JOMEC Journal
Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies

Published by Cardiff University Press

When Tourism Comes to You (But You Still Have to Go Get It, Dawg): The Rickmobile and Transmedia Tourism/Fandom

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Keywords

Fandom
Merchandising
Mobile Advertising
Social Media
Branding
Tourism
Consumer Culture
Transmedia

JOMEC Journal
Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies

Abstract

This paper analyses the Rickmobile, a mobile, pop-up merchandise car themed and designed around the eponymous Rick Sanchez (voiced by Justin Roiland) from Cartoon Network's *Rick and Morty* (2013-), as a site of transmedia mobile pilgrimage and fan-tourist destination. As a material fan object and as an object of fan tourism, the Rickmobile becomes a site of overlapping discourses surrounding the historical contexts of cult merchandising, media pilgrimage, and fans' social media reporting. Reflecting aspects of the show, it can be seen as a transmedia brand extension. At the same time, the Rickmobile encourages a particular type of fan engagement, harnessing active fan agency and encouraging fans to create their own *Rick and Morty* experience – but in doing so, fans become simultaneously imbricated within authorized, top-down and commercially-aligned structures.

Contributor Note

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Citation

Booth, Paul (2019), 'When Tourism Comes to You (But You Still Have to Go Get It, Dawg): The Rickmobile and Transmedia Tourism/Fandom', *JOMEC Journal* 14, 'Transmedia Tourism, ed. Ross Garner, 91-105. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18573/jomec.177

Accepted for publication: 24th October 2019

Introduction

Studies of transmediality offer multiple frameworks for understanding the relationship between texts in a transmedia framework. In particular, a top-down authorship approach (see Scott 2012) sees the controlling figure of an auteur as key to understanding transmedia franchises, while a bottom-up fan-centric approach (Dehry Kurtz and Bourdaa 2017) reveals more tenuous but related connections. In the former, auteurs help to frame the transmediation; in the latter, audience interpretation takes precedence. However, important differences within media texts can be revealed when different transmedia structures enter into the media environment. For example, media industries relying on fan audiences can engender different structures of transmediation. I argue in this article that different types of fan labour can be harnessed by transmedia brand extensions focused on touristic and consumerist behaviors of fans, using *Rick and Morty's* Rickmobile as a prime example.

Rick and Morty (Cartoon Network 2013–), a popular adult cartoon which airs on the US's Adult Swim late-night offerings and on the UK's *FOX* network, has become a cult hit, developing a sizable fandom despite its short tenure onscreen.[1] Developed by Justin Roiland and Dan Harmon, the show has aired, as of 2018, 31 episodes – with a further 70 ordered by *Cartoon Network* – and has developed a base of active and participatory fans. The show, which is based on Roiland's early work on the animated Internet web series *The Adventures of Doc and Mharti* (which itself is an X-rated short parody of the *Back to the Future* trilogy (Zemeckis, 1985, 1989, 1990), follows titular characters Rick Sanchez (voiced by Roiland), an alcoholic scientist and inventor (and, as we find out, intergalactic ne'er-do-well), and his grandson Morty (also voiced by Roiland) an oft-exasperated pubescent teen, as they have adventures throughout time, space, and alternate dimensions.

The transmedia dimensions of *Rick and Morty* are not vast: beyond the television program, only an ongoing monthly comic book title continues the narrative, while a series of games, toys, and merchandise further the transmedia brand (see Tenderich and Williams 2015). This paper argues, however, that the Rickmobile – a mobile pop-up shop in the shape of Rick Sanchez – reframes the transmediation through a fannish tourist framework. The Rickmobile adjusts the temporality and identity of fans, turning transmediated fan engagement into fan labour, in the way it highlights connections between media tourism, social media, and merchandising in the age of consumerist and mainstream fandom. Much recent fan studies scholarship has approached the fan-as-labour paradigm, wherein the mainstream media industries are harnessing the power and reach of fans to work (usually for free) for the media producer (see Booth 2015c; Chin 2014; Scott 2009). Much of this scholarship, however, tends to examine more active uses of fans – fans' art being cited as a type of word-of-mouth advertising, or fans' social media use being harnessed to promote and discuss a particular text. This paper argues, in contrast, that the Rickmobile paradoxically enables fans to do both: fans are active through their

[1] During the writing of this article, multiple popular criticism articles have been released detailing quite negative interactions of the Rick and Morty fandom (see Purdom 2017).

social media usage and engagement in transmedia tourism, but in doing so they become positioned by the Rickmobile as a passive consumer/promoter of the product. By applying the methodologies of fan studies to contemporary debates about transmedia and tourism, this article complicates scholars' traditional views of the monetization of the active engagement of fans of cult media texts.

