

## 7. Curating Popular Dinosaur Ephemera: Reflections on the “Aca-Fan Archivist” and Sub/cultural Capital

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**Abstract:** Utilizing autoethnography to reflect on the author’s role as an “aca-fan archivist,” this chapter considers what it means to embody a position as both an academic and a collector of fan merchandise (e.g., an “aca-fan”) who uses the material acquired to curate an archive of ephemera dedicated to a particular area of pop culture (in this instance, mediations of dinosaurs). The chapter partly argues for the continued relevance of Bourdieusian approaches to studying (aca-)fan identities and practices, and so introduces the neologism of “sub/cultural capital” to understand the status of cultural artefacts that move between contexts of fan collecting and archival curation. Additionally, reflections are offered on how an aca-fan archive generates exclusions rooted in age-based taste formations.

**Keywords:** subcultural capital, archives, fandom, collection

### Introduction

In 2018, I was part of an invited group of fan studies scholars who visited Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka to better understand Japanese fan cultures and explore transcultural fandom.<sup>1</sup> Part of the trip involved visiting Nakano Broadway, a haven of stores containing almost all imaginable forms of fan-targeting merchandise, both new and pre-owned, relating to both

<sup>1</sup> See Lori Morimoto et al., “Transcultural Fan Studies in Practice: A Conversation,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 35 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2021.1975>.

East Asian and Western popular culture interests. During this visit—and completely unprovoked—two fellow travellers presented me with small gifts related to one of my longest-standing fandoms: dinosaurs, the Mesozoic period, and the *Jurassic Park/World* franchise. One item was a collection of fan-made comics (or *doujinshi*) relating to the characters of *Jurassic World* (Trevorrow, 2015). The other was a double-sided Japanese mini poster for the original *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993). “I’ll look good in your office” was the comment that accompanied receiving the letter. I thought differently, however. This was an item of historical value sourced from a country that I had never visited before. It needed to be looked after and properly preserved.

This anecdote is just one example of how over time I have acquired many promotional texts relating to *Jurassic Park/World* through methods ranging from serendipity to actively seeking out and purchasing items. Irrespective of the method of acquisition, each object has been retained, stored, and logged on an Excel spreadsheet that is stored on my personal laptop; the spreadsheet provides a reference point for resources for future academic research. My disclosures thus reflect how “[f]ans document, catalogue, [and] preserve ... tangible and ephemeral materials” concerning their affective investments in commercial media properties.<sup>2</sup> However, my behaviour permits fusing this observation with additional debates concerning “aca-fandom” because acquiring this paratextual material has led to establishing what I name the Popular Dinosaur Culture Archive (PDCA hereafter) in my office at Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media, and Culture.

The PDCA contains promotional items related to multiple commercial intellectual properties featuring dinosaurian imagery. However, and as expanded upon throughout this chapter, the PDCA is not officially sponsored, nor consecrated by either the school, Cardiff University, or any professional funding body. In fact, if asked, few (if any) of my departmental colleagues would likely be aware of its existence. Thus, partly because of how much of the archive’s contents have been acquired, and partly because of its institutional status, I deem the PDCA an “accidental archive.” That is, it is “an assemblage of items that have come together in a haphazard way and which have been collated partly out of a felt sense of responsibility to preserve the items.”<sup>3</sup> The PDCA is thus motivated primarily by fannish

2 Philipp Dominik Keidl and Abby S. Waysdorf, “Fandom Histories: Editorial,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 37 (2022): para. 2.3, <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2022.2299>.

3 Rebekah Ahrendt and David van der Linden, “The Postman’s Piggy-bank: Experiencing the Accidental Archive,” *French Historical Studies* 40, no. 2 (2017): 192.

affect rather than the perceived social, historical, or cultural significance of the objects it contains.

Coterminous to setting up the PDCA, I have taken up the role of what I call an “aca-fan archivist,” and this chapter explores this embodied identity from an academic perspective. Building upon recent theorizations of the “fan-historian”<sup>4</sup> and integrating relevant insights with debates concerning the eternal “hot-button issue” of “aca-fandom,”<sup>5</sup> the discussion blends autoethnographic methods with insights from Pierre Bourdieu’s arguments concerning forms of capital to interrogate the “aca-fan archivist” identity.<sup>6</sup> Much like the observation of Matt Hills that “aca-fan” identities are “necessarily liminal,”<sup>7</sup> the aca-fan archivist identity that I reflect on is one that illuminates multiple contradictions arising from attempting to interrogate “aspects of our lived experiences.”<sup>8</sup> In this instance, contradictions arise from hybridizing being a fan-collector of dinosaur-derived media paratexts and an academic and archiver who studies both film and TV branding and fandom’s material cultures.

