"The Walking Dead Family is a real thing not just a hashtag": Theorizing Dissonance through Fan Tourism for The Walking Dead in Woodbury, Atlanta

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Abstract

The 2016 Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SMCS) conference took place in Atlanta. Historically important for the Civil Rights movement, the city is home to the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, but as an emerging hub for film and television production Atlanta is also home to various studios, location tours, and other sites for fan tourism. I attended SCMS 2016 because of the scholarship, but visiting Atlanta meant I was able to spend a day on Atlanta Movie Tours' 'Big Zombie' tours. The tours feature locations from *The Walking Dead* (AMC 2010-) in and around Atlanta, and are led by actors from the show. The tours thus provide fans access to behind-the-scenes stories and information, as well as exclusive access to locations, and opportunities to 're-enact' key scenes. In this paper, I document my experience of the tours as both fan and academic, focusing on the role that dissonance played. I began the tour from a purely fannish perspective, excited to see locations and hear stories, but during the tour I found it difficult to halt academic analysis of this particular form of transmedia tourism. The actors leading the tour spoke of the 'AMC family' while noting how they were instructed not to speak to primary cast members, and clips from the show played inside the tour bus before we disembarked to view them in their 'real' (rather than fictional) Atlanta context. I thus experienced a sense of dissonance from, rather than immersion in, the world of *The Walking Dead*, and suggest that this sense of liminality is currently underexplored in analyses of fan tourism. The idea of immersion is prominent in discussions of both transmedia properties and media-orientated tourism, where transmediality is assumed to bring the tourist deeper into the storyworld, rather than highlighting their divergence from it. I suggest in this article that immersion is over used in analyses of media tourism and the role that dissonance plays should be examined in greater detail.

Contributor Note

Bethan Jones is an independent scholar whose work examines the relationship between fans, objects of fandom, and producers. She has published extensively on digital media, gender, antifandom and toxicity and her work has appeared in the *Journal of Transformative Works* and *Culture, Participations, and Sexualities*, as well as edited collections for Palgrave and Routledge. She is a board member on the Fan Studies Network and has a co-edited collection on crowdfunding, published by Peter Lang in 2015.

Introduction: Welcome to Woodbury

By offering fans opportunities including visiting filming locations and sets, undertaking tours and inhabiting the 'world' of the fan-object, intersections between tourism and transmedia properties have become a popular form of leisure. Matt Hills (2016) points out that 'staging imaginary worlds in physical form has become a significant part of destination tourism, events entertainment and 'extended' film exhibition' (2016, 245) and Matthew Freeman (2018) notes that 'Throughout both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, theme parks, museums, conventions, galleries and memorabilia fairs have all emerged as commercially viable extensions of media forms around the world' (2018, 125). Work in fan studies has tended to focus on how fan tourism sites are represented in terms of authenticity (Combs, 1989; Hills, 2002; Tzanelli, 2004; Couldry, 2005; Butler, 2011) and how meaning is constructed for and by the visitors. However, this is predominantly discussed through immersion (Jenkins, 2009; Freeman, 2018; Hills, 2016). I would argue, however, that dissonance is just as important a concept to discuss in the success, or failure, of transmedia tourism yet has been undertheorized in academic work thus far.

This article aims to counter the association between transmedia, tourism and immersion by theorizing dissonance in regard to tourist perspectives and suggesting that authenticity and absorption might not sit well in the context of tourism. In other words, it is the specific aspect of 'transmedia' and 'tourism' together that becomes problematic. Discussing sites of fan tourism such as the *Harry Potter* Warner Bros. Studio Tour, the *Coronation Street* (ITV 1960-) set tour and the *Doctor Who* Experience, Hills notes that 'each tourist attraction trades on its connections to the filming of the texts concerned' (2016, 245) and that similar declarations of authenticity were made at each location. The association between authentic and immersive experiences within the media-tourism experience seems inextricably linked. For Hills, theme parks, set visits and location tours 'involve participating in an immersive performance […] that relies on audiences 'being there' and hence amassing embodied cultural distinction' (2016, 244) while Waysdorf and Reijnders (2018) suggest that 'In the multi-sensory aspects of the theme park the story-world is engaged with in an embodied and immersive manner' (2018, 180). Yet the links between authenticity and immersion are not as simple as they may appear. My interest in this article, then, is less the theme park (such as Disneyland) or museum (such as the *Doctor Who* Experience) but the tour. I explore the role that dissonance plays in media tourism by focusing on the Atlanta Movie Tours' 'Big Zombie Tour' which predominantly features *The Walking Dead* (AMC 2010-) locations.

