

# Fans' list-making: memory, influence, and argument in the "event" of fandom

## A produção de listas de fãs: memória, influência e debate no "evento" do *fandom*

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### ABSTRACT

To date, there have been very few studies on fandom and fan audiences that have focused on practice of fans' list-making. This article, which introduces this topic for analysis, first argues that fans' list-making presents fans with an opportunity to simultaneously memorialize, influence, and argue. Second, this article offers list-making as a tool for observing commonalities between the different practices of media, music, and sports fans. Finally, this article cautions against the universality of these list-making practices, illustrating how list-making shows the artificiality of the event in fan activities. Using a combination of Žižekian and Coudryian analyses, this article argues that fans' list-making becomes a new way of reading fandom reductively, and highlights the media ritual of fandom.

**Keywords:** Fandom, fan studies, memory, influence, hierarchy, list

### RESUMO

Até o momento, há poucos estudos de *fandom* e de audiência dos fãs que enfoquem a prática da elaboração de listas por eles. Este artigo, que introduz a análise do tema, inicialmente defende que a feitura de listas por fãs permite que eles tenham uma oportunidade de, ao mesmo tempo, recordar, influenciar e discutir. Em segundo lugar, o artigo mostra a elaboração de listas como um instrumento para perceber semelhanças entre as diferentes práticas dos fãs de mídia, música e esportes. Por fim, o artigo adverte contra a universalidade destas práticas de produção de listas, ilustrando como as mesmas revelam a artificialidade do evento nas atividades do fã. Usando uma combinação das análises Žižekianas e coudryanas, o artigo defende que a elaboração de listas realizada pelos fãs torna-se um novo modo de ler simplificada suas atividades, e destaca o ritual de mídia do *fandom*.

**Palavras-chave:** *Fandom*, estudos de fã, memória, influência, hierarquia, lista

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IF THERE IS one activity that most fans engage with, regardless of how affirmational or transformational (obsession\_inc, 2009; Hills, 2014b) they practice their fandom, how engaged they are in their fan activities (see Bennett, 2012; Bielby; Harrington; Bielby, 1999; Jenkins; Ford; Green, 2013), how interested or not they are in being part of a fan community (Booth; Kelly, 2013), or even what object of fan adoration they view, play, or listen to, it is almost certain to be the creation of lists. Many fans love creating and sharing lists: whether it is best-of lists (e.g., most celebrated album), favorites lists (e.g., favorite moments in football), or worsts lists (e.g., Worst plot ever!), the creation of lists seems to be a unwwiversal activity across a range of fans and within multiple fan communities. Lists of rankings populate message boards, social media sites such as Facebook, published books of *fanfac* (Hills, 2014a), fan-scholar analyses (Hills, 2002), fan critical analyses (Jenkins, 2012), and interpersonal fan discussions. Even entire panels at fan conventions exist to help fans sort and rank different types of lists (Booth, 2013a): e.g., "Big Finish Fan Favorites" at 2014 *Chicago TARDIS*.

Although much fans' list-making is conversational, list-making itself can be formalized in cult or fannish published sources. Many online "native advertising" (Coddington, 2015; Del Rey, 2013) style *news* outlets, the most famous of which is probably *Buzzfeed*, contain lists (e.g., "19 Best Movie Fight Scenes of 2014!"). Some fan- and geek-centric sites, such as *What Culture*, contain nothing *but* lists: one might call it a list of lists. List-making can also be one of the least formal fan discussions to have upon meeting fellow fans. As Paul Booth and Jef Burnham (2014) have written, upon approaching a stranger at a *Doctor Who* convention, it is probably the most common question: "who are your favorite Doctors"? (see also Thompson, 2013). Even an informal chat over a beer at a pub is liable to, at some point, verge onto the topic of *best-of*, *favorite*, or *worst ever* lists.

Given the preponderance of list-making as a fan practice, and the commonalities of making lists across a range of fan activities, it is perhaps surprising that few academic studies of fandom have explored the topic of the list in any great detail. Perhaps this is because of the list's conversational nature: it is simply difficult to "capture" the interpersonal conversations of fans, especially regarding the ease of finding online data for research. Decades of research into fans and fandom have shown both the communalization associated with fans, and the hierarchies that guide and structure many fan communities (Hills, 2002). Nevertheless, in fan studies, fans are perhaps still most commonly associated with positive affect and emotional

resonance in various texts. Fans are also likely to be grouped in “interpretive communities” of shared interest (Amesley, 1989; Jenkins, 2012; Hills, 2002: 63). That is, while organized communities of fans still do exist, it is more common to find that the term *community* is applied after the fact, by fan researchers who are reading *membership* as an organization that they themselves have defined *post hoc ergo propter hoc*.