'Does Your Car Look Like a Smaller Version of Your House?'

That there are fans of *Rick and Morty* should not be a surprise, and that they are active participants in the fandom even less so. The 21st century media environment is built for fandom (Booth 2015c). Fans are mainstreamed now, becoming the de facto audience for many hit television series and films (Jenkins 2007; Fraade-Blaner and Glazer 2017). As Rhys Williams (2016) notes in his review of *Rick and Morty*, 'If one broad current of comedy might be defined as 'playing with expectations', then *Rick and Morty* demands a fannish level of expertise to 'get' everything' (Booth 2015c, 147). Fans of *Rick and Morty* had one additional way of participating in their fandom that was not available to fans of many other shows or films: they could follow, and purchase products from, the Rickmobile as it traversed the country selling R*ick and Morty* themed merchandise. In doing so, fans not only participated in the active consumption of the text, but also become participants in a transmedia branding exercise that hinges on both the social media usage of contemporary fans and the mainstreaming of fandom in the contemporary media environment.

Studies of fandom and tourism argue that fan travel can be a type of 'pilgrimage' wherein fans journey to 'a location or site that has a meaning in the 'text' surrounding a popular culture figure' (Linden and Linden 2017, 105). Yet, traditional studies of fan pilgrimages only focus on stationary places – Graceland, Vancouver, New Zealand, *Disneyland* – or stores like Forbidden Planet (e.g. Geraghty 2014). In contrast, the Rickmobile turns fan tourism into a 'FOMO' (Fear of Missing Out) experience, as it drives from city to city and relies on the social media usage of fans to help spread the word on the vehicle's eventual locale. The car, filled with one-of-a-kind merchandise, announces it's 'tour' online – where it will stop and when – but fans work as promotional branders (Burns 2016) to advertise the vehicle. Lines often exceed the amount of merchandise available.

The Rickmobile is not the first-time fans have been asked to promote the whereabouts of a traveling cult object, nor is it the only transmedia tourist experience that has been designed. Ahead of the release of *Despicable Me 2* (Coffin and Renaud, 2013), for instance, Universal Pictures and Illumination Entertainment created the Despicablimp, a flying blimp in the shape of a Minion from the film. Fans were encouraged to follow along on social media by tweeting sightings or posting images on Instagram. Similarly, the #SpotStuart campaign used a giant balloon of Stuart the Minion for promotion of *Despicable Me 3* (Balda, Coffin and Guillon, 2017). Designed to look like Rick Sanchez, the Rickmobile (Figure 1) depicts a hunched over Rick, facing backwards, vomit spilling out of his mouth, with a deranged look in his eye. The body and image of the car paratextually frames a particular reading of the character and, through him, the show. *Rick and Morty* features 'the overriding aesthetic and substance …[of]

a grotesque body-horror/body-comedy (Williams 2016, 148), and the car features a tortured and excessive body posture – Rick on his knees, vomit on his mouth, angry look in his eye. Williams (2016) goes on to note that:

> The grotesque aesthetic and the reflexive irony of the show are generated by the void at its heart, a void that plagues the postmodern liberal today. The grotesque is, traditionally, not only an aesthetic but an expression of resistance – a folk weapon against the status quo and its strictures. (Williams 2016, 149)

The Rickmobile becomes a synecdoche for the show – fans that follow the Rickmobile are encouraged to see the car as an extension of the show and Rick as grotesque character.

Figure 1. The Rickmobile (from the official Twitter)

However, the Rickmobile does not just represent Rick Sanchez: it also represents a branded transmedia retail experience. As Kozinets et al. (2002) have noted, 'entertainment has seeped into every aspect of the economy', and 'shopping has become blended into entertainment' (Kozinets et al. 2002, 17). They argue that 'themed brand stores', or stories that are primarily focused on selling branded services rather than products, have become 'woven into the fabric of consumers' cultural universe' (Kozinets et al. 2002, 18). Consumers follow brands and, as Kozinets (2014) later illustrates, brand leaders try to cultivate their consumers as fans. The Rickmobile is a site of fan consumption, and at the same time, a space where fan interactions transmediate the *Rick and Morty* experience.

