**#Bowdown to Your New God: Misha Collins and Decentered Authorship in the Digital Age**
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[Pre-proof copy; please do not circulate beyond class]

If you were to search for information about an actor on the search engine of your choice (also

known as Google), you would likely expect to come up with a marketing profile, a sense of the

actor's past record, and current professional acting work. So it might be somewhat surprising if

your search for an actor's name instead turned up reports of a charity organization sponsoring

members to give out flowers to strangers on subways, or of pieces of a jigsaw puzzle of a

rhinosauraus being distributed to individuals for entry into a scavenger hunt … in which clues

involved a "lime jello mold with a piece of the Berlin wall suspended in it." But in with the

expected Imdb.com profile and Zap2it.com interviews, this is exactly the material that one

unearths when searching for Misha Collins. This essay considers the Strange Case of Misha

Collins and his fandom, not only to marvel at its dadaist creativity, but also to explore what

Collins and fandom contribute to our understanding of shifting modes of authorship in

transmedia culture.
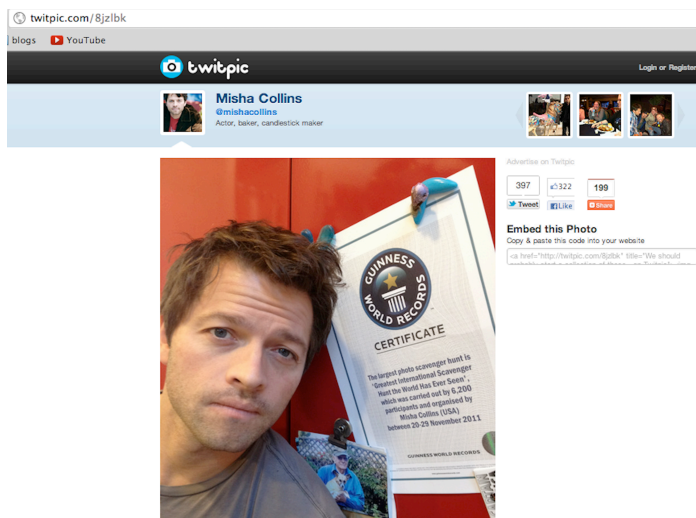
A TwitPic post by actor Misha Collins commemorating his coordination of the world's largest international scavenger hunt.

Expanding Transmedia

Through digital media, we can trace the authorial work of fans who produce fan fiction, video, and art and who create collective transmedia audience cultures. At the same time, digital media render visible the multifaceted authorial work of official producers, including directors, showrunners, writers, and actors. This double visibility constructs a picture of collective authorship that unites the labors and creative work of unofficial and official producers. Some of those in traditionally empowered authorial positions may (have reason to) greet these shifts with ambivalence or even fear. However, the overlap between official and unofficial production offers opportunities to professional authors in less ensconced positions to inhabit new modes of authorship and celebrity that acknowledge and even embrace the interdependence of official producer and audience. This chapter examines the growing relationship between character actor Misha Collins and his fans. Collins rose to fan visibility through his performance of the angel Castiel in the fan-loved CW series *Supernatural* (2005-present). Independently from his affiliation with any corporate conglomerate, Collins has used a range of other digital tools to construct a distinct star text and to mobilize a vocal fan base who help him to shape that star text. Collins has used digital tools to develop a transmedia charity organization, to launch a transmedia production company, and to coordinate a large scale, somewhat anarchic Guinness World Record-breaking international scavenger hunt. Through digital media, including Twitter and TwitPic, Collins emphasizes his commonality with his fans, while using satire to acknowledge the power differentials that inform audience/producer relationships. Misha Collins' and his fandom's use of digital media exemplifies an emerging mode of producer/audience relations, in which media producers mobilize careers precisely by acknowledging their increasingly shared position as authors in transmedia communities.

In order to understand the case of Collins and fandom, we need to consider the media landscape within which the relationship between Collins and fans has evolved, beginning with the very notion of transmedia. Before investigating the particulars of Collins' case, I will examine shifting definitions of transmedia and consider changing perceptions of who has the right to author popular media and in what ways. Academic and popular understandings of what exactly we mean by "transmedia" are in flux. The term has been put to different purposes with different end goals depending on who is using it and in what context. Henry Jenkins defined transmedia storytelling as a "process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience."[1] This original definition, with its focus on singular intent, seemed to place the emphasis on official authorial control, be it in the hands of a larger corporate entity, a small transmedia production group, or an individual transmedia auteur. More recently, Jenkins has offered a more open-ended definition, in which transmedia storytelling comes to describe a "logic for thinking about the flow of content across media."[2] This shift in understanding transmedia opens up a space for the inclusion of audience participation and authorship. If we no longer prioritize transmedia "storytelling" as a multiplatform system controlled by a single author, we can recognize the expanse of audience authorship as non-linear, ever-expanding transmedia production.

Including audience authorship within understandings of transmedia storytelling reveals transmedia storyworlds permeated by "multiplicity" rather than "a unified and coordinated"

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1 Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling 101," *Confessions of an Acafan*, March 22, 2007, http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html.
2 Ibid., "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections," *Confessions of an Acafan*, August 1, 2011, http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html. See also: "Designing Transmedia Worlds." Transmedia Hollywood panel, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2010/04/transmedia_hollywood_videos_no.php

narrative.[3] Today's media content necessarily flows across multiple media platforms, including

platforms where many audience members may expect to excersize authorial control. Online fan

communities function as transmedia entities, where participants take stories in multiple

directions simultaneously, creating multiple character renditions, narrative lines, and incarnations

of a given storyworld. Fan scholarship has emphasized the multivalence of the "fantext," a

flexible multi-authored text capable of housing contradictions.[4] Kristina Busse and Karen

Hellekson describe the fantext as offering a "multitude of interpretations" that are "often

contradictory yet complementary to one another" and that together create "a communal (albeit

contentious and contradictory) interpretation in which a large number of potential meanings,

directions, and outcomes co-reside."[5] Although Busse and Hellekson discuss the flexibility of the

fantext as a property of fandom specifically, this perception of collective authorship extends

beyond fandom. Fans, potential fans, and casually-interested visitors all engage with media texts

with the expectation that they could at least potentially participate as author, and that therefore

any given official media text will necessarily have a multiplicity of viewer-driven transmedia

paths.