Indeed, one of the chapter’s central arguments is that reflexively interrogating the “aca-fan archivist” identity requires revisiting and revising the concept of subcultural capital in fan studies. Sarah Thornton coined “subcultural capital” to capture how “‘hip’ or ‘in the know’” individuals were concerning the trends, histories, and behaviours that characterized membership of dance music subcultures.<sup>9</sup> Also, and crucial for this chapter’s arguments, Thornton recognizes that “what ultimately defines cultural capital as capital is its ‘convertibility’ into economic capital,” but subcultural capital is rarely convertible into other, more recognized forms in the same way.<sup>10</sup>

4 See, for example, E. Charlotte Stevens and Nick Webber, “The Fan-Historian,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 37 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2022.2125>, or Tosha R. Taylor, “Historicizing the Fan Archive of Talia al Ghul,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 37 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2022.2115>.

5 Sam Ford, “Fan Studies: Grappling with an ‘Undisciplined Discipline,’” *Journal of Fandom Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 58, [https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.2.1.53\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.2.1.53_1).

6 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Oxon: Routledge Classics, 2010 [1984]).

7 Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 19.

8 Henry Jenkins, “Coming Soon: Acafandom and Beyond,” *Pop Junctions: Reflections on Entertainment, Pop Culture, Activism, Media Literacy, Fandom, and More* (blog), June 3, 2011, [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/06/coming\\_soon\\_acafandom\\_and\\_beyo.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/06/coming_soon_acafandom_and_beyo.html), para. 4.

9 Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1995), 120.

10 Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 12.

In this chapter, I advance Thornton's arguments by conceptualizing "sub/cultural capital" as a term for understanding what occurs when the aca-fan archivist chooses to acquire, preserve, and store popular (dinosaur) culture ephemera and so integrate their fannish practices into academic settings. "Sub/cultural capital" is a term designed to sit between official cultural capital and the competencies valued by fan communities, capturing the indeterminacy that arises through aca-fan archiving practices. Proposing "sub/cultural capital" thus builds upon how the aca-fan archivist identity reflected upon, like the "aca-fan" more generally, "represents a crucial node" through which fannish behaviours and practices flow into the academy.<sup>11</sup> In this instance, the aca-fan archivist bids to convert the subcultural capital derived from owning fan ephemera into more established forms of cultural legitimacy. However, as argued below, these attempts at converting subcultural capital remain unstable and hence necessitates refining existing terminology.

As mentioned, this chapter uses autoethnography to explore my aca-fan archivist identity. This decision is appropriate as autoethnography permits academics to "study their own performance as fan" so that knowledge and visibility of embodied fan practices can be advanced.<sup>12</sup> By reflecting on my practice as collector, curator, and classifier of the PDCA, observations concerning the deeper structures that both enable and contest this identity can be acknowledged.

However, as Simone Driessen and Bethan Jones observe of autoethnography, "[d]ue to the creation of accounts that use self-disclosed and self-interpreted individual experience expressed through first person writing and reporting as data source, questions emerge such as how to ensure rigor, or verify the evidence."<sup>13</sup> These concerns can partly be offset through requiring "the person undertaking it [the autoethnography] to question their self-account constantly" and so locate their fan practice within social, cultural, and historical discourses.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, raised eyebrows may still be directed towards how generalizable the "aca-fan archivist" identity interrogated is.<sup>15</sup> This chapter's arguments should therefore be approached as exploratory and so are designed to encourage future examination and

11 Cécile Cristofari and Matthieu J. Guitton, "Aca-Fans and Fan Communities: An Operative Framework," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 17, no. 3 (2016): 718, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540515623608>.

12 Cristofari and Guitton, "Aca-Fans and Fan Communities," 718.

13 Simone Driessen and Bethan Jones, "Love Me for a Reason: An Autoethnographic Account of Boyzone Fandom," *IASPM Journal* 6, no. 1 (2016): 71, [https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871\(2016\)v6i1.5en](https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871(2016)v6i1.5en).

14 Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 72.

15 See Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 86.

refinement of the resonances and limitations of what I outline concerning fan collecting and archiving. Additionally, discussions of (aca-)fan archiving are presently an emergent area.<sup>16</sup> Autoethnographic reflections can subsequently provide visibility for these practices within the academy that could lead to further discussion.

### From “Fan-Historians” to “Aca-Fan Archivists”

Fan history and archival practices have been the subject of different studies. Specifically, E. Charlotte Stevens and Nick Webber have been at the forefront of theorizing the fan-historian.<sup>17</sup> Aligning their position with Hayden White on the narrativity of historical writing and Raphael Samuel on memory-as-history,<sup>18</sup> Stevens and Webber have advanced a broad understanding of fan-historian identities:

[W]e suggest that fan-historians work in a variety of ways—as public historians,... as cultural historians, in their concern with memory; as new historicists, concerned with the textuality and discursive nature of history; as what we might call traditional historians, concerned with chronologies and detail; and, most importantly, as intermediaries, constructing fans’—and fandom’s—relationship with the past.<sup>19</sup>