The absence of fan list analysis is puzzling as well, for at the same time as scholarship on fans look at their communalization, fan research has also explored the ways that fans mark themselves as separated from other groups of people, and from the members of their own fan communities (see Hills, 2012). In *Fan Cultures*, Matt Hills (2002: 46) describes fandom not just as a singular organization, but also “as a social hierarchy where fans share a common interest while also competing over fan knowledge, access to the object of fandom, and status”. Hierarchy in fan groups (I will use the terms *group* and *community* as synonymous, for ease of reference) emerges through things like deep knowledge of the text, devotion of self to fan activities, or quality of fan output.

Fans can mark themselves as different through their knowledge competencies and through their subjective analysis of the text at hand. For example, Jenkins reminds us in his classic *Textual Poachers*:

Organized fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it (2012: 86).

Fan criticism, as Jenkins discusses, locates the fan in a position of *expertise*, not just against those outside the fandom, but against those in it as well. Fans “display a close attention to the particularity of television narratives that puts academic critics to shame” and “assert a [...] cultural authority” over the content of the text, enough to justify a “critical stance” regarding a show they might love (Ibid.: 86–88). In his analysis of fan criticism, Jenkins ascribes fans a desire to “provide a public forum for evaluating and commenting on individual [TV] episodes and long-term plot developments” (Ibid.: 95). Some television episodes, he writes, will be highly valued while others will be the objects of ridicule. Fan critique, however, becomes a mean for artificial hierarchy generation, creating value within a corpus of texts.

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Throughout his analysis, however, Jenkins never actually looks at the *process* by which fans rank television episodes, nor does he describe the fact that ranking happens at all: indeed, many scholars simply assume ranking in their discussion of fans' construction of *best* and *worst* episodes. Ranking becomes an implicit activity; instead, I propose to make this moment explicit. Fans, as Alan McKee writes of *Doctor Who* fandom,

like to argue. They like to argue about the best actor in the lead role. They like to argue about the best era. They like to argue about obscure pieces of trivia [...] but most of all, fans love to argue about which is the best *Doctor Who* story (2007: 233).

Replace *Doctor Who* with James Bond, David Bowie albums, or Arsenal line-ups and a similar picture emerges. In a previous article, McKee explores how evaluation permeates fan cultures in a postmodern media environment. He argues that:

Postmodern thinking, and the sociological turn in Cultural Studies informed by the work of Bourdieu, do not refuse all distinctions. Neither do they refuse all evaluation. These ways of thinking about culture do indeed refuse the ascription of absolute, generalised and transcendent value to texts; but do not deny that, in culture, evaluations and distinctions are continually being made. It is still possible, under these approaches, given particular criteria, to decide which texts better fulfil them (which is the longest text? Which uses most traditionally feminine approaches to culture? Which is the most melodramatic? And so on, and so forth) (2001: 3–4).

Obviously, "audience members continue to exercise judgement and discrimination in making sense of cultural objects, in a variety of ways" (Ibid.: 4), and McKee's investigation of *Doctor Who* fans' discussions and debates about the value and quality of episodes of the program reveals such fannish discriminatory analysis. And yet, although McKee's (2007) analysis of the best *Doctor Who* story focuses on the subcultural value judgments of the fan community, it does not look at the *ranking* so much as the eventual *placement* of the episode on an assumed list; that is, the question he asks in the title of his chapter "Why is 'City of Death' the best *Doctor Who* story?" presupposes and assumes the existence of a list of *Doctor Who* stories, ranked, with "City of Death" at the top. As he argues, however, the cultural

criteria of evaluation are constantly shifting; this means that questions of value *are* mutable, but the presence of value judgments themselves is not.

In this article, I propose to re-open scholarship on fan criticism by focusing on the theoretical underpinning of the act of list-making as it applies to fan communities. I argue that fans make lists for three main reasons: to memorialize, to influence within a community (e.g., Booth, 2010), and to argue value within a hierarchical or antagonistic relationship with other fans (e.g., Hills, 2012). Further, I argue that fans' lists become a common link between media, music and sports fan studies. Few academic studies on fans (see, for exceptions, Duffett, 2013; Hills, 2014b) have attempted to find commonalities between media, music, and sports fans. Indeed, and as an example, my own expertise in media fandom (and, specifically, in *Doctor Who* fandom) forms the brunt of this analysis, but list-making as a fan activity goes beyond “which is the best *Doctor Who* story”. This lacuna may stem from the combination of three different factors: the fan researcher, the fan research subject, and the disciplinary nature of fan studies itself. I posit that, while impossible to ever completely reconcile these different fan groups, fan scholars can use the common activity of list-making to organize and structure fan research in the digital age. Finally, I caution against positing list-making as the *only* commonality between these three common fan groups. List-making, I argue, focuses and reifies fandom into a particular consumptive discourse. Using the study of Nick Couldry (2003) on “media rituals”, and of Slavoj Žižek (2014) on media “events”, I believe that list-making is ultimately a way of reinforcing fans engagement with media corporations, concretizing particular fan practices. But first, I turn to look at list-making as an everyday practice, contextualizing the process in which many fans engage.