Who Has the Right to Write? Authorship Made Visible

The increased visibility of audience authorship via digital technologies has spurred on what

Lawrence Lessig terms a "war" over the legal and ethical nature of audiences authoring with the

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3 Ibid.
4 Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson, "Introduction: Work in Progress," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 7.
5 Ibid.

tools and texts of commercial media.[6] Official media producers and content "owners" often see

any audience appropriation or remixing (what Lessig terms "read/write culture") as threatening

the privileged role of the official author, not to mention profit margins.[7] Copyright law has

imbued this perspective with legal weight, leading Lessig to warn of the unnecessary

criminalization of a whole generation of media users culturally inclined toward actively rewriting

media.[8]

　　Issues of generational power often frame these debates over who has the right to access,

create, and transform media and in what ways. Academic and popular discourses propel

narratives of digitally savvy youth who expect media to function as an interactive tool. Media

scholars such as Mizuko Ito et al. frame this shift in terms of the development of "new forms (of)

media literacy that are keyed to new media and youth-centered social and cultural worlds."[9] In

Heather Urbanski's words, "the Digital Generation seems to be no longer content to remain

passive receivers of messages but instead demands to be part of their creation."[10] This emphasis

on the generational thrust of read/write represents a sea change in perceptions of the significance

of audience authorship. Where in the past fan participatory practices were perceived to be

marginal at best and more often excessive and taboo, the notion of audience turned author has

now come to represent the present and assumed future of media.[11] Audience authorship is now

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6 Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 18.

7 Rebecca Tushnet, "Copyright Law, Fan Practices, and the Rights of the Author," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 60-71.

8 Lessig, *Remix*, 28.

9 Mizuko Ito, Heather Horst, Matteo Bittanti, danah boyd, Becky Herr-Stephenson, Patricia G. Lange, C. J. Pascoe, and Laura Robinson, *Living and Learning with New Media: Summary of Findings from the Digital Youth Project. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Reports on Digital Media and Learning* (Boston: MIT Press, 2009), xx.

10 Heather Urbanski, *Writing and the Digital Generation* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 3.

11 A 2012 *Transformative Works and Cultures*, guest edited by Francesca Coppa, entitled

associated with a whole generation of potentially threatening and/or lucrative youthful practices rather than only with cult fan activity relegated to fan cons and mail-order zines.[12]

Thus, despite the ongoing battles over copyright and intellectual property ownership between media corporations and viewers, those involved in media production are becoming increasingly less inclined to dismiss fan engagement as peripheral or undesired. Rather, the relationship between official producers and audiences turned authors is variable, contested, and volatile. Where some producers, writers, and actors resist the increasingly visible vocalizations of viewers (fans and otherwise), others show a willingness or even eagerness to engage with digitally-active audiences, especially because the (imagined) tech savvy millennial is a highly coveted demographic with supposed access to disposable income. Sharon Marie Ross describes the multiple modes of audience invitation to participation embedded within television texts and online paratexts, ranging from direct calls to vote on *American Idol* to more indirect invitations to explore complex narrative mysteries, as in the case of *Lost*.[13] Likewise, Jennifer Gillan maps out the strategy of "must click TV," in which broadcast networks build digital logics into their programming, inviting viewers to "click through" to digital extensions of their televisual brand.[14] Increasingly, in a wide range of ways, producers have begun to court and feed fan engagement.

Such acknowledgments of digitally-empowered fan audiences are not simple shows of good will nor even recognition of the market importance of a devoted audience, but rather are

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"Fan/Remix Video" considers the interrelations between the specific histories of fan vidding and developments in other threads of remix culture, past and present. Vol. 9 (2012).

12 Indeed, a book industry has sprung up advising older generations about how to handle and capitalize on millennials' digital expectations, with books such as Damian Ryan and Calvin Jones, *Understanding Digital Marketing: Marketing Strategies for Engaging the Digital Generation* (Kogan Page*,* 2009) and Frank Rose's *The Art of Immersion: How the Digital Generation is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the Way We Tell Stories* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).

13 Sharon Marie Ross, *Beyond the Box: Television and the Internet*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

14 Jennifer Gillan, *Television and New Media: Must Click TV* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

tools through which producers attempt to shape and control fan culture, fan investments, and fan authorship. In Derek Johnson's words, "fan audiences are economically important to the industry but they must be *managed* to fullfill that function."[15] Producers attempts to cultivate fan engagement within official proprietary spaces or to offer fan recognition on television, inscribing the notion that broadcast television should be the desired outcome of all digital and fan culture.

As part of these attempts to manage fan culture, official producers increasingly mimic fan aesthetics and traditions, often through transmedia paratexts. A couple of notable examples include Stephen Colbert and Lawrence Lessig's call for viewers to remix their interview, and The SciFi (now SyFy) Network's "VideoMaker Toolkit" in which *Battlestar Galactica* fans were invited to remix pre-approved clips for submission to an network-sponsored contest. Julie Levin Russo argues that such officially-instigated invitations to fan production attempt to "contain excessive fan productivity within proprietary commercial spaces."[16] *Supernatural* likewise sponsored a vid contest in which participants could only use pre-approved clips, and in addition the CW circulated (first online and then on air) a vid-like promo to the traditional Appalachian dirge "O Death," arranged specifically for the promotional spot and performed by a relatively unknown singer/actress. The release of this "vid" prompted many fan-authored vids (indeed, across many fandoms) to the same song, many also framed as "promos."[17] These instances of production function as paratextual dialogue between official and unofficial authors, and as such

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15 Derek Johnson, "Inviting Audiences In: The spatial reorganization of production and consumption in 'TVIII,'" *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 5.1 (2007), 64.
16 Julie Levin Russo, "User-Penetrated Content: Fan Videos in the Age of Convergence." *Cinema Journal* 48.4 (2009), 127.
17 The official promotional video has been uploaded by fans to YouTube and could be viewed at time of writing at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDZ-qfaMZjA alongside fan versions, in *Supernatural* and in many different fandoms, set to the same song, including a *Supernatural* fan-authored version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyA55JSX8cI and a *Game of Thrones* fan-created version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zD-U1Ir8dXg.

serve to blur recognizable lines between official and fan production, even if the cultural and commercial contexts remain distinct.

In addition, just as online culture has made audience authorship more visible to producers, digital networks have rendered the vagaries of corporate production more accessible to viewers. Audiences have always been interested in attaining details of production processes, but with the spread of digital media, fans now use digital tools to capture and share their forays into the world of official production. For example, fans create cameraphone videos of their journeys onto sets, shooting schedules in hand. At the same time, producers also create official digital paratexts focused on the processes of production, in the form of producer blogs, podcasts, and vlogs. These official digital narratives of production offer viewers a sense of access to the perspectives of producers. Fans engage with these pre-meditated depictions of production alongside fan reports of the production process. A mere decade ago, fans continually reiterated narratives of "The Powers That Be" as a monolithic force, a phrase derived (most recently) from the invisible god-like forces pulling the strings in fan-loved storyworlds of Joss Whedon. Now, in part thanks to digital tools and networks, fans less often convey a monolithic perception of "TPTB" but instead construct narratives of complex power plays between different levels of authors—writers, actors, producers, directors, assistant producers—across transmedia landscapes.