Stevens and Webber subsequently align fan-historian identities with similar debates that have taken place concerning “the aca-fan researcher.”<sup>20</sup> These include identifying how “fans” and “historians” demonstrate similar skills and competencies. For example, Stevens and Webber argue that “[w]hile both fan and historian are open terms (in comparison to academic, for example),

16 See Keidl and Waysdorf, “Fandom Histories.” See also Jez Collins and Oliver Carter, “They’re Not Pirates, They’re Archivists: The Role of Fans as Curators and Archivists of Popular Music Heritage,” in *Preserving Popular Music Heritage: Do-It-Yourself, Do-It-Together*, ed. Sarah Baker (London: Routledge, 2015); or Sophie G. Einwächter, “Preserving the Marginal: Or, The Fan as Archivist,” in *At the Borders of (Film) History: Temporality, Archaeology, Theories*, ed. Alberto Beltrame, Giuseppe Fidotta, and Andrea Mariani (Udine: Forum, 2015).

17 Stevens and Webber, “The Fan-Historian.”

18 See Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory, Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994).

19 Stevens and Webber, “The Fan-Historian,” para. 4.1.

20 See Ross Peter Garner, “Acafan Identity, Communities of Practice, and Vocational Poaching,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 35 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2021.1985>.

they are still bound by expectation” derived from their intended audience.<sup>21</sup> Their claims echo what Paul Booth calls “[t]he paradox of aca-fandom ... one must keep a foot in each world, but not become wholly subsumed by one identity over another.”<sup>22</sup> Whilst Stevens and Webber’s definition is commendable for its ambition, what insights might be gained from adopting a more focused perspective towards individual forms of fan-historian practice? Additionally, what alternative theoretical pathways can be taken towards examining specific fan-historian identities which might lead analysis of “aca-fandom” into less well-trodden territory?

Regarding the first question, Tosha R. Taylor’s autoethnography of operating as “a fan-archivist” on Tumblr demonstrates the advantages of drilling down into specific fan-historian identities.<sup>23</sup> By reflecting on her curation of an online archive relating to the DC Comics character Talia al Ghul, Taylor notes how her fan-archivist identity became intertwined with forms of subcultural power. Further probing the consequences of putting her archive on hiatus, Taylor identifies how this changed her position within online fandom, resulting in a reduction in status: “I was a known fan-archivist; without that role, I am a nondescript fan who also likes a particular character ... I find myself no longer in a place of being cited as an authority in the fandom.”<sup>24</sup>

In this fragment, Taylor alludes to the connection between the position of “fan-archivist,” what Andrea MacDonald named the “hierarchy of venue” relating to fans who host online spaces where interaction can occur, and the accumulation (and subsequent loss) of subcultural capital.<sup>25</sup> What’s more, Taylor recognizes how their fan-archivist identity translated to other forms of subcultural power, such as being “granted ... a gatekeeper role” by which the subcultural capital she embodied could be converted into fan symbolic capital, or status within the fan community, and bestowed upon others through endorsing individual acts of fan creation.<sup>26</sup> Addressing individual fan-historian identities can thus highlight issues concerning status and hierarchy that should be further explored.

21 Stevens and Webber, “The Fan-Historian,” para. 2.10.

22 Paul Booth, “Augmenting Fan/Academic Dialogue: New Directions in Fan Research,” *Journal of Fandom Studies* 1, no. 2 (2013): 125, [https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.1.2.119\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.1.2.119_1).

23 Taylor, “Historicizing the Fan Archive,” para. 1.2.

24 Taylor, “Historicizing the Fan Archive,” para. 2.9.

25 Andrea MacDonald, “Uncertain Utopia: Science Fiction Media Fandom and Computer Mediated Communication,” in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity*, ed. Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 1998), 138, original italics.

26 Taylor, “Historicizing the Fan Archive,” para. 2.10.

Returning to Stevens and Weber's definition of the fan-historian, considering the "aca-fan archivist" also demonstrates an oversight in their argument concerning hybrid identities. That is, whilst their discussion notes that fan-historians "sit at the intersection of historical and fan activity," they do not consider how being an academic might be added to these intersections and so complicate the proposed identity positions.<sup>27</sup> Stevens and Webber's use of the term "intermediary" provides a useful starting point for developing my point.<sup>28</sup> Just as "fan-historian" implies a hybrid identity, "aca-fan" has been usefully defined by Cristofari and Guitton as "a transitional position" through which knowledge about fan interests, practices, and tastes can, hypothetically at least, flow into the academy (and vice versa).<sup>29</sup> The implied aca-fan is thus a mediator between cultural sites of "fandom" and "academia," someone who, as Mark Duffett identifies, "speaks from his or her own fan community and uses cultural studies as a vehicle to represent, support and promote it."<sup>30</sup> This is undoubtedly an idealized understanding of the "aca-fan"—one that overlooks myriad constraints, not least "the regulative ideal of the rational academic subject."<sup>31</sup> However, the possibility of the aca-fan archivist not only representing their fan interests within the academy, but also preserving materials related to favoured phenomena by building an archive, permits considering the forms of transition taking place in greater detail.