'That Sounds Like Slavery with Extra Steps'

On the one hand, the Rickmobile illustrates some meaningful connections to previous literature about transmediation, fan merchandising, and tourism. As a retail outlet, the Rickmobile highlights the sale of toys and other paratextual material. The merchandising of fan interests and passions reveals a new way of envisioning the connection between transmediation and fandom. If toys and games can be a type of transmedia (see Gray 2010; Booth 2015b), then a car detailed to look like a character, and designed to deepen an audience's understanding of a character, can also function as transmedia. Fans' material engagement has been an underdeveloped areas of fan studies, despite research on collecting (Geraghty 2014), toys (Godwin 2015; Zubernis and Larsen 2013), play (Gray 2010, Booth 2015b), and item display (Heljakka 2015). Considering how much merchandise is made for fans today, and how fans have been (stereotypically) associated with crass commercial behavior in the past (see Sandvoss 2005), it is perhaps

surprising that most fan studies research focuses on the creative side of fandom rather than the consumerist side (see Rehak 2014). Yet, the wide availability of merchandise online and the popularity of fan conventions like the various Comic-Con's around the world, which often feature tens of thousands of fans and where merchandise is readily available for purchase, illustrates that the 'materiality' of fandom is very much alive, and meaningful (Williams, this volume).

Further, there is a particular pleasure in purchasing, one ideologically tinged through the lens of consumerism and capitalism. To 'buy into' fandom is also to buy into the very system that has turned fandom into a commodity. Fan scholars often write about the resistance of fans, or the way that fans subvert the 'given' meanings of a media text and 'read' through a more progressive lens (especially in terms of the identity politics of race and gender, see Busse 2013; Pande 2016). But not all fans are resistant, and not all fan practices depend on countering hegemonic insistences of complicity with the media system. As a reflection of transmedia, branded toys can also build social capital within fan communities. For example, part of the appeal for fans of the Rickmobile lies in the exclusive merchandise available for purchase. Merchandise only available at the Rickmobile means that these 'physical objects […] impact on fan identity' (Geraghty 2014, 5). Collecting exclusive merchandise 'is about constructing an identity as a fan and creating new meanings from a pre-established universe' (Geraghty 2014, 121), cementing a bottom-up, fan-centric transmedia experience.

Further complicating this relationship, Matt Hills (2015) notes that, in terms of the *Doctor Who* (BBC 1963-89, 1996, 2005-) celebration – the 50th anniversary convention in celebration of the British sci-fi television series – the *BBC* used fan consumerism 'to maintain and regenerate its public service ethos' (Hills 2015, 57). Fan consumption becomes a way of maintaining control over an audience's interpretation of a program: authorized merchandise maintains a close connection to the original meaning of the text, here concretized through fan monetary consumption (see obsession_inc 2009). Fans may buy things 'because they meant something, it brought them closer to that very text they were remembering and celebrating' (Geraghty 2014, 93), but they also buy things to become closer to the text itself, and to show their support for the show (Booth 2016b, 41–3).

At the same time, fans can also use merchandise as a way of signaling displeasure with a series, as Jeffrey A. Brown (2017) discusses of the *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (Abrams, 2015) #WheresRey campaign, wherein fans, noticing that the lack of Rey (played by Daisy Ridley) merchandise in *Star Wars* toys, took to social media in protest as a form of 'fan activism used to address real-world social issues' (Brown 2017, 4). Indeed, merchandise is often crucial for fans, as having merchandise can often take the place of a series, especially in the moments the series is off-air. For example, *Rick and Morty* has had a total of three seasons but only 31 episodes; the toys and tee-shirts fill in the gaps between episodes.

