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, and has since broadcast, in total, over 750 episodes—an impressive feat for a production that weathered considerable downtime from 1989 to 2005. 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* has since gained a worldwide following. It has reached cult status in many nations: John Tulloch has called *Doctor Who* an "institution" in the eyes of the public and the BBC ranks it as the Golden Child among its few "institution"-level series. *Doctor Who* 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 audio materials for fans to view and enjoy."

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 enhance nuance in details that would be lost in animation. He believes that both integrate with the broader cultural milieu that surrounds it. 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 parport 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. *Doctor Who* aficionados, or "Doctor Who*ers," have grown up with the show, and their understanding of it has formed in their own ways. 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. 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
Jacques Derrida's principle of the archontic drive
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17
"holdings."
YouTube a "mass-curated archive," calling its content
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recon materials that
Doctor Who fans interact with one another and begin to form
a one-video-to-one-page style, its entries could
in question. By these two avenues of information,
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. In 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.
Derecho's application of "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." 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 transcmedia 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.20 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."21
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."22 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 the archontic drive to compel this categorization. As she
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
accrual that all archives possess."23 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 wonderfully flushes
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 synarchy in which all
the elements come to appear in the unity of an ideal
configuration.219 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 reimpresion 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 relevance of 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, Derecho describes this power as
existing within the archive and thus always already
reflecting the work of the archontic drive. "Right on
that which permits and conditions archivization,"
explains Derecho, "we will never find anything other
than that which exposes to destruction, and in
truth menaces with destruction, introducing, a priori, forgetfulness and the archivalistic 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,
only the archontic injunction to guard
and to gather the archive, it is not less just
to remember 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 Derecho's contention that the action
of the feedback loop allows for growth in certain
directions only. The archontic 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 narrative—
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.
DOCTOR WHO

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Notes

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.
5 O’Connor, “How the Daleks Invaded Earth.”
7 Chapman, 101.
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.
15 Lewinski, “Fans Reconstruct Doctor Who’s Trashed Past.”
19 Ibid, 64.
20 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 64.
24 Ibid, 11.
26 Ibid, 12.
27 Ibid, 77.