For now, what is significant to note is that taking up a role as fan-historian might "lift ... certain fans to the role of gatekeepers, who gain fan cultural capital and influence by curating access to the production and cultural history of their object of fandom."<sup>32</sup> Thus, if fan-historians can transition historical information regarding a commercial media property to those sharing passion for that property, aca-fans can hypothetically transition knowledge between fan and academic contexts (and vice versa). The "aca-fan archivist," in this instance, can be theorized as a transitional node. That is, through their situated agency material objects of subcultural significance

27 Nick Webber and E. Charlotte Stevens, "History, Fandom, and Online Communities," in *Historia Ludens: The Playing Historian*, ed. Alexander von Lünen, Katherine J. Lewis, Benjamin Litherland, and Pat Cullum (London: Routledge, 2019), 189.

28 Cf. Stevens and Webber, "The Fan-Historian," para. 4.1.

29 Cristofari and Guitton, "Aca-Fans and Fan Communities," 718.

30 Will Brooker, Mark Duffett, and Karen Hellekson, "Fannish Identities and Scholarly Responsibilities: A Conversation," in *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, ed. Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott (London: Routledge, 2018), 63.

31 Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 11.

32 Keidl and Waysdorf, "Fandom Histories," para. 2.2.

pertaining to the history of a fan object can flow from fan collecting habits into academia for purposes including research, dissemination of knowledge, and bestowing cultural legitimacy upon the fan object. Before developing some theoretical positions further, though, it is first necessary to reflect on the possibilities offered by a Bourdieusian framework for understanding the “aca-fan archivist” identity.

### **Returning to Bourdieu: Aca-Fan Archiving and “Sub/Cultural Capital”**

Allusions to the concept of subcultural capital were observable throughout the previous section. Yet, Bourdieusian analyses of fandom have been discursively associated with the “second wave of fan studies” during the early-to-mid-2000s, where scholars revised and refined Bourdieu’s sociological arguments to demonstrate how fandoms acted as microcosms of larger social structures by reproducing forms of inequality.<sup>33</sup> These inequalities were sustained by access to subcultural capital as well as factors including disposable income (economic capital) or the scope of a fan’s peer network (fan social capital).<sup>34</sup> Whether experienced at an individual level or along broader identity structures such as race or gender, unequal distribution of these forms of capital was demonstrated as both replicating existing forms of social hierarchy at the subcultural level and producing barriers to participation in fan communities.

To an extent, Bourdieusian analyses of fandom have been replaced by questions concerning how “changing communication technologies and media texts contribute to and reflect the increasing entrenchment of fan consumption in the structure of our everyday lives.”<sup>35</sup> However, as Hills has argued about constructing conceptual categories as a strategy for managing perceived intradisciplinary shifts, “[n]arratives of transformation are themselves called upon to discursively characterise, and so fix, the earlier

33 Cornel Sandvoss, Jonathan Gray, and C. Lee Harrington, “Introduction: Why Still Study Fans?,” in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 5.

34 See Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 20–35. See also Rebecca Williams, “Good Neighbours? Fan/Producer Relationships and the Broadcasting Field,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2010); Rebecca Williams, *Post-Object Fandom: Television, Fandom and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

35 Sandvoss et al., “Introduction,” 6.



attributes of the object.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, whilst discursive attempts to construct discrete “waves” of fan studies are useful for organizing the discipline’s evolution, these should not result in theoretical perspectives such as those derived from Bourdieu becoming understood as outdated. As this interrogation of the aca-fan archivist identity suggests, Bourdieusian perspectives can be usefully employed to analyse fan identities and practices within an era of media convergence and the increasing diffusion of “fannish” practices throughout media(ted) culture.

Despite being mentioned throughout this chapter, I would argue that “subcultural capital” does not adequately capture the nuances of how claims to cultural legitimacy operate when, in this instance, the aca-fan archivist moves cultural objects from contexts of “fan collecting” to those of “academic archiving.” In plain terms, aca-fan archiving as understood in this chapter involves converting subcultural capital into legitimate forms of cultural capital. To achieve these purposes, I leverage the symbolic capital attached to my privileged public identity as an academic to convert the subcultural capital of dino-franchise paratexts into legitimate cultural capital.