Transmedia tourism also reflects these consumerist behaviors, not just through the purchasing of products, but also through the labour of fans themselves as a marker of interest in the text. Research on fan labour finds generally two contrasting views. Both agree that the

media industries often use fans – and fannish affect – to help promote their products. Bertha Chin (2014) describes this as:

> When fans blog about or discuss their favorite media texts, they are performing labor, generating word-of-mouth promotion for TV shows, films, books, celebrities, musicians, and bands. More than that, fans also manage websites, Facebook pages, Tumblrs, and Twitter accounts, sometimes collaborating with celebrities and their management team to provide news and information to their fandoms. (Chin 2014, 1.1)

The disagreement arrives between those who view this as exploitative of fans, and those who feel that 'fans who participate in these collaborations or run the fan sites may consider their work not exploitative but a service to fandom' (Chin 2014, 1.5). I've previously termed this 'service to fandom' as a type of Digi-Gratis economy, where fans work for free to see their contributions as giving back to a media industry that they have loved (Booth 2016b).

Both views of fan labour stem from the eruption between gift economy structures (typically observed in classic fan communities - see Jenkins 1992) and commercial economies. Fan gift economies, as Karen Hellekson (2009) has noted, 'require exchanges of gifts: you do not pay to read fan fiction or watch a fan-made music vid' (Hellekson 2009, 114).

Commercial economies seek to profit from the affect that fans feel for the media – hence (the failed) Fanlib, which attempted to monetize fan fiction in 2007, and (the now closed) Amazon Kindle Worlds, which provided a space for fans to write, and sell, authorized fan fiction (although with significant restrictions; Booth 2015a). Suzanne Scott (2009) describes how media corporations have coopted the fan gift economy, primarily through the lure of "gifted' ancillary content aimed at fans through official websites […] which are rapidly perfecting a mixed economy that obscures its commercial imperatives through a calculated adoption of fandom's gift economy, its sense of community, and the promise of participation' (Scott 2009, 1.5).

Seeking a compromise between the views, Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green (2013) argue that it is 'crucial to move beyond seeing the relations between producers and their audiences as a zero-sum game' (Green 2013, 174) – rather, we need to see both fans and producers as having both knowledge about and acceptance of the other. Fans are not dupes, but they are also not as powerful as media corporations.

The types of fan labour that media corporations have typically relied upon have been more active in nature. Fans make art, which can be used in advertising. Fans edit videos, which can be used online. Fans live tweet, working as word-of-mouth advertising. The active participation of fans is seen as a way to generate advertising and interest. As Tiziana Terranova (2003) notes, though, 'free labor is not necessarily exploited labor', as fans often 'willingly concede…[payment] in exchange for the pleasures of communication and exchange' (quoted in Chin 2014, 4.1). Fan labour itself can be considered part of a transmedia structure, especially when fan work can be marketed as part of the show.

'Look Where Being Smart Got Ya'

On the other hand, the Rickmobile uses a different form of fan labour to generate transmedia branding by turning fans into docents. Fans filter the transmedia experience of the Rickmobile through their own social media use, creating their own type of 'tourist gaze' (Urry and Larsen 2011). By docent, I refer to the way an individual's interpretation of a tourist site (or, in this case, a mobile tourist retail environment) can affect the gaze of other attendees, what Garner (2016b) calls the 'cued immersion' of a tour. Examining the *Doctor Who* Walking Tour of Cardiff, Garner (2016b) treats 'the tour as an official paratext' of the show that 'constructs strategies to align participants with institutional ideologies concerning the *BBC* and its status as a globally-recognized, 21st Century public service broadcaster' (Garner 2016b, 87).

While Garner is concerned here with the reification of the *BBC*, I want to apply his argument about the 'statements of the tour guide […] who primes the tourists to 'see' locations as aspects of the cult world' (Garner 2016b, 87) to the experience of being a fan of *Rick and Morty*. That is, fan participation at the Rickmobile and social media sharing, guided and supported by official social media accounts, works as a framing principle by relying on fans to spread the word about the Rickmobile. The experience of visiting the attraction becomes filtered through the particular fan experience on social media; and by highlighting particular tweets and Instagram posts (via favoriting, retweeting, or liking), the Rickmobile social media account could direct other fans' interpretations of the experience through a transmedia lens.

Fans of *Rick and Morty* did not have to travel very far to meet and greet the Rickmobile.[2] The vehicle started travelling on May 11, 2017 from Atlanta, GA (the location of the headquarters of Adult Swim, the Cartoon Network nighttime programming block; Adult Swim is owned by Turner Broadcasting System), and eventually finished up its tour in New York City at New York Comic Con on Oct 08, 2017. All told, the Rickmobile made 44 scheduled stops in 44 cities (across 18 states)[3] during that five month sojourn. Along the way the Rickmobile traveled the highways of America like a traditional US tourist, taking in many of the sights that rhetorically construct the notion of America, and being photographed countless times for social media (Clark 2004).