As Jonathan Gray (2010) argues, these varying production-oriented paratexts—both officially and unofficially produced— together not only frame but potentially constitute the transmedia/televisual text in themselves. In Gray's words, paratexts (official and unofficial) play a "constitutive role in creating textuality."[18] Furthermore, film and TV authors "become

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18 Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 7.

paratexts in their own right, constructed by the industry, creative personnel, and viewers alike as signifiers of value."[19] Gray discusses the paratexts offered by auteur figures such as directors and showrunners, but, as John Caldwell also discusses in this volume, the accessibility of digital authorship can lead to many contesting authorial claims, which circulate in at times contradictory paratexts. In this way, the same sense of an elastic fantext described by Busse and Hellekson can be extended to notions of the larger media textuality that encompasses fantext *together with* multivalent officially-authored paratexts.

Thus, on the broadest level, official production has not only been rendered more visibly multifaceted and less monolithic; it has also been situated within the larger frameworks of read/write culture. In many cases, corporate producers use close to the same (though crucially not quite the same) digital tools that audience members use. Many audience members use professional level editing software such as Final Cut Pro or Adobe Premiere, or the somewhat more limited but still powerful tools of Final Cut Express or iMovie, all editing tools capable of creating polished, professional-feeling pieces. Likewise, corporate producers and amateur fan culture both deploy the interfaces of Youtube.com and Twitter.com, but official producers may have "verified" Twitter accounts and may sponsor videos on YouTube for increased visibility. These same-but-not tools align official and unofficial production, muddying the divide between the two, and yet at the same time elucidating that very divide. And even moreso, when an officially-affiliated author such as Misha Collins positions himself as joint-creator, participant, and inhabitant of millennial read/write culture, the result is a simultaneous perception of a flattening of the transmedia playing field—a seeming disollution of the power differentials between official and unofficial authorship—and a rendering visible of those very differentials.

19 Ibid., 136.

The Collectively-Authored Transmedia Star

Misha Collins first appeared on *Supernatural* in the fall of 2008, in the premiere episode of the series' fourth season. The first three seasons of *Supernatural* had focused on the story of two brothers, Sam and Dean, who fight the forces of evil in small towns and backstreets, driving across the U.S. in their vintage Chevy Impala. The series gained critical acclaim and a devoted fan base with its synthesis of horror, noir, and melodrama. The fourth season (and Collins' entrance into the series) marked a conceptual transition, as the series began to incorporate long arc storylines featuring angels who looked, talked, and acted like film noir heavies and private eyes. Collins played the first of these angels to appear on screen, revealed at the end of the fourth season premiere in a rumpled Bogart-esque trench coat, telling main character Dean in a gruff voice that he "deserved to be saved."

Collins' performance of the angel Castiel as a morally-ambigious, inhuman innocent met with fairly immediate fan enthusiasm. Given that *Supernatural* fandom is infamous for disliking any characters who take away screentime from the two main leads, Sam and Dean, Collins'/Castiel's positive reception was significant. Before *Supernatural,* Collins was not a well-known character actor among fans; some might have recognized him from small roles in the series *24* (2001-2010) and *Nip/Tuck* (2003-2010), but he did not have a recognizable or established star text. *Supernatural* thrust him into the orbit of an active fandom with ready processes for determining and building on star texts, and for weaving connections between characters and actors in transmedia fan authorship. As one of the most visible of media fandoms in 2008, *Supernatural* had active fan communities dedicated to characters and actors, and often

to both characters and actors simultaneously, on social networking such as Livejournal.com and Dreamwidth.com.[20]

The character of Castiel, as performed by Collins, activated media tropes that had long histories of fan resonance. Misha Collins' performance of Castiel recalls the (female) fan-beloved figure of Spock, who Francesca Coppa writes represents "desiring female subjectivity" and simultaneously "a ghost, the shadow of a missing woman" (most explicitly for Spock because, as Coppa argues, his character was originally written as a female love interest for Captain Kirk).[21] Likewise fans engage with Castiel as an alien figure who channels (female) viewer desire and yet is the simultaneous object of (audience) desire. Fan authorship surrounding Castiel and Collins takes the form of blog posts, discussions, photo posts, art, memes, fan fiction, and fan vids; these fan authored texts often revel in the power play of a mostly female online audience simultaneously identifying with and indulging in the erotic spectacle of Collins' performance.

Thus, initial reception of Collins as star was deeply inflected by his character depiction in *Supernatural*, and by already existing fan patterns of reception and authorship that merged character and star, with fan reviews including comments such as these: "I like this angel dude – and I'm an atheist. As a story arc and a character, he works, he really does. I hope he keeps that meat suit that he borrowed, Misha Collins did an excellent job."[22] Worthy of emphasis here: this review includes mention of Collins' name rather than just his character's name, with an embedded link to Collins' Internet Movie Database listing that reveals his history as an actor. In

20 Indeed, a whole issue of Transformative Works and Culture has been devoted to *Supernatural* and its fandom. *Transformative Works and Cultures* 4 (2010). http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/issue/view/5
21 Francesca Coppa, "Women, *Star Trek,* and the Early Development of Fannish Vidding," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 1 (2008). http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/44.
22 Blogspot.com, Soupdragon, September 20, 2008.

addition, this review introduces a playful note of fan desire, a tongue-in-cheek framing of fan

erotic contemplation that would come to characterize much of Castiel/Collins' online fandom.

For another example, we can look to the individual and collective fan-authored transmedia

spaces at Tumblr.com. One post (of many like examples) entitled "why we love castiel" layers

text over image, resulting in a celebration of contradictory representations such as "he's a billion

year old virgin," "he's amused by his pretty body parts," "he'll watch over you while you sleep,"

"he only eats during famine so you don't need to feed him every day," and "he's the perfect

manslave, just ask Dean," to name just a few.[23] Text and image simultaneously pose Castiel as

powerful and disempowered, object of desire and desirer.