### LIST-MAKING AS EVERYDAY PRACTICE

So why do fans make lists? Given that research on fan list-making is scant, a turn to scholarship on other types of list-making seems relevant. As a recent focus on list-style journalism indicates, lists are easy to read and can present news information in “digest” form (Marantz, 2015). Okrent (2014: 2), here writing about the popularity of this *listicle* style journalism – “an article in the form of a list” – notes that the listicle is simply a different format in which to present information. Although it has a bad reputation – “it caters to our Internet-fed distractible tendencies [...] replacing complex arguments and reasoned transitions with

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snack-packs of bullet points" (Okrent, 2014: 2) –, listicle, she argues, is just one additional genre for imparting important content. The genre of list-making lies in its

consecutive order, taking a mass of stuff and finding a way to break it into pieces and lay it out in a line. That also happens to be, in a way, the essence of language. Thoughts come in layered clouds of impressions and ideas. Information is an undifferentiated pile, a mountain of facts and anecdotes. But when we speak or write, word must follow word, clause follow clause. Something has to come first, and something has to come after that (Ibid.: 6).

Therefore, lists are akin to languages: there is an order made of a disorder, a narrative formed from a database of information (see Manovich, 2001; Booth, 2010, 2015a). New media, such as information itself, is organized as a database, an inherently unordered collection of raw bits of data: "The database makes use of networked connections to add versatility and robust searchability in digital documents" (Booth, 2015a: 160). Narratives, such as lists and languages, organize that information into sequences, and "serialized elements within a correlated structure [...] develop an underlying logic" (Ibid.: 160). For Manovich (2001: 225), database and narrative structures are inherently antithetical: they are *natural enemies*. However, as Booth (2010: 82–88) has previously argued, the new media environment contains many instances in which the database and the narrative work together in structural mergers: for instance, in fan studies, when fans use a *narrative* approach to generative content in online archives, such as wikis. If the listicle is a genre, then Okrent (2014) notes that it should not be the only genre people read. But it is, she adds, one that they do. Anne Helen Petersen (2014), former academic and currently writer at listicle-centric *Buzzfeed* (although she tends to write longer, journalistic pieces), agrees, noting that one of her articles on *Buzzfeed* generated over 1.2 million readers just in the first week. Few academic articles – or even well-known books – could boost that statistic. Fans' lists may resonate with a similar frequency – fans create and read them because they bring order to a corpus and community to a subject.

But if listicle – and, consequently, list-making practices – is a genre in and of itself, then what does this genre *do* (see Miller, 1984)? That is, why do people make lists at all? To round out her article nicely, Okrent presents eight fun facts about the listicle, arranged, appropriately enough, in a list:

1. A listicle is an article in the form of a list.
2. It is kind of like a haiku or a limerick.
3. It has comforting structure.
4. It makes pieces.
5. It puts them in an order.
6. Language does that too.
7. Sometimes with great difficulty.
8. Lists make it look easier (Okrent, 2014: 13).

Interestingly, only two of these items actually present a rationale for making lists: lists have a comforting structure, and lists put things in an order (which are actually quite the same thing). In sum, listicles make organization fun, and create a lighthearted (and thus palliative) hierarchy of value. This fun sense is mirrored, in professional sources, by the use of memes, funny images, GIFs, or other irreverent content. Indeed, in a quantitative study that compared *Buzzfeed* readers with *USA Today* readers, Tara Bullock notes that:

Participants who preferred *Buzzfeed* said that they liked that the *Buzzfeed* story was shorter. For example, a participant who preferred *Buzzfeed* said, “It got straight to the point. Also, there were funny pictures”. [...] *Buzzfeed* was the overwhelming favorite; its peripheral cues were effectively persuasive in causing participants to prefer it (2014: 50).