Media Tourism and Atlanta Movie Tours

Atlanta Movie Tours was started by Carrie Burns and Patti Davis in March 2012. Both fans of the show, they created the company when 'Carrie started telling [Patti] about all the places she was taking people for the locations, when friends came into town. We said: 'We need to do that for a living'. Within a few days we incorporated and had our first tour a couple of months later' (quoted in Howard, 2015). In March 2016, Atlanta

Movie Tours ran two *Walking Dead* themed tours: 'Big Zombie 1' and 'Big Zombie 2'. A combination of walking and riding tours, the first takes place in Atlanta and covers the first season of the show, while the second heads out to Senoia and covers seasons two to five. While the diegetic geography of *The Walking Dead* takes the viewer on a road trip through the US as the group of survivors attempt firstly to find a cure, then simply to live, the show itself is filmed almost entirely within an hour or so of Atlanta. Some locales, such as the prison used in season three, were built on a set in Raleigh Studios, but most filming is done on location. The Big Zombie Tours are rated five star on Trip Advisor and reviews highlighted the fact that the tours are led by guides who've worked as extras, thus attendees are privy to a wealth of behind the scenes information. Atlanta Movie Tours is not affiliated with AMC, however, and the Big Zombie Tours are thus not official. Despite this, their links to the Network and status as an incorporated company mean that they are not unofficial (fan-led) sites of popular celebration either; rather, they sit somewhere in between. They function as 'semi-official' (Combs, 1989) tours which offer a different experience to the 'highly structured, infinitely repeatable experience [of the official studio tours], in which the fans may at times seemingly be positioned as participants, all the while remaining as spectators' (Karpovich 2010, 15). Angelina I. Karpovich suggests that after the official tours come the

> fan-organised tour […] which shares a degree of structure with the studio tours, but posits different hierarchical relationships between the tourists and the tour guide. The presumption that devotion to the object of fandom is 'shared' by the tour guide and the tourists allows for a greater degree of

interaction on the part of the tourists; in contrast to the official studio tours, fan-organised tours allow the fan tourist the possibility of immediate intervention, interjection, challenge, or addition to the narrative presented by the fan tour guide. (2010, 15)

Yet the Big Zombie Tour's relationship to AMC (the rights holder for *The Walking Dead*) is closer to the official studio tour that Karpovich describes than the unofficial tour. While the tour guides are fans of the show, they are also actors who have appeared as extras. Patti Davis notes that 'We've done a little research and we've realized we are one of a few, if not the only tour that has guides that are on the shows and movies you're viewing and you're going to locations with them', (quoted in Howard, 2015). The relationship between AMC and Atlanta Movie Tours prevents tourists from filming or taking photographs on the tour buses (a similar model is operated by Brit Movie Tours in the UK) and there are certain subjects the Big Zombie Tour guides will not discuss, including any spoilers from the current season until it has aired in its entirety. This is not only due to the non-disclosure agreement all actors, including extras, sign with AMC but part of the Atlanta Movie Tours' company policy. While Atlanta Movie Tours may not 'rigidly structure the tourist's experience' in the same way as official sites of fan tourism (Karpovich 2010, 16) they are nevertheless bound by prior agreements made with AMC. As Davis says, 'For us, it's a matter of respect for AMC, the show and the people who work for us' (quoted in Howard, 2015) and the policy is strictly enforced by the guides and the Atlanta Movie Tours staff who attend each tour.

Sue Beeton (2005), in discussing *Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003) fan tourism, documents how the owners of

the property on which Hobbiton was built were able to secure permission to run tours of the site from New Line Cinema:

> The set of *Hobbiton* had been partly bulldozed when hit by severe rainstorms that halted its demolition, giving them one final opportunity. New Line Cinema relented, but placed severe restrictions on the operation. Tours were not permitted to commence until December 2002 and were tightly scripted by the cinema company. When the owners were permitted to commence their tours in December 2002, New Line Cinema provided photo boards along with instructions as to what they could show and say. In addition, no re-working of the hobbit holes or restoration/renovation of the site was permitted – they had to stay as they were. As the holes were built from untreated wood and polystyrene, their collapse was inevitable. Finally, in late 2003, the family was given permission to maintain the site, but not to enhance it.

> In spite of the state of the set, tours have been highly successful. The operator has turned the copyright and confidentiality issues and restrictions into a benefit by taking them as the main theme of the tour, which may disappoint young visitors looking for a theme-park style recreation. During my own visit, however, all the visitors were adults and were quite fascinated with the issues. (2005, 94)

I took part in both Big Zombie Tours in March 2016, and while none of the other tourists seemed interested in the restrictions set by AMC or the discourse that the tour guides/extras reiterated, both of these began creeping to the forefront of my mind during the first tour and stayed with me for the duration of the second, ultimately leading to the creation of this article. My position in writing this paper, then, is very much that of an aca-fan (Jenkins, 2006a).