These readings (or writings) of Castiel's character intersected with and in turn shaped

Collins' developing star text. Analyses of stardom within film and media studies understand the

star image, or "star text," to be a shifting composite of discourse and representations surrounding

the star.[24] Star texts layer together popular representation of actors and of the characters they

play into a cultural text, mobilized in part by media industry and in part by audience

construction. In this volume, Lindsay Hogan describes stars as "at once texts, commodities, and

people, functioning both as the author and the authored."[25] Misha Collins' star text, with its

emphasis on transgressive power play and marginal masculinity, emerges out of a combination

of industrial paratextual discourse, writing and performance, casting choice, and fan

23 The cited post is one of many with this ethos posted at Tumblr.com (http://www.tumblr.com). Tumblr.com is an online interface where even posts that have public access may have private or semiprivate, closed-community sensibilities, and thus I have chosen not to provide a direct link to this post. For a discussion of the ethical questions involved in citing fan work, see Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, "Identity, Ethics, and Fan Privacy," in *Fan Culture: Theory and Practice*, ed. Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, forthcoming).
24 Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004); Richard Dyer, "A Star is Born and the Construction of Authenticity," in *Stardom: Industry of Desire,* ed. Christine Gledhill (New York: Routledge, 1991), 132-140.
25 Hogan in this volume.

interpretation and authorship. Prior to his role on *Supernatural*, Collins' casting history already

hinted at a somewhat non-traditional male star figure, a merger of desirer and object of desire: in

addition to playing the son of a villain on *24*, he had played a serial killer in the film *Karla*

(2006). For his guest role on *Nip/Tuck*, he played a yoga instructor who was both too well

endowed and too flexible and as a result couldn't stop pleasuring himself. Beyond these

somewhat subversive roles, Collins' star text is further unconventional in that as a college

student he interned at the White House and indeed, represents himself in interviews as someone

who had only secondarily come to acting as a career.[26] He is also a published poet, with work

appearing in the *Columbia Poetry Review*. Fans have sewn together these available elements of

Collins' personal and creative history with their interpretation of Collins' *Supernatural* character

to celebrate what they see to be a combined star text sufficiently marginal to serve as home

ground for explicit articulation of collective female desire and power.

Misha Collins thus entered and was welcomed into a transmedia playing field where

audiences expect to be authors and where female desire and queer desire is not only embraced

but aggressively demonstrated, often through fan authorship.[27] Rather than fight these elements,

Collins has engaged with and embraced them, integrating them further into his developing star

text through the interface of Twitter.com. He has used Twitter to play to and with fannish

discourses of desire and power, and in so doing, to build a sense of commonality with fans.

@mishacollins: Negotiating Power, Play, and Affect Online

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26 An example of the paratextual biographic information circulating about Collins, emphasizing his non-traditional path to stardom: http://www.buddytv.com/info/misha-collins-info.aspx
27 Alexis Lothian, Kristina Busse, and Robin Anne Reid, "Yearning Void and Infinite Potential: Online Slash Fandom as Queer Female Space," *English Language Notes* 45.2 (Fall/Winter 2007), 103-11.

Elizabeth Ellcessor argues that the prevalence of social media and social networking interfaces must necessarily impact the way we understand the construction of stardom and star texts.[28] In Ellcessor's words, "in the age of social networking […] the star text is an *agent* of convergence that functions through *connection*."[29] Ellcessor defines the "star text of connection" as being "formed through the creation of social media connections to other people, projects, and audiences."[30] In their study of the most-followed Twitter celebrities, Alice Marwick and danah boyd observe that celebrities use Twitter to create a sense of affiliation and intimacy with fans through tweets to other celebrities, friends and, in some cases, fans.[31] Along these lines, through Twitter, Collins' has built connections with fans by fostering a sense of affiliation and intimacy. In turn, he has drawn on those connections as he and fans move beyond Twitter to a web of digital interfaces and tools, all of which contribute to Collins' continually unfolding star text (of connection).

Misha Collins' evolving relationship with his fandom is thus a fully transmedia affair, but Twitter plays a crucial role in said affair. The affordances of the Twitter interface contribute to the perception of shared ground between Collins and his fandom. The Twitterverse links media professionals with their audiences, rendering them all authors of their own Twitter feeds and branded selves. Twitter brings together media authors with their viewers, so that artists such as Collins who have greater (if still limited) access to broadcast tools like television share a digital platform with viewers for whom communicating via television is not an option. On Twitter, both

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28 Elizabeth Ellcessor, "Tweeting @feliciaday: Online Social Media, Convergence and the Subcultural Stardom of Felicia Day," *Cinema Journal* 51.2 (2012), 46-66.
29 Ibid., 48.
30 Ibid., 47.
31 dana boyd and Alice Marwick, "To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter," *Convergence: The Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies* 17.2 (2011), 139-58. See also Alice Marwick, "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience." *New Media and Society* 13.1 (2011), 1-20.

share the same basic digital framework and limitations; celebrity and non-celebrity tweets appear side by side, and all are alike limited to one hundred and forty characters, no matter how famous the author. While some Twitter accounts may be labeled as "verified," verified and unverified accounts join each other in a reader's Twitter list. Thus, on Twitter, Collins and his fans all seemingly work together with the same authorship tools, affordances, and limitations.

Collins' use of Twitter asserts connection beyond shared interface; indeed, somewhat contradictarily, Collins' very first tweets convey a sense of commonality with at least a portion of his fans by expressing ambivalence toward Twitter as interface and cultural practice. Collins' opening tweets from May 2009 proclaim:

mishacollins: i am doing a tutorial on Twitter[32]

mishacollins: I am trying to figure out what the f*** Twitter is for[33]

mishacollins: okay. So, now i've officially signed up for a high-tech time-wasting device. Let the tweeting begin....... Now what?[34]

In these early tweets, Collins presented himself as an ambivalent, amateur Twitter user. His ambivalence reflected the voiced perspective of many of his fans whose preferred interface at the time was not Twitter but rather the fan-favored Livejournal. By expressing his wariness of Twitter, Collins aligned himself with the fans who had followed him to Twitter. However, his

32 Misha Collins, Twitter, May 13, 2009,
https://twitter.com/#!/mishacollins/statuses/1781444376.
33 Misha Collins, Twitter, May 13, 2009,
https://oauth.twitter.com/#!/mishacollins/status/1781491998.
34 Misha Collins, Twitter, May 13, 2009, https://twitter.com/#!/mishacollins/status/1781776590.

following tweets (all posted within his first day of Twitter use) destabilized any sense of his

being just another new Twitter user; instead Collins called out the Twitter celebrity dynamic, in

which Twitter celebrities rapidly accumulate large amounts of followers.

> mishacollins: Hi everyone. This whole interweb thing is really something. 12 hrs and
> already 412 followers. Doesn't that word have a negative connotation?[35]

> mishacollins: Anyway, i'll think of you as friends not followers. But then again, maybe
> minions is a better term... I'll percolate.[36]

> mishacollins: I like that term: twelebrity. Let the ignoring begin. And, yes I did have
> Twitter email alerts set and it crashed my account. I'm learning.[37]

These tweets still perform a wariness about Twitter, but they also begin to establish a sense of

digital play bound up in a performance of power, devotion, and desire, in which Collins

(satirically) casts himself as a power figure in the social network of Twitter.

