run, as commissioned by and currently obtainable from the BBC. Complete audio recordings for all missing episodes can be found through the BBC or from industrious fans who recorded the audio themselves upon original broadcast. Gilchrist notes that a group called Loose Cannon Productions works on and distributes this type of reconstruction, obtaining, composing, and circulating their work through videotapes and postal mail.[13]

The recon community I would like to discuss today, however, differs from Loose Cannon in several ways. Fans who choose to reconstruct episodes online and in digital formats present a much different, more interpretive and transparent form of reconstruction than the more traditional format. Their work invites us to consider what happens when part of an archive becomes inscribed to the Internet and is consequently marked as a space of active translation across media platforms. In particular, the pattern of presenting and producing recons on a platform such as YouTube or through personal webpages allows for more fans to participate in reconstructing episodes and to overlap duties in their creation of new material. It also means that reconstructionists tend to approach their work in a fragmentary way, producing scenes rather than whole episodes but displaying their labor-intensive processes as they go. Because of this, their work often loops back onto itself, by filling in gaps, improving upon awkward animation, and staging sequences in gradations and layers.

The repetition and proliferation seen here, I argue, evokes Jacques Derrida's mutually-constituting concepts of the archontic and the archiviolithic drives as taken from his 1995 essay *Archive Fever*. Because reconstructionists' online recovery work creates and recreates, constantly generating new hermeneutic choices yet striving to reproduce scenes that replicate the lost originals, each digital recon they make unavoidably prevents the manifestation of other interpretations. All recons, therefore, participate in simultaneously constituting and effacing the *Doctor Who* archive they purport to help build. Fan work arises in this context as particularly suited to a Derridean conception of an archive as transmedia phenomenon.

Though no fans have submitted a specific definition of "reconstruction" in an online setting, several clues exist that point to how they engage in the practice of reconstructing lost episodes. Gilchrist likens reconstruction to the process of recreation using new technology. As he emphasizes, the goal should be episodes that are "recreated, not updated," and "If the episodes are to be animated," he says, "they have to be done right. They have to match the original episodes as closely as possible, and feel like '60s *Doctor Who*, not updated in any way, just recreated with new technology."[14] Here, textual integrity, via reference to the original UK broadcast episode, appears significant, but is complicated by the intrusion of "new technologies" that bear on how later generations will interpret that referent. In reconstructing, Gilchrist himself prefers the technologies of hand-drawn animation for human faces, and CGI for human bodies, "monsters," synthetic materials, and background animation. He believes that both integrate with photographic elements best through these distinct characterizations. In this, we find another piece of an online fan recon definition: although recognizing that the methods of animation are limited, and hand-drawn animation will never approximate the true "look" of the original episodes, fans will still strive for a certain amount of stability and believability from segment to segment through correct applications of image technology.

On the other hand, what also plays into reconstructing for Gilchrist is, quite simply, whatever "works better." The impact of animating in color, for example—even though the original 1960s episodes aired in black and white—serves to enhance nuance in details that would be lost in a black and white drawing. Because the audience's engagement level heightens with the addition of color, Gilchrist gladly incorporates it into his drawings. Fans, envisioned as viewers and potential reconstructionists, thus become a major factor in how reconstructions are conceived and executed. "If the BBC can't afford to do animation right now, the fans might be the greatest hope for the future," muses Gilchrist, and since the BBC's first and last attempt at an animated reconstruction of missing episodes, *The Invasion*, "[was] not lucrative enough to encourage the BBC to pursue any additional animated reproductions any time soon,"[15] Gilchrist's statement may prove most prescient for how the *Doctor Who* missing episodes are surfacing in altered forms on the Internet.

Several reconstructionists, such as Gilchrist and Aaron Climas, an Australian animator, post their work on YouTube. As a free and relatively straightforward platform for the presentation of moving image materials, YouTube offers a predesigned space in which fans from around the world can gather their clips of recons at various stages of production. Reconstructionists often post test footage of 2D or 3D animated figures, set against a plain backdrop; at times, they will present a partially-completed scene; and, when sequences reach a stage of near-completion, they will often publish these to YouTube as well.[16] All of these clips function within a feedback loop that solicits and distributes advice, opinions, and pleas among viewers and creators. In posting such clips on YouTube, reconstructionists are usually actively

seeking out suggestions on how to improve their animation or composition skills. The site devotes a section for other users to leave comments or video responses below the main clip displayed on that page, and for the viewer to rate that video on a "star" scale from 1 to 5 (also located right below the video).