Participating in the tours allowed me to experience first-hand the roles that copyright and stakeholders play within the provision of transmedia tourist experiences, and these tensions are one of the overarching power structures that I engage with throughout this article (also Garner, this volume). I went on the tours because I was attending the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) conference, and the fact that I had presented a paper at the conference a few days earlier undoubtedly affected the ways in which I engaged with the tours. I do not suggest that my experiences are somehow more valuable (or valid) than non-academics who have taken the tours, but my double identity provides me with a distinctive vantage point for considering the dissonance and liminality of fan tourism spaces in a heretofore under theorised way. Hills (2002) suggests that within autoethnography, 'the tastes, values, attachments and investments of the fan and the academic-fan are placed under the microscope of cultural analysis' as the aca-fan is asked to 'question their self-account constantly, opening the 'subjective' and the intimately personal up to the cultural contexts in which it is formed and experienced' (2002, 72). Hills, writing about his autoethnographic experience of undertaking unofficial *X-Files* (FOX 1993-2018) fan tourism, suggests that

> There has been, to date, no direct attempt on the part of organised tourism to 'cash in' upon the distinction which has been generated for Vancouver by the international success of *The X-Files*. Scouting for *X-Files* locations remains an 'underground' activity in the sense that one cannot simply join a guided tour. Neither can one readily purchase tourist

souvenirs which link Vancouver with *The X-Files* (2002, 113)

Fans have to seek out the filming locations of the show, relying on 'insider' information gleaned from shops, cafes and taxis, and transposing the tropes of the show onto the physical geography of the city (Hills 2002, 114). Yet my experience is closer to that of Paul Booth. Booth's autoethnographic account of his visit to the *Doctor Who* Experience in 2012 was 'limited by my specific time and place [and] was formed and modulated by a major media corporation. And it will never be repeated' (2015, 107-108). Much as the *Doctor Who* Experience changed dependent on the current incarnation of the Doctor, so too do the Big Zombie Tours change depending on where *The Walking Dead* films and who takes the tour on any given day. Since I took the tours a 'Big Zombie Tour 3' has been added, giving fans the opportunity to visit more locations to the east of Senoia, as well as a Big Zombie Walking Tour in and around the fictional town of Woodbury (the real-life town of Senoia). Different 'insiders' also take each tour, providing fans with different anecdotes and experiences, including past and current cast members such as IronE Singleton (T-Dog) and Ross Marquand (Aaron). Thus, the tours' 'specific liminality [...] means that any tourism is specifically modulated by the temporal situation around the tourist' (Booth 2015, 108). The temporal situation for me included my prior attendance at SCMS. Not only was I in Atlanta for a short period of time and wanted to make the most of the opportunity to indulge in some fan tourism, I was attending an academic conference where I was surrounded by discussions of media, fandom and cultural studies. Three days of immersion in such an environment put me on the

fringes of the other groups on the tours, as did my status as lone traveller – I began chatting to the Atlanta Movie Tours' member of staff on the tour and we have since become friends on Facebook.

I initially joined each tour as a fan, but it was during the tour I began making observations about the experience and therefore a note on the methodological considerations is required. I attended two consecutive tours, taking the Atlanta Movie Tours bus from Atlanta (Big Zombie Tour 1) to Senoia (Big Zombie Tour 2) in order to attend both. As I was in Atlanta for a short time, I was unable to attend any further tours, and so the data presented in this article is retrospective in nature, and based on two tours which took place in March 2016. I took part in the tours on a participant-observation basis, but there are no ethical concerns regarding consent or revealing my identity as a researcher. Davies suggests, '[r]esearch in public places – for example observations of public rituals or performances – does not require notification of the presence and intent of the researcher' (Davies 2008, 65) and scholars such as Torchin (2002), Larsen (2015) and Reijnders (2011) have also not identified disclosure of identity as an ethical concern. Additionally, this article focuses primarily on the tour guide, the tour company and AMC, thus little mention is made of other tour participants, and when it is none can be identified.

'They Have the Money and Power and We Do Not': Dissonance and Discourse on the Big Zombie Tour

Duncan Light (2009), in his analysis of tourists visiting Transylvania, points out that 'Although tourist performances take

place away from home they are grounded within, and circumscribed by, the cultural context from which the tourist originates' (2009, 242) Thus the 'cultural experiences offered by tourism are consumed in terms of prior knowledge, expectations, fantasies and mythologies circulating within the tourists' original culture about their destination (Craik 1997, 119). It is not simply the tourist's home culture which circumscribes the cultural experiences, however; experiences which the tourist has while away from home adds to their understanding of their tourist experience. In my case, as I have already mentioned, my experiences at SCMS contributed to the specifically academic disconnect I experienced on the Big Zombie Tours. One paper in particular, Richard McCulloch's (2016) work on the 2015 Disney D23 Expo, resonated with my experiences on the tour.

In his paper, McCulloch (2016) noted that many of the celebrities coming out onto the stage in the panels at the Expo were engaging in the discourse of being 'part of the Disney family' and recounting personal anecdotes about their relationship with Disney. McCulloch (2016) argued that these stars were using fandom as a rhetorical device to curry favour with the audience, yet some stars were able to perform this much more convincingly than others. What struck me in this paper, which kept coming back to me on *The Walking Dead* tour, was Harrison Ford's comments when he appeared on stage. Although McCulloch (2016) noted that Ford didn't contribute to the 'member of the family' discourse, he did thank Disney for making *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (Abrams, 2015) happen, while *simultaneously* sounding like he really didn't want to be at the Expo. Ford's performance of the rhetorical device was unsuccessful, and

for McCulloch (2016) much of that discourse came across as extremely contrived over the course of the weekend. That same discourse was evident on the *Walking Dead* tour.