In effect, the Rickmobile became a tourist itself, with fans and official social media accounts telling the story of the Rickmobile's adventures. Indeed, part of the experience of the Rickmobile involved fans who encountered it to snap Instagram images and write Twitter posts about their experiences, turning themselves into a literal 'tourist gaze' for other fans: 'If the Rickmobile isn't stopping in a city near you', wrote one online article about the car, 'you can follow along with his adventures on Twitter and Instagram' (Riese 2017). Part of the job of the fan, then, became not just meeting the Rickmobile and purchasing merchandise (although, as I describe in the next section, this was also crucial to displays of fannishness), but also in working as a

[2] Unless those fans were from the vast swaths of middle America, where the Rickmobile did not visit.

[3] The States visited were Georgia, New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Utah, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Florida, before heading back to New York.

social media promoter for the vehicle. Indeed, The Rickmobile is conceptualized as a celebrity in and of itself: note the use of 'his' in Riese's (2017) quote above. The car is the attraction and the fan is the promoter. Engendering and promoting the Rickmobile through social media opens up a new type of fan-tourist experience – both as tourist and as a fan docent.

The position of the fan docent in contemporary media tours is becoming more important, through both themed interaction with the guests as well as the cued immersion into the cult text (Garner 2016). Garner (2017)'s discussion of the tour guide reflects a changing perspective, from the docent as 'an unglamorous job' (Ap and Wong 2001, 556) to one where the docent represents a 'performed identity' of knowledge; here, the Rickmobile fans serve as tour guide for other fans (Garner 2017, 427). In short, the tour guide has rarely been seen as a high-class job, but Garner (2017) makes clear, the 'ambassadorial role' coupled with the symbolic capital accrued through knowledge sharing re-values the guide's work (Garner 2017, 430-1). Fan's promotion of the Rickmobile functioned as a transmediated brand extension.

Yet, unlike traditional forms of transmedia, the Rickmobile reveals a different type of fan docent. If, as previous research has shown, a tour docent creates a cued immersion for visitors (Garner 2016), then the fan docent highlights the relevant experience for other fans at a tourist location. Garner (2017) provides a reading of the docent, the tour guide, as a performative role for the fans in attendance (Lee 2012 describes a similar practice with *Harry Potter* tour guides). The practice becomes seemingly more participatory as individual fans may direct others to view the Rickmobile in particular ways: 'Look at how crazy this experience is; you too can be part of it!' But actually, the participation is limited – posting is a relatively passive activity, or at least one that requires less activity.

In fact, the official website for the Rickmobile proclaimed 'We're bringing the store to your door' (see Plante 2017). Fans not only follow the Rickmobile around and on social media, but as one website adds: 'Rick himself will be chronicling these (mis)adventures across the U.S. on both Instagram and Twitter' (Plante, 2017). This additional level of social media detailing becomes a type of transmedia storytelling, augmenting the experience of the Rickmobile as well as *Rick and Morty*. But unlike traditional views of transmedia, which focus on the integration of multiple mediations to create one narrative, this type of storytelling hinges on the experiences of fans – without fans engaging with the Rickmobile on social media, posting its whereabouts, and becoming part of the social media ecosystem, the Rickmobile's 'story' fails to resonate. The Rickmobile requires fans to post on social media about their experiences with the car. Of course, many fans tweet and discuss their favorite texts online (Deller 2011), but 'the importance of physical embodiment is equally clear in tweets' as well (Deller 2011, 167). That is, social media is often used to reflect a physical presence at events like fan conventions, important events, and tourist locations. This social broadcasting can reflect both a desire on the part of the attending fan to present information to other fans who are missing out, as well as generating a sense of access and subcultural capital.