However, if the aca-fan (archivist) is a liminal identity, then the status granted to the items chosen for inclusion in an aca-fan archive like the PDCA remains equally contested. That is, the chosen objects may be subculturally significant to their fan community and/or the private fan-collector, but the attempted conversion of this to cultural capital remains open to dismissal by an aca-fan archivist’s peers who might contest the archive’s contents and re-evaluate its contents as worthless (in multiple senses of the word) subcultural curios.<sup>37</sup> The aca-fan archivist’s nodal position at the intersection of diverging discourses concerning fan and official culture, as well as “engaged hobbyists” and recognized historical work, transfers to the objects curated by the aca-fan archivist. This, in turn, renders their cultural importance equally untethered.<sup>38</sup>

I would thus argue that “subcultural capital” cannot adequately capture what is at stake when an aca-fan archivist attempts to transition objects from subcultural settings to official equivalents. Instead, what I would name “sub/cultural capital” better characterizes the liminal status of objects contained within an aca-fan archive. “Sub/cultural capital” is a less secure form of

36 Matt Hills, “From the Box in the Corner to the Box Set on the Shelf,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 5, no. 1 (2007): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400300601140167>.

37 See also Taylore Nicole Woodhouse, “Digital Archives, Fandom Histories, and the Reproduction of the Hegemony of Play,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 37 (2022): para. 2.2, <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2022.2105>.

38 Stevens and Webber, “The Fan-Historian,” para. 2.7.

cultural capital that characterizes objects which document the history or visibility of a popular culture phenomena whose inclusion in settings like universities remains contestable. Consequently, the symbolic capital used by the aca-fan archivist to convert subcultural capital into cultural capital remains open to negotiation by institutional colleagues and structures. The inclusion of both the prefix “sub” and the “/” in “sub/cultural capital” thus aim to capture the form’s negotiable status. The term is intended to capture how aca-fan archived items have an ambiguous, paradoxical status in that they may be valued by the aca-fan and the community that they represent, but may equally be dismissed as being of less immediate value in the eyes of the aca-fan archivist’s professional peers.

Sub/cultural capital’s relevance for understanding the status of aca-fan archived items can be further demonstrated by comparing the perceived legitimacy of PDCA objects with other dinosaur media mediations that occupy my office space and assist in my day-to-day professional performance of an academic identity. Developing this point requires returning to John Fiske’s argument that any occupied space is readable as “a symbolic environment that is constructed by a social agent out of the socially available resources, and that equally constructs that agent as a social member and marks his (in this case) position in the social space.”<sup>39</sup> Whilst Fiske discusses the presentation and organization of his living room, I would argue that this point can be expanded to include spaces like personal offices where the placement of objects within these, and in relation to each other, constitute “the semiotics of ... place.”<sup>40</sup> Whilst individual objects remain “multi discursive—they mean differently in different discourses,”<sup>41</sup> the interrelationship between where objects are located within these spaces and how they get grouped together by the subject creates meaning concerning their perceived status, value, and relationship to the identity performed within that space.<sup>42</sup>

Reading the organization of my university office as a symbolic environment, the PDCA is housed within two storage boxes and placed on a bookcase shelf. These bookcases contain other resources denoting a professional academic identity such as media and cultural studies books and journals, and

39 John Fiske, “Ethnosemiotics: Some Personal and Theoretical Reflections,” *Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1 (1990): 88.

40 Fiske, “Ethnosemiotics,” 88. See also Ross P. Garner, “Mimetic Tangible Nostalgia and Spatial Cosplay: Replica Merchandise and Place in Fandom’s Material Cultures,” in *Was It Yesterday? Nostalgia in Contemporary Film and Television*, ed. Matthew Leggatt (New York: SUNY Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781438483504-007>.

41 Fiske, “Ethnosemiotics,” 88.

42 Fiske, “Ethnosemiotics,” 88.

DVDs and Blu-rays which assist with research and teaching. The audiovisual material is on a different shelf to the PDCA, and on a different bookcase, but consists of many commercial releases of dino-centric films and TV programmes. Yet, rather than being bestowed sub/cultural capital and preserved in the PDCA, the DVDs and Blu-rays have been classified as of a different order, as objects that are associated with the symbolic and cultural capital associated with being a university lecturer such as teaching and producing publications.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, these titles assist with constructing my professional identity as “academic” by demonstrating my cultural competencies as a lecturer. This is despite many of these aforementioned texts *not* occupying the consecrated cultural canons of cinephiles. Whilst the original *King Kong* (1933) and the first *Jurassic Park* might be the exceptions, neither Disney’s animated *Dinosaur* (2000) movie, or straight-to-video B-movies like *The Dinosaur Project* (2012) or *Jurassic Planet* (2018) would be considered communally agreed upon works of artistic achievement. Nevertheless, the integration of these materials for performing a professional academic identity differentiates the type of capital that I have subjectively bestowed upon these titles to those within the PDCA. To date, PDCA items have not been integrated into my professional practices such as being used to produce publications, for teaching, or being used in public dissemination. In other words, they remain in an indeterminate status between discourses of “culture” and “subculture,” housed within a prestigious academic institution but simply being stored there.