Indeed, satire plays a key role in Collins' establishing of intimacy with fans. Satire

suffuses Collins' performance of self and his interactions with others on Twitter. For the most

part, Collins does not tweet intimate or mundane details of his life, nor use Twitter as an overt

advertising tool for his performance on another media platform (both of which would be more

expected modes of celebrity Twitter use), but rather deploys Twitter to perform a satiric

narrative of self. Collins' satiric performances of self often echo fan preoccupations with his

35 Misha Collins, Twitter, May 13, 2009, https://twitter.com/#!/mishacollins/status/1789654441.
36 Misha Collins, Twitter, May 13, 2009, https://twitter.com/#!/mishacollins/status/1789720465.
37 Misha Collins, Twitter, May 13, 2009, https://twitter.com/#!/mishacollins/status/1789920824.

character, casting him in empowered and disempowered positions simultaneously. For example, in an early narrative, he shared adventures of his capture and torture by the Queen of England, who (according to Collins' Twitter) threatened his execution and forced him at to drink tea with no biscuits. He also uses Twitter to brag about his fraught (and, one assumes, fully fictional) friendships with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Michelle Obama. These satiric narratives simultaneously position Collins as captive and as connected to networks of power, echoing fan investment in his character and also in his marginal status as renegade character actor.

Collins' play with satire and affect calls to mind the more visible, mainstream interactions between Comedy Central's Stephen Colbert and his Colbert Nation, which Lisa Colletta describes as exemplifying "the postmodern irony of cynical knowingness and self-referentiality."[38] We can understand Collins' playful performance of self on Twitter as part of a larger growth of satire on television and beyond, most visibly exemplified by Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart. Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey Jones, and Ethan Thompson describe the current flourishing of satire in a transmedia context, whereby satire's "viral quality and cult appeal" finds rapid transit via the Internet, "the technological apparatus that now allows such satire to travel far beyond the television set almost instantaneously."[39] In contemporary transmedia culture, satire has emerged as a potentially necessary route to any sense of authentic insight.

Authenticity is also a central preoccupation within star text negotiations, as industry and audience dwell on the relationship between the always inaccessible "real" individual behind the star text. Ellcessor argues that digital media offers stars "unique opportunities" to display

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38 Lisa Colleta, "Political Satire and Postmodern Irony in the Age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42.5 (2009), 856.
39 Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones, and Ethan Thompson , "The State of Satire, the Satire of State," in *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era*, ed. Gray, Jones, and Thompson (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 4.

"authenticity" and thus to control their public image.[40] One could argue that Collins establishes a sense of star text authenticity precisely through his use of satire and play with articulations of power.

So, while Collins does create a sense of affiliation and authenticity, he does so through satire and performative play, and specifically a form of play that calls attention to power differentials between audience and author. Collins uses his access to Twitter to address and heighten his role as public leader and (sexually) desired figure at the center of a predominantly female fan base. In so doing, Collins simultaneously pokes fun at and calls out structures of audience/celebrity relations, so that like Colbert, he offers what Gray, Jones, and Thompson describe as satire's potential for "defamiliarization, allowing us to see the social and scientific order anew."[41]

However, where Colbert and fans primarily perform and thus defamiliarize an excessive libertarian masculinity, Misha Collins and his fans intertwine transgressive and stereotypical gender performances. Though Collins performs the role of masculine "overlord," the overemphasis on this power role highlights its construction. At the same time, he offers counterpoint with tweets that suggest gender slippage and gender play. He has tweeted satirically about failing to teach his son proper masculine behaviors, about being mistaken for a mother on mother's day, and about dressing in drag.[42] These additional performances of non-heteronormative masculinity render his performance of dominant power strange and indicative of its opposite—not of a lack of power, but of a non-ideologically-dominant power, through which Collins is aligned *with* female fans in female/queer communities of power.

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40 Ellcessor, "Tweeting," 52.
41 Gray, Jones, and Thompson, "State of Satire," 9.
42 For example, see Misha Collins, Twitter, May 8, 2011,
https://twitter.com/#!/mishacollins/statuses/67429772803846144.

This alignment does not end with Collins' self-representation on Twitter, but rather has evolved in conversation with fans. Fans have eagerly taken up the mantle of "minion," weaving it into their own self-representation, performance, and authorship. Both Collins and his fans have cultivated a satiric deployment of military discourse and authoritarian aesthetics to create a shared star/fan ethos. Fans have framed Collins as leader of a movement of affect, transgression, and excess, all communicated through the language of satire. Gender and sexuality are key to the discourses of military (dis)order and affective domination that run through both Collins' self representation and fan response, extending beyond Twitter into a dense web of digital interfaces including Livejournal, Youtube, Tumblr, Facebook, and Flickr.

The YouTube video "Minion Recruitment Advert" by @Manic_Minion presents a particulary telling example of fan co-authorship around Collins' constructed narrative/performance of self.[43] Circulated on Twitter and Livejournal and hosted on YouTube, this video plays with the language of propagandistic and instructional film to represent Collins and fans as knowing performers of nationalistic fannish devotion. Intercutting various images from a wide array of sources and re-contextualizing them in instructional film format, the video recreates the stories Collins has performed in his Twitter persona, offering them as playful collective narratives. The video envisions the call to minionhood as the opportunity to participate in a communal, renegade military organization. It appropriates specific historical images of women engaged in military and industrial labor, but uses them to illustrate a satiric set of minion training practices mined from Collins' purposefully absurdist tweets, such as "advanced abacus skills to work out how many you are outnumbered by," "the fine art of emergency pony dissection," and "sleep deprivation." The skills listed also include more seemingly realistic

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43 @Magic_Minion, "Misha Collins: Minion Recruitment Advert,"
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pYmhKAzlwE.

threats of online collectivity, including becoming "an expert in crashing websites and cyberterrorism."

This parodic nationalistic image bookends the Minion Recruitment Advert.

In works such as this recruitment video, fans co-author and write themselves into Collins' star text, depicting Collins as a renegade artist who models an alternate mode of masculine authorship through satire. In so doing, the mostly female fans perform and thus author their own fan personae as transgressive, aggressive, and overtly sexual, yet intellectual, digitally skilled, and self-aware. This fannish self-depiction invokes and then implodes stereotypes of excessively emotive, non-verbal female fandom, gendered stereotypes that run deep both within fandom and in popular culture at large.[44]

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44 Kristina Busse, "Geek Hierarchies, Boundary Policing, and the Good Fan/Bad Fan Dichotomy," *Antenna: Responses to Media and Culture*, August 13, 2010, http://blog.commarts.wisc.edu/2010/08/13/geek-hierarchies-boundary-policing-and-the-good-fanbad-fan-dichotomy/.