Getting (and retaining) readers in the digital age is critical, as Edson Tancoc’s (2014: 571) discussion of the audience for online news reflects: “Faced with the reality of declining economic capital for traditional journalism still unmatched by the slow increase in digital revenues, journalists clearly perceive capital instability within the journalistic field”. This instability is reversed by generating more irreverent – and more *fun* – content. Such content, despite what Okrent (2014) notes, may not be just another format for information: lists do not always help readers retain information. Bullock (2014: 51) also suggests that “Though the answers were easier to quickly spot in the *Buzzfeed* quiz, the story knowledge scores were lower. This further suggests that *Buzzfeed*’s list-style with funny pictures can distract from the sharing of information”. Lists are easy; but they also can harm the retention of information. However, in their study of memory retention in the older adults, Burack and Lachman (1996: 226) found that list-making actually “significantly improved older adults’ performance on the recall tasks”.

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Moving from journalism to fandom, list-making helps fans organize their thoughts on a large corpus of texts. But fans do not make lists solely to make the access to information easier: a huge range of *fanfac* outlets and commoditized books of lists reveal that fans' access to and classification of content also helps *prioritize* their socialization (Hills, 2014a). In fact, as Taylor and Swan (2004) discuss about list-making in the home, lists can actually be *poor* at handling the simple classification of objects. Rather, Taylor and Swan (2004: 542) demonstrate that lists help organize the complex social interactions in the household: "the list is used to coordinate what has been characterized as the particularly unpredictable and complex arrangements of home life". Their ethnographic project stems from leisure research, and focuses specifically on the everyday routines of motherhood. Lists, for the participants in Taylor and Swan's study, comprise particular characteristics: temporal ordering, linear sequencing, geographic coordination, and hierarchized content. This last point is particularly relevant for fans' list-making as well: just as mothers juxtapose their daughter's and son's to-do lists with their own to-do lists, with a "conspicuous order[ing] so that the children's movements take precedence", so too fans do order lists with conspicuous attention to worthiness and value, however, that value is presented and manifested (Ibid.: 543).

From a hermeneutic, theoretical perspective, list-making also contributes to what Foucault would call a technology of the self. Writing notes and lists

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (1988: 9).

Foucault discusses two different types of technologies of the self – Greco-Roman philosophy in the first two centuries AD, and Christian spirituality – and the transition from the practice of *take care of yourself* to today's more common *know yourself*. In the past, writing lists was an important element of taking care of oneself, a therapeutic activity. Indeed, one of the major aspects of self-care is writing for oneself to be re-read. In fact, for Foucault,

Taking care of oneself became linked to a constant writing activity. The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity.

That is not a modern trait born of the Reformation or of romanticism; it is one of the most ancient Western traditions (Foucault, 1988: 46).

We see this today reflected in the emotional value of journaling or list-making (Ullrich; Lutgendorf, 2002).

The transition from the *care of* to the more basic *knowing* the self highlights the relevance of list-making as well. This “writing of the self” (Foucault, 1983: 6) is termed *hupomnemata*, and reflects one’s “guides for conduct [...] a material record of things [...] [offered] up as a kind of accumulated treasure”. Creating lists, developing structures for understanding how we (as humans) see the world around us, becomes a hupomnematic activity: it helps structure our understanding of ourselves. More than mere memory aids, the hupomnematic activity becomes exercises for *becoming*. One literally writes oneself into being (see Sundén, 2003, for an exploration of this concept in digital terms), as writing lists, or journals, presents a physical manifestation of the *self* outside of the body. This *citational* practice becomes a way of “establishing a relationship with oneself” (Ibid.: 9). The hupomnematic list is, thus, the opposite of what Okrent (2014) describes as the language-like qualities of the listicle: hupomnematic writing is not organizational, but self-transformational. From a psychological point of view, Conte, Landy, and Mathieu (1995: 179) find that list-making is strongly associated with achievement strivings, or the desire to better one’s self. Making lists is a way of *controlling time* over one’s life; a way of having power rather than succumbing to the ceaseless flow of time.

One theory of fans’ list-making might argue that lists are easy to write and read, and thus they contribute and help to build a wider fan community. Taylor and Swan (2004: 544) also note how some family lists are shared, with “responsibility [...] distributed amongst all those in the household”. Fans’ list-making is often shared as well, especially in the digital age: as demonstrated by the *Doctor Who* dynamic rankings list, a list continually updated by fans, and the Facebook group *Tori Songs, 2014 Unrepentant Edition*, a group that continuously votes on the best work of musician Tori Amos, group list-making can structure community-building as well.<sup>1</sup> Another theory might link quotidian list-making and fannish list-making. Taylor and Swan (2004: 545) show the sentimentality at the heart of quotidian lists. Often, they write, the emotional reasons for keeping or organizing a list outweigh the organizational rationale, as they “transform [...] [the mother’s] notebook into a device for storing papers she has an emo-

1. See <<http://www.dewhurstdesigns.co.uk/dynamic>> and <<https://www.facebook.com/unrepentantedition>>

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tional attachment to, far removed from its original purpose of supporting her work". The list memorializes as much as it organizes, offering a guide for the author to remember both an order and a moment, or rather a moment within an order. In sum, then, the scholarly and theoretical rationale for list-making brings up a number of different elements: self-achievement or enumeration, community-building or collective thinking, and hierarchical-structuring, or classification. For fans, list-making seems to simultaneously revolve around *memorializing*, *influencing*, and *arguing*, to which I next turn.