## PDCA Contents, Absences, and Affect

Echoing Jacques Derrida’s argument that archives are never complete, the PDCA’s contents are continually expanding.<sup>44</sup> At the time of writing, the Excel spreadsheet recording the archive’s contents contains over seventy-five individual listings. Although two of the logged items are duplicates, some entries contain multiple objects. For example, the Special Edition DNA Case release of *Jurassic Park* on VHS from 1993 includes a booklet on dinosaurs

43 For example, in Ross Garner, “*Doctor Who* and the Dinosaurs: Spectacle, Monstrosity, Melodrama and Ideology in Dinosaur Mediations,” in *Doctor Who and Science: Essays on Ideas, Identities and Ideologies in the Series*, ed. Marcus K. Harmes and Lindy A. Orthia (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2021).

44 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017 [1995]).

and cloning, a park map, and other objects alongside a VHS copy of the movie. The DNA Case is but one listing that contains multiple objects, meaning that the total number of individual items within the PDCA is currently over a hundred.

Other items include rare pamphlets distributed to members of the film industry to promote the first *Jurassic Park* movie (bought on eBay), a complete set of pre-release press stills for *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (Spielberg 1997; *The Lost World* hereafter) that were purchased from a specialist dealer at London Film and Comic Con, two different original mini posters for *The Lost World* (donated by fellow aca-fen who were clearing out domestic spaces), and various *Jurassic Park*– or *Jurassic World*–themed magazines. These include a complete set of Dark Horse’s five-part comic adaptation of *Jurassic Park* from 1993 and multiple copies of Immediate Media Company’s bimonthly and child-targeting *Lego Jurassic World* magazine. The temporal scope of the archive’s objects thus mirrors Katarina Heljakka’s argument that “collections of contemporary adult toy enthusiasts often include an extensive variety of toys—vintage, retro, and novel designs.”<sup>45</sup> Although focused around promotional paratexts, the PDCA similarly bestows sub/cultural capital on items spanning the entire history of the *Jurassic Park/World* franchise rather than favouring those from the property’s origins.

Additionally, the PDCA bestows sub/cultural capital on paratexts for other media(ted) dinosaur properties. Also represented are Disney/Pixar’s *The Good Dinosaur* (via a one-sheet cinema poster obtained from an online charity auction), the BBC’s *Walking with Dinosaurs* (represented by an illustrated dinosaur encyclopaedia),<sup>46</sup> and Sue, the *Tyrannosaurus rex* from Chicago’s Field Museum (via entry tickets and guides to the Sue attraction as well as an empty bottle of “Tooth and Claw” beer that is brewed especially for the Field Museum and available only in its café).

This summary of the PDCA and its contents immediately connotes how the aca-fan identity I have curated is one of privilege. My subjectivity as a white, childless, cishet male who is employed as a full-time and permanent academic at a Russell Group university in the UK grants me the time and freedom (economic and otherwise) to seek out and store these items. However, the summary I have offered also demonstrates how discourses

45 Katriina Heljakka, “Fans, Play Knowledge, and Playful History Management,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 37 (2022): para. 1.14, <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2022.2111>.

46 Steve Brusatte, *Walking with Dinosaurs: The 3D Movie Dinopedia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Children’s Books, 2013).

of indeterminacy characterize the PDCA's contents in myriad ways. For example, the scope of the objects curated could be read as representing what Taylore Nicole Woodhouse names an "unwieldy archive."<sup>47</sup> Writing on online fan-archives, Woodhouse argues that idiosyncratic factors frequently motivate the forms and types of content that are preserved and shared in these, resulting in the repositories being evaluated as disorganized to outsiders.<sup>48</sup>

Alternatively, my choice of "archive" over "collection" for naming the PDCA could be questioned. Lincoln Geraghty identifies "the impetus for fans to take action when texts and objects are under threat of disappearing, being cancelled, or taken off the shelves."<sup>49</sup> This motivation is arguably heightened in the case of the PDCA as much of its contents was never intended for being retained or cultural longevity. Consequently, the PDCA incorporates aspects of "fan collecting" in terms of both what items are acquired and the digital platforms that are used for obtaining these.<sup>50</sup> The PDCA also lends itself to being classified as an example of what Sarah Baker names "affective archives."<sup>51</sup> These are archives curated by amateurs, unaligned with sanctioned institutions such as museums, and are underpinned by "feelings of love and care directed towards custodianship."<sup>52</sup> Although I am educated to PhD level, my professional qualifications are in media and cultural studies rather than history and I have no formal training in institutional archiving practices. Thus, whilst the PDCA may demonstrate a centripetal "principle of organization" that guides its growth, its status and expansion is also simultaneously guided by "hobbyist" interests and available levels of economic capital, as well as, and returned to shortly, subjective factors concerning taste.<sup>53</sup>

Probing Baker's use of the term "affective" further is arguably useful, as doing so highlights significant critical limitations to the aca-fan archivist

47 Woodhouse, "Digital Archives," para. 3.2.

48 Woodhouse, "Digital Archives," para. 3.2.

49 Lincoln Geraghty, "Nostalgia, Fandom and the Remediation of Children's Culture," in *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, ed. Paul Booth (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 163.