Fans depict Collins as a talented artist creating despite (or at least in tension with) the official creative frame of *Supernatural* and "The Powers That Be." In this picture, Collins becomes representative of fans-as-transgressive-author, working to leave his imprint on *Supernatural* from within while he authors with more freedom via Twitter. Collins' position as official creator and celebrity certainly propels his popularity on Twitter, but his persona and fan favor are equally shaped by his perceived marginality and transgressiveness. In the end, both fans and Collins perform roles that highlight their construction and gesture to their shared positions as non-dominant authors working to transform the structures of media culture.

Transmedia Power Struggles

Do these new modes of authorship formed out of audience/producer interaction serve to add value to the official media product or do they threaten its very project? What happens when these digitally-situated examples of producer-fan co-creation becomes so visible that they start to inform broadcast media? A series like *Supernatural* fosters its status as a "cult" show by cultivating an ongoing relationship with fans through conventions and fan-directed publicity campaigns; because of the series' investment in its fans, developments in online fan communities cannot be ignored, and find their way into the text of the series itself. In the fourth and fifth seasons, *Supernatural* directly acknowledged its online fandom, initially by representing online fan forums and then by depicting Becky the slash fan-fiction writing fan girl, and then by depicting a *Supernatural* fan convention. These televisual representations of *Supernatural* fandom seem to offer a combination of mockery and love, and, as Lisa Schmidt describes, have led to a deep ambivalence among fans about being represented in a way they perceived to be

"mock(ing) and "expos(ing)."[45] In a sixth season episode, *Supernatural* directed its double-edged fan service specifically at Misha Collins and his fandom. The highly self-reflexive episode throws the heroes into an alternative universe in which *Supernatural* is a television series rather than their lived reality.[46] In the episode, Misha Collins plays a fictionalized version of himself, tweeting to his fans from the show's set. Where in the past *Supernatural*'s self-reflexivity directed its loving barbs at fans, now Collins also came on the receiving end of this ambivalent acknowledgment.

In depicting Collins as Twitter celebrity, *Supernatural* significantly alters the self-representation Collins has created on Twitter. For one, the show replaces the word minions, thus sidestepping Collins' and fans' satiric play with power and gender. Instead of tweeting to his "minions," fictional-Collins tweets to his "mishamigos," as follows:

mishacollins: IMHO j&j had a late one last night. Rotflmfao!

mishacollins: Ola mishamigos! j2 got me good. Really starting to feel like one of the guys.

This shift from fan-favored term "minions" to fictional/imagined fannish term "mishamigos" removes the language of playful (erotic) domination so central to Collins' fandom, and in its place constructs a picture of Collins as deluded narcissist. Indeed, one could argue that the

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45 Lisa Schmidt, "Monstrous Melodrama: Expanding the Scope of Melodramatic Identification to Interpret Negative Fan Responses to *Supernatural*," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 4 (2010).

46 The episode, entitled "The French Mistake" (the fifteenth episode of the sixth season) ,aired Feb 25th, 2011, after Collins was already firmly established on Twitter, with over 300,000 followers.

"mishamigos" term depicts Collins as not knowing his place, misguidedly representing himself as ethnically-othered. In addition, fictional-Collins' tweets suggests his desire to be included in the inner circle of the two actors who play the series' main characters, Sam and Dean (Jensen Ackles and Jared Padelecki). Where Collins has developed his internet fame through satiric excess and self-reflexive performance, the "canon" version of Collins tweets with eager earnestness, and he tweets precisely about wishing to lose his marginal/transgressive status to become "one of the guys."

And yet the whole episode is satire, indeed, moreso than usual for *Supernatural*, and perhaps more in line with the type of satire Collins and fans perform regularly through Twitter. Thus, we could perhaps read the episode as co-opting Collins and fandom's satiric worldbuilding, removing it from the transmedia spaces where fans and Collins have authorial control. The episode uses satire to punish Collins, depicting him as a pampered actor who wears a sweater jacket and bursts into uncontrollable tears when pleading for his life. In the world of *Supernatural,* machismo and the strategic release of male suffering (in the fan-favored form of "one perfect tear") are core values; in this context, fictional Collins' excessive emotion is taboo indeed. Likewise, his fictional tweets simultaneously suggest that Collins is too close in kind to fans, using fan terms like J2 and mistaking a parasocial relationship with "J2" (*Supernatural* stars Jensen Ackles and Jared Padlecki) for real intimacy. All of these representations seem to police and reprimand Collins' for stepping beyond the appropriate place of the character actor and/or the appropriate models of masculinity and masculine authorship. And finally, as if these more subtle reprimands are not enough, the episode firmly punishes Collins for his various transgressions by killing Collins (rather violently) within the alternate universe plot.

Supernatural's representation of Collins appears to have contradictory purpose and effect; it overtly represents Collins' authorship, making his role as Twitter author visible on television, and by extension also gesturing to his Twitter-authoring fandom. (His Twitter follower count shot up remarkably during the night of the episode's airing.) However, it also denigrates Collins' masculinity and violently punishes him for his transgressions, whether those be transgressions of broadcasting through means other than television, or transgressions of machismo, though really those two representations are one and the same; the representation of Collins appears marked alike by his omnipresent smart phone and sweater jacket, both indicators of his lack of *Supernatural*-valorized masculinity. The producers (and perhaps even Collins himself, who reportedly requested that the script make him out to be a rude and selfish actor) might argue that this representation is loving in its mockery, and that Collins was among many characters-modeled-on-actors or producers parodied in the episode. Indeed, Collins was not the only one to meet a spectacular demise: along with various other production crew, the episode did away with Eric Kripke, the series' past showrunner who left the show after the fifth season. So, from one perspective, the episode kills both the absent father and the transgressive son, the original author who had abandoned his story and the actor turned renegade transmedia author. And if it is Collins' very marginality and transgression with which fans identify, then this mocking representation and violence against fictional-Collins disciplines fans as well as Collins himself. Derek Johnson writes that television producers hold "privileged means of answering challenges to their producerly […] authority" and can "mobilize" television to critique or police "unruly" fans.[47] In the case of Collins, the *Supernatural* producers appear to have used their

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47 Derek Johnson, "Fan-tagonism: Factions, Institutions, and Constitutive Hegemonies of Fandom," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 294-5.

privilege to punish one of their own, and in the same move to punish unruly would-be fan authors who support him.