### FAN STUDIES APPLICATION OF LIST-MAKING

Alan McKee's (2001) exploration of fans' evaluation of the best *Doctor Who* stories remains a powerful voice on studies of value in fan communities. It is through the lens of McKee's article that we can see some of the ways in which fans utilize and negotiate list-making within fan communities. For McKee, there are a number of places where fans can go both to assemble and share their rankings, the most prominent of which is *Doctor Who Magazine* (see Booy, 2012; Hills, 2010; see also Ito, 2012: 291 for a discussion of formalized ranking in the *Anime Music Video* scene). Because it is an official magazine of *Doctor Who* licensed by BBC, *Doctor Who Magazine* serves as a marker of *Doctor Who*'s quality (see Hills, 2010: 147–77) as well as its subcultural and social capital. When *Doctor Who Magazine* #413, therefore, held a definitive ranking of *The Mighty 200* in 2009, which surveyed its readership and found 6,700 people to rank 200 episodes of *Doctor Who*, it became a touchstone upon which fans could measure their own rankings. Does "Caves of Androzani" deserve the number one spot? Does "The Twin Dilemma" deserve last place? Why is "City of Death" the 8<sup>th</sup> Best Episode of *Doctor Who*? Such questions develop upon the release of an *authorized* list such as *Doctor Who Magazine*'s.

One major reason fans may create lists, then, is not just to organize, but also to memorialize, to remember with affect a particular moment, episode, or time within a textual corpus. Indeed, a list such as *The Mighty 200* highlights a tension between *best* and *favorite* episodes, which are two radically different things. According to Tisha Turk, here writing on her blog:

One of the things I love about fandom is that fandom, for the most part, operates not on a "these are the best things" model (where the criteria for "best" are typically undefined yet implied to be shared by all rightthinking people) but on a

“these are my favorite things” model, which can be frustrating but is also wonderfully democratic (Turk, 2013: 4).

*Favorites* are rankings of a personal nature, whereas an official *Doctor Who Magazine Mighty 200* becomes a more authorized, sanctioned model. This tension becomes evident when looking at some of the comments on *The Mighty 200* (here, the list reprinted on [gallifreymatrix.wikia.com](http://gallifreymatrix.wikia.com), and all represented as in the original source, regardless of the eventual errors):

The Space Museum and Paradise Towers should be higher. And Love and Monsters should be about 47 places lower, as the only Who story that I actually don't find entertaining in some way (except as a showcase of how lucky we are that Doctor Who isn't always like that). I also place City of Death, Silence in the Library and Tomb of the Cybermen higher (City of Death is my favourite). I also like the End of [the World] and Trial of a Time Lord higher than the whovian majority. Apart from that, the list is mostly rather similar to my own. I won't go into more depth on my disagreements, except to say that I like Time and the Rani \*hides from angry whovians\*

Why are The gunfighters, The sensorites and The space museum so low. I love them.  
 Terror of the zygons has to be in the top 10  
 Power of the daleks my #1  
 The Sensorites is my favourite William Hartnell story why's it so behind?  
 What is wrong with The Space Museum, The Gunfighters and The Time Monster?  
 I love the three of them! Some of my favorite episodes in fact...

*Doctor Who* fans seem less interested in exploring the intricacies of ranking itself than they do in listing their own personal favorites. Memorialization becomes memorization.

This favoriting, also, becomes a space for conversation and communalization in fan communities, despite the hierarchical nature of the discussion. Lists are a way of contributing to a culture of fandom, and allow a sort of fan-ish influence to flourish. Turk continues:

I get so frustrated with definitions of ‘fan work’ that focus primarily on writing fic and making vids and ignore or handwave all the other kinds of work that make my daily fannish experience what it is. Fandom runs on the engine of production, but a lot of what we produce is information, architecture, access, not just artifacts (2013: 7).

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As a structured and organized examination of a particular framework of fandom, list-making is itself what Turk calls an architecture. Additionally, lists are often provided to *newbies* to a fan culture to offer *access* to the text. For instance, it is not uncommon in my own fandom of *Doctor Who* for fans of the Classic series (1963–1989) to create a list of Classic episodes for fans of *New Who* to watch (see Booth, 2013a, 2013b). This introduction to the Classic via the list offers access to a self-motivated sense of *favorite*, as it encourages Classic fans to “guide new fans and introduce them to the classic series” (Booth; Booth, 2014: 263). These guides become akin to everyday syllabi, shaping the viewing experience of newer fans.