Yet, reconstructionists also use their videos, and the YouTube platform, to recruit fans as artists in the reconstruction process. YouTube provides a space for the artist to explain his or her work in a sidebar to the right of the video. Here, a user such as Gilchrist can plead with viewers to aid in animating lost episodes, emphasizing the ease of the procedure and providing his own video work as evidence of how simple and beneficial reconstructions are. These spaces thus lend themselves most readily to interaction among the recon community and are highly geared towards facilitating their interactions vis-à-vis the video in question. By these two avenues of information, then, funneled through a design aesthetic devoted to the display of a single short video per page, fans interact with one another and begin to form an archive of *Doctor Who* recon materials that proliferates within strong guidelines.

I employ the word "archive" here because some have considered YouTube as an archive en masse. Since YouTube has the ability to maintain so much video content, and because it functions using a one-video-to-one-page style, its entries could be seen as individual records, with the YouTube website itself acting as the archival location of these records. Indeed, Rob White, in a brief piece for *Film Quarterly* in 2006 entitled "Treasure Tube," labels YouTube a "mass-curated archive," calling its content "holdings."[17] Whether or not we agree with White does not immediately concern me here. But what I find significant in White's conception is the status he gives the online platform as a site of consignation. Jacques Derrida's principle of the archontic drive is intimately tied up with this power of gathering together, or consignation, and I turn now to a consideration of how this drive operates within, and helps create, the *Doctor Who* transmedia archive.

In an essay published in 2006, Abigail Derecho undertakes a brief exploration of the historical and theoretical premises surrounding fan fiction as artistic practice. She strives to understand fan fiction as more than simply a cultural phenomenon,

arguing that such writing has given minority groups a form through which they can express "social, political, or cultural critique" toward the dominant culture.[18] One of Derecho's main objectives in this essay is to reframe common understandings of fan fiction as not merely "derivative;" she prefers to think of such works as "archontic writing," and she uses Derrida's notion of the archontic drive to compel this categorization. As she understands it, the archontic drive or principle is "the internal drive of an archive to continually expand… that drive within an archive that seeks to always produce more archive, to enlarge itself."[19] Archives have their own presence of motivation and actions, and they strive to build themselves up in a continual process of augmentation and enlargement. Derecho prefers applying this term to fan fiction because such a concept does not inherently question the originality or creativity of a fan's writing by referencing "judgments about the relative merits of the antecedent and descendant works."[20] Writings within this genre of archontic literature don't violate the source text's boundaries, preferring instead to "add to that text's archive, becoming a part of the archive and expanding it;" archontic literature thus supplements an archive by consciously quoting its elements, in a move that holds potential for infinite expansion.[21]

Derecho's application of Derrida to fan work provides crucial insight for those of us studying how fan creations relate to their originary archives. Her description of these texts as continually opening the archive for growth seems apt, and her move to include archontic writings as a vital part of any archive represents a useful leveling of archival texts, as they all are "impelled by the same archontic principle: that tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess."[22] However, given that the fan work in my case study aims not just to augment, but to fill in, what is missing from the archive, I would like to add to Derecho's reading of the Derridean archontic principle by considering two related powers in greater detail.

First, Derecho mentions, but never fully fleshes out, the power of consignation as it acts together with the archontic principle. Consignation, in Derrida's essay, refers not only to the "act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve," but also the action of "*gathering*

together signs;" it endeavors to "coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration."[23] No absolute partitions exist within an archive as consignation.

In addition, the act of consignation entails that an archive happen in a place exterior to memory and anamnesis as lived experience. An archive becomes constituted in the very act of repetition, reproduction, and reimpression that occurs when the original memories of those remembered events begin to break down. Archival technologies are thus auxiliary or supplemental to memory when alive, and yet imperative as the alternative once memory collapses.[24] It is no wonder that archival structures play an important role in what we choose to archive, as well as how we archive it. As Derrida notes, "what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way."[25] The *Doctor Who* archive—indeed, the *Doctor Who* experience as a whole—completely shifts when it becomes publicly lived across multiple media platforms. Online fan recons help expand upon the ideal configuration of what the *Doctor Who* archive could be, while at the same time conditioning what it is at present. The constant, transparent reworking of digital material online therefore helps create the circumstances under which we experience the archive as a new prosthetic memory of *Doctor Who*, one that continually loops back onto itself via the structures of feedback reinforced by online media platforms.