In other words, the Rickmobile can travel from location to location because of its reliance on its fans to describe its movement. This reliance on (passive) fan

labour – the use of social media in particular – reveals new aspects of corporate use of fan affect. In part, the Rickmobile thus hinges on the fact that 'Businesses are finding that traditional advertising is no longer enough to reach and attract customers' (Niehm, Fiore, Jeong, and Kim 2007). Getting out-and-about in the country is itself a new advertising strategy. But partly, this sort of mobile tourism also exists because of new technology that allows such interactivity. Neuhofer (2014) notes that 'the search for unique, compelling, and memorable experiences in the context of tourism consumption has become a key notion' (Neuhofer 2014, 91). Fans are already posting – the Rickmobile simply hitches a ride on the posts.

Thus, by calling on its fans to tweet, Instagram, and post about the trip around the country, the Rickmobile becomes the tourist and the fan becomes the guide for other consuming fans. Not only does fan knowledge of the show become important for the fans' subcultural capital, but their knowledge about the location of the Rickmobile – not just which cities it is in (as that information is available online), but also where in the city and for how long – becomes a type of currency. The immediacy of the Rickmobile means that fans must reorient themselves to the timing of the Rickmobile. Matt Hills (2002) has termed this 'just-in-time' fandom, when fans must make time in their schedule for the 'rhythms and temporalities of broadcasting' to be able to discuss immediately upon an episode's airing (Hills 2002, 140). However, with the Rickmobile, it's not broadcasting that is 'just-in-time' but rather the appearance of the car itself. The Rickmobile becomes a celebrity, bringing to town the promise of tourist expectations. But in order to meet those expectations, the Rickmobile must assume that fans will act in 'proper' ways: that is, fans will work to advertise the Rickmobile's visit, will visit and purchase products (to offset the cost of travel) and will participate in net-positive ways for Adult Swim. In exchange, the Rickmobile must provide fans with a wealth of reasons to visit – and those reasons include not just subcultural fan capital (Williams 2013), but also 'one-of-a-kind' merchandise.

'Keep an Eye Out for Any Zany Wacky Characters that Pop Up'

In the case of the Rickmobile, however, 'just-in-time fandom' is also 'just-in-line', as the actuality of the Rickmobile is as a mobile pop-up store. But rather than relying just on fans' social media use to advertise (in the case of the fan docent), the Rickmobile also relies on fans' bodies themselves as sites of advertising. I want to discuss here how the presence of fans *en masse* can be read within the framework of transmedia studies. Transmedia has generally referred to the interaction between different texts. Re-reading the presence of fans within the themed retail space, however, means seeing not just interaction between texts, but the importance of fans as a text too. Here, transmedia fandom is more than just using fan material; it's using fans themselves as a form of marketing on behalf of the production.

Social media posts for the Rickmobile, by and large, also display fans' bodies in various ways. Some fans pose by the front of the truck. Other fans come dressed in costume, making cosplay an 'on brand' experience for the transmedia tourist. Many fans take photos of the long queues to buy products. By displaying and focusing on the bodies of the fans in and

of themselves, Adult Swim harnesses the fandom as a mass, as if to indicate to other fans who aren't in attendance that they should come to the next location. The 'text' of the Rickmobile becomes inseparable from the fandom of the Rickmobile, which is linked inexorably to *Rick and Morty*.

Merchandising, and the queueing up for 'unique' items for sale, has become another major aspect of the mainstream fan experience. In *Crossing Fandoms* (2016a), I defined this as 'fanqueue' culture, or 'a culture of sanctioned consumerism as cultural capital' in which fans are 'defined by the eagerness to wait in lines' (Booth 2016a, 24). In fact, queueing up for products and experiences is now a common occurrence for fandom – large fan conventions like Wizard World practically run on fan queueing, and even anniversary celebrations like the *Doctor Who* and *Star Wars'* fiftieth anniversary celebrations had enormous queues (Hills 2015). If fandom is becoming a more mainstream identity, then the way that this identity is becoming expressed is through more mainstream – e.g., capitalistic and industry-sanctioned – ways, including the purchasing of products. Queuing is a mainstream practice, and we are used to seeing queues everywhere: at theme parts, at music gigs, at other tourist sites. In fact, part of knowing that a site is valuable to visit lies in seeing that other people are there as well.