On entering the Atlanta Movie Tours shop in Atlanta, visitors are faced with a quote from Greg Nicotero (executive producer) talking about how *The Walking Dead* has become a communal experience (see figure 1).

Figure 1

In addition, many of the actors talk about the '*Walking Dead* family' – which includes fans – on their social media channels, and this discourse was also in evidence at the Walker Stalker London convention I attended in March 2017. I read this emphasis on family as a way of trying to engender a sense of community (in which fans discuss their love of the show within the boundaries policed by AMC) rather than attempting to foster a participatory culture (in which fans are critical of the show and the network, or produce content such as fan fiction and fan art, etc.). By including fans under the umbrella of family, AMC are able to suggest that we are all 'in it together', bound together by a love for the show (and subsequently the various elements that produce it). Family is not, of course, a strange term within fannish circles. Fandoms are what I would term 'found families', wherein individuals can be made to feel at home, express aspects of themselves that they may not be able to elsewhere, and develop deep

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and affective relationships. However, much as in 'traditional' families, fannish families can contain their fair share of infighting, disagreements and policing (see Chin, 2018; Scott, 2019; Busse, 2013; Larsen and Zubernis, 2011). As Carlton Brick (2000) notes, 'The construction of the family within socio-political discourse becomes a mode of discursive regulation in and of itself. The family has become a highly moralized and normative concept which assumes fixed modes of behaviour' (2000, 163). AMC and its ancillaries thus use the term to promote certain *kinds* of behaviour – both from fans, actors and crew.

During the Big Zombie tours, *The Walking Dead* family was a discourse that was coded as authentic. Both guides on both tours, for example, talked about being part of *The Walking Dead* family. But they also spoke about how the extras are segregated from the stars. Extras who take the parts of zombies on the show are given different amounts of make-up and costuming depending on how close they are to the camera. The tour guides on both Big Zombie Tours were both 'hero' zombies – the ones who are killed in close up on the show - thus on film they share screen space with the main characters and work closely, to an extent, with the stars. Off screen, however, they are subject to various restrictions which could see their employment terminated should they be violated. Extras are not allowed to speak to the actors, and they have different lunch tents and facilities. Stephanie, the tour guide on the second tour, told us that on one occasion Steven Yeun (who played Glenn Rhee) came into the extras' tent for lunch and started talking to one of the zombie actors, who was too worried to say much to him in response in case he got in trouble. As a fan this anecdote was interesting, and

indeed many of the other tourists laughed or gasped when Stephanie told it. Yet as an academic I was disturbed by the discourse circulating around – and circulated by – actors and the network. Stephanie seemed unaware of the contradiction between referring to herself as part of the *Walking Dead* family and telling fans how she had to stay away from actors on set. Yet, as an academic working in fan studies this anecdote at once threw me out of the fannish space of the tour and provided me with material for work on fan/producer relationships (see, for example, Larsen and Zubernis, 2011; Williams, 2010; Chin, 2013; Milner, 2010). Although Stephanie had pointed out the limitations placed on her and Atlanta Movie Tours by AMC, her performance as a tour guide nevertheless carried an air of authenticity (contra Booth's 2015 analysis of the *Doctor Who* Experience). This contradiction, however, also showed a tension between demonstrations of individual agency and remaining 'on brand' in terms of PR. AMC's discourse surrounding the *Walking Dead* family was simultaneously reinforced and undermined by Stephanie's agency in choosing what anecdotes to tell. In this respect, she also demonstrated 'how tensions between individualised agency and organisational structures play out within specific (media) tours' (Garner 2017, 432). We were told, at the beginning of the tour, not to record anything on the bus as that could affect the guides' relationships with AMC, and it was clear that some aspects of the filming (including, obviously, discussing upcoming episodes) were out of bounds . Yet this afforded the tour a sense of authenticity because the guides were intimately involved with both the filming and the network (as opposed to the commodification and inauthenticity often ascribed to tour guides - see Lukas, 2007;

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Booth, 2015; Beattie, 2013). Stephanie thus performed a range of intermediary positions, where she demonstrated what Garner calls 'heteronomous autonomy', as her performances 'become tailored to the needs of specific tourist groups at the same time as staying 'on brand' (2017, 433).