Hills' (2014a: 32) discussion of fanfic in fan studies shows a similar frustration as does Turk in fandom, as he notes that “fan writings that are neither textual exegesis nor fiction have generally been under-researched and under-theorized”. Fanfac – fans' semi-autobiographical writing of real-world occurrences and memories – relies on fandoms' collective memory and commodization of their fan text. Fans' list-making is not quite fanfac, as it is rarely commoditized in and of itself; rather, listing becomes a way of approaching the canon text; an access rather than an artifact in and of itself. But at the same time, it shares with fanfac that same sense of the importance of memory, and the “fan cultural memory” that is “communal and collective, drawing on a sense of shared recognition” (Hills, 2014a: 35). Lists themselves create a familiar structure. Fans share lists and recognize similarities with each other, even if those lists differ in content. Fans' list-making – especially those that are aimed at favoriting, rather than besting – becomes, therefore, more than just a review or a nostalgic look at a text, but also a chance for the appropriation of individualized affective responses to the text in a community.

Finally, and at the same time, fans' list-making also becomes a space for authorized disagreement, as fans can argue and compete about what their favorites actually are. Lists enable arguments and heated discussions to have a focus. This “carnival” space online (see Shave, 2004; Booth, 2010) functions as a site for debate, discussion, and difference, and also as a space for reifying subculture values (as per McKee, 2001). That is, when enough lists call “Caves of Androzani” the best episode of *Doctor Who*, it will influence other fans to see it as a *better* episode (see Booth, 2014 for a discussion of this valuation in *Doctor Who* eras). This authorized hierarchization allows more official arenas, e.g., *Doctor Who Magazine*, to formalize these lists and to leave less room for alternative viewpoints. This formalization also functions to promote what Hills (2002: 57) calls *executive* fans who possess “very high fan cultural capi-

tal”, and therefore a “high level of fan social capital” as possessing knowledge competencies. Executive fans become instrumental in presenting the taste of a community by guiding group opinion. Hierarchies in fandom are often unspoken and linked to the lists of popular fan discussion. While perhaps never reaching the level of the *inter-fan antagonism*, described by Hills (2012), or the *fan-tagonism* within and around fan cultures, described by Johnson (2007), fans’ list-making becomes an inscribed and thus structured hierarchy (for a hierarchy that can be replicated in more traditional fan studies venues, such as fan fiction archives, see Scott-Zechlin, 2012: 64).

If fans’ list-making can be seen as a way of memorializing, influencing, and arguing, it also can be used as a scholarly heuristic for seeing the commonalities amongst media, music, and sports fandom: all these fan cultures use lists in various ways. As Hills (2013) writes in the foreword to Duffett’s (2013) *Understanding Fandom*, little integration exists between media fandom and music fandom – Duffett’s book being an exception. Indeed, beyond Hills’ (2014b) own exploration of mimetic fandom in both *Doctor Who* Dalek-building fan communities and Daft Punk helmet-creating fan communities, very little has been explored on this intersection. Even more absent is scholarship that integrates sports fandom with media and music. Cornel Sandvoss (2003, 2005) has perhaps most directly embraced both sports and media fandom, although each of his early 2000’s books tends to concentrate on one over the other. Where they do intersect tends to be in celebrity studies (Duffett, 2013 apud Cashmore, 2004). Duffett (2013: 3) argues that “sports fandom and media fandom are very different objects of study”, because sports fandom “is ultimately tribal and based on a controlled, competitive mentality” whose passion, intensity, and meaning “are significantly different [...] to those associated with enjoying television, music or cinema”, and his book therefore does not integrate sports into his discussion. However, the sports fandom is not necessarily as different from media fandom as Duffett believes: while I agree that sports fandom may be more competitive at times, there certainly is competitiveness in media fandom (Busse, 2013), and the pleasures of sport as spectacle may be no different than the pleasures of media as art (Kellner, 2003). Indeed, many sports fans enjoy playing *fantasy* sports (in which they construct virtual teams of players), which is not too dissimilar to writing fan fiction, and like a fannish mentality that enjoys memorizing canon and production details, many sports fans enjoy memorizing team and player statistics (Johnson, 2004). Indeed, this style of fan activity is often ignored in both media and sports fandoms: Hills hypothesizes that this is because

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these communities tend to be thought of as culturally gendered as masculine or dominated by male fans rather than corresponding to the purportedly feminine culture spaces of many media fandoms and fan studies, where academic work as typically focused on female-centered media fandoms (Hills, 2014: ¶ 1.3).