50 See Lincoln Geraghty, *Cult Collectors: Nostalgia, Fandom and Collecting Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2014).

51 Sarah Baker, "Affective Archiving and Collective Collecting in Do-It-Yourself Popular Music Archives and Museums," in *Preserving Popular Music Heritage: Do-It-Yourself, Do-It-Together*, ed. Sarah Baker (London: Routledge, 2015), 59.

52 Baker, "Affective Archiving," 47.

53 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 155.

identity under discussion. Writing on affect as a motivator of individual fan identities, Laurence Grossberg argues that

affect is also organised; it operates within and, at the same time, produces maps which direct our investments in and into the world; these maps tell us where and how we can become absorbed—not into the self but into the world—as potential locations for our self-identifications, and with what intensities. This “absorption” or investment constructs the places and events which are, or can become, significant to us.<sup>54</sup>

Our affective investments in popular culture subsequently generate what Grossberg calls “mattering maps” where specific commercial media properties and texts cause “different intensities or degrees of investment.”<sup>55</sup> Individual fan mattering maps thus demonstrate how “we invest ourselves more in some [media properties] than in others.”<sup>56</sup> What matters to an individual fan is thus political as what is both favoured and snubbed can be scrutinized as evidence of the deeper identity structures in which they are embedded. As Bourdieu observed, “[t]aste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make.”<sup>57</sup> These critical approaches to the politics of taste and affect also resonate with analytical attitudes towards archiving concerning processes of selection and exclusion within individual repositories. As David Beer argues, “the archive works ... by shaping memory, it is a particular telling of history and biography as told through the documents it includes or excludes.”<sup>58</sup> In the case of a fan’s affective aca-fan archive, then, the objects and properties included within this can be read as reflecting the aspects of popular culture that matter the most to that fan and, by extension, what does not.

Applying this perspective to the PDCA illustrates this point. *Jurassic Park/World* is undoubtedly the most heavily represented dinosaur franchise represented, with over three-quarters of the stored material being derived from this property. In comparison, another globally successful

54 Laurence Grossberg, “Is There a Fan in the House? The Affective Sensibility of Fandom,” in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 57.

55 Grossberg, “Is There a Fan in the House?,” 57.

56 Grossberg, “Is There a Fan in the House?,” 59.

57 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, xxix.

58 David Beer, *Popular Culture and New Media: The Politics of Circulation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 47.

dinosaur-centric property which emerged parallel to *Jurassic Park*, *Barney & Friends* (1992–2010), does not feature in the PDCA. Associated with “an image of cooperation, love and sharing, which many parents would love to see expressed by their child,”<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Tucker notes that “*Barney and Friends* surpassed *Sesame Street* as the highest rated PBS series for children.”<sup>60</sup> As a cultural phenomenon, *Barney and Friends* was also “big business” for almost twenty years,<sup>61</sup> generating a range of commodity packages “including dolls, slippers, bedsheets, and clothes.”<sup>62</sup> If it is the case that “*Jurassic Park* (1993) and its sequels,... generated a great deal of dinosaur mania, or ‘dinomania,’” and so has come to emblemize dinosaurs in popular culture, it should not be overlooked that *Barney and Friends* has had a similar impact.<sup>63</sup> Why, then, have I denied conferring sub/cultural capital upon Barney through the PDCA?

Reflecting on this question, multiple rationalizations can be offered. One explanation would invoke an economic discourse: as PDCA acquisitions are primarily funded by my disposable income, directing this towards items associated with dinosaur IPs that are not part of my fan identity would be ostentatious. An additional spatial discourse could also be summoned. Barney is not an IP that is visible in places like fan conventions or museums, nor is he part of my saved search filters on eBay. However, Barney’s absence also relates to the property’s dominant cultural meanings pertaining to gender and age and my alignment with these. The purple dinosaur has previously been named both a “saccharine saurian”<sup>64</sup> and “a bland, sanctimonious authority figure.”<sup>65</sup> These meanings directly contrast with the “so-called ‘masculine’ traits” of aggression and power which many of *Jurassic Park*’s prehistoric inhabitants demonstrate. Moreover, W. J. T. Mitchell argues that Barney has a cultural reputation of being reviled as “childish” just at the moment the child is becoming interested in “real” dinosaurs, garnering additional associations of immaturity and inauthenticity.<sup>66</sup> These are all

59 Dianne Sykes, “Finding Ourselves in Each Other: Barney and the Other-Directed Child,” *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology* 24, no. 1 (1996): 90.