However, the Rickmobile represents a new approach to fan queuing: Matar (2017) describes the Rickmobile as 'Adult Swim's unique approach to marketing'. Pop-up shops sell 'a limited supply of goods' for a limited time (Bartlett 2017). The Rickmobile is no exception – it often sells out, and often fairly quickly (when it came to my area, for instance, the queue stretched for hundreds of people and most of them didn't get any merchandise; they did, however, get photographs for Twitter and Instagram, displaying selfies with the car and with the hoardes of people). Marciniak and Budnarowska (2011) describe pop-up stores as when 'retail brands take up temporary residence in empty retail property spaces' (Marcinuak and Budnarowska 2011, np). They also cite ice cream shoppes, farmer's markets, and fish and chip shops as types of pop-up stores. Similar to pop-up shops are food trucks, which also resonate with the Rickmobile. Food trucks, or street food vending 'exemplify the omnivorous consumptive movement, embodying both lowbrow and highbrow aspects and selling this packaged experience to consumers' (Irvin 2016: 44; see also Bjimji 2010). Indeed, Niehm, Fiore, Jeong, and Kim (2007) note that pop-up stores reflect 'a pervasive change in consumer behavior; many people are no longer concerned with just buying goods and services, they also expect engaging experiences' (Niehm Fiore, Jeong, and Kim 2007, 1). Like the themed retail stores described by Kozinets et al. (2002), pop-up stores 'allow visitors to have unique, personalized interactions and experiences with the brand' (Niehm, Fiore, Jeong, and Kim 2007, 2).

Of course, the Rickmobile is not the standard pop-up shop, which sets up in one location – as previously mentioned, it's mobile. The 'limited time only' nature of the mobile pop-up requires fans to be attentive to the time and place of engagement, engendered by social media action. The Rickmobile thus brings to mind the quintessential American mobile pop-up – the Oscar Meyer Wienermobile, a hot dog shaped car that has, since 1936, been driven around the country handing

out toy whistles in the shape of hot dogs (Wienermobile 2017). The Oscar Meyer Wienermobile – actually, Oscar Meyer send out 11 at any time, 'six of which are the full-sized familiar models, each assigned to a part of the country; and five of which are the other versions: the food truck, WienerMini, WienerRover, WienerCycle, and the WienerDrone' (Wienermobile 2017) – serves as both toy distributor and advertiser, and only the food trucks sell actual hot dogs. The relative infrequency with which one can see a Weinermobile (or other Weiner vehicle) makes a sighting something exciting: everyday people post on social media their excitement when encountering one of these cars in the wild. The Weinermobile as a marketing scheme works to not only sell the product, but also to sell the idea of the car itself as an element of social capital: viewing it gives one social cache. The same model can apply to the Rickmobile and the 'limited time only' nature of transmedia marketing. Seeing the Rickmobile gives one social capital.

Additionally, pop-up stores, coupled with the often-unique merchandise and experiences there, also reflect the 'just-in-time' and the 'just-in-line' aspects of Rickmobile fandom.

For instance, a few pop-up shops have had both overwhelming fandoms, as well as limited time for fans to attend; however, whilst these pop-up shows attempt to create a simulacrum of the diegetic world of the text, the Rickmobile extends the text, bringing new readings to the fans. *A Saved by the Bell* (NBC 1989-93) pop-up bar was only around for a year but was 'slammed with fans' (Selvam 2017a). Multiple *Twin Peaks* (ABC 1990-1, Showtime 2017) pop-ups have appeared around the country, timed to the release of the new season (Dom 2017). A *Stranger Things* (Netflix 2016-) bar was only up for a month and queues went around the block (Selvam 2017b). A *Gilmore Girls* (The WB 2000-7, Netflix 2016) coffee shop in Beverley Hills, California reproduces Luke's Diner for fan-tourists. In contract, the Rickmobile augments rather than simulates the text.

Pop-ups promote through social media word-of-mouth of fans and the presence of 'hip' people, much like the Rickmobile. And part of what generates activity and interest in the store is the mass of bodies that huddle around the merchandise. Nearly every post with #Rickmobile tagged is of fans standing in the queue to buy a product, or lining up to get access to the car. The advertising is written by/on the people.