The typecompulsive ordering that goes into making lists may be overlooked by media fans because of the prominence of other types of fan work.

It is not my intention in this article, however, to try and prove that sports and media fandom are the same, or even that similar, but simply to point out that fan research tends to separate them out completely from one another. This is true whether fan research stems from the media side (as indicated in Duffett, 2013) or from the sports side. For example, in Earnhardt, Haridakis, and Hugenberg's (2012) edited collection *Sports Fans, Identity, and Socialization: Exploring the Fandemonium*, only one seminal work of media fan studies (Hills, 2002) is mentioned, and even that mention is only cursory (Gill, 2012).

The dearth of connections between these three fan groups could also be due to different fan research methodologies. For instance, it is difficult to determine whether or not this is the result of fan researchers who stay firmly welded to their own particular fannish texts. Such reflections would be a product of what Hills (2002: 3) calls *scholar-fandom*, or the "imagined subjectivity of academia" in which cultural studies scholars tend to focus on their own fandom objects for study. His own autoethnographic methodology of fan research specifically calls for this focus on the self as the only escape out of the trap of ethnography, but it still leaves a dearth of material focusing on texts nominally not part of a scholars' fandom.

Alternately, the lack of connectivity between music, media, and sports fan research may stem from different fan activities, and the ease of approaching/finding fan work. It is simply easier to find fans' work in areas that already match the interests of the researcher. For example, in researching for this article, I had to inquire with a number of colleagues and friends who have fandoms in music and sports, areas different than mine (media), to find some examples of lists that exist in those communities. It is not that fans from one type of fandom are or are not more productive than others; it is simply a lack of time in the schedule of an academic to spend time scouring sites outside of their norm, when other areas are easier (and even more enjoyable) to investigate.

Finally, there may be a lack of research focusing on commonalities between these different fan groups because of the methodological nature

of fan studies itself. As previously indicated, Hills (2014a) notes that there is more lack of discussion about masculine styles of fandom. Since the earliest days of fan studies, transformational work has been investigated more than affirmational work (obsession\_inc, 2009; Booth, 2014b). As a field generated largely from media studies and communication (among others, though), fan studies have close ties to textual analysis, and a list is difficult to describe solely as a *text*, especially when compared with an obviously textual work of fan fiction or a fan video. Methodologically, fan studies may not have yet become equipped with all the tools needed to investigate the more psychological methods behind fans' list-making (see, however, Zubernis; Larsen, 2012).

Ultimately, a stronger interdisciplinary focus on fan studies would discover a greater range of commonalities between fan audiences. But even if list-making is a more universal activity that links multiple fan groups and different types of fandoms, I want to caution seeing list-making as a completely *normative* activity. Rather, in the conclusion of this article, I'll explore how fans' list-making create an "event" out of fandom, concretizing particular views of a media, music, or sports text, and illustrating how rankings reveal the artificiality of the *event* in fan activities. Using a combination of Žižekian and Couldryian analyses, I will show how fans' list-making becomes a new way of reading fandom reductively, and highlights the *media ritual* of fandom.

## CONCLUSION: FANS' LIST-MAKING AS AN EVENT

Although fans' list-making may be a more universal fan activity that spans music, media, and sports fandom, it is also crucial to note that it perpetuates a type of *media ritual* that can manifest a dominant or hegemonic reading of a particular text while marginalizing alternative views. According to the media researcher Nick Couldry (2003: 2), media rituals are actions that the media industries present informing our understanding about the relative importance of the media in our cultural lives. More specifically, "through media rituals, we act out, indeed naturalize, the myth of the media's social centrality". These rituals – for Couldry, things such as live sporting events, reality television, media pilgrimages, and confessional media – make media texts (and, with them, the media industries) appear to be indispensable aspects of our contemporary life. Can anyone really consider himself or herself part of a culture without knowing at least a little bit about media?

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Couldry's (Couldry, 2003: 19) analysis, moving from James Carey's (1992) work on communication as a cultural ritual, asks us to examine media rituals in order to "question [...] the uneven distribution of the power to influence representations of social 'reality'". In other words, by affirming the power of the *media*, media rituals also make the realities such media portray seem more influential. But, as he notes, what makes a media ritual a ritual is "*not* whether it is performed in the media, or involves an act of media production or consumption, but the media-related categories around which it is structured and the media-related values to which it directs our attention" (Ibid.: 29). Lists are fannish practices that would fall into media-related categories. Media rituals "reinforce the mythic (and symbolic) importance of the media industries", and as Booth (2015b: 117) has pointed out, fans themselves reinforce this symbolic importance through their own rituals and practices. But fans' list-making encourages a further reification of media rituals, in which list-making inherently valorizes a particular aspect of the media (music, sport) text over another. As Booth (2014: 196) has previously said, more generally, about *Doctor Who* fandom, "how one orders and defines a text reveals underlying assumptions that guide the interpretation of that text". Placing a value marker – even if it is a *favorite* as opposed to a *best* – indicates that a particular element of a corpus is more (or less) important than others.