In a similar way, Kent's (our first tour guide) discussion on spoilers also provided me with a disconnect between my fannish and academic self, the fannish space and my experience of it, and with other fans on the tour. Like Stephanie, Kent has been in many of *The Walking Dead* episodes and also works as an extra on various other films produced in Atlanta. He was thus able to provide us with a great deal of information about the movie industry generally and *The Walking Dead* in particular. What I found especially interesting, however, was what he had to say about AMC issuing cease and desist letters to spoiler sites. One particular *Walking Dead* fan group, *The Spoiling Dead*, searches for and shares spoilers related to the series. These include set photos, while filming is taking place, and detailed plot information, and around the time of the tour they'd shared the audio for the last 10 minutes of the season six finale. This leak was the subject of Kent's speech. I hesitate to call it a rant, but it was clear that he felt very, very strongly about *The Spoiling Dead* and how fans who spoil the episodes or seek out information are not fans at all. Rather, they damage the show and they hurt the cast and crew who put in so much time and energy into making each episode. For Kent, Atlanta Movie Tours and AMC, therefore, *Spoiling Dead* fans aren't part of the *Walking Dead* family at all. Spoiling is, however, a key part of fan culture. Henry Jenkins analyses *Survivor* fans who go to great lengths, and get great pleasures

from, unearthing spoilers for who is going to win each season. For Henry Jenkins, these fans demonstrate 'collective intelligence in practice' and the process of spoiling by 'expand[ing] your individual grasp by pooling knowledge with others intensifies the pleasures any viewer takes in trying to 'expect the unexpected'' (2006b, 28). Similarly, Jason Mittell and Jonathan Gray 'came to see that the circulation and creation of spoilers helped many of those fans to engage with *Lost* on their own terms. The spoilers as paratexts helped carve a more personalized route through the text' (Gray 2010, 143-144). *The Spoiling Dead* fans thus epitomise certain aspects of fan culture: participatory, intelligent, creative. Yet in doing so find themselves in opposition to the industry. The statement that *The Spoiling Dead* issued on their Facebook page shows how they feel they fit into the fan family – or not:

> We hold a track record for accuracy and now AMC perceives us as a threat. We can understand why. We were once just a small community, but now we are 400,000 strong among all our outlets. […] We are a threat because of our accuracy. However, it was never our intention to cause harm to this show (and we don't believe we have), only to satisfy the curiosity of thousands of fans who wanted what we offered. Millions of other fans tune in to this show unspoiled and are none the wiser about who we are. We are a dedicated community of enthusiastic, passionate fans that love this show so much we always want to know what's going to happen and speculate on all those possibilities. Our spoilers are intended only for fans that seek them out to enhance their own viewing experience. (2016, np)

Of course, working as an academic who looks at fan/producer relationships this was interesting to me, and it was curious

to see how it fits into the discourse of the family. As I have suggested, there is a *Walking Dead* family but it's policed and regulated by AMC, other organisations which are affiliated with AMC, those which are not affiliated but support the network such as Atlanta Movie Tours and Walker Stalker (see Jones 2018), and to some extent fans themselves. From the extras who work with the actors on screen but aren't allowed to talk to them at lunch, to the fans who spend hours dedicated to finding out snippets about their favourite show, the *Walking Dead* family is denied to them, at least in official AMC (and partner) discourse.

Kent's role as tour guide also became inflated with his role as protector. Thus, unlike Stephanie, who showed the contradictions inherent between the tour and the network, Kent's adherence to AMC's brand values while simultaneously 'interpreting this alignment as demonstrating agency' (Garner 2017, 433) demonstrated how discourses of branding and agency interrelate and ultimately reinforce the brand values of AMC, Atlanta Movie Tours and myriad other organisations.

Kent's speech did not only disconnect me from the tour because I am an academic, it distanced me from the guide himself because I am a fan who has looked at set photos while filming is taking place, and I am a fan who supports others who want spoilers. As *The Spoiling Dead* notes, there are millions of fans out there who watch the show entirely unspoiled so to single out a specific group – a group who would be a target audience for the tour – and criticise them in the process of the tour prevented me from being immersed in and engaged with that particular aspect of it. Erik Cohen (1985) distinguished four aspects of tour guides' communicative

role, and suggested the information they impart is 'rarely purely neutral; rather it [is] intended either to impart or maintain a desired 'tourist image' of the host setting or to engender in the visitors some wider social and political impressions' (1985, 15). In the case of the Big Zombie Tour, at least part of the tour guide's function was to reiterate AMC's discourse about the *Walking Dead* family and who has access to it. Many of the other tourists on the tour with me seemed to agree with Kent's criticism of *The Spoiling Dead*, yet there have likely been others over the course of the tours who have been in the same position as I was: fundamentally opposed to what the tour guide was saying, and what fellow fans appeared to agree with, yet powerless to do anything but sit in silence.

Rather than these tour participants 'enjoy[ing] a temporary increase in their own media-derived symbolic capital by 'buy[ing] into' the tour/guide's official status' (Garner 2017, 434), the tour guide's official status works to cast doubt on the fan's subcultural capital, or to disconnect them from the tourism experience. A dissonance thus emerged during the tours regarding fan-producer relations, but they also evidenced more micro-examples of policing where contributors on the periphery also try and discipline 'good' and 'bad' fan behaviour. The effect of this is to prevent fans from being immersed in the world of *The Walking Dead*, by positioning them as outside of the fan family, 'bad' fans who perform 'bad' activities. Rather than immersion, then, 'transmedia' and 'tourism' coming together in this instance created the opposite.