The end of the sixth season surprised many fans by making Collins' character Castiel temporarily more central to the narrative than his limited airtime during the season would have suggested, revealing in closing episodes that Castiel was working with the devil, and transforming him in the closing moments of the season from a renegade angel to a self-proclaimed god. Fans of Collins read the shift in Castiel's character as an integration of Collins' star text into the character of Castiel. While Collins' star text was built upon the character of Castiel's alienness, it has grown to encompass a sense of his elasticity as an actor-author, a penchant for over-the-top storylines, and narratives of domination and extreme self importance. Fans recognized these elements of Collins' persona on screen for the first time in the season six finale; indeed, it was these aspects of his actor-author persona that the earlier self-reflexive episode had seemingly quite purposefully sidestepped. But the pleasure in recognition came also with fear that this representation could be a step in the eventual removal of Collins from *Supernatural*, the final rejection of the new mode of authorship and de-centered authorial community Collins represents. The question among fans seemed to be thus: could this new "god" of de-centered authorship really be represented on television, or was Collins/Castiel being raised to god-like status only to be put to death for his hubris? Fears of further and more permanent punishment for Collins and fans were further flamed (and, for a period of time, seemingly fulfilled) in season seven, in which Castiel was killed in the opening episodes and several months passed before showrunner Sera Gamble revelealed that Collins would eventually return to the show (followed by Collins' announcement on Twitter: "It's true. I'm going to be back on the

reality show about the two brothers who drive around testing out seedy motels. Any questions?")[48]

While it is tempting to read the temporary but lengthy removal of Collins from the series as further disciplining the mode of authorial and audience power Collins represents, an equally viable reading would be to understand the series' reluctance to fully commit to Collins (at least in public press) as a move to rile up and aggressively court Collins' dedicated fanbase, thus acknowledging the power of the new author/fan relationship Collins has managed to harness. In either case (or most likely, both), Collins emerges like his character as a new self-proclaimed god potentially threatening the entrenched power structure from within its ranks.

Decentering Transmedia Authorship

Collins' engagement with fans exemplifies shifts not only in authorial modes but in the infrastructures that will shape media production and participation in the future. While Collins' position on *Supernatural* remains somewhere between marginal and non-existent, his Twitter followers (currently passing 435,000) proactively celebrate his importance to their appreciation of the series. Fans simultaneously celebrate Collins' accessibility and willingness to interact with them on Twitter, and have made clear their willingness to follow Collins from platform to platform, franchise to franchise, and even ideological stance to ideological stance. Thus, for Collins' growing star text and fandom, the interface of Twitter functions as the core of a much larger transmedia playing field. Via Twitter, Collins dubbed his fans "minions," but fans have embraced and propagated this label on a network comprised of multiple online interfaces including Twitter, Livejournal, and YouTube, playfully co-authoring a cross-interface narrative

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48 Misha Collins, Twitter, Dec 5, 2011,
https://twitter.com/#!/mishacollins/statuses/143910127601328128

of fannish world domination. Together, Collins and his fans spread a serial narrative of celebrity/fan co-creation.

Having followed Collins to Twitter, fans then used Twitter as a launching pad to create and run a non-profit charity organization, therandomact.org. Random Acts—a non profit organization run together by Collins and fans on the blogging interface Wordpress.com-- (http://www.therandomact.org/wordpress/) organizes (among many projects) recurring trips to Haiti to build housing for orphans and to address other community needs. Collins and fans do not leave the satiric power play behind as they move into the roles of coworkers in the non-profit charity domain, although certainly there is a sense of communion as Collins has now taken two trips with fans to Haiti. The following tweets illustrate this intertwining of playful satire and shared social ethics:

> mishacollins: Ancestors, minions and trainees: Change your Twitter time zone and location to "Tehran." It'll make it look like we care about others.[49]

> mishacollins: I went to Haiti with these bad-ass mofos. Each was a killer; green berets, MMA fighters, stay-at-home moms...http://lockerz.com/s/115162708[50]

This utopian story of celebrity-endorsed charity work may seem to retread a familiar narrative of star personae backing charity causes, with only a veneer of satire, but I would argue it is significant in both the collective action involved and in the way that it uses satire to assert a shared ethics within transmedia communities composed of audience and author (and audience as

49 Misha Collins, Twitter, June 18, 2009, https://twitter.com/#!/mishacollins/status/2229238845.
50 Misha Collins, Twitter, June 28, 2009, https://twitter.com/#!/mishacollins/statuses/85889823163949056.

author). In this way, Collins and fandom's work with Random Acts shares common ground with the projects of the Harry Potter Alliance, a fan-instigated non profit that channels Harry Potter fan investment into digital and real world social action.[51]

This same call for collective transmedia ethics fueled Collins' use of Kickstarter.com to raise money for his co-produced web series entitled *Divine.* Kickstarter is a crowdsourcing fundraising interface self-described as "a new form of commerce and patronage."[52] Kickstarter crowdsources funding through small donations, much like the web-savvy funding strategies employed by the Obama campaign in the 2008 election. Kickstarter provides protection to both creators and funders by mandating that creators propose budgets, and ensuring that no money changes hand until the budgeted goal has been met. Kickstarter represents itself as innovative because of the crowdsourcing nature of its funding method and also because of its efforts to restore and reshape of notions of authorship. Kickstarter employs the language of creative ownership ("Project creators keep 100% ownership and control over their work"[53]) and yet at the same time depicts creative authorship as something everyone can be involved in at all levels: "Each and every project is the independent creation of someone like you. Projects are big and small, serious and whimsical, traditional and experimental. They're inspiring, entertaining and unbelievably diverse."[54]

Thus, Kickstarter's business model relies on a (re)definition of authorship as simultaneously individual and collective; this reframing of authorship in turn fed into the larger project of the *Divine* web series, which began posting episodes in 2011. At the Kickstarter site, creators Collins and the other members of Maple Blood Productions (including *Divine*

51 See Henry Jenkins, "'Cultural Acupuncture': Fan Activism and the Harry Potter Alliance," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 10 (June, 2012), forthcoming.
52 http://www.kickstarter.com/start.
53 http://www.kickstarter.com/help/faq/kickstarter%20basics.
54 http://www.kickstarter.com/help/school/defining_your_project.

showrunner Ivan Hayden) described their intent to use *Divine* to transform traditional models of broadcast television production:

> We all know that the Internet will be the next evolution in storytelling, it's just that the guys in the old towers of power don't know how to make it work for them. […] Since they're not trying to find solutions it's up to the rest of us to find that new business model so we can start producing the content we all want to enjoy.
>
> And that's where you come in. […] If our fundraising is a success, we can hold up the result and say the fans paid for one whole episode, or two, or all four, or even a whole season's worth. Then when we pitch our business model, the "*old money men*" will have to listen. No one could say we don't know how to reach the new generation of enthusiasts or that our business model isn't backed by proof. If we can do that, then maybe the door will finally be open for a new, easier way for creators to make ongoing, online entertainment. Wouldn't that be something amazing to be a part of?[55]

While again this language of collective revolution may sound somewhat utopic, what I want to emphasize here is Collins and team's use of Kickstarter to position themselves as authors poised to bridge the gap between the "new generation of enthusiasts" and the traditional, hierarchal structures of media production. In a period of less than three years, Collins has come a long way from his initial self-representation as an ambivalent Twitter user who needed a tutorial to use Twitter. Twitter has served not only as the platform for his fan base and performative star persona, but also as a route to a transmedia production framework designed strategically to

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55 Online at http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1194035957/divine-the-series.

change the media landscape. To lend authenticity to this narrative, Collins and team draw on his perceived commonality with his fans, a position built on Twitter and beyond. Now, targeted toward the goal of shared investment in new modes of transmedia authorship, both Collins and company and fans are held in opposition to "old money men," a version of The Powers That Be striking in its overt gendered and generational tone. From this angle, fans become producers not (only) by making fanvids or writing fan fiction but by funding the projects of creative producers not yet in control of the commercial broadcast avenues of production, creative producers who emerge from and will continue to be part of their shared digital authorship networks.