60 Elizabeth Tucker, “‘I Hate You, You Hate Me’: Children’s Responses to Barney the Dinosaur,” *Children’s Folklore Review* 22, no. 1 (1999): 25.

61 Sykes, “Finding Ourselves in Each Other,” 90.

62 Tucker, “‘I Hate You, You Hate Me,’” 26.

63 José Luis Sanz, *Starring T.Rex! Dinosaur Mythology and Popular Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 46.

64 W. J. T. Mitchell, *The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 232.

65 Tucker, “‘I Hate You, You Hate Me,’” 31.

66 Mitchell, *The Last Dinosaur Book*, 258.

meanings that I associate with Barney, thus indicating how aspects of my subjective fan tastes have structured the choice of objects stored in the PDCA.

These reflections are significant as the rationalizations offered demonstrate how the aca-fan archivist acts as a gatekeeper whose subjectivity places limits on the contents and contours of what they choose to preserve. Just as effective mattering maps direct individual fans towards what does and does not matter in consumer culture, when these investments combine with the privileged, intermediary position occupied by the aca-fan archivist this can lead to situations where properties and items that should align with the archive's intended organizational principle, but diverge from the individual's affective investments, become either consciously or unconsciously overlooked. In the case of the PDCA, then, conferences of sub/cultural capital must align with the long-standing subcultural interests of the aca-fan archivist's subject position.

## Conclusions

Undertaking this autoethnography has highlighted how my fandom for dinosaurs (and *Jurassic Park/World* especially) has produced a felt responsibility to act as guardian and custodian for, as well as gatekeeper of, promotional material that is representative of the meanings of prehistoric creatures in popular culture. The PDCA's contents have subjectively been deemed significant materials that demonstrate the historical development of how high-profile dinosaur mediations have evolved and the extent to which processes of commercialization and mediatization impact upon how we assign meaning to the Mesozoic period. By occupying a privileged position as an academic, my affective investments in *Jurassic Park/World* and other dino-mediations provoke a sense of responsibility to preserve, protect, and represent the importance of these properties within the academy, as well as to speak up for the importance of making these topics visible within these spaces. As I have indicated throughout this chapter, this is not an easy stance to adopt, nor is it value neutral. Curating the PDCA brings with it a felt sense that, in the eyes of my peers, the items I am aggregating might constitute a worthless extravagance.

Additionally, I am aware that the PDCA is largely reflective of my own preferences for dino-mediations, meaning that it contains (unconscious) biases that exclude representations that do not fall into my subjective taste preferences. Whether the absences that have been highlighted because of



writing this chapter will be addressed is uncertain. If I am honest, if it is me making the purchases, then a character like Barney will likely not appear as I could use personal disposable income for other purposes. However, I would have gladly received donations of paratexts featuring this character (or others) from others. Perhaps, though, this conclusion demonstrates one of the limitations of “aca-fandom,” in that our mattering maps draw us away from alternative-yet-relevant examples and, in doing so, create an affront to the assumed objectivity of academic work (whether in media and cultural studies or elsewhere).

However, and as Hills notes, autoethnography requires continually directing reflexivity towards the construction of self-hood provided and asking, “What does this account leave out?”<sup>67</sup> Whilst reflexive comments concerning my privileged status as a fan, academic, and collector have been made, less has been directed to the spatial privileges occurring at the institutional level. Writing on increasingly digitized workplaces, Lizzie Richardson argues “[g]iven that workers may potentially work in any number of locations, and that real estate is a costly overhead for business, contemporary office space must be adapted to suit a more mobile workforce.”<sup>68</sup> Such perspectives view private office spaces where personal artefacts can be housed as a costly inefficiency that goes against contemporary discourses of “co-working.” Luckily, the School and institution has, to date, resisted these trajectories. Nevertheless, recognizing this point indicates another privileged set of discourses structuring the PDCA, as it has been allowed to be stored and grown as a result of my institution recognizing the value of individual workspaces. More work is needed on these issues and how they relate to contemporary instances of aca-fan archiving.

I would however continue to argue for the relevance of performing autoethnographies of (aca-)fan practices as, by doing so, particular forms of fan behaviour are granted visibility, become better understood, and, as has been the case in this chapter, can illustrate deeper problems within fan studies that require further debate. Additionally, I would encourage future research into fans’ historical practices to interrogate my account of the aca-fan archivist to test its applicability to other fan objects, especially in relation to those behaviours or fandoms that fall outside of the hegemonic identity positions that I occupy. Finally, I would argue that by highlighting the aca-fan archivist identity, this could give rise to a new area of discussion

67 Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 55.

68 Lizzie Richardson, “Coordinating Office Space: Digital Technologies and the Platformization of Work.” *Society and Space* 39, no. 2 (2021): 349.

within fan studies concerning how individual fans begin engaging in *specific types of fan behaviour*. By undertaking this task, a better understanding of fan identities and the affective motivations behind these practices can potentially be ascertained.

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