'The Landscape has Forever Become Associated with the Undead': The Appeal of Authentic Dissonance

So far, I have examined the dissonance I experienced on the Big Zombie Tour as a result of the discourses put forward by AMC, Atlanta Movie Tours and the tour guides. While I have framed this dissonance in terms of my academic background, I have nevertheless suggested that other fans who engage in practices which AMC seek to prevent may experience similar feelings. I have suggested that semi-official transmedia tourism produces different identity positions that must be negotiated by the (aca-)fan-tourist, and have noted that forms of policing disrupt the discourse of immersion so often used in accounts of transmedia properties. In this next section, however, I suggest an alternative way of thinking about dissonance and turn to the disconnect fans experience when seeing the fictional locations in their real life context. Hills (2016), discussing the *Doctor Who* Experience, notes that binaries of 'real' and 'fictional' worlds permeate discussions of media tourism, but argues this is too simplistic a reading: transmedia tourism

> might be thought of as a paradigmatic case of travelling from the Primary (real, or represented-as-real) world and into a secondary world—that is, entering a symbolically bounded, fantastical domain. But the 'magic circle' of the *DWE* walkthrough is, if anything, a resolutely nested set of concentric circles rather than a singular framing [...] There is no one 'symbolic immersion' where we definitely know we have 'entered' the walk-through's Whoniverse [...] Nor is the 'real world' firmly excluded; fans' memories of *Doctor Who* encountered in the ordinary world of media consumption are drawn

on by references to multiple TV episodes. (2016, 257)

The *Doctor Who* Experience is 'a distinctive recombination of ordinary world, media world, commercial world, and fan world' (Hills 2016, 257), so too does the Big Zombie tour amalgamate these multiple worlds. Clips from the show were played on screens within the tour bus during both parts of the tour. This served to occupy tourists on the sections of the tour when we were travelling between locations, as well as 'setting up' the location to which we were going. Both Nick Couldry (2000, 83) and Melissa Beattie (2013, 179) note that visitors are required to 'cross through the screen' when entering into the diegesis of *Coronation Street* and *Doctor Who*; by playing clips prior to disembarking, fans on the *Walking Dead* tours were literally invited to '[cross] various thresholds' (Beattie 2013, 179) in order to enter the fictional frame. Despite Will Brooker's argument that outside spaces cannot 'offer a convincing experience of entering a fictional diegesis' (2005, 14) the pairing of the fictional (via the TV clip) and the real (via leaving the bus) functioned as a form of 'cued immersion' (Garner 2016). Ross Garner argues that 'The [*Doctor Who* Experience Walking Tour] guide's script therefore imbues the location with diegetic and/or extra-diegetic significance through intertwining narrative and production discourses [...] as the information disclosed provides cues which are designed ...connect tour members to the space' (2016, 93). Thus, when we were heading to the department store from which Rick (Andrew Lincoln), Glenn, Andrea (Laurie Holden), Morales (Juan Gabriel Pareja), Jacqui (Jeryl Prescott) and T-Dog (Irone Singleton) escape in the second episode of season one, a clip from that episode featuring the

department store was played. The clip was used to stimulate fans' memories of the scenes which took place there and ensure we were primed to 'enter' the location from the diegesis, layered over the physical location. Hills argues that it is enchantment which is arguably more important to visitors than immersion (2016, 259), yet the *Doctor Who Experience* is markedly different to the Big Zombie tour and – I would suggest – other forms of location tourism. Rather than engaging with an illusion (such as standing at the controls of the TARDIS), participants on the tour are experiencing 'behind the scenes'. Clips are played so that we can recognise the location from the diegesis but we are visiting the sites of key scenes in *The Walking Dead* and are aware that we are not engaging with the show itself.

The building, in the diegesis, is an abandoned Macy's store but the scene was actually filmed at the Sam Nunn Federal Building. This is, of course, not unusual. Many filming locations stand in for other sites, such as Vancouver which has doubled for many other North American cities (Brooker, 2007). Michael Saler (2012) suggests that a 'self-conscious strategy of embracing illusions while acknowledging their artificial status, of turning to the 'as if', has become integral to modern enchantment' (2012, 13), and thus fans visiting sites of fan tourism are able to embrace the apparent contrariness of the 'fictional world' and the 'real world' existing at the same time and in the same space. Yet I would suggest that this mode of enchantment (the 'disenchanted enchantment', as Saler (2012, 12) refers to it) does not apply to the location tour as visitors are not experiencing illusions. Rather, we are seeing the diegetic location in its real-world locale. The site of Macy's has

changed very little since the episode aired thus we were able to walk up to the doors through which the characters escape into the back of a truck, *imagining* ourselves in the same situation while not *experiencing* the situation.

Angelina Karpovich (2010) points out that this can cause potential disappointments for the fan-tourist: 'Unlike fans of sport and popular music, film and television fans traditionally follow fictionalised worlds, and every instance of physical proximity brings with it a potential demystification and disavowal' (2010, 16). In fact, this did occur when visiting the barn where Rick meets the Governor (David Morrissey) in season three. The barn itself is located in Haralson, and on the way to the site we watched the relevant clip from the show. On arriving in Haralson we had a short walk over some train tracks and down a street in order to reach the barn. Unlike its location in the diegesis, in real life it is located on the main road, and features prominent no trespassing signs. On entering the barn, the first thing that struck me was its layout. The barn in its real-life location has a walkway down the middle, with two raised platforms on either side. In the show, however, the floor of the barn is on one level. Thus, we were in the *actual* barn, but we weren't in the barn as depicted on screen. In the centre of the walkway was a table with two glasses on top (see figure 2).