However, there's a catch here. While Collins and team succeeded in raising money for *Divine*, support for the series did not spread independently in fandom, and fan investment dwindled upon its release. While causality is difficult to determine, I'd suggest that *Divine* may have failed to gain fan momentum because it imagined specific structures for audience transmedia engagement, developing predetermined spaces for particular modes of fan engagement, including producer-created fan boards and calls for monetary support. Thus *Divine* may have failed in part because it did not facilitate enough of a sense of fan collective ownership through authorship and through choice of the tools of authorship.

In contrast, fans more enthusiastically claimed alleigance to Collins' most recent (at the time of writing) transmedia enterprise: the scavenger hunt GISHWHES, held in November 2011, in which Collins, together with partner/advisor Jean Louis Alexander, coordinated a large scale scavenger hunt with tasks that often referenced the tropes and in-jokes of *Supernatural* and Collins fandoms. GISHWHES (an acronym for "The Greatest International Scavenger Hunt the World Has Ever Seen) lacked the articulated strategy of a transmedia industrial shift seemingly present in *Divine*, and yet I would argue it was the true co-authored transmedia experience.

GISHWHES unfolded through an enactment of the power and control of coordinating authors Collins and Alexander, who sporadically released pertinent information and demanded fan action on strict timetables within a rubric of extensive rules. For example, one rule declared no complaining: "5. Complaining: Any whining, whimpering, yelling, screaming, crying, tantrum-throwing, challenging or contesting the judges or contest results will result in immediate disqualification and revocation of your GISHWHES citizenship. Seduction, however, is allowed under certain circumstances." Thus, GISHWHES continues the play with power, erotics, and emotional excess present in Collins fandom. And, at the same time, the open framework of GISHWHES allows for the sense of collective, shared authorship important to fandom more generally and to Collins' relationship with his fans specifically. Participants in the 2011 GISHWHES hunt chose their own paths to group organization, forming networks on a range of digital interfaces including Twitter, Livejournal, Facebook, Tumblr, GoogleDocs, and email to coordinate their entries into the competition. The various pieces of art created for GISHWHES now populate Youtube and Flickr, as, for example, the many submissions to GISHWHES item #193 of stop motion films featuring Cabbage Patch dolls doing strip teases, or "a painting/drawing of Misha and the Queen of England as Tarzan and Jane posing in a red chair" (referencing Collins' Twitter origins).[56]

Collins frames the collective authorship of GISHWHES not as a strategic intervention in the media industry's mode of production, but as a shared ethos of anarchic, transgressive creativity:

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56 While the rules and item list for the 2011 GISHWHES hunt are no longer posted at the official website, they have been reproduced in parts throughout Tumblr.com and Livejournal.com.

The term *Gishwheshean* refers to any willing—and accepted—member of any

GISHWHES movement that deplores artistic normalcy, social trivialities and small talk,

is tired of the inherently flawed structure of our political and economic systems and

chooses to initiate change through collective artistic (and un-artistic) creation and

destruction. That being said, they create art for no sake or purpose whatsoever; otherwise,

it would not be Gishwheshean art.

Examples of a Gishwheshean's natural habitat include art galleries, seventeen-course

picnic lunches, over-priced naturalist coffee shops, and dadaist poetry readings.

Gishwhesheans are not above blatant hedonism as a recreational sport. They are typically

the only patron in the Duchamp exhibit performing the Balducci Levitation whilst

wearing the GISHWHES national flag as a cape.[57]

GISHWHES may lack the overt language of industrial reconfiguration found in the *Divine*

Kickstarter Project. But through its satire and performative, dadaist play, it more fully models the

potential for a congregation of authors, both official and unofficial, to direct fannish and creative

investment into digital participation.

Conclusion

I'd like to close with a note about my own authorship of this chapter. It's a common saying

among media studies scholars that studying contemporary media culture is like trying to pin

down a moving object, and if that is indeed the case, then writing about Misha Collins (and

fandom) is like trying to capture the (Looney Tunes version of the) Tasmanian Devil. When I

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57 Online at http://greatestinternationalscavengerhunttheworldhaseverseen.com/faq/.

first envisioned this project, I had in mind to write about Collins' use of Twitter to engage with his fans. Since then, Collins has worked with fans to launch RandomActs.org, he has co-produced and acted in the *Divine* web series, and co-organized the international scavenger hunt GISHWHES.

Because the object of my "study" has been in such constant movement, I have been very aware of my own role in creating a narrative and imposing the meaning of closure through my interpretation. This brings me to my larger point about my own academic authorship—or perhaps it would be better to term it my acafan authorship (acafan being the much debated term that signifies a likely uneasy synthesis of academic and fan).[58] I have followed Misha Collins on Twitter since the start and participated in his various enterprises; I supported *Divine* and signed on for the craziness that was GISHWHES (I even dragged my husband into it). Because of my ongoing participation, I am especially aware of how Collins has continually presented himself as an individual contributing to a creative network. As such, his authorship has been always already decentered and collective, to one degree or another, making it a ready base for the collective transmedia projects he has helped facilitate.

In this moment of uncertain transition in the media landscape, those involved in television production are eager to tame the threat represented by digital media, to redefine television as something that incorporates digital media while still maintaining television's cultural and aesthetic norms and hegemonic centrality.[59] Within this potentially reactionary context, official televisual transmedia extensions or even web series may take the digital into account, but they do not re-imagine the form and very definition of programming in

58 See the "Acafandom and Beyond" series hosted at Henry Jenkins' blog, http://henryjenkins.org/2011/06/coming_soon_acafandom_and_beyo.html.
59 Kohnen, Melanie. "In the World of Web-based TV, Everything New is Old Again," *Hacktivision*, Mar 11, 2012. http://hacktivision.org/?p=4110

itself, nor the relationship between producer and consumer. Rather, it is collectively authored, de-centralized projects such as digital scavenger hunts that may represent the potential for future transmedia creative authorship, an authorship that does not disavow hierarchies of professional and amateur, content owner and content transformer/remixer, but that nonetheless finds its engine in the collective coordination and agency of all involved.