But the relentless repetition practiced by reconstructionists reveals another drive at work within the archive. In their desire to rework and incorporate feedback into online reconstructed scenes, reconstructionists always encounter the opposite of the archontic drive. Known in Freudian terms as the death drive, aggression drive, or the destruction drive, Derrida describes this power as existing *within* the archive and thus always already effacing the work of the archontic drive. "Right on that which permits and conditions archivization," explains Derrida, "we will never find anything other than that which exposes to destruction, and in truth menaces with destruction, introducing, *a priori*, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument."[26] The archive thus always destroys while it creates. It can do this in a number of ways, but it appears as such because

of the archive's prosthetic quality, which compels repetition. In order to access an originary memory that is no longer our own, we must repeatedly consult supplementary, archival technology, which not only conditions how and what we see but shuts down any other possibilities of archival creation.

Derrida says as much later on in a deeply striking passage from *Archive Fever*:

> Because if it is just to remember the future and the injunction to remember, namely the archontic injunction to guard and to gather the archive, it is no less just to remember the others, the other others and the others in oneself, and that the other peoples could say the same thing— in another way.[27]

Key to this is Derrida's contention that the action of the feedback loop allows for growth in certain directions only. The anarchontic drive's silent work demands that we perceive it only in the archival absences, in the directions, interpretations, and premises not taken. These *Doctor Who* online fan reconstructions, as they exist now, represent only a few ways the archive could have augmented itself in the face of its losses. And none of the recons, real or potential, can replace the primary lack of the missing original episodes. Each and every archival object will eventually face its own destruction at the onslaught of the death drive.

The *Doctor Who* online recon community is, admittedly, a small one, and rather unique in purpose. Gilchrist, Climas, and a handful of other fans have devoted their time and energy to producing a number of reconstructed sequences, but the fragmentary, process-oriented approach they take means that they have little chance of reconstructing all 108 lost episodes. This, however, is not necessarily a negative condition of the *Doctor Who* archive. As I said in the introduction to this essay, *Doctor Who* is a show that prides itself on gradually revealing and continually rewriting its own history.[28] Its status as a transmedia archive —one that promotes active and dedicated creation across a variety of media platforms—indicates that the show and its surrounding, referring creations will likely continue to unfold upon themselves in intriguing and complex ways.

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Katherine Newbold is a Ph.D. student in Northwestern University's Screen Cultures program. She is currently working on issues of recuperative or revisited television and memory and temporality in the new media archive.

Notes

1 Kim Newman, *Doctor Who*, BFI TV Classics (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), 1.
2 A television "movie" of sorts did air in 1996. It was initially put forth as a pilot episode "for a series that was not commissioned," but did not engender a reboot of the series. See James Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS: The Worlds of Doctor Who, A Cultural History* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 173-83.
3 Gavin O'Connor, "How the Daleks Invaded Earth," *Wales Online*, July 13, 2008, http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2008/07/13/how-the-daleks-invaded-earth-91466-21331115 (accessed July 13, 2009).
4 John Tulloch, "The Changing Audiences of Science Fiction," in *Science Fiction Audiences: Doctor Who, Star Trek, and Their Fans*, by John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins (New York: Routledge, 1995), 64.
5 O'Connor, "How the Daleks Invaded Earth."
6 John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 3.
7 Chapman, 101.
8 John Scott Lewinski, "Fans Reconstruct *Doctor Who*'s Trashed Past," *Underwire Blog*, *wired.com*, September 29, 2008, http://blog.wired.com/underwire/2008/09/who-recon.html#more (accessed July 13, 2009).
9 Dick Fiddy, *Missing, Believed Wiped: Searching for the Lost Treasures of British Television* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), 9, 26.
10 Ibid, 27.
11 See http://www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/classic/index.shtml, for a list of everything the BBC provides online.
12 Garrett Gilchrist, personal e-mail communication with author, December 10, 2008.
13 Ibid.
14 "WhoSprites in the Press," published articles and interviews about the WhoSprites, http://orangecow.org/who-sprites2/1guide/inthepress.html (accessed July 13, 2009). All quotes from this paragraph and the next are taken from this interview unless otherwise indicated.
15 Lewinski, "Fans Reconstruct *Doctor Who*'s Trashed Past."
16 To view examples of Gilchrist's work, see the following videos uploaded to YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IHj_WlQGIw&feature=related; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyRzUffExIM&feature=related; and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgdMdhyXL_g&feature=related. Others are available on his YouTube playlist "*Doctor Who* – WhoSprites Animation," located at http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=6F99FD203CCECC5D (all accessed July 13, 2009).
17 Rob White, "Treasure Tube," *Film Quarterly* 60.2 (2006), 3.
18 Abigail Derecho, "Archontic Literature: A Definition, A History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006), 66.
19 Ibid, 64.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid, 65-6.
22 Ibid, 64.
23 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.
24 Ibid, 11.
25 Ibid, 18.
26 Ibid, 12.
27 Ibid, 77.
28 Chapman, 101.