The word 'Rick' was engraved on one and 'the Governor' engraved on the other. Stephanie asked us if we thought the glasses had been there since the episode. But since the episode was filmed? Since the episode aired? It wasn't clear. A young boy who was on the tour responded with a yes, but, they did not appear in the episode. Rather, they seemed to have

been placed there to reinforce the barn's status as 'actual filming location'.

Figure 2

Both the layout of the barn and the appearance of the glasses threw me out of the world of *The Walking Dead*. Neither were faithful recreations of the world that we see on screen. This attempt to develop the hyperdiegesis ran hollow because it did not '[appear] to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension' (Hills 2002, 137). Rick and the Governor may have shared a drink in the episode, but their glasses were not etched and they sat several feet above the place where we were standing. Stephanie's attempts to enhance the tour by engaging with us in a form of transmedia expansion

thus actually caused me further dissonance. It felt as though the barn was positioned to *perform* the barn from the episode rather than *be* the barn from the episode. Chris Rojek (1993) writes of 'the sense of anticlimax that often accompanies the visit' to contemporary tourist sites, asking 'we see it; but have we not seen it before in countless artifacts, images, dramatic treatments, and other reproductions?' (1993, 196). I would argue a same sense of anti-climax can accompany visits to sites of fan tourism. We have seen the place before on our TV or mobile devices, perhaps multiple times, and have imbued it with a specific meaning to us. When faced with the 'real' we can experience that sense of let-down. Yet in visiting the barn my sense was not of anti-climax but dissonance – I was in the barn, but it was not the barn that I had seen on screen. It was not authentic.

A similar feeling occurred when we entered Morgan's apartment (first seen in season 3, episode 12). The space is located in Grantville and again the apartment we entered into is where the scenes from the show were filmed. But the location was stripped of its decoration when production wrapped and has since been recreated from photographs (see figures 3-5).
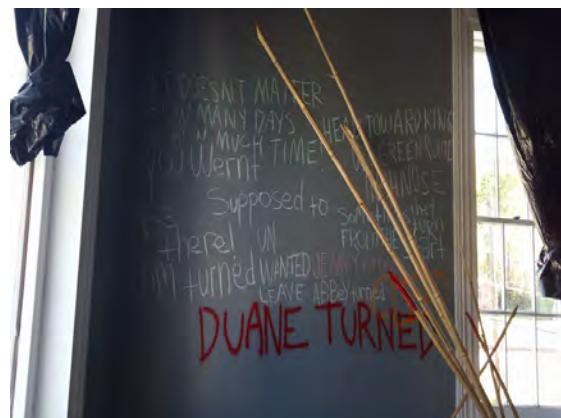

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

On walking through the front door, we were faced with Morgan's welcome mat trap. We stepped over it and proceeded up the stairs, which were covered in warnings. In the apartment proper, the walls were covered in scrawls, replicating what we see on the show, and Morgan's cot, supplies, rifle and ammunition are all in the room. In many ways, the apartment is a faithful recreation but there are also additions – cardboard cut outs of zombies and various characters are dotted around the space and zombies are painted onto the walls as well as the show's iconic 'don't open dead inside' image. Karpovich notes that

> tour guides often delight in revealing the nuances and the mechanics of the creative process, and in pointing out the subtle inconsistencies in the finished products (Torchin, 2002, 254) (although fans themselves are frequently sufficiently knowledgeable about production processes to be able to speculate about the technicalities of filming (Couldry, 2000, 98)). Such knowledge adds to the valuable resources of information at the fan's disposal, but at the same time may alter the ways in which fans will watch the film or programme from this point on. (2010, 16-17)

Stephanie pointed out the work that was done on the apartment during our time there and the apartment itself functions as a combination of faithful recreation and a reminder that we are fans on a fannish tour. In addition, some of the text on the wall tells us which characters were killed or turned into zombies in the seasons *after* we see Morgan's apartment. Our tour guide neither confirmed nor denied whether these were recreations from the diegetic apartment, but I overheard several fans stating they would

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rewatch the episodes when they got home. Other changes had been made to the apartment compared to what we see on screen. The axe curtain was changed so the text read 'Not *kidding* you' and the apartment itself isn't as cluttered as we see on the show. These points were made in the Atlanta Magazine review of the tour:

> Arriving at the building's doorstep, you see Morgan's welcome mat trap. We stepped over it, immersing ourselves into the world and walked up the warning-lined stairs to the axe curtain. It's been changed to say: 'Not kidding you', an understandable departure from the show's more explicit wording. Inside, every wall has been painted in chalkboard paint and artistically filled with ramblings of a mad man. Replicas of Morgan's cot, his traps, and ammo bring the realism up a notch. Although it's not as cluttered as on the show, its [sic] easy to suspend one's disbelief. Combined with the overcast day of our tour, it wouldn't be too farfetched to think the world really did end somewhere between Senoia and Grantville. (Walljasper 2015, np)

The review conflates the real world with the diegesis – neither Senoia nor Grantville appear as themselves in the show though the world in the *Walking Dead* does end between those two locations. The tour also highlights the differences between the show and the real apartment, however, highlighting the interplay between trying to create an 'authentic' experience and extending or maintaining the world of the fiction. When we left Stephanie told us that everything in the apartment was a recreation, but one original prop from the show remained. She asked us to guess which it was. It was the welcome mat.