The Wienermobile (and also the Red Bull-themed car) primarily serve as advertising in and of themselves; the handing out of merchandising is secondary to the car reminding people to 'eat a hot dog!' Seeing people interact is key, whether on social media or in person. In the case of the Rickmobile, however, a more complicated relationship between the pop-up, the mobile tourist, and the fan comes together. The car is in the shape of Rick, but the actual advertising is relatively small and hidden: a small hashtag on the bottom bumper (#rickmobile) and the title of the show on the front doors. One would have to be already familiar with *Rick and Morty* to know what the car is. The mystery helps drive people to use the hashtag (hopefully not while driving, though). The purpose of the Rickmobile is to sell merchandise, but it's also to sell the idea of *Rick and Morty* as cutting-edge, a contemporary comedy that takes chances and does things differently. This is transmedia branding, for fans and using fans. For fans, part of the pleasure lies in collecting the merchandise from the

Rickmobile, but part of the pleasure also stems from finding and following the car, from posting about it, and in being seen with it. Using fans, the Rickmobile markets the very idea of the cult nature of the text through the bodies of the fans at the pop-up. They become as important as the actual merchandise itself, and the presence of fans serves as advertising itself, saying 'you should come here and be with other *Rick and Morty* fans'. With over 18,000 followers on Twitter and hundreds of thousands of Twitter and Instagram posts, the Rickmobile becomes the celebrity and the fans become, quite literally, the followers. The Rickmobile turns the presence of fans into active labour for the show.

Conclusion: 'Don't Even Trip, Dawg'

While the Rickmobile might reveal a different take on fan labour, there is an additional wrinkle which bears ironing out: there is a fundamental contradiction when applying fan pop-up tourism to *Rick and Morty.* The show itself 'does more than make us laugh – it exposes the terrible void at the heart of contemporary liberal US culture, while aggressively seeking relief from this knowledge in grotesquery' (Williams 2016, 147). The avant-garde science-fiction and nihilistic narrative 'contrasts the chaos of *Rick and Morty*'s universe against the damage that it inflicts on the individuals within it, deriving emotional pathos from rampant surrealism. It also shows how fundamentally impossible ascertaining true happiness is' (Evans 2015, 11). Given these, then, the underlying functionality of the series seems fundamentally at odds with merchandising at all. If buying goods can lead fans to happiness (Geraghty 2014), and if fan merchandising itself is part of capitalist culture (Booth 2016a), then the Rickmobile, like *Rick and Morty* itself, 'thus swings from irony to sincerity and back to a more profound and unassailable irony that recognises nothing as sacred and leaves no solid moral ground to stand on' (Williams 2016: 148). Indeed, the very idea of the Rickmobile would go against the ethos espoused in *Rick and Morty*; the paratext has reframed the discourse of the originary text (see Gray 2010, 15 for a similar discussion of *The Simpsons*).

The idea of purchasing products to celebrate a series would be mercilessly mocked by protagonist Rick Sanchez, as would the Rickmobile itself. As an obscene parody of the Oscar Meyer Wienermobile, in that it features a hunched over, inebriated caricature of Rick staring down the cars trailing behind, the Rickmobile plays on the grotesque humor of the show. For Rick, as for the narrative of the series, resistance against any sort of corporation or corporate-control is meaning in and of itself. There is a libertarian streak running through the show, which balances Rick's desire for absolute autonomy with Morty's desire to become part of some of the alien groups they encounter (e.g., the Vindicators, an *Avengers*-like group of superheroes).

That the Rickmobile is thus positioned as a celebrity in its own right is antithetical to a show that revels in its anti-status quo strictures and designs. Rick is the ultimate anti-(capitalist) hero: he makes his own tools, he is beholden to nobody, and he is a systematically takes down any government or ideological state apparatus that angers him. He will shoot a friend in the face and then get drinks with him the next day. He cares about no one (not even Morty - well, maybe a little) except himself. He once made an entire mini-universe (the 'microverse') in a tiny box and populated it with tiny people, only

so he could appear to them as a god, force them to generate electricity on 'Goobleboxes', and then steal the power from them.

So, while Rick might assume buying merchandise would be silly, the Rickmobile demonstrates that fans will queue up and advertise for days. So, perhaps, the Rickmobile most ably matches the show it is supposedly advertising through its fandom: like Rick, it cares not who its fans are, but only how it can use them. Like the people of the microverse, fans serve the car; and through the car, the show, generating labour through fannish Goobleboxes of their own.

Acknowledgement

My sincerest thanks to Ross Garner for the helpful conversations and notes about this project in its draft stages.

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ISSN: ISSN 2049-2340