This arbitrary valuation serves to highlight traditional, or dominant, readings of the media at the expense of other views. This type of value system "teaches us about ruptures in the categorical systems, and illuminates assumptions and conventions within those systems" (Booth, 2014: 196). For instance, saying that "City of Death" is the best episode of *Doctor Who* assumes and ascribes the characteristics of that episode – opening, plot, cliffhangers, performance, family entertainment (McKee, 2001) – as being the most relevant/important characteristics to *Doctor Who*, as opposed to other characteristics (e.g., special effects, genre considerations, underlying theme). Fans' list-making turns characteristics, elements, aesthetics, and/or themes into notions of valuation, which in turn reflects a particular emphasis on the underlying assumptions that helped to determine those valuations in the first place.

For the philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2014), these underlying assumptions that undergird the development of the values of list-making could be termed *events*, as they refocus fans' attention onto specific moments within a larger canon of moments as being more relevant. For Žižek (2014: 5), events appear as such because "the effect [...] seems to exceed

its causes”, and they can be natural disasters, media moments, political happenings – anything that appears extreme or out of the ordinary. Although it appears that events “change [...] the way reality appears to us” because they stand out as exceptional, subduing the traditional or humdrum, in effect they work oppositely: by presenting the extreme as atypical, they actually reinforce the typical as such as well (Ibid.: 7). In other words: by their very nature as *not* everyday, events actually inscribe the everyday as meaningful.

What this means for fans’ list-making is that the creation of (artificial) value on a particular item within a series, the hierarchical listing of fans’ personal (or even authorized) opinions about a particular text, actually reinforce the *normality* of that text. Ranking becomes a type of media ritual that reminds fans about the singular importance of that text itself. Whether it is “best album of the 90s”, “favorite Doctor”, or “worst baseball catcher in the National League”, simply stating a list in such a manner inscribes the text corpus *as a whole* as relevant. The event determines the everyday.

If this is the case, then the fannish media ritual of list-making highlights not just the everydayness of the media text, but the importance of fandom in the media ecology as well. Fans are crucial audiences; they are, as Zwaan, Duits, and Reijnders (2014: 1) note, the “holy grail of media culture” as they not only actualize the type of interaction that many audiences engage in, but also spend more money, in such a way that many media producers crave their attention. List-making is one of an infinite number of ways fans can approach their text or game; but it also symbolizes the clear link between fan audiences and producers. By staying attuned to the development of a canon, fans naturalize the seeming-universality of media, music, and sports in a given community, and centralize the relevance of fandom.

With the rise of digital technology, shifts in the way media rituals occur will become more common. Couldry summarizes these eventual shifts as ones in

a world where “media” comprise a “scatter” from many sources, a succession of sources, with a very different balance for individuals between possibilities of production and possibilities of consumption. Within this new horizon, current forms of media rituals [...] should seem less necessary, even redundant (2003: 138).

New participatory cultures may open up less-controlled realms of mediation; but as ownership of digital venues itself becomes more common, these spaces where openness of expression is valued will be controlled by

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dominant ideologies as well. Consider the case of Facebook, for example: many fans' list-making practices occur today on this ubiquitous social media site, having migrated from harder-to-find but less-restrictive spaces in earlier, pre Web 2.0 days. That Facebook's terms of service take ownership and monetize many postings, means that fans' list-making practices feed back into a system of media rituals. The affirmation of the dominance of social media becomes marked, as list-making – among other fan practices – allows the media rituals of fandom to persist.

In sum, then, the ubiquitous practice of fans' list-making resonates with far more meaning in the contemporary cultural environment than previous research on fandom has demonstrated. In this article, I have attempted to illustrate what list-making entails, discuss the multiple rationales for why fans might make lists (to memorialize, influence, and argue), and present a theory of fans' list-making as a more universal activity across multiple genres of fans. I have also shown how fans' list-making can ultimately reinforce dominant ideologies of the media, but reinscribing the *text* as central, and the outliers (the *best* and *worst*) as *events* that strengthen the everyday practices and meanings of fan audiences. Fans' list-making does not just order *texts*, it also brings *fandom itself* to life. ■

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