While transmedia storytelling may depend on the link between authenticity and the storyworld, transmedia tourism seems unable to successfully navigate those divides. Leshu Torchin's (2002) study of an unofficial tour of film and TV locations around New York demonstrates how 'the majority of [the] tour offers the deliberate display of discrepancy, or 'bloopers', which call attention to the gaps between virtual worlds and the world before us on the tour' (2002, 254). Rather than cultivating a 'cued immersion' (Garner 2016) these anecdotes from guides seem to cue dissonance. Things such as pointing out how unlikely it would be for the characters on *Friends* (NBC 1994-2004) to be able to afford to rent in that area of New York given their jobs, or 'the practical impossibility of certain scenes' in Inspector Morse during the tour in Oxford (Reijinders 2010, 45) may add an air of authenticity to the transmedia tour, while simultaneously provoking a sense of dissonance from the storyworld. Rather than 'rendering the imagination compatible with reason' (Saler 2012, 13) however, this attempt to make the tour more authentic serves to highlight the artifice of the storyworld. Rather than transmedia tourism being an entry-point into the universe, when the two terms come together their intersection instead becomes problematic.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have begun to reframe the concept of transmedia tourism as being between immersion and dissonance. There are some occasions where the dissonance I experienced on the Big Zombie Tours was specifically because I am an academic, but there are certainly others instances which are shared by non-academic fans. Those times where fans are drawn out of the transmedia tourist site because of

discourses evidenced by the tour guide and/or industry are currently under-theorised within fan studies and would, as we look more closely at fan/producer relationships and sites of power, be worth further study. This approach would also serve to add to work such as Brooker's (2005) and Hills's (2016) in order to examine theories of liminality through dissonance rather than immersion, and the disenchanted enchantment of tertiary worlds.

However, rather than assuming that transmediality automatically brings the tourist deeper into the story world, it is worth exploring the ways in which dissonance is cultivated or sought out. Matthew Freeman (2018), in discussing the *Harry Potter* Warner Brother's studio tour, writes that some fans have described the attraction as 'a kind of 'media museum'. And in characterizing it in this way, there is the sense that some visitors perceive the attraction as somehow less of an all-consuming experience for engaging with the fictional fabric of the *Harry Potter* world and instead as more of a paratextual experience that exists between the textual entry points of the storyworld' (2018, 126). In a similar way, the Big Zombie Tours functioned as a paratextual experience to the world of *The Walking Dead*. By visiting filming locations with tour guides who had appeared on the show, fans were given access to behind the scenes information not readily available elsewhere. Indeed, this aspect of the tour was a key draw for many fans, with reviews of the tour on TripAdvisor highlighting the use of extras as tour guides as one of the key aspects of the success of the attraction. This suggests that dissonance might actually be something which fans seek out in engaging with fan tourist sites. 'Theoretical

approaches to the study of tourism rely on the discursive poles of authenticity and simulation. Frequently, these discussions suggest a struggle where one world 'wins" (Torchin 2002, 250). Yet it may be the case that the appeal of fan tourism is to both authenticity *and* simulation. Fans seek to obtain information about the fan object, which can be provided by tour guides, while simultaneously seeking the 'real' location where Daryl (Norman Reedus) killed Merle (Michael Rooker) or Rick met the Governor. Christina Lee (2012) argues that 'the design of such ventures equalizes the importance of the (f)actual and imaginary geographies to create affective, liminal spaces where the tourist anticipates and partakes in the transformation of sights/sites' (2012, 53). These transformations rely on a level of dissonance, where fans recognise that what they are seeing is both the same as, and different from they have seen on screen. I would suggest that this underscores the importance of recognising dissonance within the context of transmediality and tourism. Lee, in her analysis of *Harry Potter* tourism, notes that the level of immersion of the tour 'differed for individuals. Not all partici-pants were equally willing to suspend reality as can be seen from Jennifer's response: 'While I'm a fan and really enjoy the books and movies, I also know it's fiction. My interest was mostly in seeing the transformations of real places to fictional". (2012, 61). This response further demonstrates that immersion is not the appeal of transmedia storytelling for all tourists. For some fans, dissonance is as much an appeal as immersion. The transformational appeal of the liminal space of fan tourism is that it ultimately affects the fan's existing knowledge and relationship to the location of fandom, rather than immersing them within the diegesis.

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